

A STUDY OF
THE EPISTLE OF
JAMES

MATERIAL BY
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BUT HE WHO LOOKS
INTO THE PERFECT LAW
OF LIBERTY AND
CONTINUES IN IT, AND IS
NOT A FORGETFUL
HEARER BUT A DOER OF
THE WORK, THIS ONE
WILL BE BLESSED IN
WHAT HE DOES.

– JAMES 1:25 –

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INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

The epistle of James brings a reminder to all about the necessity of practical religion. We cannot be guilty of mere nominal Christianity – wearing the name, but not putting on Christ. The gospel is intended to drastically change the way we think, speak, and act. It is not enough to hear and know God’s word. We must do what it says. This pervades every facet of our lives.

James also brings humbling reality to the great work it takes to be a disciple worthy of the name. At every turn there is something to correct, add, or improve. The Jewish Christians James addressed still had far to go in their journey of faith despite their “head start” with familiarity of the Old Testament, and all the examples contained in it. One cannot read the epistle without seeing himself in need of great change as he peers into the mirror of James’ description.

The epistle of James deals in understandable practicality but will also challenge the one who studies it with depth of thought. One might be inclined to read James in segmented fashion, but diligent study will impress the reader with cohesive thought throughout. In the greater part of James, the relationship a Christian has with God’s word is manifested in detail. Any who have ever doubted or minimized the importance of God’s word in the life of His children will not be able to read James without being pushed to drastically alter the way they think of faith. There is a reason Paul revealed the origin of faith is hearing the word of God (cf. Romans 10:17). James shows a vivid practicality of that truth.

AUTHORSHIP

“James” being a common name among the Jewish people, and the fact that the author of this epistle does not specify which “James” he is, may pose difficulty in narrowing the author down. However, at the same time these points lend some weight to the author being the brother of Jesus.

In the New Testament there are four identified as James:

- 1) One of the two given the designation by the Lord Himself, “*Sons of Thunder*” (Mark 3:17), was named James. This brother of John (Matthew 4:21) was one of the twelve chosen by Jesus to be apostles (Matthew 10:2). It is unlikely he wrote the epistle as he perished at the hands of Herod Agrippa I in AD 44 (Acts 12:2), a death date which would prove difficult to reconcile with supposed dates for the epistle noted later.
- 2) James the son of Alphaeus was another of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:3). The writer of the epistle does not identify himself as an apostle of the Lord. While this alone does not necessitate the rejection of his authorship, most agree it was not likely him.
- 3) A third James mentioned in the New Testament is the father of Judas the apostle (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16). Little is known about this James, and far less points to him being the author.
- 4) James, the brother of the Lord is believed by most to be the author (Matthew 13:55). During Jesus’ ministry His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7:5). However, when the Lord appeared to James after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7) he became a notable figure in the early church. The fact that James did not find it necessary to

identify himself in a specific way indicates the readers would know which James was writing. The Lord's brother was an elder at the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:18), and is described, along with Peter and John, as one of those who "*seemed to be pillars*" (Galatians 2:9) in the congregation at Jerusalem. This James was instrumental in defending the truth against Judaizing false doctrine as recorded in Acts 15, especially verses 13-21.

DATE OF WRITING

Scholars generally agree the epistle was one of the earlier written New Testament books. Dates suggested range from AD 44-68. The epistle was addressed to Christians "*scattered abroad*" (1:1), so one might believe its writing was after the scattering by persecution recorded in Acts 8. There is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Hegesippus and Josephus give slightly different dates, but both record James, the brother of the Lord, as being stoned to death at least by AD 65.

RECIPIENTS

James addresses his epistle to the "*twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*" (1:1). "*Scattered abroad*" translates the Greek, *diaspora*. *Vincent's Word Studies* describes the term as "a familiar one for the whole body of Jews outside the Holy Land, scattered among the heathen" (cf. 1 Peter 1). "*The twelve tribes*" is a reference to the Jewish people in general (cf. Acts 26:7). Since the Assyrian captivity Jews dwelt in various parts of the world. Luke records in Acts, "*And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven*" (2:5). Additionally, prior to the gospel being presented to the Gentile world, persecution scattered Jewish Christians beyond Jerusalem (cf. Acts 8:4).

There appears to be ample evidence that the recipients of the epistle are of a Jewish background. However, it is even more obvious they are Christians. While "the twelve tribes" may indeed refer to Jews in general, by the writing of the epistle the literal twelve tribes of Israel had long been dissolved. Knowing there to be an "*Israel of God*" (Galatians 6:16) in contrast to those who merely fit into the physical seed of Abraham, "the twelve tribes" could very well be a reference to Christians in general. John mentioned the twelve tribes in Revelation 7:4-10 as a way of describing those who were Christians.

Regardless of the specific recipients, as have all books of the New Testament, James has been preserved by the omnipotence and providence of God as the eternal word. It is part of that which has been "*once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3) and is in this way addressed to all Christians in every generation.

Notable characteristics of James' audience:

- 1) *Their likely Jewish background*: Additional to the address of the epistle are distinctly Jewish tones to James' exhortations and admonitions. James refers to the gospel as "*the perfect law of liberty*" (1:25) which might bring to one's mind the contrast to the "*yoke of bondage*" (Galatians 5:1) that is the Law of Moses. The partiality shown to the rich in

chapter 2 is reminiscent of the injustices among Israel of old. The chapter dedicated to the tongue describes the kind of disharmony and hypocrisy which characterized the spiritual leaders of Israel which no doubt had an influence on the readers. Likewise, the judgment condemned by James in 4:11-12 reflects similar problems to the Pharisaical judging we read about in the New Testament. Lastly, James seems to address the same problem concerning the swearing of oaths that Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew 5:33-37) in 5:12. This vice is one which Jesus also condemned in the famous pronouncement of “woes” upon the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 (cf. vv. 16-22).

