

# NINE TESTS OF GENUINE FAITH

## Commentary on the Book of James

by Paul G. Apple, Revised February 2003, December 2024

### IN THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE, GENUINE FAITH EMBRACES FULLY THE WILL OF GOD

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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

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## BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

**Daniel Wallace: Good Overview**

<https://bible.org/seriespage/20-james-introduction-outline-and-argument>

**David Malick: Good Overview**

<https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-james>

**John MacArthur: Good Overview**

[https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/macarthur\\_john/bible-introductions/james-intro.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/macarthur_john/bible-introductions/james-intro.cfm)

**Chuck Swindoll: Good Overview**

<https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-general-epistles/james>

**Bruce Hurt – Preceptaustin.org – Good Overview and References**

[https://www.preceptaustin.org/james\\_commentaries](https://www.preceptaustin.org/james_commentaries)

### GENERAL

**Curtis Vaughan:** James is the most intensely **practical book** of the New Testament. There is, to be sure, a “compressed theology” in James (cf. **1:1, 18, 21; 2:1, 5; 5:7, 9**, etc.), but theological teaching is not the chief contribution of the book. James is “the **epistle of practice**,” the Amos of the New Testament. It rebukes all sham and hypocrisy, insisting that conduct must conform to creed, that profession must be matched by performance. From beginning to end it is an urgent demand for “reality in religion.” James would surely have agreed with Bunyan that “the soul of religion is the practical part.”

**Brian Racer:** Character of the Book:

James is called the “Proverbs of the New Testament.” James was obviously influenced by Proverbs of the Old Testament, the exhortative Psalms and the Sermon on the Mount. James writes with terse, pointed exhortations that call his audience to obedience. The Book only references the person of Jesus on a couple occasions and does not develop any deep or new theological ground. That and the fact that James introduces the idea that faith must have works and seems to be an apparent contradiction to Paul’s teaching of justification, caused **Martin Luther** to declare the book to be “a right strawy epistle.” He did not believe the book to be inspired.

It might be strawy in the sense that it is uncomfortable to sit on very long because it pricks the conscience and the back side at the same time, spurring us to act on our faith.

**David Nystrom:** By all accounts James is something of an oddity among the books that comprise the New Testament. This letter is difficult to categorize and elicits a wide variety of descriptions. It is simple and straightforward, marked by unambiguous ethical teaching and authoritative pronouncement, but seems bereft of any sustained theological argument.

**D. Edmond Hiebert:** This epistle sternly insists upon Christian practice consistent with Christian belief, heaps scathing contempt upon all empty profession, and administers a stinging rebuke to the readers' worldliness. Its stress upon the gospel's ethical imperative makes the epistle as relevant today as when it was first written. The presence of this practical epistle in the New Testament canon is a magnificent monument to the moral sensitivity and concern of the Christian church.

**Chuck Swindoll:** The book of James looks a bit like the Old Testament book of Proverbs dressed up in New Testament clothes. Its consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith is reminiscent of the Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament, encouraging God's people to *act* like God's people. The pages of James are filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness. He makes no excuses for those who do not measure up. In the mind of this early church leader, Christians evidence their faith by walking in certain ways and not others. For James, a faith that does not produce real life change is a faith that is worthless (**James 2:17**). . .

In the opening of his letter, James called himself a bond-servant of God, an appropriate name given the practical, servant-oriented emphasis of the book. Throughout the book, James contended that faith produces authentic deeds. In other words, if those who call themselves God's people truly belong to Him, their lives will produce deeds or fruit. In language and themes that sound similar to Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, James rails against the hypocritical believer who says one thing but does another. For James, faith was no abstract proposition but had effects in the real world. James offered numerous practical examples to illustrate his point: faith endures in the midst of trials, calls on God for wisdom, bridles the tongue, sets aside wickedness, visits orphans and widows, and does not play favorites. He stressed that the life of faith is comprehensive, impacting every area of our lives and driving us to truly engage in the lives of other people in the world. While James recognized that even believers stumble (**James 3:2**), he also knew that faith should not coexist with people who roll their eyes at the less fortunate, ignore the plight of others, or curse those in their paths.

More than any other book in the New Testament, James places the spotlight on the necessity for believers to act in accordance with our faith. How well do your actions mirror the faith that you proclaim? This is a question that we all struggle to answer well. We would like to point to all the ways our faith and works overlap but too often see only gaps and crevices. As you read the letter from James, focus on those areas that he mentioned: your actions during trials, your treatment of those less fortunate, the way you speak and relate to others, and the role that money plays in how you live your life. Allow James to encourage you to do good, according to the faith you proclaim.

**Dan McCartney:** The document known as the Epistle of James has a unique voice in the NT. Its orientation to practical theology, its interest in true godly wisdom and consistent Christian behavior, and its large supply of memorable phrases and aphorisms that encapsulate many aspects of the practical Christian life have made it useful for purposes of moral exhortation. However, it has been a lesser influence on the development of the church's theology, and until recently it has been somewhat neglected. . .

It is in fact the thesis of this commentary that James should be seen as a book about **true faith** as opposed to a **false one**. Far from minimizing faith, the author of James regards faith as supremely important, and it is for this very reason that it is crucial that a person's faith be genuine. People often deceive themselves, and it is quite possible for people to think that they have faith when in fact they are hypocrites. James, in the first chapter alone, uses three different words to describe this capacity for self-deceit: *πλανάω* (*planaō*, *lead astray*) in **1:16**, *παραλογίζομαι* (*paralogizomai*, *deceive*) in **1:22**, and *ἀπατάω* (*apataō*, *deceive*) in **1:26**. Indeed, the issue runs all the way through James: the doubter's double-mindedness in **1:6–8**, empty religiosity in **1:26**, the pretense of loving neighbor while showing favoritism in **2:8–9**, the empty, dead faith of **2:20**, the contradiction of blessing God and cursing his image-bearers in **3:9** and of boasting while being false to the truth in **3:14**, and the pretense of the merchant in **4:13** are essentially all referring to **forms of self-deception**. But James wants those who profess to believe in Christ to be real disciples and manifest living faith, and he wants to awaken people who complacently think that they are believers but do not act like believers—in other words, those who have deceived themselves. Further, the threats to faith that can come by way of persecution, illness, and the delay of the coming of the Lord are met with exhortations to **persevere**, which is the stance of faith. Truly, James as a whole is **a book about genuine faith**. Surely, there are few times more in need of James's insistence that faith be genuine than our own.

### **AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE**

**Douglas Moo:** Canonicity -- The epistle of James has had a controversial history. Along with 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, it belongs to that category of New Testament epistles called 'general' or 'catholic' (in the sense of universal). This designation was given to these seven letters early in the history of the church because each appears to be addressed to the church at large rather than to a single congregation. These letters also shared an uncertain status in many areas of the early church. Along with Hebrews and Revelation, several of them were the last to achieve generally recognized canonical status. In the case of James, it was not until the end of the fourth century that both eastern and western Christendom acknowledged it as Scripture. , ,

Audience: The letter implies that these Jewish believers were mainly poor people who were caught in a situation of considerable social tension. Oppressed and taken advantage of by wealthy landlords (**5:4–6**), hauled into court by rich people (2:6) who also scorn their Christian faith (**2:7**), the readers are exhorted to be patient and reminded that the coming of their Lord, the judge and deliverer, is at hand (**5:7–11**). In the meantime, the trials they are suffering are to be met with steadfast endurance, so that their Christian character might reach full maturity and their reward, 'the crown of life', be secured (**1:2–4, 12**).

But while the situation of the church in the world provides the background for the letter, James' concern is with the world getting into the church. He warns his readers that '*friendship with the world means enmity against God*' (**4:4**) and highlights one key ingredient of '*religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless*' as keeping '*oneself from being polluted by the world*' (**1:27**). **Worldliness** in the church has manifested itself in a number of ways: a fawning

deference to the rich and callous indifference towards the poor (2:1–4); uncontrolled, critical speech (3:1–12; 4:11–12; 5:9); ‘*earthly, unspiritual, demonic*’ wisdom with its envy and selfish ambition that in turn produce dissensions and violent quarrels (3:13 – 4:3); arrogance (4:13–17); and, most of all, an essential ‘*double-mindedness*’ with respect to God that short-circuits the effectiveness of prayer (1:5–8) and manifests itself in a failure to put faith into practice (1:22–27; 2:14–26). James calls on his readers to repent from this worldliness, to humble themselves before the Lord so that he might exalt them (4:7–10), and to work diligently to bring other sinners back from the error of their ways (5:19–20).

**Chris Vlahos:** Authorship: If we examine the NT for his identity, we find five people named James:

1. James the son of Zebedee brother of John, one of the twelve apostles (Mark 1:19; 5:37)
2. James the son of Alphaeus, also one of the twelve (Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13)
3. James “*the Younger*” (Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10 = son of Alphaeus?)
4. James the father of Judas, not Iscariot (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13)
5. James the Lord’s brother and leader of the early church (Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Jude 1:1)

**Travis Moore:** “**Jet Tour Through James**” –

INTRODUCTION: James is a call to put faith to work. Mere words will not do. Agreement with a particular creed is not enough. Genuine faith will be displayed in a life that is increasingly maturing in Christ. We are saved by faith alone, but faith that saves is not alone.

I. The Author of the Book = James the ½ brother of Jesus; He was...

1. the oldest of Jesus’ brothers. (Mark 6:3)
2. an unbeliever prior to the resurrection. (John 7:3-10)
3. among those Jesus appeared to after the resurrection, resulting in his conversion. (1 Cor 15:7)
4. with the disciples in the upper room awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. (Acts 1:14)
5. the 1st pastor of the Jerusalem Church. (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 19; Gal 2:1, 9, 10, 12)
6. married. (1 Cor 9:5)
7. humble; referring to himself not as “*brother*” of Jesus, but rather as a “*servant*” of Jesus. (Jas 1:1)
8. traditionally regarded as an “unusually good man”.
9. given the nickname “*the Just*”.
10. said to have had calluses on his knees from spending so much time in prayer.

II. The Recipients of the Book.

A. The 12 tribes (of Israel) scattered abroad (1:1)

B. Jewish Christians (2:1)

C. A “General Epistle” = circulated among several groups of believers.

### III. The Date & Place of Writing.

A. Date = 45 A. D.; 1st NT Book written

B. Place = Jerusalem

### IV. The Purpose of the Book.

A. To show that true faith produces good works.

B. To emphasize the practical aspects of Christian living.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/jet-tour-through-james-travis-moore-sermon-on-bible-study-30801>

**Ray Stedman:** There has been considerable controversy as to whether James, the brother of Jesus, was the one who wrote the letter, but if you look carefully into its background, you can see that it almost certainly must be the Lord's brother who pens this letter. In the early days after the resurrection, he became the acknowledged leader of the church in Jerusalem, and was regarded by all with reverence and respect even by the Jews -- so that he gained the title, "James the just one." Tradition tells us, supported by Eusebius, one of the great church fathers and a respected historian, that James was finally martyred for his faith by being pushed off the pinnacle of the temple. The pinnacle was the point in the wall around the temple that jutted out over the Kidron Valley. There is a drop of about a hundred feet from the height of that wall straight down into the Valley...

Eusebius tells us that in about the year 66 A.D., James the Just, the brother of our Lord, was pushed off this pinnacle by the Jews who had become angered with him for his Christian testimony. Eusebius says that the fall did not kill him, and that he managed to stumble to his knees to pray for his murderers. So they finished the job by stoning him to death, and he joined the band of martyrs.

Now it is very evident that this letter was written during the early part of the life of the church. It comes out of that period reflected in the book of Acts, and may therefore be the earliest Christian document that we have, written perhaps even before the gospels of Mark or Matthew.

You cannot read this letter of James without being struck by its likeness to the teaching of Jesus; in fact, if you take the Sermon on the Mount, and the letter of James, and lay them side by side, you'll see more than a dozen exact parallels. So, it is quite evident that this man James listened to the Lord Jesus and heard these messages, even though perhaps he struggled with them at the time. Also, this letter, more than any other letter in the New Testament, is characterized, like the teaching of the Lord himself, by figures of speech taken from nature. You have the waves of the sea, the animal kingdom, the forests, the fish, and others, all drawn from nature, just as the Lord Jesus himself used to do.

**George Guthrie:** Date -- If James the brother of the Lord is the author, the latest possible date of writing is just prior to his martyrdom in AD 62 at the instigation of a rash, new high priest named Ananus (Josephus, Ant. 20.199–203). Yet those who hold to the traditional position on

authorship are divided between those who place the book very early (in the forties, making it perhaps the earliest NT book written) and those who place it in the last decade of James's life. Creatively, **Ben Witherington** dates the book to around AD 52, after the Jerusalem Council, understanding it as a Jewish letter corresponding to the letter sent by that council to the Gentiles (**Shanks and Witherington**, 146). But this does not seem to fit the content of the letter, which is geared to the **problem of social fractiousness** in the communities addressed. Rather, it may be suggested that the book of James reflects a time **prior to the Jerusalem Council**, for **2:14–26** reflects a situation in which the detailed arguments of the council, reflected in Acts 15, have yet to be aired widely. However, it also seems obvious from James that misunderstandings of the teachings characteristic to the ministry of Paul and Barnabas concerning the centrality of faith for salvation have begun to surface. It may be that a period after the beginning of Paul and Barnabas's ministry in Antioch (**Ac 11:19–26**) but prior to the Jerusalem Council is not far off the mark. Thus we date the book roughly in the **mid- to late-forties**.

**Dan McCartney:** Date -- It is as though James is imbued with the wisdom teaching of Jesus, but not in the written form in which we now find it. All this points to a time quite early in the life of the church, prior to the theological reflections of Paul, prior to the circulation of the Gospels, and prior to the authors of Hebrews, 1 Peter, and the Johannine materials, or at least prior to the time when these other writings began to have widespread and determinative influence. . .

There are four commonly espoused views regarding the authorship and dating of the Epistle of James:

1. The letter was written by the historical James prior to the Galatians controversy, and even before the apostolic council in Jerusalem noted in **Acts 15**, thus probably in the mid- to late 40s.
2. The letter was written by James in response to Paulinism of some sort, specifically correcting the idea that righteousness can be acquired simply by acknowledging certain theological propositions.
3. The letter is pseudonymous, written at the end of the first century or early in the second century by a proponent of Jewish (non-Pauline) Christianity.
4. Much of the material of the letter goes back to James, but has been edited and assembled after his death by someone with Greek literary training.

**Thomas Lea:** The most likely candidate among the New Testament Jameses for authorship of this letter is the **Lord's brother (Mark 6:3; Acts 15:13)**. The letter contains several references showing possible influence by Jesus' words on the author (cf. **Jas. 4:11** and **Matt. 7:1–2**). The early church also accepted the Lord's half brother as the author of the writing.

**Brian Racer:** Audience:

Jewish Christians who were scattered after the persecution associated with the stoning of Stephen (**Acts 8:1**).

- They were driven out with zealous spirits as they shared the gospel as they left home, property and kin. (**Acts 8:4**)
- Probably settled in the region of Syria
- Had the familiarity of synagogue and other Jews – converted and non-converted
- Had to re-establish their homes, work, and circle of friendships.

- The witness of the book is that James knew this audience, was respected by them, and could command them to obey spiritual truth.
- By character, these were not people dealing with overt worldly sin, but were succumbing to impatience, bitterness, materialism, disunity, and spiritual apathy.

**David Malick:** Audience:

The following evidence suggests limiting the audience to Christian Jews:

- a. The congregation's meeting is a *synagogue* (2:2)
- b. The Hebrew title "*Lord Sabaoth*" ( κυρίου Σαβαώθ ) is Jewish (5:4)
- c. The author identifies his readers as Christians (2:1; 5:7, 8)

It is difficult to identify the exact location of these recipients:

- a. The fact that they are "*dispersed abroad*" implies that they are not in one location
- b. One possible reconstruction is that these believers fled during the persecution which came upon the heels of Stephen's death in Acts 7--8.
  - 1) Acts reports that the Jewish Christians spread out over Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:19) as a result of the persecution of Stephen
  - 2) If this is the case, then James would have felt responsible as their former pastor to offer instruction to them at this time.

## **PURPOSE OF WRITING**

**Warren Wiersbe:** The Epistle of James was written to help us understand and attain **spiritual maturity** (1:4b)... James used the word *perfect* several times, a word that means "*mature, complete*" (see 1:4, 17, 25; 2:22; 3:2). By "*a perfect man*" (3:2) James did not mean a sinless man, but rather one who is mature, balanced, grown-up.

**David Platt:** There are two primary reasons to study the book of James. First, we study James to examine the relationship between faith and works. . . There's another aspect to the idea that faith works. Faith not only acts, but James also teaches us that faith is effective in the world. So the second reason we study James is to explore the impact of our faith on life in this city and in this world. James addresses many practical issues: trials, poverty, riches, materialism, favoritism, social justice, the tongue, worldliness, boasting, making plans, praying, and what to do when we're sick, among other things. As we'll see, James sometimes moves from one issue to the next, which can make it difficult to find the book's structure, but he returns repeatedly to how faith impacts not only the details of our lives but also the lives of people around us—both locally and globally.

**Dan McCartney:** Genre:

James falls into the class of Jewish literature known as a "**diaspora letter**," which presents itself as a circulating epistle sent by a person of recognized authority in Judea to Jews located outside the land. Diaspora letters typically give advice on how to maintain integrity as the people of God in the midst of a non-Jewish world, and they articulate some expectations regarding the future



(Niebuhr 1998). The Aramaic letters of Gamaliel are of this sort, and similar epistles are seen in 2 Macc. 1–2; Bar. 6:1–73 (the so-called Letter of Jeremiah); 2 Bar. 78.1–87.1. The short letter of James found in **Acts 15:23–29** is also of this type. As noted earlier, there are some interesting similarities between the letter reported in Acts and the Epistle of James.

## **MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY**

**Douglas Moo:** Paul vs. James on Justification and Role of Works -- Paul and James are combating opposite problems. In Paul's statements about justification in Galatians and Romans, he is countering a Jewish tendency to rely on obedience to the law ('works of the law') for salvation. Against an overemphasis on works, Paul highlights faith as the sole instrument of justification. James, on the other hand, is combating an underemphasis on works, a quietistic attitude that turned faith into mere doctrinal orthodoxy. Against this perversion of faith, James is forced to assert the importance of works.

**Dale Allison:** The letter is in large measure a statement of beliefs shared by Jews and Christians.

### Theology

The God of James is the God of Abraham (2.21-23) and Rahab (2.25), the God of '*the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord*' (5.10), and of Job (5.11) and Elijah (5.17-18). In other words, he is the **God of Israel**; cf. 1.1.

Everything in the letter comports with this foundational fact. God is the creator (1.17) who fashioned humanity in the divine likeness (3.9). He is the one God of the Shema, who should be loved (1.12; 2.19). He is the giver of the law (4.12; cf. 2.11), whose will and word should be obeyed (1.22-25; 2.8-13; cf. 4.7, 15). He is '*the Lord of hosts*' (5.4) who will judge the wicked and reward the righteous (1.12; 4.10). This is the God of the Jewish Bible.

To all these theological commonplaces one may add the following as attributes of the deity in James, many of them also routine for Judaism:

- God gives generously to all in response to prayers of faith, 1.5, 17; 4.3-4; 5.17-18
- God is not tempted to do evil and does not tempt others, 1.13
- God is unchanging, 1.17
- God is the father of all, 1.17, 18, 27; 3.9
- God is righteous, 1.20
- God favors the poor over the rich, 1.9-11; 2.5; 5.1-6
- God and 'the world' stand against each other, 4.4
- God gives grace to the humble, 4.6
- God heals the sick, 5.15
- God forgives sins, 5.15

None of this is distinctively Christian. On the contrary, and as the verse-by-verse commentary establishes, everything that James teaches about God has multiple parallels in the Bible and other Jewish texts.

### Christology

The upshot is that we know next to nothing about the Christology of our author.

### Law

James offers no systematic statement about the law, so we must infer his views from passing remarks. These include **2.9** and **11**, which assume that one should not transgress the law; **2.10**, which posits the unity of the law; and **4.11**, which pleads that one should do the law rather than speak against it or judge it (**4.11**).

### Practical Teaching

James requires that **Torah be not just heard but kept**. Wholly in accord with that, he teaches that right religion is a means of bringing about concrete results in the world. Belief and piety are bankrupt if they tolerate hearing without doing (**1.22-25; 2.14-26**), if they do not lead to assistance of the disadvantaged (**1.27; 2.14-17**), if they do not issue in control of the tongue (**1.19; 3.1-12**), if they do not eliminate judging and cursing others (**3.9-10; 4.11-12**), or if they do not displace the desire to lay up riches (**4.13 – 5.6**). Faith is what it does, and religion is a way of being in the world for others, not a way of believing and living for oneself.

### Eschatology

Eschatological expectation is important for James, and it is present in every section. It is nonetheless not a topic in and of itself, and it remains undeveloped. This is in large part due to the author's assumption that his audience will concur with him about much: 'the Lord' will return (**5.7-9**); there will be a final reckoning (**2.12-13; 3.1; 4.12; 5.9**); that reckoning is near (**5.7-9**); it will mean salvation and reward for the righteous in God's kingdom (**1.12, 21; 2.5; 4.10; 5.20**); it will mean the punishment of Gehenna for others (**2.13; 3.6; 5.3**).

Beyond these conventions, details are not necessary. Will judgment of the wicked mean extinction or everlasting punishment, or maybe temporal retribution? Will the punishment vary according to the crime? Will the kingdom be on earth or in heaven? Although our author may have pondered such subjects, for the purposes of his letter he is mute. All that matters is the consolation of hope and the threat of loss.

## **STRUCTURE**

### **Ken Boa: Talk Thru the New Testament:**

James is an intensely practical manual on the outworking of true faith in everyday life. It explores Christian conduct from several perspectives and shifts abruptly from topic to topic. Faith perseveres under trials, resists temptation, responds to the Word, overcomes prejudice, produces good works, controls the tongue, manifests wisdom, submits to God rather than worldly

pleasures, depends on God rather than wealth, and waits patiently for the return of the Lord. Biblical faith moves from assent to actions, from words to works.

Outline:

**I. Character of Faith**

- |                                      |       |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| A. (1:1-12) Persevering under Trials | Will  |
| B. (1:13-18) Progress of Temptation  |       |
| C. (1:19-27) Planting the Word       | Word  |
| D. (2:1-13) Personal Favoritism      | Works |
| E. (2:14-26) Performance of Faith    |       |

**II. Control of Faith**

- |                                      |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| A. (3:1-12) Power of the Tongue      | Words  |
| B. (3:13-18) Portrait of Pure Wisdom | Wisdom |

**III. Conflicts of Faith**

- |                                     |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| A. (4:1-12) Perversity of Pleasures | Worldliness |
| B. (4:13 - 5:6) Pride of the Rich   | Wealth      |

**IV. Consummation of Faith**

- |                                     |           |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| A. (5:7-12) Patient Endurance       | Wait      |
| B. (5:13-20) Prayer and Restoration | Wholeness |

**Brian Racer:** James = **Christian Maturity Manual**

Outline: **The Faith Building Process**

Requires interaction along 2 fronts: both dynamics must be present and active:

- 1) Contact with unbelievers – communicating our faith
- 2) Communion with Christ and His Church

**I. Commitment of Faith**

**II. Confession of Faith – in Baptism**

**III. Consecration of Faith – Rom. 12:1-2**

**IV. Character Development of Faith**

Growing up process; takes longer with some than others; God uses adversity in the form of tests to target those areas that don't look like Christ


**V. Completed / Mature Faith**

Now able to be a model for others; set an example; assume leadership; the more we look like Christ the better hearing we will receive from unbelievers

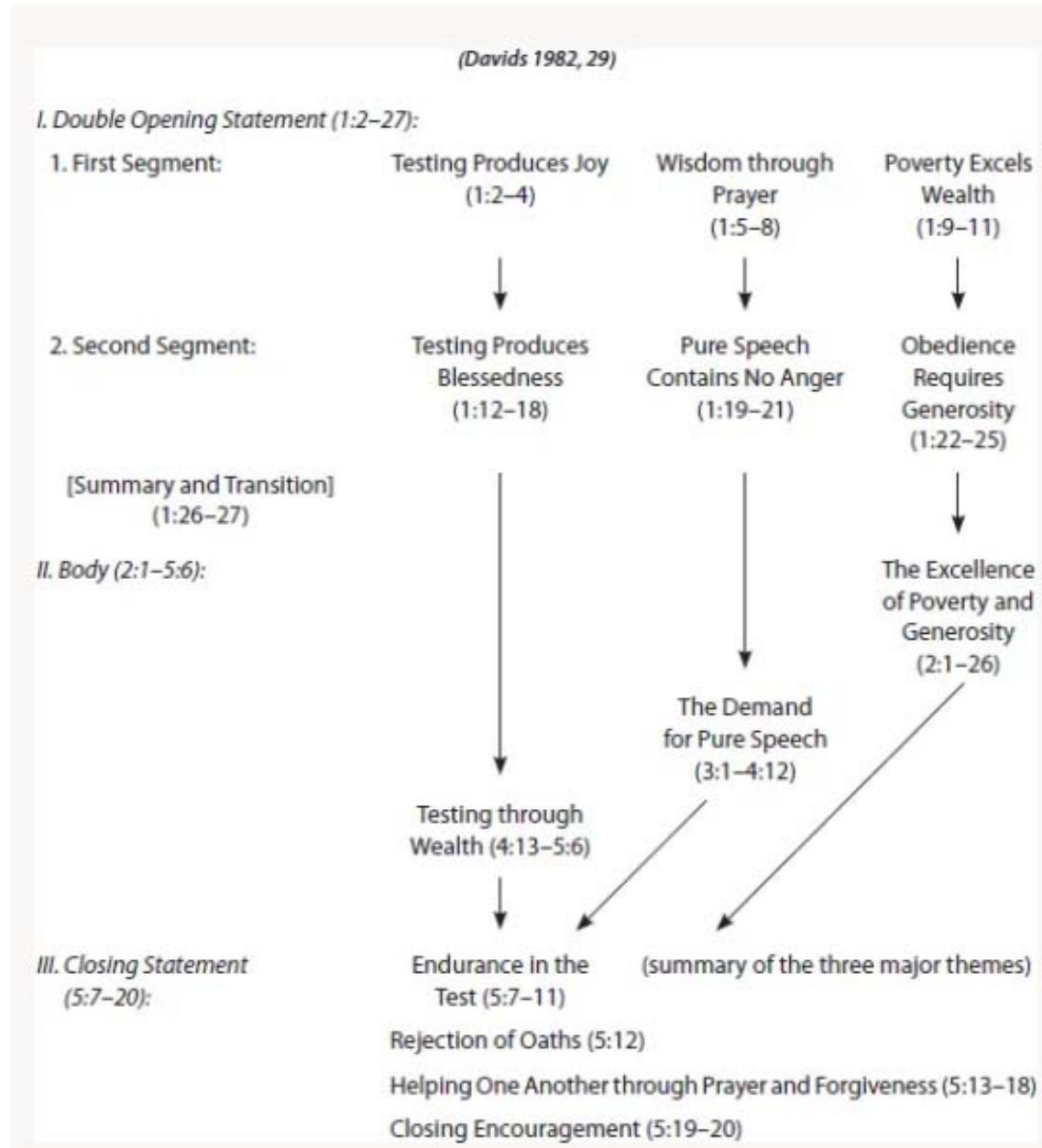
J. Alec Motyer: The introduction and conclusion balance each other in this way:

<i>Introduction</i> (1:2–11)	<i>Conclusion</i> (5:7–20)
The need for <b>patience</b> (1:2–4) and <b>prayer</b> (1:5–8)	The need for <b>patience</b> (5:7–12) and <b>prayer</b> (5:13–18) and <b>care</b> (5:19–20)
in all the contrasting circumstances of life (1:9–11)	in all the contrasting circumstances of life.

The central content of the letter (1:12 – 5:6) carries the theme of the birth (1:13–19a), growth (1:19b–25) and development (1:26 – 5:6) of the Christian. Not all growth is true growth; true Christian growth can be assessed by noting whether certain specific developments are taking place:

a. Recapitulation of the introduction (1:12): through <i>trials</i> , by <i>patience</i> , to the <i>crown</i> .		
b. <b>Birth</b> (1:13–19a): though the old nature remains active (13–16) the Father has brought us to new birth by his word (17–19a);		
c. <b>Growth</b> (1:19b–25): we grow by hearing (19b–20), receiving (21) and obeying (22–25) the Fathers Word;		
d. <b>Development</b> (1:26–5:6): there are three notable developments which are the characteristics of true Christian growth:		
1:26 The controlled tongue	1:27a Care for the needy	1:27b Personal purity of life
		
Detailed study of:		
Care for the needy (2:1–26)	Control of the tongue (3:1–12)	Personal purity of life (3:13–5:6)

## Peter Davids: Structural Diagram of James



## Ralph Martin:

### I. Address and Greeting (1:1)

### II. Enduring Trials (1:2–19a)

1. Trials, Wisdom, Faith (1:2–8)
2. The Reversal of Fortunes (1:9–11)
3. Testing: Its Source and Mischief—and Rationale (1:12–19a)

### **III. Applying the Word (1:19b–3:18)**

1. The Obedience of Faith (1:19b–27)
2. Problems in the Assembly (2:1–13)
3. Faith and Deeds—Together (2:14–26)
4. Warning about Teachers and Tongues (3:1–12)
5. Two Types of Wisdom (3:13–18)

### **IV. Witnessing to Divine Providence (4:1—5:20)**

1. Community Malaise and Its Antidote
  - (i) False Hopes (4:1–10)
2. Community Problems
  - (ii) Godless Attitudes (4:11–17)
3. Judgment on Rich Farmers (5:1–6)
4. Call to Patience (5:7–11)
5. Community Issues: Oath-taking; Reactions to Trouble, Sickness, and Sins (5:12–18)
6. Final Words and Fraternal Admonitions (5:19–20)

### **Craig Blomberg: Outline**

#### **I. Greetings (1:1)**

#### **II. Statement of Three Key Themes (1:2–11)**

- A. Trials in the Christian Life (1:2–4)
- B. Wisdom (1:5–8)
- C. Riches and Poverty (1:9–11)

#### **III. Restatement of the Three Themes (1:12–27)**

- A. Trials/Temptations in Relation to God (1:12–18)
- B. Wisdom in the Areas of Speech and Obedience (1:19–26)
- C. The “Have-Nots” and the Responsibility of the “Haves”: The Thesis of the Letter (1:27)

#### **IV. The Three Themes Expanded (2:1–5:18)**

- A. Riches and Poverty (2:1–26)
  1. Favoritism Condemned (2:1–13)
  2. The Problem of Faith without Works (2:14–26)
- B. Wisdom and Speech (3:1 – 4:12)
  1. The Power of the Tongue (3:1–12)
  2. Wisdom from Above and Wisdom from Below (3:13–18)
  3. The Misuse of Speech in Quarrels and Slander (4:1–12)
- C. Trials and Temptations (4:13 – 5:18)
  1. Planning apart from God’s Will (4:13–17)
  2. Responding to Oppression (5:1–12)
  3. Anointing Prayer for Serious Illness (5:13–18)

## V. Closing (5:19–20)

**John MacArthur:** James wrote his epistle to challenge his readers to examine their faith to see if it was genuine saving faith. Accordingly, the outline is structured around that **series of tests**.

### OUTLINE

- Introduction (1:1)
- I. The Test of Perseverance in Suffering (1:2–12)
- II. The Test of Blame in Temptation (1:13–18)
- III. The Test of Response to the Word (1:19–27)
- IV. The Test of Impartial Love (2:1–13)
- V. The Test of Righteous Works (2:14–26)
- VI. The Test of the Tongue (3:1–12)
- VII. The Test of Humble Wisdom (3:13–18)
- VIII. The Test of Worldly Indulgence (4:1–12)
- IX. The Test of Dependence (4:13–17)
- X. The Test of Patient Endurance (5:1–11)
- XI. The Test of Truthfulness (5:12)
- XII. The Test of Prayerfulness (5:13–18)
- XIII. The Test of True Faith (5:19–20)

### Jensen's Survey of the NT

JAMES Faith for Living						
Motives for Works	The Place of Works: Outward Demonstration of Inner Faith					Outreach of Works
Jas 1:1-18	Jas 1:19-2:13	Jas 2:14-25	Jas 3:1-12	Jas 3:13-4:12	Jas 4:13-5:12	Jas 5:13-19
Trials & Temptations	Word & Works	Faith & Works	Tongue	Wars	Future	Others
Faith In Testings	Fulfill	Favor	Fallacy	Fountain	Factions	Faith and the Future
	FAITH AT WORK					Faith and our Fellowship

## Chuck Swindoll: James Overview Bible Chart

	REAL FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE STABILITY	REAL FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE LOVE	REAL FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE HUMILITY	REAL FAITH PRODUCES GENUINE PATIENCE
	James 1	James 2	James 3–4	James 5
	Greeting Troubles Temptation Response to Scripture	Partiality and prejudice Indifference and mere intellectualism Obedience and action	The tongue The heart The will	Money matters Patience and endurance Prayer
FAITH	When stretched, it doesn't break.	When pressed, it doesn't fail.	When expressed, it doesn't explode.	When distressed, it doesn't panic.
DEEDS	Authentic stability	Authentic love	Authentic control and humility	Authentic patience
BACKGROUND	The difficulties of life had caused the scattered saints to drift spiritually, leading to all forms of problems—unbridled speech, wrong attitudes, doubt, strife, carnality, and shallow faith.			
CHARACTERISTICS	As "the Proverbs of the New Testament," James contains many practical, straightforward exhortations. The emphasis is on the importance of balancing right belief with right behavior. This book has many Old Testament word pictures and references.			
THEME	Real faith produces authentic deeds.			
KEY VERSE	James 2:17			
CHRIST IN JAMES	Jesus is the glorious Lord, who inspires true faith and authentic works ( <i>Jas. 2:1, 14–26</i> ).			

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# OUTLINE OF JAMES

## NINE TESTS OF GENUINE FAITH ... FAITH WITHOUT "X" IS DEAD

IN THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE,  
GENUINE FAITH EMBRACES FULLY THE WILL OF GOD

### 1:1 OPENING SALUTATION

#### **I. (1:2-18) FAITH WITHOUT PERSEVERANCE IS DEAD PERSEVERANCE = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"the testing of your faith produces endurance"*

##### A. (:2-12) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH WITH THE GOAL OF PERSEVERANCE

1. (:2-4) TRIALS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES
2. (:5-8) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH AS WE ASK GOD FOR WISDOM
3. (:9-12) PERSEVERANCE UNDER TRIAL BRINGS BLESSING FOR ETERNITY

##### B. (:13-16) TEMPTATIONS CANNOT BE BLAMED ON GOD

##### C. (:17-18) THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD BLESSES US FROM START TO FINISH

1. (:17) THE BLESSING OF GENERAL GRACE: EVERY GOOD GIFT COMES FROM GOD (WHO IS GOOD AND IMMUTABLE)
2. (:18) THE BLESSING OF SAVING GRACE: REGENERATION (SPIRITUAL LIFE) COMES FROM THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD (WHO IS GOOD AND POWERFUL)

#### **II. (1:19-27) FAITH WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IS DEAD OBEDIENCE = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers"*

##### A. (:19-21) OBEDIENCE REQUIRES A RECEPTIVE HEART

B. (:22) OBEDIENCE REQUIRES PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRUTHS OF GOD'S WORD

C. (:23-25) CONTRAST BETWEEN A FORGETFUL HEARER AND AN EFFECTUAL DOER

1. (:23-24) FORGETFUL HEARER

2. (:25) EFFECTUAL DOER

D. (:26-27) PRACTICAL EVIDENCES OF OBEDIENCE

1. (:26) NEGATIVE EXAMPLE: CONTROLLING OUR TONGUE

2. (:27) POSITIVE EXAMPLE: SOCIAL CONCERN AND MORAL PURITY

### **III. (2:1-13) FAITH WITHOUT IMPARTIAL LOVE IS DEAD IMPARTIAL LOVE = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism"*

A. (:1) CONVICTING COMMAND = DON'T SHOW PARTIALITY

B. (:2-3) CASE STUDY CONTRAST – FAVORITISM AND PREJUDICE

C. (:4) CONTEMPTIBLE CONDEMNATION – FOLLY OF SOWING PARTIALITY

D. (:5-11) CORRECTING CONFUSED THINKING

E. (:12-13) CONCLUDING CAUTION AGAINST A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT TOWARDS OTHERS

### **IV. (2:14-26) FAITH WITHOUT GOOD WORKS IS DEAD GOOD WORKS = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself"*

A. (:14) FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION = THEME OF THE BOOK – WHAT USE IS FAITH ALONE?

B. (:15-17) SIMPLE ILLUSTRATION = HELPING A NEEDY BROTHER – FAITH ALONE NEVER FED ANYONE / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS

C. (:18-20) SHOW AND TELL – FAITH ALONE DOES NOT DIFFERENTIATE YOU FROM DEMONS / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS

D. (:21-26) TWO OT PROOF CASES – WORKS VINDICATE THE REALITY OF OUR FAITH / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS

**V. (3:1-18) FAITH WITHOUT SELF CONTROL OF THE TONGUE AND GODLY WISDOM IS DEAD**

**PRACTICAL WISDOM = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."*

A. (:1-12) FAITH WITHOUT SELF CONTROL OF THE TONGUE IS DEAD

B. (:13-18) FAITH WITHOUT GODLY WISDOM IS DEAD

**VI. (4:1-10) FAITH WITHOUT INTIMACY WITH GOD IS DEAD  
INTIMACY WITH GOD = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."*

A. (:1-2) RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO WORLDLINESS

B. (:3-6) FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD = HOSTILITY TOWARDS GOD  
(THE TUG OF WAR BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD AND FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD)

C. (:7-10) INTIMACY WITH GOD = THE CURE FOR WORLDLINESS  
6 STEPS TOWARDS RENEWED INTIMACY WITH GOD  
(THE PATHWAY TO TRUE INTIMACY WITH GOD)

**VII. (4:11-17) FAITH WITHOUT SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD IS DEAD  
SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"if the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that"*

A. (:11-12) DON'T USURP GOD'S ROLE AS JUDGE

B. (:13-17) DON'T USURP GOD'S ROLE AS MASTER PLANNER

**VIII. (5:1-12) FAITH WITHOUT THE FEAR OF GOD IS DEAD  
THE FEAR OF GOD = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

*"behold, the Judge is standing right at the door"*

A. (:1-6) THE DANGER OF RICHES

B. (:7-11) THE DANGER OF COMPLAINING AGAINST YOUR BROTHER

C. (:12) THE DANGER OF SWEARING AN OATH

**IX. (5:13-18) FAITH WITHOUT FERVENT EFFECTUAL PRAYER IS DEAD  
FERVENT EFFECTUAL PRAYER = THE TEST OF GENUINE FAITH**

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

A. (:13-16) DEALING WITH RESTORING WEARY AND WEAK PERSECUTED BELIEVERS

B. (:17-18) EXAMPLE OF EFFECTUAL PRAYER OF ELIJAH

**(5:19-20) DEALING WITH RECONCILING UNBELIEVERS**

A. (:19) ENCOURAGEMENT THAT THOSE WHO STRAY CAN BE RESCUED

B. (:20) ENCOURAGEMENT THAT THE BENEFITS OF SAVING THE PERISHING ARE ENORMOUS

TEXT: JAMES 1:1-12

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT PERSEVERANCE IS DEAD -- PART 1

**BIG IDEA:**

**TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH WITH THE GOAL OF PERSEVERANCE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

James is concerned with the effectiveness of our faith. As we examine our faith, there are two different possible threads of application:

- 1) If we fail the tests of faith that James has provided we need to examine ourselves to see if our heart has deceived us with a mere profession of faith without the reality of **genuine saving faith**.
  
- 2) But the major thread since James is writing to professing believers deals with the **growth of our faith into maturity**. We will all be challenged by the different areas which James chooses to highlight – we will find ourselves somewhere along the spectrum of faith for each topic. James wants to motivate believers to press on in their faith to maturity.

**Peter Davids:** James presents the first statement of his main themes in **1:2–11**.

1. The first of the three major concepts which he brings together is that **the genuineness of faith will be tested**. James argues that this testing is for the benefit of the individual, for it produces the approved character.
  
2. The second concept is that the “wisdom” needed to discern the test and stand fast under pressure is the **gift of God** to the person who seeks him with a single heart, i.e. with his total being. “Wisdom” functions for James in an analogous position to that which “Holy Spirit” occupies for Paul.
  
3. The third concept is that one major situation in which belief is tested is the use of wealth. Faith is the great equalizer, but can the wealthy Christian stand the test? Will he share with his poorer brother? Will he try to compromise when his radical adherence to the faith threatens his economic circumstances?

These issues begin to emerge in this opening paragraph.

**George Guthrie:** The first and last verses of this introductory movement of the book may be taken as marking the beginning and end of a cohesive unit. Placed in the context of the whole book, we see that the themes of trials, wisdom, and wealth recur over and again and, when understood in light of James’s overall program, make sense in relation to one another.

**John MacArthur:** James does not distinguish between internal and external trials, doubtless because they typically are indistinguishable. What begins as a purely external problem inevitably develops internal problems and testings. And, of course, it is the internal effect of trials, the way in which we respond to them, that involves our faith. Whether the trial begins as a financial problem or physical illness, as a disappointment, criticism, fear, or persecution, it is our attitude about it and response to it that reflect our spiritual condition. . .

Recognizing that trials are an essential means God uses to perfect Christian character, James gives five keys for persevering through them.

- A joyful attitude
- An understanding mind
- A submissive will
- A believing heart
- A humble spirit

**Dan McCartney:** All of **James 1** serves to give an overview of James's concern with the life of faith, or faithful life. All the concerns that will later be developed in **James 2–5** are introduced here: the importance of genuine and unwavering faith, the nature and desirability of wisdom, not just hearing but doing God's word, the importance of self-control, the problem of self-deception, the dangers of wealth and the corresponding blessing of the poor, and the importance of prayer.

The two overarching concerns of **faith** and **wisdom** are presented in the opening paragraph. James is especially interested in the importance and indispensability of genuine faith and unyielding conviction, and this interest runs right through the letter. But it is also clear from this opening that James's audience is facing problems that are putting that faith to the test, problems that require wisdom. James writes his letter in response to the sufferings, trials, and temptations that threaten the integrity of the community of those who have believed in Jesus as Lord and Christ.

**Craig Blomberg: Exegetical Outline**

### **I. Greetings (1:1)**

### **II. Statement of Three Key Themes (1:2–11)**

A. Christians Should Respond to Trials by Rejoicing at the Maturity They Can Foster (**vv. 2–4**).

1. They should count them as grounds for thorough joy (**vv. 2–3**).
2. They should allow perseverance to lead them to maturity (**v. 4**).

B. Christians Should Respond to Trials by Asking God for Wisdom (**vv. 5–8**).

1. They must ask, sometimes persistently, and they will receive (**v. 5a-d**).
2. The assured result is that God will give wisdom (**v. 5e**).
3. The manner of prayer must be with faith that does not doubt that God can give (**vv. 6–8**).
  - a. This is because the doubter is unstable, like turbulent sea waves (**v. 6**).

- b. This is because the doubter will receive nothing from the Lord (v. 7).
- c. [This is because] the doubter is torn between two allegiances (v. 8).

C. Christians Should Respond to Trials by Viewing Them As Leveling Experiences That Often Invert the Roles of Rich and Poor (vv. 9–11).

1. Poor Christians must boast in their exalted position (v. 9).
2. Rich Christians must boast in their humble position (vv. 10–11).

## (:1) OPENING SALUTATION

**Ralph Martin:** In an opening salutation James directs his writing to his compatriots of the messianic faith whom he regards also as one in kinship with ethnic Israel in the international arena. This use of a conventional “greeting” is meant to pave the way for the call which follows, with the link-word of “joy” (*chara*) producing a word association with greeting (*chairein*). His authority as God’s servant is placed in a prominent position; he chooses to pass over his natural kinship with his brother Jesus since now Jesus is the exalted Lord, known by faith and crowned with “glory” (2:1).

### A. Author

#### 1. Identification = *James*

Half-brother of Jesus -- **Gal. 2:9, 12; Jude 1; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18;**  
(Note how this refutes the Catholic notion of the perpetual virginity of Mary)

So prominent that he could be referred to only by his personal name with no other qualifying remarks.

**Tony Miano:** We’re going to look at three phases of James’ life. Some of you may be able to relate really well to this. We’re going to look at

- James, the skeptical brother;
- James, the saved sinner; and
- James, the servant Leader.

<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/and-to-think-i-called-him-crazy-tony-miano-sermon-on-people-in-the-gospel-32007>

**R. Kent Hughes:** James was a late bloomer, but he flowered well! James knew Christ as only a few could. For years he had eaten at the same table, shared the same house, played in the same places, and watched the development of his amazing older brother. And when he truly came to know Christ, his boyhood privilege was not wasted, for he became known as James the Just, a man of immense piety. The historian Eusebius records the testimony of **Hegesippus** that James “used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So from his excessive righteousness he was called the Just.”

## 2. Life Calling

*“bond-servant  
of God  
and of the Lord Jesus Christ*

James writes as one who is totally sold out to the will of God; quite a change from his lack of belief in **John 7:5**.

Expression of humility -- striking in the life of a brother!

Commitment to serving Christ.

**William Barclay:** Yet, at the back of it, this word implies a certain pride. So far from being a title of dishonor it was the title by which the greatest ones of the Old Testament were known. Moses was the *doulos* of God ... By taking the title *doulos* James sets himself in the great succession of those who found their freedom and their peace and their glory in perfect submission to the will of God. The only greatness to which the Christian can ever aspire is the greatness of being the slave of God.

**Craig Blomberg:** Commentators have often marveled that James does not refer to himself either as an apostle (cf. **Gal 1:19**) or as Jesus’ brother, and some have used these omissions as an argument for pseudonymity. Most likely, however, James is implying that his familial relationship to Jesus gives him no extra authority, while his addressees would have already known of his role as chief elder in Jerusalem. Instead, he wants to stress that he is a fellow slave to God in Christ, just like his readers. Indeed, it seems less likely that a pseudepigrapher would have used so nonauthoritative a descriptor.

**David Nystrom:** In the Old Testament the term *servant* is often used of persons who are placed in positions of authority because they combine loyalty to God with humility before him. This is especially true of the “servant songs” of **Isaiah 42–53**. In summary, the Old Testament often describes a person or persons selected by God to bear authority as “*servants*.” This designation indicates a humble willingness to be at God’s disposal and to live according to his principles.

## **B. Recipients**

### 1. Identification

*"to the twelve tribes"*

James, as the initial leader of the church in Jerusalem, bore a special relationship and responsibility to these Jewish believers; note that Jews still have a special status in the program of God -- it is still valid to maintain the ethnic distinction between Jew and Gentile despite the areas of identity among true believers.

### 2. Location

*"who are dispersed abroad" -- Acts 8:1; 11:19*



Try to imagine the unique pressures on these Jewish believers who had every expectation of victory and the kingdom of God on earth and yet found themselves pressured and persecuted on every side.

**Curtis Vaughan:** "*Dispersion*" was a technical term used for the Jews who were scattered over the Gentile world outside of Palestine. (The word occurs in only two other places in the New Testament -- **John 7:35** and **I Peter 1:1**).

**R. Kent Hughes:** When Jewish Christians were first persecuted in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, they fled first to Judea and Samaria (**Acts 8:1**) and then to Jewish communities around the Mediterranean (**Acts 11:19, 20**). Tragically these Jewish Christians were not taken in by their expatriate Jewish kinsmen, but rather were rejected and persecuted.

Further, refused protection by the Jewish community, these Jewish Christians were exploited by the Gentiles. Homeless and disenfranchised, they were robbed of what possessions they had, hauled into court, and subjected to the Gentile elite. They had less standing than slaves. They became religious, social, and economic pariahs.

### C. Greetings

*"Greetings"*

Root meaning of the word is "joy"

**David Nystrom:** The book of James is also a letter, but of somewhat different character. It possesses a homiletical quality and reads much like a tract or a didactic essay. This is true for at least two reasons: (1) The letter begins an exposition of its themes almost immediately, with little or no evidence of personal sentiment; and (2) the audience is essentially undetermined.

## I. (:2-4) TRIALS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES

- Trials from **without** covered here;
- Temptations from **within** covered in next section

### A. (:2) Opportunity for Greater Joy

*"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials"*

1. Trials are Inevitable (but Unpredictable -- Allen) and Unexpected as to When and What
2. Trials are Varied -- come in all shapes and sizes
  - as to their severity
  - as to their nature

All of us face different trials, uniquely tailored for us

**Robert Gundry:** “*Various*” describes the temptations in that they included displacement from homeland, social ostracism, economic boycott, and the loss of loved ones and friends through martyrdom—all because of persecution.

**Alec Motyer:** He is nothing if not realistic: life is a tale of various trials. The Greek here is more vivid than the English word *various*. In classical Greek *poikilos* means ‘many-coloured, variegated’, and from this basic meaning it came to be used for ‘diversified, complex, intricate’. Matthew (**4:24**) uses it to describe ‘any and every kind’ of sickness dealt with in the healing ministry of our Lord; Paul (**2 Tim. 3:6**) uses it of the limitless shapes which human desires take; and Peter (**1 Pet. 4:10**), of the endless ways in which the grace of God is proved to be sufficient for our needs. As he writes, James throws his main emphasis on *poikilos*: ‘... when you fall in with trials—no matter what form they may take.’ What a true picture of life!

### 3. Trials bind us together in the family of God

### 4. Our Response Should be a Perspective of Joy Rather than Depression

Not just look for a silver lining, but consider it all joy (your perspective towards the experience as a whole)

**Curtis Vaughan:** Christians can triumph in trials.

**Brian Racer:** Examples of responding out of the flesh = grumbling, anxiety, stress. Instead we are commanded to adopt an extraordinary attitude toward trials. Requires thinking of the outcomes of the trial = what God is trying to accomplish; Requires mental discipline; the pain and the pressure are all part of a larger process. Not saying that we are to rejoice in just the circumstances alone.

**Craig Blomberg:** Joy may be defined as a settled contentment in every situation or “an unnatural reaction of deep, steady and unadulterated thankful trust in God.”

**Thomas Lea:** This does not suggest that we should seek out trials. Nor are we to pretend that enduring trials is pleasant. They cause pain and difficulty. Still, we should look at trials as an occasion for joy because of their potential for producing something good in us. This calls us consciously to develop a positive attitude toward trials, quite contrary to our normal response. Similarly, Hebrews regards trials as the discipline a Father gives to help us share in God's holiness (**Heb. 12:10**).

## **B. (:3) Opportunity for Greater Endurance**

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

Shows us how genuine is our faith; Produces endurance

Adversity builds toughness; Prosperity makes us soft.

**William Barclay:** *Hupomone* is not simply the ability to bear things; it is the ability to turn them to greatness and glory.

**Craig Blomberg:** This approval produces “*endurance*” (ὕπομονήν), a key value for James. The RSV captures the **active nature** of this patience, calling it “steadfastness,” for this is not a passive virtue but a steady clinging to the truth within any situation.

**Tamez** expresses it as “militant patience,” embracing the idea that James does not advocate a downtrodden passivity, but rather an engaged waiting (cf. NEB, “fortitude”), a concept foreign to our culture in which patience is often considered letting others walk over us. In short, “endurance is faith stretched out.”

**Allen: Problems Purify my Faith...**

James uses the word “testing” - as in testing gold and silver. You would heat them up very hot until the impurities were burned off. Job said, “*But God knows the way that I take, and when he has tested me, I will come out like gold.*” **Job 23:10** (NCV)

God is not interested in watching our faith get torpedoed. God desires that our faith would be “approved.” A student who is accepted by the admissions office of a college can say, “I am a student.” But until that person takes tests and exams, no one can actually affirm that he is worthy of the name “student.” The only way to determine the validity of a student’s work is to see the performance on exams.

Christians are a lot like tea bags. You don’t know what’s inside of them until you drop them in hot water. Your faith develops when things don’t go as planned. It purifies your faith.

**Brian Racer:** Importance of **finishing strong**. It is said to see believers who failed the test and didn’t finish well; or who ran away from the test and didn’t stay under the pressure and allow it to accomplish God’s purposes in the process of character building. God doesn’t want us to bail out of the relationship or out of the commitment.

Endurance is needed to squeeze everything out of the trial; but endurance is not an end in itself. Some trials last a long time; as you get more mature it takes longer to reach your pressure point. We can take illustrations from the realm of sports to easily see the value in stressful training. The suicide sprints are not fun in themselves, but they produce greater endurance and an ability to accomplish more as a team. When the championship result is attained, the training seems very worthwhile! Athletes learn to visualize that reward ahead of time to help them through the process.

**C. (:4) Opportunity for Greater Maturity**

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

**William Barclay:** **Perfect** in the sense of "fit for the task in the world which he was sent into the world to do, and which God meant him to do."

**Brian Racer:** Proven character produces **Hope (Rom. 5:1-5)**. Author implies that each test has a specific ending point, with the ultimate finish line being the passing out of this life to the next. We need to keep on Keeping On until we hear God say, "*Well done.*"

**Dale Allison Jr.:** **1.3-4** has played a role in debates over the nature of Christian perfection. Wesley identified the '*perfect work*' of **v. 4** with full sanctification. He fretted much over whether it is typically the outcome of a protracted process or—as he eventually came to believe—is more often than not rather an instantaneous work of God. Some of his followers have occasionally cited the passage to prove that God requires perfection, which must include sinlessness. To this others have responded that **3.2** indicts everyone, including the author, as a sinner, and that **1.2** has to do with the perfection of steadfastness, not a second work of the soul leading to sinlessness.

**Craig Blomberg:** In light of the full range of NT teaching, this "*wholeness*" is characterized by the absence of self-centeredness and division, the presence of the fruit of the Spirit, the ability to teach others, deeper insight into God's will and ways, greater trustworthiness—in short, growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

**Dan McCartney:** "*Not lacking in anything,*" or being fully equipped, perhaps also carries forward the priestly notion of proper investiture and preparation, but may be more closely associated with military imagery, being fully outfitted for battle. Since endurance was the prime virtue of a soldier, this certainly fits. Whatever the particulars of the image in James's mind, the meaning is clear: the strengthening of endurance through trials is an important aspect of Christian life, and without it the Christian is ill-equipped for service to God, whether that service be viewed in military, athletic, or priestly imagery (all of which are used in the NT at one point or another).

**George Guthrie:** **James 1:2–4** challenges believers undergoing trials to consider their difficulties from the vantage point of the spiritual payoff of the experience. Such trials may be embraced with joy, therefore, not by relishing the trial itself but rather by seeing the greater effect as one learns to endure in such circumstances. Neither is the act of enduring in and of itself the ultimate goal. Instead, the path of endurance leads to a place of well-rounded Christian character, a place where we do not lack the necessary equipment for facing the variety of difficulties we are bound to experience in this life.

## **II. (:5-8) TRIALS TEST OUR FAITH AS WE ASK GOD FOR WISDOM**

### **A. (:5) Ask God for Wisdom**

1. Trials Expose our Need for Wisdom  
"*But if any of you lacks wisdom*"

2. Trials Drive us to God for Answers and for the Grace to Endure

*"let him ask of God"*

3. God Loves to Help Us -- this encourages us to ask Him for wisdom

- a. Impartial  
*"who gives to all men"*
- b. Generous  
*"generously"*
- c. Accepting  
*"without reproach"*
- d. Faithful  
*"and it will be given to him"*

**Thomas Lea:** Four facts about God encourage us to ask for this wisdom. First, God is a giving God. Giving to those who ask from him is natural for God. Second, God gives generously to all. He has no favorite recipients of his gifts, but gives to all classes, races, and types of people. Third, God gave without finding fault. God does not give in such a way as to humiliate us. He does not chastise us for our failures or hold our unworthiness against us. He is always ready to add new blessings to old ones without finding fault in us for our many shortcomings. Finally, God promises to answer those who come seeking wisdom. A request according to his will receives his answer (**1 John 5:14–15**).

**B. (:6-8) Ask God in Faith Without any Doubting**

**Ralph Martin:** Having stated the clear character of a beneficent and bountiful giver James moves on to stress how appropriate also is the human response in a faith that is wholehearted and loyal. Building on the (mainly) Deuteronomic teaching on Israel's calling to be devoted to Yahweh with a single heart, he exposes the folly of a person with divided affections, likening that person's predicament to that of a storm-tossed boat. That same imagery supplies the punch line of the pericope: the double allegiance that people cherish, hoping to serve God and Mammon (**Matt 6:24**), leaves them in no better shape than a frail vessel on angry seas; they are tossed about in all their ways.

1. What does it mean to Ask in Faith?

2. What does it mean to Doubt?

- a. Analogy -- Unstable  
*"like the surf of the sea  
driven and tossed by the wind"*
- b. Failure –  
*"for let not that man expect that he will receive anything  
from the Lord"*

**Dan McCartney:** James is telling his hearers that they should in no way fail to commit to God and must wholeheartedly and single-mindedly trust his character and promises.

c. Description

1) "*being a double-minded man*"

**Douglas Moo:** The ‘double-mindedness’ that James criticizes here is the antithesis both of that ‘wholeness’ or ‘perfection’ (*teleios*) which is the goal of Christian living (v. 4) and of God’s ‘single’, ‘wholehearted’ character (v. 5). This desire for singleness and purity of intention is a leading theme in **verses 2–8**, and occurs throughout the letter (see esp. **4:4–10**, where James again uses the word *dipsychos* [v. 8]).

2) "*unstable in all his ways*"

**Chromy:** The double-minded man has reservations about being completely yielded to God. You are double-minded when you want your own will and God’s will at the same time. God wants you to trust him completely and allow him to take care of you throughout difficulties.

**Craig Blomberg:** The last phrase, “*in all their ways*” (ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ), shows them to be consistently inconsistent throughout their lives. This verse sheds further light on the original question of who is a doubter and what it means to be double-minded: these are people who are unwilling to let go of the world and truly follow Christ, torn between sin and obedience, reluctant to let go of the pleasures of the world for the sake of discipleship. This description hits close to home in an age of nominal Christians who attend church from time to time, perhaps even regularly, but who refuse to let God interfere with their daily lives and goals.

**David Nystrom:** Being “*unstable*” is a quality that marks one’s whole existence, not just spiritual life. It carries the idea of inclining this way and that, but never committing. Paul uses the noun form of this word to mean “disorder” (**1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 12:20**), and in Luke Jesus uses it to mean “revolutions” (**Luke 21:9**). This word is rare in Greek literature before James, but prevalent in Christian literature afterwards, speaking perhaps to the influence of James.

### **III. (:9-12) PERSEVERANCE UNDER TRIAL BRINGS BLESSING FOR ETERNITY**

**R. Kent Hughes:** Webster defines a paradox as “a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.” An example of this is the statement, “giving is receiving.” The Scriptures contain many paradoxes, telling us that the weak are strong, the empty are full, the slave is free, the cursed are blessed, and death brings life—all statements that first strike the ear as contradictory, but become increasingly true to us as we meditate on them. **G. K. Chesterton** gave this

magnificent definition of a paradox: “**a paradox is truth standing on its head shouting for attention.**” In my mind’s eye I see truths lined up like ridiculous people on their heads, feet waving in the air, calling, “Hey, look at me! Up is down! Down is up! Think about it.” **Paradox is a powerful vehicle for truth, because it makes people think.**

James, concerned that his pressured readers not succumb to instability, resorted to paradoxes in **verses 9, 10** to convey stabilizing wisdom. First: “*Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation*”—the paradox of the rich poor. And second: “. . . *and the rich in his humiliation*”—the paradox of the poor rich. Together these powerful paradoxes shouted with poignancy and effect to James’ persecuted, scattered brethren, and they do the same for all today who feel out of sync with the prevailing culture, and especially to those suffering for their faith socially and economically.

#### **A. (:9-11) This Present Life is Transitory**

(Dealing with believers in both categories)

**Daniel Doriani:** The poor are prone to dishonor God by breaking his law, if necessary, to obtain the next meal. But the rich are prone to trust their wealth and power and so to forget God. The rich are also tempted to insult and abuse the poor (**James 2:6–7**), to live for themselves, and to exploit whomever they can (**5:3–6**).

In truth, God singles out neither the rich nor the poor for special testing (**1:13**). The poor must remember they have an exalted position in God’s eyes (**1:9**). The rich must remember the dangers of materialism. They must believe their life is fleeting, impermanent, and beyond their control, as it is for everyone else (**1:10–11**).

**Douglas Moo:** James, then, exhorts both poor and rich Christians to remember that the sole basis for their confidence is their identification with Jesus Christ. Poor believers, insignificant and of no account in the eyes of the world, are to rejoice in their relationship with the Lord who has been exalted to the highest position in the universe. Rich believers, well off and secure in their possessions, with great status in the eyes of the world, are to remember that their only lasting security comes through their relationship with the ‘man of suffering’, ‘despised and rejected by mankind’. Both types of Christians, in other words, must look at their lives from a heavenly, not an earthly, perspective.

##### 1. (:9) Easier Understood by the Poor -- the Test of Poverty

*"But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position"*

**Craig Blomberg:** If scarcity of goods inherently improves one’s spirituality, no biblical text would ever command help for the poor! Far more likely is the view that sees James as referring to our promised exaltation in the life to come. Focusing on our future destiny can, of course, begin to reframe our perspectives on the present as well, as we look beyond our socioeconomic status and begin to see the world through God’s eyes.

2. (:10) Harder for the Rich to Understand -- the Test of Prosperity (Vaughan)

*"and let the rich man glory in his humiliation,  
because like flowering grass he will pass away"*

**R.V.G. Tasker:** Similarly, the rich brother is to rejoice that in Christ he has been brought down to a level where “*the deceitfulness of riches*” (**Mk. iv. 19**) and the anxiety to amass and retain them are no longer primary or even relevant considerations; for in Christ he has learned to make a totally different evaluation of material prosperity. The new factor in his situation is that he has come to see that real wealth lies in the things that abide because they are eternal, and that it is the unseen things that have this characteristic... In comparison with these unshakable possessions material riches are recognized by him to be what in fact they are, transitory and uncertain.

**William Barclay:** If life is so uncertain, if man is so vulnerable, if the externals of life are so perishable, then calamity and disaster may come at any moment. Since that is so, a man is a fool to put all his trust in things --like wealth--which he may lose at any moment. He is only wise if he puts his trust in things which he cannot lose.

So then, James urges the rich to cease to put their trust in that which their own power can amass. He urges them to realize and to admit their own essential human helplessness, and humbly to put their trust in God, who alone can give us the things which abide for ever. He is pleading with men to glory in that new humility which realizes its utter dependence on God.

**Peter Davids:** The wealthy Christian is instructed to take no pride in possessions or position, but rather to think on his self-abasement in identifying with Christ (i.e. repenting) and Christ’s poor people. This is how most scholars have interpreted the phrase (e.g. **Adamson, Cantinat, Mayor, Mussner, Ropes**).

3. (:11) Proven by Nature

*"For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass;  
and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed;  
so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away"*

**George Guthrie:** The term rendered “*scorching heat*” by the NIV could also refer to the **sirocco**, a seasonal, burning “wind” (NASB) that blows for three or four days in the fall and spring, and this is a common use of the word in the LXX (e.g., **Hos 12:2; 13:15; Isa 49:10; Jer 18:17**). Yet that wind blows day and night, not being directly related to the rising of the sun (**Davids**, 78). It is better, therefore, with the NIV, to understand the reference here to **the blazing heat of the sun**.

**B. (:12) Living for Eternity Makes Trials Bearable**

**Dan McCartney:** It is unusual to group **1:12** with **1:9–11**. Most commentators notice the theme of “*testing/temptation*” in **1:12** (the word *πειρασμός*, *peirasmos*, can mean either



“testing” or “temptation”) and therefore take that verse as introducing the subject of temptation in **1:13–15**. Further, it is difficult to see **1:12** as somehow connected with the eschatological reversal material of **1:9–11**.

Nevertheless, I agree with a few recent commentators (**Moo** 2000: 71–72; **Johnson** 1995: 174–76; cf. **Penner** 1996: 144–47) who think that the break should be between **1:12** and **1:13**, with “*testing/temptation*” as simply the catchword that provides a pivot to the new subject. Note that the testing in **1:12** is a cause for blessedness and is of a different kind than the temptation in **1:13–15**, which is a cause of sin. Further, the endurance of testing in **1:12** forms an **inclusio**, or verbal bracket, with **1:2–3**, where endurance and testing are likewise linked positively. The sun with its scorching heat in **1:11** is an image for testing, reflecting the experience of suffering in the desert. Finally, **1:12** has the character of a saying, or proverbial form, one of several in James that evince the wisdom character of this letter. James typically uses these “proverbial sayings” to conclude or encapsulate a matter rather than introduce a new subject (see, e.g., **1:27; 2:13, 26; 3:11–12, 18; 4:17**).