- 2) *Their acquaintance with suffering trials*: Suffering is a theme which finds its way to the surface several times throughout James’ epistle. While the epistle is likened by many to the proverbs of the Old Testament, along with 1 Peter one may make a connection to the Old Testament book of Job. James even uses him as an example of perseverance in suffering (cf. 5:11). Their being Jewish gives a distinct flavor to their suffering much like the epistle to the Hebrews. Much of the adversity they were experiencing came from their own. It is apparent by the reading of this epistle that the brethren were struggling to face these trials with the kind of steadfastness the gospel requires.
- 3) *Their acquaintance with poverty*: From the very start of the epistle James makes clear their suffering owes its existence in part to destitution (cf. 1:9; 2:5). His specific description of “*pure and undefiled religion*” (1:27) including the visitation of “*orphans and widows in their trouble*” is a reference to some who were among the poor in the brotherhood. The adversity of persecution and poverty intersected for others as the rich employers of these working brethren kept their wages back by fraud (cf. 5:1-6). Perhaps the knowledge of the Christian’s ethics made them easier targets (cf. 5:6).
- 4) *Their spiritual immaturity*: James’ words describe those who had habits of accusing God (cf. 1:13), lashing out at God (cf. 1:19-20), hearing but not obeying God (cf. 1:22-27), obeying God partially (cf. 2:8ff), being double-tongued (cf. 3:9-12), appealing to worldly wisdom (cf. 3:13-18), fighting among one another (cf. 4:1), speaking against God’s law (cf. 4:11-12), leaving God out of their plans (cf. 4:13-17), being impatient (cf. 5:7-11), and simply being guilty of sin (cf. 5:19-20). Clearly, there was an immaturity among James’ readers.
- 5) *Their tendency toward selfish ambition*: This problem is specifically pointed out by James in his chapter on teaching, the tongue, and wisdom (cf. 3:14, 16). However, it seems this problem was more pervasive for James’ readers. The entire first chapter has an underlying theme of pursuing self-interest at the expense of God’s will. Likewise, chapter 2 seems to describe one who might only adhere to those parts of the law that are most convenient for them. Chapter 3 notes those who aspire to be teachers for the seeming purpose of gaining attention, not for the edification of others and the glorification of God. Finally, in chapter 4 the general pride of sin is exposed, especially in the call to humility before God (cf. 4:6-10). These brethren were failing to truly deny self and pursue the will of God.

PURPOSE

The epistle has been referred to by many as both the “Christian’s book of proverbs,” and the “Gospel of common sense.” These descriptions of James owe themselves to the practical nature of the epistle. James deals with some fundamental aspects of discipleship and gives practical applications of the truths of the gospel in ways specific to the circumstances of his readers. These applications hold true to the eternal nature of God’s word (cf. 1 Peter 1:20-25) as they are as relevant today as they were when James’ pen was moved by the Holy Spirit to write them.

OUTLINE

- I. Greeting (1:1)**
- II. Enduring Trials God’s Way (1:2-27)**
 - A. The testing of faith under trial, and the product of patience (vv. 2-4).
 - B. The need for wisdom in trials, and the way to ask God for it (vv. 5-8).
 - C. The trials of the poor and rich (vv. 9-11).
 - D. The contrast of self-direction in trials, and the direction of God (vv. 12-18).
 - E. The word of God, and the Christian’s responsibility to it (vv. 19-27).
- III. Perfect Faith (2:1-26)**
 - A. Partiality shown to the rich in the assembly (vv. 1-4).
 - B. The incompatibility of mistreatment of the poor with God’s view of them (vv. 5-7).
 - C. The failure to fulfill the royal law manifest by keeping it only partially (vv. 8-13).
 - D. The relationship of works to faith necessary for faith to be perfect (complete) (vv. 14-26).
- IV. The Teacher, the Tongue, and True Wisdom (3:1-18)**
 - A. The warning to those who aspire to teach (vv. 1-5a).
 - B. The description of the tongue’s potential power for evil (vv. 5b-12).
 - C. The contrast of earthly and heavenly wisdom (vv. 13-18).
- V. Friendship with the World (4:1-17)**
 - A. The effect friendship with the world has on one’s relationship with God (vv. 1-5).
 - B. The call to humility before God (vv. 6-10).
 - C. The admonition against improper judgment of brethren (vv. 11-12).
 - D. The call to plan one’s life around God’s will (vv. 13-17).
- VI. Living Like a Christian Should (5:1-20)**
 - A. The oppressive rich denounced (vv. 1-6).
 - B. The brethren exhorted to patience (vv. 7-11).
 - C. The vice of oath-taking condemned (v. 12).
 - D. The proper reaction to suffering and sickness (vv. 13-18).
 - E. A final exhortation to accountability, and the saving of the erring (vv. 19-20).

QUESTIONS

1. Which James seems to have written the epistle?
2. What seems to be the time window for the writing of the epistle?
3. Who did James write to?
4. Describe the recipients of the epistle based on the topics James addressed.
5. What is the purpose of the epistle of James?

– CHAPTER 1 –
ENDURING TRIALS GOD’S WAY

MY BRETHREN, COUNT IT ALL JOY WHEN
YOU FALL INTO VARIOUS TRIALS,
KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR
FAITH PRODUCES PATIENCE.

COMMENTS

I. Greeting (1:1)

II. Enduring Trials God’s Way (1:2-27)

A. The testing of faith under trial, and the product of patience (vv. 2-4).

It is difficult to fathom the position of a Jewish convert to the faith of Christ in the 1st century. The pages of the New Testament are filled with examples of hardship faced by Jewish brethren from their own countrymen. James is an epistle bearing general admonitions for Christians of all backgrounds but has an apparent Jewish audience. The attention given to trials, and the corresponding call to adhere to the “*law of liberty*” (1:25) has an undertone of particularly Jewish convert troubles. The adversity they faced was immense.

The abundant scriptural evidence which led the Jew to accept Jesus as the Christ did not take away the emotional and physical toll such conversion would have on one who essentially – in the eyes of unbelieving Jews – forsook his countrymen. The vitriol and abuse hurled his way would have to be endured and overcome.

Yet, the trials of persecution from their own countrymen were only a part of what they were experiencing. James speaks of “*various trials*” (v. 2), many of which he enumerates throughout the epistle. Additional to persecution were trials of suffering brought about by circumstances common to man. Others were brought about by themselves. Regardless, trials are experienced by Christians and must be handled in a godly manner.

Through the pen of James, the Holy Spirit makes clear the necessary appropriation of wisdom to endure such trials (1:5). This request, reception, and application of wisdom is a thread which runs throughout the course of this epistle. Specifically, the wisdom requested in context is concerning the appropriate response to trials. However, such more fundamentally serves as the formula for the proving and growing of faith (1:3). Hardships test faith, and for faith to be found genuine one must endure by remaining true to God’s word (cf. 1 Peter 1:6-9). It may be that one finds a way to make it through trials emotionally, and even in a way which alleviates the suffering. Yet, if the actions taken and decisions made were not by the direction of the “*law of liberty*,” though they may appear to have been effective outwardly, spiritually they will have failed miserably. For, only the one who does what God tells him to do, even if it does not take the pain away, is “*blessed in what he does*” (1:25). So then, while enduring trials is the specific context at hand, how we use our free-will in response to God’s word is the general principle.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The “testing of your faith” (1:3), then, is all about how we use God’s word in the face of trials. James reveals that God desires the production of patience through the crucible of trials. The negative circumstances may not come from God as He gives “every good gift and every perfect gift” (1:17), but His power can provide for something good to come of them (cf. Romans 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). This is cause for rejoicing even in the face of trials (1:2).