### 1. Enduring Trials Brings Blessing

*"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial"*

**Daniel Doriani:** As James sees it, God fashions maturity and endurance by means of the trials that befall us. Do we take responsibility and endure, or doubt and blame God? Our response to trials reveals our heart condition. This is the first concern of James’s letter to the Christian Jews under his care.

**George Guthrie:** The word translated “*Blessed*” (*makarios*, GK 3421) calls to mind Jesus’ teachings, especially the Beatitudes (**Mt 5:3–11; 11:6; 13:16; 16:17; 24:46; Lk 6:20–22; 7:23; 11:27–28; Jn 13:17; 20:29**), which hark back to Jewish tradition embodied, for instance, in the Psalms (e.g., **Pss 1:1–2:12; 31:1; 39:5; 83:5; 111:1; 143:15**). “Blessedness” has to do with well-being in life that flows from the favorable position in which one is rightly related to God (**Johnson**, 187). Here the blessing is for the person who endures a trial. The absence of the Greek article probably indicates that no specific trial is in view, and the earlier passage, **1:2–4**, has noted that trials are “*various*” (NASB). James, then, is interested in giving his readers encouragement in the face of discouraging and difficult experiences in general.

### 2. Passing the Test of Faith Brings God's Approval

*"for once he has been approved"*

### 3. The Reward

*"the Crown of Life"*

the crown which consists of life

**Brian Racer:** Since multiple trials are referred, which each have an ending point, it would seem as if the reward is realized in this life rather than in eternity, since successful perseverance gains immediate approval.

**Thomas Lea:** The crown is not a physical object but a spiritual privilege which gives a deeper, fuller life on earth (**John 10:10**) and an unending, joyous life in the world to come.

**John MacArthur:** **Perseverance** attests to God's approval, for it gives evidence of eternal life (salvation). In other words, perseverance does not result in salvation and eternal life, but is itself the result and evidence of salvation and eternal life.

#### 4. The Requirement

*"which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we appreciate our freedoms in worship and evangelism and the preciousness of our fellowship together? What special pressures did the early Jewish believers face as they were "*dispersed abroad*". What Christian groups around the world are experiencing similar persecution?
- 2) When have we chosen to remain under a trial vs. when have we tried to escape from the trial and circumvent the will of God for our life? What did we learn in each instance?
- 3) Why does God not provide shortcuts to maturity? Why is the process so important to God?
- 4) What is the "*high position*" that the poorer brother should be glorying in? What is the "*humiliation*" that corresponds to the state of the rich man? How has God designed a program that provides a level ground for both groups in terms of their relationship with Him?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**R.V.G. Tasker:** The Greek word translated *temptations*, *peirasmoi*, has the double sense of **outward trials**, and **inward temptations**. Outward trials very often become occasions of temptation to sin. In this verse the translation "*trials*" (R.S.V.) is preferable.

**Allen: When Troubles Go Away ... How to Profit from your Problems...**

Today, there are numerous ideas being tossed around regarding trials and hardships. Some believe they're a form of punishment from God. Others dangle before us the promise that if we can just reach a certain level of maturity, trials will disappear and we'll live happily ever after. Life will be one big Disneyland. And still others are out there trying to convince us that there's really no such thing as adversity. Trials such as death, pain, sickness, emotional hurt, are a figment of our imagination.

James – the most practical letter in the New Testament - has something quite different to say about trials. It is the “How To” manual for the Christian life.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Our values determine our evaluations. If we value comfort more than character, then trials will upset us. If we value the material and physical more than the spiritual, we will not be able to “count it all joy!” If we live only for the present and forget about the future, the trials will make us bitter, not better.

**Mooney: Learn to Grow Through Adversity ...**When faced with adversity we will also discover some things about ourselves.

- We will discover what our view of God really is.
- We will discover what our weaknesses and our strengths are.
- We will discover how mature we are.
- We will discover what our priorities really are. God's command or my comfort.

**John MacArthur:** Scripture mentions at least eight purposes for the Lord's allowing trials to come into the lives of His people.

1. First, is to test the strength of our faith.
2. Second, trials are given to humble us, to remind us not to let our trust in the Lord turn into presumption and spiritual self-satisfaction.
3. Third, God allows us to suffer trials in order to wean us from our dependence on worldly things.
4. A fourth purpose of trials is to call us to eternal and heavenly hope. The harder our trials become and the longer they last, the more we look forward to being with the Lord.
5. A fifth purpose of trials is to reveal what we really love.
6. Sixth, trials are given to teach us to value God's blessings.
7. Seventh, the Lord uses trials to develop in His saints enduring strength for greater usefulness.

8. Eighth, and finally, the Lord uses trials to enable us to better help others in their trials.

**Chromy:** Now, wait a minute. Isn't it enough for me to claim that I have faith in Christ without having it be tested? What if I don't want my faith to be tested, especially when I have to go through the misery of trials? The reason why God uses the trials of life to test your faith is to prove that your faith is real. Let me give you an illustration. In football, we have a drill called 'eye-openers.' In eye-openers, two boys stand 3 yards apart. On command, they run into each other at full speed and collide, then they back away and run into each other again and again and again. The purpose of eye-openers is for them to prove that they can play football, because in a football game they have to hit and be hit. The point is they look like football players, they call themselves football players, but until they prove that they will hit they really aren't football players.

The same is true for us. The trials of life are spiritual eye-openers. You can say that you're a Christian. You can claim to have faith in Jesus Christ. But until that faith is proven to be real, it is meaningless. You prove that your faith is real when you trust God in the face of trials, when you recognize that God is the ultimate authority for your life and that you're going to rely on his wisdom, and the truth of his Word to get you through. And God will honor your faithfulness by giving you a sense of security, and peace of mind, and the knowledge that he will be with you every step of the way...

In this letter, then, the Apostle James is telling us several things about faith. In chapter one you have a wonderful answer to the question, '**What makes faith grow?**'... There are two things, James tells us, that make faith grow.

- The first is trials...
- Second, the instrument that makes us grow is the word...

**Curtis Vaughan: The Purpose of the Epistle** ... There may, however, be significance in the fact that the letter opens with a discussion concerning trials and closes with an appeal to render compassionate help to the brother who wanders from the truth. It would appear, then, that under the pressures of poverty and persecution some of the readers had become depressed, bitter, and impatient, and were accommodating their lives to the life of the world. Specifically then, the book is intended to give comfort, rebuke, and counsel to Christians passing through a period of severe trial -- comfort for their sorrows, rebuke for their worldliness, and counsel for redirecting their lives.

**Luck:** Patience is usually thought of as calm resignation to God's will in face of the inevitable. But Christian patience, as spoken of in the New Testament, is more than this. It is true that calm submission is a part of it, but this is only the negative side. On the positive side there is a steady and determined perseverance, in spite of difficulties, toward the right--toward the goal of God's will for our lives.

**Curtis Vaughan:** The burden of **verses 2-12** is encouragement in face of the afflictions and trials of life -- encouragement to patient endurance, encouragement to believe that

trials can be turned to our good, encouragement to prayer, encouragement to joyful acceptance of one's lot in life, encouragement to look hopefully to the future.

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.*

-- William Cowper

**R. Kent Hughes:** Several years ago the Presbyterian pastor **Lloyd John Ogilvie** underwent the worst year of his life. His wife had undergone five major surgeries, plus radiation and chemotherapy, several of his staff members had departed, large problems loomed, and discouragement assaulted his feelings. But he wrote,

*The greatest discovery that I have made in the midst of all the difficulties is that I can have joy when I can't feel like it—artesian joy. When I had every reason to feel beaten, I felt joy. In spite of everything, [God] gave me the conviction of being loved and the certainty that nothing could separate me from him. It was not happiness, gush, or jolliness but a constant flow of the Spirit through me. At no time did he give me the easy confidence that everything would work out as I wanted it on my timetable, but that he was in charge and would give me and my family enough courage for each day: grace. Joy is always the result of that.*

### **Brian Racer: (1:1-4) The Power of Pressures to Perfect Us**

Introduction: Plumbing Illustration – when you attempt to fix a plumbing problem, the real test comes when you turn the water back on and put pressure on the system ... then you find out whether the system can hold up. Trials pinpoint the weaknesses in our system that still need to be addressed. Life might appear all well and good until God sends just enough pressure so that we can't handle things on our own; then we blow a gasket and need to turn to Him for help. Opportunity in this passage to examine how we respond to pressure – different options: being built up, blown up by the pressure, or blowing up at the pressure.

### **(1:5-8) Wisdom: The Way Through our Trials**

#### I. Wisdom is a Perspective to Gain (:2-4)

ability to see life's situations from God's perspective

- A. Trials bring joy outcomes – knowing that I did the right thing; knowing that I am on the same page as God
- B. Trials endured produce maturity

#### II. Wisdom is a Petition to Request (:5)

- A. Knowing we are asking someone who both wants to help and has capability

to help

B. Knowing the nature of our God – expectancy that God will respond

**III. Wisdom is a Pursuit to Strive After (:6-8)**

A. Faith seeks God and His Ways

B. Faith is single-souled in its response to God

C. Faith is a Sure Foundation when facing trials

**(1:9-12) How to Boast About the Blessedness of Trials**

The great leveler in life = trials experienced together as a church; brings unity

Trial = whatever is difficult for you

**I. (:9) If Poor: Boast about Your Exalted Position**

A. The Principle of the Last Being First (**Matt. 19:16-30**)

B. The Privilege of Suffering for Christ (**Acts 5:41-42**)

persecution did not cause them to modify their message

**II. (:10-11) If Rich: Boast about Your Enduring Possession**

Rich people need to experience a sense of loss so that they will be more dependent upon God. Talking about believers here, not unbelievers.

A. A Picture of a Quickly Fading Life

B. Pursuing True Riches and an Unshakable Fortune

**III. (:12) If Approved: Boast about Your Enjoyed Prize**

Doesn't matter if rich or poor; what matters is finishing well!

A. Approval based on Finishing the Trial

B. Approval Awarded with an Abundant Life here and now; a quality of life

**Conclusion:**

- Pray for our persecuted brethren (**Heb. 13:3**)
- Be content; stop complaining
- Glory in what we have in common – God gives all of us the grace to finish the trial; encourage others not to give up

**Thomas Leake: Help in the Midst of Adversity**

**Introduction:** cf. adversities faced by OT saints; all received God's help; still trials are tough; involve real struggle; experience of groaning instead of joy; but God is right there even at the lowest point of the trial – "*How long, O Lord?*"

You must first take the step of faith and put your life on the line; God specializes in last minute rescue; that is God's method; He is our Deliverer; our Savior; we must learn who God is

**Review: 2 Previous Messages:**

1. Consider it pure joy when you encounter Trials
2. Through Endurance we get Maturity

God wants to mature our character; accomplishes this through trials as we exercise faith; He wants to help us in the midst of adversity

## 4 Ways to Obtain God's Help in the Midst of Adversity

### I. (:5) Ask for Wisdom – a Command

#### A. Need for Wisdom

Our degree of need for wisdom varies; but we all need it; it is obvious we need wisdom; we fire off questions:

- Why are you taking me through this trial?
- Why now?
- Why this particular trial?
- Is this really necessary?
- What am I supposed to do in the midst of this trial?

We need a Christ-like attitude to benefit us and glorify God;

#### B. Nature of This Wisdom

Hebrew concept of wisdom – not a trivia buff of accumulating knowledge but a lived-out type of wisdom; not a theoretical abstraction (**3:13-17**); national political leaders need this type of wisdom; we tend to think that we know a lot more than we do; youth especially think this way; but God wants to teach us; we need to benefit from the trial; Proverbs teaches that wisdom is an important commodity; we don't always know what God is trying to accomplish – cf. Job; it is easy for us to see the character weaknesses of others; sometimes God will press the trial harder against us; God puts weights on our shoulders to push us down to our knees; **Luke 10:21** – those who refuse to seek wisdom from God will remain in the dark (**1 Cor. 2:9**)

#### C. Source of this Wisdom

this wisdom comes from a supernatural source outside of us; not from human philosophy – Where do you turn for wisdom? The very act of asking acknowledges that you do not know and need God's input; He does have the wisdom; Progressive sense = keep asking; God gives generously; easy, unconditionally, directly, without reproach

**Rom. 11:33** – never a lack of wisdom to dispense; a virtual pipeline of wisdom;

**John 16:24; Ps. 84** – “*it shall be given him*” = a promise

**Matt. 5** – look at promises here

How does God bring that wisdom to me? **Prov. 2:6** from His mouth = the Scriptures; **2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21**; God is talking; are we listening and receiving? **Ps. 119:18**; we need wisdom now! Solomon needed instant wisdom to rule the kingdom – **1 Kings 3:7-9**; Answer received in **vs. 12** – he got the wisdom he needed because he asked the right person and listened;

Caution: Next thought you get may not be from God; don't just assume every thought comes directly from God and is consistent with His wisdom

### II. (:6-8) Maintain Unmixed Faith

#### A. Faith is Essential

**Heb. 11:6** – Faith is never optional; God demands faith – **Matt. 13:58; Heb. 3:19**

## B. What is Faith

1. Negatively -- Not just agreeing something is true (**James 2:19**);
2. Positively -- **Heb. 11:1** = *Assurance of things hoped for*; you don't see it yet; taking God at His Word;

## C. Proper Object of Faith

Religion of today = Faith in Self; but we are mere dust; nothing there to believe in; faith must be placed in the right object; God is good to me and generous and loves me; so I will trust you – **Matt. 17:17**; Unbelief vexed Christ

## D. How do you get Faith?

**Matt. 21:22** – tied to effectiveness in prayer; God is in control, not our prayers

## E. Nature of Doubting

*Disputing* – middle voice – with yourself; mistrust; acting like a Yo-Yo; opposite of faith; our thinking must not be divided; **Rom. 4:20** – example of Abraham – he did not waver; **Mark 9:24** – divided in his thinking and he knew it; **Heb. 10:23** – stand on the rock of God's Faithfulness; keep asking, keep seeking; keep knocking – Pres. Tense; this is not meaningless repetition; adding more information and gaining wisdom; we need fervency in our prayers; Lord wants us actively dependent on Him; Why doesn't God respond quicker? We get impatient, demanding, whining – cf. Peter walking on the water – Why did you Doubt? He certainly did better than the other disciples who remained in the boat; but still rebuked for his doubt; Doubt is unreasonable to God; The more desperate we are, the more humble, the more willing to give up our own devices; Faith arises from Need; send the doubting soldiers on home; God may press the trial harder against us to purify our faith; the one who doubts is on the wild ride to nowhere; cf. incident of Elijah and Baal – you can't sit on the fence; make a decision; YHWH or Baal? People on the fence like an oscillating fan blowing back and forth; Doubt brings confusion, stagnation, unfruitfulness; **Rev. 21:8** – Why should God give anything to people who doubt His generosity? He is wishy-washy, unstable, occasionally believes God but refuses to rest on God; just keep praying and never lose heart – **Ps. 56** – When I am afraid, I will put my trust in Thee

## **III. (:9-11) Keep the Right Perspective**

James examines the two contrasting perspectives: that of the wealthy and that of the poor; most of us lean towards the side of the rich man in our culture; If you can learn happiness and contentment in either of these extremes, you should have no problem anywhere on the spectrum

### A. Perspective of the Poor

Principles of **Phil. 4** are the same no matter what your circumstances; there were many poor believers in the early church; Advice of James: not to pursue the American Dream; not to pick up weapons and instigate a revolt against the wealthy class; not rely on the government to bail you out and solve all your ills; but "*Glory in your high position*"; you enjoy Sonship with the Living God; unbelievable privileges in the coming



kingdom; but these can only be grasped now by faith – but that doesn't make it less real; cf. **Eph. 1** = listing of all of our spiritual blessings in Christ; no higher position than being seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places; Are you in Christ? Then Boast of your high position; you may be hungry physically but you have the bread of life; you may be rejected by men but you are accepted by the God of the universe; **Jer. 9:23-24; 1 Cor. 1:31** – boasting is required; Is Jesus the Boast of your life?; Faith give you a glimpse of coming glory; unsaved will be begging to be like us; we're going to have a home in a pretty good neighborhood; You're not as rich as you want to be ... So what!

### B. Perspective of the Rich

Don't build your house on sinking sand; will find it all to be a mirage; blessing will not come through their riches;

think of other Scriptural paradoxes ...

Generally speaking the rich are poor in faith; they try to avoid trials by hiring others to do their work; their money buys them out of many situations; leads to a deceptive security regarding their deficiencies; but God uses trials to expose their deep need for Him; cf. **1 Tim. 6** – they think their education or business savvy has made them secure; these won't profit in the day of wrath; they have the same need for Righteousness – **Prov. 11:28; Luke 6** – Woe to you who are rich; possible to be both rich and righteous; but riches can be a snare choking out the Word; one of the best things that can happen to a rich person is to lose his riches; find out who they really are trusting in; God is the best insurance policy; Trials are a good teacher to the rich; they need to consider the reality of their spiritual position; they need to lower their view of the value of their riches; the rich man will physically die also; **Ps. 49:16-17** – transitory, temporal nature of this life; it is wrong to glory in riches, trust in them, boast in them;

Where is your heart? Here are some practical tests:

- Are you not giving abundantly, significantly?
- Do you buy more expensive items than you need?
- Does your anxiety level go way up when you don't have insurance?
- Are you overly consumed with your job and work?
- Do your thoughts focus on how to make and preserve and multiply money?
- Do you choose your place to live based on expediency and comfort?
- Are you unwilling to give to the poor?
- Do you argue with your spouse about financial matters?

Recognize where materialism has grabbed your heart and repent

**Brevity of Life** – 4 Verbs applying to the flowers:

- *Like flowering grass he will **pass away***
- ***Withers** the grass*
- *Its flower **falls off***
- *Beauty of its appearance **is destroyed***

Analogy applied to people spending inordinate attention on trying to maintain their youth = futile – just patching up that quickly fading flower; we need to establish our

identity around spiritual standards, not physical; maintain eternal and spiritual perspective

#### **IV. (:12) Persevere to the End = “Blessed Man”**

Jewish concept of blessedness = **Psalm 1:1; 34:8**

Richer and broader than mere happiness; privileged recipient of divine favor; particularly looking at the future life here – Someone who wins out in the end; perseverance is the requirement – thru all trials; not just this one particular trial; life is filled with trials

What is the Blessing promised? *Crown of life* – *dokimos* – [cf. **1 Cor. 9** and the opposite – *adokimos*] -- Genuine, real faith; those who turn back never had saving faith; **2 Tim. 4:8** – Crown is life itself – eternal, spiritual life; we must Hold Fast; description of a believer = one who loves Christ – **Rom. 8:28; Rev. 2:10** – no quitting, no turning back – **James 5:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:13; Rom.8**

**Lehman Strauss:** Although it may be an unusual perspective, it is true nevertheless that nothing but divine love sends trouble to the child of God, “*For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*” (**Heb. 12:6**). When, in the first shocking moment, I look my trouble in the face, it is hard for me to recognize any blessing in it. Usually I count it all joy when I escape trials and tribulations. **How do you react to trouble?** Do you ever think of a heavy burden or affliction someone carries, and then thank God that you have been delivered? Of such an experience, **Charles Brown** says: “It is just possible--according to James--that they are to be envied and we to be pitied.” James appeals to us to recognize that every test, every trial, every tribulation, with all the accompanying sorrow and disappointment, is a God-given **opportunity for growth** and development in the Christian life.

My brother in Christ, **Richard H. Seume**, inserted the following clipping in his *Studies in James*. I beg his patience with me as I quote it here. It is entitled: “*The Blessing of Irritations.*”

"Life on earth would not worth much if every source of irritation were removed. Yet most of us rebel against the things that irritate us, and count as heavy loss what ought to be rich gain. We are told that the oyster is wiser; that when an irritating object, like a bit of sand, gets under the 'mantle' of his shell, he simply covers it with the most precious part of his being and makes of it a pearl. The irritation that it was causing is stopped by encrusting it with the pearly formation. A true pearl is therefore simply a VICTORY over irritation. Every irritation that gets into our lives today is an opportunity for pearl culture. The more irritations the devil flings at us, the more pearls we may have. We need only to welcome them and cover them completely with love, that most precious part of us, and the irritation will be smothered out as the pearl comes into being. What a store of pearls we may have, if we will!"

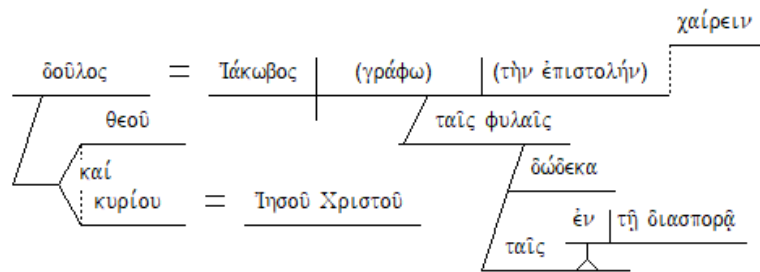
Trials are not a sign of God's displeasure, for the Apostle Peter tells us that we are not

to think it strange when some trial comes to test us as though some strange thing happened to us (**1 Peter 4:12**). The Lord Jesus said: “*In the world ye shall have tribulation*” (**John 16:33**). Beloved, if we know these things we will not be caught unguarded when trials come.

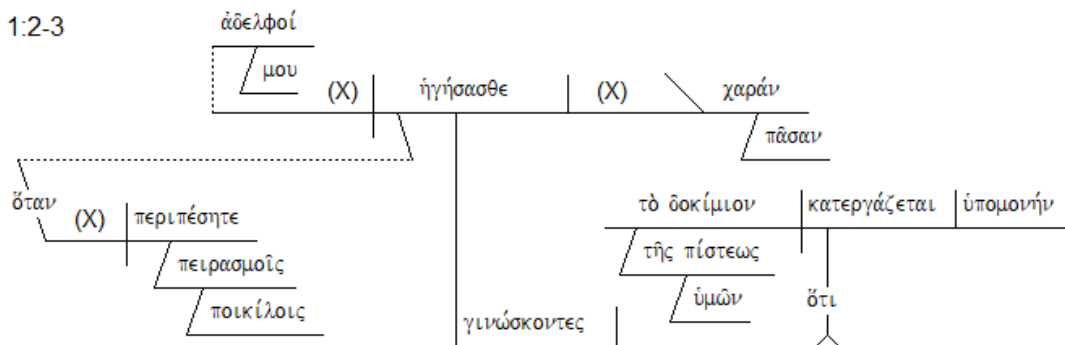
Remember, all things, even our sorest troubles, work together for good to them that love God (**Romans 8:28**). Failing to reckon upon this and becoming disconsolate and discouraged under trial brings no glory to God. Moreover, a grumbler places his own limits on his usefulness in the service of the Lord. Joy is contagious, and joy under fire brings blessing to others.

**Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:**

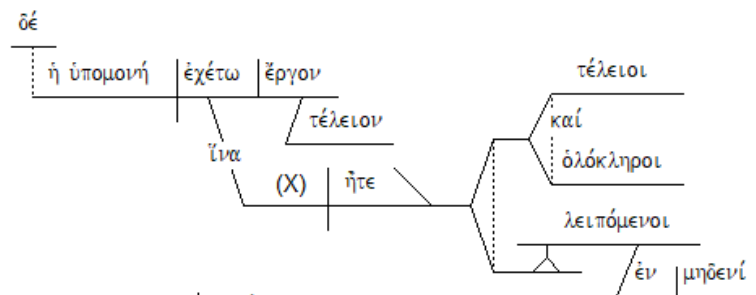
Jam 1:1



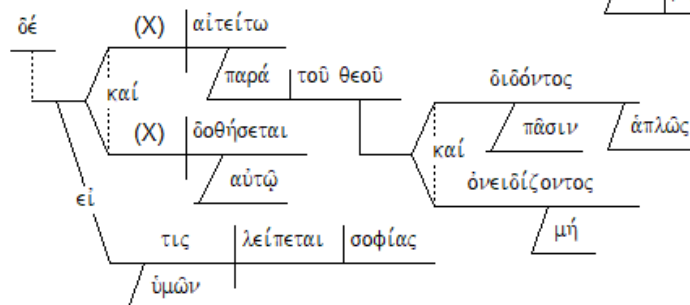
Jam 1:2-3



Jam 1:4

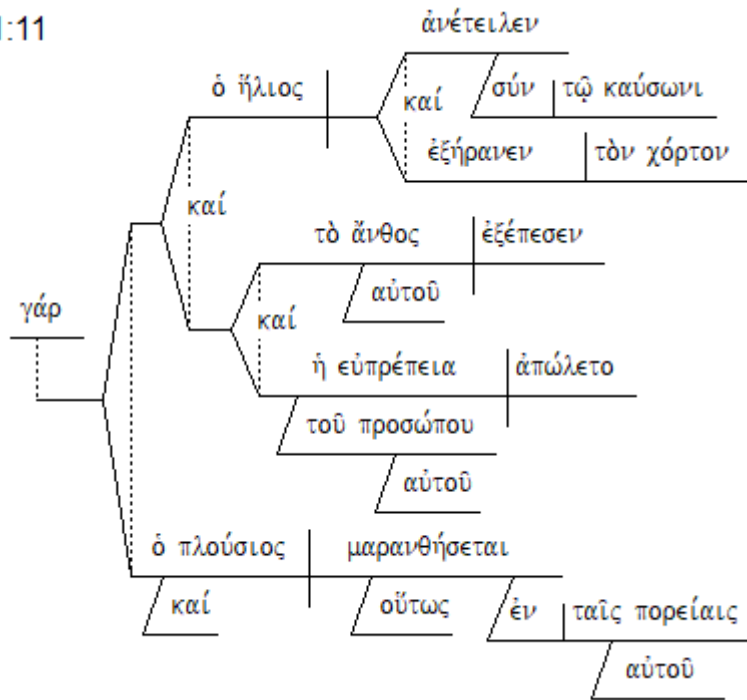


Jam 1:5

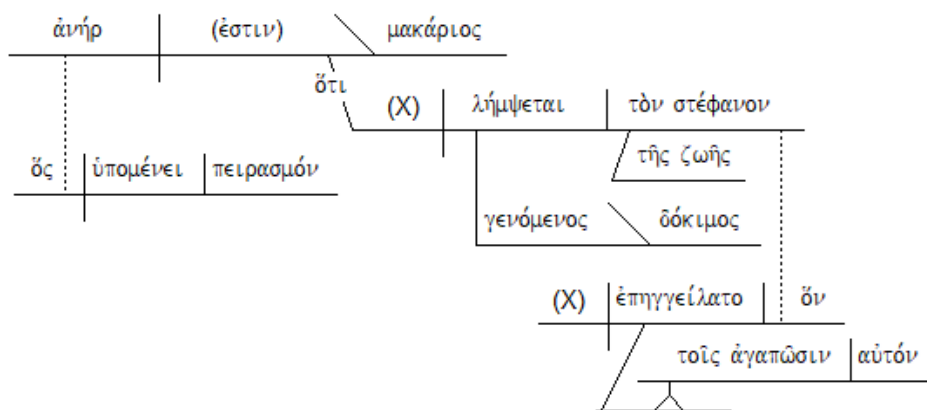




Jam 1:11



Jam 1:12



TEXT: JAMES 1:13-16

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT PERSEVERANCE IS DEAD -- PART 2

**BIG IDEA:**  
**TEMPTATIONS CANNOT BE BLAMED ON GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:**

James switches his focus from Trials sourced in our external circumstances to Temptations arising from sin within. These two can easily be related since our response to external Trials can unleash inner bitterness and rebellion that are problems of the heart.

**Tony Miano:** We're going to talk about how we can recognize the opportunity for failure before the situation gets to the point that we're left disappointed, looking back at our mistakes. That opportunity for failure begins with temptation.

**Alec Motyer:** Between **verses 12** and **13** James performs another of his lightning **changes of direction**. In **verse 12** he pronounces a blessing on the one who endures (bears up under, perseveres through) trial (*peirasmos*). But when we come to the related verb (*peirazō*), in **verse 13**, it refers no longer to the outward, circumstantial trial, but to inner enticement to sin: what we speak of as '**temptation**'. Typical of his approach, he does not warn us of this change of meaning; he plunges us into it. In other words he writes to us in exactly the same way as experience comes to us: the same circumstances which are, on the one hand, opportunities to go forward are, on the other hand, temptations to go back. There is no need to illustrate the point. We all know only too many people who have ceased to walk with God under the pressure of trouble or tragedy; the call to endure and mature was abandoned in favour of the suggestion to give up.

**Dan McCartney:** The **reproductive metaphor** is carried throughout this paragraph. The metaphor of conceiving and giving birth to evil (**1:15**) is found elsewhere in the Bible (**Ps. 7:14**). But in the latter half of the paragraph it is God who is the creative agent. It is indeed God who is personally the "*Father*," who uses the seed of the word of truth to give birth to ("*bring forth*") believers, who are then a kind of firstfruits, a first harvest of creation. This paragraph is full of contrasts with previous material. Unlike the unstable person, God is unchanging and unshifting. Unlike desire and sin, which produce death, God produces living beings. Unlike the darkness and shadow that sin brings forth, God begets lights.

**John MacArthur:** In his fierce opposition to the ungodly rationalization of blaming God for sending enticement to evil, James gives four strong proofs that He is not responsible for our temptations and even less responsible, if that were possible, for our succumbing to them in sin. He does so by explaining

1. the nature of evil (**1:13**),
2. the nature of man (v. **14**),
3. the nature of lust (vv. **15–16**), and
4. the nature of God (v. **17**).
5. In **verse 18**, he gives a fifth proof, the nature of regeneration

## **I. (:13A) THE NATURAL EXCUSE (THE EASY WAY OUT) IS TO BLAME GOD**

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

Man's natural tendency is to try to shift the blame off on someone else. Cf. Adam in the garden blaming the woman "*whom thou gavest to be with me*". Typical excuses:

- "God, you expect too much from me"
- "God, you have made things too difficult for me"
- "God, you have not given me the same grace and power to resist temptation that you have given others; this is just my temperament; I can't help myself"
- "God, you created me this way"

**Dan McCartney:** In the context of a strong belief in God's sovereign disposition of everything, it is easy to slip into the pattern of **blaming God** for one's own failure. Adam did it: "*The woman whom you gave to be with me . . .*" (**Gen. 3:12**). And the request "*Do not lead us into temptation*" (**Matt. 6:13 NASB; Luke 11:4**) could be misconstrued to suggest that God is the agent of temptation to evil. This struggle to maintain the balance between acknowledging God's total sovereignty and maintaining his non-responsibility for sin is as much a theme of Jewish wisdom literature as it is of modern theological controversy.

## **II. (:13B) WHY CAN'T YOU BLAME GOD?**

**THESIS: His Righteous and Holy Character Sets Him Apart from Temptation**

**A. First Reason: "*God cannot be tempted by evil*"**

Problem: How do you reconcile the temptations of Christ with this statement?  
He was fully God and yet perfect man.  
The temptations were real ... and yet Christ could not sin ...

**Curtis Vaughan:**

- God's sufficiency means He "has no needs to be supplied" = the main way temptation gets a foothold
- In God's character there is no "weakness or bias on which evil may lay hold and act"

**John MacArthur:** the nature of evil makes it inherently foreign to God (see discussion of v. 17). The two are mutually exclusive in the most complete and profound sense. God and evil exist in two distinct realms that never meet. He has no vulnerability to evil and is utterly impregnable to its onslaughts. He is aware of evil but untouched by it, like a sunbeam shining on a dump is untouched by the trash.

**R. Kent Hughes:** This assertion that God cannot be tempted is stressed by a rare verbal adjective that means that he is “*unable to be tempted*”—he is “*untemptable*.” The sense is that “God is unsusceptible to evil; evil has never had any appeal for Him. It is repugnant and abhorrent to Him.” Evil cannot promote even the slightest appealing tug in the heart of God. Because he cannot be tempted to sin, James’ conclusion follows: “*he himself tempts no one*” to sin. God has never tempted us to sin because he cannot! It is a moral impossibility. This is extremely important because the human inclination from the Garden of Eden to this day is to consciously, or at least subconsciously, blame God and thus try to palliate our own feelings of guilt.

## **B. Second Reason: "He Himself does not tempt anyone."**

Problem: What about the Lord's prayer: “*Lead us not into temptation ...?*”

**Tony Miano:** God cannot do or be that which is contrary to His character. Likewise, His actions are always consistent with His character. Since He is an untemptable God, He will not tempt anyone.

What we see here is one of God’s characteristics that set the one true God, the God of the Bible, apart from every other god. If we look at the gods of other religions, whether ancient or present, the character of these gods, in many ways, resembles the character of their followers. Take for instance the gods of Greek mythology. They were certainly an unseemly lot. They were prone to all of the sins and vices of common man. They were jealous in an unholy sense of the word. They were vindictive, lustful, and deceitful.

These false gods were temptable and evil.

**Douglas Moo:** while God may test or prove his servants in order to strengthen their faith, he never seeks to induce sin and destroy their faith.

**John MacArthur:** To some Christians, Jesus’ instructions about prayer, commonly called the Lord’s Prayer, suggest that God can, if He wants, “*lead us into temptation*,” and that we should therefore earnestly beseech Him instead to “*deliver us from evil*” (**Matt. 6:13**). But the idea there is that we should ask our heavenly Father not to lead us into a testing of our faith that, because of our immaturity and weakness, could become unbearable temptation to evil. Reinforcing what James says at the end of **James 1:13** (“*He [God] Himself does not tempt anyone*”), Paul assures believers that “*no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it*” (**1 Cor. 10:13**). God



allows the trials in which temptation can occur, not to solicit believers to sin, but to move them to greater endurance (cf. **James 1:2–4**).

### **III. (:14) WHOM SHOULD YOU BLAME? THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION = OUR OWN POWERFUL, SEDUCING LUST**

#### **A. Universal/Personal Problem**

*"But each one"*

Attacks each of us in different ways

**Dan McCartney:** In the environment of James's audience this focus on **individual responsibility** (each one enticed by one's own desires) was not universally acknowledged. People of pagan background often regarded themselves as pawns in the hands of supernatural forces. Further, the moral focus and unit of responsibility frequently was the family, the tribe, the nation, the community. In the modern West the opposite has been the case, and responsibility has until recently been overly individualized. But now, in the twenty-first century, James's focus on the individual may again be worth emphasizing. Contemporary enthusiasm for focusing on corporate responsibility should not obscure that individuals, as individuals, are responsible for the consequences of their moral choices, as also for their choices in belief.

#### **B. Reality of Temptation**

*"is tempted"*

Expect temptation and be prepared to combat it.

#### **C. Power and Seductive Nature of Temptation**

*"when he is carried away and enticed"*

**Warren Wiersbe:** No temptation appears as temptation; it always seems more alluring than it really is. James used two illustrations from the world of sports to prove his point. *Drawn away* carries with it the idea of the baiting of a trap; and *enticed* in the original Greek means "to bait a hook." The hunter and the fisherman have to use bait to attract and catch their prey. No animal is deliberately going to step into a trap and no fish will knowingly bite at a naked hook. The idea is to hide the trap and the hook.

**Curtis Vaughan:** The suggestion is that man's *lust*, like a harlot, entices and seduces him. Man surrenders his will to lust, conception takes place, and lust gives birth to *sin*.

**Chris Vlahos:** The ptcs. are adv., describing the **manner** in which the individual is tempted (most EVV; on the adv. ptc. of manner, see T 154-57). The pres. tenses coincide with the gnomic nature of the passage as a whole. Both terms were applied to hunting and fishing. If the metaphor is fully intended, the two ptcs. may be sequential—either the first leading to the second like a creature being drawn out from its safe place

to be then enticed by the bait (**Mayor** 54) or the second leading to the first like a creature taking the bait and then being dragged away (**REB**), or they may depict independent metaphors, the first denoting fishing, the second hunting (**Dauids** 84; cf. the mixed metaphors of nets and snares in **5:8**).

**David Nystrom**: The expressions have their home in the realms of hunting and fishing. The fact that they appear in an odd order (“*dragged off*” is placed before “*enticed*”) is best explained by the predilection of the Old Testament to mesh images of snares and nets. So in **Ecclesiastes 9:12** we read, “*As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.*”

In other words, this verse contains **two similar images**, not a succession of action within one image. The first pictures the violent action of capture that follows setting a lure, and second the attractive bait that draws an unsuspecting victim. The extraordinary vividness of these images shows how dangerous James believes the evil impulse to be. Evil desire within us acts as both the attractive bait and as the lure. The evil desire is our own, and a bent to be attracted to it is equally our own responsibility.

#### **D. Ultimate Culprit**

*"by his own lust"*

**David Platt**: After telling us God does not tempt us to sin, we might expect James to say Satan drags us away and entices us, but he doesn't. Now, that doesn't mean Satan isn't involved in the temptations of this world; this will become clear later in this book (**4:7**). However, **the responsibility for temptation and sin lies squarely with us**, for our sinful desires within lead us to give in to temptation. We have no one else to blame for our sin.

May God help us understand this in a world where there are efforts at every turn to absolve us from our responsibility for sin. We want to put the fault on others or blame our upbringing, our friends, our family, our government, our condition, or anything else we can think of. This doesn't mean different factors don't affect us all in different ways, but the teaching of Scripture is clear: the fault for my sin lies with me. There is a problem at the core of who you are and who I am. In the words of Paul in **Romans 7:18**, “*For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.*”

The **anatomy of sin**. Having looked at the origin of sin, we also need to consider the anatomy of sin. Sin does not just happen out of the blue. There is a **process** behind it, and we might think about this in the following four steps:

1. Deception. **Genesis 3** presents a perfect example of this process with Adam and Eve. The heart of sin is unbelief—not believing God. We don't believe God when He says something is best for us or another thing is not. Instead, we question Him. This is where sin starts, and we see it in the serpent's question, “*Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden?'*” (**Gen 3:1**).

2. Desire. James says each one is tempted when he is “*drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires*” (v. 14). The language here carries the idea of baiting a hook. No fish knowingly bites an empty hook. The idea is to hide the hook. Temptation appeals to our desires, attracts us, but hides the fact that it will kill us. This kind of desire drives men to pornography, women into another man’s arms, employees to dishonesty, and people to a number of other sins. Sin starts with disordered thought, which leads to disordered desire, and we begin to want that which will destroy us. When we are enticed and when desire like that is conceived, it gives birth to sin.

3. Disobedience. We act on our desire.

4. Death. This is the result of disobedience. The imagery of death is vivid and terrifying, and we need to see it for the horror it is.

**John MacArthur**: Sin can look attractive and pleasurable, and usually is, at least for a while. Otherwise it would have little power over us. Satan tries to make sin as attractive as possible, as do the evil and seductive men and women just described above by Peter. But there would be no attraction of sin were it not for man’s own sinful lust, which makes evil seem more appealing than righteousness, falsehood more appealing than truth, immorality more appealing than moral purity, the things of the world more appealing than the things of God. We cannot blame Satan, his demons, ungodly people, or the world in general for our own lust. Even more certainly, we cannot blame God. The problem is not a tempter from without, but the traitor within.

#### **IV. (:15) LUST INITIATES A DEADLY CAUSE AND EFFECT SCENARIO -- LUST HAS THE POWER TO DRAG US DOWN INTO SIN AND DEATH**

James develops the entire process of temptation and sin -- showing how each stage bears a cause-and-effect relationship to the next stage

**David Holwick**: The lifecycle of sin

##### **A. Lust is only the Starting Point**

*"Then when lust has conceived"*

**Craig Blomberg**: Desire does not necessarily equate with lust, although that is one common translation for this word. Rather, it refers here to any **intense longing for an improper object**, that is, anything that gets in the way of our pursuit of God.

This proves crucial in pastoral ministry: what one person finds as intense temptation another person may never experience as even a faint enticement, and vice-versa. **Temptations are tailored to the individual**, and so we as believers must never belittle a person for struggling with something we think of as inane. Instead, we must realize that each of us has particular battles nuanced specifically for us, and we need to give

both grace and exhortation to one another to stand firm in times of testing. Conversely, we must always flee temptation, regardless of how “little” it may seem to us. These inner longings, James says, busily work to pull us away from our Lord.

### **B. Sin is its Natural Offspring**

*"it gives birth to sin"*

**Bonhoeffer:** With irresistible power desire seizes mastery over the flesh. . . . It makes no difference whether it is sexual desire, or ambition, or vanity, or desire for revenge, or love of fame and power, or greed for money. . . . Joy in God is . . . extinguished in us and we seek all our joy in the creature. At this moment God is quite unreal to us, he loses all reality, and only desire for the creature is real . . . Satan does not here fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God. . . . The lust thus aroused envelops the mind and will of man in deepest darkness. The powers of clear discrimination and of decision are taken from us. The questions present themselves: “Is what the flesh desires really sin in this case?” “Is it really not permitted to me, yes—expected of me, now, here, in my particular situation, to appease desire?” . . . It is here that everything within me rises up against the Word of God. (*Temptation*)

### **C. Death is the Inevitable Outcome**

*"and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death"*

**Daniel Doriani:** So there are two potential paths in any test. Testing met with endurance makes us mature and complete; it leads to life (**1:3–4, 12**). Or testing met with selfish desire leads to sin and death (**1:14–15**). “Death” is more than the death of the body, tragic as that is. Rather, just as faith and endurance lead to eternal life (**1:12**; cf. **Matt. 10:22**), so selfish desire and sin lead to eternal death (**Rev. 20:14–15**).

## **V. (:16) DON'T BE FOOLED IN THIS MATTER**

*"Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."*

Don't let the temptation entice and defeat you.

Remember God's harvest principle: *"As we sow, so shall we also reap."*

Remember that the Judge is watching all that we do and He is standing at the door ready to return and render judgment.

The foolish think that they can get away with something.

Live life with a healthy **fear of the Lord**.

Which way does this warning point . . . to the preceding verses or following verses?

**Curtis Vaughan:** Applying it to the discussion of **verses 13-15**, the words may be understood as a warning against trying to excuse ourselves from responsibility for sin. If we see the words as pointing forward to **verses 17, 18**, they may be understood as a

warning against casting suspicion upon the character of God... as the source of all good.

**Dan McCartney:** The readers are not to be deceived with regard to God's character by thinking either that he is the source of temptation or that truly good things have a source other than he. And it is precisely the knowledge of God's character, both what he is not and what he is, and the knowledge that believers are his offspring by the word of truth, that protect one against the deceitfulness of sin.

**Alec Motyer:** At this point comes the warning call of **verse 16**: *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren*. Note how the addition of *beloved* strikes the note of **urgency**. The rich love which links believer with believer prompts concern for spiritual welfare, and issues in a call to be clear-headed and open-eyed as to the realities of the situation. Present within is the great and inescapable foe of progress with God, the subtle and insinuating power of our sinful and fallen nature.

**Douglas Moo:** This verse serves as a **transition** between **verses 12–15** and **17–18**. The attributing to God of evil intent – tempting people – is a serious matter. James wants to make sure that his readers are not deceived about this. Far from enticing to evil, God is the source of every good gift (**v. 17**), one of the greatest of which is the new birth (**v. 18**).

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the popular modern day excuses for sin? How are these excuses highlighted by the terminology used for sin today? Why doesn't James point to Satan as the one to blame for sin?
- 2) Why are we so quick to blame God? Are we careful to make a distinction between trials from without and temptations from within? How is perseverance key in both cases?
- 3) What are some of the enticing, seductive, deceptive arguments and emotions that are associated with our selfish cravings?
- 4) How can we break the chain of lust, temptation, sin, and death?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** Re "*lusts*" -- Some people try to become "spiritual" by denying these normal desires, or by seeking to suppress them; but this only makes them less than human. These fundamental desires of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the

machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is in constant control. These desires must be our servants and not our masters and this we can do through Jesus Christ.

**William Barclay:** Now desire is something which can be nourished or stifled. A man can check and control his discipline ... But a man can allow his thoughts to follow certain tracks ... He can use mind and heart and eyes and feet and lips to nourish desire. He can so hand himself over to Christ and to the Spirit of Christ that he is cleansed of evil desire. He can be so engaged on good things that there is not time or place left for desire. It is idle hands for which Satan finds mischief to do; and it is an unexercised mind which plays with desire, and an uncommitted heart which is vulnerable to the appeal of lust.

**R.V.G. Tasker:** Thus Jesus in the wilderness is tempted by the devil to pursue courses of action contrary to God's will, but in the end the devil retreats, having failed to deflect his would-be victim from His divine vocation.

**Alexander Ross:** The mere fact of our being tempted does not involve in itself anything sinful. It is when the desire of man goes out to meet and embrace the forbidden thing and an unholy marriage takes place between these two, that sin is born. Once sin is born, it grows, and, unless it be counteracted and mastered by the grace of God, when it is full-grown, it brings forth death, death in all the breadth of the meaning of that dread word, death spiritual and death eternal, the death that lies beyond physical death for the ungodly. Thus, we have here the two destinies of man, in **v. 12** the fullness of life that is to be the portion of those who love God and the death that is to be the inevitable doom of the persistent haters of God.

**MacPhail:** Re **fighting Temptation:** We should avoid evil attractions. Don't expose yourself to activities, images, or conversation that provoke evil thoughts. If watching certain television programs stir up improper images, don't watch them. This is what Jesus meant figuratively when He said, *"If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown in hell"* (**Matt.5:29**).

**John MacArthur:** *Epithumia* (lust) is itself morally and spiritually neutral, its rightness or wrongness being determined partly by the object that is desired and partly by how and for what purposes it is desired. It begins primarily as an **emotion**, a feeling, a longing for something that, at first, may be largely subconscious. It develops from somewhere deep within us, expressing a want to acquire, achieve, or possess something that we do not have. It can be sparked by any number of things and types of things. Looking in a jewelry store window can spark an immediate and strong desire for a ring, a watch, a bracelet, or crystal vase. Driving past a model home, we may suddenly feel an intense longing to have one like it. Passing an automobile dealership may just as suddenly spark a desire for a new car, perhaps even a make and model we had never thought much about before. The **desire** may develop and gain our full attention. Lust to

sin comes much in the same way. Something we see or hear about suddenly grabs our attention and draws out a strong desire, or lust, to have it or to do it.

The next step is **deception**, which is more closely related to the mind than to the emotions. When we think about a desired object, our mind begins to rationalize a justification for getting it. That is virtually an automatic part of the process of temptation. We don't have to tell our minds to rationalize our lusts, because they are already so predisposed by our fallenness. Like the animal or fish that goes after the bait, the desire to have what we want is so strong that we are inclined to discount possible dangers or harm. Simply wanting it justifies the effort to have it. It is at that point, James says, that lust has conceived. The "life of sin," as it were, has started to form and grow.

The third step is that of **design**, when plans start to be made to fulfill the emotional desire that we have rationalized and justified with our minds. This stage involves our will, our conscious decision to pursue the lust until it is satisfied. And because the will is involved, this is the stage where the most guilt lies. What has been longed for and rationalized is now consciously pursued as a matter of choice.

The fourth and final stage is **disobedience**. If we allow the process to continue, the design inevitably produces disobedience to God's law, by which it gives birth to sin. That which is desired, rationalized, and willed is actually done, committed, and accomplished. Desire leads to deception, deception to design, and design to disobedience, which is sin.

It should go without saying that the earlier in the process we determine to resist, the greater the likelihood we will avoid the sin. Conversely, the longer we delay resisting, the more likely the actual sin becomes. It is only the Christian who is able to control his emotional responses to temptations when they first appear who will effectively deal with sin in his life. The principle of "nipping it in the bud" has no better application than here. The battle must be fought in the mind, where sin is conceived. The truth of God which activates the conscience, the soul's warning system, must be heard and not ignored. No one can fight the battle in the mind or imagination except the individual believer.

**Brian Racer:**

Introduction: Giving in to temptation and falling prey to some major sin doesn't just come out of the blue. (cf. a man who runs off with another woman in an adulterous relationship; that did not just happen out of the blue) It might seem like a sexual fall happened in just an instant of weakness, but actually it is the predictable result of neglected relationships and lack of purity in one's thought life over time. There are numerous tiny indulgences and wrong decisions that build to such a catastrophic breaking point. The battle is a constant one in the heart and mind.

**What to Do When You are Tempted? 5 Commands:**

## **I. STOP Playing the Blame Game (:13)**

Honestly admit that you made a choice to do X. Believers are not in bondage to sin as unbelievers are.

### **A. It is as old as the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8-13)**

- Adam: The woman that you gave to me is the problem
- Eve: The serpent deceived me; I couldn't help it

### **B. As Recent as your last excuse**

You can't argue: "I couldn't help myself; I couldn't take X any longer"

### **C. God is in the Clear – when you blame God you don't really understand His character**

- He takes no pleasure in our fall
- He is not out to tempt us to sin at our point of weakness

## **II. SEE Where Temptations Lead You (:14-16)**

When we do X, we can expect that Y will follow. Simple cause and effect relationship. God has designed us with certain powerful drives (appetite, sex, desire to accomplish, desire to be significant, etc.). Key: are we fulfilling these drives righteously or in a sinful fashion? Sin is subtle. The consequences might not show up immediately.

### **A. We're Built to Bite the Bait (:14)**

Our desires are God-Designed, but our Solutions are not.

1. Lust of flesh / Desire for Provision / Desire for Security
2. Lust of eyes / Desire for Pleasure / Desire for Satisfaction
3. Pride of life / Desire for Purpose / Desire for Significance

### **B. We're to Wait because God's not Late**

(might seem like it takes a long time from our perspective)

We have need of endurance. At the end God will say "Well done."

People every day are buying into Satan's plan of Instant Gratification.

## **III. SPIT OUT the Lie and the Lure**

Satan likes to set the hook and reel us in.

### **A. Not Wrong to be Tempted – Christ was (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:15)**

### **B. It is Wrong to Yield**

## **IV. FLEE Temptations**

Involves being sensitive to circumstances, places and people that cause us problems; will be different for everyone; need to keep our guard up; cf. Vanity Fair in Pilgrim's Progress

### **A. Joseph – Gen. 39:1-18**

God had ordained that he work in Potiphar's house. God is sovereignly responsible for everything that comes into my life. Day after day she enticed him until finally she upped the ante.



B. Youthful Desires – **2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Cor. 10:13**

What to flee to? get a new crowd; a posse of pure people; doesn't mean you cast off your old friends – still maintain contact with unbelievers and seek to win them to the Lord

You can't be carrying a bunch of garbage; cf. sinking ship where you throw everything overboard to lighten the load; dumping those things that would hinder you from being successful so you can run the race of holiness (**Heb. 12:1-2**).

**V. GIVE THANKS for Deliverance**

A. To a Giving, Generous God

The gifts given by God are an expression of Who He is; consistent; never changes

B. To a Life-Giving God

*“He brought us forth by the Word of truth”*

Song: “God will make a way when it seems there is no way”

Conclusion:

Victory doesn't just come from passively praying; must aggressively use the Sword of the Spirit. Our New Birth restored the pre-Fall opportunity to be successful and to choose the right.

cf. The Applause of Heaven by **Max Lucado**

**Thomas Leake: 4 Reasons that God is Not the Source of Evil in Our Lives (Not Responsible for Evil)**

**Introduction:**

James gives us insight into the source of Sin and Evil so that we won't be deceived; we tend to be wimps in combating sin; Temptation lurks behind every Trial; we ask: Have I been set up by God? Who is to blame for the evil that we do?

Theodicy = defense of God; God is right and good and glorious; Man is wrong; God is in control of all things – even evil; but never the source of evil or responsible for advancing evil; Evil is not a thing created by God; instead it is the twisting and warping and perversion by angels and man of that which is good

**I. (:13a) God Does Not Tempt Anyone**

Such a thought is intolerable to a godly mind; Same word = *test* and *tempt*

Intent makes all the difference; the Lord is trying us but never tempting us; we cannot blame our sinful habits on what the Lord has given to us = our bodies, genes, chemical makeup; the relationship between the spirit and body cannot be determined by science; you can't get drunk unless you choose to drink; It is impossible to walk with God if we doubt His goodness; people want to make excuses, pass the buck, blame shifting; spin zone is not just used by politicians

**II. (:13b) God Cannot Be Tempted By Evil Himself**

Evil does not influence God; He is not controlled by evil so He would never advance evil; He is impeccable, untemptable; Evil and God are mutually exclusive; He is aware

of evil but untouched by it; has no personal experience with evil; like a sunbeam that is untouched by the trash pile it shines on; cf. pagan gods with their sinful blemishes – Concept of the true God is very different from pagan gods  
Nevertheless temptations are real – so where do they come from?

### **III. (:14-15) Man Tempts Himself**

Process of temptation is very individualistic – specific and personal; we don't need any help tempting ourselves; we have darkness and sin inside of us;  
“I am the one to blame” = the foundation truth to nail home here;

**1 Pet. 2:11** – fleshly lusts waging war inside of us – usually word has evil connotation, although used for good desire in **Phil. 1:23**; **1 John 2:16**; **2 Pet. 2:18**; **Jude 16**; **Eph 4:22**;

Are we resisting God's Will?

*Lust* = singular – indwelling principle that tempts you –

2 examples of how man tempts himself through lust:

- 1) like a fish dragged out of the water
- 2) lured by bait – surprised by the concealed hook

Enticement fools us with the mirage of pleasure; no one is immune from this; “I just didn't think I was capable of that”

- For lust Esau gave up his inheritance for a pot of stew
- For lust David threw his family into turmoil

The problem is right there inside of you

### **2 Images:**

#### **A. Image of Fishing** – drawing out and enticing

What about the Devil's role in temptation? James does not even raise that issue; doesn't mean that the devil is inactive (**4:7**); he runs the entire world system; main power he uses is deceit; but he can't actually generate an evil desire within us; he flourishes in a context of deceit and manipulation; **Eph. 6:11** – we are not ignorant of the schemes of the devil; father of lies; cunning ploys designed to catch us off guard; devil worked in David, Peter, Ananias and Sapphira; he is deceiving the whole world; **1 John 5:19**; not just a principle of evil but a person; he tempted Christ in the wilderness; he impersonates angel of light; he is a lion prowling about that we need to be concerned about; not presently bound like he will be in millennium; good churches will attract the attention of Satan; he wants to bring us down and discourage us; Power of tempter – **2 Cor. 11:3** – be alert; but the blame is primarily ours; we have choice to say Yes or No to Satan; we are not responsible for the trial we fall into . . . but we are responsible not to sin; no one got the short straw in life in terms of being unable to stand up against temptation; My enemy = my lusts

#### **B. Image of Child Birth** – 3 Sequential Events

1. lust
2. sin
3. death

Lust = I have to have this; a desire that controls; that gets in the way of seeing God; cf. fixation on food or pleasure; overindulgence; **2 Tim. 2:22**; **1 Pet. 2:11** – battle for your soul; **Gal. 5:24** – Victory through Jesus; **Rom. 13:14** – need to nip it in the bud; evil lusts can only produce ugly sin; where there is lust, sin is inevitable; damage done already; matter of time before it is born; inner desire results in outward sin; **James 4:1-2**; cf. passion for self comfort; sin of laziness; gluttony; etc. Lust just waits for the right time before it is expressed

#### **IV. (:16-18) God Only Gives Good Things**

List everything in your life that is Good = all came from God as the source;

Word means *useful, beneficial*

All came from the heavenly sphere – so Thank God! Not “thank our lucky stars”;

*Father of lights* – originator of goodness, holiness, purity – unchanging in His Holiness; no variation; absolutely constant – Great is Thy Faithfulness – no shadow of turning with Thee; **Mal. 3:6**

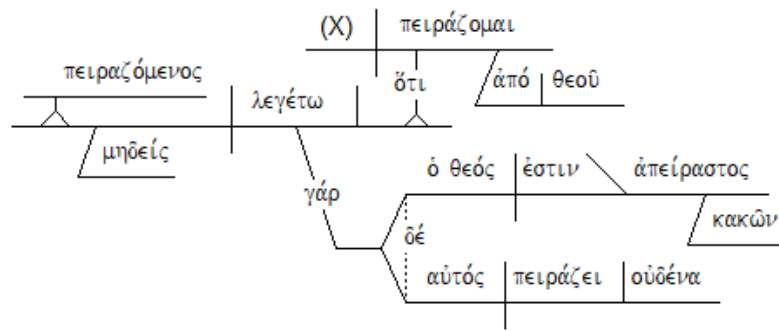
Gives specific example of the best gift He has given us = our New Nature – we have been completely and fundamentally changed; He birthed us; regeneration = something that God did; He exercised His will; sovereign in salvation – **Eph. 2:4-5** – He must initiate the process; yet we are not robots; does not do this apart from our wills; are you deceived thinking God has not been good to you?

**Ps. 34:8; Ps. 106:1 – He is Good**

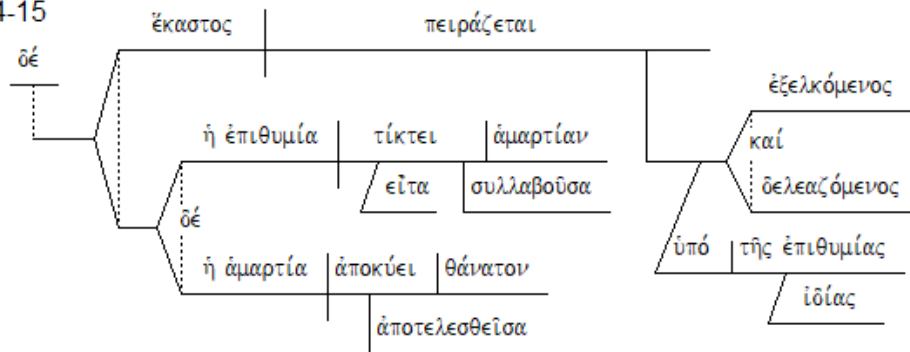
**Robert Plummer:** The truly “good life,” and the one approved by God, is not the pain-free life but is instead a life of Christian faithfulness and perseverance through trials. God has given his people great promises as a means of encouraging us through the dark valleys of this broken world. One such promise is the **crown of life** (or “*life as your victor’s crown*,” **Rev 2:10**) – that is, Christians can look forward to God crowning us with eternal life in his presence. When facing temptation to sin, a Christian should remember that God is sinless and never tempts someone to sin. Although demonic or worldly influences may tempt us, the culpability for succumbing to temptation rests with us. Christians must fight against a sin nature – indwelling sinful impulses that must be resisted by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians should remain strong in the face of temptation because they could easily fall into the sticky mire of sin. A life lived in unrepentant sin is the highway to death and hell. Thankfully, God’s Holy Spirit convicts Christians of sin and enables their repentance and restoration. It is much better, however, to resist initial temptation and avoid the devastating effects of sin in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

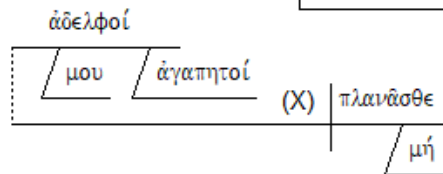
Jam 1:13



Jam 1:14-15



Jam 1:16



TEXT: JAMES 1:17-18

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT PERSEVERANCE IS DEAD -- PART 3

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD BLESSES US FROM START TO FINISH**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Rather than God being the source of tempting us to evil, He must be recognized as the giver of every good gift and the one who has sovereignly granted us spiritual life.

**Craig Blomberg:** If God is not directly responsible for producing anything evil, then it logically follows that what he is directly responsible for creating or giving can be only **good**. The most fundamental biblical background for this concept is **Genesis 1–3**. Everything that God fashioned on the six days of creation he observed to be “*good*” (**1:4, 10, 12**, etc.). Their corruption came only later, as the result of human sin (**ch. 3**). But God’s plans will not be thwarted; human history will end with the re-creation of a new heavens and a new earth (**Rev 21–22**).

Of course, many events in this life that seem to come from God also seem **undesirable**. At such times, Christians must remember the two main principles of vv. 17–18.

- First, **God does not change** in the way that heavenly bodies or earthly shadows do (cf. esp. **Mal 3:6–7**). Therefore, he who created the heavens and earth can be trusted to continue to provide only good things for his children (cf. esp. **Mt 7:11**).
- Second, the **preeminent example** of his wonderful provisions is our rebirth (for firstfruits applied already to Israel, see **Ex. 23:19**), which, as James has already highlighted, more than compensates for anything we experience that seems to us far less than perfect (cf. esp. **Ro 8:18; 2Co 4:17**).

**David Doriani:** God gives good gifts, not impossible tests. We must view tests as gifts, not traps.

**Alec Motyer:** According to **verse 12**, there is a way forward into life. It consists of making the right choices in the moment of trial and temptation, enduring and, since the crown comes to those who love God, keeping alive the glow of love for him in our hearts, come what may. It means making our decisions out of love for him; holding on through thick and thin for love’s sake. But, according to **verse 14**, this is impossible. We have a nature (heart) which gives rise to desires, insistent and alluring, leading to sin and death. However are we to step forward to life when the whole thrust and pull of our nature is to sin and death? How are we to love and keep loving God when our hearts are springs of death-bearing wishes? To these questions **verse 17** replies: Every good we need is in, and from, him.

James traces this basic position out in three steps.

1. First, he explores the bounty of God (17a);
2. next, his changeless nature (17b); and,
3. thirdly, one particular and utterly basic way in which the bounty of the changeless God has operated towards us (18).

## **I. (:17) BLESSING OF GENERAL GRACE: EVERY GOOD GIFT COMES FROM GOD (WHO IS GOOD AND IMMUTABLE)**

### **A. Goodness of General Grace**

1. Look at Grace from the Perspective of the Act of Giving

*"Every good thing bestowed"*

2. Look at Grace from the Perspective of the Result of that Act, the Gift itself

*"and every perfect gift"*

**Spiros Zodhiates:** All of God's gifts have as their end the accomplishment of God's purpose in our lives, and that is perfection."

**Craig Blomberg:** The verse links verbally with 1:4 (on “*perfection*”) and 1:5 (on a “*giving*” God). James may thus still have **wisdom** in mind here as God’s preeminent gift. Verbal and conceptual links with 3:17–18 (on “*wisdom from above*”) further support this suggestion. A key gift could also be the **Holy Spirit**, especially if James is thinking of Jesus’ promise in **Lk 11:13**.

### **B. Giver of General Grace**

1. Lofty Heaven

*"is from above"*

2. Majestic God

*"coming down from the Father of lights"*

Reference to His creative activity over all of nature

**Craig Blomberg:** God is the one who created the lights of heaven—the sun, moon, and stars.

**Robert Gundry:** James introduces the phrase “*of lights*” to prepare for a description of God as **stable**, in contrast with the heavenly bodies, which are in constant motion—hence the variation in their positions above and the consequent shifting of shadows here below—and which were widely thought to be personal beings whose movements determine events on earth (astrology). God’s stability contrasts also with the instability of the doubter in 1:5–8. James cites the stability of God—Christians can count on his generosity—to encourage their own stability in temptations.

**R. Kent Hughes:** God’s being called “*the Father of lights*” points to his essential nature

as light and to his **moral goodness**. Paul tells us that God's "*invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made*" (**Romans 1:20**). God's goodness is at the center of what we see in God's handiwork. When on a clear night we look out past the moon and the spinning planets of our solar system to the relentless blanket of stars and the luminous backdrop of the Milky Way, a message dazzles our eyes from a zillion points of light: God is not only powerful, he is perfect and good! "*God is light,*" said John, "*and in him is no darkness at all*" (**1 John 1:5**). **There is only goodness in God, and no evil at all.**

Understanding that the term "*the Father of lights*" proclaims **God's goodness**, we are prepared for the stupendous truth of the next phrase: "*with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*" We earthlings, with our feet planted here on earth, are subjected to constantly changing light. The sun rises, and our shadows fall long to the west; it stands high at noon, brightening all; and as it sets, our shadows are to the east, until they fade to nothingness. Day and night light perpetually change. The moon waxes full and wanes to a crescent. Light is reflected and refracted differently moment by moment.

But it is not so with the goodness of God. With God "*there is no variation or shadow due to change.*" God's goodness is always at high noon.

**Process theology** falsely portrays a changing, relativistic God. Evangelicals properly debate the exact meaning of some of the attributes of God, such as his omniscience or omnipotence. But no committed Christian can debate or doubt the unchangeable goodness of God.