B. The need for wisdom in trials, and the way to ask God for it (vv. 5-8).

Yet, the finite mind struggles to comprehend how suffering can amount to any good. Furthermore, the fact granted, it struggles to understand the process to ensure good, and what role an individual is to play. So, naturally James instructs the reader to turn his thoughts to God in request of much needed guidance through the difficulty. He follows with the encouraging notion that God will give more than enough to provide for our spiritual needs and will do so “without reproach” (1:5). Yet, as with most promises of God there are conditions we must meet.

Since the very reason we are asking God for wisdom is the shoring up of faith to withstand the trials and grow from them, it is only logical that our asking be “in faith” (1:6). I.e. it must be a request made in relation to the very nature of Biblical faith which comes from hearing God’s word (cf. Romans 10:17), and in the interest of that faith continuing as God sees fit. The idea of asking “in faith” is further demonstrated as James addresses what would be opposite – asking “with doubting” (1:6). The doubting man is double-minded, tossed and turned “like a wave of the sea” (1:6). His ways of religion are unstable because he is back and forth on whether he truly desires God’s way. He has asked for it but has done so with reservations in his heart. Maybe he thinks he knows a better way. Maybe he has an idea of what God’s instructions will be, but they are not attractive to him. Whatever it is, his doubt will prevent God from giving him anything, and he will be left to himself since he has essentially rejected God’s wisdom even while asking for it.

C. The trials of the poor and rich (vv. 9-11).

What trials might James be addressing? “Various trials” (1:2) suggests trials in general. However, James addresses some specific areas which might cause brethren to experience trials. The poor among James’ readers certainly are prone to trial. The wisdom provided by God for enduring them – let him “glory in his exaltation” (1:9). The rich also are prone to trial, even though it be somewhat different than that of the poor. The wisdom provided by God for enduring such trials – let him glory “in his humiliation” (1:10). The rich must recognize his riches, as well as his life, are temporary.

D. The contrast of self-direction in trials, and the direction of God (vv. 12-18).

All who endure trials will ultimately be rewarded with “the crown of life” (1:12). However, the double-minded man will be unable to endure, for he has rejected the wisdom of God. He is unstable (1:8). James explains why: such a one is inclined to follow his own ways, not the ways

of God. The Bible has a word to describe the urge to do what we want to do, rather than what God instructs – temptation. However, this wavering brother understands the fundamental contradiction of such a mindset to his profession of faith. Therefore, in attempt to ease his conscience, he may ascribe his desires to God’s direction. Yet, if his ways are contrary to God’s will revealed in His word it is obvious this is not from God, for it is evil, and God cannot have anything to do with evil. Rather, James exposes the thought’s true origin – it is his own desire which has trapped the man, produced sin, and finally will result in eternal death. The Christian must beware lest he deceive himself into thinking his ways are the same as God’s.

To deter self-deception, James shows the obvious – God only gives what is good. He is the “*Father of lights*” (1:17). In Him is no darkness (cf. 1 John 1:5). Staying true to the source of wisdom provided by God to endure trials and produce patience to the proving and strengthening of faith, James gives the spiritual birth from God’s word as an example of such good being provided by God. The man seeking to endure trials, thus proving his faith, needs to remind himself of the beginning of his faith. What did he follow to become a child of God in the first place? The same would help him grow as a child of God. It is best to trust in God’s word, not our own thoughts.

E. The word of God, and the Christian’s responsibility to it (vv. 19-27).

The man who asks God for wisdom needs to stop his mouth and open his ears. We speak to request of God, and we listen to receive. It is foolish to reply against our Maker (cf. Romans 9:20). Such a one hears but does not hear (cf. Isaiah 6:9-10). It is even less helpful to react to God’s word in wrath. The one who hears God’s word and is moved to anger does not possess the malleable heart of faith, but the stubborn, hardened heart of unbelief. It is impossible for such wrath to produce the intended result of God’s direction in the gospel (cf. Romans 1:17).

The only way God can help the Christian endure trials is if the Christian is willing to abandon sinful passions in a heart of penitence and receive God’s word. This can only be accomplished in a spirit of “*meekness*” (1:21). There must be a humble willingness to yield to any and all of God’s instructions. Only then can the word save us, for any other approach fails to give God’s word free course in the heart to do its work (cf. John 8:37).

James describes the meek reception of the word in greater detail. It involves more than simply hearing. The one who hears but does not do is no better than he who deceives himself by thinking his ways are acceptable to God (1:13-16). An illustration is used of a man who utilizes a mirror, but instead of correcting anything that is out of sort discovered in his reflection, he leaves only to forget what he saw. This illustration shows the folly in approaching God’s word without the intent and execution to act on it. Who would ever discover a flaw in their appearance with a tool purposed toward that very discovery only to ignore the finding? Yet, the Christian who studies God’s wisdom in His word only to fail in personal application involves himself in something far more foolish. The only one blessed by God’s word is the one who does what it says.

Interestingly, both the one who hears God’s word only, and the one who hears God’s word and obeys, thinks himself religious. But the former, in context, is not “*swift to hear, [and] slow to speak*” (1:26). He is the “*double-minded man*” (1:8) who replies against God’s wisdom with his own. This does not simply occur through a literal verbal exclamation, but through the conversation of daily life. He has no control over that which reveals his heart, and thus can have

great control in his life (cf. 3:2). *“This one’s religion is useless”* (1:26) because it is *“self-imposed religion”* (Colossians 2:23) to the exclusion of God’s wisdom.

Perhaps following the specific cases of trial with the poor and rich of verses 9-11, James offers an example of what one might show to be true religion by the hearing and doing God’s word. The visitation in generous service of the orphans and widows who are indeed among the poor of James’ audience would exhibit the will of God in action (cf. 2:15). It may be that the rich brother can respond to his trials in the flesh by aiding a less fortunate brother or sister in need. This indeed would be a great bolster of faith. On the other hand, the poor among James’ audience that would include the orphans and widows would do well to avoid succumbing to worldliness to alleviate their suffering. Worldly wisdom has suggested virtue in this route through various sources. There is no virtue in undermining God’s law to overcome suffering. If such were the case, *“the offense of the cross has ceased”* (Galatians 5:11).