An old music teacher was once asked in greeting, "What's the good news today?" The old man, without saying a word, walked across the room, picked up a tuning fork, and struck it. As the note sounded, he said, "That is A. It is A today, it was A five thousand years ago, and it will be A ten thousand years from now. The soprano upstairs sings off-key, the tenor across the hall is out of tune." He struck the note again and said, "That is A, my friend, and that's the good news today!"

The good news today and for all eternity is this: God is infinitely good. He has never had and will never have more goodness than he has now. **He is unchangeably good.** He stands like an eternal sun in a cloudless sky radiating unbroken goodness upon us. God will always—eternally—be good to us.

**Dan McCartney:** It is instructive that James uses such a personal and relational image of God not just as "*creator*" of lights, but also as "*father.*" This is in line with the **reproductive metaphor** running through this paragraph (**1:18**: God "*brought us forth,*" i.e., gave us a new life as his children), but it is also a clear reminder of the Christian emphasis on God's fatherhood in relation to believers. God's general fatherhood is found elsewhere in Judaism, but his designation as personal father is a distinctive emphasis of Jesus that is unique or nearly so. It is rarely if ever applied personally in

Second Temple Judaism outside of Christianity, but James shares Jesus's faith in God's personal fatherhood (1:27; 3:9).

### C. Guarantee of Continued General Grace = Immutable Nature of God

#### 1. "with whom there is no variation"

completely consistent; never changes; can be counted on

**David Nystrom:** The terms used here are technical terms denoting the movements of the heavenlies. In other words, unlike the planets and the stars, which shift and waver, there is no change in God. As Father, God is ultimately reliable. He does not change, whether in the specific (he is always and will always be the one who gives good things) or the general (God is unchangeable and good).

#### 2. "or shifting shadow"

**Spiros Zodhiates:** The heavenly bodies change, they move about in space, and their benevolence to us varies, but not so with the One who is light, who is space, who is time, who is the Creator of them all, and no one can cast a shadow on Him... There is no night so dark that His light cannot shine upon you. "*I am the Lord, I change not*" (Mal. 3:6). "*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*" (I John 1:5).

**G. Coleman Luck:** But these physical lights are subject to alternations of light and darkness. Even the shining sun has its 'spots.' But there are no spots--no variableness--within the perfect light of the great Creator.

**Evan Baltz:** And so we are encouraged by these words, because we understand that God will not change. He will continue to give us good gifts. He will never take back what He has given us. His rules will never change. His promise will never be forsaken. Our salvation through Christ can never be revoked or pulled out from under us. God is our benevolent Father, our unchanging Creator, and our anchor, which is firm and secure, even in a world that is changing so quickly.

**Peter Davids:** God does not change, but people fail to receive wisdom because they waver (1:6–8) and even accuse God for their own failings (1:13–15). This verse ties together several lines of thought. But its creation reference points forward to the next step in the argument.

## II. (:18) BLESSING OF SAVING GRACE: REGENERATION (SPIRITUAL LIFE) COMES FROM THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD (WHO IS GOOD AND POWERFUL)

**John MacArthur:** In this verse James adds another piece of evidence (to those in vv. 13–17) that God is not responsible, directly or indirectly, for our temptations, much less our sin—namely, proof from the nature of regeneration itself. The new life that the Lord gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ is a godly holy, Christlike life. It is the life of



God in the soul of man. By the new birth, a believer is re-created, given a completely new nature that has no part in sin or evil. Our own lust begets death (v. 15); the gift of God in Christ begets life. . .

In **1:18**, James answers four questions about **regeneration**, the new birth, that shed light on the proof that God is not responsible for our temptations or for the sins that result from succumbing to them. Rather, He is responsible for our righteousness.

- WHO DOES IT?                    “*in the exercise of His will*”
- WHAT IS IT?                     “*He brought us forth*”
- HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?       “*by the word of truth*”
- WHY IS IT DONE?             “*so that we would be . . .*”

**Douglas Moo:** We take it, then, that James appeals to the spiritual ‘new birth’ of Christians as a particularly striking illustration of the good things God gives. This new birth is motivated by the sovereign determination of God, whose will, unlike the creation he made, is unvarying. The instrument through which God accomplishes this spiritual birth is the gospel, the word of truth. And the purpose of this birth is that Christians should stand as the ‘first instalment’ (*firstfruits*) in the universal redemptive plan of God – ‘good gifts’ that he has yet to give.

**Alec Motyer:** The idea of a divinely-given ‘**new start**’ is expressed in many ways in the Bible. Jeremiah, for example, stressing that obedience to the Lord’s law is the leading characteristic of the new life, speaks of a heart on which the law of God is written (**Je. 31:31–34**), i.e. a heart tailor-made for obedience. Ezekiel too speaks to the gift of a new heart (**Ezk. 36:26**), a heart expressive of the true human nature which the Lord intended—therefore a ‘*heart of flesh*’ replacing the heart of stone which sin had produced. Paul speaks of a **new creation** (e.g. **2 Cor. 5:17**; **Eph. 4:22–24**). James looks straight back to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, who spoke to a baffled Nicodemus about being ‘*born again*’ (**Jn. 3:3–8**) or ‘*born from above*’. **Here indeed is the new start presented in its most vivid terms.** Earthly life originated with human parents, who bequeathed to us human nature in all its fallen hopelessness and helplessness. But there is another birth, coming to us, irrespective of the age we have reached in human life, and wholly apart from our own or any other human agency: a birth of the Spirit (**Jn. 3:5–8**). With this new birth there comes new life, new energies, new prospects and, above all, a new relationship with God, by whose will the birth has come about. . .

This is one of the most glorious truths in the whole Bible. It reaches us that salvation is truly **all of God**: for until new life is imparted we are ‘*dead in trespasses and sins*’ (**Eph. 2:1**), and as totally unable as anything that is dead to respond to God in repentance and faith. If anything is to be done, he must do it; if any blessing or change is to come to us, it must come from outside; if any agency is to be at work, it must be other than ours, for we are dead, and our only activity is to increase in corruption. Here is the greatness of the divine mercy, the sufficiency of the divine strength and the depth of the divine condescension. He has come right down to us in our death; he has raised us up into life; and it is all due to a rich mercy prompted by a great love (**Eph. 2:1, 4–5**). It is no more possible for us to be agents or contributors to our new birth than it was

for us to be so in our natural birth. All the work, from initial choice to completed deed, is his—and so is all the glory. But there is something else as well: inherent in this great truth of the new birth is the security of our salvation. Were salvation to depend on my choice, it would be as uncertain as my will which fluctuates, blows hot and cold, and reflects my divided, fallen nature. But it is his choice: of his own will be brought us forth by the word of truth. And until his will changes, his word alters or his truth is proved false, my salvation cannot be threatened or forfeited.

#### **A. Accomplished by God's Sovereign Decree**

*"In the exercise of His will"*

**Thomas Manton:** That which engaged God to the work of regeneration was merely his own will and good pleasure: *"Of his own will begat he us;" Rom. ix. 18, "He hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."* God's will is the reason of all his actions; you will find the highest cause to be will, love, and mercy. God can have no higher motive, nothing without himself, no foresight of faith and works; he was merely inclined by his own pleasure: **John xv. 16**, *"Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you."*

**George Guthrie:** *"God's will"* is a common biblical idea speaking of **God's sovereign choice** rooted in his own determination (**Job 23:13; Ps 113:11**). This "birthing" is how God determined to express his grace to us.

**John MacArthur:** Not only theologically but logically, that is the only way life could be given to those who are dead. The dead have no awareness or understanding of sin, no desire to turn from it (**John 3:19–20**), and no power or resources to change if they wanted to. They do not, of course, even know that they are dead. Regeneration could only happen by the sovereign will and power of God, the Source and Giver of spiritual life. . .

The new birth results from God's sovereignly coming down to a sinner and by His grace cleansing him, planting His Spirit within him, and giving him a completely new spiritual nature. He then has *"put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth"* (**Eph. 4:24**).

#### **B. Accomplished by God's Creative Power**

*"He brought us forth"*

**Peter Davids:** Having established that God can properly be said to bear or bring forth, we still have the question of what he does bring forth:

- (1) humanity as the peak of creation (**Elliott-Binns**, "James I. 18"; **Windisch**, 9–10; **Hort**, 32; **Spitta**, 45–47; **Cadoux**, 21–23),
- (2) Jews as chosen out of creation (**Mayor**, 155–159), or
- (3) Christians as the first in God's process of redeeming creation (**Dibelius**, 104–105; **Mussner**, 94–95; **Adamson**, 76–77).

We agree with **Elliott-Binns** that the author intended some reference to creation: **Philo** (Ebr. 8; Leg. All. 3.31, 51) does speak of God's begetting the world (the reference to the "*Father of lights*" in **1:17** is certainly an allusion to **Gn. 1:3; Ps. 33:6; Is. 55:11; Wis. 18:15; Sir. 43:26**), creation in Genesis was "*by the word*" of God, and κτίσμα does refer to the whole creation, not just humanity (**Elliott-Binns**, "James I. 18," 154–155, believes this last point is "the nearest approach to anything decisive"). Yet is it not the case that redemption in the NT is often seen as a **new creation**, the creation terminology being used for effect? It is this fact that has persuaded most recent commentators that the regeneration reference is intended, although **Laws**, 78, entertains the possibility that **both creation and redemption are in view**.

### **C. Accomplished by God's Instrument of Regeneration = the Gospel Message** *"by the Word of Truth"*

**Craig Blomberg**: "*By the word*" (λόγω) is an instrumental dative of means, showing the **method** God chose to bring us into the company of the redeemed. The genitive "*of truth*" (ἀληθείας) is descriptive, depicting the "*word*" by which we have been reborn as "*true*." This word of truth most likely equals the **gospel message**—the story of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection—and its significance.

**Dan McCartney**: The "*word*" as a reference to the **gospel of truth** has its roots in Jesus's "seed" parables (see **Matt. 13:18–43**, where the "*seed*" of the parable of the sower is interpreted as the λόγος [logos, word] of the kingdom, the gospel). In **John 17:17** Jesus's prayer makes it explicit: "*Your word is truth*."

**Ralph Martin**: In the OT God's word and truth are frequently joined (**Deut 22:20; 2 Sam 7:28; 2 Kgs 10:6; 17:24; Pss 15:2; 118:43; Jer 23:28; Dan 8:26; Zech 8:16; Prov 22:21; Eccl 12:10**). In the Pauline corpus the phrase "*word of truth*" means the proclamation of the gospel or the apostolic mission and ministry (**2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15**).

### **D. Accomplished for God's Goal of Spiritual Life and Ownership** *"that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures"*

**Spiros Zodhiates**: In the Old Testament the first fruits, therefore, were the peculiar possession of God. Among His entire creation we are peculiarly His possession, for we were not only created by Him, but also re-created. A little boy who had lost his toy boat found it for sale in a store, and when he bought it, he took it in his hands and hugged it, saying "My little precious boat, you are now twice mine; once I made you and once I bought you."

**George Guthrie**: We are set apart as God's special people for the destiny to which God has birthed us and designated us.

**R.V.G. Tasker:** The Christians living in James' day are described as *a kind of first fruits* of this new creation, probably because there would be a greater harvest to come as a result of subsequent Christian missions.

**John Painter:** James shares with Paul a redemptive view of reborn humans as the firstfruit of God's creatures. The rest are yet to follow—the residue not only of humanity but also of all God's creatures (see in particular **Rom. 8:21–23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; 16:15; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Clem. 24.1; 42.4**). This is nothing less than the hope and guarantee of the renewal of the creation or, better, the culmination and completion of God's creative purpose.

**David Platt:** The picture of firstfruits carries the idea of a foretaste of that which is to come. What God has done in our lives to change our hearts by His goodness is only a preview of the day to come when He will make all things new in all creation. And the work He has done in our new birth will one day lead to a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more trials and no more temptations.

**Peter Davids:** God naturally brings forth for a purpose: εἰς τὸ following βουληθεῖς underlines this good purpose clearly (**BDF**, § 402 [2]). The Christian is to be “*a type of firstfruit*” (for the use of τίς to soften a metaphorical expression see **BDF**, § 301 [1]). The OT background is that of the firstfruit of people, animals, and plants, which belonged to God and were either redeemed or offered to him (**Ex. 22:29–30; Nu. 18:8–12; Dt. 18:3; 26:2, 10; Lv. 27:26; Ezk. 20:40**; cf. Greek parallels: Homer Od. 14.446; Hdt. 1.92; Thuc. Hist. 3.58). Israel was pictured as God's firstborn (**Ex. 4:22; Je. 2:3**; Philo Spec. Leg. 4.180; Ex. Rab. 15:6) and thus specially belonging to him (**G. Delling**, TDNT I, 484–486). This picture, both as the first ripe fruit which promises the coming full harvest and as the special possession of God (often also thought of as the best of the harvest as well), was frequently used in the NT both temporally (**Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20; 16:15**) and theologically (**Rev. 14:4; 2 Thes. 2:13**) with a soteriological sense (cf. **Dibelius**, 106).

**David Doriani:** James probably has three Old Testament principles touching firstfruits in mind:

1. All the produce of flock and field come from God. But the firstfruits were especially his. The rest of the food was for daily use, but the firstfruits came to priest and tabernacle.
2. The firstfruits were only the best (**Ex. 23:19; 34:26**).
3. The firstfruits were an annual confession that God supplied the year's bounty, that he was faithful to his covenant people yet another year.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do these verses keep us humble and prevent us from boasting in our own achievements or comparing what we have in terms of gifts and abilities and possessions

with what others have? Certainly there is no room for boasting or for envy or for self-pity when the giving of God is properly understood.

2) Are we doing our part to walk as "*children of the light*" and to reflect the goodness and graciousness of our God? Are we shining brightly in the midst of this dark and perverted world?

3) Why is it that man complains so much about the sovereign exercise of the will of God in determining our salvation, when that is the supreme example of the goodness of God? Why does man want to hang on to some rationalistic notion of "free will" and "independence" from God's decrees when by so doing he would be doomed to the inevitable destructiveness of his own sinful bent?

4) What other Scriptures refer to the power of the Word of God in conjunction with the Holy Spirit in accomplishing our regeneration?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Spiros Zodhiates:** God's giving is good, is noble, is gentle in its generation, in its origin, in its birth. All things that God created are good in themselves. Good can, however, become evil, as it reaches the hands of sinful man and is misused. That, nevertheless, does not rob it of its goodness of origin. . .

God willed your salvation and mine after considerable thought about the cost it would involve for Himself. On the one side of the scale God put the cost that man's redemption would involve and on the other side the misery, the unhappiness, the eternal separation between man's spirit and His Spirit, and the fires of hell; and the decision, the considered decision, I repeat, was to provide His sovereign grace. Yes, indeed, God counted the cost of restoration of man to Himself. He knew it would mean the sacrifice of His own Son. He knew that it would mean the forsaking of His heavenly glory to come down to earth, so that man would have the possibility of being a partaker of the heavenly glory.

**William Barclay:** So James insists that, so far from ever tempting man, God's gifts are invariably good. In all the changes ... of a changing world they never vary. And God's supreme object is to re-create life through the truth of the gospel, so that men should know that they belong by right to Him.

**Warren Wiersbe:** One of the enemy's tricks is to convince us that our Father is holding out on us, that He does not really love us and care for us. When Satan approached Eve, he suggested that if God really loved her, He would permit her to eat of the forbidden tree. When Satan tempted Jesus, he raised the question of hunger. "If your Father loves You, why are You hungry?"

The goodness of God is a great barrier against yielding to temptation. Since God is good, we do not need any other person (including Satan) to meet our needs. It is better to be hungry *in* the will of God than full *outside* the will of God. Once we start to doubt God's goodness, we will be attracted to Satan's offers; and the natural desires within will reach out for his bait.

**C. Leslie Mitton:** The powers of evil, if they cannot force their way into human life by a frontal attack, are subtle enough to be able to deceive the Christian by turning his thoughts from his rich store of blessings, and inducing him to brood on his real or imagined hardships. In this way discontent becomes the seed-bed of all kinds of evil. . .

The verse, therefore, declares that the new life offered to us in Christ is God's intention for us, and God's free offer to our need. It reaches us and becomes effective in us through the proclamation by others of God's truth, as it has first of all become clear to them. It is as Paul wrote in **Rom. 10:17**: "*Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.*"

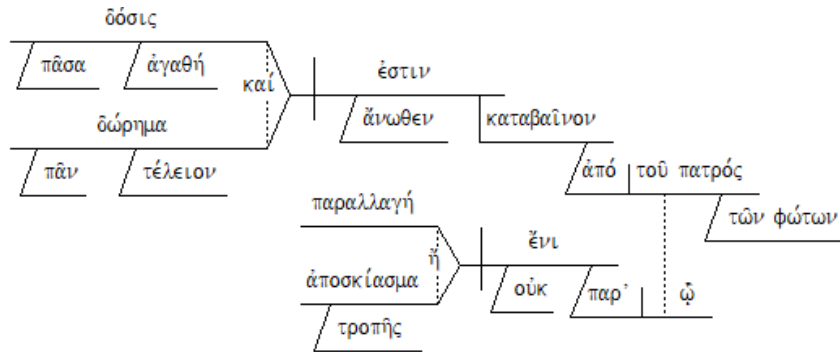
God's purposes designed for mankind a renewal of their human nature through the offer of the Gospel, and the end which this was intended to achieve is that *we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

**Geoff Thomas: Re General Grace** -- But what of the rest of you who as yet do not belong to the family of faith ? Hasn't God been good to you? Where is the source of all that you have enjoyed? The blue skies above and the views from the cliff tops. The song of the birds, and the bark of the fox. Eyes and ears to appreciate such beauty. The Father of the heavenly lights made it all and gave it to you. Health and energy, dear parents who love you, family and friends, an education, a sense of right and wrong, and a vocation - "my job." These things did not come to you by chance. Kismet did not bring them into your life, but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And have not some of you received more than these blessings? You have been enlightened by the gospel, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age? Aren't these the most extraordinary good and perfect gifts? They too have come down to you from above, from the Father of lights. He has personally and lovingly granted them to you. Then why is there no doxology? Why the absence of the thankfulness of grace? Why, when God has blessed you so greatly are you not lost in wonder, love and praise? Multitudes in the world have had nothing like the gifts you have enjoyed, then why are you not saved? Is it lack of clarity? Ignorance of the great Giver himself? I cannot believe it. Is it not ingratitude? Yes, that is the reason. Like the nine lepers visited by the Saviour and given the perfect gift - cleansing of that wretched disease - you go on your way through life without a word of thanks. You take all his good gifts and give him in return the silence of unbelief. You are without excuse, and for that he will put you in hell, left to the agony of your own ingratitude forever, and all the holy beings will say, "*Righteous oh Lord art Thou when thou judgest.*" There is not one person in the place of woe who has not received from God's hands an abundance of good and

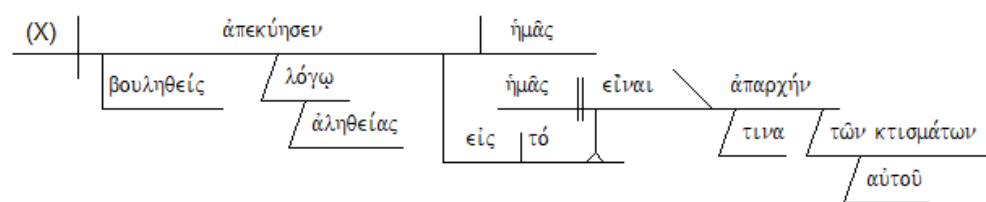
perfect gifts, bestowed upon him because God loved him. The Lord is unfailingly generous.

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

Jam 1:17



Jam 1:18



TEXT: JAMES 1:19-25

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IS DEAD -- PART I

**BIG IDEA:**

**PROVE YOURSELVES DOERS OF THE WORD, AND NOT MERELY HEARERS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**David Nystrom:** His central purpose is to issue a call for **the observance of a faith that practices**, rather than a mere formal profession of faith. In this James echoes the thought of the great prophets. He urges adherence to “*the perfect law that gives freedom*” (1:25), a phrase that constitutes one of the thorniest interpretive problems in the New Testament. What we can say is this: James not only calls us to positive action but also to eliminate immorality. He knows that mere intellectual assent is often accompanied by an anemic will in matters of morality. In making this case James teaches a central paradox of the faith: God’s gift to us also lays upon us **the responsibility of moral behavior**.

This passage unfolds in three movements:

1. In **verses 19–21**, James argues that to receive the word with humility is better than speaking in anger;
2. next, he teaches us that simply hearing the word is without value unless it results in action (**vv. 22–25**);
3. and the last two verses provide a transition from doing to the question of “*pure religion*” by citing a number of specific examples that add flesh and sinew to the general points made in the second movement.

True religion is not merely “works,” but a humble receptivity to God’s word so that it can develop deep roots within us, shaping our character until the natural result is the sort of good works that James extols.

**Alec Motyer:** The ever-practical James would never face us with conflict and not go on to point the way forward. He has just been speaking of the word of God as the seed in the womb (18) issuing in birth. Now he speaks of the word of God as the seed in the soil (21) growing to the (full) salvation of the soul. He has held before us the stimulating prospect of the future crown (12). Now he wants to help us to enter into a present salvation (21) and a blessing here and now (25). He has made us aware that our position as Christians is one of conflict, the battle of the two natures within us. But the word is able to save (21), and God’s law is a law of liberty (25). Along these lines, this section grows out of, and develops, the theme of the preceding verses. Though the conflict lasts while earthly life continues, it may be hard but it is not fruitless. **The key to this desired productivity is the word of God.**

**Dan McCartney:** The *word of truth* of 1:18, when it is fruitful, has certain practical effects. In 1:19–25 James begins to point out in general terms what those effects are.



The passage consists of a number of sentences that have a “proverbial” character and could function independently of context: “*Be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. . . . The wrath of man does not accomplish the justice of God. . . . Lay aside all filth and abundant malice. . . . Receive the implanted word that can save you. . . . Be doers and not hearers only.*” But these are not just collected sayings; all of them are related to the character development of those “*firstfruits*” whom God has brought forth by the word. It is the word that ties all these things together. Hence, this hortatory material grows out of the material in **1:17–18** relating to God’s fatherhood by the word. The mandate of **1:19a** specifically connects to the previous material by linking the wise behavior and ethical mandates of **1:19b–25** to “being aware” of God’s implanted word.

**David Platt: The Journey of Obedience**

- I. We Receive the Word Humbly (**1:19-21**).
- II. We Remember the Word Constantly (**1:22-25**).
- III. We Obey the Word Wholeheartedly (**1:22**).

**Craig Blomberg: Wisdom in the Areas of Speech and Obedience (1:19–26)**

- 1. The Thesis Statement: Be Quick to Listen, Slow to Speak, Slow to Anger (**v. 19**).
- 2. Christians Should Respond to God’s Word with Humility Rather Than Wrath (**vv. 20–21**).
  - a. Christians should not be easily angered because anger does not usually enable them to live by God’s standards (**v. 20**).
  - b. Christians should respond to God’s Word humbly as they recognize how it has worked in their lives in the past (**v. 21**).
- 3. Christians Should Respond to God’s Word by Not Merely Listening to It but by Also Obeying It (**vv. 22–25**).
  - a. The topic sentence: Do not just hear the Word but do it, too (**v. 22**).
  - b. People who only listen but do not obey are as ridiculous as those who fail to groom themselves even after careful self-observation in a mirror (**vv. 23–24**).
  - c. People who do carefully study God’s Word and obey it are truly blessed (**v. 25**).

**I. (:19-21) OBEDIENCE REQUIRES A RECEPTIVE HEART**

**(:19A) No New Truth Here (No Surprises)**

*"This you know, my beloved brethren."*

Knowledge is not the end all. We need to be reminded; we need to be encouraged; but ultimately the only thing that matters is whether we implement God's truth.

**John MacArthur:** Jesus’ true disciples are to pay keen attention to the content of what they hear and read, measuring every idea, every principle, and every standard against the infallible and sovereign authority of God’s Word. Believers are not, however, left

only to the limits of their own diligence and understanding but are enabled by God's indwelling Holy Spirit to accurately interpret what they hear in light of the Word. . .

James reveals three attitudes that are necessary for believers to rightly receive God's Word:

- willingness to receive it with submission (**James 1:19–20**),
- with purity (v. **21a**),
- and with humility (v. **21b**).

**A. (:19B-20) Make Calm Listening a Priority –  
An Attentive Heart is a Receptive Heart**

**1. Priority of Listening Calmly**

*"But let everyone be quick to hear"*

Be objective about God's truth; not emotional in your evaluation;  
Listening is a valuable skill that we should all work to improve

**David Platt:** Be humble as you approach the Word, not coming with your defenses up, which leads to anger and resistance to the Word. Don't we often approach God's Word talking and not listening? Don't we often come to God's Word thinking, "Here's what I want it to say"? Don't we often come to God's Word looking to justify ourselves? We're like people in an argument who are not really listening to one another, but instead we're consumed with formulating what we're going to say in response. We are not quick to hear and slow to speak but loathe to listen and anxious to argue.

**R. Kent Hughes:** The first duty is to be "*quick to hear.*" This was particularly important to the Jewish church because, apart from the Old Testament, there were no canonical Scriptures at this early date. Virtually all communication of the gospel was oral, when they met together in their house churches. Thus listening was imperative. Those who were not disciplined in listening ran the risk of spiritual impoverishment. It is not too dramatic to say that ready listeners gained for themselves a life-giving spiritual advantage.

**2. Presumption in Speaking Rashly**

*"slow to speak"*

**Prov. 10:19; 17:27**

God gave you two ears and only one mouth so that you would listen twice as much as you talk. Some people just babble on; hard to get a word in; they are thinking only of their response instead of listening. (**Zeno** quoted by **William Barclay**)

**Spiros Zodhiates:** Once a young man came to that great philosopher Socrates to be instructed in oratory. The moment the young man was introduced, he began to talk, and there was an incessant stream for some time. When Socrates could get in a word, he said, "Young man, I will have to charge you a double fee." "A double fee, why is

that?" The old sage replied, "I will have to teach you two sciences. First, how to hold your tongue, and then, how to use it." What an art for all of us to learn, especially for Christians.

**William Barclay:** The tribute was once paid to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages. Many of us would do well to wait and listen more, and to rush in and speak less.

### 3. Peril of Responding in Anger

*"slow to anger*

*For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."*

If we respond to God's Word in anger we miss the opportunity to humbly receive the conviction we need in order to repent and grow.

**Alec Motyer:** An angry spirit is never an attentive one. When anger comes in, listening flies out. The courts of men are our drill-ground for the courts of the Lord. Those who would listen to him must train themselves to be listeners and, to that end, they must covet and cultivate a reticent tongue and a calm temper. For nothing must militate against—rather, everything must be made an adjunct to—that great, fundamental practice, hearing God's Word.

**Douglas Moo:** Hasty, uncontrolled anger is sin, because it violates the standard of conduct that God demands of his people.

**Thomas Lea:** The challenge to be slow to become angry warns against hostile, bitter feelings. We cannot hear God if we remain distracted with resentment, hatred, or vengeful attitudes.

## **B. (:21A) Put Aside Sinful Distractions –**

### **A Clean Heart is a Receptive Heart**

#### 1. Separate from Filthiness

*"Therefore putting aside all filthiness"*

**John Painter:** The language of *putting aside* (*apothemenoi*) is idiomatic of putting aside a dirty garment—a suitable metaphor of ritual impurity, but one that here includes matters of both ritual purity and moral/ethical wickedness. In Christian use, this language became a metaphor of the life-changing renewal of the person. Parallels with **Col. 3:8** and **1 Pet. 2:1** strongly emphasize the separation from ethically bad actions. But James retains reference to putting aside both ritual impurity and ethical wickedness, indeed, placing ritual impurity first.

**John MacArthur:** *Filthiness* translates *rhuparia*, which refers to any sort of moral defilement or impurity. It is closely related to a term used of wax in the ear, which impairs hearing, and is therefore especially appropriate in this context. Moral filthiness is a serious barrier to our clearly hearing and comprehending the Word of God.

## 2. Separate from Wickedness

*"and all that remains of wickedness"*

**Alec Motyer:** *Wickedness* is a very general word. It is rooted in the idea of ‘badness’ and covers, in a broad way, everything that might be ‘wrong’ in character or conduct.

**Spiros Zodhiates:** Sin in our lives is like having wax in our ears; it prevents the Word of truth from reaching our hearts; for if it cannot penetrate through the ear, it will not come down to the heart.

**David Nystrom:** James instructs us to remove “*moral filth*” (*rhyparia*) and “*evil*” (*kakia*). *Rhyparia* means dirt, filth, greediness, and moral uncleanness; *kakia*, when linked with the word “*prevalent*” (*perisseia*), has the connotation of an abnormal growth of wickedness or even malice. Since this noun can also mean “excess” or “surplus,” some see James warning against only a superfluity of moral filth and evil (cf. **NEB**, “*the malice that hurries to excess*”). This is an odd rendering, for clearly James wants no vulgarity, moral filth, or evil to be present within the Christian community. These terms are among the strongest he has at his command and imply not only general moral evil, but also a premeditated evil intent. **Laws** ably and helpfully translates the phrase, “*all vulgarity and the great mass of malice.*” The meaning is clear: Christians must turn not only from anger, but from evil and malice, whether random or premeditated.

**Thomas Lea:** Obedience to God's Word promotes holiness and develops godly character. We demonstrate a genuine likeness toward Christ as we get rid of the flaming desires for filth and evil. This shows the presence of a real experience of salvation.

### **C. (:21B) Receive the Word of God in Humility – A Humble Heart is a Receptive Heart**

#### 1. Attitude

*"in humility"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** In general it may be said to mean a full consecration to an unselfish purpose to the complete exclusion of self-seeking and self-assertion, and of any spirit of resentment and retaliation. It is a spirit which enables a man to learn from others and to accept with glad contentment whatever the pursuit of God's will brings to him. Here it means primarily a readiness to learn, to accept correction, to submit one's life uncomplainingly to the total control of God. It stands in contrast to “anger” and “malice” both of which come into existence only when the human will is exerted in defiance of God's.

**Dan McCartney:** **Meekness** stands in contrast with anger (cf. **Titus 3:2**) and registers the attitude of faith. It is the attribute commended by Jesus in the third beatitude: “*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*” (**Matt. 5:5**). Meekness, along with righteousness and truth, is one of the triad of virtues that the king rewards in **Ps.**

**44:5 LXX** (45:5 MT; 45:4 ET). It is also one of the fruits of the Spirit in **Gal. 5:23**. Many commentators and preachers have rightly challenged the notion that meekness means taking on a “doormat” personality, allowing oneself to be trampled on. They point out that Jesus refers to himself as meek and lowly in heart (**Matt. 11:29**), but he never permitted anyone to trample on him. But the fact that meekness is not “doormatness” is no excuse for arrogance. In **Matt. 5:5** (echoed in **James 2:5**) Jesus declared the meek to be the inheritors of the earth, precisely in opposition to the way things appear. The world neither rewards nor respects gentleness, meekness, and humility, but these are the key to proper reception of God’s word and the implementation of God’s righteousness. Worldly wisdom admires arrogance, self-assurance, and the captaincy of one’s own soul, but the entirely different wisdom of God is meek (**James 3:13**), for it is the attitude of the poor.

**Craig Blomberg**: In the Greco-Roman world, humility was not typically viewed as a virtue; many then saw it as an outright weakness. In Judaism and Christianity, however, humility before God remains essential, as demonstrated by Christ’s example of humble submission to the will of the Father even unto death.

## 2. Action

*"receive the word implanted"*

cf. the Parable of the Sower (**Matt. 13:1-9**); only one type of soil bears any fruit; requires a receptive heart

cf. football analogy of a receiver: what causes dropped passes?

- not looking the ball into the hands
- taking eyes off the ball; looking at circumstances around me
- getting distracted
- running the wrong route; not prepared to receive the ball
- requires good hands

**William Barclay**: The teachable spirit is *docile* and *tractable*, and therefore humble enough to learn. The teachable spirit is *without resentment* and *without anger*, and is, therefore, able to face the truth, even when the truth hurts and condemns. The teachable spirit is not blinded by its own overmastering *prejudices*, but is clear-eyed to the truth. The teachable spirit is not seduced by *laziness*, but is so self-controlled that it can willingly and faithfully accept the discipline of learning. *Prautes* describes the perfect conquest and control of everything in a man's nature which would be a hindrance to his seeing, learning and obeying the truth.

**Dan McCartney**; That the word may be described both as implanted and as something that must be received may appear paradoxical, but it well describes the “already/not yet” character of the saving activity of the gospel, reflecting also the biblical tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in the working out of the believer’s deliverance from evil. It is already implanted in the believer and cannot fail (good seed that is received into the ground will always grow up and bear fruit), but the

human subject also is not yet fully matured and is responsible continually to accept, believe, and act upon that word.

**Peter Davids:** The call to **receive the word of the gospel** which they have already implanted in them sounds contradictory. But the stock characteristic of the language of receiving the word (meaning accepting and acting on it, as in the examples above) and the fact that the gospel consists of both a word about Jesus and ethical content (which is James's main concern; cf. **Mussner**, 102) point to the sense "act upon the word you accepted at conversion" (or baptism, if one accepts **Mussner's** baptismal context).

### 3. Anticipation

*"which is able to save your souls"*

**Curtis Vaughan:** (Compare **Acts 20:32**, where it is stated that the word of God's grace is "*able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance.*") The reference is to the Christian's final and complete salvation. The Word of God, welcomed and rooted in the Christian's heart, is used by the Spirit to promote holiness, stimulate spiritual growth, develop character, and generally produce the things that accompany salvation. In this way it is "*able to save.*"

**John MacArthur:** *Able to save your souls* first refers back to our initial salvation, in which the Word brought the truth of the gospel to an unsaved heart, showing us the way of salvation and saving us from the penalty of sin (cf. **1 Pet. 1:23**). It is also able to save by being a constant resource of God's truth that the Holy Spirit uses to guard believers' souls from being snatched out of God's family by protecting us from the power and dominion of sin. Finally, it is able to lead us to ultimate and complete salvation, when we are glorified with Christ in heaven, forever separated from the presence of sin. It is that comprehensive truth that Paul declares in assuring us that "*now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed*" (**Rom. 13:11**). It is the divine power behind the truth of Scripture that is able to initiate salvation, keep it alive and growing, and finally bring it to final glory, complete and perfect. We have been saved (justified) through the power of the Word of God; we are kept saved (sanctified) through the power of the Word; and we will be ultimately, completely, and eternally saved (glorified) through the power of the Word.

## **II. (:22) OBEDIENCE REQUIRES PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TRUTHS OF GOD'S WORD**

**Ralph Martin:** The topic now introduced may be stated under the rubric of "a Christianity of practice" (**Mussner**, 98), or perhaps better, **a faith that practices**. James' chief interest lies in setting before his readers the need for obedience to the message that translates itself into practical effect. He is warning against the notion of mere assent or tame acceptance of God's truth when it is viewed as an end in itself, or worse, as a substitute for practical religion.

### A. The Proof is in the Doing

*"But prove yourselves doers of the word"*

**Douglas Moo:** The doers of the word are commended for demonstrating in their actions the continuing impact of the word on their lives.

**John MacArthur:** Just as there are three elements to hearing and receiving the Word (with submission, purity, and humility), so there are also three elements to obeying the Word. Thus, the true believer, the hearer and doer of the Word, proves his faith in three ways: In relation to himself, he is willing to apply the Word without deception (**1:22b-26**); in relation to others, he is willing to apply the Word without selfishness (**v. 27a**); and in relation to the world, he is willing to apply the Word without compromise (**v. 27b**).

### B. The Deception is in the Hearing without Implementation

*"and not merely hearers who delude themselves"*

**Warren Wiersbe:** It is not enough to hear the Word; we must do it. Many people have the mistaken idea that hearing a good sermon or Bible study is what makes them grow and get God's blessing. It is not the hearing but the doing that brings the blessing. Too many Christians mark their Bibles, but their Bibles never mark them! If you think you are spiritual because you hear the Word, then you are only kidding yourself.

**C. Leslie Mitton:** This section is an emphatic warning against sentimental and unpractical religion. There is a kind of religious man who can enjoy listening to a preacher, and being present at a public act of prayer, but fails to translate his faith into effective action in daily life, fails to make obedience to Christ in the common acts of life the essential feature of his religion which it ought to be.

## III. (:23-25) CONTRAST BETWEEN A FORGETFUL HEARER AND AN EFFECTUAL DOER

**Craig Blomberg:** Vv. 22–25 likewise begin with a topic sentence that governs the entire section (**v. 22**), this time made up of an exhortation and a contrast (**be doers of the word and not just hearers**). James further describes the hearers as self-deceiving. Vv. 23–24 employ an illustration in the form of a condition and inference (if anyone hears but does not do, they are like people who look in the mirror but do not attend to whatever problems they might see there). **V. 25** then moves from the metaphorical level to the spiritual truth being illustrated, but does so by contrast (the person looking into the perfect law of liberty is the one to emulate, not the one looking in the mirror). James expands this truth (one must also remain in it), again contrasted with what not to do (forgetting), and with the results of looking and remaining then identified (the blessing that comes in the very act of obedience).

**A. (:23-24) Forgetful Hearer -- Inspection Without Correction**

*"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,  
he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;  
for once he has looked at himself and gone away,  
he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was."*

**Alexander Ross:** The mirror of the Word of God never flatters; that is why some do not like to gaze too long or too often into it.

**Peter Davids:** The momentariness and lack of real effect is the point of the parable, not a comparison with a different type of mirror or a different way of seeing.

**Craig Blomberg:** Mirrors in the ancient world were very different from our modern crystalline inventions. Generally made of polished bronze or copper, they produced dim and warped reflections. While one could gain a good impression of oneself, one could not simply glance at such a mirror and learn much. So one would have to “consider” carefully what one saw in a mirror. **Martin** adds that “what is seen in a mirror is meant to lead to action, usually regarded as remedial,” for example, a dirty face that needs washing. Yet here this person goes away and fails to deal with the flaws that the mirror revealed.

**B. (:25) Effectual Doer -- Implementation (Obedient Activity) Yields Productivity**

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

There is great freedom in obeying the Word of God -- **Ps. 119:45; John 8:31-34**

**R.V.G. Tasker:** It is not therefore something imposed upon the believer from without in the form of a code of external rules and regulations. It is not for him a dead letter but a living power. It would seem to be called the *law of liberty* partly because it enables men to find their true freedom in the service of God's will, and partly because the believer accepts it without any compulsion. The Christian loves God's commandments and is eager to obey them.

**George Guthrie:** The “*doer*” not only has this practice of investigating God’s law but stays with it. In other words, the law becomes a frame of reference for living. With the law ever before the eyes of the heart, this person lives out the law instead of forgetting it. This is the path of blessing. One thinks of passages such as **Psalm 1:1–3**: The person is blessed whose delight in the Lord’s law is manifested by a constant meditation on it. Such a person is like a tree planted by streams of water.

**Alec Motyer:** True freedom is the opportunity and the ability to give expression to what we truly are. We are truly free when we live the life appropriate to those who are created in the image of God. The law of God safeguards that liberty for us. But it does even more, for obedience brings life and power (**Lv. 18:5; Dt. 4:1a; Acts 5:32**). The



law of God is the law of liberty because it safeguards, expresses and enables the life of true freedom into which Christ has brought us. This is the blessing of which James speaks (25), the blessing of a full life, a true humanity. Obedience is the key factor in our enjoyment of it.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What practical steps can we take to make us more attentive listeners and more cautious speakers? How do we accept constructive criticism from others? How prepared are we to receive the Word when it is taught?
- 2) How can we put aside anger in how we nurture and disciple our children so that we can achieve our goal of accomplishing in them "*the righteousness of God*"? How does anger manifest itself in our lives? What things typically make us angry?
- 3) What level of imperfection and sin and blemish are we willing to tolerate when we look at our life through the light of the Word of God? Do we truly hate sin and long for the righteousness of God to be manifested in our life?
- 4) What is our game plan for looking "*intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty*" and obeying it? Do we persevere in our efforts to understand and implement the Word of God?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** The emphasis in this section is on the dangers of **self-deception**: "*deceiving your own selves*" (v. 22); "*deceiveth his own heart*" (v. 26)... Many people are deceiving themselves into thinking they are saved when they are not... But there are true believers who are fooling themselves concerning their Christian walk. they think they are spiritual when they are not... Spiritual reality results from the proper relationship to God through His Word. God's Word is truth (**John 17:17**), and if we are rightly related to God's truth, we cannot be dishonest or hypocritical.

**William Barclay:** So long as a man has to obey his own passions and emotions and desires, he is nothing less than a slave. It is when a man accepts the will of God that he becomes really free--for then he is free to be good, and free to be what he ought to be. His service is perfect freedom, and in doing His will is our peace.

**Curtis Vaughan:** Three figures are used in describing the **Word of God**.

- It is likened to a seed planted in the heart (**verse 21**),
- a mirror into which one looks (**verse 24**),
- and a law by which one's life is guided (**verse 25**).

The thought of the passage may be developed around the three imperative verbs which are used. These three verbs speak of the demands of God's Word upon the believer's life. They have to do with

- (1) hearing the Word (**verses 19, 20**),
- (2) receiving the Word (**verse 21**), and
- (3) doing the Word (**verse 22-27**).

**Jim Mooney:** We must read God's Word (Focus your attention on the Word of God) ... We must review God's Word (meditation)... We must remember God's Word (memorization).

**R. Kent Hughes:** Obviously, something must be done if we are to maintain and enhance our ability to hear God's Word. Briefly there are at least five things that will help make us "*quick to hear*."

1) We must work at truly listening to others. Listening requires an intense interest in the other person. As **Simon Kistemaker** says: "Listening is loving the neighbor as oneself; his concerns and problems are sufficiently important to be heard." This requires eye contact and sensitivity to the other's gestures and moods and silences.

2) We must limit our exposure to the visual media. If we do not control our time, the media will! And if they do, they will impair our ability to hear.

3) We must read God's Word, and that involves more than advancing a bookmark. It means "hearing" as we read.

4) We must slow down and take time to listen, perhaps praying Samuel's eager words, "*Speak, for your servant hears*" (**1 Samuel 3:10**).

5) We must prepare for worship and the hearing of God's Word. For many, the time before Sunday church is the most stress-filled time of the week. I may be wrong, but I suspect there are more fights in Christian households on Sunday mornings than at any other time. We must prepare not to have this happen, beginning the night before.

Ever so practical, Pastor James says we must "*be quick to hear*." This is a continuous command (present act imperative)—that is, we are to keep at it. It is the first duty of those who would profit by the Word.

**Danny Williams:** Many of us want to audit the Christian life, that means you want the information but you don't want the work.

People audit the a course when they want the data without the responsibility of the test or the maintaining of the Grade...

But understand when you audit a course you don't get credit for it.

**David Hoke:** If we just hear the Word, we are like somebody who glances in the mirror and shaves himself, or powders her nose, and walks away and doesn't really remember what they look like. I have this idealized image of myself. I think I am still the good-looking guy I was twenty years ago. But the mirror pops my bubble. Most of you probably think you look differently than you really look. Some of you might remember when cassette recorders were first introduced. When we heard ourselves on tape we said, 'I don't sound like that!' But you do. The tape is precisely how you sound. Somebody takes a home movie and says, "I don't look like that!" Yes you do! That's precisely how you look. We have an idea of what we really want to be and what we want to look like. Sometimes that is true for our Christian lives. Sometimes we deceive ourselves into believing we are something we are not simply because we know the facts of the Word of God.

**Brian Racer: How the Word Becomes Flesh – Again**

Introduction: **John 1:14** – The Word still needs to become flesh today; people need to see Christ and His character is us

**I. (:19-20) Preparing to Hear the Word**

If the Word is ever going to come out of you, it must first get into you; If the Word is ever to get into your heart, you must first prepare your heart properly

A. Listen Up – “*quick to hear*”

Attitude of Lord, speak to me; I want to hear what you have to say in order to do it; God knows when we mean business; need to have a bent to hear; leaning forward to catch God’s every Word; not being distracted by what we disagree with

B. Zip the Lip – “*slow to speak*” – not ready with quick rebuttal; not applying the passage to someone else first but letting it sink home personally; Remember, God might speak to us by other than His Word – He might use our wife, our children, our employer – do not be defensive or reject these communications; sometimes when it gets uncomfortable we tend to tune God out

C. Settle Down – “*sloooow to become angry*” – Calm your spirit; listen quietly; take it all in; anger and resentment are hindrances to change; you won’t have victory this way

D. Decision: Do I accept God’s Authority to Direct My Life  
we are not in charge

**II. (:21-22) Preparing to Do the Word**

Truth is meant to be applied

A. Throw Down Filthiness – Can’t come to the Word with dirty clothes on; cf. the dirty, nasty clothes of coal miners; requires confession before the Lord

B. Receive the Word Deep Down – in gentleness, humility  
like welcoming someone into your house

Word need to get implanted deep down where it can develop strong roots

C. Nike-size Your Walk = Just Do It!

look at the Nike commercials; people disciplined to run every day in the rain and snow; do you think they feel like doing this?? No! But they do it because they desire the results.

D. Decision: Will I obey God's Voice? Will I act even when I don't feel like it?  
cf. our makeup: Body, Soul (mind, will, emotions) and Spirit –  
- the Word is implanted into our Spirit and we are converted and given a new Nature; but our soul still needs transforming = process of sanctification

- mind – needs to be transformed so we think God's thoughts
- will – What will I decide to do about what I know?
- emotions – these will follow; not the leading indicator

Word should bring us to a crisis of Choice = what will I do about it?

### III. (:22b-25) Two Portraits

Problems:

- I know what I look like and I'm OK with that (sin and all)
- I know what I look like and would like to change but not willing to make effort

A. Hearer-Non-Doer

Fool themselves into thinking they are making spiritual progress:

Glad I know just a little bit more than I did before ...

Glad I figured out that chapter ...

B. Hearer-Doer (cf. **Psalm 1**)

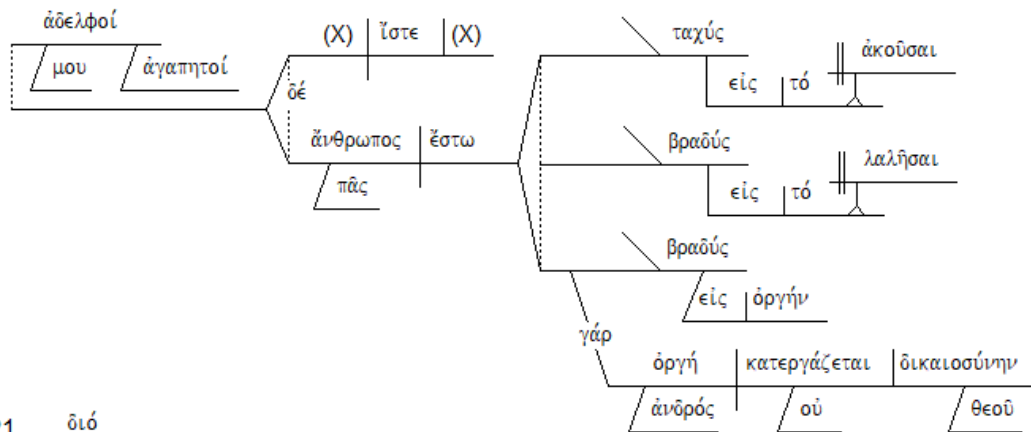
C. Decision: What kind of Hearer will you be?

Conclusion:

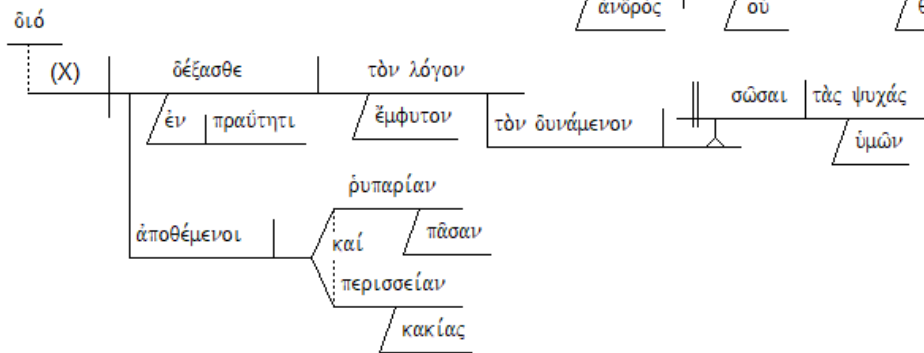
Am I regularly having **Transforming Encounters with the Word of God?**

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

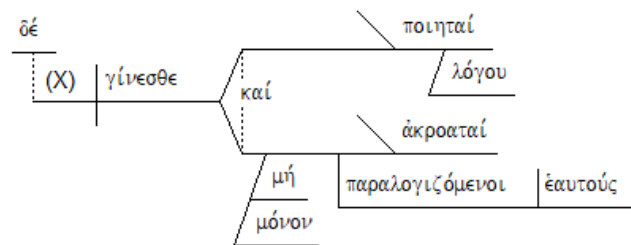
Jam 1:19-20



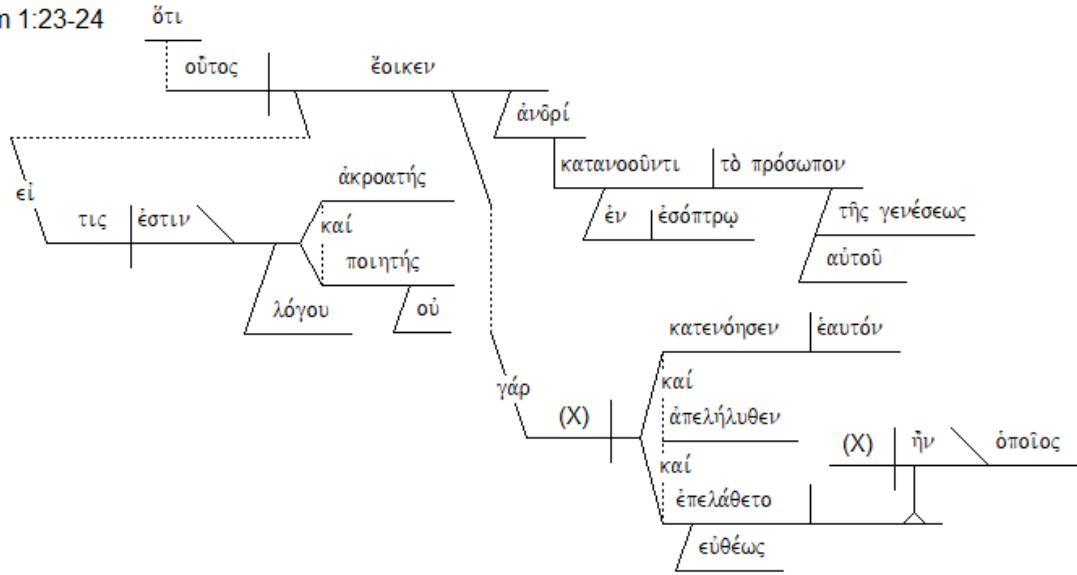
Jam 1:21



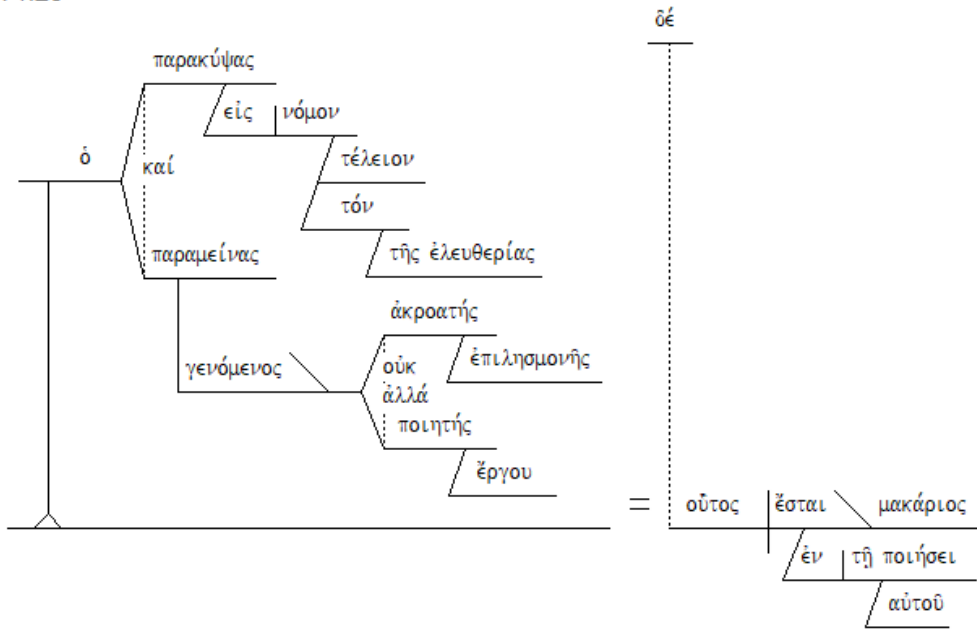
Jam 1:22



Jam 1:23-24



Jam 1:25



TEXT: JAMES 1:26-27

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT OBEDIENCE IS DEAD -- PART 2



**BIG IDEA:**

**PRACTICAL EVIDENCES OF OBEDIENCE**

- **NEGATIVE: CONTROLLING OUR TONGUE**
- **POSITIVE: SOCIAL CONCERN AND MORAL PURITY**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Alec Motyer:** The three Christian characteristics of **verses 26–27** are thus not an arbitrary choice. They say to us “Like Father, like child”. It is right that the life which he has given to us should bear the same fruits in us as in him. James is so convinced of this that it is to these three topics he devotes the whole central substance of his letter (2:1 – 5:6). We can set it out as a diagram:

Three Truths about our Father	(i) His spontaneous care for the helpless (18a)	(ii) His word of truth (18b)	(iii) His purpose of holiness (18c)
			
Three marks of the child of God	(i) A controlled tongue (26)	(ii) A caring ministry (27a)	(iii) A holy life (27b)
			
The three topics developed	(i) A caring ministry (2:1–26)	(ii) A controlled tongue (3:1–12)	(iii) A holy life (3:13–5:6)

This overview makes it clear that James' teaching about how we should live rests on what he discerns to be true about our Father.

**Dale Allison:** **1:26-27** is a succinct, threefold characterization of authentic religion. Such religion involves measured speech, requires social action, and entails separation from "the world". It is the antithesis of a sham religion that fails to control the tongue, shuns unfortunates, and assimilates itself to "the world".

**R. Kent Hughes:** James has powerfully driven home the point that if we are merely hearers of the Word, we have deluded ourselves, for we must also be doers of the Word. Now he issues a further warning against the danger of deceiving ourselves with false religious doings. The doings are not bad in themselves, but the practice of them can delude believers with a deceptively comfortable sense of religiosity.

**David Platt:** In this section of James [**1:26 – 2:13**], we are going to see a New Testament explanation of faith and religion—the kind of religion that honors and is acceptable to God—and we are going to be faced with a choice. Are we going to define religion on our terms and settle for a Christianity that appeals to our lifestyles? Or are we going to submit to God's terms for what faith, religion, and Christianity look like in our lives, in our families, and in our churches? Be careful how you answer. **Martin Luther** said, "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." **James 1–2** may turn your idea of Christianity upside down.

## **I. (:26) CONTROLLING OUR TONGUE -- NEGATIVE EXAMPLE -- WORTHLESS RELIGION**

### **A. Inflated Opinion of Self**

*"If anyone thinks himself to be religious"*

**John Piper:** "*Religious*" Means "Faith in Jesus" --  
The reason I think he means "faith in Jesus" when he uses the word "religious" (in **verse 26**), or talks about "*pure and undefiled religion*" (in **verse 27**), is that this is what he continues with in the next verse (**2:1**): "*My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.*" There is no break in the flow between **1:27** and **2:1**; so there is good reason to think that "pure religion" is "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." That is James' religion.

**Spiros Zodhiates:** James does not speak here of the estimate others have about us, but of the subjective estimate which we form of ourselves. It is not what we appear to be to others, but what we think we are. Our mental estimate of our own spiritual condition is extremely important. After all, we are affected more by what we think of ourselves than by what others think of us.

**George Guthrie:** In line with the previous passage, true religion does not participate simply in forms of worship (i.e., hearing the word spoken or read) but must extend to a transformation of life that has implications for how one interacts in community.



## B. Unbridled Control of Speech

*"yet does not bridle his tongue"*

This failure is visible to all; no mystery here.

Not what we do on Sunday, but what we do on Monday to Saturday shows the reality of our religion.

**Curtis Vaughan:** James was thinking of the man who may be punctilious in religious activity but careless about everyday speech. All of his religious activity is vain if he does not bridle his tongue... To bridle the tongue is to discipline it, restrain it, curb it, keep it under control. The imagery suggests that the tongue is like an unruly horse that needs bit and bridle to check its wild tendencies.

**Dale Allison:** What **restraining the tongue** means, beyond not saying everything that enters one's head (cf. **1:19**), is not indicated. This explains the variety of suggestions in the history of interpretation. We might think of **1:13**: one should hold the tongue when inclined to attribute temptation to God. More plausible and closer to hand is a connection with **1:19-21**: one should be slow to speak, above all when one is angry. The imperative, however, remains vague at this point. Is this because its content will be unfolded in **3:1-12**, which implores one to beware of teaching, to avoid boasting, and to refrain from cursing others? Whatever the answer, the envisaged offense involves a disjunction—conscious or not—between outward appearance and inward reality, and James would surely have agreed with m. 'Abot 1.17: those who multiply words occasion sin. Many commentators cite for comparison **Mt 12.32-37**.

**Craig Blomberg:** James begins his characterization of the tongue as a separate entity that can and will destroy a person if it is not restrained and controlled. "The ancient world agreed that the wise person was also taciturn. Silence was generally better, and always safer, than speech" (cf. esp. **Pr 10:19** or **29:20**).

Wrongful speech can come in the form of angry words or maligning another's character, something sadly prevalent in church life in every era. Gossip, for example, does not merely annoy those who are maligned; it threatens the gossipers' spiritual health.

**Daniel Doriani:** True religion bridles the tongue. Angry talk, gossip, and deception are leading failures of speech, but James develops quite a litany of verbal sins. His concern for the proper and improper uses of the tongue pervades his letter.

- He warns against self-justifying speech. When tempted, no one should blame God, saying, "*God is tempting me*" (**1:13-14**).
- He criticizes those who flatter the rich and humiliate the poor (**2:3-4**).
- He condemns the careless speech that wishes well, but never lifts a hand (**2:16**).
- He questions the superficial claim "*I have faith*" if no deeds confirm it (**2:18**).

- He deplores tongues that praise God one moment and curse people the next (3:9).
- He chides those who slander and judge their brothers (4:11).
- He condemns boastful plans, as if one can do whatever he decrees (4:13).

The tongue, James says, boasts and curses and sparks conflicts that prove that it is set on fire by hell itself. Yet heirs of true religion will rein in these sins.

### C. Ignorant Persistence in Self-Deception

*"but deceives his own heart"*

He still does not get it!

**John MacArthur:** Such things as attending church services and activities, doing volunteer work, following various rituals and ceremonies, saying prayers, and even having right theology have no spiritual value in themselves apart from true saving faith and honorable motives to glorify the Lord. The person who trusts in those outward things sooner or later will expose his faithlessness with his mouth, because he does not have the inner power to bridle his tongue. Trusting in those things to please God and receive His blessing are deceptive and worthless. Even if a ritual or liturgy is biblical in its wording, it is as futile as pagan idolatry unless the heart is right with the Lord. A corrupt and unholy heart eventually will be exposed by corrupt and unholy speech.

**David Platt:** Oh, Christian brother or sister, be warned here! Don't deceive yourself: when you speak, you tell the truth about your heart. The way men speak to and about their wives tells the truth about their hearts. Likewise, the way women speak to and about their husbands tells the truth about their hearts. The way you speak to your friends, the way you speak to your family, the way you speak about others—all of these things are indicators of whether or not your faith is real. If you are engaging in gossip, if your words are biting, if they are cursing, if they are angry, even if they are just plain inundated with trivialities, then be careful; you are showing that your religion is worthless. . .

I believe there is a word of application here for us. In a day of text-messaging, e-mail, cell phones, Twitter, blogs, Facebook, etc., we need to be careful. We've created an entire culture that says if you have a thought, then you should immediately share it with the rest of the world. But follower of Christ, don't buy that line of thinking. Keep a tight rein on your tongue, and speak in a way that shows your faith is real and the core of your heart belongs to God.

### D. Ultimate Futility of Hypocrisy

*"this man's religion is worthless"*

What's the point of fooling yourself and trying to fool others?

**Peter Davids:** This person's religious practice is *empty* (μάταιος, **Je. 2:5; 8:9; 10:3; Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:20; 1 Pet. 1:18**; most of these examples refer to idolatry). Religion which does not have ethical results, particularly in this case control of the tongue, is totally useless before God: such faith is dead, not salvific, as James will say later (**2:20, 26**). Here is a critique of religion similar to that of the prophets (**Ho. 6:6; Is. 1:10–17; Je. 7:21–28**) and of Jesus (cf. his sabbath controversies or the command of love [**Mk. 12:28–34; Jn. 13:34**], which James will take up in **2:8**).

**Robert Gundry:** an unbridled tongue dirties and defiles its owner's religion

## **II. (:27) SOCIAL CONCERN AND MORAL PURITY -- POSITIVE EXAMPLE -- WORTHWHILE RELIGION**

**Thomas Lea:** The emphasis here is that for God to accept our worship it must be accompanied by loving ministry and a holy life.

### **A. (:27a) Social Concern**

#### 1. Essence of Worthwhile Religion

a. *"pure and"*

b. *"undefiled religion"*

#### 2. Evaluator of Worthwhile Religion -- only God's opinion really matters

*"in the sight of our God and Father is this"*

#### 3. Example of Worthwhile Religion

*"to visit orphans and widows in their distress"*

**Thorold Marsaw:** And what about the orphans? The dictionary tells us that an orphan is one bereaved of his or her parents. Doesn't this definition apply to a child who comes from a broken home?! I certainly think so. I would go so far as to argue that a child whose parent has died is likely to be emotionally better-off than the one who has been abandoned. In the latter situation, the child experiences rejection and often is overcome with feelings of guilt. In many instances, these poor kids believe that they are responsible for the whole mess while those orphaned through the death of a parent view the loss as being a tragic yet unwillful act. Had the parent not died, he or she would still be by the child's side.

**John Piper:** So orphans are children whose parents have died and left them at the mercy of others to take care of, lest they die. How does abortion relate to that? Well, abortion puts the child in a worse situation. The parents are not dead, but they have turned on the child and choose to have the child dead. This is worse than being an orphan. To have Mommy and Daddy choose to have you dead is worse than Mommy and Daddy being dead.

So it seems to me that if God wants us to care about the orphan whose life is endangered because his parents are dead, he would want all the more that we care about the child whose life is endangered because his parents choose to make him dead.

**Tony Miano:** Sometimes it is difficult to do that. Sometimes we tend to shy away from the less fortunate as if their misfortune may rub off on us. Sometimes we distance ourselves from those in need because we don't want to be forced to look at our own pressing needs, or we consider our own needs to important to put those less fortunate first. Regardless of whatever hang-ups we may have about serving those in need, if our hearts don't break for them to the point that we extend to them more than just a smile and a kind word, we are just playing church.

**George Guthrie:** The admonition to care for widows and orphans expresses a widely held virtue of Jewish piety. God's concern for the poor and distressed, his taking their cause of justice and basic sustenance as his own, must extend to the person who is God's follower in the world. Widows and orphans especially had little means of provision for basic needs other than the care and generosity of their broader communities. Thus the person who claims to be religious in the best sense must seek to address the plight of the poor and most vulnerable (**Isa 1:17**).

**David Platt:** The second mark of true and acceptable religion is **sacrificial care for those in need**. We are to "look after" orphans and widows. That word literally means to "to seek out someone" or to "visit" them, and the implication is that you go to them in order to care for them. This is such a potent word in the New Testament. God uses it to describe how He visits His people to help them, to strengthen them, to encourage them (**Luke 1:68,78; 7:16; Acts 15:14**). When James wrote this letter, there was no life insurance a husband or father would leave to a widow or his children, nor were there government-run programs to provide for them. As the Old Testament story of Ruth shows us, widows and orphans were desolate and destitute. James tells us that true religion consists in looking after the neediest people in your community. He's not just saying that if you are a Christian, this is one way you might help someone else. No, he's saying that if you are a Christian, you are obligated to look after orphans and widows, and if you don't, your religion is not acceptable before God.