QUESTIONS

1. How does James describe himself in the opening verse? If the writer is the brother of the Lord, what significance, if any, might this description hold?
2. Why should we “*count it all joy*” (v. 2) when we are confronted with trials?
3. How should we ask God for wisdom?
4. What does it mean for the poor to “*glory in his exaltation?*” (v. 9)
5. What does it mean for the rich to “*glory in...his humiliation?*” (vv. 9-10)
6. What might the discussion of temptation in verses 13-15 have to do with the “*double-minded man*” of verse 8?
7. How are we to receive God’s word? Explain the meaning of the word, especially in relation to the context of verse 21.

8. Whose religion is useless? Why might this be the case?

9. What does James describe as “*pure and undefiled religion?*” (v. 27)

10. How might the exhortations of verse 27 concerning “*pure and undefiled religion?*” relate to the poor and rich of verses 8-11?

11. CONSIDER – Does the description of “*pure and undefiled religion?*” in verse 27 authorize the support of human institutions such as orphan and widow homes from the church treasury? If so, how? If not, why?

– CHAPTER 2 – PERFECT FAITH

WAS NOT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER
JUSTIFIED BY WORKS WHEN HE OFFERED
ISAAC HIS SON ON THE ALTAR? DO YOU
SEE THAT FAITH WAS WORKING
TOGETHER WITH HIS WORKS, AND BY
WORKS FAITH WAS MADE PERFECT?

COMMENTS

III. Perfect Faith (2:1-26)

A. Partiality shown to the rich in the assembly (vv. 1-4).

James established that the blessed man is not he who asks for wisdom with hidden reservations in his heart, ultimately desiring to go a different direction according to his own desires, but he is the one who is a doer of *“the perfect law of liberty”* (1:25). The *“law of liberty”* is still under discussion in this chapter (2:12). James addresses a problem among his readers which reflected the opposite of his admonitions from chapter 1. His readers were being inconsistent with their application of God’s word. They were holding it with partiality (2:1).

Contrary to understanding the exaltation of the poor and the humiliation of the rich (1:9-11), the brethren James addressed were showing partiality to the rich. However, James asserts that *“the faith”* (2:1), or the *“law of liberty”* (2:12), the gospel, is not to be applied differently to various classes of people, even if they be visitors of the assembly.

Evidently, the readers thought they were successfully fulfilling the *“royal law”* (2:8) regarding the command to love their neighbor. Yet, that law is impartial, as Jesus demonstrated in His parable (cf. Luke 10:25-37), and these brethren were guilty of showing partiality. When a man entered their assembly decked in expensive clothing and jewelry, they sat him in a place of honor. But the poor man who walked in right beside him dressed in rags was told to sit in an inferior place. He was pushed to the side as if he had no worth. They effectively usurped the position of judge, and like Israel of old perverted justice, and neglected mercy with their *“evil thoughts”* (2:4).

B. The incompatibility of mistreatment of the poor with God’s view of them (vv. 5-7).

However, God, the true judge (4:12), chose the poor to be subjects of immeasurable wealth in His kingdom. Yet, they dishonor him. Ironically, the one they are partial to is part of an oppressive and unjust class who have been guilty of blasphemy against the very faith the readers hold with

partiality. Should they have treated him poorly? No, but they should not have treated the poor man any differently.

C. The failure to fulfill the royal law manifest by keeping it only partially (vv. 8-13).

If they really fulfilled the royal law (2:8) they would not have shown partiality. The love we are to have for our neighbor includes both the poor and the rich. While they had done well in showing the rich man love and respect, they showed utter contempt for the royal law by failing to apply it to their dealings with the poor man. In doing so they sinned and were proven to be transgressors by the very law they claimed to fulfill.

This introduces a fundamental principle of law. If one is to avoid guilt and stand just by the law, he must keep it entirely. Theoretically, he could keep the law flawlessly in every area but one, and he would still be *“guilty of all”* (2:10) due to that failure. This adds to the admonition to *“be doers of the word, and not hearers only”* (1:22). James asserts that we must be doers of the entire word. Every part of the law comes from the same Lawgiver. Both adultery and murder are prohibited, and equally part of the law. If one is committed but the other avoided, the law has still been broken.

Their conduct must reflect this principle. If they are to stand just before God in judgment, they must act in such a way consistent with the entirety of *“the law of liberty,”* not just part of it. Regardless, they will require mercy at judgment due to their past failures. The very rebuke of their holding the faith with partiality makes their need for mercy evident. However, if they show no mercy themselves, they will receive no mercy in judgment. They fail to show mercy to the poor man by dishonoring him. Instead, their love of mercy, and eagerness to show it, should have extinguished any initial judgment of the poor man in comparison to the rich man. God’s mercy will triumph over judgment in the end for those who meet His conditions. Why should it not do the same in our relationships one to another?

D. The relationship of works to faith necessary for faith to be perfect (complete) (vv. 14-26).

Ultimately, in claiming to fulfill the royal law while showing partiality to the rich man, and dishonoring the poor, the brethren have become guilty of wielding a dead faith. Actions speak louder than words. Their actions of partiality did not agree with their words which claimed to follow the *“royal law.”* What profit comes with such an empty profession? There is no security in judgment from an empty affirmation of faith which is lacking in works of obedience.

James addresses this inconsistency by offering a hypothetical. Following the practice of what is described as *“pure and undefiled religion”* (1:27), and the need to show mercy to the poor man, James suggests a situation where a brother is found *“naked and destitute of daily food”* (2:15). What should one do in this instance? It may be that he is first inclined to wish the person well, and even offer a prayer on his behalf. This is not wrong. However, to do so without the corresponding action of loving service in offering the destitute brother what he needs is to fail. This, too, would be a failure to *“really fulfill the royal law”* (2:8). Love is expressed in action of

service. But to say without doing is to fail in faith. As James will say later, *“to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (4:17). The one who has wished his brother well need not expect any spiritual profit by his words. He has not borne any fruit of righteousness but has merely exposed his faith as being devoid of works, thus, dead.

Someone may reply to James, *“You have faith, and I have works”* (2:18), making faith and works mutually exclusive. This could not be further from the truth. James shows that neither faith, nor good works exist separate from each other. Faith cannot be shown separate from works, and as expressed before, faith must be shown. James provides the demons as an example of the worthlessness of faith devoid of works. Demons know that God exists, but they are by no means servants of God with that conviction. Likewise, faith without works is dead, and to think otherwise is foolish.

Anyone with a smattering knowledge of scripture can recall the way Abraham was justified. He did not possess an inactive faith, but continually showed his faith by his works, especially as he endured his most profound test of offering his son on the altar. The account demonstrates the partnership between faith and works. They work together, and by works faith is made *“perfect,”* or complete. The faith of Abraham was not unfinished, like that of those who claimed to fulfill the royal law but showed partiality. He did not simply journey to Moriah, climb the mountain, and build the altar only to neglect offering his son. Rather, *“he offered Isaac his son on the altar.”* By doing so he filled up all the more the scripture which spoke of his righteousness accounted to him by God on the basis of his faith. He truly was a friend of God.