We are to help orphans and widows because they are helpless. For the widow or the widower, the deceased spouse creates a void. God is the defender, sustainer, strength, and provider for such people, and His provision comes through the hearts and lives of His people.

**B. (:27b) Moral Purity (or Avoiding Worldliness) –  
Essential Prerequisite of Worthwhile Religion = Personal Purity / Separation from  
Worldliness**

*"and to keep oneself unstained by the world"*

No amount of ministry to others can make up for a failure to guard your own purity or character.

**Douglas Moo:** Moral purity is another hallmark of pure religion. *To keep oneself from being polluted by the world* means to avoid thinking and acting in accordance with the value system of the society around us. This society reflects, by and large, beliefs and practices that are unchristian, if not actively anti-Christian. Believers who live “in the world” are in constant danger of having the taint of that system “rub off” on them. It is important and instructive that James includes this last area, for it penetrates beyond action to the attitudes and beliefs from which action springs. The “pure religion” of the “perfect Christian” (v. 4) **combines purity of heart with purity of action.**

**Alexander Ross:** There must be no selfish isolation of himself from all contact with the woes of humanity, but, at the same time, he must seek earnestly to maintain personal purity in all his intercourse with others.

**Thomas Lea:** **(Not) polluted** demands a freedom from contamination by the world. Peter used this word to refer to Christ as “*without ... defect*” (1 Pet. 1:19). Christians are to model their purity after that of Jesus.

**David Platt:** James defines holiness as **going against the grain of the world**, not living according to the system of this world. James immediately applies this truth in **1:27** to the issue of favoritism in **chapter 2**.

**C. Leslie Mitton:** Re “*world*” -- It means the world of men as it is in its alienation from God and rebellion against Him. It is almost synonymous with “evil”, because the ‘world’ is now in the power of evil. This ‘world’ is also the environment in which the Christian must live. Its customs and habits are tainted with evil. Therefore the pressures which come to the Christian from the social life about him are in the direction of evil. He has constantly to be on the alert against this pressure, sometimes direct and threatening, more often insidious and unnoticed.

**Craig Blomberg:** Here emerges a perfect example of being “*in the world but not of it,*” where we must function as salt and light to the needy, but not lose our ability to arrest corruption and illuminate the darkness in the midst of ministry.

The two tasks must be held in balance so that we do not lose social justice in our quest for personal piety or sacrifice moral purity in trying to reach the physically needy. James insists that the two go hand-in-hand; neither may supplant the other. And separation from sin includes the renunciation of social and structural as well as personal sin.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What does the world think makes someone a "religious" person? how do we counteract the tendency to be perceived as "self-righteous"? How do we show the

world that our focus is on internal character produced by God in us and that good works are an expression of our thankful service to a gracious God rather than an attempt to earn salvation?

2) When was the last time we said something that we wish we could take back? What makes us so quick to pull the trigger and blurt out something harmful rather than exercise self-control?

3) When we are giving help to the less fortunate, how do we make sure that our motives are correct? Think of examples of people who emphasize works of compassion but err greatly in the area of personal purity and then examples of people who put a lot of emphasis on purity but evidence very little compassion towards others. What type of example do we see in Christ?

4) How do we balance reaching out to the world in friendship evangelism with a need for separation from the defilement of the world?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**R.C.H. Lenski:** Rationalists have pointed to this passage as being one that supports their idea of genuine religion: Just do works of charity and lead a clean moral life; all the rest does not matter!

**Curtis Vaughan:** Re fatherless and widows -- There are indications in Scripture that their helplessness made them at times victims of oppression (**Psalm 94:6; Isaiah 10:2; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5**). The Pharisees, for instance, who made a boast of religion, devoured widows' houses (**Matthew 23:14**). Both are mentioned in the Bible as the objects of God's special care and compassion. He is "*father of the fatherless, and a judge [protector] of the widows*" (**Psalm 68:5**).

**William Barclay:** All through history men have tried to make ritual and liturgy a substitute for sacrifice and service. They have made religion splendid within the Church at the expense of neglecting it outside the Church.

**Alexander Ross:** It is painfully easy to degenerate into one like Mr. Talkative, whose portrait is painted with such biting satire by John Bunyan. He was "the son of one Saywell, who dwelt in Prating Row, and notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow."

**R. Kent Hughes:** Illustration -- Once while John Wesley was preaching, he noticed a lady in the audience who was known for her critical attitude. All through the service she sat and stared at his new tie. When the meeting ended, she came up to him and said very sharply, "Mr. Wesley, the strings on your bow tie are much too long. It's an offense to me!" He asked if any of the ladies present happened to have a pair of scissors in her

purse. When the scissors were handed to him, he gave them to his critic and asked her to trim the streamers to her liking. After she clipped them off near the collar, he said, “Are you sure they’re all right now?” “Yes, that’s much better.” “Then let me have those shears a moment,” said Wesley. “I’m sure you wouldn’t mind if I also gave you a bit of correction. I must tell you, madam, that your tongue is an offense to me—it’s too long! Please stick it out . . . I’d like to take some off.” On another occasion someone said to Wesley, “My talent is to speak my mind.” Wesley replied, “That’s one talent God wouldn’t care a bit if you buried!”

**Warren Wiersbe:** There are many references to speech in this letter, giving the impression that the tongue was a serious problem in the assembly... It is the tongue that reveals the heart (**Matt. 12: 34-35**); if the heart is right, the speech will be right. A controlled tongue means a controlled body (**3:1ff**).

**C. Leslie Mitton:** In this passage, therefore, “*religion*” means the outward forms of religion. If they are used as God meant them to be used, as means of grace to enable us to submit our lives in obedience to the whole will of God, they are a valuable, even necessary part of the religious life. One of the commonest faults, however, into which religious people are prone to fall, is to come to regard these outward forms as of value in themselves. Observance of them is felt to be of the very essence of religion, in comparison with which purity of life and compassion for the distresses of others are of small importance. It is this attitude which earns for religious people the reputation of hypocrisy. It was this that Jesus deplored so deeply in the Pharisees, and led Him to rebuke them as “hypocrites”. The real outward marks of a religious man are honesty and personal integrity in all his dealings, and fairness and kindness in all his treatment of others, and it is very sad when religious people themselves forget it.

**Tony Miano: How to Avoid Playing Church ...**Sometimes we, as evangelical Christians, can be very quick to dismiss the word “religion” as always being a negative, manmade thing. It’s not—and that’s one of the points James is making in these verses. As believers, we should not be so quick to throw out the baby with the bath water. What we need to do is discern between false and superficial religion from that religion which is based solely on an authentic, genuine relationship with Jesus...

Who we really are can often be determined by what we say. Our speech will do more to make or break our reputations than just about any other character trait. More types of sin can likely be attributed to the tongue than any other part of the body....

The fact that James doesn’t give us specific areas in which we should control our tongue, we can conclude that he is telling us that we should control our tongues in every form of speech. Areas in which we should be controlling our speech include sarcasm, anger, slander, bitterness, and boasting. There are many others.

**Robert AuBuchon Jr:** If our religion is not taking on the dimensions of . . .

- words . . . bridling the tongue
- hands . . . taking care of the helpless
- hearts . . . keeping un-spotted by the world's ways . . .

Then our religion is not practical and therefore useless.

Religious? Or Irreligious? Which might you be?

**Brian Racer: Three Previews of True Religion**

(you can outline the rest of the book of James around these three areas)

These areas will determine whether people regard you as authentic; whether your religion really counts for anything

**I. (3:1-12) Controlled Speech**

- not just bridling your tongue, but speaking out at the appropriate time

**II. (2:1-13) Compassionate Service to the Poor who are in Distress**

Do you feel their needs?

Are you involved in meeting their needs?

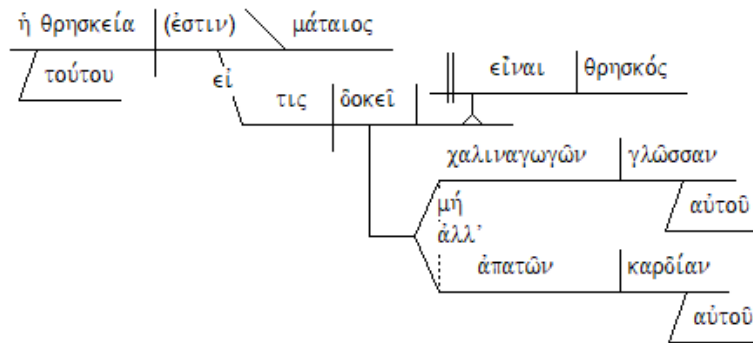
**III. (4:1-10) Cleanse Self**

God will give the necessary grace.

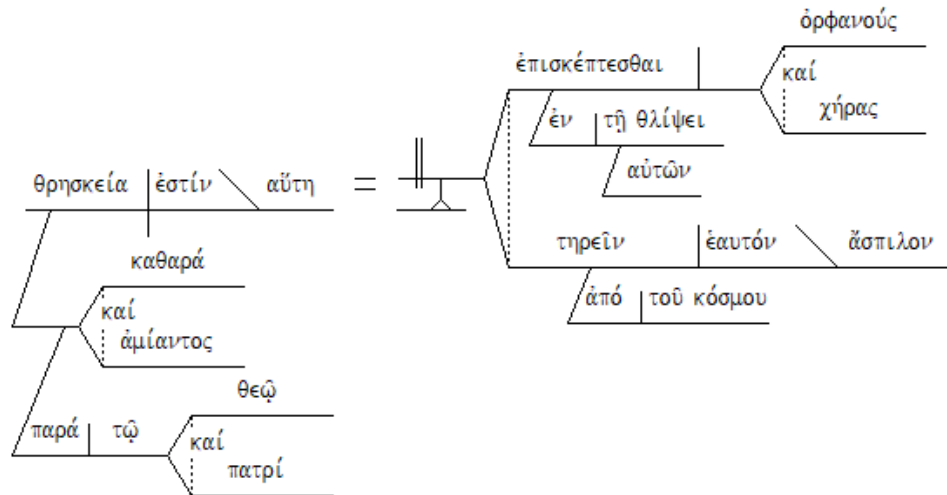


Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

Jam 1:26



Jam 1:27



TEXT: JAMES 2:1-13

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT IMPARTIAL LOVE IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**DO NOT HOLD YOUR FAITH IN OUR GLORIOUS LORD JESUS CHRIST WITH AN ATTITUDE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**David Nystrom:** The first chapter of James is in some ways an extended multilayered introduction to the entire letter. With this completed, James now turns his attention to a detailed discussion of one of the major themes already placed on the table, that of wealth and charity. Here he issues a warning against showing favoritism to the wealthy and displaying a belittling attitude toward the poor. Such favoritism mirrored the standards of the surrounding culture and ignored the essentially egalitarian tone of the Christian gospel. It is an obvious example of the failure to “*keep oneself from being polluted by the world*” (1:27).

**Douglas Moo:** In this section, James applies many of the key ideas from 1:19–27 to a specific situation: discrimination against poor people within the Christian community. Doing the word (v. 22), ‘*the perfect law*’ (v. 25), James has argued, includes showing compassion to the helpless (v. 27). By showing favour to the rich and treating the poor with contempt, the believers to whom James writes are acting in direct contradiction to this central demand of God’s law. This paragraph is the first in James that develops a single idea at any length. The prohibition of partiality in **verse 1** governs the entire section. **Verses 2–4** illustrate the problem James is concerned about, with reference to discrimination against the poor. This discriminatory action is ascribed to ‘*evil thoughts*’. Two reasons why Christians must shun this sort of favouritism are given in the rest of the paragraph. First, preferential treatment of the rich stands in stark contrast to the attitude of God, who has chosen the poor to be ‘*rich in faith*’ (vv. 5–7). Second, any manifestation of favouritism is condemned by the ‘*royal law*’ that demands love of the neighbour (vv. 8–13). Concern with doing the word, interpreted in terms of the law, frames this paragraph (1:25; 2:8–13), suggesting the thematic continuity in subject matter.

**Ralph Martin:** This section, in fact, brings no fewer than three charges against the readers. First, they are guilty of social snobbery and partiality, which runs counter to the character of God (vv 1–5). Second, they are strangely and ironically shortsighted. In siding with the rich—here, at v 5, the scope of the argument broadens to include the general situation of how rich persons treat the poor—the readers are taking the part of those who are their opponents and oppressors (vv 6–7). Finally, the social malaise and the topsy-turvy situation where misguided Christians actually prefer to play up to their persecuting foes, is given by the author the name of sin (vv 8–13) as he turns the debate to side with the poor. For James sin is regarded as an infraction of the “*supreme* [lit., ‘royal’] law,” found in Lev 19:18, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” When

favoritism implies that the poor neighbor is treated with disdain and his social rights abridged, then the community commits active transgression (v 9); and the same law that is broken turns upon the offenders and “convicts” them as “lawbreakers” (παράβαται, v 9, repeated in the singular in v 11: pace Kilpatrick, “Übertreter”; see Note g\*).

**Craig Blomberg:** Christians must not discriminate either in favor of or against anyone because such behavior is inconsistent with God’s choice of the poor, the conduct of the rich, and the law of love. Instead, they must live in ways that anticipate the Judgment Day, demonstrating God’s fairness to all and his grace to believers.

### **Favoritism Condemned (2:1–13)**

- a. The warning and central thesis: Christians must not discriminate against others (v. 1).
- b. The illustration of the problem: Christians must not discriminate against the poor in favor of the rich (vv. 2–4).
- c. The rationale for the warning: Discrimination is wrong for at least three reasons (vv. 5–11).
  - i. It is inconsistent with God’s choice of the poor (vv. 5–6a).
  - ii. It is inconsistent with the conduct of the rich (vv. 6b–7).
  - iii. It is inconsistent with the law of love (vv. 8–11).
- d. Conclusion (the warning restated positively as an exhortation): Christians must act in ways which are consistent with God’s coming judgment (vv. 12–13).
  - i. Remember God’s coming liberation of those who do his will (v. 12).
  - ii. Remember God’s coming condemnation of lawbreakers (v. 13a).
  - iii. Remember that God’s mercy (liberation) triumphs over his judgment (condemnation) for those who are believers (v. 13b).

**John MacArthur:** Another attribute of God that is not thought or spoken of so often is His **impartiality**. Yet that is a serious and recurring theme throughout Scripture. God is absolutely impartial in His dealings with people. And in that way, as with His other attributes, He is unlike us. Human beings, even Christians, are not naturally inclined to be impartial. We tend to put people in pigeonholes, in predetermined, stratified categories, ranking them by their looks, their clothes, their race or ethnicity, their social status, their personality, their intelligence, their wealth and power, by the kind of car they drive, and by the type of house and neighborhood they live in. . .

Therefore, whether it concerns salvation, judgment, discipline of church leaders or ordinary church members, God’s standards are the same. He deals entirely with the soul, the inner person, and with total impartiality. Peter affirms that divine impartiality, reminding believers that “*it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’ And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth*” (1 Pet. 1:16–17). In other words, if we expect God to be fair and impartial with us, we should be fair and impartial with others, just as we are to forgive others if we expect God to forgive us (Matt. 6:14). . .

Tragically, many otherwise biblical and faithful churches today do not treat all their members the same. Frequently, those who are of a different ethnic background, race, or financial standing are not fully welcomed into fellowship. That ought not to be. It not only is a transgression of God's divine law but is a mockery of His divine character.

**Dan McCartney:** Believers, as God's offspring through the word (**1:18**), are presumed to exhibit God's character. God shows no favoritism to those of high societal status, and so his children must do likewise. This equality of people before God is even more evident in the new covenant than in the old, as Jeremiah prophesied (**Jer. 31:34**).

The first half of **James 2** sets the stage for the attack on dysfunctional, hypocritical "dead faith" that James will develop in **2:14–26**. Here is addressed a specific problem, hinted at in **1:9–10**: wealth can get in the way of genuine faith. Some in the community of believers apparently have been dealing, or have been tempted to deal, with people according to their economic and social status. This makes a mockery of their averrals of faith, for God shows special interest in the poor, and it is the poor who will inherit the reign of God. Indeed, the wealthy are those who typically inhibit and resist the gospel and are persecuting those who have received the word.

The theme of the first half of **James 2**, on showing favoritism, is announced in **2:1** and then developed in two thought units, the first (**2:2–7**) focusing on the folly of favoritism, and the second (**2:8–13**) on its being contrary to God's commands and character.

**George Guthrie:** [Logic Flow of the passage]

**2:1** A Personal Exhortation: "*Don't show favoritism to the rich!*"

**2:2–4** A Hypothetical Situation and Assessment

**2:5–6a** An Appeal to Principle: "*God has chosen the poor,*" and the Contrast with Wrong Actions: "*but you have dishonored the poor man*"

**2:6b–7** An Appeal to Personal Experience: "the rich oppress, drag to court, blaspheme the Lord's name"

**2:8–11** Two Courses of Action, Hypothetically Stated: Living by the Royal Law and the Contrast with the Sin of Partiality

**2:12–13** A Concluding Exhortation and Its Basis: speak and act as those judged by the law of liberty, for mercy is most important

Notice that the structure of this section is very balanced, forming a chiastic pattern of A–B–C–C'–B'–A'. Exhortations begin and end the section. The hypothetical situation of **2:2–4** is balanced with the hypothetically stated appeal to the royal law and the importance of keeping that law. The two center units concern, respectively, God's favor on the poor (**2:5–6a**) and the wickedness of the rich (**2:6b–7**). Through this highly

stylized and structured approach, James confronts his readers with a critical aspect of living as God's people in community: according to the royal law of love, we must not make distinctions between people based on economic status.

### **I. (:1) CONVICTING COMMAND = DON'T SHOW PARTIALITY**

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

Look at other Scriptures: **Lev. 19:15; Mal. 2:9; Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Ephes 6:9; Col. 3:25**

**John Painter:** It makes good sense that reference to faith in the imminently coming judge should be opposed to discriminatory behavior that favors the rich and disadvantages the poor. The call for justice in the Jewish Scriptures was to vindicate the poor against exploitation by the rich. Thus, although no appeal is made to the impartiality of God, that impartiality is assumed in the role of the coming judge, and this awareness is brought against discriminatory behavior (see also **1:26–27**). . .

Underlying such favoritism may be the hope that the favor will be returned in some way—something beyond the means of the poor person. Self-interest drives this behavior. The call to impartiality (**2:1**) apparently involves a refusal to judge/discriminate between brothers and sisters on the basis of power or wealth (cf. **4:11–12**). This critique of discrimination in terms of judges with evil thoughts/motives may arise from a vision of Jesus's exaltation to glory as the imminently coming judge of all, whose judgment they will face without favor or prejudice (**5:8–9**). It does not imply a judicial setting for the gathering in **2:1–4**.

#### **A. Audience = Addressed to Professing Believers**

*"My brethren"*

**Alexander Ross:** He begins his exhortation by using once again his favorite form of address... and it is very appropriate here, as he is about to deal with a glaring example of the lack of Christian love and brotherhood.

#### **B. Axiom (Issue) = Genuineness of Faith Demonstrated by Conduct Consistent with that Faith**

*"do not hold your faith"*

*"with an attitude of personal favoritism."*

**Dan McCartney:** There can be no separation between the trust component of faith and the faithfulness component, because to trust an authority entails a commitment to it. This is not to turn faith into some kind of work, but to point out that faith is a matter of commitment to relationship, not just the acceptance of some intellectual truth.

Thus, the fact that some in the community of believers apparently are showing favoritism is a serious breach of their faith and calls into question its viability (as will be expounded more in 2:14–26).

### **C. Argument = Proper View of Christ Leads to a Proper View of Others**

*“in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ”*

Once we truly see how "*glorious*" Christ is, there will be no room for distinctions on the human plane because we all pale in comparison to the glory of Christ. Look at how our Lord (in all of His Majesty) treated others and we will see that there is no room for "*personal favoritism*" on our part. Surely the disciples are not above the Master when it comes to showing compassion to all men without distinction.

**Andy Atkins:** Partiality is treating a person better or worse than he deserves for selfish reasons.

**Baker:** "*Glory*" is best recognized, then, as signifying the presence of God as judge.

## **II. (:2-3) CASE STUDY CONTRAST – FAVORITISM AND PREJUDICE**

### **A. Favoritism towards the Rich Man in Your Assembly**

*“For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes,”*

*“and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’”*

**R. Kent Hughes:** The evident assumption in this favoritism was that the rich man was considered to be morally superior, or obviously smarter, more disciplined, more hard-working, and thus a “better man”—more fit for the kingdom.

### **B. Prejudice towards the Poor Man in Your Assembly**

*“and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,”*

*“and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’”*

- We tend to judge people on the basis of external appearance and stereotype groupings
- We are impressed by riches and professional success and social standing

**C. Leslie Mitton:** Apparently there was a shortage of seats, and some of the congregation had to stand or sit on the floor, so that to have a seat at all was a privilege.

### III. (:4) CONTEMPTIBLE CONDEMNATION – FOLLY OF SHOWING PARTIALITY

#### A. Undermining of Christian Unity

*"have you not made distinctions among yourselves,"*

**Alec Motyer:** James' illustration is timeless. It speaks as loudly today as when he penned it. It is still not always easy to know how to accommodate a tramp in a worship-service and it still is easy to assume that wealth gives a commanding voice in church affairs. The sin of partiality is the sin of judging by accidentals and externals and, as James noted, it always bears down on the poor and disadvantaged. . .

We have, in fact, committed a double fault. We have misunderstood our status—as if it were our position to sit in judgment on others; and we have trusted our own judgment—as if, by ourselves, we could make a true and accurate assessment. On the contrary, James teaches by a clear implication that in both status and judgment the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the Glory, must reign supreme. As to how we accept others, we must ask how he would accept them (cf. **Rom. 14:1, 3; 15:7**). As to how we appraise others, we must ask how he appraises them. As to how we act towards others, we must ask how he would act towards them. Our values, priorities and activities must ever be governed by the definition of true glory displayed in the person, conduct and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Dan McCartney:** James's addition of the words "*among yourselves*" brings home that it is not just visitors who are affected by such discriminatory behavior. The very class distinctions that Christian faith is supposed to transcend have insinuated their way into the worship service and into the social fabric of the church.

#### B. Unmasking of Evil Motivation

*"and become judges with evil motives?"*

**Dan McCartney:** James likens discriminatory behavior to that of corrupt judges who are biased or bribed and give rulings in preference to rich clients, and who then justify their rulings by specious reasoning. In the ancient world, as is still to an appalling degree the case in the modern world, the application of justice in the civil and criminal courts quite often was a function of the economic resources and social status of the litigants. But Judaism, and Christianity with it, insisted that God gave real justice; he cannot be bribed (**Deut. 10:17**), and his judgments are based not a whit on whether the person in the dock is king or pauper, movie star or farmhand (see **Job 34:19**). Thus, equity is also required of human judges, and inequity is roundly condemned in the OT (e.g., **Lev. 19:15; Deut. 16:19; 27:19, 25; Ps. 82:2; Mal. 2:9**). James points out that discriminatory seating is of a piece with the perversion of justice that all too frequently occurs in secular courts, and thus it is an implicit denial of faith in the God who shows no partiality (see **2 Chron. 19:7**). Since the following verses bring up the subject of lawsuits that the rich are bringing against Christians, this is a shocking judgment indicating that when believers show favoritism, they class themselves with the corrupt judges who are giving unfair verdicts against them when they are accused in court.

**Craig Blomberg:** This clause anticipates his later assertion in 4:12 that “*there is one lawgiver and judge.*” When we attempt to discern people’s value based on external features, we not only try to usurp God’s role as judge, but we fail miserably in the process.

#### **IV. (:5-11) CORRECTING CONFUSED THINKING**

##### **A. (:5-7) Our Thinking is Upside Down**

###### 1. Look at Election -- God more often has chosen the poor

###### a. Pay Special Attention

*"Listen, my beloved brethren"*

###### b. Look at God's Choice -- **1 Cor. 1:26**

*"did not God choose the poor of this world"*

1) *"to be rich in faith"*

2) *"and heirs of the kingdom"*

**Dan McCartney:** The “*kingdom of God*” is in the Gospels a rubric for the content of Jesus’s eschatological announcement that defines his ministry (**Mark 1:15**; see **Ridderbos** 1962: especially xi). It is a Jewish term for the expected restoration of God’s righteousness on earth, and it implies also the overthrow of wickedness and the restoring of God’s people to a subordinate sovereignty (**McCartney** 1994), sharing in the rule of God on earth. The phrase thus summarizes the eschatological hopes of Israel, which the NT writers typically focus on Jesus.

**William Barclay** (quoting Abraham Lincoln): God must love the common people because He made so many of them.

###### c. Consistent with God's Promise

*"which He promised"*

###### d. Key = a person's relationship to God (not their social or economic status) -- *"to those who love Him"*

###### 2. Look at Your Own Failure

*"But you have dishonored the poor man."*

###### 3. Look at Personal Experience -- The Rich more often mistreat and persecute you

###### a. The Rich Mistreat You and Show No Mercy

1) *"oppress you"*

2) *"personally drag you into court"*



**William Barclay:** In the society which James inhabited the rich oppressed the poor. They dragged them to the law courts. No doubt this was for debt. At the bottom end of the social scale men were so poor that they could hardly live, and moneylenders were plentiful and extortionate. In the ancient world there was a custom of summary arrest. If a creditor met a debtor on the street, he could seize him by the neck of his robe, nearly throttling him and literally drag him to the law courts. That is what the rich did to the poor. They had no sympathy; all they wanted was the uttermost farthing. It is not riches that James is condemning. It is the conduct of riches without sympathy.

**George Guthrie:** How the rich handled the debts, rent payments, and wages of the poor, as well as abuse of the legal system of the day by the rich, are probably in mind. The wealthy landowner could use a poor person's debt to take land or possessions, charge unreasonably high interest rates, and withhold pay for spurious reasons, all of which were common practices. To make matters worse, their money and social status often enabled the rich to buy off the court system. Thus they could drag the poor before the courts and systematically abuse them.

b. The Rich Persecute You and Blaspheme God

*"Do they not blaspheme the fair name  
by which you have been called"*

**John MacArthur:** *By which you have been called* emphasizes the believer's personal relationship to and identity with Jesus Christ. Every reference to being "called" in the New Testament epistles refers to God's effectual, saving call, by which He saves sinners (cf. **Rom. 8:28–30**). The very name Christian means "Christ's ones," those who belong to and identify themselves with Christ and have the great privilege of expressing His love and impartiality.

Peter Davids: The blasphemy referred to indicates the reviling of the name of Jesus (whether explicitly or by implication, e.g. "those followers of a cursed criminal"), which was the baptismal "seal" of the Christian. By siding with the rich the church was siding with blasphemers! James has held the worst charge until last.

**Craig Blomberg:** James points out the ridiculous nature of kowtowing to people who treat the poor in this manner. He does not, however, condemn the rich for being rich; his invective condemns their actions.

**B. (:8-11) Our Evaluation of the Seriousness of this Conduct is Warped**

1. (:8) At Stake is Obedience to the Law

*"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture,  
'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing well."*

**Douglas Moo:** In the Old Testament, the neighbour (*rē'a*) means particularly the fellow-Israelite, but Jesus expands the application to include everyone that a person

might come into contact with, including foreigners (**Luke 10:25–37**) and enemies (**Matt. 5:44**).

**John MacArthur:** Contrary to what many teachers claim today, Scripture does not teach that we must learn to love ourselves before we can properly love others. Quite to the contrary, it simply acknowledges that it is basic human nature to love ourselves, for “*no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it*” (**Eph. 5:29**). Because we naturally love ourselves so much—whose mouth we are careful to feed, whose body we take care to dress, whose looks we are concerned about, whose job and career occupy our minds, whose life we are determined to make comfortable and happy—that is the same concern we should have for others. And when we determine to occupy ourselves with such love for others, thus fulfilling God’s sovereign law, we will have no problem with partiality (cf. **Phil. 2:3–4**).

a. This is a good law -- "*royal law*"

**Warren Wiersbe:** Why is “*love thy neighbor*” called the **royal law**?

- For one thing, it was given by the King. ...
- for a second reason: it rules all the other laws. Love is the fulfilling of the law (**Rom. 13:10**). There would be no need for the thousands of complex laws if each citizen truly loved his neighbors.
- But the main reason why this is the royal law is that obeying it makes you a king. Hatred makes a person a slave, but love sets us free from selfishness and enables us to reign like kings.

**John MacArthur:** **Royal** carries the ideas of supreme and sovereign, indicating the absolute and binding authority of the law. When a sovereign king gives an edict, it is incontestably binding on all his subjects. There is no court of appeal or arbitration. According to the Scripture indicates that God’s sovereign, royal law and His biblical commands are synonymous. What James calls the royal law is, in essence, the sum and substance of the complete Word of God, summarized in **Matthew 22:37–40** as perfectly loving God and loving one’s neighbor. Paul says, “*Love is the fulfillment of the law*” (**Rom. 13:10**; cf. **vv. 8–9**). When one loves God with perfect devotion, he does not break any of His commands. When one loves his neighbor perfectly, he never violates another person. Thus perfect love keeps all the commands, thereby fulfilling the whole law.

C. **Leslie Mitton:** that which describes the mode of life expected of those who have entered into the Kingdom of God (**Matt. 5:20**; **7:21**, **Mark 9:47**, etc.).

**Alec Motyer:** The **royal law** is that which comes to us with some special imprimatur from the King. The case for this is strengthened when we recall that the Lord Jesus himself took this law and gave it a special dignity within the whole body of biblical law. Furthermore, this is the sense which best suits the context in James. He has just said that God has made us heirs of the kingdom (*hasileia*, **5**), and now he enunciates the *hasilikon-law*, the kingdom-law, the law which in a very special sense belongs to the king within whose realm we are privileged to live.

Here, then, is a law which comes to us with all the weight of scriptural authority, but which in particular is marked out as being a special concern of our King, something that is specially suited to him and which comes to us bearing the royal arms upon it: *You shall love your neighbour as yourself* (8). How very important the last two words are! They are the key to the whole meaning. If we want to know how we are to love our neighbours, then we must ask a prior question: how do we love ourselves? Never (it is to be hoped!) with an emotional thrill; rarely, as a matter of fact, with much sense of satisfaction; mostly with pretty wholesale disapproval; often with complete loathing—but always with concern, care and attention. . .

The opposite of the royal law (8) is partiality (9). They are contrasted as *‘doing well’* and *‘committing sin’*. The essence of the royal law is that wherever there is need there is an obligation to extend the sort of love we lavish on ourselves; the essence of partiality is to select the recipients of our care on some ground other than that they are in need.

b. This is consistent with the Old Testament Scriptures

2. (:9) Showing Partiality = Breaking the Law

a. *"you are committing sin"*

No way to sugarcoat the offense

b. *"you are convicted by the law as transgressors"*

No way to escape the penalty

3. (:10-11) The Law is a Cohesive Unity

a. Any Infraction (whether perceived as small or great in your mind)  
Renders one Totally Guilty Before God

*"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point,  
he has become guilty of all"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** The extent of guilt may vary, but the reality of it is the same.

**William Barclay:** The Jew was very apt to regard the law as a series of detached injunctions. To keep one of these injunctions was to gain credit; to break one was to incur debt. Therefore, a man could add up the ones he kept and subtract the ones he broke, and, as it were emerge with a credit or a debit balance.

**Douglas Moo:** The law, the will of God for his people, is an indivisible whole, and to violate one part of it is to be at odds with all of it. The unity of the law, with the corollary that it had to be observed in its entirety, was a widely held notion.

b. Each Command was Issued by the Same God

*"For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,'  
also said, 'Do not commit murder.'"*

**Thomas Lea:** The Bible does not say all sins are equal. Stealing a candy bar is not the same as committing adultery. Thinking about murder is not as bad as committing the act. Every sin does bring guilt. It takes only a single sin to make a person a sinner. No act of obedience can compensate for acts of disobedience.

- c. Breaking Any Part of the Law Makes You a Transgressor of the Law  
*"Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law."*

**Dan McCartney:** Because the law is a perfect, complete law, **selective obedience of it is disobedience.** Thus, the one who keeps the whole law save in one respect is a transgressor. This may seem harsh, but at issue is not the totaling up of merits and demerits, where one demerit then wipes out all the merits, but an attitude toward God's law. Violation of even one of its tenets bespeaks the attitude of the doer toward the law: it is an **attitude of rebellion.** The unity of the law is based on the unity of the lawgiver (**James 4:12**), and therefore "disregard to a single point is disregard to the Lawgiver" (**Mayor** 1897: 86). James's application here, of course, is first of all that someone who "loves" wealthy people more than the poor is not truly obeying the command of love. However, the principle is more far-reaching. It undercuts any notion that keeping most of the law most of the time has any value at all, and it should give the lie to the theory that James is advocating the acquisition of merit by obedience.

**Craig Blomberg:** But why these two examples? One answer looks ahead in James, where in **4:2–4** these ideas return, as people "*murder*" out of envy and are "*adulterous*" in their relationship with God. Another option is to look at the Sermon on the Mount in **Mt 5:21–30**, where these are the two laws out of the Ten Commandments that Jesus picks out to expand.  **Davids** adds that murder was "frequently associated with discrimination against the poor and failure to love the neighbor," which would fit James's context well. In any event, his point in **vv. 10–11** is to show that neglecting the poor **transgresses a central tenet of God's will.**

## **V. (:12-13) CONCLUDING CAUTION AGAINST A JUDGMENTAL SPIRIT TOWARDS OTHERS**

### **A. (:12) Fundamental Standard of Judgment**

*"So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty."*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** This is the law which operates, not by outward enforcement, but when the love of Christ inwardly constrains. It is part of the freedom of the children of God, which issues in glad and spontaneous obedience to Him, for the sake of pleasing Him who has done so much for them, and in the glad assurance that what He commands is life's surest guide to deep and lasting happiness.

**Alexander Ross:** We shall be judged... not so much by the observance or neglect of this or that external rule as by the degree in which our heart and life have been dominated by the spirit of love.

**Curtis Vaughan:** Those who make a habit of judging others are inclined to forget that they themselves face a day when God will judge them.

**David Nystrom:** James thus links profession and action (see **v. 12**). His appeal to judgment is not foreign to the thought of the New Testament. Here is a strong reminder of the true center of the Christian life—the perfect law that is planted within us. It is in actions of self-sacrifice and love for others that the mettle of our faith is demonstrated. In a long passage (**Matt. 25:31–46**) Jesus makes the claim that the efficacy of faith is demonstrated in acts of mercy (providing for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the ill-clad, the sick, and the prisoner). For both Jesus and James, in other words, the law that is the fulcrum of judgment is the law of love for one’s neighbor.

**Douglas Moo:** God’s gracious acceptance of us does not end our obligation to obey him; it sets it on a new footing. No longer is God’s law a threatening, confining burden. For the will of God now confronts us as a law that gives freedom (see also **1:25**) – an obligation that is discharged in the joyful knowledge that God has both ‘liberated’ us from the penalty of sin and given us, in his Spirit, the power to obey his will. To use James’ own description, this law is ‘*planted in*’ us and has the power to save us (**Jas 1:21**).

**John MacArthur:** The gospel is the **law of liberty** because it frees those who place their faith in Jesus Christ from the bondage, judgment, and punishment of sin and brings them ultimately to eternal freedom and glory. It liberates us sinners from falsehood and deception and from the curses of death and hell. Even more marvelously, it frees us to obey and serve God, to live faithfully and righteously according to His Word and by the power of His indwelling Spirit. And it frees us to follow our Lord willingly out of love rather than reluctantly out of fear. In every sense, it is the “*royal law*” of God (**v.8**), the divine and wondrous law of liberty.

**Alec Motyer:** James has so far taught us two truths about the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. First, because it is the **royal law**, the law that in a special sense belongs to the king, we would wish to obey it—simply because he would specially desire us to do so. Secondly, because it is a command of the law of God, we must obey it. To dismiss it is to dismiss the facet of the Glory of God which it represents; to leave it to others is to say that it is immaterial whether this part of the Lord’s likeness is seen in me. It comes to us as a revelation of God, and with his authority, therefore we must obey it. But, thirdly, it is part of the law of liberty, and therefore we can obey it. . .

Man is made in the **image of God**. Our true freedom depends on discovering how we can give expression to our true nature. How can we live so as to be like him? James answers this crucial question by his startling expression, the law of liberty. bringing together the two things which people think of as opposites, law and liberty! But, as we have seen, the law is the nature of God expressed in commandments. When we obey his commands, then we are living like him. We are in the image of God; the law is in the image of God. When we bring these two together, we are ‘being ourselves’; we are

truly free. God's law describes the life of true freedom; **obedience opens the door into the free life.**

**B. (:13a) Fallacy of a Merciless Faith -- What Goes Around Comes Around**

*"For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy."*

**Dale Allison:** James switches from the theme of love to the theme of mercy (and from the second person to the third person). Given his concerns, there is no practical difference between the two virtues: loving one's neighbor means showing mercy to the poor, and showing mercy to the poor means loving one's neighbor. Commentators do indeed sometimes wonder why love here gives way to mercy; but the answer is evident. Biblical tradition associates the two divine and human virtues, love and mercy, which in the Psalms often appear in synonymous parallelism. One recalls that the parable of the good Samaritan opens by asking, with reference to the commandment to love in **Lev 19.18**, "*And who is my neighbor?*", and that it comes to its climax by asserting that "*the one who showed mercy*" fulfilled the commandment.

**Curtis Vaughan:** We should be very careful in interpreting this statement. James surely does not mean that by showing mercy to man we procure mercy from God. That would make salvation a matter of human merit and would contradict the whole tenor of Scripture. What James means is that by failing to show compassion on our fellow men we prove ourselves to be utterly destitute of Christian character. Christian people are the children of God. They bear his image; they copy His example. It is therefore impossible for them to fail to share in his compassion, to fail to reflect His spirit of mercy. If one does not show mercy, he thereby shows that he has no vital connection with God.

**R. Kent Hughes:** A deeper terror in James' words is this: favoritism is evidence of an unmerciful spirit. The merciful do not ignore the poor in favor of the privileged, but reach out to them. James is saying that a life characterized by discrimination and favoritism indicates a damned soul! This is frightening moral theology from the brother of Jesus.

Of course, there is an upside in his final sentence: "*Mercy triumphs over judgment*" (v. **13b**). A heart full of mercy through faith in the mercy of God "*triumphs over* [literally boasts against] *judgment.*" A truly merciful Christian heart looks forward to judgment.

The beauty of James' practical, moral approach to faith is that it cuts through all the religious words and rhetoric. We can fool each other so easily, simply by learning to quote a few Bible verses and slip in some evangelical clichés. We can learn to give a proper Christian testimony and deliver it with apparent conviction, but that does not mean our faith is real.

James is saying that real faith is not indicated only by avoiding the big no-no's like murder and adultery, but by how we treat people, especially the needy.

**Craig Blomberg: Martin** warns against diminishing “the severity of this verse,” because “those who fail to demonstrate a living and consistent faith are in danger of facing harsh judgment at the end, for they live as though ethical issues were of no consequence.”

True believers (the ones showing mercy to others) will find God’s mercy in Christ annuls the condemnation they otherwise would have received. The mercy in view in this verse is thus both human and divine. But unbelievers (the ones not showing mercy at all) can look forward only to their just condemnation.

#### **D. (:13b) Fundamental Principle Regarding the Relationship between Mercy and Judgment**

*"mercy triumphs over judgment"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** It may, however, well be that though James has felt it necessary to stress the reality of God's judgment, yet he feels compelled to conclude with a glad acknowledgement that in the end it is God's mercy which has the last word: It triumphs over judgment.

**Douglas Moo:** This can be interpreted as a statement about the relative weight of two attributes of God, the point being that God rejoices in being able to overcome his judgment with his mercy. But it is better to take the mercy as human: our showing mercy triumphs over God’s judgment in that it defends us before God’s judgment seat. As **Hort** describes the image, ‘κρίσις [*judgment*] comes so to speak as the accuser before the tribunal of God, and ἐλεος [*mercy*] stands up fearlessly and as it were defiantly to resist the claim.’ Believers, in themselves, will always deserve God’s judgment: our conformity to the ‘royal law’ is never perfect, as it must be (vv. 10–11). But our merciful attitude and actions will count as evidence of the presence of Christ within us. And it is on the basis of this union with the One who perfectly fulfilled the law for us that we can have confidence for vindication at the judgment.

**Dale Allison:** One suspects (i) that James adopts the traditional sentiment, that divine mercy trumps divine justice, in order to convey that mercy is what matters most and (ii) that the *imitation dei* is implicit: if mercy carries the day with God, it should carry the day with human beings.

**Dan McCartney:** 2:13 serves as a bridge verse to the following section, where James attacks the notion that faith without works can avail anything by reminding the readers that the law’s liberating aspect, the aspect that will lead to eschatological deliverance, is bound up with the requirement and blessing of being merciful, even as God is merciful.

**John MacArthur:** James brings us to the climax of his great argument. Partiality is inconsistent with the Christian faith because the Christian faith is consistent with the nature of God—and God is wholly impartial. Partiality is inconsistent with the purpose and the plan of God in choosing the poor of this world to be spiritually rich. Partiality is inconsistent with loving your neighbor as yourself. Even if it were the only sin a person ever committed, partiality, like all other sins, shatters the entire law of God and makes a

person a transgressor, condemned to hell forever. If you come before the judgment seat of God and He sees that you have lived a life that is merciful to others, He will show mercy to you, because your mercy will testify to your saving faith. It will be true in your case that mercy triumphs over judgment. Contrarily, a person who has lived a life devoid of mercy to others will show himself to be without saving faith.

\* \* \* \* \*

### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we minister to others based on how gracious God has been to us or based on what we think we will receive in return from the other individual? Is our selection of church officers ever influenced by the person's professional or economic status? Do we refrain from preaching on certain controversial topics so as not to offend the rich and powerful in the church?
- 2) What type of prejudices do we have based on judging others on external appearance? We all are guilty of this from time to time. How can we work at viewing others from God's perspective?
- 3) What can the wealthy do to improve the vitality of their faith and protect against the danger of trusting in their own resources? How can they stay humble and not let their money or power affect how they relate to others?
- 4) Why should we be overly impressed with the rich and powerful since we are ourselves children of the King of Kings? Does our concept of church family brotherhood make for a level playing field as we relate to one another?

\* \* \* \* \*

### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**William Barclay:** But the Church must be the one place where all distinctions are wiped out. There can be no distinctions of rank and place and prestige, when men meet in the presence of the God who is the King of glory. There can be no distinctions of merit and worth, when men meet in the presence of the supreme holiness of God. In the presence of that glory all earthly distinctions are less than the dust, and all earthly righteousness are as filthy rags. In the presence of God all men are one.

**Warren Wiersbe:** The religious experts in Christ's day judged Him by their human standards, and they rejected Him. He came from the wrong city, Nazareth of Galilee. He was not a graduate of their accepted schools. He did not have the official approval of the people in power. He had no wealth. His followers were a nondescript mob and included publicans and sinners. *Yet He was the very glory of God!* No wonder Jesus warned the religious leaders, “*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment*” (John 7:24, NIV).



**Curtis Vaughan: Faith transcends Social Distinctions (2:1b-13)**

1. Partiality is inconsistent with faith in Christ (1b-4).
2. Partiality is contrary to the purpose of God (5, 6a).
3. Partiality is not in the best interests of the Christian (6b, 7).
4. Partiality is a violation of the royal law (8-13).

**Andy Atkins:** It is generally true that those who are poor are more likely to be rich in faith. The fact is that they have less to distract them from their faith. That does not mean that the wealthy are incapable of faith. The existence of the church in America is living proof of that fact. We are the wealthiest nation on the earth. It stands to reason that the faith of believers in the Third World is by far greater than our own. Remember, though, that this statement is a general principle and not a law. It is possible for you and I to have a remarkable faith, but it is not generally as likely. Remember the story of the rich young ruler in **Matthew 19:16-25**. The fewer the distractions, the greater the faith.

**David Roper:** The word translated “*show . . . partiality*” is a Greek word that means “to receive by face,” i.e., to judge on the basis of some external or superficial factor--to judge a man by the color of his skin, or the length of his hair, or the kind of clothes he wears, or the sort of academic credentials he carries, or his economic status. This is what James is talking about when he says, “Do not show partiality.” “Do not receive a man by face.” We cannot judge on the basis of externals. This word is used a number of other times in the New Testament. But in every other case God is the subject of the sentence and it is expressed negatively. “God does not show partiality.” “God is not a respecter of persons.” “God does not receive people by face.” God doesn't judge by externals; he judges the heart.

**Brian Racer: Passing the Test of Partiality**

Introduction:

Recent movie *Radio* has theme of partiality in it; how do we recognize in each person the value God sees as someone made in His image?

Need to examine our culture and our church and our personal lives for instances of showing partiality

**I. (:1-4) Partiality Damages the Testimony of Christians**

A. Stop showing Partiality

Command of Prohibition; apparently some level of failure that James needs to correct; does not mean that certain people are not worthy of special honor; deals with the condition of our heart more than with our actions

B. A Hypothetical Example Will Illustrate

C. Your Actions Betray Your Heart

**II. (:5-7) Partiality Damages Your Ability to Respond Appropriately to Each Person**

Five Rhetorical Questions:

- A. Didn't God choose the Poor to be Rich in Faith?
- B. Didn't God choose the Poor to be Heirs of His Kingdom?  
cf. **Matt. 5** "*poor in spirit*"
- C. Don't the Rich Exploit and "Lord it Over" You?
- D. Don't the Rich Use the Courts to Bring Trouble to You?
- E. Don't the Rich Slander the Name of Your Lord?
- F. Partiality Renders You Incapable of Significant Ministry in Either Class' Life  
The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor  
The wicked does not understand such concern (**Prov. 29:7**)

### **III. (:8-13) Partiality Shows a Lack of Discernment about God's Law**

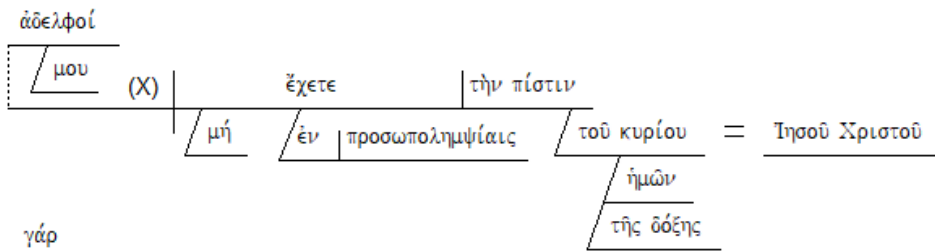
- A. (:8-9) The Royal Law is Either Kept or Broken to the Extent We Love Our neighbor or Not (see **Prov. 29:14; 20:28**)
- B. (:10-11) Partiality isn't a "Little Sin"
- C. (:12-13) Recognize that to Break God's Law is to be Broken by it  
Law of God is a cohesive whole; cf. a vase – if it is cracked at all, it is not the same

#### Conclusion:

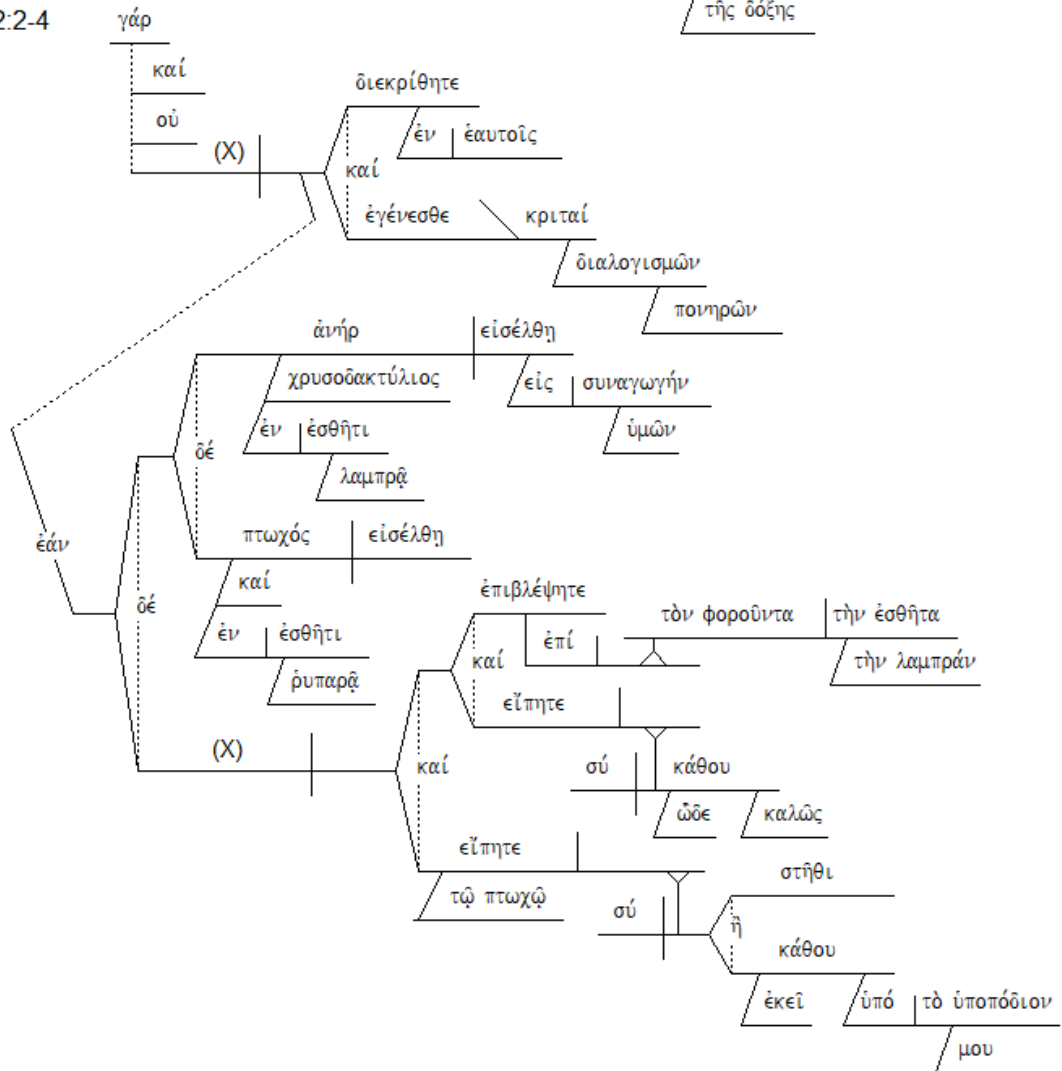
- People are all the same; some good, some bad ... etc.
- Don't rush to partial judgment;
- Are we marked by kindness and mercy towards all?
- Our heart must be open to each person God brings into our lives;
- Goal: how can I minister appropriately to that person?

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

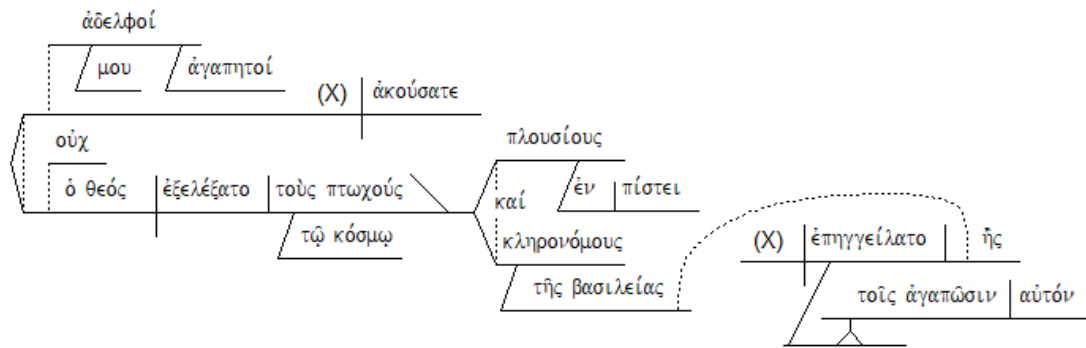
Jam 2:1



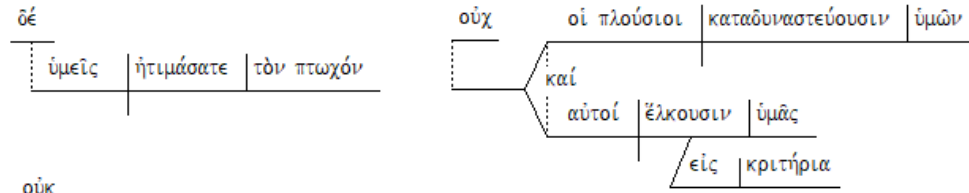
Jam 2:2-4



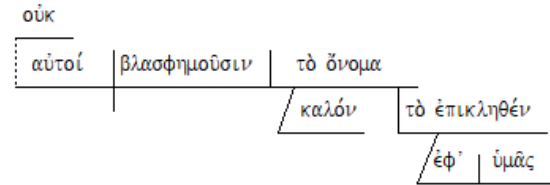
Jam 2:5



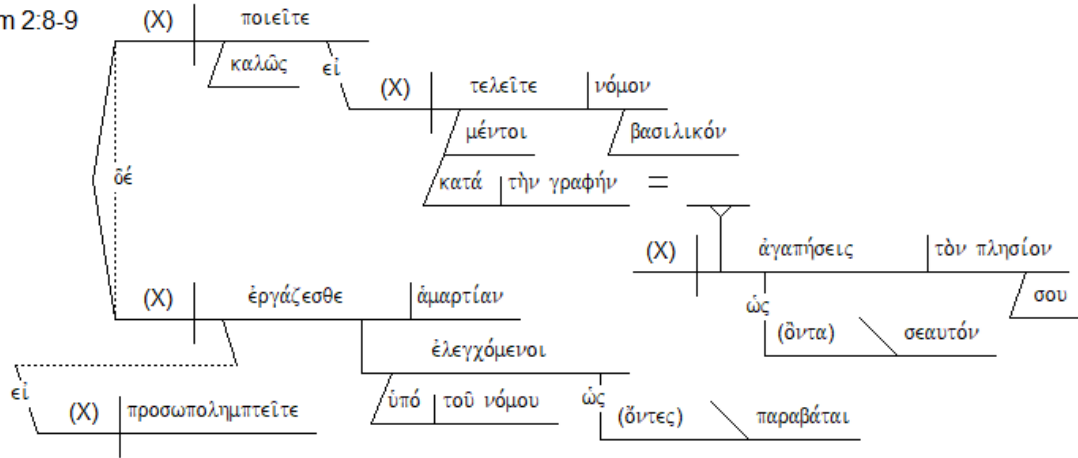
Jam 2:6

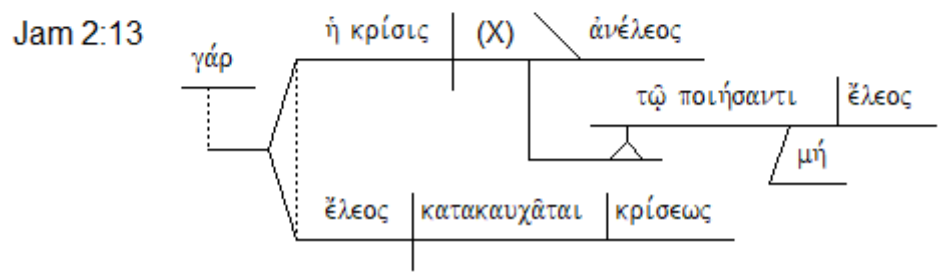
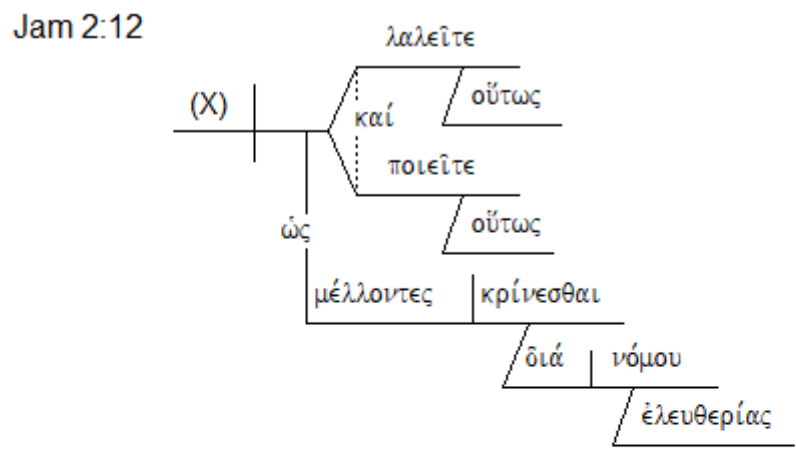
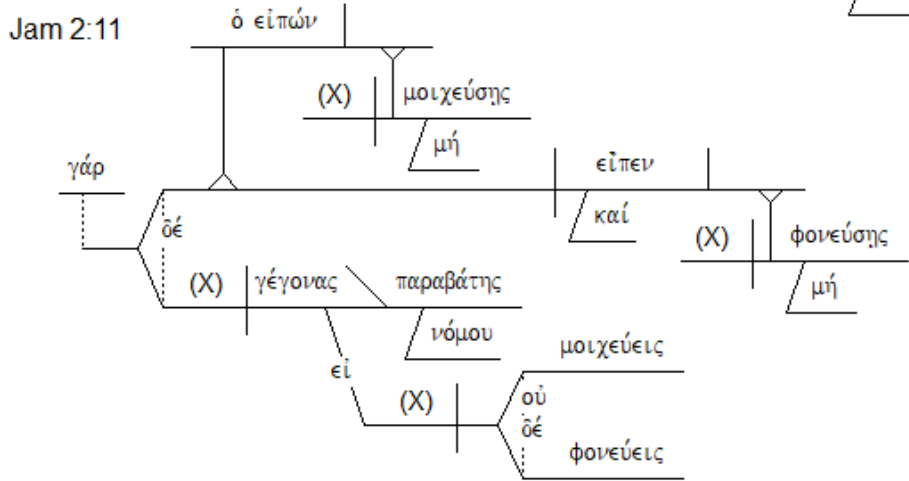
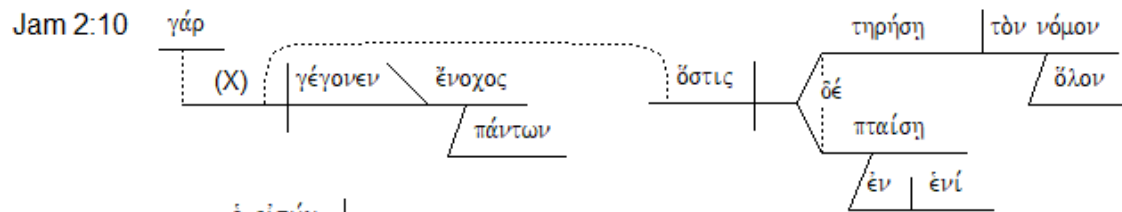


Jam 2:7



Jam 2:8-9





TEXT: JAMES 2:14-26

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT OBEDIENT DEEDS IS WORTHLESS

**BIG IDEA:**

**OBEDIENT DEEDS (GOOD WORKS) = THE TEST (OR EVIDENCE) OF GENUINE FAITH**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Dale Allison:** James appeals to Abraham to teach that justification is by works and not by faith alone. Romans and Galatians, by contrast, appeal to Abraham to teach that justification is not by works but by faith. Readers of the NT have often wondered what to make of this apparent contradiction. Augustine wrote much on the issue, and whether justification is by faith alone, as Paul argues, or must be accompanied by works, as James clearly says, became a standard theological question for the medieval schools. The Reformation greatly enlarged the debate, which has continued ever since. The upshot is that the relevant books, chapters, and articles are as the sands of the sea. Indeed, the secondary literature on **Jas 2:14-26** seemingly exceeds that dedicated to the rest of James put together.

**Curtis Vaughan:** Re **differences** between Paul and James --

1) First, the situations faced by the two writers were entirely different. Paul had in mind those who denied the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith; he was refuting their insistence that one must observe the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic law in order to be saved. James, on the other hand, had in mind those who, by the barrenness of their lives, distorted the doctrine of salvation by faith; he was insisting that any faith worthy of the name must express itself in deeds...

2) Second, by “*justified*” Paul means acquitted, declared to be righteous, treated as righteous. As used by James the word means having a just claim to one's profession, shown to be righteous, vindicated. Paul means the initial justification (acquittal) before God that brings one into a saving relationship with God. James means justification (vindication) of one's profession at any after-moment in the Christian life, and finally before the throne of judgment.

3) Third, the intention of James was not to contrast two opposing methods of salvation ... but two kinds of faith -- one genuine, the other spurious; one alive, the other dead; one that saves, another that does not save. What he says may be summed up in three statements:

- (1) Genuine faith is not an empty claim (**verses 14-17**);
- (2) Genuine faith is not mere acceptance of a creed (**verses 18-20**); and
- (3) Genuine faith is faith that produces an obedient life (**verses 21-26**).

**Peter Davids:** That which will be useless in the final judgment is a faith lacking works. The hypothetical situation introduced by *ἐάν* is described as a person “claiming to have

faith.” And a claim it is, for whatever the content of the faith in terms of orthodox belief, pious expressions, prayers, etc., it appears only in the person’s verbalizations (and ritual actions) but not in such deeds as would prove the reality of an eschatological hope. The emptiness of such profession is not new in the NT. One has only to scan the prophets to discover a condemnation of ritual piety without practical justice for the poor (cf. **Miranda**, 111–160). John the Baptist is also reported as demanding deeds be added to faith (**Lk. 3:7–14**), and Jesus warned that it would not do to enter the last judgment merely verbalizing his lordship (**Mt. 7:15–27**; cf. **5:16**). Paul also reiterates this theme (**Rom. 1:5**; **2:6–8**; **6:17–18**; **1 Cor. 13:2**; **15:58**; **2 Cor. 10:5–6**; **Gal. 6:4–6**). James has already mentioned this theme in **1:22–27**; here he underlines it. Works are not an “added extra” to faith, but are an **essential expression** of it

**Dan McCartney**: This passage contains many marks of the type of Greek discourse known as **diatribe**, especially the use of rhetorical irony, hyperbolic examples, colorful metaphors and analogies, and a hypothetical interlocutor (see **Ropes** 1916: 12–16; **Burge** 1977; see also the various rhetorical observations in **Dibelius** 1975: 124–206).

This particular diatribe comprises three subsections:

- (1) inactive faith is useless and dead (**2:14–17**);
- (2) two types of false faith: that which separates faith and works and that which confuses faith with intellectual assent to a creed (**2:18–19**);
- (3) two examples of genuine faith: Abraham and Rahab, concluding with a reiteration of the principle that inactive faith is dead (**2:20–26**).

**Craig Blomberg**: Main Idea: Those who claim to be believers but offer not the slightest aid to Christians in dire need, whom they are in a position to help, demonstrate the emptiness of their claims. True saving faith will by nature produce good works, as illustrated by examples as diverse as Abraham and Rahab.

**Ralph Martin**: James, therefore, is intent on defining the **scope of saving faith**, which he sets in direct contrast to (i) mere sentiment that never gets beyond a pious expression (**v 16**), and (ii) an intellectual conviction (voiced in **v 19**), which he dismisses scornfully as the mark of a mere dilettante (**v 20a**: “*you empty-headed person*”). This discussion takes a step further the condemnation already given in **1:11, 23–27** of those rich people in his community who are vulnerable to the point of self-deception by resting content simply with mental agreement and formal concurrence with “*the implanted word that is able to save your lives*” (**v 21**). The unit in **2:14–26** picks up his earlier judgment on the peril of a self-deceiving attitude that leads to a person’s becoming no better than a “*forgetful hearer*,” rather than a “*doer of work*” (ποιητῆς ἔργου, **1:25**), and falling prey to mere verbal profession (**1:26**). The upshot is that such a person’s religion is “*futile*” (μάταιος, **1:26b**).

### **Workless “Faith” Exposed (2:14–26)**

- a. An illustration of workless faith: People who claim to be Christians but fail to help poverty-stricken fellow believers are in fact not saved (**vv. 14–17**).
  - i. The thesis stated as a rhetorical question: Can workless faith save? (**v. 14**).

- ii. The illustration unfolded: James considers the example of Christians who refuse to help their fellow-believers in time of need (vv. 15–16).
- iii. The thesis restated as a declaration: Workless faith cannot save (v. 17).

b. An objection considered: Despite allegations to the contrary, faith and works are inseparable (vv. 18–26).