Likewise, James gives Rahab the harlot as an example of faith that is perfected in works. She was justified, not by simply declaring her faith in Jehovah when the spies presented themselves to her, but by acting on that faith in the service of God’s people, thus, God Himself. So, the requisites of God span evenly from the father of the Jewish people even to the lowly Gentile. God does not show partiality but demands that all respond to Him with a working faith.

Lastly, James stresses the point with a final parallel. The body is animated to life by the spirit. When the spirit leaves the body, death is the result. *“So faith without works is dead also.”*

QUESTIONS

1. What is “*the faith*” (v. 1) and why should we avoid holding it with partiality?
2. How were James’ recipients guilty of showing partiality?
3. How might partiality be shown in the church today?
4. How has God evaluated the poor? In what way has God chosen the poor to be “*rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?*” (v. 5)
5. What effect did their offense of partiality have on their claim to “*fulfill the royal law?*”
6. How does James’ description of the nature of keeping the law versus transgressing the law in verses 10-11 generally apply to us as Christians?
7. How might the section on faith and works beginning in verse 14 correspond to previous thoughts in the chapter?

8. How does James describe faith devoid of works?

9. What does the word used to describe Abraham's faith, translated "*perfect*," (v. 22) mean? (NOTE: Greek, *teleioō*)

10. What scripture was fulfilled through Abraham's offering of Isaac? At what point in Abraham's life was this spoken concerning his faith? What does it mean that this scripture was "*fulfilled*?" (v. 23) (NOTE: Greek, *plēroō*)

11. What other Old Testament character is used as an example of these principles of faith and works? Who was she? What significance, if any, might her example alongside Abraham's hold regarding God's system of justification by working faith?

12. CONSIDER – Martin Luther rejected the entire epistle of James calling it, "an epistle of straw," primarily due to the content of chapter 2. His issue concerned a supposed contradiction between James' teaching on justification by works and Paul's teaching on justification by faith apart from works. Are the "works" of Paul's writing from which he teaches justification is separate the same as the "works" of James' epistle which he teaches are necessary for justification? How might we explain the harmony between James and Paul?

13. CONSIDER – Besides the false doctrine of "salvation by faith only," what might be another example of "*faith without works*?"

– CHAPTER 3 –
THE TEACHER, THE TONGUE,
AND TRUE WISDOM

MY BRETHREN, LET NOT MANY OF YOU
BECOME TEACHERS, KNOWING THAT WE
SHALL RECEIVE A STRICTER JUDGMENT.
FOR WE ALL STUMBLE IN MANY THINGS. IF
ANYONE DOES NOT STUMBLE IN WORD, HE
IS A PERFECT MAN, ABLE ALSO TO BRIDLE
THE WHOLE BODY.

COMMENTS

Already, James has indirectly spoken at length about the tongue. It is the instrument used in requesting wisdom from God (1:5); the weapon used to accuse God (1:13), and express anger toward His will (1:19-20, 26). The tongue was used in the sinful practice of showing partiality (2:2-3). James warned about judgment, and exhorted his readers, “*so speak...as those who will be judged by the law of liberty*” (2:12). He also addressed the empty profession of faith devoid of works (2:14).

In the discussion of desiring, requesting, hearing, and submitting to God’s wisdom to the end of possessing a perfect, or complete faith, James commences with a detailed discussion of the most powerful, though small member of man – the tongue. This small member of the body is the fountainhead of unveiling the innermost content of a man. It ultimately reveals whether one is under the influence of Divine, or earthly wisdom (3:13-18). In excessive use, it regularly manifests the latter.

IV. The Teacher, the Tongue, and True Wisdom (3:1-18)

A. The warning to those who aspire to teach (vv. 1-5a).

What position has more to do with the tongue and wisdom than that of a teacher? Furthermore, what position is more misunderstood than that of a teacher? James, therefore, is unsurprisingly directed by the Spirit to write on the subject. Evidently, there were among James’ readers, much like the crowds the Lord addressed in His ministry, some who desired to become, or became teachers from selfish ambition. They sought the publicity rather than the “*fruit of righteousness*” (3:18). They did not undertake the project of teaching with the heart of a bondservant like the writer of this great epistle (1:1), but with a heart corrupted by worldly wisdom (3:14-16). They knew not what great damage they could cause and did cause by their careless approach to such an important work.

James begins by discouraging many from aspiring to become teachers. He is not undermining the plan Christ left with His church for edification (Ephesians 4:7-16), nor is he contradicting the principle that over time all ought, to a degree, to mature to the ability of teaching (Hebrews 5:12-14). Rather, he is addressing the very important topic of teaching God's word with an appropriate measure of caution and dissuading those who have not exemplified a spiritual maturity from undertaking such a weighty role.

His dissuasion first highlights a personal reality for the teacher. He then will progress to the possible effects which reach far beyond. Some should decide against becoming a teacher as they reflect on the judgment (3:1). Jesus said men will be judged for every idle word (cf. Matthew 12:36). Naturally, the teacher speaks more than others, and therefore has a "*greater judgment*" (YLT) – i.e. a greater scope of judgment. There are many ways to stumble and overcoming these vices can display varying degrees of maturity. However, the one who has mastered his tongue "*is a perfect man*" (3:2). His growth has reached a level of completeness where he has learned to control the most uncontrollable part of his body. He is therefore equipped with the self-control to "*bridle his whole body*" (3:2). One might be impressed, even surprised, by the amount of power attributed by James to one of the smallest members of the body. James gives the examples of a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a small flame to demonstrate what small things have great power.

B. The description of the tongue's potential power for evil (vv. 5b-12).

Building on the figure of a fire used to demonstrate the great power residing in something so small, James demonstrates the potential destructive power of the tongue. It is a fire. Its potential capacity for sinful practices spans like the universe. It defiles the entire man as it manifests the content of the heart from which proceed evil thoughts leading to action (cf. Matthew 15:18-20). Its effects spread throughout the whole round of a man's existence. It alone can lead a man to the burning fires of Gehenna.

James further demonstrates the danger of the tongue. While men have continually displayed their God-given dominion over creation by taming wild animals, none have successfully tamed the tongue. Of course, James is stressing the power of the tongue with hyperbolic language. The "*perfect man*" (3:2) has gained control over the tongue. However, most men fail to do so. It is an unstable and uncontrollable evil with potent and deadly poison. It is a viper waiting to strike.

The tongue is capable of unnatural and inconsistent things. Where a spring sends forth only fresh or bitter water from its fountainhead, and a fruit tree bears only that of its kind, the tongue is capable of both blessing and cursing. One can speak well of God and use the same instrument to malign his fellow man who has been made in God's image. "*My brethren, these things ought not to be so*" (3:10).

C. The contrast of earthly and heavenly wisdom (vv. 13-18).

"*Let not many of you become teachers*" (3:1). Why might they have this desire in the first place? The chapter has not left the discussion. Teachers are to impart the wisdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel. However, much like today, even in the first century men were guilty of assuming the role of a teacher to draw attention to their own wisdom. Men enjoy praise. But

one is not to teach to appear wise. The church needs teachers, but she does not need men who misuse the position as a platform for self-aggrandizement. Does one want to appear wise? Teaching is not the approach to take. Rather, he should display it through humble submission to God's word in performing His will on a daily basis.

Contrariwise, the one who is zealous to teach for the sake of teaching possesses bitter zeal. It will not lead to blessing. Primarily because such a teacher is not seeking the edification of his brethren but is ambitious for his own sake. As such men project a façade of wisdom by teaching, *"understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm"* (1 Timothy 1:7), they produce the opposite effect intended by teaching. They raise themselves up against the truth with lies of wisdom. Yet, this wisdom manifests that it is not from God. It has no greater concern than the things of the earth, and sensual pleasure. It comes from Satan. This is confirmed by the insubordination and resultant sin that exists in the heart of one driven by bitter zeal and selfish ambition. Nothing good comes from teaching directed by worldly wisdom.

True wisdom, that which *"is from above"* (3:17), is not bitter, selfish, disorderly, and sinful. It is without admixture in theme with true religion (1:27). It promotes peace, and deals with others in a gentle fashion, unlike the use of the tongue which leads to the damage described earlier. It is submissive, first to God, then to others. Contrary to the *"judges with evil thoughts"* (2:4) who showed no mercy to the poor man, it is compassionate and serving. It does not hold itself back from certain people but extends to any and all, and with the same quality, quantity, and measure. It is consistent with its profession in word and deed.

The teacher's ultimate goal should be the production of righteousness. He is to declare the *"righteousness of God"* (1:20), so that, when men apply his teaching that is according to the gospel it produces the fruit of God's will, not that of man. However, the teacher who possesses worldly wisdom fails in this. The seed which will bring forth the harvest of righteousness is only sown in peace, and it is done so with conscious effort. Worldly wisdom does not accomplish this. As James will show in the following chapter, worldly wisdom, and the teachers who possess it and promote it, only starts and stokes fires among brethren. It leads to *"wars and fights"* (4:1). God's will is peace, and only His wisdom will promote it.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the subject matter of chapter 3 as indicated by verse 1?
2. Study the Greek word, *meizōn*, translated “*stricter*” (v. 1). Does James mean teachers will be judged by a stricter standard than “regular Christians?” If so, what does this say about God? If not, what might “*stricter judgment*” indicate?
3. Is James discouraging Christians from ever becoming teachers at all? If teachers are an important part of the Lord’s church, what point might James be seeking to make for those who have this aspiration?
4. What does “*perfect man*” (v. 2) mean?
5. Why would control over the tongue imply control over the whole body? (Think: What does the tongue reveal in a man? How does that relate to the actions of his body?)
6. To what does James liken the tongue?
7. Based on James’ description of the tongue in verses 6-12, is the tongue inherently evil? If not, why not? What is James’ point?

8. If “*no man can tame the tongue*” (v. 8), can we control our tongue? Is verse 2 an impossibility? Explain.

9. Are the verses on wisdom (vv. 13-18) related to the verses on the tongue? How?

10. Explain James’ description of earthly wisdom in verses 14 and 16.

11. Based on verse 18, what should be the goal of teaching? How is this accomplished?

12. CONSIDER – What is a “*false teacher*?” (cf. 2 Peter 2:1) Could there be false teachers in the Lord’s church? Based on James’ description of the potential destructiveness of the tongue, should false teachers ever be tolerated in any way?

– CHAPTER 4 – FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD

ADULTERERS AND ADULTERESSES! DO YOU
NOT KNOW THAT FRIENDSHIP WITH THE
WORLD IS ENMITY WITH GOD? WHOEVER
THEREFORE WANTS TO BE A FRIEND OF
THE WORLD MAKES HIMSELF
AN ENEMY OF GOD.

COMMENTS

Wisdom has shown itself to be a key part of James' epistle. The first step in properly responding to trials is to ask God for wisdom to endure them (1:5). This wisdom remains the topic of consideration throughout the first chapter as James deals with the practice of submitting to the wisdom revealed in God's word (1:12ff). The discussion of faith that obeys the law completely and is confirmed to be alive through such works continues general themes of submission to God's wisdom which began in the first chapter (2:1ff). The section on teachers and the tongue is concluded with a contrast of earthly and heavenly wisdom (3:13-18). Some who aspired to be teachers were motivated by a worldly wisdom. Their teaching posed an incredible threat shown by a graphic depiction of the tongue's destructive potential.

James does not break his thoughts on wisdom with the fourth chapter division. He merely continues application. Earthly wisdom is characterized by "*bitter envy and self-seeking*" (3:14). In contrast to the peaceable fruit of righteousness heavenly wisdom yields, the putrid fruits of "*confusion and every evil thing*" (3:16) are borne by demonic wisdom. James shows more specifically how these fruits of earthly wisdom are manifest in the lives of his recipients.

V. Friendship with the World (4:1-17)

A. The effect friendship with the world has on one's relationship with God (vv. 1-5).

His question concerning their possession of wisdom (3:13) is paralleled by a question about the origin of the conflict among them (4:1). His connection is not hard to see – their conflict is another result of their worldly wisdom. Their hedonistic ("*desires for pleasure,*" Greek, *hēdonē*) mindset led them to turn on each other (4:1), even to harm their brethren (4:2). All these selfish attempts failed. Some were not gaining what they sought because they left God completely out of the picture. They were not asking the One who promised to give His children their necessities (4:2) (cf. Matthew 7:7-11). Others were not receiving because, as James noted earlier (1:6), their prayerful petition did not meet God's standard (4:3). Worldly wisdom even found a way to leave its mark on the prayer life of Christians. Their petition was tainted by carnality (4:3).