- i. The objection posed: Some may allege that faith and works are separable (v. 18a).
- ii. The objection refuted: Faith and works are inseparable (vv. 18b–26).
  - (a) The refutation in a nutshell: Without works it is impossible to demonstrate the presence of a living faith (v. 18b).
  - (b) The refutation illustrated negatively: Demons have faith without works but are not saved (v. 19).
  - (c) The refutation illustrated positively: Abraham and Rahab demonstrated their faith by their works (vv. 20–25).
  - (d) The initial thesis again restated: Faith without works is dead (v. 26).

**John MacArthur:** In **James 2:14–20**, James provides three characteristics of such false, dead, and worthless faith.

1. It is marked by empty confession (v. 14);
2. false compassion (vv. 15–17);
3. and shallow conviction (vv. 18–20).

## **I. (:14) FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION = THEME OF THE BOOK WHAT USE IS FAITH ALONE?**

**Simple Equation:** Professing Faith - Works Not = Saving Faith

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

**Craig Blomberg:** “Works” here are not the Pauline “works of the law,” such as circumcision, but rather the works of love, such as caring for those who are in need, not showing favoritism, being humble, or being slow to speak. In essence, works are the sum total of a changed life brought about by faith. Where “Paul denies the need for ‘pre-conversion works,’” James emphasizes the absolute necessity of post-conversion works. James calls a “faith” that does not bring about a changed life dead, lifeless, and useless. It does not work to save a person, for it cannot, lacking life itself. As **Dauids** summarizes, “a ‘faith’ which is purely doctrinal and does not result in pious action (i.e., charity) is a dead sham, totally useless for salvation.”

**John MacArthur:** Jesus began encountering **superficial believers** early in His ministry. “When He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone



to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man” (John 2:23–25). He did not entrust Himself to them because they did not belong to Him. Their belief amounted to the acknowledgment of certain truths about Jesus, but they did not trust in Him as Savior or surrender to Him as Lord.

**Dan McCartney:** In both 1:21 and 5:20 James refers to the **salvation** of “souls,” and this is the salvation spoken of here. It refers to the deliverance from eschatological judgment (Dibelius 1975: 152) and hence deliverance from death, and the reception of the “*crown of life*” (1:12) from God. Without “faith-full” behavior, the claim to have faith will not itself eventuate in deliverance from judgment, because it is an invalid claim.

**Douglas Moo:** James does not in any way question the vital and central importance of faith. We miss James’ point in this paragraph if we do not understand this. James does not dispute the power of faith to justify or to save. What he is concerned to do is to **define the true nature of faith**. As he does throughout his letter, James attacks superficial and inconsistent Christians who claim they have faith but fail to act on the basis of their faith. Such a ‘faith’, James says, amounts to no more than a verbal profession – such as the confession that ‘*God is one*’ (v. 19). A ‘faith’ that is apart from ‘*deeds*’, or ‘*works*’ (vv. 20, 26), is dead (vv. 17 and 26) and ‘*useless*’ (v. 20). It does not have the power to save (v. 14) or to justify (v. 24). True biblical faith issues in ‘*deeds*’ (vv. 14, 17); it works along with active obedience and is ‘*completed by*’ works (v. 22). It is the kind of faith exhibited by both the revered ‘*father*’ of faith, Abraham (vv. 21–23), and Rahab, the immoral outcast (v. 25). It is absolutely vital to understand that the main point of this argument, expressed three times (in vv. 17, 20 and 26), is not that works are a kind of second, unrelated, addition to faith but that **genuine faith naturally produces works**. That is its very nature.

## **II. (:15-17) SIMPLE ILLUSTRATION = HELPING A NEEDY BROTHER -- FAITH ALONE NEVER FED ANYONE / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS**

### **A. Immediate Pressing Need**

#### 1. Involves a Close Family Member

*"If a brother or sister"*

Not talking about the masses in China here.

#### 2. Involves Basic Daily Needs for Existence

a. *"is without clothing"*

b. *"and in need of daily food"*

Not talking about wants or desires, but basic needs; the things which God says He will provide and with which we should be content.

**John MacArthur:** *Without clothing* does not mean stark naked but rather poorly and insufficiently clothed, suggesting they were cold and miserable due to lack of proper clothes. Similarly, *in need of daily food* does not necessarily indicate starvation but rather insufficient nourishment for normal, healthy living. The reference is to those who are **deprived of the necessities of life**.

## **B. Indictment of Empty Words Without Practical Help**

### 1. Empty Words

*"and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled'"*

**Daniel Doriani:** True faith meets the clear and present needs of brothers or sisters. False faith greets the needy brother with kind words and warm wishes, but no action. Instead of helping, false faith offers a false blessing. The blessing is “*Go, I wish you well.*” “*Go in peace*” is actually a common biblical blessing (e.g., **Judg. 18:6; 1 Sam. 20:42; 2 Kings 5:19; Luke 7:50; 8:48**). It means, “*May God go with you.*” The statement itself is not objectionable. The problem is that it functions “as a religious cover for a failure to act.” “*May God go with you*” stands in the place of “*I will go with you.*”

### 2. Without Practical Help

*"and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body"*

### 3. Worthless

*"what use is that?"*

## **C. Irrefutable Conclusion / Refrain**

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

**John Calvin:** It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone.

**C. Leslie Mitton:** A profession of sympathy which is no more than polite talk, and which does not lead to helpful action, when such action is in our power, is mere sentimentalism.

**Thomas Lea:** A verbal testimony alone is not an adequate evidence that true saving faith is present. Only works of obedience can prove the presence of genuine faith. **Verse 15** provides an example of such deeds. . .

A faith not accompanied by action, that is faith alone, having no works to distinguish it, is dead. Anything with life produces fruit. The living are the acting, creating things that reveal their nature and character. Faith in Jesus produces actions revealing the nature and character of Jesus. The dead lie still doing nothing. So faith that lies still, inactive, proves it is dead. True faith brings salvation and life, not death.

**Dan McCartney:** Indeed, such a faith is less than worthless; it is repulsive. James pulls no punches here: this faith devoid of deeds is not just sick or in danger of dying; it is νεκρά (*nekra, dead*), a corpse (an evaluation repeated in **2:26**). Religious Jews, for

whom contact with a dead body imparted ceremonial pollution, would have regarded such an image as especially repugnant, but dead bodies are repulsive to Gentiles as well.

**David Nystrom:** As Ropes notes, the contrast is not so much between faith and deeds (although this stands in the background) but between dead, useless faith and living faith. Faith alone without works is as dead as a body without breath. Deeds are not something extra to be added to faith; they are a necessary constituent part of faith. Without deeds faith is not really true faith—it is only a shadow, a shade, an impostor of true faith.

### **III. (:18-20) SHOW AND TELL -- FAITH ALONE DOES NOT DIFFERENTIATE YOU FROM DEMONS / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS**

**William Barclay:** Here James is meeting a possible objection. He is thinking of an objector who says, "Faith is a fine thing; and works are fine things. They are both perfectly real and genuine manifestations of real religion. But the one man does not necessarily possess both. One man will have faith and another man will have works...."

#### **A. (:18) Show is Necessary -- Only Works Make Faith Visible**

*"But someone may well say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'"*

**Daniel Doriani:** False religion takes religion classes in a university. True religion seeks the living God. False religion analyzes the historical and social contexts of the Bible. True religion studies Scripture itself to hear the very voice of God. False religions know what Christian creeds assert about God. True religion knows God himself. False religion is dead, because it knows Christianity, but not Christ. True religion believes and prays and works. James 2 contrasts true and false faith in four case studies.

**Dan McCartney:** The most common approach among recent commentaries, and the one adopted here, is to treat the hypothetical interlocutor's comment not as specifically identifying his own faith as opposed to James's works, but as using the "you" and "I" as a way of saying "One person says this, another that." Thus, the position James is setting himself over against is the notion that works and faith are somehow separable, and either faith or works is a viable approach. James insists that faith and works are inseparable. Although this suffers from poor attestation of such use of "you" and "I," it is the solution that does the least violence to natural use of language.

**David Nystrom:** His argument is: (1) Faith and deeds are separate entities; for (2) if faith is validated by deeds, then it can be said to have some existence prior to this validation; thus, (3) faith is both prior to and superior to deeds; and (4) the demons believe without deeds, so therefore a non-saving faith does indeed exist. While both

James and his opponents believe that a faith with deeds exists and is a saving faith, James cannot agree with his opponents that there is a saving “faith” that exists without deeds.

In response James argues that (1) faith and deeds cannot be sundered; (2) the only faith that is worthy of the name is faith that expresses itself in deeds; and (3) faith without deeds is false, since it “does not work”; it fails to accomplish its purpose. . . Faith has a purpose, and that purpose is for the word to grow within us (**1:18**) until we are mature and complete (**1:4**). Any “faith” that does not move toward the goal of salvation is therefore not “true” faith. The idea is similar to that of **Isaiah 55:11**, where God declares that his word always accomplishes the purpose for which he sends it. Anything less is evidence that what is in view is not the word of God.

**B. (:19) Tell is Not Sufficient -- Even Demons Agree Intellectually with the Truth**

*"You believe that God is one. You do well;  
the demons also believe, and shudder."*

**Dan McCartney:** In **2:19** James challenges another false notion, that faith is simply the acceptance of doctrine.

**William Barclay:** What James is arguing against is, in fact, the first kind of belief, the acceptance of a fact without allowing the fact to have any influence upon life. The devils are intellectually convinced of the existence of God; they, in fact, tremble before God; for all that they are none the less devils; their belief has not in the least altered them.

**Craig Blomberg:** To show that correct doctrine is not enough, James appeals to demonic “faith.” Satan and all his evil hordes are monotheists; even they know there is only one God and that his loyalties remain undivided. The demons do something about their belief: they tremble violently when faced with the one true God of the universe. The word “tremble” (φρίσσοουσιν) means more than just slight shuddering; it refers to uncontrollable, uncontrollable, violent shaking from extreme fear. James asserts that the demons can match the original challenger’s theology point for point, and they are overwhelmed by the truth of these doctrines, but they remain condemned. Thus one cannot have “workless” doctrine, because that leaves one salvifically in the same position as the demons! The comparison, however, should not be pressed to say that the objector is actually demonized. Rather, James uses an extreme example to make his point that the demons are so certain of the existence of the one God that they are horrified, but even that does not bring them to salvation (because their knowledge does not change their behavior?).

**David Platt:** James makes three things about faith abundantly clear. First, faith is not mere intellectual assent. In **verse 19** he says, “*You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder.*” Every Jewish man or woman believed the Shema in **Deuteronomy 6:4**: “*Listen, Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.*” The demons believe the Shema. Demons believe a lot of things that we

believe—they believe in the existence of God, the deity of Christ, and the presence of heaven and hell. They know Christ is the eternal Judge, and they know that Christ alone is able to save. I fear that countless men and women have bought into the soul-damning idea that mere intellectual assent to the truth of God in Christ is enough to save, and the reality is that these people are no better off than the demons themselves.

Second, **faith is not simply an emotional response**. According to **James 2:19**, the faith of demons is not just intellectual but also emotional. The demons believe and they “*shudder*.” They are affected by the truth of God; they tremble at it. I wonder how many people define their faith today merely by the emotions they feel at any given time.

The third point James makes about faith is that **faith involves willful obedience**. You show your faith not just by what you think or by what you feel but by what you do. **Faith acts**. If your faith consists merely of listening to the Word, talking about the Word, or feeling a certain way about the Word, your faith is dead. Faith acts on the Word. Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our lives.

#### **C. (:20) Irrefutable Conclusion / Refrain**

*"But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow:  
faith without works is useless"*

### **IV. (:21-26) TWO OT PROOF CASES -- WORKS VINDICATE THE REALITY OF OUR FAITH / FAITH ALONE IS WORTHLESS**

**Craig Blomberg**: James realizes his listeners may not yet be convinced, so he turns to two excellent models from the Hebrew Scriptures, sandwiched in between three reaffirmations of his main point.

**David Platt**: Main Idea: The faith that saves always produces good works and is based on God's saving work in Jesus Christ.

#### **I. Two Pictures of Faith (2:20)**

- A. Dead faith, which does not save
- B. Living faith, which does save

#### **II. Two Pictures of Righteousness (2:21)**

- A. Positional righteousness: how we stand before God
- B. Practical righteousness: how we live before God

#### **III. Two Pictures of Works (2:22-24)**

- A. Works fueled by the flesh, which do not honor God
- B. Works that are the fruit of faith, which bring great glory to God

#### **IV. Two Pictures of Justification (2:24)**

- A. Initial justification

B. Final justification

**V. Two Truths to Remember**

A. Salvation is through faith

B. Faith works

**A. (:21-24) Case of Abraham**

1. (:21) Sacrifice of Isaac Vindicated the Faith of Abraham

*"Was not Abraham our father justified by works,  
when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?"*

**R. Kent Hughes:** What exactly did Abraham do in offering Isaac? **Genesis 22** gives the full account, and we must note as we look at this experience that the offering of Isaac took place a full thirty years after **Genesis 15:6** when “[Abraham] *believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*” Now, in **Genesis 22**, Abraham was well over one hundred years old when God said to him, “*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you*” (**Genesis 22:2**). This is easily the most shocking command ever given to any human being by God! We can imagine the sickening horror that must have spread over Abraham’s soul. It was contrary to his common sense, his natural affections, his lifelong dreams. This makes his ready obedience almost as equally shocking as with the first glow of dawn, without a word to aged Sarah, Abraham saddled his donkey, quietly called for two servants and his son Isaac, split wood for the sacrificial pyre, and began the terrible journey (**Genesis 22:3**).

How could he do it? we wonder. Our text gives us the answer: “*On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, ‘Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you’*” (**Genesis 22:4, 5**). Abraham was confident they would return together! This was because, as the writer of Hebrews reveals, “*He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back*” (**Hebrews 11:19**; cf. **Hebrews 11:17, 18**). Abraham believed God would bless him through Isaac, giving him offspring as numerous as the stars. God would certainly therefore resurrect his son!

2. (:22) Works Complement and Perfect our Faith

*"You see that faith was working with his works,  
and as a result of the works, faith was perfected"*

**Craig Blomberg:** Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son not only showed his faith to be real, but also through his obedience his faith actually “grew up.” Abraham’s faith was not mature until he acted upon it. In the process he learned more about God’s character, further bolstering his faith. His confidence in God’s trustworthiness was “brought to the goal for which it was intended.”

**Douglas Moo:** But the faith of Abraham and God's verdict of acquittal were 'filled up', given their ultimate significance, when Abraham 'perfected' his faith with works and the angel of the Lord reasserted God's verdict: 'now I know that you fear God' (**Gen. 22:12**). James does not deny that Abraham was given a righteous standing with God through his faith, long before he offered Isaac in obedience to God. But he wants to emphasize that Abraham's faith was a vital, active faith and that God's verdict was reconfirmed on the basis of that activity. The initial declaration of righteousness on the basis of faith is given its ultimate meaning and validity through the final declaration of righteousness on the basis of a 'faith that works'.

### 3. (:23) Role of Faith in Justification

*"and the Scripture was fulfilled which says,  
'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as  
righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God."*

**John MacArthur:** It is important to understand that the Greek verb *dikaioō* (*justified*) has two general meanings. The first pertains to acquittal, that is, to declaring and treating a person as righteous. That is its meaning in relationship to salvation and is the sense in which Paul almost always uses the term. . .

The second meaning of *dikaioō* pertains to **vindication, or proof of righteousness**. It is used in that sense a number of times in the New Testament, in relation to God as well as men. Paul says, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, 'That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged'" (**Rom. 3:4**). He writes to Timothy that Jesus Christ "was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated [from *dikaioō*] in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (**1 Tim. 3:16**). Jesus commented that "wisdom is vindicated [justified] by all her children" (**Luke 7:35**).

It is the second sense in which James uses *dikaioō* in **2:21**, asking rhetorically, *Was not Abraham our father justified by works?* He explains that Abraham's supreme demonstration of that justification occurred when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar, which, as noted above, happened many years after his justification by faith recorded in **Genesis 15:6**. It was when he offered up Isaac that the whole world could perceive the reality of his faith, that it was genuine rather than spurious, obedient rather than deceptive, living rather than dead.

### 4. (:24) Irrefutable Conclusion / Refrain

*"You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone."*

**David Platt:** What James is confronting in his letter is different from what Paul is confronting. Paul wants us to avoid thinking we need to work in order to earn salvation. Then there's the danger James wants us to avoid: thinking that works are not necessary as evidence of our salvation. Again, **works are not the basis of our justification**. Final justification is not based on our works, but rather James is wanting us to see that when

we stand before God on the day of judgment, it will be clear whether we had real, true, and authentic faith or dead, demonic faith.

You may ask, “How will I know if my faith was real?” And the answer is, “**Was there any fruit?**” Because if there was faith, then there will be fruit. Paul says Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness at the moment he believed. That leads us to ask questions like, “How do we know Abraham’s faith was real?” And James tells us Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. This can only be the fruit of faith. When Paul says, “*For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law*” (**Rom 3:28**), he is saying a man is justified by wholehearted trust in the grace of Christ, not from any work he can do to earn his way to God. And James is in the background saying, “Amen!” And when James says, “*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone*” (**Jas 2:24**), he is saying a man is not justified by a cold, intellectual belief in Jesus that even the demons have. Instead, a man is justified by **a faith that produces radical obedience and sacrifice**. And Paul is in the background saying, “Amen!”

## **B. (:25-26) Case of Rahab**

### 1. (:25) Rahab also was Justified by Works

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

**R. Kent Hughes:** Abraham was a patriarch, Rahab a prostitute. He was moral, she was immoral. He was the original Jew, she a Gentile woman. He was upwardly mobile, she lived in the gutter.

**Peter Davids:** Her actions are those of receiving hospitably (ὕποδεξαμένη in its classical sense) the spies (ἄγγέλους, normally used of heavenly messengers in the NT; the LXX follows the MT, using νεανίσκοι or ἄνδρες, while Hebrews and 1 Clement use the clearer κατάσκοποι) and then saving their lives (ἑτέρα ὁδοῦ ἐκβαλοῦσα, which contains the complex idea of her refusal to betray them to the king, her sending them out of the city through her window—thus the appropriateness of ἐκβάλλω—and her directing them to avoid the pursuit). This was seen in later Jewish literature as part of Israel’s treasury of merit (**Marmorstein**, *Doctrine*, 86).

**John MacArthur:** Abraham’s and Rahab’s justification by works was not demonstrated by their profession of faith, their worship or ritual, or any other religious activity. In both cases it was demonstrated by putting every thing that was dear to them on the line for the Lord, entrusting it to Him without qualification or reservation. They were supremely committed to the Lord, whatever the cost. It is in the vortex of the great plans, decisions, and crossroads of life—where ambitions, hopes, dreams, destinies, and life itself are at stake—where true faith unfailingly reveals itself.

### 2. (:26) Irrefutable Conclusion / Refrain

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



**Warren Wiersbe:** You could not find two more different persons! Abraham was a Jew; Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was a godly man, but Rahab was a sinful woman, a harlot. Abraham was the friend of God, while Rahab belonged to the enemies of God. What did they have in common? **Both exercised saving faith in God.**

**Alexander Ross:** James concludes his argument here by making use of this figure of the body and the soul. When body and spirit are separated, death and putrefaction result: so, if faith be separated from works, it is a dead faith; it is *'dead in itself'* (v. 17). Faith of that kind indicates the absence of all real spiritual life, and shows that spiritual death and corruption still reign.

**Craig Blomberg:** Here is the final answer to the question first raised in 2:14, *"is such faith able to save a person?"* The answer, throughout all the arguments and examples of 2:14–26, has been a resounding “no.” Faith that does not reveal itself in works—in a changed lifestyle that glorifies God and seeks his heart for the world—is dead, lifeless, workless, and worthless. In reality, it is not faith at all; it is only the shell or the corpse of faith. As **Davids** declares, “dead orthodoxy has absolutely no power to save and may in fact even hinder the person from coming to living faith, a faith enlivened by works of charity.” . . .

**Gench** shows keen insight when she observes that James’s question is not “what good is faith without works?” but “what good is it to say you have faith but do not have works.” Nothing in this passage suggests that James believes in two kinds of faith—one that is mature and one that is nominal. One either has saving faith or one does not.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can the Apostle Paul write that a man is justified by faith apart from works while James emphasizes that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone? Where do you find the same emphasis of James in the preaching of John the Baptist and of Christ? Do Paul and James use words like *"justify"* in exactly the same way or with a slightly different emphasis?
- 2) Since much of our benevolent giving is to organizations which help the poor and the needy rather than directly to the needy individuals themselves, what do we lose as a result of this disconnect and this lack of personal involvement?
- 3) What acts of obedience and what good works can we point to in our lives as having helped to perfect our faith? As we examine our own lives, how can we be sure that we have exercised saving faith and not just an intellectual or emotional response?
- 4) Why do evangelicals spend so little time discussing the reality and significance of the role of angels and demons?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Warren Wiersbe:** Someone has said that faith is not “believing in spite of evidence, but obeying in spite of consequence.” When you read **Hebrews 11**, you meet men and women who acted upon God's Word, no matter what price they had to pay. Faith is not some kind of nebulous feeling that we work up; faith is confidence that God's Word is true, and conviction that acting upon that Word will bring His blessing...

There are three kinds of faith, only one of which is true saving faith:

- 1) Dead Faith (:14-17) -- the intellect alone
- 2) Demonic Faith (:18-19) -- intellect plus emotions
- 3) Dynamic Faith (:20-26) (also must involve the will)

**William Barclay:** These two examples show fully and finally that faith and deeds are not opposites; they are, in fact, inseparables. No man will ever be moved to action without faith; and no man's faith is real until it moves him to action. Faith and deeds are opposite sides of a man's experience of God.

**George Guthrie:** This emphasis on the relationship between faith and righteous living is one greatly needed in the modern church. In America especially, the important emphasis on grace (inherited from the Reformation), and in some quarters the focus particularly on one dimension of salvation (i.e., conversion) apart from ongoing transformation and righteous living, has resulted in large portions of the church tragically illustrating a vapid, inadequate faith. In response to James, we must again emphasize that one part of what it means to follow Christ faithfully is to live for him righteously in this world. This righteous living does not earn entrance to the covenant but rather manifests that the new covenant life is present. Those who simply give mental assent, failing especially to take up the tasks of practical ministry in the body (e.g., meeting the needs of the poor), must be called into question as to the validity of their faith. May God grant us the grace to understand and live out the true relationship between faith and works in the years to come.

**R.V.G. Tasker:** **Faith is a practical response to the divine initiative.** It is an answer to a heavenly call, and the call is always a call to obedience. Therefore obedience, expressing itself in action, is the inevitable and immediate issue of faith. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.* In other words, the life of sanctification dates from the moment a man is justified by faith, when he surrenders himself to Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour, through whose saving death apart from any merit of his own he is counted righteous in the sight of God; but the life of sanctification is not a life of faith only; it is a life of what might be called faith-obedience.

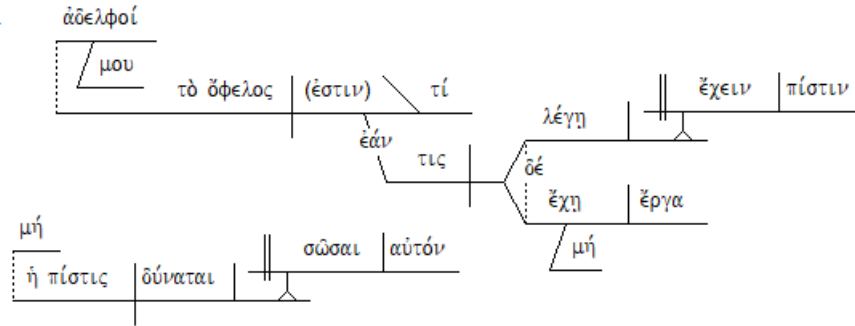
**R. Kent Hughes: Diagram of Four Illustrations:**

<p><b>A<sup>1</sup></b></p>	<p>(verses 15–17)</p> <p>(a) Spurious faith is ineffectual manward: the hungry are sent away unfed (15–16).</p> <p>(b) Summary statement (17): faith, lacking evidential work, is dead.</p>
<p><b>B<sup>1</sup></b></p>	<p>(18–20)</p> <p>(a) Spurious faith is ineffectual godward: it gives no peace with God, for demons have faith of a sort but it leaves them in terror (18–19).</p> <p>(b) Summary statement (20): faith, separated from the works which validate it, is barren.</p>
<p><b>B<sup>2</sup></b></p>	<p>(21–24)</p> <p>(a) Genuine faith is effectual godward: like Abraham’s faith, it shows itself in works of obedience to the will of God (21–23).</p> <p>(b) Summary statement: works of obedience provide evidence that faith is true, justifying faith (24).</p>
<p><b>A<sup>2</sup></b></p>	<p>(25–26)</p> <p>(a) Genuine faith reaches out in costly compassion to people at risk (25).</p> <p>(b) Summary statement (26): it is the activity of ‘works’ that reveals faith as a living entity.</p>

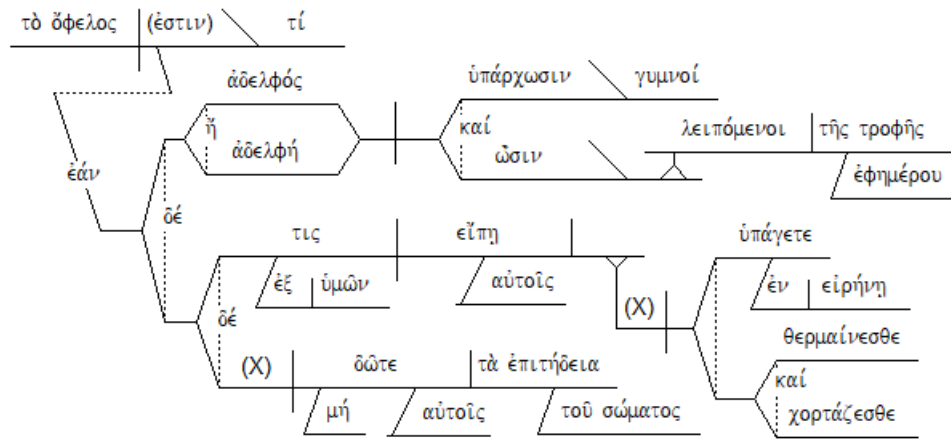
We ought to start rather with the fact that unity of body and spirit is required for life, and so also there must be a **unity of faith and works**. They must belong together in a living Christian experience. **A. Barnes** puts it exactly: “There is as much necessity that faith and works should be united to constitute true religion, as there is that body and soul should be united to constitute a living man.”

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

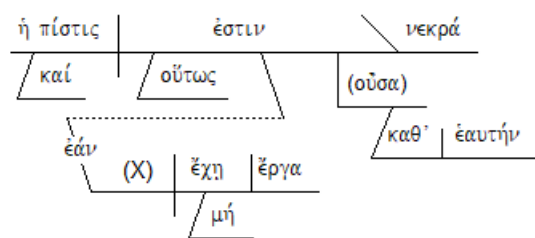
Jam 2:14



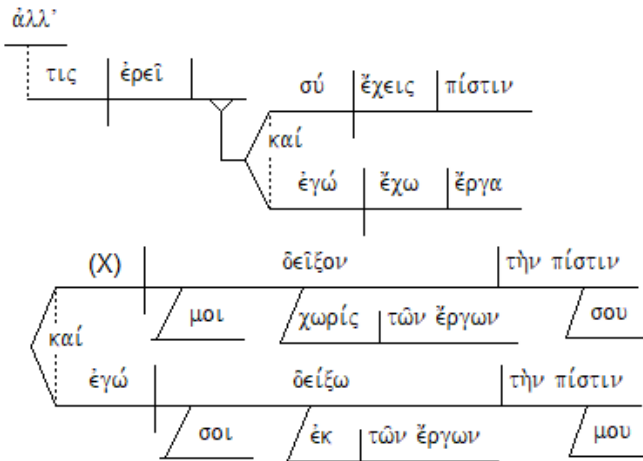
Jam 2:15-16



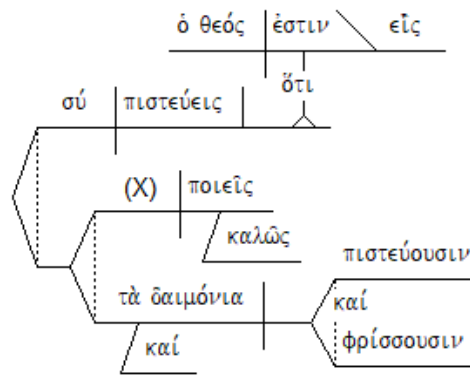
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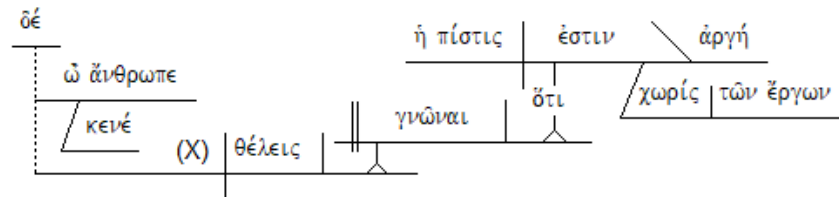
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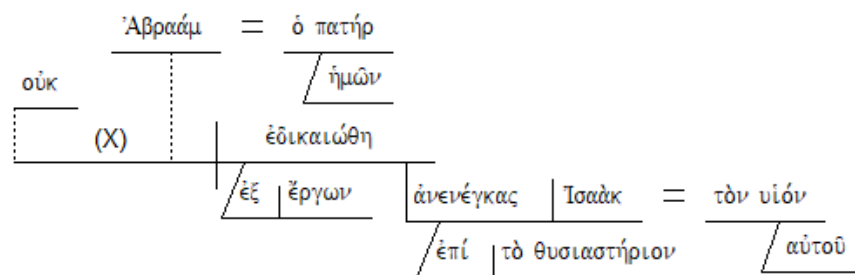
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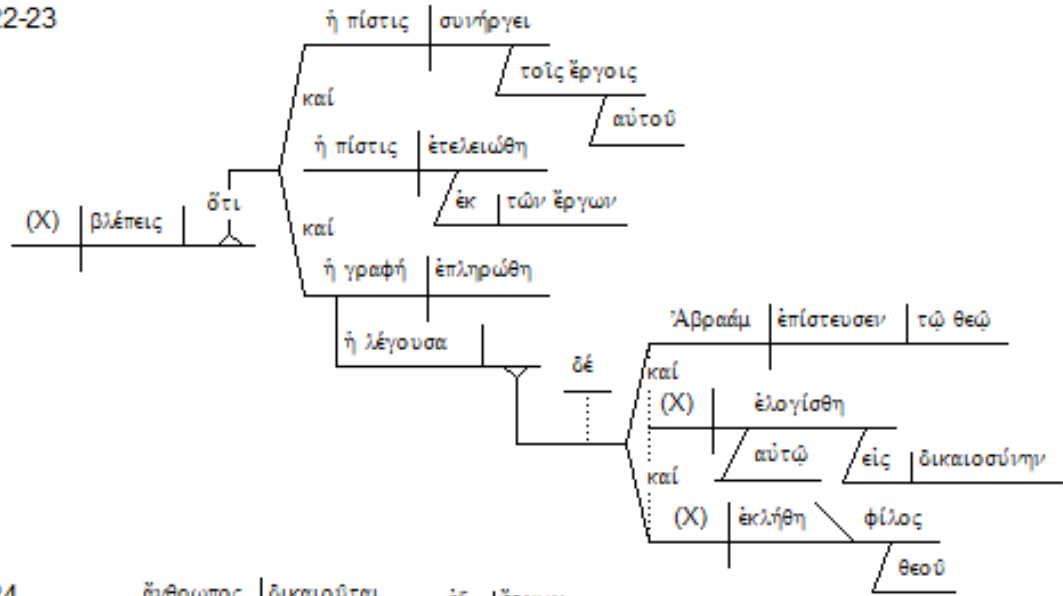
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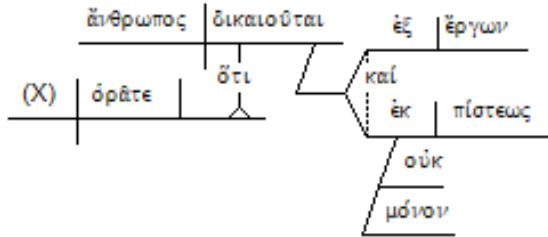
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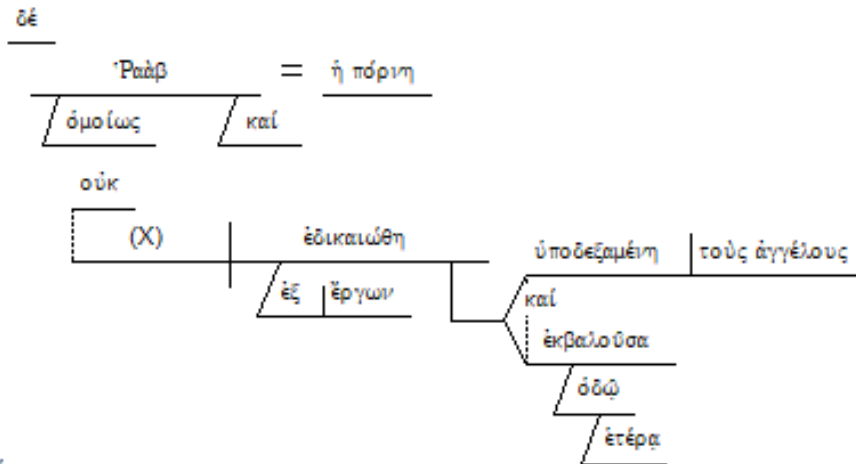
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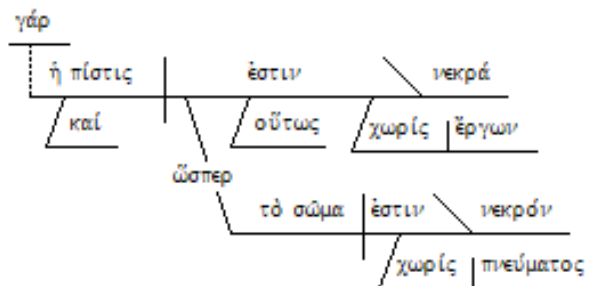
Jam 2:24



Jam 2:25



Jam 2:26



TEXT: JAMES 3:1-12

TITLE: SPEECH AND WISDOM – PART 1 -- FAITH WITHOUT SELF CONTROL OF THE TONGUE IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE TAMING OF THE TONGUE IS NO SMALL MATTER -- BUT IT WILL PREVENT BIG-TIME TROUBLE**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**David Nystrom:** James's thought in the present section has three layers.

1. The first (3:1–2) is a proverb concerning teachers, which serves to introduce the heart of the section.
2. The second layer (3:3–5) builds on this proverb by discussing the practical difficulty of controlling speech by focusing on the tongue, as if it had a mind of its own.
3. The final layer (3:6–12) also furthers the thought in 3:1–2 by outlining the power of the tongue and its propensity for impropriety.

In all of these our author draws on a wealth of images, from animal husbandry to navigation to fire to horticulture, in order to illustrate the power of the tongue for evil or for good. . .

The central thrust of this passage has to do with **power**, and specifically with its wrong application. Persons in position of leadership fall prey to its allure, even leadership within the church. Each of us has the power to inflict pain on others through our speech. Finally, the world in which we live is awash in the abuse of power, which makes it all the more difficult and necessary to remain unattracted to the abuse of power.

The text offers us three significant issues for application. Towering over the others is the question of teachers and the power that is theirs by virtue of position. Because James offers us **warnings concerning teachers and leadership**, the discussion will focus on some of the perils teachers face. The second major issue has to do with the **power of the tongue to inflict damage and pain**. But the idea that allows these other two to achieve clarity is expressed in James's phrase "*a world of evil*." He wishes to remind his readers that **Satan is capable of great evil**, and he employs this phrase to create a terrible vision of warning. Without diligence, the church can become too much like this world of evil, even though those within the church are blissfully ignorant of the slide toward depravity. Certainly this was the case in the congregation to which James has directed his letter.

**David Platt: Faith Speaks**

Main Idea: We need to recognize that the tongue is untamable, capable of great damage, and an indicator of our hearts, but God has a gracious provision in the gospel for our sinful words.

- A. Recognize the great responsibility of teaching God's Word (3:1).
- B. Recognize the great potential of sinning in what we say (3:2).
- C. Recognize the great power of the tongue (3:3-6).
- D. Recognize our inability to tame the tongue (3:7-10).
- E. Recognize that our words are an indication of our hearts (3:11-12).

**Craig Blomberg:** A major break occurs at the end of **Jas 2**. The apostle turns from unpacking the theme of riches and poverty to his elaboration of the theme of wisdom and obedience, particularly in the area of speech. This section will span **3:1 – 4:12**. As a result, there are not many direct links between **3:1–12** and the immediately preceding passage, **2:14–26**.

### **The Power of the Tongue (3:1–12)**

- a. The Problem of Too Many Teachers (3:1–2a) -- Believers must not aspire to becoming teachers too hastily
  - 1) This is because teachers (who depend so heavily on their tongues) will be judged more strictly when they sin (because of their more widespread influence) (v. 1).
  - 2) And teachers can sin just as often as do other people (v. 2a).
- b. The Positive Potential of Speech (3:2b–5a) -- The tongue is a powerful influence for good, out of proportion to its size
  - 1) Right speech is the preeminent sign of Christian maturity (v. 2b).
  - 2) The tongue is to the individual what a bridle is to a horse (v. 3).
  - 3) The tongue is to the individual what a rudder is to a ship (v. 4).
  - 4) In each case, a little object controls a big one, accomplishing great things (v. 5a).
- c. The Negative Potential of Speech (3:5b–8) -- The tongue is a powerful influence for bad, out of proportion to its size
  - 1) The tongue is like a small spark setting a large forest on fire (vv. 5b–6).
  - 2) The tongue is like an untamable creature (vv. 7–8).
- d. The Possibility of Inconsistency (3:9–12) -- These simultaneous possibilities for good and evil create a unique inconsistency, contrary to God's creation
  - 1) The tongue is like a small spark setting a large forest on fire (vv. 5b–6).
  - 2) The tongue is like an untamable creature (vv. 7–8).

## **I. (:1-2) THE TAMING OF THE TONGUE IS A MEASURE OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY**

### **A. The Responsibility of Teaching Carries with it Greater Accountability**

#### 1. Don't Rush into the Spiritual Spotlight

*"Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren"*



**John Painter:** The teacher's role and authority in the community was recognized by Jesus, who directed a scathing criticism at (some) scribes and Pharisees as teachers who failed to live up to their responsibility (**Matt. 23:1–36**). "*The scribes and Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses. Therefore, do and keep whatever they teach you, but do not do what they do*" (**Matt. 23:2–3**). The word order in the Greek text places their position as teachers first for emphasis: "*Upon the seat of Moses they sit.*" That privileged place lays great responsibility on them. Jesus then pronounces a sevenfold woe on the scribes and Pharisees, labeling them as hypocrites (**Matt. 23:13, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, 29**) and drawing attention to the disparity between what they say (teach) and what they do. This is comparable to James's critique of those who speak but do not act (**James 2:16–17**). But teachers can also err in what they teach, leading others astray. This was not the focus of Jesus, but it seems to have been included by James.

**David Nystrom:** By nature of their position teachers have an inordinately great opportunity to influence others within the congregation. It seems unavoidable that James is blaming certain teachers in the community for teaching false practice, such as favoritism and an erroneously antinomian attitude. Having dealt with each error, he now focuses on the source of those errors, the false teachers themselves.

**Ralph Martin:** Persons were putting themselves forward as teachers without having paused to reckon with the high standard of behavior required or having faced the temptation of ulterior motives (such as love of prestige or reward; **Moo**, 120). The church was evidently plagued by teachers who were insincere and were inflicting false doctrine upon unsuspecting listeners. . . they were failing to show the fruit of Christian character in their lives, a trait that most likely did have a theological error at its heart (*ibid.*, 493, citing **Matt 7:16 // Luke 6:44**) as well as promoting party strife, as **3:13–18** will develop (*ibid.*, 509). At issue was evidently the **issue of authority**, and **3:1–12** is a tacit plea for a recognition of James' primacy as teacher par excellence.

## 2. Consider the Greater Accountability

*"knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment"*

**Curtis Vaughan:** The office of teacher offered a respect, a prominence, and an authority which made some men hanker after it. Don't, says James. Think not so much of its outward privileges as of its immense responsibilities under God. Be more concerned about your fitness for teaching than with the external trappings of the office.

**Dan McCartney:** The potential error is, however, not so much doctrinal as **moral**. Jesus said that teachers who "*devour widows' houses*" would receive greater judgment (**Mark 12:40**). Similarly, teachers who slander, who make reckless accusations or verbal attacks, who grumble and quarrel (cf. **4:1; 5:9**) will naturally cause greater damage to the community by virtue of their position and implicit authority than those who are not teachers. It is also consequent upon their wider influence that they will be judged more strictly: "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be required*" (**Luke 12:48b** NASB). One can see a sad example in Moses, the great teacher

of Israel, who received a severe judgment when he failed to do exactly as he was told, striking the rock instead of speaking to it (**Num. 20:11–12**). Hence, James’s command that few should be teachers stands as a warning that the vocation of a teacher is dangerous.

**John MacArthur:** James’s point is that no believer should begin any form of teaching God’s Word without a deep sense of the seriousness of this responsibility. To sin with the tongue when alone or with one or two other persons is bad enough; but to sin with the tongue in public, especially while acting as a speaker for God, is immeasurably worse. Speaking for God carries with it great implications, both for good and ill.

**Daniel Doriani:** Teachers should certainly guard their speech. They are especially vulnerable to failures of speech because their role demands that they speak so much. More words mean more errors. As we grow accustomed to public speaking, we can become careless. When asked to offer an opinion, we tend to comply, even if we have scant qualifications and little factual basis. Humor is a dangerous gift. It pleases the crowd, but can easily wound or mislead. Too many laughs come at someone else’s expense.

Public speech before a frequently captive audience “provides temptations to virtually every form of evil speech: arrogance and domination over students; anger and pettiness at contradiction or inattention; slander and meanness toward absent opponents; flattery of students for the sake of vainglory.” These problems are all the worse in the church since Christian teachers are expected to be models of virtue. So teachers are subject to judgment.

## **B. There are Many Pitfalls on the Road to Spiritual Maturity**

### 1. Universal Traps

*"For we all"*

**Douglas Moo:** But the rest of the passage makes no reference to teachers, and James’ warning about the tongue certainly has **general application**. Probably, then, James intends to include all his readers in the first person plural of **verse 2**. His warning to would-be teachers has suggested to his mind the problem of the tongue; and this is a problem for **everyone in the church**.

### 2. Harmful Snares

*"stumble"*

### 3. Diverse Obstacles

*"in many ways"*

We all sin repeatedly in many ways ... but especially in the area of our speech.

## **C. Control of the Tongue is a True Indicator of Overall Self-Control**

### 1. Passing the Test of Taming the Tongue

*"If anyone does not stumble in what he says"*

## 2. Grading the Results

*"he is a perfect man"*

not sinless, but a man of maturity

**Alec Motyer:** By *perfect* he means (as in **1:4**) the completeness and maturity that will mark us when God has fully wrought in us all that he intends for us in Christ—in a word, the holiness of those who see him and are like him (**1 Jn. 3:2**).

## 3. Extrapolating the Same Ability

*"able to bridle the whole body as well"*

**Dan McCartney:** One of the principal marks of maturity is self-discipline, and self-discipline with regard to one's speech is rare. Hence, few should be teachers. Further, the "*word*" that teachers ought to bring is the word of truth that gives new birth and brings salvation (**1:18, 21**); it is the word that people are to do, not just hear (**1:22**). Therefore, it is all the more incumbent on teachers that their own lives exhibit the wholeness and integrity that the word they teach is expected to engender.

## **II. (:3-4) TWO ILLUSTRATIONS TO PROVE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TAMING OF THE SMALL TONGUE AND SELF-CONTROL ON A LARGER SCALE**

### **A. (:3) Powerful Horses Can be Controlled by a Small Bit**

*"Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well"*

### **B. (:4) Large Ships Can be Controlled by a Small Rudder**

*"Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires."*

**Warren Wiersbe:** Both the bit and the rudder must overcome contrary forces. The bit must overcome the wild nature of the horse, and the rudder must fight the winds and currents that would drive the ship off its course. The human tongue also must overcome contrary forces. We have an old nature that wants to control us and make us sin.

**Ralph Martin:** Taken together, the first two instruments of bit and rudder do not correspond exactly with the tongue and its relationship to the human body. The bit and the rudder control the larger bodies, but the tongue does not control the human body. However, if we assume that the body is the **church congregation** then we have a point of agreement because all three instruments may be characterized under the rubric of *pars pro toto*, exercising influence over the larger body of which they form a significant

part. With respect to the tongue, the text is not saying that the church at large is controlled by the tongue; rather it is saying that if we can control the latter then it will prove much easier to control the former (Adamson, 143); or better, if teachers who use their tongue to influence others are kept in firm check, the health and condition of the congregation will be assured thereby. All three examples are used to show that these small instruments determine the direction (or the destiny; Moo, 122) of the larger body.

**Dan McCartney:** [Argues against the interpretation of the church body] – Several things in the text stand against this approach:

1. What in the text would have clued the original readers to the notion that the “*body*” of the horse now represents the church? The evidence that James could have thought of “the body” as a metaphor for the church in the way Paul did is restricted to only one questionable datum: the expression “*in your members*” (4:1), which might mean “*among the people in the church.*”
2. The examples of “*ships,*” as also “*bits in the mouth of horses,*” are in the plural. If the illustrations represented the church, one would expect the singular. The plural implies only a general resemblance, not an allegorical correspondence. It is only the remarkable power-versus-size differential between the ships and their rudders, or between horses and bits, that is given point, as also with forest fires.
3. Decisive is 3:6. If the tongue represents teachers, then why suddenly are they regarded not just as potentially dangerous, but as “*a fire*” that inflames the course of life of this age and is inflamed by hell? And why are teachers now regarded as the representatives of the wicked world (literally “*world of unrighteousness*”) within the church?
4. In 3:7–8 the tongue is said to be untamable and an unstable evil. If the tongue simply signifies an individual’s speech, then this is comprehensible (if hyperbolic), but it is unlikely that James, who classifies himself as a teacher (3:1), would say that teachers as a class are untamable and an unstable evil, even if he were speaking hyperbolically.

Hence, we must conclude that James is simply making comparisons to the outsized power of speech and warning of its susceptibility to wickedness and the consequent necessity of guarding it closely. Teachers must be especially careful because their speech is especially important, but such advice is applicable not just to teachers. The horses and ships are only illustrations; they are not intended to be metaphors for the church.

### **III. (:5-8) THE SMALL TONGUE CAN CAUSE BIG-TIME TROUBLE**

#### **A. Characterization -- Small in Size but Huge in Potential**

##### 1. Small in Size

*"So also the tongue is a small part of the body"*

##### 2. Huge in Potential

*"and yet it boasts of great things"*

**John MacArthur:** The tongue is you in a unique way. It is a tattletale that tells on the heart and discloses the real person. Not only that, but misuse of the tongue is perhaps the easiest way to sin. There are some sins that an individual may not be able to commit simply because he does not have the opportunity. But there are no limits to what one can say, no built-in restraints or boundaries. In Scripture, the tongue is variously described as wicked, deceitful, perverse, filthy, corrupt, flattering, slanderous, gossiping, blasphemous, foolish, boasting, complaining, cursing, contentious, sensual, and vile. And that list is not exhaustive. No wonder God put the tongue in a cage behind the teeth, walled in by the mouth!

### **B. Cause and Effect -- Illustration of an Innocent Small Match and a Huge Destructive Forest Fire**

*"Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire"*

**Douglas Moo:** In saying that the tongue sets on fire the whole course of one's life, James clearly intends to reiterate the magnitude of the tongue's destructive potential. . .

James does not elaborate the ways in which the destructive power of the tongue can make itself felt: but he undoubtedly would have thought of those sins of speech that are enumerated in Proverbs: thoughtless 'chattering' (10:8; cf. 12:18; 29:20); lying (cf. 12:19); arrogant boasting (18:12); gossiping (10:18). Think what enormous, sometimes irreversible, harm can be caused to people by unsubstantiated, often false, rumours. Such a rumour can be harder to stop than any forest fire (cf. v. 5). We know from bitter experience that the childhood taunt, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me', reverses the truth of the matter. The wounds caused by sticks and stones heal; the wounds caused by words sometimes never heal.

### **C. Comparison -- The Tongue Compared to a Defiling Fire**

(chiastic structure: A B B A)

#### 1. Nature of the tongue

a. *"And the tongue is a fire"*

**William Barclay:** wide-ranging and quite uncontrollable

b. *"the very world of iniquity"*

#### 2. Function of the tongue

a. *"the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body"*

**Curtis Vaughan:** This means that the tongue, wrongly used, pollutes man's whole personality, soils his whole nature, leaves a deadly stain upon him (cf. **Matthew 15:11**). It does this by permitting itself to be used as an organ for sin.

**George Guthrie:** Further, the tongue is set among the members of the body as that which defiles, or pollutes, the whole. Though a different Greek verb is used, this point brings to mind the teaching of Jesus that what comes out of a person defiles the person (**Mk 7:20**). James's statement drives home one of the striking difficulties of dealing with the tongue—this world of unrighteousness, as a member of the body, is part of us, and the consequences of its presence are great! When uncontrolled, the tongue is an agent of spiritual and moral pollution that corrupts the entire body.

b. *"and sets on fire the course of our life"*

3. Curse of the tongue

*"and is set on fire by hell"*

**John MacArthur:** That it is said to be *set on fire by hell* indicates that the tongue can be Satan's tool, fulfilling hell's purposes to pollute, corrupt, and destroy. It is unbelievably dangerous and destructive.

**John Painter: Gehenna** -- The notion of the fires of hell may have developed from the Hebrew *Gehinnom* (Gk. *geenna*, Eng. "*Gehenna*"), the Valley (Ge) of Hinnom. In earlier times, this valley was the place where the devotees of Baal and Moloch sacrificed their children in fire. The valley later became the rubbish dump for Jerusalem, where corpses and garbage rotted and burned. In rabbinical and early Christian sources, Gehenna becomes the place of punishment for the wicked. In the NT, there are only twelve references to Gehenna, eleven of them in the Gospels and the other one in **James 3:6**. In the Gospels, all references are sayings attributed to Jesus. Six involve overlaps between Matthew and Mark and can be reduced to the single saying that it is better to lose one part of the body than to be cast whole into Gehenna (**Matt. 5:29, 30; 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47**); **Matt. 10:28** more or less corresponds to **Luke 12:25** concerning whom to fear, the one with power to cast a person into Gehenna; **Matt. 5:22** says that whoever calls someone a fool is bound for Gehenna; **Matt. 23:15** speaks of the Pharisees making a convert twice as much a child of Gehenna as themselves; in **Matt. 23:33** Jesus calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers and asks how they will escape Gehenna. All but **Matt. 23:15** refer to Gehenna as the **destination of the wicked**. **Matthew 23:15** refers to Gehenna as the source of the wicked: "*a child of Gehenna.*"

**D. Contrast -- Man's Ability to Tame Wild Animals Contrasted with His Inability to Tame His Own Tongue**

1. Man's ability to tame wild animals

*"For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race."*

John Painter: James, like Genesis, distinguishes humankind from the other kinds of creatures named and interprets the "*dominion*" of Genesis in terms of humans having power to tame and control every kind of beast and bird, reptile and sea creature.

2. Man's inability to tame his own tongue  
*"But no one can tame the tongue"*

This ability can only come from God.

#### **E. Conclusion -- The Natural Tongue Reveals our Total Depravity**

1. "it is a restless evil"
2. "and full of deadly poison"

### **IV. (9-12) USING THE TONGUE FOR BOTH BLESSING AND CURSING IS A CONTRADICTION BY DEFINITION**

#### **A. Unnatural by Definition -- from Personal Experience**

1. Blessing the Creator While Cursing His Creation  
*"With it we bless our Lord and Father  
and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God"*

**Douglas Moo:** This activity of blessing, in which we praise and honour God, is cited by James as the highest, purest, most noble form of speech. The lowest, filthiest, most ignoble form of speech, on the other hand, is cursing. The word of the curse, which is the opposite of blessing (cf. **Deut. 30:19**), was seen to have great power in the ancient world. To curse someone is not just to swear at him or her; it is to desire that he or she be cut off from God and experience eternal punishment. Jesus prohibited his disciples from cursing others; indeed, they were to *'bless those who curse you'* (**Luke 6:28**; cf. **Rom. 12:14**). What makes cursing particularly heinous is that the one whom we pronounce damned has been made in God's likeness (James' further allusion to **Gen. 1:26** [cf. v. 7] is clear). The rabbis cautioned against cursing for the same reason: one should not say "Let my neighbour be put to shame" – for then you put to shame one who is in the image of God' (Bereshith Rabba 24, on **Gen. 5:1**).

**Thomas Lea:** We show our moral inconsistency by using the same tongue both to bless God and to insult his creatures.

2. Using the Same Mouth for Contradictory Actions  
*"from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing"*

**Dan McCartney:** The undisciplined tongue is pernicious (full of poison) because it hides its evil under the guise of good. It can profess the gospel of Jesus in calling upon God as Lord and as Father (cf. **1 Pet. 1:17**) while at the same time cursing another human being.

3. Unnatural and Just Plain Wrong  
*"My brethren, these things ought not to be this way"*

**Douglas Moo:** Like Jesus, James sees a person's speech as a **barometer of his or her spiritual state**; it reveals what is in the heart. Jesus' warning must be taken with utter seriousness: *'But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned'* (**Matt. 12:36–37**). The person who is double and inconsistent with regard to the things of God in his or her heart (*dipsychos*; see **1:8** and **4:8**) will be double and inconsistent in speech.

**R. Kent Hughes:** Few sections of Scripture are so graphically relentless in making a point. In addition, this is the most penetrating (and convicting) exposition of the tongue anywhere in literature, sacred or secular. One must also conclude that it was not just James' local concern for his churches that occasioned the writing, but also the Holy Spirit's desire that the church at large learn to control the tongue.

## **B. Unnatural by Illustration -- from the World of Nature**

### 1. Fountain

*"Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?"*

**Alec Motyer:** [The tongue's] pollution, not its sweetness, prevails (**11**). The question James asks expects the answer 'no', and for a very obvious reason. Suppose two separate sources of water flowed together into the same outlet, one sweet water, the other brackish and unpalatable, we would never know of the double source because the bitter flavour would prevail. That is what would prove to be the stronger element; that is what would leave its mark. So the tongue needs guarding lest it leave a bitter taste behind it wherever it makes itself felt.

**Ralph Martin:** The point he makes is that one spring does not alternate between producing good and bad water. It is either one or the other, and the "tragedy of the tongue" (**Moo**, 129) lies, in fact, in this vacillation and consequent contamination. The spring was made to produce one type of water; likewise the tongue was created to bring forth only one type of speech—namely, a "good" speech (of blessing). Unfortunately, while the spring "stays" within its assigned boundaries (as the wild animal submits to human authority), the tongue continues to go against its nature and, ultimately, against its creator. The power (and poison) of the tongue (**3:8**) can be seen from the fact that while fresh water added to salt water does not produce fresh water, salt water added to fresh causes the water to be salty. The poison of the tongue is all-pervasive.

### 2. Fig Tree

*"Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives"*

**Dan McCartney:** Figs, olives, and grapes were and are the primary staples of Mediterranean agricultural life, and the recognition that each kind of plant produces its own distinctive fruit was long proverbial in both Jewish and Greco-Roman sources. The rhetorical question echoes the saying of Jesus that one cannot obtain good fruit from a rotten tree (**Matt. 7:16–18; 12:33**).



3. Vine

*"or a vine produce figs?"*

4. Salt Water

*"Neither can salt water produce fresh"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** A fresh water lake can be relied on to contain fresh water, and a salt lake salt water (like the Dead Sea). But with the human tongue, fickle and unreliable, it is now one thing, now another.

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) Do churches and Christian training institutions push people too quickly into positions of teaching and spiritual leadership without observing the cautionary tone of this passage?
- 2) Think of instances where you did not control your tongue. How harmful was your speech? How much did you later regret what you had said? What steps did you take to try to correct the situation? How difficult is it to make amends once the damage has been done?
- 3) What are some of the different types of harmful speech? What does the Book of Proverbs have to say about each different type? (study out some passages)  
When we are under pressure and squeezed the hardest, what type of speech pops out of our mouth?
- 4) Do we treat even unbelievers as those who have been "*made in the likeness of God*" or do we treat them with contempt?

\* \* \* \* \*

**QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:**

**Warren Wiersbe:** The power of speech is one of the greatest powers God has given us... The ability to speak words is the ability to influence others and accomplish tremendous tasks; and yet we take this ability for granted.

Outline:

- Power to Direct: the Bit and Rudder (3:1-4)
- Power to Destroy: the Fire and Animal (3:5-8)
- Power to Delight: the Fountain and Tree (3:9-12)

**R.V.G. Tasker:** Teachers are continually engaged in passing judgments, both moral and intellectual. The very nature of their work makes them critical, sometimes severely critical. James warns them that all who have professed to point out to others the way in which they should live, will receive greater condemnation than the rest of men if they have failed to walk in that way themselves.

**W.A. Criswell:** Do you remember those three little monkeys? One has his eyes covered--see no evil. One has his mouth covered--speak no evil. And one has his ears covered--hear no evil. The whole body.

A gossipy tongue is a dangerous thing  
If its owner is evil at heart.  
He can give whom he chooses many a sting  
That will woefully linger and smart.  
But the gossipy tongue would be balked in its plan  
For causing heartburning and tears,  
If it weren't helped out by the misguided man  
Who possesses two gossipy ears...

If I am not to be a talebearer and a whisperer and a defamer and a slanderer then what am I to do? This is what I am to do. I am to speak beautifully, graciously, and kindly. The apostle Paul writes, "*Speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another ... Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.*"

**G. Coleman Luck:** Remember, as indicated earlier, that no man can tame the tongue, but there is One who can. Bitter waters were made sweet at Marah when a divinely revealed tree was cast into them (**Exod. 15:23-26**). So as the tree--the cross of Christ--becomes real in our lives, as we trust in the Lord Jesus and walk in faith with Him, the bitter waters of Marah will become sweet, and our tongues instead of producing evil will be a blessing to all about us.

**William Barclay:** In the Early Church the teachers were of first rate importance. Wherever they are mentioned they are mentioned with honor...

In the New Testament itself we get glimpses of teachers who failed in their responsibility and their task, and who become false teachers. There were teachers who tried to turn Christianity into another kind of Judaism, and who tried to introduce circumcision and the keeping of the law (**Acts 15:24**). There were teachers who taught others, but who themselves lived out nothing of the truth which they taught, teachers whose whole life was a contradiction of their instruction, and who did nothing but bring dishonor on the faith they represented (**Romans 2:17-29**). There were some who tried to teach before they themselves knew anything (**1 Timothy 1:6,7**). There were false teachers who would pander to the false desires of the crowd (**2 Timothy 4:3**).

But apart altogether from the false teachers, it is James's conviction that teaching is a dangerous occupation for any man. His instrument is speech and his agent the tongue...

We may find in this passage four characteristics of the wrong kind of teaching.

- (i) It is *fanatical*. The truth it holds is held with unbalanced violence rather than with reasoned conviction.
- (ii) It is *bitter*. It regards its opponents as enemies to be annihilated rather than as friends to be persuaded.
- (iii) It is *selfishly ambitious*. It is, in the end, more eager to display itself than to display the truth, and it is interested more in the victory of its own opinions than in the victory of the truth.
- (iv) It is *arrogant*. Its whole attitude is pride in its own knowledge rather than humility in its own ignorance. The real scholar will be far more aware of what he does not know than of what he knows.

**John Painter:** James gives significant attention to the need to develop speech ethics. Such is his view of the power of words that he would hardly agree with the sentiment “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.” Today we have another saying: “Mud sticks.” When something is said often enough, people begin to believe what is said, especially if it is something bad. Speech that misrepresents usually is self-serving and ultimately destructive. So we can speak of the power of words, whether the words are faithful and true or false and deceiving. Words, spoken or written, are potentially powerful. Because the written word may be more carefully planned and expressed, there is another saying: “The pen is mightier than the sword.” But written or spoken, when carefully planned, choosing words for their persuasive effect, we speak of rhetoric, the art of persuasion. It may seem surprising, but it is precisely because James lays such weight on the power of words that his first word about speech is “*Be swift to hear, slow to speak*” (1:19). The call to hold back speech has two sources. First, because speech has such power for good or evil, there is need for care to ensure that speech is faithful and true and not a misrepresentation to manipulate the hearer and that it is constructive and not destructive in its effect. Second, because of “*desire*” (*epithymia*), speech tends to be self-serving, and the tongue needs to be controlled/bridled (1:26). Speech needs to arise from the reception of the implanted word (1:21). Thus the call to be swift to hear turns the hearer from self-orientation to the other, to God and neighbor.

The critique of the tongue in 3:1–12 recognizes its **destructive potential**. The power of the tongue can be turned to good effect by God’s gracious gift of the wisdom from above (1:5–8; 3:13–18). Rhetoric and wisdom from on high need one another if speech is to be ethical and constructive

**Brian Racer: The Test of the Tongue –  
Harnessing the Pint-Sized Power Between Your Teeth**

Introduction:

Start off on the light side looking at all types of verbal bloopers before getting to the serious side of this important topic; Imagine some artistic images as well where we picture ourselves all tangled up in our tongues:

- tongue shaped like a lariat tied around our feet and tripping us up
- tongue like a noose around our neck

### **I. (:1-2) Two Measures of Maturity – Contrast between:**

A. Those who are too quick to Teach – a warning against rushing into this role

B. Those who are Mature because they understand their heavy accountability

List of 15 sinful uses of the tongue: “*We all stumble in many ways:*”

1. lying
2. deceit – shading the truth
3. cursing – pronouncing damning outcome on somebody else
4. false oaths/swearing – trying to authenticate your authority at the expense of God’s Name
5. name calling
6. backbiting
7. slander – sharing truth with a design to hurt someone else
8. gossip – sharing intimate negative details with someone who is neither part of the problem or part of the solution
9. false accusation
10. harsh speech
11. impulsive speech
12. profanity/vulgarity
13. flattery – trying to gain an advantage by saying something nice that others want to hear
14. seduction
15. clamor – loud, abusive speech; raising a ruckus

### **II. (:3-5) The Tongue Has the Power to Direct**

“pound for pound the tongue is the strongest Muscle in the body”

3 Illustrations: Small, but powerfully influential

A. Like a Bit to a Horse

1.5 lb bit vs. 1200 lb horse

Application: work on the mouth first in counseling session; then you can make progress at controlling the rest of behavior (as opposed to those who advocate venting); control the tongue; then control the whole body; then control the whole environment

B. Like a Rudder to a Ship

C. Like a Spark to a Forest Fire

### **III. (:6-8) The Tongue Has the Power to Destroy**

#### A. A Fire

1. Defiles our Body
2. Desires a Full Destruction
3. Its Destructive Source is Hell

A fire reportedly started in the O’Leary barn in Chicago at 8:30 P.M., October 8, 1871; and because that fire spread, over 100,000 people were left homeless, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, and 300 people died. It cost the city over \$400 million. Tradition has it that a cow kicked over a lantern to set it off.

#### B. An Unruly Beast

1. Untamed – no one can tame it (of mankind)
2. Poisonous – Picture the serpent back in the Garden – demonstrates all the wrong uses of the tongue listed above

### **IV. (:9-12) The Tongue Has Contradictory Power to Delight**

#### A. The Blessing Should Persist (**Prov. 18:21**)

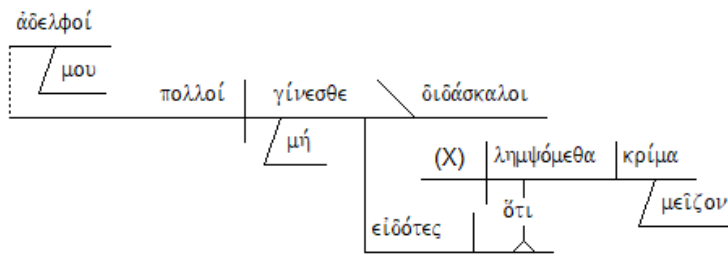
#### B. The Cursing and Contradictions Should Desist (Bite your tongue)

#### Conclusion: How Your Tongue Can Be Controlled:

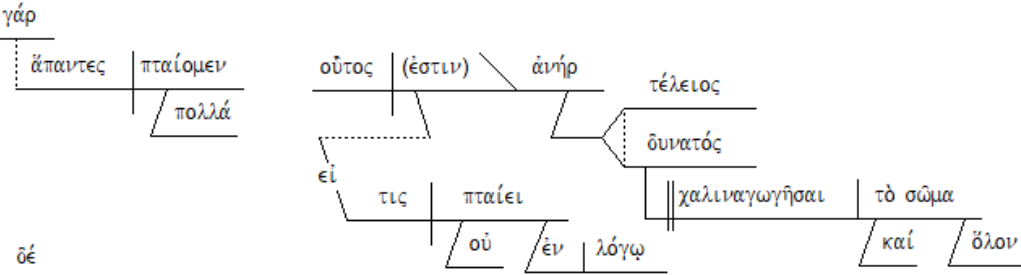
1. Let someone Stronger Direct it
2. Ask someone Wiser what to say – **Is. 50** speaking of the Messiah:  
*awakens My ear to listen as a disciple ...*
3. Let someone Purer cleanse it – **Is. 6**
4. Practice teaching Your Mouth Before you teach someone else --  
**Prov. 15:28** “*the heart of the righteous thinks about what he will say*”  
**Prov. 16:23-24** “*the heart of the wise teaches his mouth*”

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

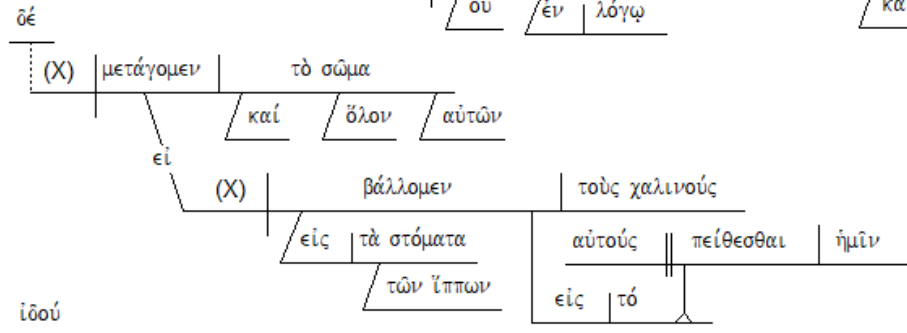
Jam 3:1



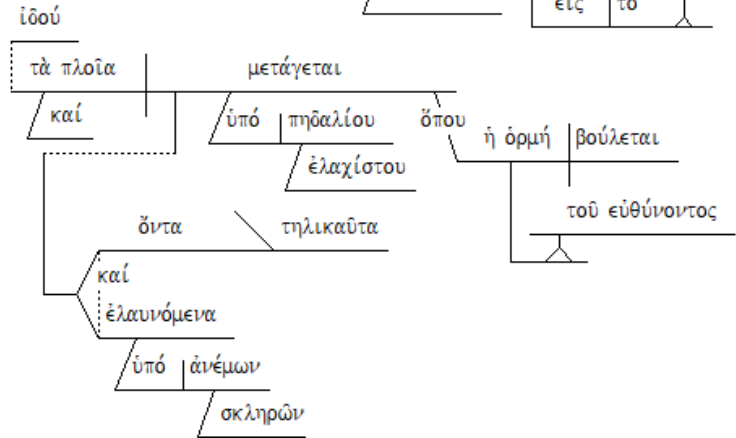
Jam 3:2



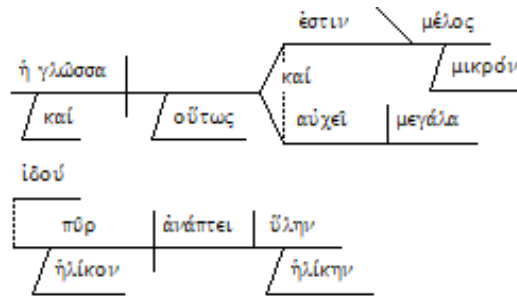
Jam 3:3



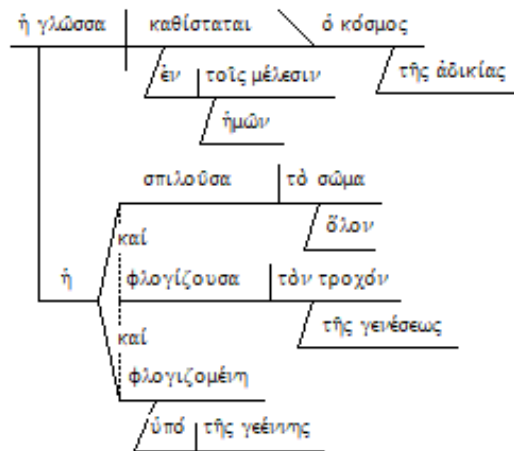
Jam 3:4



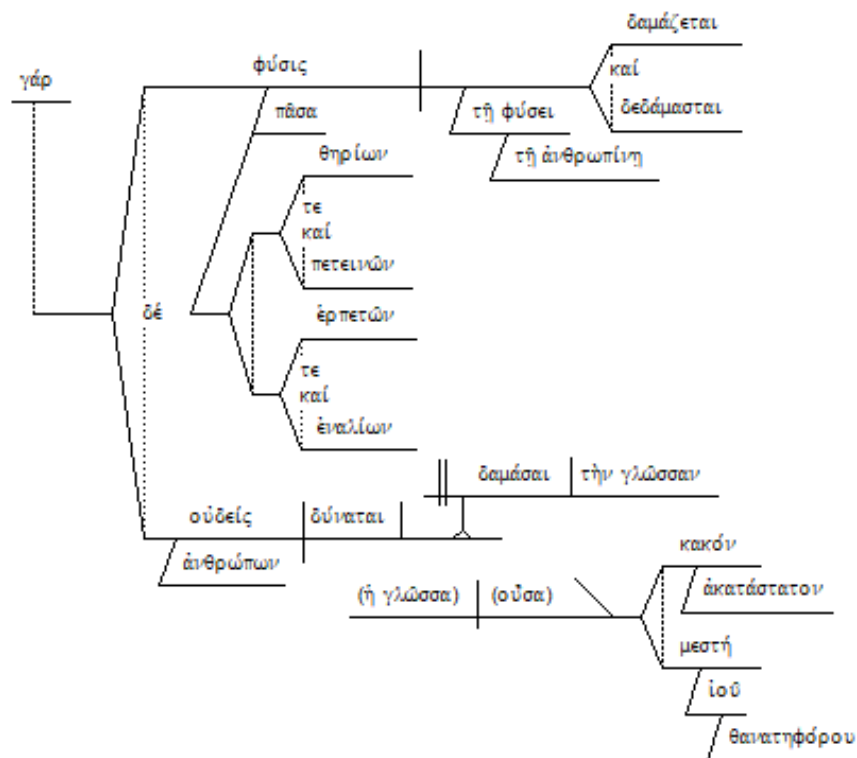
Jam 3:5



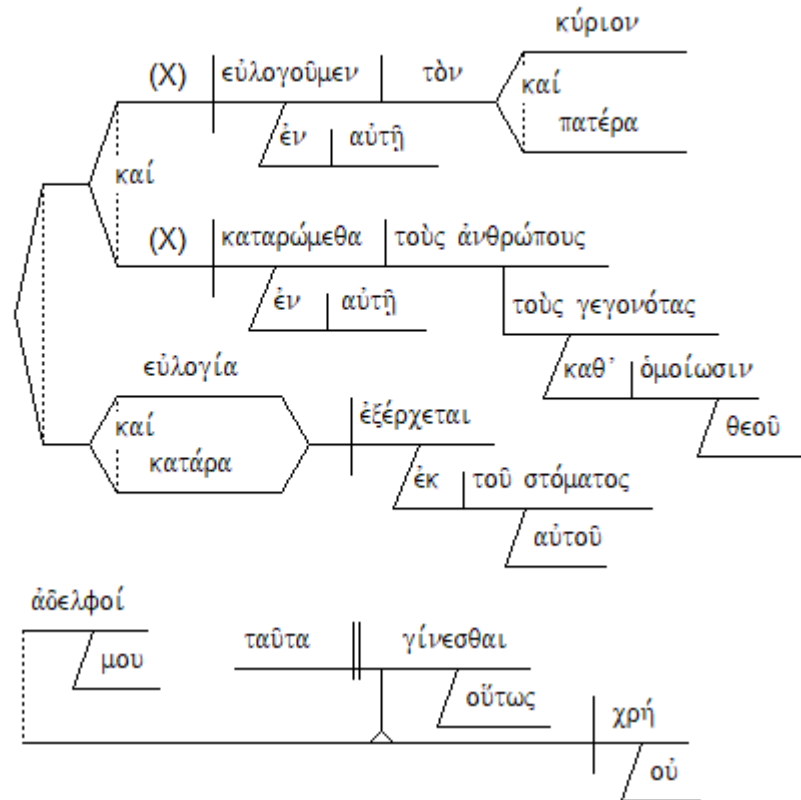
Jam 3:6



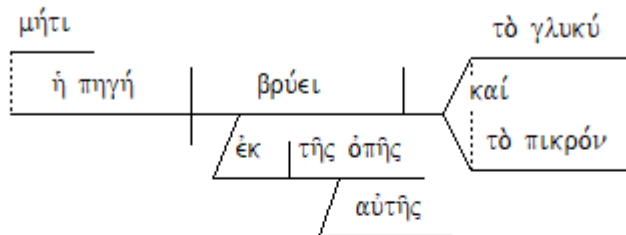
Jam 3:7-8



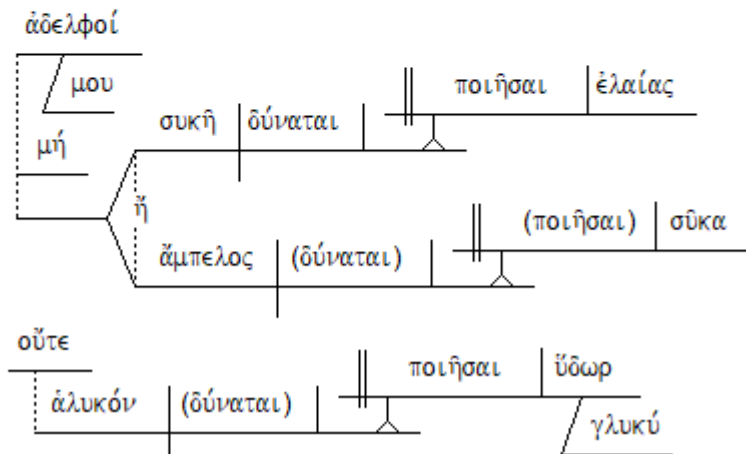
Jam 3:9-10



Jam 3:11



Jam 3:12





TEXT: JAMES 3:13-18

TITLE: SPEECH AND WISDOM – PART 2 -- FAITH WITHOUT GODLY WISDOM IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE ROOT AND FRUIT OF GODLY WISDOM VALIDATES OUR FAITH AND PROMOTES PEACE – TWO CONTRASTING TYPES OF WISDOM**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**George Guthrie:** We now come to a focal passage for the whole of James. As noted in our treatment of **James 1:5–8**, true wisdom, the wisdom that comes as a gift of God, is closely associated with righteous living. This truth he embodies clearly in the passage at hand. James begins by asking a rhetorical question, “*Who is wise and understanding among you?*” and then answers by **wedding wisdom with good conduct (v.13)**. He then sets this teaching in bold relief by contrasting this godly wisdom with a lifestyle of relational discord due to jealousy and selfishness (**v.14**). Rather than coming from heaven, this so-called “wisdom” has the demonic as its source, being earthly and unspiritual (**v.15**), for jealousy and selfishness are associated with a lack of order and the practice of evil (**v.16**). Such a pattern of relating to others stands in direct contrast to the pattern of heaven’s wisdom, which issues forth in righteous living (**vv.17–18**).

**Dale Allison:** The Catenaed. Cramer, 24, introduces our section with these words: ‘Concerning good conduct and being peaceable toward each other.’ This rightly emphasizes the communal dimension of **vv. 13-18**—their ‘social-ethical engagement’ (**Frankemölle**, 525)—and their call for humility and peace. It is fitting that most preachers and ecclesiastical exegetes have used the verses to exhort their audiences to good deeds and to discourage quarreling among Christians. **Manton**, 318, was eloquent: the ‘truly wise Christian’ should be ‘moderate’ in ‘his opinions; not urging his own beyond their weight, nor wresting those of his adversaries beyond their intention to odious consequences which they disclaim, a fault which hath much disturbed the peace of Christendom. Charity should consider not what followeth of itself upon any opinion, but what followeth in the conscience of those that hold it... A man may err in logic that doth not err in faith.’

This carefully crafted unit, which prominently features parallelism, sets up an antithetical series that reflects James’ dualistic outlook. On the one side are those who understand. Their good conduct is manifest in their wisdom, which begets a host of virtues. On the other side are those driven by jealousy and strife. Their nether wisdom fosters boasting, falsehood, disorder, and vile practices. The structure is straightforward.

The key theme is not really wisdom but **peace**: the former counts because it produces the latter.

**Daniel Doriani:** James says that anyone who is wise and understanding shows it by his good life, by deeds that reflect wisdom. The way of wisdom is the way of **humility**. True wisdom is gentle, meek, humble. If we walk in the path of wisdom, we know that our wisdom is “*from above*”—a gift of God (**James 3:17** ESV). Humble faith, a faith that comes from heaven, is the source of the wise life.

**John MacArthur:** Both Scripture and ancient philosophers placed a premium on wisdom, which, broadly defined, is not simply a matter of possessing factual knowledge but of properly and effectively applying truth to everyday life. Solomon wrote, “*Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding*” (**Prov. 4:7**). Some nine hundred years later, the first-century B.C. Roman philosopher **Cicero** stated that wisdom is “the best gift of the gods” and is “the mother of all good things.” Both men considered wisdom to be the highest and most noble and valuable of all possessions. But it was the Hebrews who clearly understood that true wisdom was not intellectual, but behavioral. Thus, the biggest fool was one who knew truth and failed to apply it. To the Jews, **wisdom was skill in living righteously**. . .

The New Testament is even more explicit about the **source of true wisdom**. Paul declared that Christ is “*the power of God and the wisdom of God.... who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption*” (**1 Cor. 1:24, 30**). He reminded the church at Colossae that in Christ “*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” (**Col. 2:3**). In his epistle to the church in Rome he wrote, “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!*” (**Rom. 11:33**; cf. **Job 5:9; 9:10; 11:7; Ps. 145:3**).

**David Nystrom:** As far as James’s structure here is concerned, the opening verse establishes the topic to be discussed. It is followed by a double list of virtues and vices. Worldly wisdom (**3:14–16**) as offered by the teachers with whom James is at odds is characterized by ambition and a desire to seek status through wealth or the securing of a position of power. True wisdom (**3:13, 17**) implies a vision of heaven, is marked by humility, and results in good deeds. The passage concludes with an apt proverb: “*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*”

**Dan McCartney:** [Contextual Linkage]

**3:13–18** serves: by contrasting God’s wisdom with the human wisdom that is at root self-seeking and envious, it moves from the dangers of speech (especially for those who would be imparters of wisdom) to the problems of intracommunity strife found in **James 4**.

**Craig Blomberg:** Main Idea: By their good conduct, Christians should demonstrate heavenly rather than worldly wisdom. Specifically, they will exhibit purity and peacefulness rather than jealousy and strife.

### **Wisdom from Above and Wisdom from Below (3:13–18)**

a. Wise persons demonstrate their wisdom through good conduct (v. 13).

- b. Christians should avoid worldly wisdom (vv. 14–16).
  - i. They ought not to boast or lie about bitter, jealous attitudes among believers (v. 14).
  - ii. The source of this so-called “wisdom” is the world, the flesh, and the devil (v. 15).
  - iii. Such attitudes typify a much larger morass of rebellion and evil (v. 16).
- c. Christians should embrace heavenly wisdom (vv. 17–18).
  - i. True wisdom must above all reflect moral purity (v. 17a).
  - ii. This wisdom also includes many good works reflective of an even-tempered, well-balanced personality (v. 17b).
  - iii. True wisdom places a special priority on peacemaking (v. 18).

## I. (:13-14) ANY CLAIM TO PRACTICAL WISDOM MUST BE VINDICATED BY THE GENUINENESS OF ITS FRUIT

### A. Anyone Can Claim to be Wise

*"Who among you is wise and understanding?"*

**Peter Davids:** The passage is properly applied primarily to teachers and other leaders capable of dividing Christian communities (notice the σοφός terminology occurring in a different passage on community division—**1 Corinthians I**), but naturally finds a wider application in the lives of all Christians.

**George Guthrie:** It may be that there were strong personalities in the churches James addresses—people who boasted of their great learning and “wisdom,” insisting that their perspectives on certain matters be given the highest consideration. Yet James issues a reminder that true wisdom “speaks” loudest in one primary way: a life lived well and with an attitude of humility.

**John MacArthur:** Although the two terms seem to be used synonymously here, wise and understanding carry a shade of difference in meaning. *Sophos* (*wise*) is a general word, often used by the Greeks to designate speculative knowledge, theory, or philosophy. For the Jews, as noted earlier, it carried the deeper meaning of careful application of knowledge to personal living. *Epistēmōn* (*understanding*) appears only here in the New Testament and carries the idea of specialized knowledge, such as that of a highly skilled tradesman or professional.

**Alec Motyer:** The description **wise** must be understood in the light of our discussion of Old Testament Wisdom. There are those who live closely to God, see more clearly into things than others do, and just know how to manage life’s varied circumstances. They are godly in character, sharp in discernment and helpful in their advice and counsel. Equally they are **understanding**. The word does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament, but it points to ‘professional knowledge’ (**TASKER**), ‘like our “expert” ’ (**ROPES**). Provided we do not push the ideas of ‘professional’ and ‘expert’ too far, this

is exact. At the very least the word describes the well-informed person (**ALFORD**). Here, then, is the one who has a veritable mass of stored-up, useful, helpful knowledge. What place has such a person in the church? Well, of course, some will be called out and recognized as teachers of the flock of God (cf. **Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17**). James does not say that none are to become teachers! Yet even in their case he would recommend caution. For not only is that wordy task full of hazard (**2**), but also it is not the priority use of the gifts of wisdom and understanding (**13–18**). The great priority is to put whatever gift the Lord has given to the task of **living the good life**. Again, how true to its Old Testament background: **a wisdom of deeds; an understanding and knowledge that reshapes life.**

## **B. The Proof is in the Behavior**

*"Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."*

**Dale Allison:** As **3:13** directly follows the discourse on the tongue, one may infer that the wise and understanding are those who take **3:1-12** to heart. Such people will not curse (**vv. 9-10**) but make peace (**vv. 17-18**). They will not boast (**vv. 5, 14**) but abandon selfish ambition (**vv. 14, 16**). They will not succumb to restless evil (**vv. 8, 16**) but will pursue reason and righteousness (**vv. 17-18**).

**Daniel Doriani:** What James calls “*the wisdom that comes from heaven*” drives the excellent life. The wise demonstrate God’s wisdom daily. They inspire others by giving them a living model of righteousness that incarnates the will of God. Their lives become models of righteousness. They become our heroes in the faith as they reflect the character of Christ. . .

The Bible says **gentle people** live a certain way: They are patient. They make peace. They are slow to take offense. They are long-suffering. They do not demand their way. Peace follows them wherever they go (**James 3:18**).

**Dan McCartney:** James’s “*wisdom from above*” is not the wisdom of how to “get ahead” in life or how to achieve worldly success, nor is it special insight into divine secrets; it is about how one displays godly character patterned after the life of the one who identified himself as meek and lowly (**Matt. 11:29**).

## **C. Selfish Motives Produce Proud Hypocrites**

### 1. The Root = Selfish Motives

a. *"But if you have bitter jealousy"*

**Craig Blomberg:** The term “*zeal*” (ζήλος) ranges in meaning from the positive concepts of “enthusiasm” and “ardent concern” to the negative ones of “jealousy” and “envy.” Given that here the zeal is “bitter” (πικρὸν) and paired with “selfish ambition” (ἐπιθειάων), the term is clearly negative in this context, hence, “jealousy.” This kind of envy seeks the best for oneself, regardless of what might be good for another person, always wishing for others to have less than oneself, whether with possessions or with

opportunities. In a group setting, “bitter jealousy” may manifest “a fierce desire to promote one’s own opinion to the exclusion of those of others.”

**Peter Davids:** The problem is that zeal can easily become blind fanaticism, bitter strife, or a disguised form of rivalry and thus jealousy; the person sees himself as jealous for the truth, but God and others see the bitterness, rigidity, and personal pride which are far from the truth.

b. *"and selfish ambition in your heart"*

**Daniel Doriani:** The Bible never praises selfish ambition, but to be accurate, we must say the Bible praises what we might call **aspirations**. For example, we should aspire to a quiet and productive life (**1 Thess. 4:11**). We should aspire to please the Lord (**2 Cor. 5:9**). Paul aspired to preach the gospel where the name of Christ was unknown (**Rom. 15:20**).

So it is fine to have goals or aspirations. We may have goals for the development of our gifts, for our family, for the lost, or for growth in wisdom or righteousness. God blesses those who have a passion for social justice. Everyone who is energetic, everyone with a taste for life, has ambitions. The Lord simply wants them to be godly, not worldly.

**John MacArthur:** Understandably, the word became closely associated with those who sought high political office or other positions of influence and power. It was used of personal gratification and self-fulfillment at any cost, which are the ultimate goals of all fleshly endeavors. It has no room for others, much less genuine humility. It is that ultimate self-elevation rampant in the world today which is the antithesis of what the humble, selfless, giving, loving, and obedient child of God is called to be.

**Dan McCartney:** **Ambitious boasting** is another way to evince a false faith and earthly wisdom. Human wisdom seeks self-advancement and is anything but humble, especially when it achieves worldly success. Indeed, Greek wisdom gives advice on being successful in the world. But anything that generates, or is generated by, jealousy (envy of someone else’s success) or selfish ambition (the desire to achieve one’s own advancement at the expense of others) is a denial of the teaching of Jesus, as well as the OT, and hence to boast of that kind of wisdom is to “*give the lie to the truth*,” that is, to the gospel (**1:18**; cf. **5:19**). One form of such ambition is the desire to be a teacher, and certainly the honor of being called “teacher” can have the form of worldly success, but without humility, teaching becomes boasting (**Hort 1909: 83**).

2. The Fruit = Proud Hypocrites

a. *"do not be arrogant"*

**Thomas Lea:** Boasting describes the malicious triumphant attitude gained by one party over its opponents.

b. *"and so lie against the truth"*

**John MacArthur:** A professed Christian who is proud, boasting, self-centered, loveless, and arrogant is a fraud. To claim otherwise is to *lie against the truth*, to utterly contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ and the clear teaching of all the New Testament. Near the beginning of this letter, James speaks of salvation as God's bringing "*us forth by the word of truth*," and at the end he says, "*My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth*" (1:18; 5:19, emphasis added), clearly identifying truth as a synonym of the **gospel**, where true wisdom starts.

There is nothing more characteristic of fallen, unredeemed men than being **dominated by self**. James is therefore saying that, if a person claims to belong to God and to have the wisdom of God, but his life is motivated and characterized by selfish ambition and bitter jealousy, he is simply lying against the truth. Whatever he might claim, he cannot be saved. **He is a living lie.**

## **II. (:15-18) THE ROOT OF WISDOM WILL PRODUCE CORRESPONDING FRUIT**

### **A. (:15-16) Wisdom Not From Above Stirs Up Strife and Trouble**

#### 1. Source

*"This wisdom is not that which comes down from above"*

**Craig Blomberg:** The term "*from above*" (ἀνωθεν) points the audience back to 1:17–18, where God was seen as the One who pours out good gifts from above. This link encourages the interpretation of wisdom as the preeminent gift from above. It also clearly indicates a divine origin for wisdom. Likewise, the participle "*coming down*" (κατερχομένη) echoes the "*coming down*" (καταβαίνων) of 1:17, underlining again the **heavenly source**.

#### 2. Characteristics

**Craig Blomberg:** James exposes his congregation's **faulty worldview** as the complete antithesis of anything godly: it is earthbound, spiritually dead, and demon-instigated. These three adjectives form the biblical source of the well-known English triad of "**the world, the flesh, and the devil**."

**Douglas Moo:** The wisdom that does not produce a good lifestyle (v. 13) is, in sum, characterized by 'the world, the flesh and the devil'. In each of these ways, it is the direct antithesis of 'the wisdom that comes from above' – heavenly in nature, spiritual in essence and divine in origin.

#### a. *"earthly"*

**John MacArthur:** First, such wisdom is **earthly**, in that it is limited to the present, material world of time and space. By definition, it is restricted to things that man can

theorize, discover, and accomplish by himself. It has no place for God or the things of God. It has no place for spiritual truth or illumination. It is a closed system, a circumscribed box, as it were, of man's own making and choosing under satanic prompting.

As James has just noted, this wisdom is motivated by pride, selfish ambition, arrogance, self-centeredness, self-interest, and self-aggrandizement. It spawns a society whose watchwords are "Do your own thing," "Have it your way," and "Look out for number one." It pervades philosophy, education, politics, economics, sociology, psychology, and every other dimension and aspect of contemporary human life.

**William Barclay:** Its standards are earthly standards; its sources are earthly sources. It measures success in worldly terms; and its aims are worldly aims.

b. "natural"

**John MacArthur:** It relates only to the fallen, unredeemed man, who is wholly corrupted by the Fall and separated from God. It originates in the "*natural man [who] does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised*" (1 Cor. 2:14). Those who rely on this wisdom are "*worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit*" (Jude 19). All of their feelings, desires, appetites, standards, and impulses are grounded in a humanistic view of the world and of man, who, understandably, becomes the measure of all things. Such wisdom not only feeds the flesh but also is foolish (1 Cor. 1:20).

**Dan McCartney:** The context in James is best understood if the word is taken as "having to do with the ψυχή" (*psychē*, self, natural life, or soul), and so we might cautiously translate it "self-ish," that is, focused on the advancement of one's own earthly personal welfare. Earthly wisdom offers a person counsel about self-advancement. It is the kind of "wisdom" retained by fallen angels (demons), who no doubt are very intelligent and apt at advancing themselves (in the short term). As in 1 Cor. 1:21, God's wisdom is different from human, earthly wisdom, because it serves different aims. Envy (often considered the motivation for Satan's rebellion; see Wis. 2:24) and selfish ambition (the desire to advance one's power and influence to the detriment of others) are exactly the kinds of desires that motivate the demons, and so James also terms such wisdom "demonic" (in other words, **wisdom that is like the "wisdom" of demons**, not wisdom inspired by demons). But demonic "wisdom" is no more real wisdom than the "faith" of demons in 2:19 is real faith.

c. "demonic"

3. Motivation

a. "For where jealousy"

b. "and selfish ambition exist"

4. Fruit

a. "there is disorder"

**John MacArthur:** *Akatastasia* (disorder) has the basic meaning of **instability**, and hence came to be used of a state of confusion, disturbance, disarray, or tumult, sometimes even of rebellion or anarchy.

b. "and every evil thing"

**George Guthrie:** The earthly wisdom, characterized as it is by jealousy and ambition, is associated with disrupted and dysfunctional community that does not walk in God's righteousness.

**Alec Motyer:** Now he is ready to put the vital choice to us: is the wisdom of earth (15–16) or of heaven (17–18) to rule our lives? No compromise is allowed, for they are true alternatives, standing in contrast to each other in origin, characteristics and results.

	Verses 15–16	Verses 17–18
<b>Origin</b>	not from above earthly unspiritual devilish	from above
<b>Characteristics</b>	jealousy selfish ambition	pure peaceable gentle open to reason full of mercy, etc. without uncertainty without insincerity
<b>Results</b>	disorder every vile practice	the harvest of righteousness

**B. (:17-18) Wisdom From Above Promotes Peace and Blessing**

1. Source

"But the wisdom from above"

2. Characteristics

a. "is first pure"



**Peter Davids:** The chief characteristic of true wisdom is **purity**. The meaning here is that of the OT in which God's words are pure (**Ps. 12:6 [11:7]**) or the ways of the righteous are pure as opposed to crooked (**Pr. 21:8 LXX**) or unjust (**Pr. 15:26**). This purity, then, means that the person partakes of a characteristic of God: he follows God's moral directives with unmixed motives. This person serves God alone, and so does not need the cleansing about which James will speak later (**4:7–8**; cf. **1:27**; **3:6**).

Moral purity is expanded by means of a list of adjectives arranged to take advantage of **assonance** (first initial ε, then initial α).

**Ralph Martin:** Wisdom is first and foremost a virtue that is marked by **purity** (ἀγνή; cf. **Sir 21:8**). It is no accident that James begins his list with this word, for he who is pure has taken on the characteristics of God's word (**Ps 12:6**; cf. **19:8**). Such a person serves God only and is not defiled (**1:27**) or unrighteous (**3:6**). The one who is pure is free of the moral and spiritual defects that are the marks of the double-minded (**1:7, 8; 4:8**; see Introduction). The presence of such stains produces the inevitable jealousy and strife that are characteristic of some in James' church. The absence of such blemishes produces a church that is loving, tolerant, and healthy; above all, it is centered in God's holy will. The idea of purity is expanded in what follows and can rightly be considered the "key" to all the qualities of wisdom.

b. "*then peaceable*"

**Daniel Doriani:** "*Peace-loving*" (**3:17 NIV**) or "*peaceable*" (ESV; Greek, *eirēnikē*) contrasts with the social discord caused by envy and ambition (**3:14**) and the fights caused by uncontrolled desires (**4:1–2**). True wisdom leads to peace (Prov. 3:17).

**William Barclay:** The true wisdom is the wisdom which produces right relationships. There is a kind of clever and arrogant wisdom which separates man from man, and which makes a man look with a superior contempt on his fellow-men. There is a kind of cruel wisdom which takes a delight in hurting others with clever, but cutting, words. There is a kind of depraved and wicked wisdom which seduces men away from purity and from their loyalty to God. But the true wisdom is the wisdom which at all times brings men closer to one another and closer to God."

c. "*gentle*"

**Daniel Doriani:** The considerate are willing to yield, not quick to demand. They are forbearing and slow to fight (**Titus 3:2**). Since this is a trait of the Lord Jesus (**2 Cor. 10:1**), all disciples, including church overseers, must be **gentle** (**1 Tim. 3:3**; **1 Peter 2:18**).

d. "*reasonable*"

**Daniel Doriani:** "*Submissive*" (NIV) is ordinarily translated "*open to reason*" (ESV, RSV; Greek, *eupeithēs*). It also means "easily persuaded" or "compliant." The

submissive person is docile, ready to obey, and willing to get along with others. He or she is willing to defer to others where appropriate.

e. *"full of mercy and good fruits"*

**George Guthrie:** That this wisdom is *"full of mercy"* (*mestē eleous*, GK 1799) means it is characterized consistently by compassion or kindness toward someone who has a need.

**John MacArthur:** refers to every sort of good work or deed. He demonstrates his genuine faith by his authentic good works (**James 2:14–20**). A believer is known for doing good and for exemplifying the fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5:22–23**). In all of this, he reflects his *"hunger and thirst for righteousness"* (**Matt. 5:6**).

f. *"unwavering"*

**Daniel Doriani:** It seems that James means **unwavering**. First, James commends unwavering loyalty to God later in this section of his epistle (**4:7–8**). Second, unwavering makes a better pair with the next term, *"insincere"* (literally, "not hypocritical"; Greek, *anypokritos*). James's virtues form clusters. The opening trio "peace-loving, considerate, and submissive" all point to a unified church, and the final pair both indicate a wholehearted faith, **a faith without wavering or hypocrisy**.

**John MacArthur:** literally means not to be parted or divided, hence without uncertainty, indecision, inconsistency, vacillation, or doubtfulness.

g. *"without hypocrisy"*

**John MacArthur:** Hypocrisy is one of the sins Jesus condemned most, four times just in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matt. 6:2, 5, 16; 7:5**). He repeatedly excoriated the scribes, Pharisees, and other Jewish leaders for their gross hypocrisy and insincerity. He warned His disciples, *"Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"* (Luke 12:1). When a group of Pharisees conspired to trick Him into criticizing paying taxes to Caesar, *"Jesus perceived their malice, and said, 'Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites?'"* (**Matt. 22:18**). A short while later He told a similar group, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness"* (**Matt. 23:27–28**).

### 3. Fruit

*"and the seed whose fruit is righteousness"*

### 4. Motivation

*"is sown in peace by those who make peace"*

**Dan McCartney:** We may also detect here again wisdom's functional similarity with the Holy Spirit. As **Martin** (1988: 133) observes, this list of wisdom's attributes is analogous to the fruit of the Spirit in **Gal. 5:22–23**. And just as in Paul's letters the Spirit is the source of faith (**1 Cor. 12:9**) and is received by faith (**Gal. 3:2, 14**), so also for James, wisdom and faith are coattendant. . .

James's point is that those who do deeds of peace and promote peace thereby plant seeds and create an environment that eventually yields righteousness, not only for the sower, but also for the whole community to whom peace comes (cf. **5:20**). The tongue's fire spreads destruction, but the seeds of peace-doing disseminate into a harvest of righteousness.

**Craig Blomberg:** The farming image contrasts strongly with the earlier images of fire, instability, and chaos. "Peace is the idea that gathers together a number of disparate ideas that are at work in this passage, as the wisdom of God leads to the peace and wholeness God desires of and for us." Throughout all of Scripture, the idea of peace centers on the idea of "wholeness," an idea that is "thoroughly Hebraic, meaning much more than a mere absence of disquiet. The prime notion is positive, embracing prosperity, contentment as well as security." This concept of peace goes far beyond a shallow avoidance of problems and uncomfortable issues. Neither will wisdom "pursue peace at the expense of purity. It will not compromise with sin to maintain peace. But even when fighting against sin, it hungers for peace, yearning to heal all divisions by its wise counsel." In essence, **peace is the ultimate goal of wisdom**, and wisdom only reaches its fullest potential in the midst of peace.

**George Guthrie:** Divisiveness and disorder, products of earthly ways in interpersonal relationships, have their counterpoint in peace, in a community that is unified and harmonious because it lives according to God's wise patterns of interaction.

**John MacArthur:** There is an inexorable causal relationship between godly wisdom, genuine righteousness, and peace. Godly wisdom produces a continuing cycle of righteousness, which is planted and harvested in a peaceful, harmonious relationship between God and His faithful people and between those people themselves. As Isaiah declared, "*The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever*" (**Isa. 32:17**).

As James continually emphasizes, the person who professes to be a Christian must prove it by his works, his daily living. If he is a true believer, he will possess his Lord's own wisdom, and that wisdom will manifest itself in righteous, selfless, and peaceful living. He has the revelation of God's wisdom in Scripture and the teacher and interpreter of God's wisdom in the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul therefore prayed for the church at Ephesus, "*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*" (**Eph. 1:17**). He later admonished them, "*Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise*" (**5:15**). "*He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food,*" the apostle elsewhere assures us, "*will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the*

*harvest of your righteousness” (2 Cor. 9:10), the righteousness “which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11).*

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why do people have such an inflated opinion of their own sense of wisdom and understanding? Are they really fooling anyone with their false claims?
- 2) Are we training our children to make the necessary connection between practical wisdom and good deeds? ... to make the necessary connection between the proper attitude and good deeds?
- 3) Towards what individuals do we tend to struggle with problems of jealousy and selfish ambition? How do we recognize these sinful tendencies in our life and work at putting them off and responding in unselfish love instead?
- 4) Would other people characterize us as "peacemakers"? Why or why not? How can we use our tongue to bless others rather than to stir up strife and trouble?

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**William Barclay:** It is characteristic of the natural man. The word which James uses is difficult to translate. The word is *psuchikos*, which comes from the word *psuche*. The ancients divided man into three parts--body, soul and spirit. The body (*soma*) is our physical flesh and blood and constitution; the soul (*psuche*) is the physical life which we share with the beasts; it is no more than animal life; the spirit (*pneuma*) is that which man alone possesses, that which differentiates him from the beasts, that which makes him a rational creature and kin to God. This is a little confusing for us, because we are in the habit of using the word *soul* in the same sense as the ancient people used the word *spirit*, whereas to them the word *soul* meant the physical life which is not peculiar to man, but which is shared by all the animal creation which has life. So then, what James is saying is that this wrong kind of wisdom is no more than an animal kind of thing; it is the kind of wisdom which makes an animal snap and snarl with no other thought than that of prey or personal survival. The wrong kind of wisdom is the wisdom which a man shares with the animals and which is part of his lower nature.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Wisdom was an important thing to Jewish people. They realized that it was not enough to have knowledge; you had to have wisdom to be able to use that knowledge correctly. All of us know people who are very intelligent, perhaps almost geniuses, and yet who seemingly are unable to carry out the simplest tasks of life. They

can run computers but they cannot manage their own lives! *'Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom' (Prov. 4:7)...*

Any person enamored with the wisdom of this world ought to read the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians and notice how much Paul has to say about God's wisdom and man's wisdom. Man's wisdom is foolishness to God (**1 Cor. 1:20**), and God's wisdom is foolishness to man (**1 Cor. 2:14**). Man's wisdom comes from reason, while God's wisdom comes from revelation. Man's worldly wisdom will come to nothing (**1 Cor. 1:19**), while God's wisdom will endure forever.

**Curtis Vaughan** (quoting **John Adams**): Do we often see anything corresponding to the description here given? Where are these lovely, placid features? Where these soft, gentle, graceful movements? Where this spirit, pure, yet peaceful and pitiful? Where this hand, ever stretched out, not to strike, but to succour, -- not to deal blows, but to scatter blessings? We have plenty of noise, bustle, activity, -- abundance of a certain kind of zeal and effort. But O! where is Christianity with the lineaments it here bears, so beautiful, so benign? And the rarity of it is a very sad affair; for this wisdom is not merely an ornament, it is a necessity. Destitute of it we are undone -- without it we perish. It is the way to salvation -- indeed it is itself salvation. It is another name for religion, as it dwells in the heart, and influences the character and conduct.

**Alexander Ross**: Peace is the atmosphere in which, or the conditions under which we may expect the good seed to ripen to the fruit which is righteousness. And the sowers are not merely *lovers* of peace, but *makers* of peace.

**Dr. Packer**: [explaining divine wisdom] -- The experience of God's wisdom is like learning to drive a car. When driving it is important to make appropriate responses to the constantly changing scene, to exercise soundness of judgment regarding speed, distance, and braking. If you are going to drive well, you must not fret over the highway engineer's reasoning for an S curve; the philosophy that produced red, green, and yellow traffic lights; or why the lady in front of you is accelerating while her foot is on the brake. Rather, "You simply try to see and do the right thing in the actual situation that presents itself. The effect of divine wisdom is to enable you and me to do just that in the actual situations of life." In order to drive well, you need to keep your eyes wide open to what is before you and use your head. To live wisely, you must be clear-eyed about people and life, seeing life as it is, and then responding with a mind dependent on the wisdom of God.

Being wise does not mean we understand everything that is going on because of our superior knowledge, but that we do the right thing as life comes along. Some drivers may have immense knowledge about everything, but they cannot drive well at all. Others who are less knowledgeable consistently do the right thing as they wisely drive through life.

**Brian Racer**: **The Ways of Wisdom**  
**Testing Our Readiness to Speak to the Masses**

## INTRODUCTION:

Church preparing for massive outreach opportunity connected with Mel Gibson movie: The Passion of the Christ

### **I. (:13) A CALL FOR THE READY**

A. A Question for Self Examination (cf. 3:1-2)

B. A Challenge to be Measured by

- not deeds
- not just good deeds
- but good deeds done in gentleness

### **II. (:14-16) THE CASE OF THE UNPREPARED**

A. Competitive Motive – What is the motive behind what people are saying?

“*bitter jealousy*” -- “Zeal for God and His truth is a commendable attitude, but the subtleties of sinful human nature can readily pervert it into bitter antagonism against those who do not express their adherence to God and His truth in the same way we do.”

– D. Edmond Hiebert

“*selfish ambition*” – GR. *Epitheian*: “a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means” – by Aristotle; on working for a cause for pay; unethical practice is implied; which will only lead to factions and division.

B. Carnal Wisdom

1. *Earthly* – bounded by the earth
2. *Natural* – “soulish” – Bounded by soul of man
3. *Demonic* – spiritual, but demonically spiritual; Satan especially wants to destroy relationships among believers

C. Contentious Environment

look for such a situation and then trace the problem back to the contentious person who has a root heart problem

### **III. (:17-18) THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WISE PEACEMAKER**

A. He Works with Wisdom from Above

1. *Pure* – squeaky clean; God doesn’t use a dirty vessel
2. *Peaceable* – desiring and fostering peace; but not at expense of purity
3. *Gentle* – gently reasonable; cf. Abraham Lincoln
4. *Reasonable* – willing to yield; easy to be entreated; looking for an easy way to be persuaded and cooperative; requires listening before rendering judgment
5. *Full of Mercy and Good Fruits* – the compassionate side; Does your heart break over people and their problems?
6. *Unwavering* – in contrast to wavering, doubting person of Chap. 1;

steadfast; straightforward

7. *Without Hypocrisy* – no mask; not playing games to win people’s favor; sincere; what you see is what you get

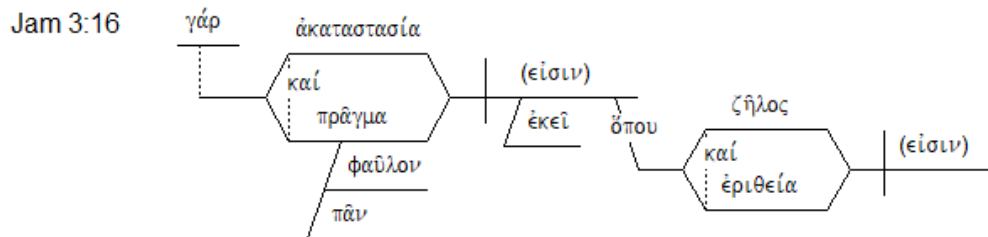
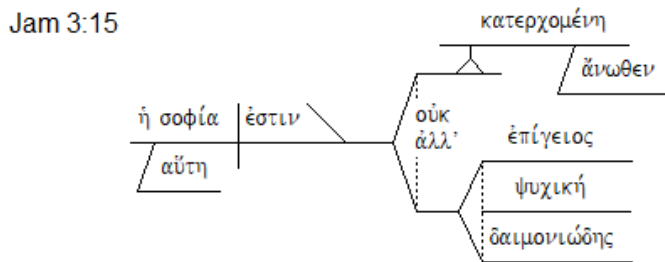
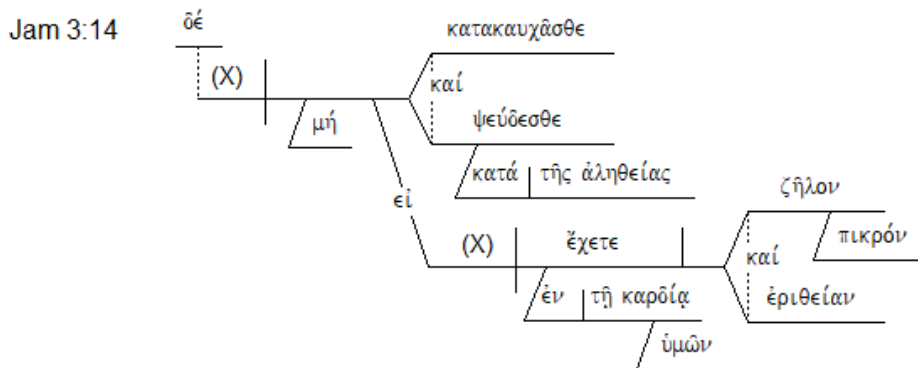
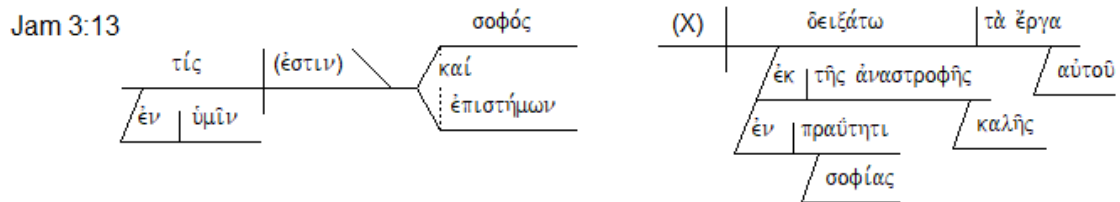
B. He Works to Make Peace

1. He Sows the Right Seed

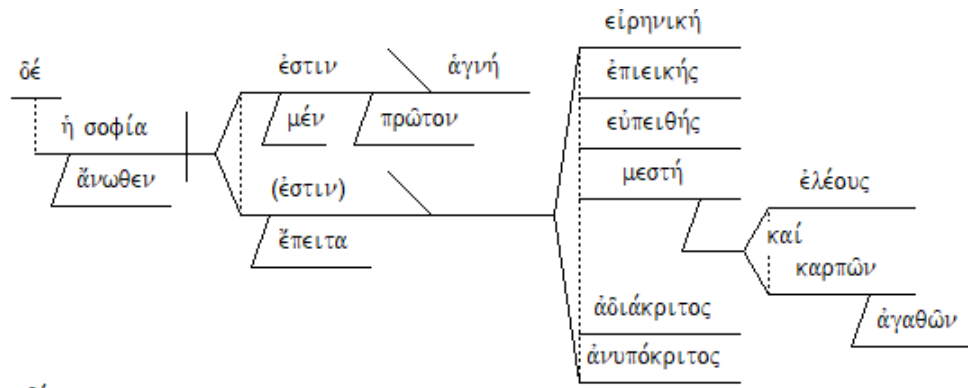
2. He Sows for the Right Reason -- Motivation = “*in peace*”

**CONCLUSION: Peacemaking** = Dangerous Ministry; you are getting into the middle between two antagonists; you must be prepared; you will be hit with some blows; have to value deeply the worth of restoring relationships

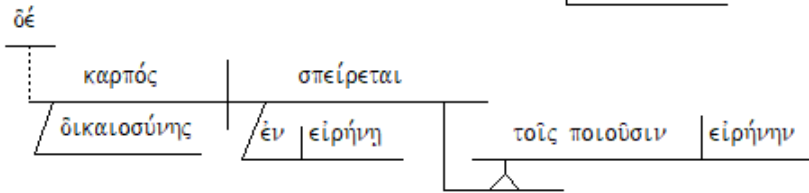
Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:



Jam 3:17



Jam 3:18





TEXT: JAMES 4:1-10

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT INTIMACY IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**HUMBLY DRAW NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**David Nystrom:** So here the two ways are set with particular clarity and urgency before his readers: **earthly wisdom or heavenly wisdom**, self-interest or the law of love, self-exaltation or exaltation at the hand of God. His language is powerful and graphic: Resist the devil/come near to God; wash your hands/purify your hearts; grieve and mourn/turn joy to gloom; humble yourselves/God will lift you up. The seriousness of the matter is confirmed in the harsh vocabulary James marshals: They “*kill*” (4:2); they are an “*adulterous people*” (4:4), whose actions make them “*an enemy of God*” (4:4); they are “*sinners*” (4:8).

**Thomas Lea:** James's readers claimed to be Christians, but they had the spirit of their unconverted neighbors in them. They were dominated by a self-will which pursued pleasure, power, and prominence rather than the will of God. James rebuked their sinful ways and urged his readers to turn to God with repentance and purity.

**Craig Blomberg:** **James 4:1–10** flows so naturally from **3:13–18** that some commentators keep the two subsections together as a single passage. Having just warned against the evils that result from jealousy and rivalry (3:14, 16), James now points out what some in his churches have seemingly allowed those motives to produce—coveting and quarreling—which resemble devotion to this fallen world rather than to God (4:1–6). Vv. 7–10 offer the antidote: resist the devil (recall the link between the world and the devil in 3:15) and submit to God (as with those who exhibit wisdom from above, cf. 3:13, 17–18).

**The Misuse of Speech in Quarrels and Slander (4:1–12)**

a. Christians should reject strife as stemming from friendship with the world (vv. 1–6).

- i. The question raised and answered: Where does strife come from? From our evil natures (v. 1).
- ii. The behavior observed: Strife among Christians does not satisfy their desires (vv. 2–3).
- iii. The question and answer rephrased: Where does all this selfishness come from? From friendship with the world, which is incompatible with friendship with God (v. 4).
- iv. The appeal to Scripture: God does not want us to act this way and makes it possible for us not to act this way (vv. 5–6).

b. Christians should humbly submit to God in response to his friendship (vv. 7–10).

- i. The main point stated: Submit to God (v. 7a).

- ii. Three commands on how to do this (vv. 7b–9).
- iii. The main point restated: Humble yourselves before God (v. 10).

c. Christians should reject slander as one particularly insidious manifestation of strife (vv. 11–12).

- i. Slandering fellow believers slanders God’s law, which prohibits such action (v. 11a).
- ii. This usurps God’s role as sole judge by placing believers in a position of judging God’s law instead of obeying it (vv. 11b–12).

**David Platt: Two Pictures of Friendship**

A. Friendship with the world (4:1-5)

- 1. comes from the sinful desires of the flesh,
- 2. is motivated by a longing for earthly pleasure,
- 3. and results in spiritual adultery against God.

B. Friendship with God (4:6-10)

- 1. comes from the gracious desire of God,
- 2. is motivated by a longing for eternal satisfaction,
- 3. and results in submission to the authority of God.

We have a chapter break after **3:18**, but the reality is that the fights and quarrels James refers to in **chapter 4** flow from the worldly wisdom that was permeating the community of faith in **chapter 3**. In fact, the word “*covet*” in **4:2** comes from the same word James uses in **3:14** and **3:16** that is translated “*envy*.” James illustrates in **chapter 4** the disorder and evil that is the result of the envy and selfish ambition of **chapter 3**. This picture is summed up in **4:4**: “*Adulteresses! Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world’s friend becomes God’s enemy.*” We’ve seen two pictures of wisdom that lead us now to think about two pictures of friendship.

**I. (:1-2) RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO WORLDLINESS = A LUST FOR:**

- **WORLDLY PLEASURES**
- **WORLDLY POSSESSIONS**
- **WORLDLY POWER / PRESTIGE**

**INSTEAD OF DEPENDING ON GOD**

**A. The Surface Problem = Fighting with One Another**

*"What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?"*

**Zimmerman:** Although James specifically had in mind the conflict that leads to battered congregations and split churches, his words apply equally well to abusive families and broken homes. The same passions that lead to church disputes are at the root of all conflicts. Affairs of the heart, whether against God or a spouse, are remarkably similar.

Following the steps James prescribes for dealing with these issues in the church will also extend their benefits into our homes and society.

**R. Kent Hughes:** The hounded Jewish congregations of the Dispersion were shot through with strife. They were experiencing class conflicts between the gold-fingered rich and their many poor (cf. **2:1–11**). Rival would-be teachers grasped at the imagined good life of being Christian rabbis (literally “*great ones*”) (cf. **1:19–26; 3:1**). They boiled with “*bitter jealousy*” and “*selfish ambition*” and fell to “*disorder and every vile practice*” (**3:14, 16**). They praised God in church at every mention of his name, saying “Blessed be he! Blessed be he!” and then verbally cursed their fellow parishioners on the street (**3:9, 10**). Some of the new believers in these congregations were former Zealots, violent political activists. Because of this, many prominent scholars believe some may have actually become violent in the churches.

## **B. Three Root Problems = Worldliness**

### 1. First Root Problem = Lust for Worldly Pleasures

*"Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"*

**Spiros Zodhiates:** The passions of the flesh are described as constantly fighting to have their way, to be victorious over the spirit, over the new nature which Jesus Christ has given us. The flesh knows nothing of the grace of forgiveness and of esteeming others superior to ourselves. Pride and arrogance are instruments of the flesh for fighting its battles. The flesh loves war, war against others and war against what is lofty and ideal in life. The flesh is quick to declare others enemies.

**John Painter:** The first question refers to external conflicts between people (*en hymin*), while the second one identifies an internal conflict within people (*en tois melesin hymōn*).

**David Nystrom:** It is the **passions**, or more properly the decision to cultivate rather than control the passions, that have contributed to the problems within the church. These passions (untrammled desire for power and authority, a desire for popularity within the eyes of the powerful, etc.) constitute a state of double-mindedness. The members of the congregation are pushed this way and that, first by their conscience, then by the evil impulse.

**Alec Motyer:** James, however, is not examining our inner conflicts, but the wars we wage against each other. All our desires and passions are like an armed camp within us, ready at a moment's notice to declare war against anyone who stands in the way of some personal gratification on which we have set our hearts.

Our condition (**1b**) is one of self-willed determination, summed up as **passions**. This word, like the words desire and covet in **verse 2a**, is in itself morally neutral. It means ‘*pleasures*’. All would be well except that in us ‘pleasures’, ‘desires’ and strong longings are allied to, and at the service of, a sinful nature. Consequently the sinful self,

setting its heart on this satisfaction or that, will not allow anything to stand in its way: so you kill ... so you fight and wage war (2a). The condition becomes a practice.

James' language sounds so extravagant, so exaggerated in our ears, that we feel we must positively refuse to see our small-time disagreements and occasional squabbles as meriting such a description. But if we take this line we only show how imperfectly our thoughts have been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. When the Lord Jesus undertook to explore the length and depth of the sixth commandment, he spoke of anger, derogatory, dismissive remarks, name-calling. He illustrated his serious intent by the story of the sudden realization, during worship, that a brother has '*something*' against us (Mt. 5:21ff.). He spoke not of great, prolonged or unjustified anger, or anything of the sort. He did not specify 'something big', or 'something important', which a brother might be holding against us—or even some charge with which we agreed—just '*something*'. Was the Lord Jesus exaggerating when he brought it all under the heading of murder? Or was John extravagant when he said that anyone who failed to love his brother was like Cain (1 Jn. 3:11–12)? It is we who diminish the importance of right relationships, not the Scriptures which exaggerate the importance of quarrels. We smile with the wrong sort of tolerance over a touchy and difficult brother or sister; we shrug our shoulders over two who have fallen out. But we should not be tolerant of war, or shrug our shoulders over fightings.

## 2. Second Root Problem = Lust for Worldly Possessions

*"You lust and do not have; so you commit murder"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** The fierceness of their desire and the violence of their resentment against interference with it actually culminates in murder. This is not other than our Lord warned us to be prepared for. He said: '*For within, out of the heart of man, comes ... murder*' (Mark 7:21). The Old Testament bears witness to the same grim truth. Bitter jealousy led Cain to kill Abel. Thwarted covetousness led to Naboth's death at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel. Uriah the Hittite was sent to his death to make way for David's lust.

**Robert Plummer:** When James asks, "*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*" one can only imagine the finger-pointing and accusations if his recipients had been allowed to respond. It's not other people or unjust situations that are causing a quarrel; it's evil desires in our own hearts. We must look first within ourselves for the cause of the strife around us. A covetous heart inevitably demonstrates itself through quarreling and fighting (v. 2). What does James mean, though, by accusing the community of killing because of unfulfilled desires (v. 2)? Actual murder does not fit the context. Perhaps James is drawing on the language of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where hateful speech and actions are associated with murder (Mt 5:21-22; cf. 1Jn 3:15).

## 3. Third Root Problem = Lust for Worldly Power / Prestige

*"And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel"*

**David Roper:** All of us have certain desires, many of them legitimate. But often we are frustrated in the expression of these desires. When we are frustrated, we have two options. We can either assert ourselves and get what we want by ourselves, and thus cause conflict and destruction - or we can ask God. And if we ask God he delights to give.

**Spiros Zodhiates:** History tells us of a statue that was erected to a celebrated victor in the public games of Greece named Theogenes. The erection of this statue so excited the envious hatred of one of his rivals that he went every night and strove to throw the statue over by repeated blows. Ultimately he succeeded, but alas, the statue fell upon him, and he was crushed to death beneath it. Such generally is the end of the man who allows himself to be carried away by the spirit of envy.

### **C. The Fundamental Problem = Lack of Dependence upon God**

*"You do not have because you do not ask"*

Only God can satisfy the needs of the human heart

**Alexander Ross:** These desires for the wrong kind of pleasure which are at work in our members, he says, wage ceaseless warfare against everything that stands in the way of their gratification, and they express themselves in covetous longings after the wealth and the possessions of others, and thus strife and bloodshed arise, and even murders may result.

## **II. (:3-6) FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD = HOSTILITY TOWARDS GOD (THE TUG OF WAR BETWEEN FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD AND FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD)**

### **A. (:3) Worldly Motives Abandon You to a Life of Frustration**

*"You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives,  
so that you may spend it on your pleasures."*

### **B. (:4) Worldly Alliances Alienate You as an Enemy of God**

*"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world  
is hostility toward God?  
Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world  
makes himself an enemy of God."*

**Dan McCartney:** The intention to be a **friend of the world** makes a person an enemy of God because it puts the world in the place of God; it submits to the world's ethics and values instead of God's, desires the things of the world instead of God, and exalts the creature over the creator. James's application is that both those who have resources but spend them on their own "pleasures" and those who have not but want them for "pleasures" are indicted as "friends of the world," spiritual profligates.

The word for “friendship” (φιλία, *philia*) ordinarily means simply “affectionate regard” (LSJ 1934), but it can slide over into the semantic range of sexual love (cf. **Prov. 5:19** LXX). Hence, when James berates the world’s would-be “friends” as “adulteresses,” he implies that flirting with the world is akin to **spousal unfaithfulness**. In the OT idolatry sometimes was called “adultery” because Israel was represented as God’s bride (especially in **Hos. 1–3**; but see also, e.g., **Isa. 62:5**; **Ezek. 16:32**; **23:45**), and, like marriage, Israel’s covenant relationship with God demanded exclusive fealty. Although James does not spell it out, he no doubt shares the conviction of other NT writers (e.g., **John 3:29**; **Eph. 5:28–32**; **Rev. 21:2**) that the present-day community of faith, the people of God, is the bride of Christ, and hence idolatry or covenantal unfaithfulness of any kind is tantamount to adultery. Coziness with the world and its values is not unknown in the church of our day either, and such coziness should be named for what it is: a manifestation of unbelief (nonfaith).

**Daniel Doriani:** God’s value system is different. In his eyes, all humans have honor, since he made all in his likeness. Therefore, we are not God’s friends if we define people by their acquisitions, their merit, and their “station.” We must not adopt the values of our culture. We cannot be loyal to the culture and to the kingdom. Their values clash. To try to serve both systems is adultery. Yet the Lord, like a good husband, woos his faithless wife instead of seeking divorce.

### **C. (:5) Worldly Loyalty Arouses the Jealousy of the Indwelling Holy Spirit**

*"Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose:*

*'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us?'"*

**Daniel Doriani:** [After quoting a variety of translations, points out the key interpretative questions] -- These respected translations reveal what the main questions are.

1. First, does the verse speak of the human spirit or the Holy Spirit? (The question arises because the Greek did not differentiate lowercase and capital letters as we do; as a result our Greek New Testament never capitalizes “spirit,” even when it clearly refers to the Holy Spirit.)
2. Second, is the intense envy or jealous yearning that James describes best understood as a positive or a negative desire?
3. Third, is the spirit (or Spirit) the subject or the direct object of the sentence? Is the subject of the sentence the human spirit or God?

**Dan McCartney:** five options:

1. “The Spirit that God has caused to dwell in us [believers] yearns jealously” (i.e., God the Holy Spirit does not tolerate his people trying to be friends with the world).
2. “God yearns jealously regarding the (Holy) Spirit that he has caused to dwell in us” (i.e., the threat of withdrawing the Holy Spirit hangs over those who want to become friends of the world; NASB).
3. “God yearns jealously regarding the breath of life that he has put within us” (i.e., God vehemently desires fealty from his human creatures generally; NRSV, ESV).

4. “When the (human) spirit that God has caused to dwell in us yearns (for the pleasures of the world), envy (and thus fighting) is the result.”
5. “The (human) spirit that God has caused to dwell in us yearns (for the world) enviously” (NIV).

Hence, in my judgment, the “*S/spirit he caused to dwell in us*” is a reference to the divine S/spirit considered not as the person of the Holy Spirit but as **the presence of God in divinely given wisdom and understanding**, or what the OT called the “*spirit of wisdom*” with which the Messiah was to be anointed (**Isa. 11:2**) but that had already been given to leaders such as Joshua (**Deut. 34:9**) and even artisans such as Bezalel (**Exod. 35:31**). The jealousy with which God yearns over it reflects the common Jewish understanding that in order to keep the S/spirit, one must remain in submission to God (**James 4:7**), and that the divine S/spirit is unavailable to the proud.

Therefore, **4:5b** basically reflects, as it were, an **implied threat of withdrawal of the spirit of true wisdom**.

A second approach, one that is available to those who think that **4:5b** is speaking of **God’s jealousy**, is to identify the quotation as a paraphrase of the explanation attached to the second commandment, “*I the Lord your God am a jealous God*” (**Exod. 20:5**), or other similar texts (e.g., **Ezek. 8:3**).

Alternative View:

**John MacArthur:** One cannot be dogmatic, but, in context, it seems that the Authorized (King James) rendering is preferable: “*The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy.*” James would therefore be saying, in effect, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are living proof of the veracity of Scripture, which clearly teaches that the natural man has a spirit of envy?” That interpretation is clearly consistent with James’s emphasis in the larger passage.

**Walter Wessel:** God is a jealous God (cf. **Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 32:16; Zech 8:2; I Cor. 10:22**)

**George Guthrie:** In the face of his people’s friendship with the world, God does not sit by idly. He has made us for relationship with himself, and he will not passively let us embrace the world in an adulterous relationship.

**Alec Motyer:** If this spirit is simply the spirit of man, what is the point of the descriptive clause which he has made to dwell in us? Why should James call attention to the fact that our spirit, involved as it is in sinful longings, was nevertheless placed in us by the Lord? It would, of course, underline our sinful corruption of a good design of God, but the context does not seem to need such a point to be made. On the other hand, if the reference is to the Spirit, made to indwell us by the act and purpose of God, then the unique verb ‘*to make to indwell*’ (*katoikizō*), used nowhere else in the New Testament, is justified and the ‘*greater grace*’ of **verse 6** has added force in the light of this considerable grace noted in **verse 5**.

**Ralph Martin:** God opposes those who fight and war within the church, and he has placed his Spirit within his people to combat that tendency. Therefore, it is **God's jealousy** that is described in v 5, for he stands waiting for the belligerent to forsake their envy of others and direct their attention back to him.

**R. Kent Hughes:** I am convinced that the text refers to the **Holy Spirit's jealousy over us** because it best fits the argument of the context and because it touches on that grand truth so indispensable to the New Testament theology—the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding that the Holy Spirit's jealousy for us is what is meant here opens a heart-changing truth to us: even when we sin by seeking our pleasures in friendship with the world, we are greatly loved, for jealousy is an essential element of true love. We are brides of Christ, and the Holy Spirit does not want us to go somewhere else to "have our needs met." The Holy Spirit's true love for us evokes a proper intolerance of straying affection. The personalness of this ought to steel us against wandering.

This jealous Spirit is inside us. When we sin, he is pained! Furthermore, his jealousy is passionate, for the idea in the Greek is that he longs or yearns for us with an intense jealousy.

To realize that the awesomely holy God who transcends the universe and is wholly other and self-contained is at the same time personally and passionately and lovingly jealous for our affection—this realization ought to stop any of our "affairs" with the world and cause us to prostrate our souls adoringly before him. How we are loved! And how we ought to love! For as John informs us, "*We love because he first loved us*" (**1 John 4:19**).

Though God is the author of all true pleasures and desires us to enjoy life, the illicit tugging strings of self-centered hedonism constantly pull at us. And many of us have become friends of the fallen world order and are thus God's enemies. What are we to do?

#### **D. (:6) Supernatural Grace is Available to the Humble**

*"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says,  
'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"*

My wife and I worship with our fellow believers at Grace Bible Church. When I think on this verse, I wonder if the name of our church should actually be Greater Grace Bible Church! What a marvelous promise from our all-sufficient God.