James does not mince words; He calls them what they are – “*Adulterers and adulteresses!*” (4:4) These Jewish converts to Christianity may have thought themselves better than their idolatrous ancestors, but they were no different. It is those who “*desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*” (Hebrews 11:16a) that God is not ashamed to be associated with. The affections of James’ readers, however, are for the world, and that places them against God as His enemies (4:4). Their behavior showed an indifferent mindset toward the general principle of Scripture concerning God’s children – He wants their entire devotion. As James has already spoken about keeping the whole law (2:10-11), he reiterates such by showing that God’s Spirit revealed word is intended to take over our entire self (4:5). As a husband, God jealously desires our full commitment.

B. The call to humility before God (vv. 6-10).

The convicting nature of God’s word was revealed by James in the figure of the mirror (1:22-25); his words of rebuke brought the principle to life. The text continues with the solution – what can be done when the mirror of God’s word reveals a life opposed to God? Those who are humbled can appeal to Him for His grace (4:6). He still “*yearns jealously,*” and will receive the penitent. What seems like insurmountable worldliness is nothing compared to the immeasurable grace of God.

“*God...gives grace to the humble*” – James describes this virtue opposite of sinful pride. The humility is related to the “*meekness*” with which one must receive the implanted word (1:21). It involves accepting and assuming the subordinate position before God. He requires a full surrender of will to His authority (4:7). This call to submission implies the need to resist any other power. The devil rules the darkness, and he must be refused. James promises his readers that the adversary will flee from those who reject him (4:7). As the humble penitent submits to God and resists the devil he is drawing near to God. The readers are assured that such a change before God from foe to friend will gain His favor – “*He will draw near to you.*” (4:8)

James elaborates on this humility which submits to God and resists the devil. It involves the cessation of the outward practice of sins involving the “*hands,*” which requires a purification of the inward part of man, the heart (4:8). Their hands were involved in sinful deeds because their hearts were divided regarding service to God (cf. 1:8). Repentance involves the cleansing of both. This change only comes from an intense sorrow for sin. They should have a newfound repugnance for the deeds of the flesh they were involved in, and a corresponding shame and grief for their prior behavior (4:9). This is the humility God calls for, and the one who displays it He will exalt (4:10).

C. The admonition against improper judgment of brethren (vv. 11-12).

Where James showed the worldly wisdom pursued before by his readers resulted in their opposition to God, having now called them to humble penitence, he addresses two specific offenses which they had committed. Their evil judgments did not stop at interactions with visitors of the assembly (2:1-4) but were even among themselves (4:11). James censors and rebukes their evil speaking against one another by showing the deeper implications of their speech and

attitude. Such evil speaking came in the form of improper judgments. These judgments resulted in a judgment of the law itself, and therefore a “speaking against” the law (4:11). Such audacious judgments were tantamount to usurping the position of Lawgiver which belongs only to Deity (4:12). They judged some as unrighteous based on standards they created themselves, and thus, considered themselves right by the same carnal standards. In doing so, they manifested their view that the law was insufficient as it lacked what they deemed to be necessary judgments. James shows they are out of place. Only the true Lawgiver dictates what is right and wrong, and who is saved or to be destroyed (4:12). The Christian’s place is to submit to that law, thus the Lawgiver, not to usurp His role.

D. The call to plan one’s life around God’s will (vv. 13-17).

James addresses another problem. Some of his readers were involved in a lifestyle leading them to neglect doing what they knew to be God’s will (4:17). He beckons those who are consumed with commerce to consider just how little control they have (4:13). These presumptuous ones boasted in their confidence of “tomorrow.” James impresses them with the brevity of their lives and tells them what their attitude should be instead (4:14). They should avoid the feeling of complete control and realize who really is in complete control – the Lord (4:15). His words are not suggestive of an exact utterance all children of God are to recite before planning. They resemble the humble mindset which acknowledges the Lord as being in control and accepts the subordinate position of being under His control (cf. 4:7). Only this perspective leads to the consistent doing of what is known to be “good” according to the Lord’s will (4:17). Any other way of living is boastful, prideful, and negligent (4:16).

QUESTIONS

1. What connection is there, if any, between the content of this chapter and the previous?
2. What two reasons did James give for the fact that his readers *“do not have?”*
3. What other things may hinder our prayers?
4. What is *“friendship with the world,”* (v. 4) and what effect does it have on one’s relationship with God?
5. What principle of scripture does James appeal to as a demonstration of the incongruity of their friendship with the world and their being children of God?
6. To whom does God give His grace? Of what does this attitude consist according to James?
7. Explain the significance of the requirement to *“Cleanse your hands...and purify your hearts”* (v. 8).

8. Of what does the exaltation of the humble consist? (v. 10) (cf. 1:9)

9. In speaking against their brethren, what does James say they also speak against? Why might this be the case?

10. What are some examples in scripture of speaking against another which results in speaking against the law?

11. What is James' issue with those who are involved in buying and selling?

12. In what way does the negligence noted in verse 17 connect with the circumstances addressed by James in verses 13-16? How might this apply to us today?

– CHAPTER 5 –
LIVING LIKE A CHRISTIAN SHOULD

THEREFORE BE PATIENT, BRETHREN, UNTIL
THE COMING OF THE LORD...ESTABLISH
YOUR HEARTS, FOR THE COMING OF THE
LORD IS AT HAND.

COMMENTS

In this concluding chapter of the epistle James revisits themes with which he started – suffering (1:2), patience (1:3-4), and prayer (1:5). Additionally, he provides a solution for those who have gone astray and failed to be “doers of the word” (1:22; 5:19-20). As he alluded to earlier, the rich have much to do with the trials experienced by the brethren (2:6-7); he reintroduces them in this chapter. Overall, the epistle is brought to a full circle ending with thoughts on proper behavior for Christians in the face of difficulties.

VI. Living Like a Christian Should (5:1-20)

A. The oppressive rich denounced (vv. 1-6).

One manifestation of worldly wisdom James condemned in the previous chapter concerned the aspiration to be rich. The brethren are admonished for the presumptuous and boastful character leading to neglect displayed in planning with worldly wisdom. His call for them to include the Lord in all their plans (4:15) shows the guilty addressed are those supposed to be concerned with the Lord’s will – brethren. Now James utilizes the literary device of apostrophe to address the rich who are not the intended readers of the epistle. In doing so, the brethren will be forewarned concerning the end of the path several are headed down, and those who have fallen victim to the exploitations and injustices of the rich will be comforted to know God is not ignoring these wrongs.

The rich are called to violent grief appropriate for the misery in their future (5:1). Such misery is what they had truly treasured up in their lives of materialism and worldliness (5:3b). All they lived for, from their crops to their clothes and even their money, is perishable, and stands as a witness against their lives of vanity and the just reward due them (5:2-3).