**Alec Motyer:** What comfort there is in this verse! It tells us that God is tirelessly on our side. He never falters in respect of our needs, he always has more grace at hand for us. He is never less than sufficient, he always has more and yet more to give. Whatever we may forfeit when we put self first, we cannot forfeit our salvation, for there is always



more grace. No matter what we do to him, he is never beaten. We may play false to the grace of election, contradict the grace of reconciliation, overlook the grace of indwelling—but he gives more grace. Even if we were to turn to him and say, "What I have received so far is much less than enough," he would reply, "Well, you may have more" His resources are never at an end, his patience is never exhausted, his initiative never stops, his generosity knows no limit: **he gives more grace.**

**Annie Johnson Flint:**

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater;  
He sendeth more grace when the labours increase;  
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,  
To multiplied trials His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,  
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done:  
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,  
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,  
His power has no boundary known unto men;  
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,  
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

### **III. (:7-10) INTIMACY WITH GOD = THE CURE FOR WORLDLINESS 6 STEPS TOWARDS RENEWED INTIMACY WITH GOD (THE PATHWAY TO TRUE INTIMACY WITH GOD)**

No "self-help" program here; this is a "God-help me" program.

#### **A. Submit to God**

*"Submit therefore to God."*

#### **B. Resist the Devil**

*"Resist the devil"*

**Result:** *"and he will flee from you"*

**Daniel Doriani:** James links submission to God with resistance of the devil. That is, to submit to God's authority is to resist the devil's authority. To submit to God is to order our lives under his authority. To resist the devil means we oppose, we fight back, we take a stand against the devil's authority. To oppose Satan in this setting means to resist temptations especially to fight each other or covet (4:1–2). Curiously, Paul says one way to resist Satan is to flee from him, that is, to flee from his blandishment to sin.

#### **C. Draw Near to God**

*"Draw near to God"*

**Result:** *"and He will draw near to you."*

**John Painter:** Fundamental devotion to God is crucial for resisting the devil and controlling desire. This means that desire, when transformed and redirected toward God and neighbor, does not have acquisitive and possessive intent but instead is devoted to serving God and neighbor (2:8; 4:6–8).

#### **D. Cleanse Yourselves**

##### 1. Outward Purity

*"Cleanse your hands, you sinners;"*

**John MacArthur:** Beginning in 3:13, James warns against the worldly wisdom of unbelievers, which *"is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic"* (v. 15). It produces *"jealousy and selfish ambition, ... disorder and every evil thing"* (v. 16) and gives evidence that the one possessing it is *"an enemy of God"* (4:4). He here offers those unbelievers an invitation to **saving faith**. This text, like the epistle as a whole, includes admonitions to believers to put away any remaining vestiges of their former worldly living that continue to mar their spiritual lives. But the primary emphasis is clearly on those who claim to be saved but are not. The interpretive key identifying the recipients of James's rebuke as unbelievers is the term **sinners**—a term used only to describe non-Christians.

##### 2. Inward Purity

*"and purify your hearts, you doubleminded."*

The doubleminded are those with divided loyalty between God and the world.

**Peter Davids:** Thus in the NT one finds the moral call to purity (Mt. 5:8; Mk. 7:21–23 par.), a call that John, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and the Pastorals take up. The call is for right deed and right commitment: pure hands would do good works and pure hearts would be totally committed.

#### **E. Grieve over Your Sin**

*"Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom."*

**Peter Davids:** Rather than experience mourning at the judgment, sinners should mourn now in true repentance so that they will not have to mourn then.

**Craig Blomberg:** James does not claim that there are never times for joy, but he maintains that this is the time for repentance, a "reaction ... for purposes of restoration. Those who follow such a path will be qualified to laugh and rejoice" at the time of the eschatological reversals. Once we realize the grievous nature of our sins, we ought to "be upset and show it when we realize just how far away we let ourselves get from God," crying "at the horror of" our sins.

## F. Humble Yourself

*"Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord"*

**Result:** *"and He will exalt you"*

**Curtis Vaughan:** It calls for an awareness of God's greatness and glory and our own insignificance and unworthiness. It suggests an acknowledgment of God's right to rule our lives and our readiness to do His will.

**George Guthrie:** The value of humility as the right path to exaltation is widely published in the OT, but the most immediate backdrop for James is the teaching of Jesus, who said, *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"* (Lk 14:11; cf. Mt 23:12; Lk 18:14). The thought is echoed in the writings of the early church (e.g., 1Pe 5:6; see Moo, 196), due in no small measure to the example of the Lord himself, who lived a life of perfect submission to the Father in the face of suffering and was exalted as a result (Heb 2:9; Php 2:5–11). This forms a cornerstone of the Lord's upside-down value system, which governs the kingdom. The way "up" is "down"; the path of freedom is submission; the road to joy is walked in mourning and with tears. Yet the end result is grace. The Lord lifts those who, recognizing their sin, repent, bowing before him in submission.

**Craig Blomberg:** Finally, we reach the conclusion of the discussion of **humility versus pride**, started back in 3:14, as James rephrases his call for submission and God's promise of exaltation. It is not for us to compete for position for the sake of our own selfish ambition; instead, it is for God to exalt as he wills. The theme of humility here proves essential to James's thought: God gives grace to us when we are humiliated and exalts us, but we in turn are asked to humble ourselves. Having introduced this theme due to the arguments and rivalry occurring in his churches (recall 3:14 and 4:1–2), James concludes it with humility as his answer to these problems. People who are humble do not seek their own "rights" to positions of leadership, but allow God to encourage and lift them up as he sees fit. Thus, humility comprises an essential attribute for community.

In contrast with pride and selfish ambition in the church, "only self-abasement and repentance is needed to gain the true exaltation which comes not from the world, but from God (cf. 1:9–11)." "Humility is not passivity, but receptivity. It is certainly not groveling before God or others; it is simply accepting truth, learning from every situation, growing in simplicity and in wisdom." As throughout the Bible, God's people must work hard to please him, but by his great grace (recall v. 6) that work accomplishes something of eternal value. James has now completed his *inclusio*, begun in v. 7.

\* \* \* \* \*

## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) The word for "*lusts*" is the root word for "hedonism". What types of pleasures or entertainment tug at our heartstrings and threaten to divert our loyalty from God? Are we "*doubleminded*" in some respects?
- 2) How can this passage be applied to other types of conflicts and abuse -- such as child abuse, spouse abuse, even abortion?
- 3) What are some examples where we have either prayed for something with wrong motives or failed to pray because we did not want to live a life of submitted dependence upon God?
- 4) How can these same principles for renewed intimacy be applied to our marriage relationship as well? What specific things can we do to implement the six step program outlined here?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Alexander Ross:** (quoting **Farrar** from *Early Days of Christianity*) -- Wars, fightings, pleasures that are ever setting out as it were on hostile expeditions, disappointed desires, frustrated envy and even fruitless murder to supply wants which would have been granted to prayer -- then, again, prayers utterly neglected or themselves tainted with sin because misdirected to reckless gratification, and because ruined by contentiousness and selfishness -- all this spiritual adultery, the divorce of the soul from God to the love of the world -- is this indeed a picture of the condition of Christian Churches within thirty years of the death of Christ?

**C. Leslie Mitton:** Sometimes we tend to think that peace is the natural state of man, and that strife is the unnatural element which disturbs it. Quite the reverse is true. Strife is characteristic of human life, and where lasting peace exists in a community, it is the mark of a great work of God's grace. Peace represents a notable achievement, and is possible only when individuals are ready to subordinate personal feelings to the common good. It does not just 'happen' but has to be 'striven for' (**Eph. 4:3**). It is like a garden with beautiful flowers. It does not just 'happen' by accident. Quarrels are like weeds; they flourish everywhere."

**C. Leslie Mitton:** James has been denouncing the wicked causes of strife in human communities--the aggressive self-seeking of corrupt human nature, concerned only to find satisfaction for its own desires without regard for the evil things it brings to others and the community as a whole. Now he turns from the causes of this ugly evil, and points us to the neglected cure of it. The cure lies in the completely opposite approach to life, not greedy self-seeking, but a readiness to submit the whole of life in meek obedience to the will of God, a humble desire to learn that will, and a glad acceptance

of it as the one rule of life, once it is known. This is the way that leads to peace and good will in the community, and it is the refusal of this which provokes bitter hatred and ill will.

**C. Leslie Mitton:** It is not, of course, that our lives have to be made entirely satisfactory, before we may draw near to God. Otherwise, who would ever be able to come? Often it is the very act of drawing near which first awakens the desire to have things put right, and then bestows the means for this to be done. But he who comes to God must be willing to be put right. Faith is not identical with obedience, but it must imply the readiness to be obedient, if only the power to obey is granted to us. Genuine faith, therefore, while fully aware that only God can really heal a sick soul will at the same time want to put right immediately those things which lie within its own power.

**David Roper:** Re becoming a friend of the world -- The most obvious thing is that we become a friend of the world. A self-assertiveness is the essence of worldliness. That is the world's creed: if you want to get ahead, then do it for yourself. No one else will do it for you. You have to claw and kick your way to the top of the heap. You only go around once, so you have to grab the brass ring. You have got to get what you want out of life. James says that when we feel that we have to get what we desire by asserting our self; then we ally our self with the world and with its philosophy, and thus we become an enemy of God. Why God's enemy? Because God wants to bring peace and reconciliation to the world. But the world's way always produces conflict and bitterness and strife. So when we choose to assert our self we constitute our self an enemy of God.

**Zimmerman:** Spiritual adultery occurs when Christians look outside their relationship to God to get their needs met. A third party, the world, is invited into the relationship.

The world refers to the philosophies and practices that fallen men have devised in their effort to live apart from God. Thus, they are against God (anti-God).

To embrace the world (especially in this context of fulfilling our desires), is like inviting a hated rival into the marriage bed.

When we crave acceptance from the world, we reject God and set ourselves against Him as though we were His enemy.

**Spiros Zodhiates:** Wars among us as Christian communities, denominations, and groups harm everyone. Perhaps the reason God has permitted the existence of various Christian groups in the course of the history of the Christian Church is for us to show that, although we are different, we can love each other. That impresses the world much more than if we were all one because of the will of a superhand imposed upon us.

**Brian Racer: Maintaining a One-Flesh Union with Christ**

Introduction:

Look at the marriage relationship; look at broken relationships where adultery and infidelity has occurred; think of how all of the emotions of jealousy, love, passion, patience, anger, etc. compare to how the Lord feels about His bride when we forsake

Him to pursue worldliness in some area

## **I. (:1-5) A Broken Union**

### **A. (:1-3) In Conflict with Each Other – with Troubling Consequences**

1. An Internal Problem – strife between members  
Pleasures waging internal way; when something else begins to own our hearts, our spirit becomes anemic and powerless;  
Breaking fellowship with Christ evidences itself in our breaking fellowship with other believers
2. An External Pain – spilling out into our relationships
3. All Prayers Hindered  
When we disconnect from God’s grace and mercy and the plan of God, God won’t give us something He knows will damage us

### **B. (:4-5) In Conflict with Our Beloved**

Idolatry = Heart of Adultery – displacing the fidelity, loyalty and passion owed to Christ

1. Friends & Enemies – Friendship with the world = Hostility to God  
(**Jer. 3:20**)
2. The Fury of the Jealousy of God – **Song of Solomon 8:6-7**

Def. of Jealousy = Fear of being displaced that provokes one to anger in order to protect one’s position; not just something God feels; but moved Him to take action; God wants our full passion devoted to Him; “*My Heart, God’s Home*”;  
God patiently waits, loves, doesn’t quit

## **II. (:6-10) The Blessing of Brokenness** – there is a way back; a way to be reconciled

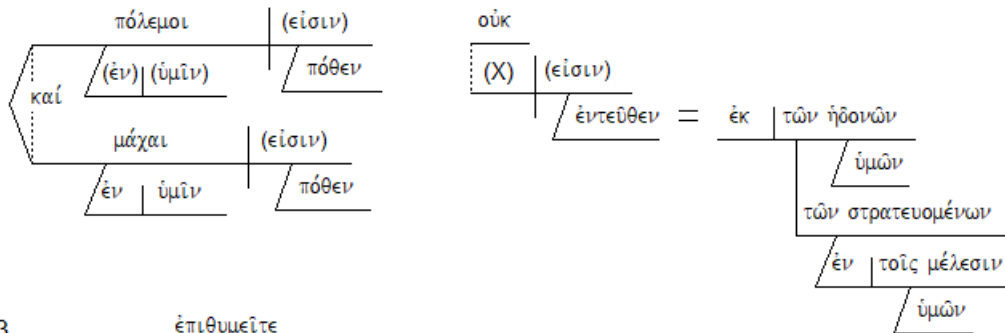
### **A. The Power of Grace** – we admit that we have messed up and need God’s help

1. “*Submit to God*” – Get under and Listen  
Where did I get off track; How can I get back on and proceed?
2. “*Resist the Devil*” – Must do step #1 before step #2  
Stand firm against Satan’s lies, accusations, temptations and false guilt trips
3. “*Draw Near to God*” – God hasn’t moved; you just need to come back
4. “*Cleanse Your Hands*” – deals with sinful actions
5. “*Purify Your Hearts*” – deals more with the attitudes and motives
6. “*Be Miserable, Mourn, Weep*” = sign of genuine repentance; sometimes we cheapen grace and don’t recognize the cost of the cross; also we often have to live with the consequences of our sin (even though we have been forgiven) – Humbly absorb these consequences as your lot in life without complaining against God
7. “*Humble Yourselves*” – I have messed up; I need you desperately  
lower your thinking about yourself; we get the wrong idea that we deserve everything: we deserved that promotion that someone else got (therefore he must have gotten it by some illicit means); we did everything right and therefore don’t deserve to be in this position

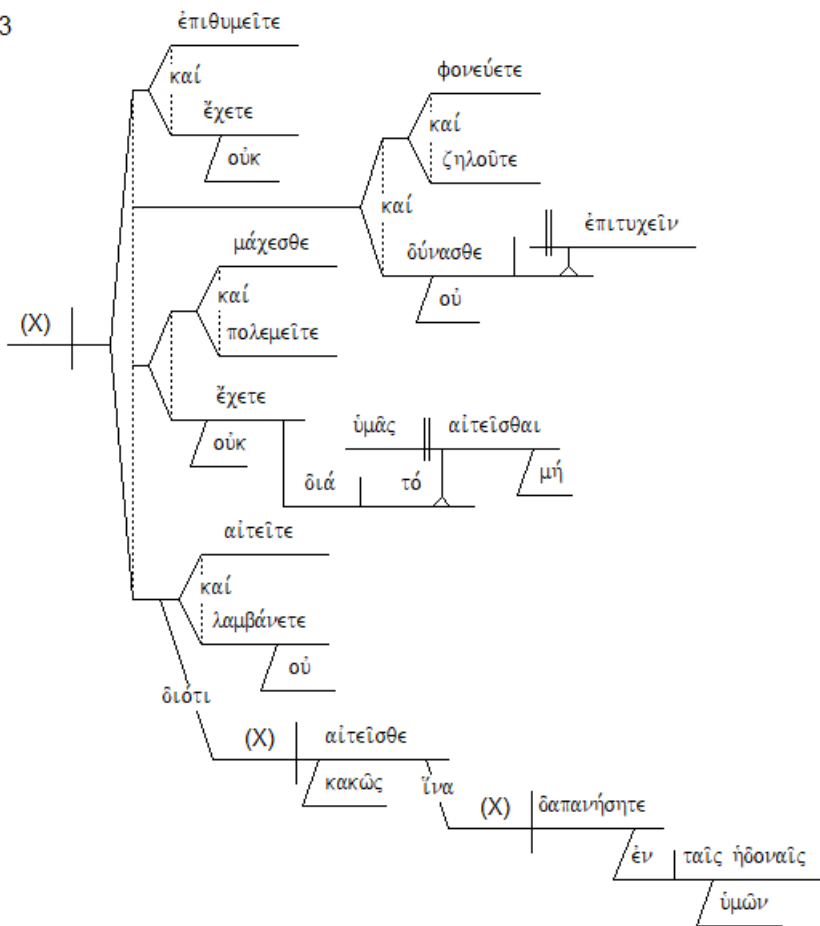
B. The Power of a Jealous Love that Wins and Rewards  
 God's heart keeps coming after us until He makes us wholly His

Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:

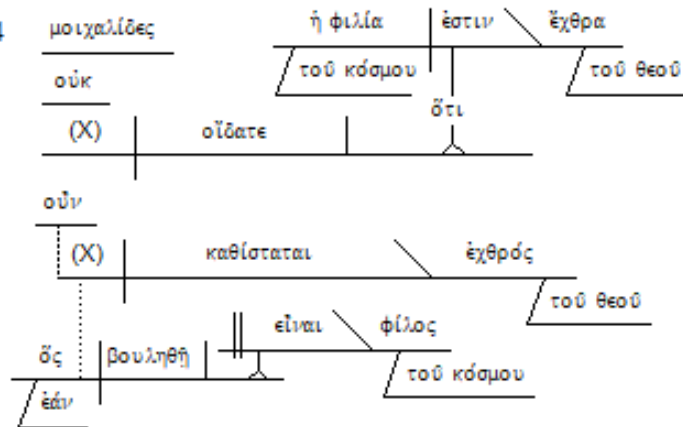
Jam 4:1



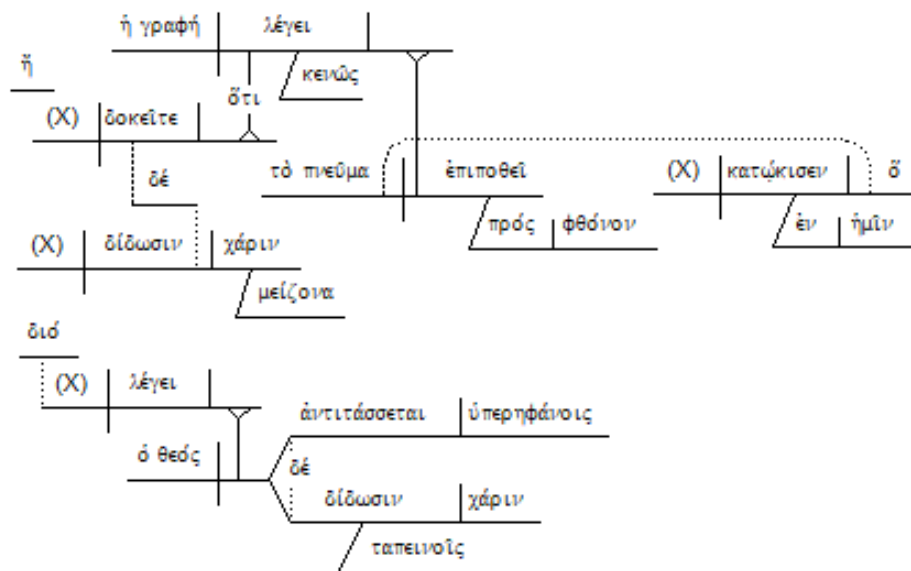
Jam 4:2-3



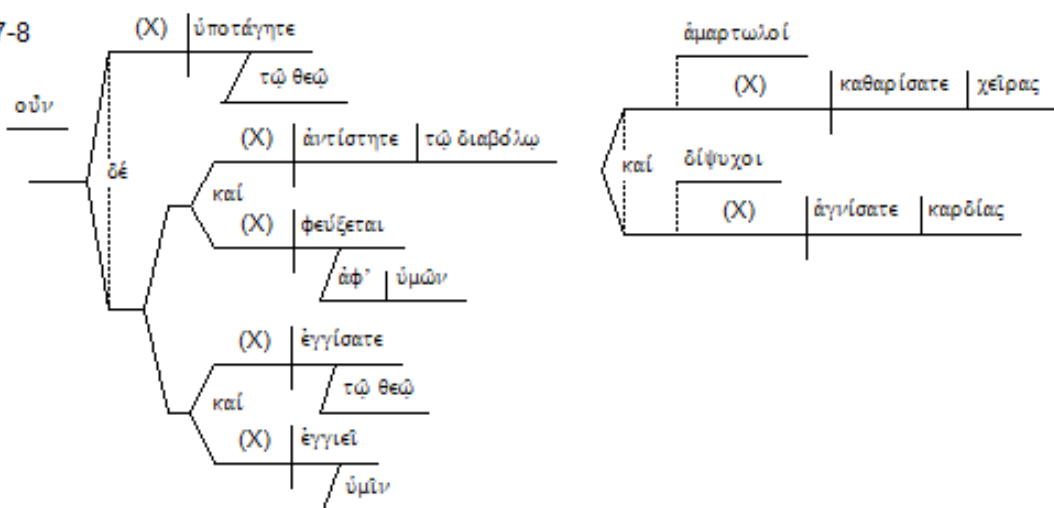
Jam 4:4



Jam 4:5-6

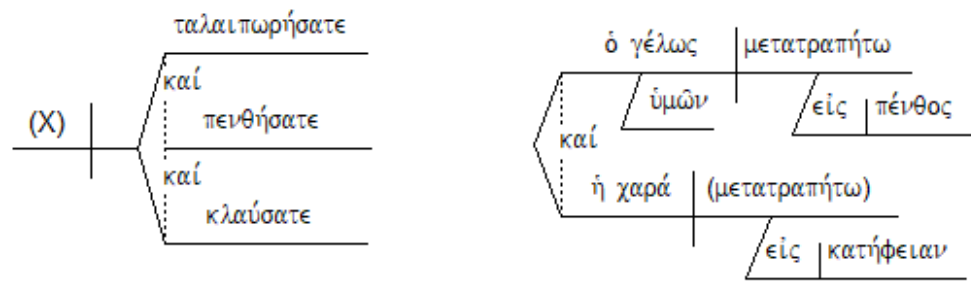


Jam 4:7-8

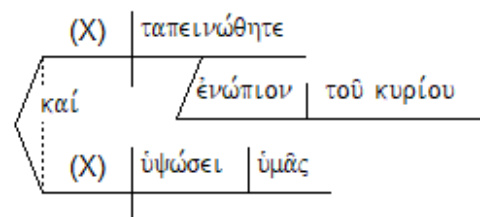




Jam 4:9



Jam 4:10



TEXT: JAMES 4:11-17

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT SUBMISSION TO THE WILL OF GOD IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**DON'T USURP THE ROLE OF GOD AS JUDGE OR MASTER PLANNER**

**INTRODUCTION:**

A lot of times Christians try to play God without even realizing the folly of what they are doing.

**Craig Blomberg:** Despite formal parallels with **5:1–6**, the present section really is not about wealth or poverty but about the temptations of **autonomous planning** more generally and thus a failure to take God's will into account. . .

Main Idea: Christians should not plan for the future as if they are in complete control of their own lives but should consistently make a healthy allowance for God's sovereignty. Awareness of this principle makes failure to implement it all the more culpable.

**Ralph Martin:** In the search for a **thematic thread** binding these apparently disparate sections (cf. **Blevins'** chapter title: he considers the issues under two heads, namely, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, with submission to God the major emphasis) there is another suggestion to be made. James has already devoted much of his writing to **the use and abuse of the tongue**. We propose that these pericopes are a continuation and an application of the same topic, with a variation. . .

Now he returns to this general theme by commenting on the different areas of social life **where the tongue betrays a proud spirit**. When his audience indulges in derogatory words and insults directed against the brothers (**4:11–12**; cf. **Ps 50:20**, where slander against one's brother is held up to reproof) this evil speaking is seen as an offense against God's law and against God himself. He is the only one who can be rightly regarded as the all-knowing person and so able rightly to judge (**4:12**). This is one manifestation of the **sin of presumption**.

Another area where the arrogance of the tongue shows itself is when plans and proposals for future business transactions, involving travel, sojourn, and prosperity, are entered into (for the ease and safety of travel in the empire, see Casson, *Travel*, 127, chap. 11; and for Syro-Palestine in particular, **Maynard-Reid**, *Poverty and Wealth*, 72–77). Note that James is not condemning the desire to get rich; rather what concerns him is the hyper-activity and mobility these persons evince—akin to the thought in Sir 38:24–34, which, however, gives a more sympathetic picture of those devoted to their work — and the fact that they look to the future without reference to divine providence (**4:13–15**). It is in their words, cast in *oratio recta* as an index of their godless character, that their true selves stand revealed. The piling up of future tenses in πορευσόμεθα . . .

ποιήσομεν . . . ἐμπορευσόμεθα . . . κερδήσομεν has a powerful literary effect (with alliterations in the verbs and the presence of a rhythmical structure including a chiasmus, formed from the verb endings, and homoioteleuton), and well illustrates and enforces the writer's point against the bourgeois "men of affairs" (Vouga, 122) on whom he has trained his sights. Their presumption lies in their pretended control over their future, to which they really have no claim (v 14). Overlooked by them are both the uncertainty and brevity of life (marked by alliterative participles φαινόμενη . . . ἀφανιζομένη, "appearing . . . disappearing"). They ignore too the providence of God, who holds all human prospects for the future in his hands (see **Luke 12:16–21**).

## **I. (:11-12) DON'T USURP GOD'S ROLE AS JUDGE**

**Craig Blomberg:** Christians should reject slander as one particularly insidious manifestation of strife (vv. 11–12).

- i. Slandering fellow believers slanders God's law, which prohibits such action (v. 11a).
- ii. This usurps God's role as sole judge by placing believers in a position of judging God's law instead of obeying it (vv. 11b–12).

**Thomas Lea:** Human pride leads to disparaging criticism of others. . . . When we slander our neighbors, we show our opposition to the law of love and imply that we are exempt from observing it. . . . A slanderous Christian attempts to play the role of God.

**Dan McCartney:** Slander and judgmentalism are close cousins. Many slanderers probably are unaware that they are spreading falsehood; they believe their negative accusations and censorious remarks to be reasonably well founded, and they may even see themselves as having a special calling to inform the world of someone's evil or to preserve a church's purity by excising its less-than-perfect members. To spread accusations or publish unproven allegations is, however, in effect to act as a sentencing judge, but without authorization and probably also without adequate information. Slander indirectly imposes censure because the wider community is implicitly being encouraged to ostracize the accused person, who may very well be innocent. But the more important issue is that no individual in the community is in any position to judge the spiritual condition of another.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that one should never denounce sin or criticize fellow believers (cf. Moo 2000: 198)—here James himself is doing so—but that one should not spread abroad accusations, cast aspersions, or defame or denigrate persons or their motives.

### **A. (:11a) Example of Usurping God's Role as Judge = Slander**

*"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law;"*

Note emphasis on the relationship we enjoy as "brothers"

**Dale Allison:** The call not to speak against others or to judge them takes readers back to the condemnation of social conflict in **vv. 1-2** and forms an *inclusio*. Slander and judging manifest and foster personal ‘*conflicts and disputes*’ (**v. 1**), just as shunning the role of judge undoes enmity.

**R. Kent Hughes:** Literally the command is, “*Do not speak down on one another, brothers,*” or “*Do not speak against one another, brethren*” (NASB). Slander is malicious speech that is untrue. But the command here forbids any speech (whether it is true or false) that runs down another person. . .

In point of fact, it is the Christian’s duty to **exercise judgment**. For example, we are to beware of false prophets (**Matthew 7:15**). How can we determine a false prophet except by judging him against the standard of the Word of God? Likewise we are told, “*You will recognize them by their fruits*” (**Matthew 7:16**). Recognition hinges on careful judgment. We are to judge adultery, murder, lying, and theft as sins, and if anyone does these things, we must judge them as being sinful! Jesus said, “*Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment*” (**John 7:24**). What the Scriptures forbid is **judgmentalism**, a critical and censorious spirit that judges everyone and everything, seeking to run others down.

**Alexander Ross:** The spirit of humility cannot exist alongside the spirit which speaks against the brethren; such censoriousness in speech leads to one of the worst forms of pride; the man who is guilty of it does not merely criticize his brother but really criticizes the Law of God, that is, no doubt chiefly the Royal Law of love (**2:8**).

**Curtis Vaughan:** This is another way in which the worldly mind expresses itself.

**Ralph Martin:** Any attitude that shows disdain or contempt for others reflects pride on the part of the one who adopts the scornful attitude.

**Alec Motyer:** James tells us how we should regard the law. God has given us his ‘*royal law*’ (**2:8**) that we should love our neighbours. What happens, then, when we desert the path of love for that of criticism and denigration? Outwardly we speak against a brother and neighbour, actually we speak evil against the law (**11**). First, we break the law as a precept which we were meant to obey. It commands love; we respond with defamatory talk’. Secondly, we set ourselves up as knowing better than the law, we judge the law. In effect we say that the law is mistaken in commanding love. It ought rather to have commanded criticism—and if we were lawgivers it would do so. The law no longer expresses the highest values as far as we are concerned. We know values—those of ‘*talking down*’ to our brothers—which are higher still. And, thirdly, we take up a new position, not a doer of the law but a judge. We seek to usurp the authority of God himself.

**B. (:11b) Explanation of Our Responsibility to Obey the Law, Not Judge It**  
“*but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.*”

**Daniel Doriani:** Much judgment involves a decision to take a position superior to another, to dominate them. Envy and ambition, the sins that most contradict humility, cause slander and judgment.

**John MacArthur:** Since slander is a violation of the law of love, a slanderer speaks against the law and condemns the law, thus showing utter disregard for the divine standard. And if you place yourself above God's law, warns James, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. The unimaginable implication of that is that the one who disregards God's law in effect claims to be superior to the law of God, not to be bound by it or to be subject to its authority. By such fearful disrespect the sinner judges the law as unworthy of his attention, affection, obedience, submission—all of which is blasphemy against God.

**David Nystrom:** We often judge inappropriately. When we use slander, misinform for ulterior motive, or seek what appears to our eyes to be "the good," we are doing more than sinning against our neighbor. We are breaking trust with God; and in so doing, we are, in fact, judging ourselves. We demonstrate our lack of understanding of God our Father, and we place ourselves in jeopardy.

**John Painter:** Any form of speaking that is destructive of the other person qualifies. This is especially true of slander, which implies that the negative criticism is not based on reality and misrepresents the other person. The use of the reciprocal "*one another*" suggests that a situation of leadership rivalry again surfaces here. Addressing the readers as "*brothers [and sisters]*" forcefully emphasizes the inappropriateness of this bitter rivalry. Indeed, it now becomes apparent that such behavior is an attack on the law.

### C. (:12) Exclusivity of God's Role as Lawgiver and Judge

*"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?"*

**Warren Wiersbe:** James was not forbidding us to use discrimination or even to evaluate people. Christian need to have discernment (**Phil. 1:9-10**), but they must not act like God in passing judgment. We must first examine our own lives, and then try to help others (**Matt. 7:1-5**).

**John MacArthur:** The desire to **usurp the place of God** has been the essence of every sin ever committed. Sin seeks to dethrone God, to remove Him as supreme Lawgiver and Judge and rule in His place. Because it asserts that the sinner is above God's law, as noted in the previous point, sin strikes a murderous blow at the very person of God Himself.

**Alec Motyer:** To disobey his law is to contradict him. To value our opinions above the law is to value ourselves above him. To take up the position of judge is to elbow him off his throne. Where now is the humility and lowliness before God which is the essence and key to the heavenly wisdom?

## II. (:13-17) DON'T USURP GOD'S ROLE AS MASTER PLANNER

### **Craig Blomberg: Planning apart from God's Will (4:13–17)**

- a. Christians should not presume to know the future but should always leave room for God's will to overrule theirs (vv. 13–15).
  - i. The wrong attitude is to pronounce confidently on all coming events (vv. 13–14).
  - ii. The right attitude is to plan but to make allowance for God's will to change those plans (v. 15).
- b. Such presumption about the future is in fact boasting in one's own arrogance (vv. 16–17).
  - i. For Christians, all such boasting is particularly evil (v. 16).
  - ii. This is because Christians know better (v. 17).

**Thomas Lea:** It is easy for Christians to make plans and goals, expecting God to fall in line with them. It is easy to plan our lives as if we controlled the future and had unlimited authority over all factors affecting our life. It is quite simple to plan our lives as if God does not exist. This paragraph warns against such self-centered planning. Worldly living does not always show itself in hatred for God. Sometimes it appears in the form of disregarding God as we plan life's daily activities.

**Dan McCartney:** It is true that today there are merchants who claim to be Christians, and they may very well need to be reminded of the tenuousness of life and transitoriness of wealth. Planning for the future is wise, not evil, but planning without acknowledging or consulting God, or without reference to his ethical precepts, or, even worse, boasting of one's independent planning (4:16) is both foolish and wicked.

**Robert Plummer:** James rebukes **human presumption in planning**. Humans so easily forget that each day of life (and any abilities or gifts associated with life) are from God and may be withdrawn by the Creator at any moment. James says bluntly, "*you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*" (v. 14; cf. **Mt 6:27**). Such a truth should not make us fearful, since we serve a loving heavenly Father (**Mt 7:9-11**). Instead, realizing our contingency and frailty should make us humble, conscious of our moment by moment dependence on God. Sometimes this dependence should be expressed explicitly by voicing the qualification, "*If it is the Lord's will . . .*" (**Jas 4:15**). But even if that qualification is not on our lips, it must be on our hearts.

### **A. (:13-14) Presumption Regarding Our Future Represents a Failure to Submit to the Sovereign Will of God**

#### 1. Presumptuous Plans

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

**Dan McCartney:** “*Come now*” is an interjection that James seems to use with the force of an upbraiding call to attention. Each of the two sections (4:13–17; 5:1–6) is introduced with this call, with a vocative, very much like Jesus’s woe oracles in **Matt. 23:13–29** and **Luke 11:42–52**. In no way is James mincing words in these paragraphs.

**Curtis Vaughan:** In Palestine the Jews generally adhered to the agricultural life; but in the Dispersion they were frequently merchants and bankers.

**Craig Blomberg:** This verse does introduce, however, the concept that wealth allows people an independence from God that can be dangerous for their spiritual state, and James wishes to convict people about this arrogant autonomy. . . . “As so often in James, it is speech as revealing the orientation of the heart that is the special target.” And who is this group? They are the people who plan their lives, their futures, without thought of God and his plans or sovereignty. The general statements of “*today or tomorrow*” and “*such and such*” reveal that James writes this about **anyone who makes any plans separate from God**.

**Peter Davids:** These merchants are making **typical plans**: setting the time of departure, selecting “*such and such a city*”, determining the length of stay (ἐνιαυτόν), and projecting the profit from the venture. Their plans are firm and expectations certain in their own eyes. There is nothing unusual about the situation, for merchants did this daily all over the Greco-Roman world, nor is anything apparently unethical. What bothers James is simply the **presumption** that one could so determine his future and the fact that these plans move on an entirely worldly plane in which the chief value is financial profit.

**Daniel Doriani:** James says such speech is **presumptuous** and **arrogant** in several ways.

- It presumes we will live as long as we please.
- It presumes we can make whatever plans we please: we can go today or tomorrow; the choice is ours.
- It presumes we have the capacity to execute whatever plan we conceive. We declare that we will make a profit.

This way of thinking forgets three things.

- It forgets our **ignorance**. We think we can plan a year in advance and come and go as we please, but we do not even know what tomorrow will bring.
- It forgets our **frailty**. James says: “*Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes*” (4:14). We think we can master our destiny, but our lives are as insubstantial and fleeting as the morning mist, that appears and disappears in hours. . . .
- Presumptuous planning also forgets our **dependence on God**. Our frailty and ignorance lead to the conclusion that we should say, “*If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that*” (4:15 ESV).

**John MacArthur:** Like Satan's five self-centered "*I wills*" (**Isa. 14:13–14**) that caused his fall, the businessmen's statement contains five presumptuous elements indicating their ill-advised confidence.

1. First, they chose their **own time**, today or tomorrow.
2. Second, they chose their **own location** for doing business, such and such a city.
3. Third, they chose their **own duration**, deciding to spend a year there.
4. Fourth, they chose their **own enterprise**, to engage in business (literally, "to travel into an area for trade").
5. Finally, they chose their **own goal** or objective, to make a profit. James is not attacking their profit motive, but their exclusion of God. Allowing for no contingencies, they planned as if they were omniscient, omnipotent, and invulnerable.

## 2. Limited Knowledge or Control over Your Future

*"Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow."*

**Ralph Martin:** All humanity—the merchants included—is incapable of seeing into the future, and so no one knows what the future holds. Rather the question is, how does one approach life in the light of not knowing the outcome? The incorrect, i.e., foolish, way is to assume that all will transpire as planned. The more sensible attitude—because it alone is safe—is to assume that whatever happens is under the control of God. James is not suggesting that Christians are to go around in fear that disaster will surely take place. What he is requiring his readers to consider is that a trust in God and not a well-thought-out plan for aggrandizement and gain is the only way to face the future. To live in the recognition that God—not the human being—is in control is to choose a Christian life of humility before God; to live as though we ourselves—not God—have the final say is to adopt a proud and haughty attitude.

**David Nystrom:** For James the real question is how to approach life when the outcome is uncertain. His answer is to trust in God's graciousness, not in human plans. This is, in fact, one of the central messages of the Old Testament prophets. To trust in one's own devices is foolish in light of the fact that one can trust in God.

## 3. Uncertain Lifespan – Its Brevity and Frailty

*"You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."*

**Dale Allison:** James sets the uncertainty of every person's future over against the current self-assurance of the short-sighted rich, who think themselves masters of their fate. Presumably their financial success has bred confidence in their own powers. James counters with common sense. In the words of **Erasmus**, "Life is in itself very, very short, and so many accidents, so many diseases make it thoroughly uncertain as well. And here you are, as if you had a treaty with death, speeding over land and sea to prepare some provision for your old age, which you will perhaps never reach since no one can guarantee even his own tomorrow."



**Alexander Ross:** The uncertainty and brevity of human life should lead us to humble dependence on the will of God.

**John MacArthur:** The Psalms also stress the **transitory nature** of human life. “*As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,*” wrote Moses, “*or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away*” (Ps. 90:10). “*My days are like a lengthened shadow,*” the psalmist mourned, “*and I wither away like grass*” (Ps. 102:11). Summing up the Bible’s teaching on the brevity of human life, David wrote, “*As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer*” (Ps. 103:15–16; cf. Isa. 40:6–8; 1 Pet. 1:24).

Their ignorance of the future and the frailty and brevity of human life should give pause to those who foolishly ignore God’s will.

### **B. (:15) Submission to the Will of God is the Proper Perspective Towards the Future**

*"Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'"*

**Craig Blomberg:** This expression should be interpreted neither as a pious addendum to be repeated mindlessly nor as an expression of fatalism that excuses us from taking responsibility for our actions. Rather, it ought to convict our hearts of God’s sovereignty in every area of our lives even as we seek to please him by following his will as best as we can discern it.

**Daniel Doriani:** Planning is entirely proper as long we confess that God is sovereign and that we are frail, ignorant, and dependent upon him. The phrase “*Lord willing*” is no magical incantation. It does not ensure our humility. But the suffix “*If the Lord wills*” is helpful. It reminds us that our plans, even our lives, are as frail as the mist. Thus we plan, hoping that God will use the process so that our aspirations match his purposes.

Indeed, to refuse to plan may be a sign of sloth. It is easier to drift along with adequate food and funds, doing what others want, taking whatever comes along, hardly troubling over the future, as long as we have enough food and enough fun. But the Lord expects us to do more than take whatever pleasures each day affords.

Sadly, James says, much of our planning is boastful or arrogant. He writes: “*As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil*” (James 4:16). The boaster forgets God. He thinks he is the master of history. He presumes he can trade and make money when he does not even know if he will be alive tomorrow. Such planning manifests ambition for wealth (3:14, 16), since trade was the way to become wealthy in the first century. (People purchased land to stay wealthy). The desire to get rich to spend it on our own pleasures is a primary sign of the envy that James forbids (3:14; 4:3).

**George Guthrie:** The appropriate response to the veiled nature of the future is humble submission—an attitude implicit in the conditional clause “*if it is the Lord’s will.*”

**Alec Motyer:** James is not trying to banish planning from our lives, but only that sort of self-sufficient, self-important planning that keeps God for Sunday but looks on Monday to Saturday as mine. Certainly the words ‘*God willing*’ or their equivalents are not to become a fetish, or used as a protective talisman. **John Calvin** aptly notes that ‘we read everywhere in the Scriptures that the holy servants of God spoke unconditionally of future things, when yet they had it as a fixed principle in their minds that they could do nothing without the permission of God’. **C. L. Mitton** goes to the central point when he contrasts ‘evil doers’ who make the transience of life ‘an excuse for snatching all the pleasure out of it while there is time’, while ‘others use it as an excuse for doing nothing’, but ‘James refers to it as a reason why men should be humble before God’. Once more it is this key factor of the lowly walk with God that is threatened. Our initial determination is to commit ourselves decisively to God’s side (7), to live in close fellowship with him (8a), to purge our lives and our hearts (8b), to come to the place of wholesale repentance (9) and so to humble ourselves before God. All this can be lost, however, if, once outside the doors of our private room, we take the reins of life into our own hands, we forget our ignorance, frailty and dependence and plan our day, our week and next year as if we were lords of earth and time, and there was no God in heaven. To be sure the words ‘*If the Lord wills*’ can be a protective superstition; but they can also be the sweetest and most comfortable reassurance to a humble and trustful spirit.

### **C. (:16) Presumption Represents Arrogant Boasting**

*"But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil."*

**John MacArthur:** *Kauchaomai* (*boast*) can mean “to be loud-mouthed,” or “to speak loudly,” either in legitimate rejoicing (e.g., **Rom. 5:2–3, 11**) or in touting one’s own accomplishments (e.g., **1 Cor. 1:19**). The context indicates James has the latter meaning in mind in this passage. *Alazoneia* (*arrogance*) comes from a root word meaning “to wander about” and reflects empty pretense. It was sometimes used to describe charlatans who traveled around selling phony goods. Taken together, the two words picture someone bragging pretentiously about something he doesn’t have and can’t obtain. Such is the arrogance, James says, of those who deny the will of God.

**Dan McCartney:** Note the irony here: the merchants in view are proud when they ought to be ashamed. A mind-set of independence from God is the opposite of faith; it is both foolish and wicked.

**Ralph Martin:** They not only omit God from their plan-making (4:13) but they boast about their presumed independence as well.

### **D. (:17) Failure to Obey the Truth is Always Sin**

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

**Dan McCartney:** James has simply moved from a particular problem to a general principle. The merchants in question ought to know better, and thus they sin when they make plans without reference to God. Certainly, believers know better, yet often they act and plan as though God were not in the picture. It is therefore legitimate to apply the proverb broadly: in every dimension of life, to neglect doing what we know we should do, or to neglect to seek to know what God would have us do, is as much a sin as doing what we already know we should not.

**Alec Motyer:** Verse 17 finds James at his abrupt best! He moves without preparatory warning from the particular of **verse 16** to the general of **verse 17**, from the evil of the sin of arrogance to a searching statement of the principle of the sin of omission. In fact, the whole idea of sinning by default has never been given more pointed expression. It is a principle which exposes the insufficiency of even our best accomplishments, and makes us realize that we are never more than unprofitable servants. 'We may be able', says **C. L. Mitton**, 'to avoid committing forbidden evil; but who can ever seize positively every opportunity of doing good?'

\* \* \* \* \*

#### DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do you balance the need to be discerning and judge in areas where that judgment is appropriate with the warning in this passage against speaking against a brother and judging him in a manner that is reserved for God?
- 2) How do you balance the need for proper planning and goal setting and appropriate action steps with the warning in this passage against presumptuous assumptions and planning that leaves God out of the equation?
- 3) What other Scriptures speak of the frailty and brevity and unpredictability of the life of man? What other figures or images are used to convey this message?
- 4) Why do we seem to put such a greater weight on sins of commission rather than sins of omission? How does **James 4:17** help to balance our perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**Curtis Vaughan:** Re the connection between **vs 17** and the preceding context -- There are others who feel that the statement is made with special reference to the sin which James has described in the immediately preceding verses. His readers were well-aware that their future was really in the hands of God. They knew perfectly well that they could not be sure of a single day and that they were absolutely dependent upon God for

the preservation of their lives and for any prosperity which came to them. If, in spite of their knowledge, they continued in their proud ways, they were guilty of sin. In this interpretation the 'doing good' has reference to making one's plans in reliance on the will of God.

Still other commentators feel that this interpretation of the verse, by restricting its meaning too severely, robs the statement of its true significance. They feel that the verse should be treated as an independent saying having no connection with what has gone before. In this view the 'doing good' has broad and general application to any conscious duty of the Christian life. But whether one follows this interpretation or the immediately preceding one the essential meaning of the verse is the same. It insists that sins of omission are not to be thought of as inconsequential. They have in them the essence of rebellion against the divine will.

**John MacArthur:** **The Bible has much to say about slander.** The Old Testament denounces the sin of slandering God or men more often than it does any other sin. In **Leviticus 19:16**, God commands His people, “*You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people.*” It is the mark of a godly man that “*he does not slander with his tongue*” (**Ps. 15:3**); it is the mark of the wicked that they do slander others (**Ps. 50:19–20; Jer. 6:28; 9:4; Rom. 1:30**). The seriousness of slander caused David to vow, “*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy*” (**Ps. 101:5**), and to pray, “*May a slanderer not be established in the earth*” (**Ps. 140:11**). Solomon wisely counseled against associating with a slanderer (**Prov. 20:19**).

The New Testament also condemns slander. The Lord Jesus Christ identified its source as an evil heart (**Matt. 15:19**) and taught that it defiles a person (**Matt. 15:20**). Paul feared that he would find slander among the Corinthians when he visited them (**2 Cor. 12:20**), and he commanded the Ephesians (**Eph. 4:31**) and the Colossians (**Col. 3:8**) to avoid it. Peter also exhorted his readers not to slander others (**1 Pet. 2:1**).

The Scriptures chronicle the devastating effects of slander. **Proverbs 16:28** and **17:9** note that it destroys friendships. **Proverbs 18:8** and **26:22** speak of the deep wounds inflicted on the one slandered, while **Proverbs 11:9** and **Isaiah 32:7** warn that slander can ultimately destroy people. Slanderers stir up contention (**Prov. 26:20**), spread strife (**6:19**), and become fools (**10:18**).

**William Barclay:** This uncertainty of life is not a cause either for fear or for inaction because of the insecurity of the future. It is a reason for accepting and realizing our complete dependence on God. It has always been the mark of a serious-minded man that he made his plans in dependence on God.

**David Roper:** All of our life is to be lived out in recognition of the fact that God is sovereign Lord. He commands the future and he runs my life. He does what he chooses to do in my life and therefore behind my planning must be the recognition that God is sovereign. I must accept what he chooses to do. James says that anything other than that is arrogance. That is seemingly a very strong term, because planning for the future is a

very ordinary activity. We do that all the time. And yet James says that if we plan without making room for God in our life it is an act of evil arrogance.

**David Holwick:** Re illustration from the life of Spurgeon -- **God alone knows the heart.**

One of the most famous preachers of the 1800's was Charles Spurgeon. He was Queen Victoria's favorite preacher, and he was a Baptist.

Spurgeon and his wife had a practice of selling, but refusing to give away, the eggs their chickens laid. Even close relatives were told, "If you want them, you have to pay for them." Since he had a huge church and a salary to match, some people labeled the Spurgeons as greedy. Sort of like how television evangelists are labeled today.

The Spurgeons accepted the criticisms without defending themselves. It was only after Mrs. Spurgeon died that the whole story was revealed: All the profits from the sale of eggs went to support two elderly widows. The critics never knew this; HOW OFTEN DO WE?

There are many times when it is best to leave our doubts about others to Almighty God. He is still in charge of the universe - he'll know what to do with them."

**David Holwick:** Re planning in submission to the will of God -- Examples of God-oriented plans in the Bible:

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| a) Paul's anticipated return to Ephesus. | <b>Acts 18:21</b>  |
| b) A visit to Corinth.                   | <b>1 Cor 4:19</b>  |
| c) Longer stay if permitted.             | <b>1 Cor 16:7</b>  |
| d) Reaching spiritual maturity.          | <b>Hebrews 6:3</b> |

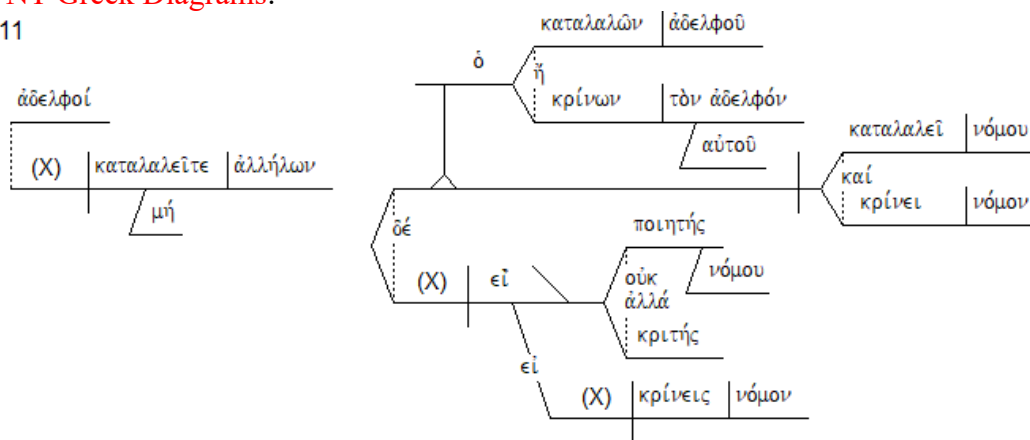
**Spiros Zodhiates:** One of the greatest temptations of an advanced, well-informed Christian is to assume an authoritative attitude toward other Christians. If we live close to God, it is sometimes possible that Satan may try to make us consciously or unconsciously act as though we ourselves are little gods and therefore have the right and sometimes the imperative duty to assume the responsibilities that belong to God,

especially the responsibility of passing judgment upon others. It is good to remember that there are certain responsibilities and prerogatives that God does not choose to pass on to us, no matter how close we are to Him.

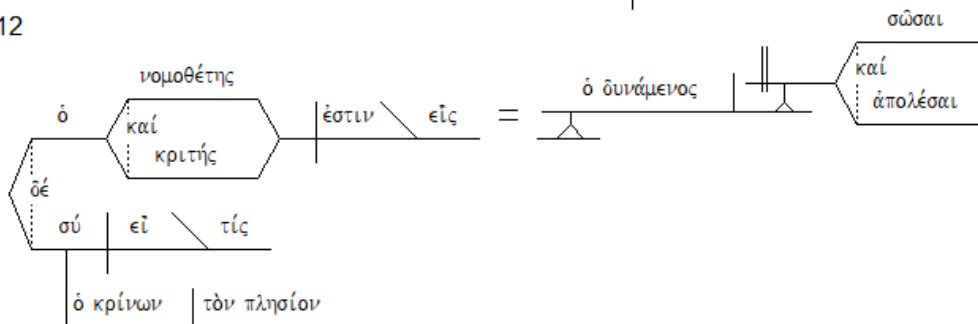
**Spiros Zodhiates:** The call to take no thought for tomorrow is certainly not a call to neglect duties and evade responsibilities, but a call to trust in Providence when the time only to trust has come. When I have done for tomorrow all that is laid at my door, then let me not encroach upon the province of Him who alone can rule the future and the contingent by troubling myself with them. Let me simply do this day the work which is this day due; and though long and impenetrable months may lie between me and its result, for that I must trust Him whom the sparrows trust; saying cheerfully, "The Lord will provide!"

**Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:**

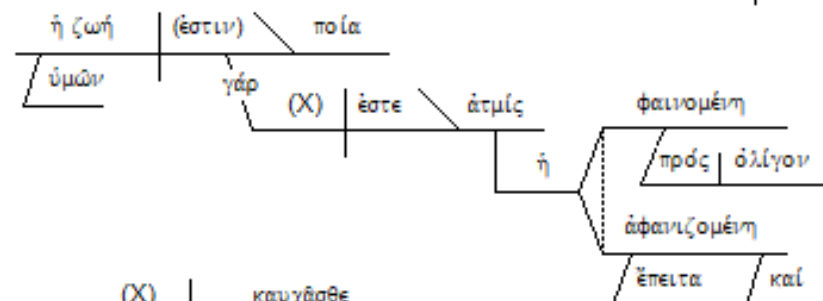
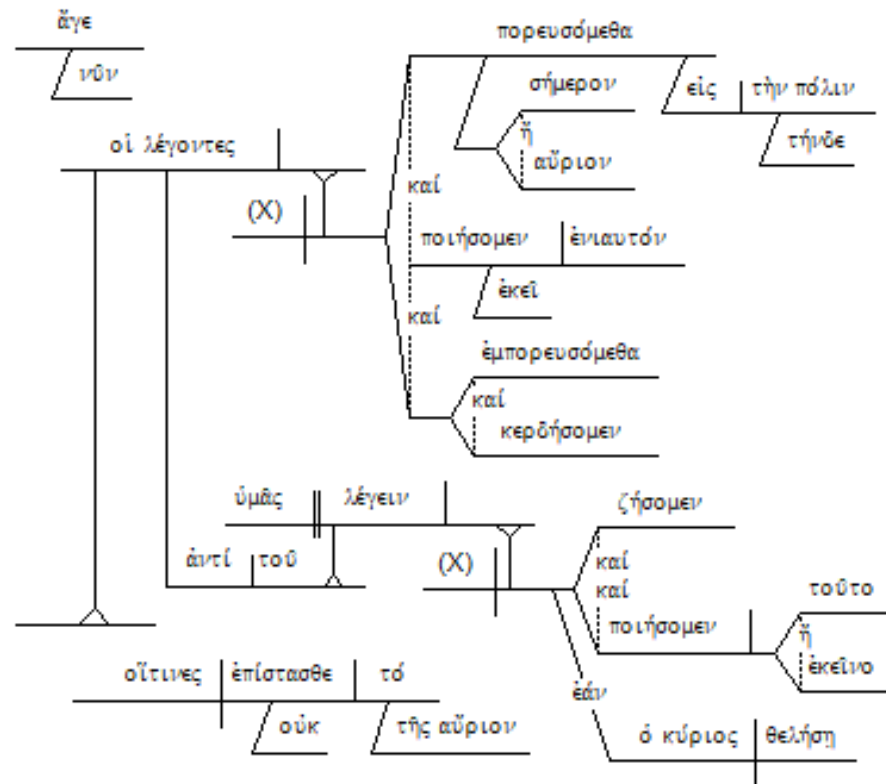
Jam 4:11



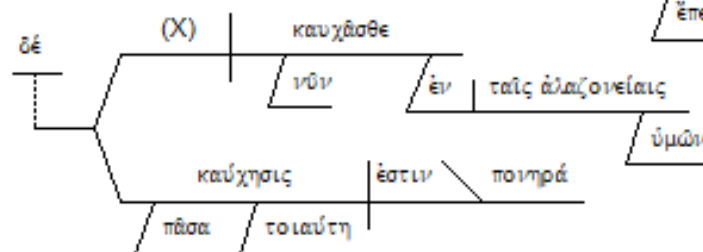
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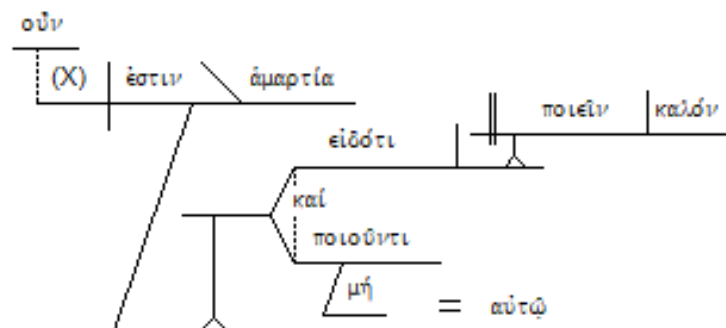
Jam 4:13-15



Jam 4:16



Jam 4:17



TEXT: JAMES 5:1-12

TITLE: FAITH WITHOUT THE FEAR OF GOD IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**FAITH THAT PATIENTLY PERSEVERES AVOIDS THREE DANGERS BY THE PROPER FEAR OF GOD**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Craig Blomberg:** Many commentators end the body of the letter at **5:6**, but this appears a singularly inappropriate place for so major a break. **Vv. 1–6**, after all, sketch the **key trial** that has caused all of the others discussed in this book, while **vv. 7–11** (and, we will argue, **v. 12** as well) present the **proper response** James’s audience is to offer to these difficult circumstances. **These twelve verses, therefore, belong closely together.**

**Responding to Oppression (5:1–12)**

a. Christians should not try to wreak vengeance on their oppressors because God has promised to take care of that (vv. 1–6).

- i. The rich oppressors are called to lament their coming miseries (**v. 1**).
- ii. Their judgments are enumerated (**vv. 2–3b**).
- iii. Their sins of oppression are illustrated (**vv. 3c–6**).

b. Christians should respond to oppression with a persevering and prophetic patience (vv. 7–11).

- i. Christians can remain patient because the judgment day is near (**vv. 7–9**).
- ii. Christian patience must be persevering and prophetic (**vv. 10–11**).
- iii. Christians must persevere in faith until they see God’s great compassion (**v. 11**).

c. Christians should not be tempted to fend off creditors with unrealistic promises (v. 12).

- i. They should not promise what they can’t deliver (**v. 12a**).
- ii. They should be individuals of impeccable integrity (**v. 12b**).

Main Idea: Christians should respond to oppression not by usurping God’s role as avenger, nor by making unrealistic promises to their oppressors, but with a **persevering and prophetic patience**. Only God can fully and fairly right all wrongs, and he has promised to do so at the *Parousia*. . .

What James’s church members should not do, however, is make vows. These likely involved promises to pay off debts if only they could be given more loans or more time, in ways that probably often simply exacerbated the problem. Christians should be people of such integrity that their words may simply be trusted (**v. 12**). By introducing this verse with “*above all*,” James demonstrates that it is the **climax of this treatment of proper responses to oppression**. Once again, it is **speech** that forms the heart of



how one behaves, rightly and wrongly. Indeed, we may think of vv. 7–12 as even more tightly knit together: vv. 7–8 command patience; v. 9 warns against the wrong use of the tongue (grumbling); vv. 10–11 then illustrate patience; and v. 12 again warns against the wrong use of the tongue (oaths). But this time, the positive flipside appears as well. Most important of all is **verbal integrity**.

**David Platt:** James’s emphasis on the poor leads to the harshest language in the entire book. The tone at the end of chapter 4 has carried over into the **rebuke of the rich** in these verses. James emphasizes the fact that the **judgment of God is coming soon**. **Verse 1** mentions “*miseries that are coming*,” **verse 3** refers to the “*last days*,” and **verse 5** alludes to a “*day of slaughter*.” This emphasis on God’s end-time judgment continues in **verses 7–9**: James says to “*be patient until the Lord’s coming*” (v. 7); in **verse 8** he says that “*the Lord’s coming is near*”; then in **verse 9** we learn that the “*judge stands at the door!*” Jesus is coming back, and He’s going to do at least two things.

- He is coming to judge the sinful.
- He is coming to deliver the faithful.

**John MacArthur:** As noted throughout this commentary, James was presenting **tests of genuine saving faith**, tests which validate or invalidate one’s claim to be a Christian. Building on the teaching of our Lord, as he often does, James presents another such test in **chapter 5**—that of how one views money. The first six verses of **chapter 5** form a strong rebuke—the strongest in the entire epistle. James’s blistering, scathing denunciation condemns those who profess to worship God but in fact worship money. He calls on them to examine the true state of their hearts in light of how they feel about their wealth. . .

Though primarily addressed to those rich fakers in the church who professed allegiance to Christ but actually pursued riches, James’s warning is a timely one for Christians as well. Believers must be wary of falling into the same sins that characterize unbelievers. James shows the sin of loving money to all so none will fall into it. . .

In **verses 7–11** he shifts his focus from the persecutors to the persecuted, moving from condemning the faithless, abusive rich to **comforting the faithful, abused poor**. James also instructs the suffering poor as to what attitude they are to have in the midst of persecution. The theme of this section is defining **how to be patient in trials**. . .

James gives six practical perspectives enabling believers to patiently endure trials: anticipate the Lord’s coming, recognize the Lord’s judgment, follow the Lord’s servants, understand the Lord’s blessing, realize the Lord’s purpose, and consider the Lord’s character.

**R. Kent Hughes:** Though this is a characterization of the world without Christ, we must never imagine ourselves to be immune. We must each ask ourselves: Do I hoard? Am I guilty of overaccumulation of wealth? Have I ever or am I now defrauding someone? Is there financial deception in my life? Have I succumbed to the culture’s Siren song of

self-indulgence? Are there sub-Christian excesses in my life? Have I “murdered” another—that is, have I victimized someone because of a power advantage I possess?

## I. (:1-6) THE DANGER OF FILTHY RICHES

**David Nystrom:** James provides four reasons for the wealthy landowners to weep:

1. Their wealth is temporal and subject to the ravages of time;
2. they are guilty of a crime against their sisters and brothers;
3. they will be judged and condemned for this selfish use of temporal goods;
4. and they have been adding to their material treasure as if the world will go on forever.

**Douglas Moo:** The rich people pictured are clearly **wealthy landowners**, a class accused of economic exploitation and oppression from early times. In James’ surroundings, we may think particularly of Palestinian Jewish landlords who owned large estates and were often concerned only about how much profit could be gained from their lands. James proceeds to announce the condemnation of these rich landholders (v. 1) and justifies their condemnation on the grounds of their selfish hoarding of wealth (vv. 2–3), their defrauding of their workers (v. 4), their self-indulgent lifestyle (v. 5) and their oppression of ‘*the righteous*’ (v. 6).

Why does James preach this message of denunciation of non-Christians in a letter addressed to the church? **Calvin** appropriately isolates two main purposes:

1. James ‘... has a regard to the faithful, that they, hearing of the miserable end of the rich, might not envy their fortune,
2. and also that knowing that God would be the avenger of the wrongs they suffered, they might with a calm and resigned mind bear them’.

### A. (:1) Summary: It's Payback Time for the Filthy Rich!

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

Speaking against those who had gained wealth in unethical ways and then had used that wealth in selfish ways; stresses the certainty of the judgment

**Curtis Vaughan:** anguish for impending judgment

**Alec Motyer:** But who are these rich people? Are they Christians who have been so drawn off course by the power wealth bestows that they have turned to oppress their fellow-believers? It may sadly be so, for there has surely been no period in church history when James’ strictures against the rich would not apply to some church members. In support of the view that James is addressing rich Christians, we may note that this is suggested by the opening words of **verse 1**, where *Come now, you rich* is parallel with *Come now, you who say* in **4:13**, and since the latter are Christian business folk, why should not the former be wealthy Christians? . . .

Commentators who argue against interpreting the rich as members of the church urge, for example, that there is no call to repentance (LAWS, ADAMSON), nor any holding out of an expectation of salvation but only of judgment to come (KNOWLING).

**R.V.G. Tasker:** Assuming their unrepentance he announces, in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, the inevitable doom that confronts them. And the inference he would wish his Christian readers to draw from this denunciation is the folly of setting a high value upon wealth, or of envying those who possess it, or of striving feverishly to obtain it. For the truth is that all who are rich without having 'poverty of spirit' are faced, whether they are aware of it or not, with swift and sure retribution at the hands of God. Because the rich are nearly always self-deceived, by thinking that their present prosperity will be permanent, James warns them that *miseries* are coming upon them. And because they imagine that by means of their wealth they can mitigate, if not render themselves immune from the sorrows and hardships that are the lot of others, James bids them weep and howl at the severity of the divine retribution which will fall upon them. This judgment has not already arrived; but it is so certain and so predetermined that James, in true prophetic manner, speaks of it almost as if it were a present reality, for the literal meaning of the original is that these miseries are now in the process of coming upon them.

**John Painter:** The sins of those who actually are rich are more seriously unscrupulous and exploitative, and James's criticisms are correspondingly stronger, using graphic terms to describe the end of the rich. . . There is a piling up of language rarely used in the NT . . . This multiplication of the language of despair and disaster communicates an overwhelming sense of distress and anguish. . .

This tirade may also function to dissuade any who are tempted by the attraction of the way of the rich. Wealth has its place, but if it is hoarded for selfish satisfaction, it will not only fail to do the good that might be achieved but will also fail to satisfy the hoarders.

**David Nystrom:** These wealthy people must "*weep and wail.*" "*Weep*" (*klaio*) means to respond to disaster in a rightful manner—to weep from the depths of one's being in grief and remorse. "*Wail*" (*ololuzo*) means to howl, especially as a result of sudden and unexpected evil and regret (see **Isa. 15:2–3, 5; Jer. 13:7; Lam. 1:1–2** as Old Testament parallels). This remorse is justified because the lot of these rich is "*misery*" (*talaiporia*, a word used only here and in **Rom. 3:16** in the New Testament). James may indeed have **Jeremiah 12:3** within view: "*Set them apart for the day of slaughter.*" The reason is not their wealth per se, but the fact that they have not sought to use their wealth to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. In fact, their desire for wealth is the cause of much of this suffering in a direct fashion, for the poor work for the landowners.