“*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6:10). Such is manifested by the way these rich have come into their wealth. They intentionally failed to pay the laborers of their fields – prospering from their efforts at the expense of their livelihood (5:4a). They used their positions of influence and power as people of affluence to manipulate the innocent who were powerless to resist them, even taking their lives (5:6). However, James reminds them, and assures the brethren, that the lack of resistance to their ungodly ways would not last. The Lord of armies has heard the cries of His people (5:4b). All the luxuries these have lived for have simply been a preparation for their doom (5:5).

This graphic depiction of judgment on the ungodly rich serves as a foundation for James' appeal to the "brethren" (5:7). As they are oppressed by this ungodly class, they must not lose heart knowing the Lord hears their cries and will avenge them. However, it also stands as an effective warning to avoid being blemished by such worldliness, and rather to endure such trials with godly patience.

B. The brethren exhorted to patience (vv. 7-11).

Echoing his previous call to perseverance in trial (cf. 1:2-4), James makes use of three examples of patience. The farmer does not see the fruit of his labor immediately, but must patiently wait (5:7). In the same way the brethren need to stand firm in the faith, waiting for their reward at the Lord's coming (5:8). The prophets are given as an excellent example of suffering for doing the Lord's will and bearing such patiently (5:10). Lastly, the famous account of the suffering of Job is used by James to demonstrate the blessedness of endurance, and the graciousness of the Lord (5:11).

While the hope of these brethren is evident, James' call to perseverance also comes from the sobering perspective of their own judgment. Their patience is needed, "*lest you be condemned*" (5:9). The same Judge coming to avenge His people and bestow upon them the promised reward will also judge them. With such adversity about them, they may be inclined to grumble, directing their frustrations toward their own brethren (5:9). Such would not be without consequence. It may even be a temptation to simply grumble to others about their problems. Either way, godly patience is inclusive of joy and thanksgiving. James urges the same as Paul – "*Do all things without complaining and disputing*" (Philippians 2:14).

C. The vice of oath-taking condemned (v. 12).

In verse 12, James either continues thoughts relating to the need for perseverance under trial, or as he brings his epistle to its close, he addresses a separate matter he deems worthy of attention. With some identical words and phrases, it is hard to believe James is not speaking of the same problem addressed by Jesus. His thoughts are parallel to that of the Lord in His sermon on the mount (cf. Matthew 5:33-37). In His pronouncement of woes upon the Pharisees, Jesus seems to address the same problem He did earlier in His ministry (cf. Matthew 23:16-22) and elaborates on the particulars of the sinful action.

James addresses another form of useless religion (cf. 1:26) where one's words are incompatible with their conduct. It is possible this inconsistency is spurred on by the pressure of suffering at the hands of evil doers. It was a common practice among the Jews to reinforce their words with oaths. To avoid taking the Lord's name in vain, they often invoked the names of various places or things – "*heaven or by earth*" (5:12). Usually, this use of oath taking was common among those who had no intention of performing their oaths or speaking the truth. To be more convincing in their lie they would take an oath.

This practice was utterly inappropriate for those who were disciples of "*the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6). A Christian's word should always be true. James points the brethren away

from this vice and calls them to be truthful with their words. To succumb to this ungodly custom would be to play the hypocrite (*“judgment,” hypokrisis*, Majority Text).

D. The proper reaction to suffering and sickness (vv. 13-18).

As he noted in the first chapter of the epistle, patience in trials is achieved in part by petitioning God in prayer (cf. 1:2-5). A proper response to suffering, especially for the sake of the Lord, is to pray (5:13a). The wellness of mind (*“cheerful,” euthymeō*) which comes from giving our troubles to God should result in singing songs of praise to Him (5:13b). As Paul did, James intimately places joy, endurance, and prayer together (cf. Romans 12:12).

In context with physical suffering, James notes prayer to be the appropriate response to physical illness (5:14). Considering that the *“prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (5:16b), James instructs the brethren to call for the elders of the church to come pray for the sick. The Lord promises through James that such prayers will be answered, and the sick will be restored. However, the effectiveness of prayer is not lessened through the administration of medicaments. So, the elders are to appropriately apply oil to the sick *“in the name of the Lord,”* acknowledging He is in control to make such effective.

Additionally, prayer is especially appropriate and effective in matters pertaining to the spiritual (5:15b). The Lord’s second law of pardon involves prayer (cf. 1 John 1:9; 2:1-2). While such petition for forgiveness in a spirit of penitence is a matter ultimately between the offender and his God, it is right for brethren to be open about spiritual struggles and failings to offer intercessory prayers on behalf of each other (5:16).

As he did in his call for the brethren to be patient, James alludes to an example to emphasize his point further. Elijah the prophet exhibited the great effectiveness of prayer when he petitioned God for the rain to stop, and it did, and then for the rain to start again, and it did (5:17-18). Great confidence is given the brethren by James when he noted that Elijah had no special advantage than they in this realm of prayer (5:17a). His prayer was effective because of the One it petitioned, and because it was offered in faith (5:15a).

E. A final exhortation to accountability, and the saving of the erring (vv. 19-20).

James has given attention to various details and practical applications of Christian living. Ultimately, all the matters addressed boil down to an adherence to God’s truth in faith. Naturally then, as a final exhortation James addresses the great deed of restoring those who wander from the truth (5:19-20). There should be no hesitation on the part of brethren to turn their spiritual kin away from death and sin. The brethren must hold each other accountable to all that James gave attention to in his epistle. Such is a great act of love (cf. 1 Peter 4:8)

QUESTIONS

1. What similarities are there between chapters 1 and 5?
2. How might addressing the ungodly rich who are not a part of James' readers be helpful? (vv. 1-6)
3. Consider the three descriptions of the belongings of the rich which James shows are corruptible (vv. 2-3). What is there of a physical nature that is reliable, and worthy of our greatest attention?
4. What could the brethren expect at the "*coming of the Lord*" which they would need to be patient for? (vv. 4, 11)
5. Given the three examples James supplies, what can we learn about the patience required of Christians? (vv. 7, 10, 11)
6. Compare James' prohibition of swearing to the words of Jesus (v. 12; Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22). What is James teaching in this verse?
7. What is the relation between "*suffering*" and being "*cheerful*?" (v. 13) ("*cheerful*," *euthymeō*; 3x, Acts 27:22, 25)

8. What is the nature of the suffering and sickness James addresses? Explain. What is the proper response to such? (vv. 13-15)

9. What advantage is there in confessing trespasses to one another? (v. 16)

10. Whose prayer "*avails much*"? (v. 16) Why?

11. What significance is there for pointing out the nature of Elijah? (v. 17)

12. What is the proper response to a brother wandering from the truth? Why? (vv. 19-20)