## **B. (:2-3a) You Can't Take it With You / Even Riches Don't Last Forever**

### 1. Rotten

*"Your riches have rotted"*

cf. storehouses of corn and grain going bad

2. Ruined

*"and your garments have become moth-eaten"*

3. Rusted

*"Your gold and your silver have rusted"*

**John Painter:** The rusted, unused, wasted resources are evidence against the rich of their heartless disregard for the poor, of their unwillingness to come to the aid of the poor, to provide alms. **Matthew 6:19–21** and **Luke 12:33–34** provide sayings about storing up treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume, and a number of parables add their critique, such as the parable of the rich fool, who built bigger barns to store up an excessive harvest (**Luke 12:13–21**), and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:19–31**). The first shows the folly of hoarding wealth and not using it for a good purpose (“*You fool! This night your life will be taken from you!*” **Luke 12:20**). Note also “*Every work decays and ceases to exist, and the one who made it will pass away with it*” (**Sir. 14:19**). The second parable condemns the rich man for willful disregard of the plight of the poor man, narrating their reversal of fortunes in the “afterlife” beyond death. The fate of the rich man is described in **Luke 16:22–28**. He is in torment, in agony in the flames, his tongue hot and dry, while Lazarus is in paradise, in Abraham’s bosom. This image of torment in the flames seems to be a variant on the notion of the rust of wasted resources eating into the flesh like fire. For James, hoarded wealth is wasted; it is evidence of the heartlessness of the rich, and the dissolution (rust) will fuel the fire of their torment.

**Douglas Moo:** All three statements in **verses 2–3a**, in fact, reflect the traditional Old Testament and Jewish teaching about the foolishness of placing reliance upon **perishable material goods**.

**C. (:3b) Your Hoarding of Wealth Will Come Back to Haunt You**

1. Evidence that Demands a Verdict

*"their rust will be a witness against you"*

**Ralph Martin:** While they think that the wealth accumulated is held as a perpetual possession, they are vulnerable to severe judgment because not only is such wealth temporary, but it is the witness whose testimony condemns the rich. Instead of sharing their wealth with the needy (a response already spoken of as a sign of a saving faith in **2:14–16**) they hoard it; what makes this doubly tragic is that they do so in the last days and thus underline the folly of their actions.

2. Conspicuous Consumption

*"and will consume your flesh like fire"*

### 3. Bad Timing

*"It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!"*

**Alec Motyer:** **Hoarding** is a denial of proper use (cf. **Lk. 12:33**), of true trust (cf. **1 Tim. 6:17**) and of godly expectancy (cf. **1 Tim. 6:18–19**).

**Douglas Moo:** As those who live in these ‘*last days*’, we, too, should recognize in the grace of God already displayed and the judgment of God yet to come a powerful stimulus to share, not hoard, our wealth.

**Thomas Lea:** James thundered warnings of judgment on the stingy, greedy landlords who preferred to collect money rather than help the poor and needy. The generosity and unselfishness of early Christians provided visible solutions to the problems of hunger, need, and greed which they confronted (see **Acts 4:32–37**).

**Daniel Doriani:** Material wealth only temporarily quenches the soul’s thirst for meaning and acceptance. Acquiring wealth to cure the problem of meaninglessness is like drinking coffee to solve the problem of exhaustion. It can mask the problem, but it cannot cure it. Riches cannot fulfill the quest for meaning, but those who live for wealth decide the problem is not wealth per se, but their insufficient wealth. Thus, devotees of wealth work harder and harder at the wrong thing. The desire for wealth becomes insatiable. If anyone thinks riches or social rank will satisfy his soul, he deludes himself.

- Does anyone hope wealth will gain him respect? In our achievement-oriented society, as soon as our performance falters, honor plummets. (Consider the way a failed presidential candidate is treated in the media.) Lasting respectability really comes from our creation in the image of God.
- Does anyone hope wealth will gain her acceptance? In society, any flaw can spoil our rank, but God accepts us whatever our flaws may be, if we trust in him.
- Does anyone hope wealth will gain him significance? We cannot find permanent significance in impermanent things. We find significance by joining the kingdom and the cause of God.

#### **D. (:4) Your Exploitation Has Not Gone Unnoticed**

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

**William Barclay:** The selfish rich have gained their wealth by injustice. The Bible is always sure that the laborer is worthy of his hire (**Luke 10:7 1 Timothy 5:18**). The day laborer in Palestine always lived on the very verge of starvation. His wage was small; it was impossible for him to save anything; and if the wage was withheld from him, even for a day, then literally he and his family would not eat.

**Curtis Vaughan:** In **Psalm 46:7, 11** the title is used in a context declaring God to be the Saviour and Protector of His people. Its use in James points up that none other than the omnipotent God to whom all the hosts of the universe are subject is the Avenger and Protector of the poor.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Note the **witnesses** that God will call on that day of judgment.

- First, the rich men's *wealth* will witness against them (**5:3**).
- The *wages* they held back will also witness against them in court (**5:4a**).
- The *workers* will also testify against them (**5:4**).

**John Painter:** Here the rich are depicted as exploiting their workers, withholding their wages. For the rich to do this was heartless and unscrupulous, creating great hardship for the poor. The law explicitly forbade this practice: “*The wages of the workers shall not remain with you until morning*” (**Lev. 19:13**). Vividly, James depicts these withheld wages as crying out, along with the cries of the unpaid workers rising to the ears of the Lord of hosts. The presence of what should have been paid to the workers, retained unjustifiably by the rich landowners, was damning evidence and, with the cries of the workers, called for justice.

**David Nystrom:** [:4-6] James now lists specific behaviors that have contributed to the hoarding of wealth.

- For one thing, they have not paid their hired laborers their due, thereby robbing their own neighbors of earned pay.
- In **verse 5** James turns his attention from the hardship imposed on others to the ease and sloth of the wealthy. He levies two allegations:
  - (1) They have lived lives of “*luxury*” and gross “*indulgence*.”
  - (2) The final accusation aimed at the landed class is their plotting of the wrongful treatment and even murder of the innocent (**v. 6**).

## **E. (:5) Your Hedonism Has Set You Up for Stricter Judgment**

### 1. You Have Lived High Off the Hog

a. "*You have lived luxuriously on the earth*"

**Douglas Moo:** The pursuit of a luxurious lifestyle that is selfish and unconcerned about others' needs is the third accusation brought against the rich. They have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. The Greek for this phrase has two verbs. The latter one translates a form of *spatalaō*, which occurs in biblical Greek elsewhere only in **1 Timothy 5:6** and in **Ezekiel 16:49**. In the Ezekiel text, the people of Sodom are condemned for being ‘*arrogant, overfed and unconcerned*’, and for failing to help ‘*the poor and needy*’. *Lived... in luxury* translates a form of *tryphaō*. Peter uses the noun cognate to this verb to refer to the daytime ‘*revelling*’ in which depraved false teachers delight (**2 Pet. 2:13**). Even the easily overlooked phrase *on earth* bears clear negative connotations, suggesting a contrast between the pleasures the rich have enjoyed in this world and the torment that awaits them in eternity.

b. "and led a life of wanton pleasure"

**William Barclay:** The selfish rich have used their wealth selfishly. They have lived in soft luxury, and have played the wanton. The word translated *to live in soft luxury* is *truphein*. *Truphein* comes from a root which means *to break down*; and it describes the soft living which in the end saps and destroys a man's moral fibre; it describes that enervating luxury which ends by destroying strength of body and strength of soul alike. The word translated *to play the wanton* is *spatalan*; it is a much worse word; it means to live in lewdness and lasciviousness and wanton riotousness. It is the condemnation of the selfish rich that they have used their possessions to gratify their own love of comfort, and to satisfy their own lusts, and they have forgotten all duty to their fellow-men.

**Alec Motyer:** Worldly wealth is an area of high risk in the battle to walk humbly with God. It is hard to be rich and lowly at the same time. The use of money and the life of self-pleasing are never far apart.

## 2. You Have Fattened Yourself for the Day of Slaughter

*"you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter"*

**Ralph Wilson:** Though the actual event of catastrophic judgment is yet to begin, for this letter the death-knell of the rich has already sounded. The wealthy indulge themselves and ignore the poor as if the day of slaughter (that "*great judgment day*," **Mussner**, 197) were not only far away but did not exist at all!

### **F. (:6) Your Bully Tactics Will Now Be Avenged**

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

The rich did not fear God and did not think they would be held accountable for their behavior. They placed all of their security in their wealth.

**Charles Ryrie:** This probably refers to the practice of the rich taking the poor ("*the righteous*") to court to take away what little they might have, thus "*murdering*" them.

**Douglas Moo:** *Innocent* could also be translated 'righteous' (*dikaion*), and some interpreters think that this 'righteous one' might be Jesus, or perhaps even James 'the Just' (or 'righteous') himself (assuming, of course, that a later writer has used James' name). The context and the traditions that James is using suggest another meaning, however: a **generic reference to righteous people** who are being persecuted by the rich. These people are 'poor and needy' and trust in God for deliverance.

## II. (:7-11) THE DANGER OF COMPLAINING AGAINST YOUR BROTHER

Alec Motyer: Balanced Structure of 5:7-12

<p>7–8 <i>The coming Lord</i>          The farmer's patience is related to God's programme of the seasons and issues in precious fruit.          Patience will bear precious fruit for the coming Lord.</p>	<p>... 9 <i>The coming Judge</i>          Sins of speech will bring us under condemnation.          The Lord who is near (8) is also the Judge who is at the doors (9).</p>
<p>10–11 <i>The coming end</i>          The 'end' (RSV purpose, 11) towards which the Lord is working is to bestow compassion and mercy on those who have endured.</p>	<p>... 12 <i>The coming judgment</i>          Sins of speech, the use of oaths, make us liable to fall under condemnation</p>

In this way we see that not only do sections on patience and speech alternate, but that sections dealing with joyful hope (7–8) and (10–11) lead into sections dealing with fearful expectation (9), (12). The whole unit (7–12) is, in fact, wonderfully symmetrical and balanced.

**A. (:7a) Summary: Be Patient** (as you anticipate the soon return of the Lord)  
*"Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord."*

**George Guthrie:** The passage at hand is connected to the previous unit on the guilt of the wicked wealthy (5:1–6) by the word “*therefore*” (NASB; *oun*), indicating that judgment on the rich serves as a basis for encouragement to the righteous. On this basis they are to “*be patient*” (*makrothymeō*, GK 3428), a term connoting enduring under provocation or waiting with a right attitude (1Co 13:4; 1Th 5:14; Heb 6:15; 2Pe 3:9). It is almost synonymous with *hypomonē* (GK 5705), used in both its verbal and nominal forms in v.11. It may be that life's hardships in general are in mind (Ropes, 293), but James specifically ties the exhortation back to 5:1–6 and thus seems to have **patience under injustice or oppression in view**.

**Douglas Moo:** The transition from denunciation of rich non-Christians to encouragement of believers is signalled by James' return to his familiar address: *brothers and sisters*. *Then (oun)* shows that this encouragement is based on the prophetic condemnation of wicked, rich oppressors in 5:1–6: since God will punish



these oppressors, the believers need to wait patiently for that time. **Patience** is clearly the key idea in this paragraph.

**R. Kent Hughes:** Three great words in the New Testament refer to the Lord's second coming. **Epiphania** means an appearing or a showing or a manifestation of Christ. Another great word is **apokalupsis**, which means an unveiling, a laying bare, a revelation, and refers to the full display of Christ's power and glory. The third word, the one for the Lord's "coming" in **verses 7, 8** of our text, is **parousia**, which emphasizes Christ's physical presence, literally meaning "*being alongside of.*" It is used in this way fifteen times in the New Testament in reference to Christ's return, denoting "**the physical arrival of a ruler.**" The significance of the word as James uses it here is that **his suffering people longed for the presence of Christ their King.** They knew that when Jesus came to be with them, everything would be all right.

### **B. (:7b) Example of the Patience of the Hard Working Farmer**

(Looking forward to the harvest; trusting in divine providence)

*"Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil,  
being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains."*

**David Nystrom:** As a practical illustration of such patience, James refers to a farmer who waits patiently for harvest time and for the autumn and spring rains. In the eastern Mediterranean two seasons of rain are normal and necessary for a successful crop. The emphasis here is double, not only on patience, but also on the surety of the farmer that the rains and the harvest will indeed come, each in its due season. This waiting is hard psychologically, for in the presence of the vagaries of weather that determine the success of the crop, the farmer is helpless. But the waiting also involves a good deal of hard work and encounters with the vicissitudes of normal existence.

**Craig Blomberg:** The early and late rains were standard climatic features of the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin, familiar to the readers. The early rains normally lasted from mid-October to mid-November, while the late rains spanned key portions of March and April. Thus the two main harvest (and planting) seasons came in fall and spring. Farmers, however, hardly sat idle in between, but rather worked hard in weeding, hoeing, fertilizing, and doing whatever they could to bring their crops to full fruition. James's analogy would have resonated deeply with his audience, many of whom were clearly farmers.

**Peter Davids:** The picture is that of the small farmer in Palestine, not the hired laborers of **5:4** (ἐργατής), who were often once small farmers and dreamed of yet owning land, but who were either not the firstborn or had lost their land to large landholders due to hard times. The small farmer plants his carefully saved seed and hopes for a harvest, living on short rations and suffering hunger during the last weeks. The whole livelihood, indeed the life itself, of the family depends on a good harvest: the loss of the farm, semistarvation, or death could result from a bad year. So the farmer waits for an expected future event (ἐκδέχεται); no one but he could know how precious the grain really is (τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς is one indication that the author has a small farmer

in view; cf. **Mussner**, 202). He must exercise patience no matter how hungry he is (μακροθυμῶν), for he waits with a view toward the coming harvest (ἐπ’ αὐτῷ). This patience must last “*until he receives the early and late rain.*”

**William Barclay**: The early Church lived in the expectation of the immediate Second Coming of Jesus Christ; and James exhorts his people to wait with patience for the few years which remain... the early rain was the rain in late October and early November; without it the seed which had been sown would not germinate at all. The late rain was the rain of April and May, without which the grain would not mature. The farmer needs patience to wait until nature does her work; and the Christian needs patience to wait until Christ comes.

**Ralph Martin**: James, on the other hand, makes much of the interval “between the times,” specifically employing the horticultural allusion to sowing and reaping and enforcing the need to wait in patient hope for the harvest of divine judgment and redemption to come. There is no way the readers can accelerate the arrival of that day (contrast **2 Pet 3:12**). In fact the opposite is the needful reminder: only in God’s good time and way will the end come. The Judge is already at the door, but the exact time when the decisive moment (*kairos*) of eschatological deliverance (for the poor) and doom (for the rich, **1:10–11; 4:9–10; 5:1–6**) comes is not to be hastened; it can only be awaited. Any other disposition is not only frowned upon and treated as useless (as an impatient farmer who cannot wait for harvest will always be disappointed); it is positively injurious, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε, lit., “*lest you be judged.*”

### **C. (:8) Summary Repeated: Be Patient**

(as you anticipate the soon return of the Lord)

*"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts,  
for the coming of the Lord is at hand."*

**Douglas Moo**: As the farmer waits patiently for the seed to sprout and the crops to mature, so believers must wait patiently for the Lord to return to deliver them and to judge their oppressors. And while they wait, they need to *stand firm* (lit. ‘*establish your hearts*’). Paul gave the same exhortation to the Thessalonians as they awaited the *parousia* (**1 Thess. 3:13**; cf. **2 Thess. 2:17**), and the author to the Hebrews claimed that ‘*it is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace*’ (**Heb. 13:9**). What is commanded, then, is a firm adherence to the faith in the midst of temptations and trials. As they wait patiently for their Lord to return, believers need to **fortify themselves** for the struggle against sin and difficult circumstances. . .

The accusation that James has erred on this matter rests on the supposition that James believed that the *parousia* must necessarily occur within a very brief period of time. But there is no reason to think that this was the case. The early Christians’ conviction that the *parousia* was ‘**near**’, or ‘**imminent**’, meant that they fully believed that **it could transpire within a very short period of time**, not that it had to. They, like Jesus, knew neither ‘*that day or hour*’ (**Mark 13:32**), but they acted, and taught others to act, as if **their generation could be the last**. Almost twenty centuries later, we live in exactly

the same situation: our own decade could be the last in human history. And James' advice to us is the same as it was to his first-century readers: **be patient and stand firm!**

**Ralph Martin:** That summons to ὑπομονή (a term frequent in the Testament of Job, where Job's wife Sitis is the chief complainant, e.g., **chaps 24, 25, 39**, and Satan is given a prominent role as tempter: see **R. P. Spittler** in **J. H. Charlesworth**, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1:829, 834, 836 on the origin of this in Jewish and Christian sectarian teachings) is the main facet of Job's experience on which James fastens in order to drive home the single point that his readers should learn how to see their troubles as part of God's *design* (τέλος). Like the canonical Job they will be brought to vindication (**4:10**) only if they maintain this faith and fortitude and endure to the end. **Job 27:7** could well be James' motto as well as Job's: "Now then, my children, you also must be patient in everything that happens to you. For patience is better than anything."

**D. (:9) Warning Against Complaining** (in light of the soon return of the Lord)

*"Do not complain, brethren, against one another,  
that you yourselves may not be judged;  
behold, the Judge is standing right at the door."*

Cf. how the Israelites grumbled against their spiritual leaders when confronted with difficult trials

**John Painter:** This is both an assurance to those who have strengthened the resolve of their hearts and a threat to those who grumble and complain about their brothers (and sisters) and to those who exploit the righteous poor. This sense of imminent judgment undergirds the forceful warning in **5:1–6**. Very likely the Jesus tradition underlying this development is found in **Matt. 7:1–5**, which begins, "*Do not judge lest you be judged.*" This warning is especially pressing because the judge has drawn near and stands at the door (see **Mark 13:29**).

**Douglas Moo:** The meaning may be that believers should not grumble to others about their difficulties, or that believers should not blame others for their difficulties (cf. NLT). Perhaps James intends both ideas. Once more, however, biblical usage might suggest a further allusion. The verb *stenazō* (*grumble*) regularly refers to the 'groaning' of the people of God under oppression; see, for example, **Exodus 2:23**: '*The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.*' This biblical allusion strengthens the supposition that the grumbling James warns about has arisen because of the **pressure of difficult circumstances**.

**John MacArthur:** Living with difficult circumstances can cause believers to become frustrated, lose patience, and complain ... against one another, especially against those who appear to be suffering less than they are or who seem to be adding to their trouble. *Stenazō* (*complain*) also means "to groan within oneself," or "to sigh." It describes an

attitude that is internal and unexpressed (cf. **Mark 7:34; Rom. 8:23**). It is a bitter, resentful spirit that manifests itself in one's relationships with others.

**Daniel Doriani:** But we must notice a certain twist. So far, James has referred to Christ's return to encourage believers to stand firm under duress. But now he bids us to remember the coming judgment whenever we would grumble against each other. Christians will not face God's wrath on judgment day, but we will face God's assessment of every word and every deed (**Matt. 12:34–37; 2 Cor. 5:10**). As **Peter Davids** says: "The nearness of the eschatological day is not just an impetus to look forward to the judgment of 'sinners' . . . , it is also a warning to examine one's own behavior so that when the one whose footsteps are nearing finally knocks on the door, one may be prepared to open, for open one must, either for blessing or for judgment."

**Craig Blomberg:** Whatever one's views on the disputed concept of degrees of eternal reward in heaven, at the very least these believers risk more severe censure and less hearty praise from Christ on the judgment day (cf. **1Co 3:14–15; 2Jn 8**).

## **E. (:10-11) Remember the OT Examples of Endurance**

### 1. Example of the Godly Prophets

*"As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we count those blessed who endured."*

**R. J. Knowling:** Patience is the self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate against a wrong, and steadfastness is the temper which does not easily succumb under suffering.

**John MacArthur:** The rejection of God's spokesmen is a familiar and tragic theme in Israel's history. Jesus denounced the Pharisees as the "sons of those who murdered the prophets" (**Matt. 23:31**). Later in that chapter, Jesus described Jerusalem (symbolic of the entire nation of Israel) as the city "who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her" (**v.37**). Stephen, on trial before the Sanhedrin, challenged them, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become" (**Acts 7:52; cf. Neh. 9:26; Dan. 9:6**).

### 2. Example of Job

*"You have heard of the endurance of Job"*

**William Barclay:** Job's is no groveling, passive, unquestioning submission; Job struggled and questioned, and sometimes even defied, but the flame of faith was never extinguished in his heart.

**Ralph Martin:** Job's example offers the Christian hope because it becomes apparent from the biblical story that Christians can withstand adversity. By examining Job's life, the readers may appreciate that there was a purpose behind what happened to him (again the sovereignty of God is in view; see **4:15**). Job came to understand God's

faithful nature (**Job 42:5**) before his material possessions were restored, and as he persevered, he found his closest communion with God in the midst of adversity.

**R. Kent Hughes:** What an encouragement to know that God does not expect stoic perseverance in the midst of trials. He knows we are clay. He understands tears. He accepts our questions. But he does demand that we recognize our finiteness and acknowledge there are processes at work beyond our comprehension. A plan far bigger than us is moving toward completion. And God demands that we, like Job, hold on to our faith and hope in God.

### 3. Examples of the Compassion and Mercy of God

*"and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings,  
that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."*

The anticipated return of the Lord as the Judge should give us all a proper fear of the Lord and the necessary patience to endure suffering rather than to complain against perceived mistreatment by our brothers.

**David Nystrom:** Finally, the purpose and plan of God includes his “*compassion and mercy*.” We have seen these themes before (**4:6**), but James knows that human beings are not only in constant need of the assurance of grace and forgiveness, but also in constant need of the fact of God’s grace and forgiveness.

**Douglas Moo:** James, we have seen again and again, has a very **practical theology**. His eschatology is no exception. To be sure, James does not say much about ‘*the last things*’, although he says enough for us to place him securely within the typical New Testament ‘already/not yet’ perspective. In this passage, James urges us to think about life in light of the ‘*end*’ of things. God has established a day when he will culminate his programme of redemption and judge all human beings. We are to live each day in the light of that ‘end’ God has appointed: an end whose timing we cannot predict but whose coming is absolutely certain and ultimately significant. Too often, believers fall into the trap of thinking, like the ‘*scoffers*’ of **2 Peter 3**, that Christ’s coming has been pushed so far into the uncertain future as to have no significance for the present. Quite the contrary, teaches James: Christ, the judge of all, including Christians, ‘*stands at the door*’.

**Ralph Martin:** How is the Lord compassionate and merciful if his children continue to suffer? He is loving and gracious in that he provides the strength to endure to the end, which is a denouement that consummates in glory and vindication for the faithful. That is a purpose of the Lord: to create his people as mature and complete persons of God and to uphold them so that in the teeth of persecution (**1:1–4**) they may enjoy the blessedness of the new world (4 Macc 17:17–18). Thus James closes his exhortation to patience (**5:7**) with a theodicy that rests on the assurance of the Lord’s goodness (**5:11**).

**Daniel Doriani:** This passage offers us many reasons to persevere in the faith. It comforts us in several ways. First, it shows us the Lord. He is near. He is the Judge and

comes to set all things right. Second, it reminds us of Job and the prophets, who persevered to the end in great adversity. Yet above all, James takes us to the fatherly heart of God. He abounds in love and he is sovereign still. Knowing this, whatever our troubles, we can endure. We can persevere to the end and know the full blessing of God.

### III. (:12) THE DANGER OF SWEARING AN OATH

#### A. Summary: No Need to Swear an Oath

*"But above all, my brethren, do not swear,  
either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath"*

cf. "Cross my heart and hope to die" mentality of children swearing that something is true

**Daniel Doriani:** Students of James puzzle over the place of this verse in the structure of the epistle. Its connection to the rest of **chapter 5** is a challenge. From **Martin Luther** to **Martin Dibelius** and beyond, theologians who question the structural cohesiveness of James cite **5:12** as a prime example of its tendency to drop disjointed aphorisms into the text. . .

Even if the meaning is clear, the exegetical and theological question remains: **Why this teaching here?** If James is a disorderly book, flitting from one topic to the next, **5:12** seems like prime evidence of the charge. Specifically, **James 5:1–6** declares woe upon rich oppressors. Then **5:7–11** calls God's people to patient endurance as they trust God to vindicate them. The book closes with a call to pray in all the circumstances of life (**5:13–18**) and a call to stand together in the faith (**5:19–20**). We wonder, then, what the prohibition of oaths has to do with either the theme of endurance in the face of oppression or the theme of praying and standing together in the faith.

Some say it is simply another sign of James's concern about the proper use of the tongue, with no closer connection to the rest of the epistle.

Others see **5:12** as a final word on the proper response to trials. It retains the section's interest in being prepared for judgment (5:9, 12). Further, it warns against a foolish response to the oppression described in **5:1–6**, for people commonly respond to trouble and distress with unrealistic pledges to God. But it is better to be genuine than dramatic, better to mean what we say than to have unfulfilled, unrealistic vows hanging over us (cf. **Eccl. 5:4**). The warning against vows is, therefore, part of James's call to patience and restraint in speech as in other daily behavior.

Still others see it as a genuine transition to James's final section. The phrase, "*above all*" in **James 5:12** is a literary convention meant to **introduce final remarks**. The topic, once again, is speech and the need to use the tongue to build community solidarity. Plain honesty is the first necessity (**5:12**), followed by prayer, confession of sin, and efforts to win straying brothers (**5:13–20**).

**David Nystrom:** “*above all*” (*pro panton*) means “most importantly” or “but especially.” However, given the care with which James has developed other themes—for example, the great stress he has placed on patience—it would be odd indeed if James were saying that his message concerning oaths he regards as the single most important in the entire letter. Rather, the term ought to be understood as “*finally*” or “*to sum up*”; that is, James is alerting his readers that **the letter is about to conclude**.

Any attempt to defend the present placement of this saying must show how it connects either with what has gone before or with what comes after. As many have noted, this logion appears out of place. However, when seen as an inappropriate use of the tongue in contradistinction to the proper uses pointed out in **5:13–18**, it is clear that this verse has a rightful place here. This, of course, connects the verse with what comes after. But what about the preceding section? **Martin** believes that **Reicke** is correct when he argues that the swearing of oaths is a sign of the impatience displayed by the poor who live under the cavalier and unchristian treatment of the wealthy in their community. Since James has counseled these poor to be patient and to wait for the deliverance of God, **Reicke**’s insight may well be accurate.

**Thomas Lea:** [These words] warn against the use of a hasty, irreverent oath involving God's name during a time of suffering or hardship. This logically follows the discussion of suffering in **verses 10–11**. Above all during our stress we should not resort to flippant oaths that communicate something about God to the world that we do not intend.

This prohibition bans the careless use of God's name to guarantee the truthfulness of a statement. Christians who face suffering can be easily tempted to make a frivolous appeal to God's name to bargain their way out of trouble or difficulty.

**John MacArthur:** The custom of swearing oaths was a major part of life in biblical times. It had become an issue in the church, particularly the predominantly Jewish congregations to which James wrote. Since swearing oaths was an integral part of Jewish culture, Jewish believers brought that practice into the church. But such oath taking is unnecessary among Christians, whose speech is to be honest (**Eph. 4:25; Col. 3:9**), and whose lives are to demonstrate integrity and credibility. For believers, a simple yes or no should suffice because they are faithful to keep their word.

To encourage believers to be distinctive in the matter of speaking the truth, James issues a command to stop swearing. There are four features of his command that need to be considered: the distinction, the restriction, the instruction, and the motivation.

**Douglas Moo:** The **swearing** that James here prohibits is not ‘dirty’ language as such, but the **invoking of God’s name, or substitutes for it, to guarantee the truth of what we say**. In the Old Testament, God is frequently presented as guaranteeing the fulfilment of his promises with an oath. The law does not prohibit oaths, but demands that a person be true to any oath he or she has sworn (cf. **Lev. 19:12** – yet another

instance in which James includes a topic mentioned in that chapter). Concern about the devaluation of oaths because of their indiscriminate use and the tendency to try to avoid fulfilling them by swearing by ‘less sacred’ things (cf. **Matt. 23:16–22**) led to warnings against using them too often (cf. Sirach 23:9, 11; Philo, *On the Decalogue*, 84–95). Jesus, it appears, went even further than this when he commanded his disciples not to swear ‘*at all*’ (**Matt. 5:34**). Jesus’ teaching in **Matthew 5:34–37** is particularly important in understanding James’ teaching, because it looks as if James is consciously reproducing that tradition. . .

It is questionable whether either Jesus or James intended to address the issue of official oaths, oaths that responsible authorities ask us to take. What both have in mind seem to be voluntary oaths. Even with these, it is argued, the intention is not to forbid any oath, but only oaths that would have the intention of avoiding absolute truthfulness. This would seem to be the problem that Jesus addressed (cf. **Matt. 23:16–22**), and the evidence from Paul’s epistles show that he, for one, continued to use oaths (**Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; 11:11; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10**). Nevertheless, caution is required.

### **B. Stick to Your Simple Word**

*"but let your yes be yes, and your no, no;  
so that you may not fall under judgment"*

**David Platt:** In **verse 12** James takes what seems like a hard left and starts talking about oaths. He says, “*Your ‘yes’ must be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no’ must be ‘no,’ so that you won’t fall under judgment.*” This is important, particularly in light of all that we have seen about our tongues in James. He is saying **faith that perseveres is trustworthy in speech**. The words from our mouths should be so consistent and dependable that they guarantee reliability.

**R. Kent Hughes:** Jesus and James are telling us we must never use “big guns” like “on my mother’s grave” or “as God is my witness.” Everyday speech and pulpit speech and courtroom speech are all to be the same—**radically true!**

**Ralph Martin:** Rather, what appears to be the case is the “voluntary” (**Moo**, 174) oath Christians feel must be given in order to ensure the integrity of their speech. The idea of *condemnation* (κρίσις) comes into operation when oaths are offered as a means of signaling the truthfulness of human intention. To conclude one’s remarks with an oath—which usually involved invoking God’s name—placed the speaker under even greater obligation to fulfill declared promises, and this in turn placed the oath-taker in greater danger of condemnation by God, since such speech was “more honest than other speech” (**Davids**, 190). For James (as for Jesus), believers should deal with one another in truth and honesty.

\* \* \* \* \*



## DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do I acquire wealth and material possessions only by ethical means? Do I function as a faithful steward of what God has committed to me, or do I use my wealth selfishly and extravagantly in self-indulgence? How does this passage help me not to envy the rich?
- 2) Regarding **verse 10**, do we presume that our patience and perseverance will always end up in some type of fairy book ending with God always delivering us in this life? What was the experience of the prophets of old who were patient to remain faithful to God's message?
- 3) Isn't it remarkable that the story of Job actually ends up as a testimony to the *compassion* and *mercy* of the Lord? How does this help us deal with some of the suffering in our own lives?
- 4) How should **verse 12** be applied in the context of taking an oath to tell the truth in our current legal system? Why do some Christians believe that they should not swear an oath of any kind?

\* \* \* \* \*

## QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

**W.A. Criswell:** Job was a man who found greatness in yielded submission, in loss, in pain. He was a man who came to glory under the hand of God... In the furnace of the fires of the trial of God, the Lord always has a purpose. From that vantage point, looking as God views our sufferings, we see that He is in it, He purposes for us a double portion of His grace and kindness, and He would bring us to glory. Had Job remained a rich man and that is all, would it have been the same? ... God had a marvelous thought in His mind when He looked at Job and saw how fine he was and how good he was and how responsible he was. So God decided to lift him up, to bless him beyond what Job ever thought possible in just having possessions. God added to Job's possessions a shekinah, a glory, a presence as though it were given from heaven itself. Did you know trial does that and without the trial there is no glory?

**William Barclay:** Re vs **12** -- James is not thinking of what we call bad language, and of swearing in the modern sense of the term; he is thinking of what we call taking oaths, and confirming a statement or a promise or an undertaking by an oath. In the ancient world, there were two evil practices.

- (1) There was a distinction--especially in the Jewish world--between oaths which were binding and oaths which were not binding. The distinction was this: any oath in which the name of God was directly used was considered to be definitely binding ...

(2) There was in this age an extraordinary amount of oath-taking. This in itself was quite wrong. For one thing, the value of an oath depends to a large extent on the fact that it is very seldom necessary to take one. Its impressiveness lies in its exceptional character ... And for another thing, the practice of taking frequent oaths was nothing other than a proof of the prevalence of lying and cheating and falsehood and swindling. In an honest society no oath is needed; it is only when men cannot be trusted to tell the truth that they have to be put upon oath.

**R.V.G. Tasker:** The way to avoid swearing of this kind is by being strictly truthful in ordinary speech, avoiding exaggeration, so often indulged in to create an impression, eschewing the half-truth which conceals the lie, and generally aiming at simplicity and straight-forwardness. Sometimes it is the fear that their words will not be taken at their face value which leads men to try and reinforce them by swearing; and that in itself is a reflection upon the insincerity and duplicity which so often characterize conversation. Men should say what they mean, and mean what they say.

**Warren Wiersbe:** Luxury has a way of ruining character. It is a form of self-indulgence. If you match character with wealth, you can produce much good; but if you match self-indulgence with wealth, the result is sin. The rich man Jesus described in **Luke 16:19-31** would have felt right at home with the rich men James wrote to!

**G. Coleman Luck:** Contrary to the conception of some, these verses evidently do not forbid the use of oaths on the part of Christians in connection with testimony at a court of law, for it must be remembered that our Lord did not refuse an oath in such an instance (**Matt. 26:63, 64**). But the teaching is that we should ever be temperate and absolutely truthful in our speech, our yes always meaning *yes*, and our no, *no*, so that oaths will not be necessary; men will know that our simple statements are completely trustworthy and dependable.

**Curtis Vaughan:** In the present passage James teaches that Christians are to be longsuffering in reference to the hardships and injustices which they experience. They must not seek retaliation nor harbor resentment against their oppressors. James does not mean that there is never any occasion for protest against wrong, nor does he mean that the Christian is to put forth no effort to remove evil. What he does suggest is that suffering inflicted on Christians by a hostile world is to be expected. When it comes it should be borne valiantly and without complaint.

**Daniel Doriani:** The prophetic oracles against foreign oppressors accomplished three things.

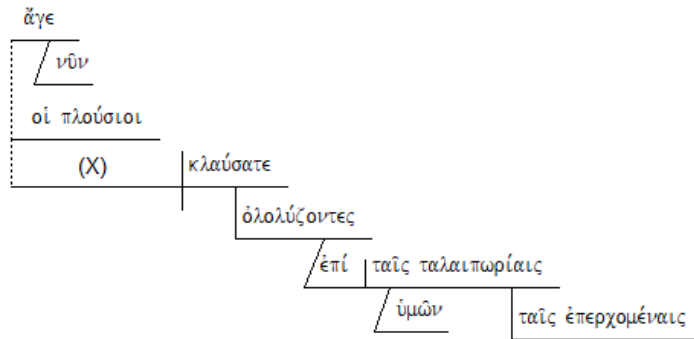
1. They promised that wicked oppressors would not last forever. They assured God's people that the Lord defends the righteous and punishes the wicked on the day of reckoning (cf. **Gen. 12:3b**).
2. They comforted God's people, assuring them that he knows their suffering (**Isa. 40:1-2; Jer. 31:10-14; Zech. 1:14-17**). One day he will wipe every tear from their eyes (**Rev. 7:17; 21:4**). Thus, **Calvin** says, when the faithful hear of the "*miserable end of the rich*," they should not envy their fortune but trust God to

avenge “the wrongs they suffered . . . [and] with a calm and resigned mind bear them.”

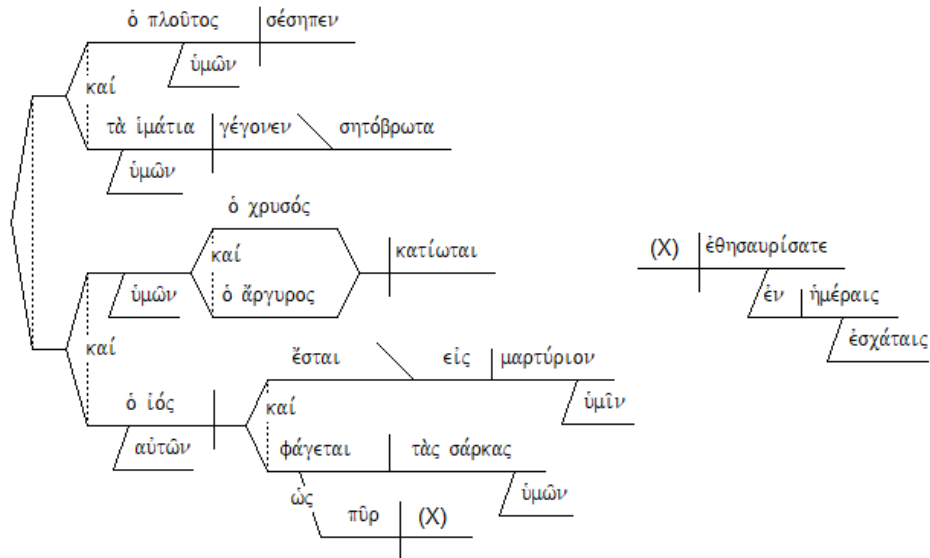
3. They revealed God’s standards. When God tells the rich that hoarding, oppression, and wage fraud lead to judgment, it notifies every listener that those sins violate his will and nature. Thus James helps his readers “keep a healthy distance from the seductive power exercised by wealth and the luxuries of civilization.”

**Leedy NT Greek Diagrams:**

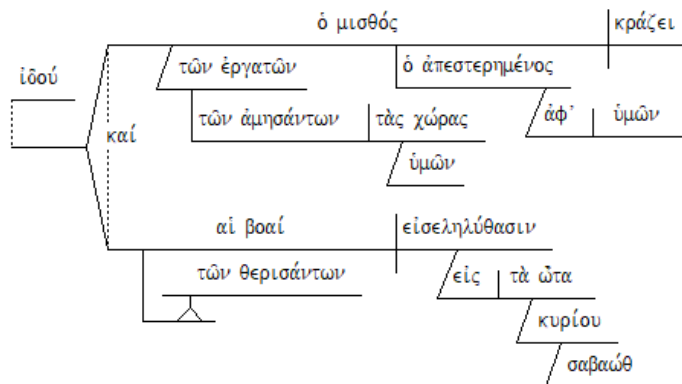
Jam 5:1



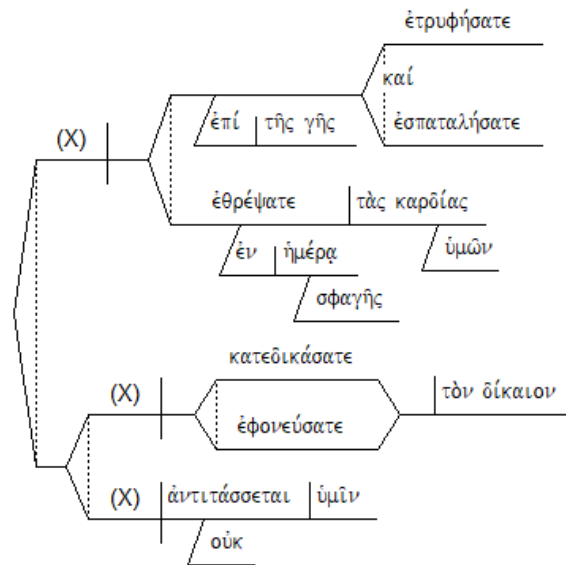
Jam 5:2-3



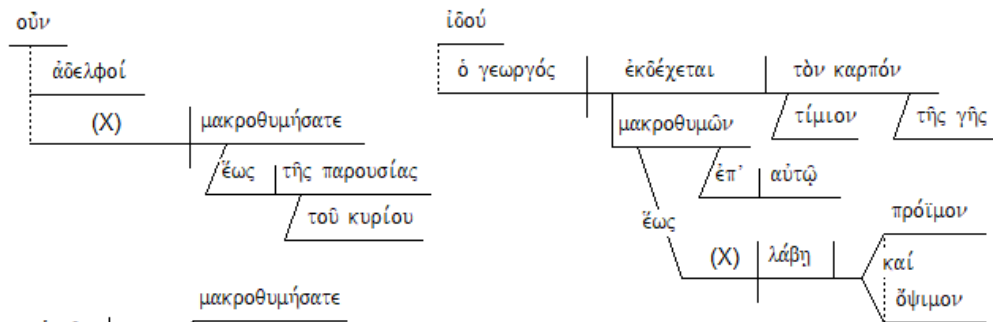
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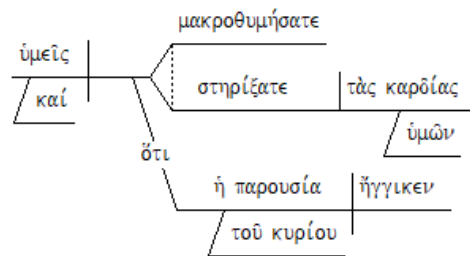
Jam 5:5-6



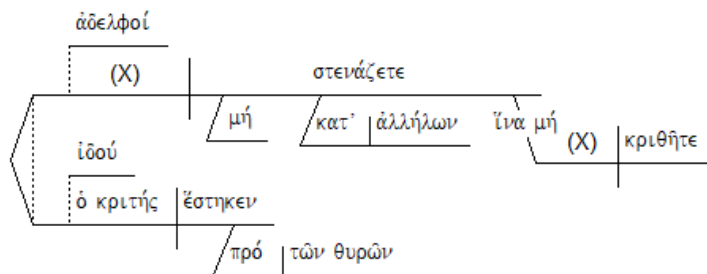
Jam 5:7



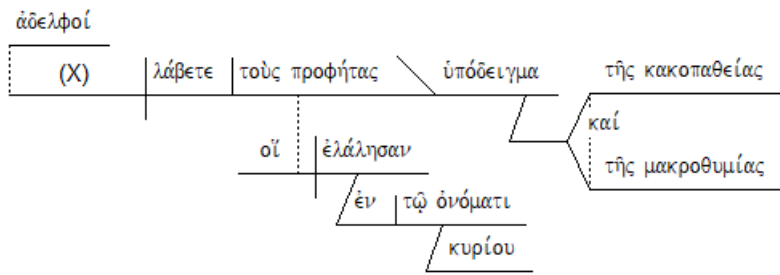
Jam 5:8



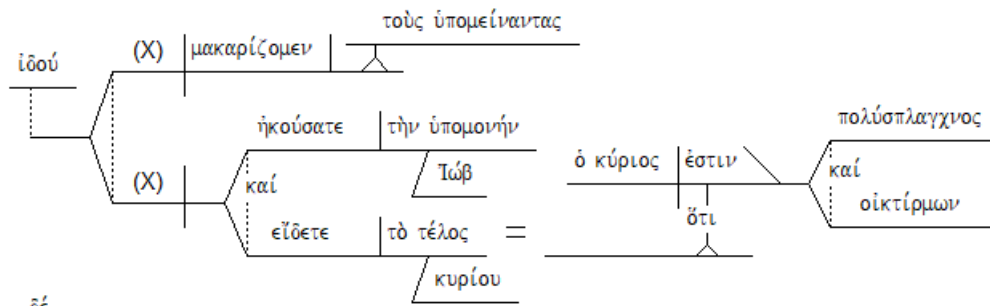
Jam 5:9



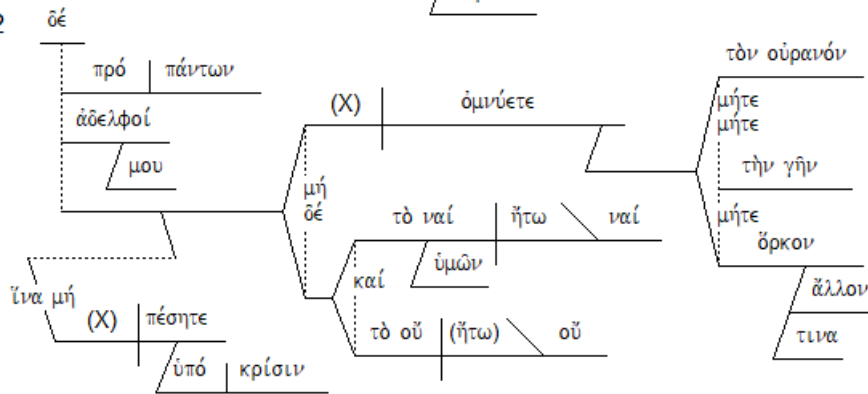
Jam 5:10



Jam 5:11



Jam 5:12



TEXT: JAMES 5:13-20

TITLE: RESTORE AND RESCUE -- FAITH WITHOUT FERVENT EFFECTUAL PRAYER IS DEAD

**BIG IDEA:**

**THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN CAN RESTORE THE WEAK PERSECUTED BELIEVER AND LOVING INTERVENTION CAN RESCUE SINNING UNBELIEVERS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

**John MacArthur:** [I am following his view of this passage rather than the majority position that focuses on healing of the physically sick.] The passage raises a number of difficult interpretive questions. What kind of suffering does James have in view in verse 13? What type of sickness is in view in **verse 14**? Why are the prayers of the elders different from those of other believers (**vv. 14–15**)? What is the anointing with oil described in **verse 14**? Does the prayer of faith (**v. 15**) always restore the sick? How does sickness relate to sin (**v. 15**)? What type of healing is in view in **verse 16**? Why does James insert an illustration about rain (**vv. 17–18**) into the middle of a discussion of healing?

The theme of **verses 13–18**, then, is **prayer**, which is mentioned in every one of those verses. James's exhortation to prayer embraces the prayer life of the entire church. Individual believers are called to pray in **verse 13**, the elders in **verses 14–15**, and the congregation in **verse 16**. This section also reflects James's compassionate pastoral care for his suffering flock; his main focus is on the casualties of the spiritual battle, the persecuted, weak, defeated believers.

As the context and the content of this section make clear, the subject is not physical illness or healing. Instead, its concern is with **healing spiritual weakness**, spiritual weariness, spiritual exhaustion, and spiritual depression through prayer, as well as dealing with the suffering and sin that accompanies it. To insert a discussion here on physical healing would be incongruous. Nothing in the preceding or following context would prepare James's readers for that. But a section on how to help the casualties of persecution through prayer fits perfectly into the flow of James's thought. Specifically, James discusses **the relationship of prayer to comfort, restoration, fellowship, and power**.

**George Guthrie:** James has been concerned with appropriate Christian responses to trials from the very beginning (**1:2–4**), and here he emphasizes that difficulties are to be addressed with prayer. Perhaps, given the broader context, in which James has focused on oppression of the poor at the hands of the rich (**5:1–6**), he counters our natural human tendency to respond with hatred and even violence. Rather, we should respond with the godly posture of prayer, trusting God for justice and vindication ( **Davids**, 192).

**Dan McCartney:** Both **5:7–11** and **5:13–18** are concerned with the Christian’s response to the suffering and stress of life, **5:7–11** focusing on the passive attitude of patience and **5:13–18** encouraging active prayer (thus drawing to conclusion the overall concern of the letter, first broached in **1:2–15**, of the believer’s response to testing). Also note that both passages end with a brief description of an exemplary OT character’s manifestation of the virtue in view (Job in **5:11**; Elijah in **5:17–18**). Finally, note that in both sections the analogy of “rain” (implicit in **5:7**; explicit in **5:17–18**) is used to refer to the promised eschatological restoration, which must be patiently waited for in faith (**5:7–11**) and prayed for in faith (**5:13–18**).

Alternative View (dealing with Physical Sickness)

**Craig Blomberg:** The last passage in James has often been seen as the conclusion to this epistle, even though it reads more like the last topic of the letter body than a standard epistolary closing. If our proposals about James’s outline are on target, **5:13–18** fits very nicely as the final subsection of James’s unpacking his theme of trials and temptations.

Main Idea: Christians should deal with suffering, sickness, and sin by intercession with God and intervention in the lives of fellow believers. Sometimes sin will be one of the direct causes of suffering or sickness and sometimes it will not. When it is, confession becomes crucial. In all situations, prayer proves powerful.

**I. Christians must always pray and, when necessary, confess their sins, in order to deal with suffering and sickness (5:13–18).**

- A. Christians should respond to all situations of life with prayer (v. 13).
- B. Christians should respond to sickness with prayer and anointing with oil (vv. 14–15a).
- C. If the sickness is the result of sin, Christians should confess their sin in order to receive physical and spiritual healing (vv. 15b–16a).
- D. The prayers of righteous people are powerful, like Elijah’s (vv. 16b–18).

**II. Christians must intervene in the lives of fellow believers who are sinning (vv. 19–20).**

- A. Successful intervention (that which brings repentance) saves that person from the consequences of possible apostasy (vv. 19–20a).
- B. Successful intervention can bring forgiveness even when that person has committed many sins (v. 20b).

**I. (:13-16) DEALING WITH RESTORING WEARY AND WEAK PERSECUTED BELIEVERS**

**A. (:13-15) Proper Response to Different Situations**

**Peter Davids:** James, then, wants God remembered **in all situations**, good as well as bad. Turning to God in need is half the truth: turning to him in praise either in the church or alone when one is cheerful (whatever the situation) is the other half. God is

not just an errand boy to help human need, but one who deserves worship and praise at all times (**Phil. 4:4, 6; Eph. 5:20; 1 Thes. 5:16–18**) and a person to whom one may relate no matter what the circumstance.

**Alec Motyer:** The word (*kakopatheia*, *kakopatheō*) is wider than the sufferings of sickness. Jeremiah suffered opposition, Ezekiel bereavement, Hosea marital breakdown. It is **any ill circumstance** which may come upon us, any trial, anything of which we or an onlooking friend might say “That’s bad”. Alternatively, life has other experiences in store for us as well. James asks, *Is any cheerful?* The word means, broadly, ‘*to be in good heart*’. It does not necessarily mean to be trouble free but to be buoyant, whatever the circumstances, to be **happy in spirit**. **Here, then, in two words, are all life’s experiences, and each of them in turn can so easily be the occasion of spiritual upset.** Trouble can give rise to an attitude of surly rebellion against God and the abandonment of spiritual practices. Equally, times of ease and affluence beget complacency, laziness and the assumption that we are able of ourselves to cope with life, and God is forgotten. James is fully aware of all this, for the persistence, throughout his letter, of the themes of trial, alongside warnings against allowing the heart to stray after riches, indicate his acquaintance with the full run of life, and his concern to armour us against its varied assaults.

His insistence, nevertheless, is that none of these things should move us. Neither suffering nor ease should find us without a suitable Christian response in prayer and song.

1. (:13a) Pray When You Experience Suffering/Persecution/Abuse  
*"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray."*

**John MacArthur:** James addresses not those suffering from physical diseases, but those being persecuted, abused, and treated wickedly.

2. (:13b) Praise When You Experience Joy  
*"Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises."*

**Daniel Doriani:** Christian musicians ought to write songs that enable believers to take every joy and sorrow to God. Christian music rightly focuses on worship and praise, and each generation rightly desires to express its faith in its own “songs of praise.”

**Dan McCartney:** the cheerfulness is better understood as the experiencing of God’s goodness in ways that are desirable from a human point of view. At any rate, the appropriate response is not pride at one’s accomplishments (like the boastful merchant in **4:16**) but gratitude that expresses itself in musical praise to God.

3. (:14-15) Seek Elder Involvement When You Experience Severe Weakness
  - a. The Occasion  
*"Is anyone among you sick?"*



**John MacArthur:** Here is the most misunderstood and disputed portion of this passage. At first glance it appears to be teaching that sick believers can expect physical healing through the prayers of the elders. But such an interpretation is out of harmony with the context. And as noted in the previous point, the **suffering James has in view is evil treatment, not physical illness.**

It is true that, apart from the present verse, *astheneō* is translated *sick* eighteen times in the New Testament (e.g., **Matt. 10:8; 25:36, 39; Mark 6:56; Luke 4:40; John 4:46; Acts 9:37**). But it is also used fourteen times to refer to **emotional or spiritual weakness** (**Acts 20:35; Rom. 4:19; 8:3; 14:1–2; 1 Cor. 8:11–12; 2 Cor. 11:21, 29; 12:10; 13:3–4, 9**). Significantly, in all but three (**Phil. 2:26–27; 2 Tim. 4:20**) of *astheneō*'s appearances in the epistles it does not refer to physical sickness. Paul's use of *astheneō* in **2 Corinthians 12:10** is especially noteworthy, since it there describes **weakness produced by the sufferings of life**—in a similar context as its usage in the present verse.

Translating *astheneō* “*weak*” here in keeping with its predominant usage in the epistles allows us to view this verse in a different light. James moves beyond the suffering believers of the previous point to address specifically **those who have become weak by that suffering**. The weak are those who have been defeated in the spiritual battle, who have lost the ability to endure their suffering. They are the fallen spiritual warriors, the exhausted, weary, depressed, defeated Christians. They have tried to draw on God's power through prayer, but have lost motivation, even falling into sinful attitudes. Having hit bottom, they are not able to pray effectively on their own. In that condition, **the spiritually weak need the help of the spiritually strong** (cf. **1 Thess. 5:14**).

b. The Initiative

*"Let him call for the elders of the church"*

**George Guthrie:** “*Elders*” (*presbyteros*, GK 4565) is one of four designations for the primary local church leadership role in the NT, the other three being “*overseers*,” “*pastors*,” and “*leaders*.” When used of this role, the last of these terms is only found in the NT at **Hebrews 13:7, 17** (although it is used adjectivally at **Ac 15:22**), and “*pastors*,” referring to the position, only occurs as a noun at **Ephesians 4:11**. The words for “*elders*” and “*overseers*,” given their use in **Acts 20:17, 28** and **Titus 1:5–7**, are synonymous, and these leaders are instructed by Paul to “*be shepherds of*,” or “*pastor*” (*poimainō*, GK 4477) God's people (**Ac 20:28**). Consequently, **the elders were the overseers or pastors of the church.**

c. The Remedy

1) *"let them pray over him"*

2) *"anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord"*

**C. Leslie Mitton:** The use of oil, both by the disciples of Jesus (**Mark 6:13**) and as recommended by James, was supplementary aid for awakening faith. The healing work

is done by God's Spirit, offered freely to man's need and appropriated by faith, but material aids may sometimes prepare the way.

**Douglas Moo:** It is best, then, to think of the anointing with oil as a symbolic action. Anointing frequently symbolizes the **consecration** of persons or things for God's use and service in the Old Testament. And while *chriō* is usually used in these texts, James has probably chosen *aleiphō* because of the physical action involved. As the elders prayed, they would anoint the sick person in order to symbolize that that person was being '**set apart**' for God's special attention and care.

**John MacArthur:** It may well have been that the elders literally rubbed oil on believers who had suffered physical injuries to their bodies from the persecution (cf. Luke 10:34). Medical science was certainly in a primitive state and there were few trustworthy doctors. It would have been a gracious, kind act on the part of the elders to rub oil on the wounds of those who had been beaten, or into the sore muscles of those made to work long hours under harsh treatment.

**Dale Allison:** The Reformers and subsequent Protestants rejected extreme unction, arguing that neither **Mk 6.13** nor **Jas 5.14** is the mandate for a sacrament. The result was that most Protestant communions ceased to practice anointing for healing, which explains its absence from editions of the Book of Common Prayer between 1552 and 1892 — although the Non-jurors in the eighteenth century and the Tractarians in the nineteenth century urged a return to the practice, in large measure because of the passage in James. In recent times, with the older controversies mostly past, many Protestant groups have reintroduced anointing for the sick, for which **Jas 5.14** is always the main proof text. . .

Our passage has also been prominent in inner-Protestant debates regarding the cessation of miracles. Charismatics and faith-healers have always found in James encouragement for their view that miraculous healings continue in the Christian dispensation. In the words of one advocate of miracles, **5.14-16** entails that 'prayer for physical healing and God's healing power is normal and to be expected in the life of the church'. By contrast, the so-called cessationists, who believe that all miracles of the sort that appear in the NT ceased in the fourth, third, or second century or with the end of the apostolic age, so that all subsequent reports of such should be disbelieved, have had to ask why, if miracles no longer happen, one should bother to heed James' admonition to pray for the sick or anoint them with oil. One common response has been to distinguish between providential blessings and extraordinary miracles: while the latter no longer occur, one can still hope that 'the ordinary operations of God's general providence in nature' may bring a special blessing. Other options have been to regard miracles of healing, which God still works, as fundamentally different than other miracles, such as prophesying and speaking in tongues, which God no longer bestows; or to hold that, while God may still (in an unpredictable fashion) respond to prayer, no individual has the gift of healing. **B.B. Warfield**, in attacking faith-healers, insisted that (i) **Jas 5** does not exclude ordinary medicinal procedures; (ii) the text does not promise miraculous intervention and answers to prayer; and (iii) anointing is not a religious act; the oil is

medicinal and perhaps symbolic (of the power of the Spirit), not imbued with supernatural power. In sum, then, ‘what James requires of us is merely that we shall be Christians in our sickness as in our health, and that our dependence then, too, shall be on the Lord’.

**Craig Blomberg:** Two main interpretations compete for acceptance.

- Some see the oil as **symbolic**, in the sense that the anointing of kings in the OT symbolized God’s presence with them. Moo discusses at length the uses of oil in the ancient Mediterranean world, both medicinal and ritual, and concludes that “*anoint*” here “refers to a **physical action with symbolic significance**.... As the elders pray, they are to anoint the sick person in order to symbolize that the person is being set apart for God’s special attention and care.” Note that the grammar in this clause indicates the need for prayer as the primary reason for the elders’ visit, represented by the main verb “*they should pray*” (προσευξάσθωσαν). The participle “*anointing*” (ἀλείψαντες) indicates concurrent but subordinate action. **The oil is the symbol of God’s presence, but prayer is the mechanism for tapping into his power.**
- Some scholars, however, understand the oil as a **medicinal substance**, though partial parallels in Jewish circles to ritual anointing for physical healing make this view less probable.

The descriptive phrase “*in the name of the Lord*” reminds us that the healing is done solely by the will and power of God.

**Peter Davids:** Thus one finds three actions in the healing rite: prayer, anointing, and the calling out of the name of Jesus. This is not a magical rite, nor an exorcism (cf.

**Dibelius**, 252), but an opening to the power of God for him to intervene whether or not the demonic is involved. It is also interesting to note that this is not the special gift of an individual, unlike **1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30**, but the power of a certain office in the church (for which no NT passage suggests gifts of healing were a qualification). This exercise of eschatological power as a duty of office is something not present in the synagogue elders. Yet it was a power regularly exercised in the church during the first centuries of its existence (cf. **Kelsey**, 104–199).

**Dan McCartney:** James may have in the back of his mind a promise made in **Isa. 61**, one of the great messianic “eschatological reversal” texts of the OT. There Isaiah says that the **Messiah is anointed** in order to, among other things, “*provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair*” (**Isa. 61:3** NIV). If James has this in mind, then just as in **1:2**, suffering is linked with eschatological joy.

- d. (:15) The Result = Prayer Offered in Faith Works Like a Charm  
“*and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.*”

**John MacArthur:** The blessed result of the elders' comfort and ministry of intercession is that their prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick. Again, *sick* is misleading and not the best translation of *kamnō*, which in its only other New Testament usage (**Heb. 12:3**) clearly does not refer to physical illness. As has been noted, James speaks here of a **spiritual restoration of weak, defeated believers**. Nor does *sozō* (*restore*) necessarily refer to physical healing; it is most commonly translated "save" in the New Testament. The idea here is that the elders' prayers will deliver weak, defeated believers from their spiritual weakness and restore them to spiritual wholeness. Those prayers, of course, are but a channel for God's power; it is the Lord who will raise up the weak. *Egeirō* (*raise up*) can also mean "to awaken" or "to arouse." Through the righteous prayers of godly men, God will restore His battered sheep's enthusiasm.

**Warren Wiersbe:** But what is 'the prayer of faith' that heals the sick? The answer is in **1 John 5:14-15** -- '*And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*' The 'prayer of faith' is a prayer offered when you know the will of God. The elders would seek the mind of God in the matter, and then pray according to his will.

**Craig Blomberg:** Somewhere in our prayers we must find a balance between never expecting God to heal and requiring him to heal on demand. Trying to identify an exact definition of the "prayer of faith" is perplexing, but perhaps the best explanation appears already in **1:5-8**, where we are instructed to pray "*with the confident expectation that God will hear and answer the prayer.*" Still, these commands also assume the proviso of **4:15** in which everything for which we hope remains **contingent on God's will**. Thus **Keith Warrington** concludes that "the prayer of faith is best identified as knowledge of God's will for a particular situation when no scriptural guidance is available." **Warrington** nevertheless recognizes that such a knowledge of God's will is often absent, in which case we are still to pray, but in a way that acknowledges **God's right to supersede our desires**.

**Peter Davids:** In James it is clear that sin is not necessarily, though it may be, the cause of illness; *καὶν*, "and if" (BDF, § 374), plus ἡ πεποικωτός, the perfect subjunctive, indicate possibility, the perfect perhaps showing that the person has not been forgiven and so is in a state of guilt. The person would do well to follow the rabbinic advice (b. Ber. 5a) and **examine himself**. Should sin be the cause, the healing for which the elders pray will not end with the body. It will be a total healing and include the soul, the forgiveness of sins (as in **Mk. 2:5**; cf. **Mt. 12:32**; **Lk. 12:10**).

**Daniel Doriani:** [Some] Christians claim that everyone can be healed, if he or she prays with enough faith. Conversely, if anyone is not healed, they can blame his or her lack of faith. This teaching doubles the misery for the chronically ill. They suffer their original problem, and they suffer the stigma of insufficient faith.

**B. (:16a) Confession of Sins to One Another Must Accompany Intercessory Prayer for One Another** (where appropriate)

1. Confession of Sins to One Another

*"Therefore, confess your sins to one another"*

**Craig Blomberg:** Catholicism elevated this procedure to a sacrament but limited it to a private encounter between church members and clergy. The Lutheran and Anglican/Episcopalian liturgies include a public confession of sins at the start of each service, followed by the pastor's pronouncement of absolution. Still, neither of these practices is quite the same thing as going to the person against whom one has sinned to acknowledge one's failure and seek forgiveness. **Mt 18:15–18** lies in the background. When sin has estranged two parties, one of them needs to take the initiative to restore the relationship. If that fails, then other Christian helpers must be brought into the process. If at all possible, the confession should not be made any more or less public than the original sin. And "any confession should be offered in the presence of those who have been harmed by the sin or in the presence of the leaders of that community rather than a wider context, so that wise counsel may be offered."

**Thomas Lea:** Roman Catholics have used this verse to justify confession of sins to a priest. It is important to note that this verse discusses confession and intercession among Christians and not between a believer and a priest.

John MacArthur: The Bible nowhere teaches that all sickness is the direct result of an individual's sins. Spiritual defeat, however, is often both the cause and result of sin. When that is the case, the antidote is to confess those sins to God and obtain His forgiveness.

2. Mutual Intercessory Prayer

*"and pray for one another"*

**Dan McCartney:** Corporate confession of corporate sins and prayer for one another heals the church's wounds. This is particularly applicable to the situation described in **4:1–2** and **4:11–12** of mutual destructiveness that results from selfishness and judgmentalism.

3. Goal

*"so that you may be healed."*

**George Guthrie:** James, dealing with communities in which there was a good bit of social strife, points to vital Christian remedies for fractured relationships—open confession of sin and mutual prayer, which are actions that promote transparency, support, and unity. Consequently, the exhortations to confession and prayer are followed by "so that" (*hopōs*), a marker showing the purpose for something, and that purpose in the present case is expressed as "you may be healed." The healing in mind is physical but points to a deeper spiritual healing of sin and broken relationships.

**C. (:16b) Theme Emphasizing Effective Prayer**

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

**II. (:17-18) EXAMPLE OF EFFECTUAL PRAYER OF ELIJAH**

**A. (:17) Elijah Was No Different Than Us**

*"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours"*

**Craig Blomberg:** [James] sets up his illustration carefully, making it clear that Elijah was simply a representative human being rather than a larger-than-life hero, somehow holier than us. His ability to pray and obtain results did not stem from his differing from us in any way. Rather, Elijah was a fallen, stubborn person *"just like us,"* but one who on these occasions was in touch with the Spirit. Thus his prayers did not arise from arrogance or a selfish desire to prove a point; rather, they came from trust and confidence in God. By the expression *"a man with the same nature as us"* (ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν), James makes it clear that **we have this same ability to pray powerfully.**

**B. (:18) Elijah Prayed and Got Results**

1. Prayed for No Rain

*"and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain;  
and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months"*

2. Prayed for Rain

*"And he prayed again,  
and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit"*

**Craig Blomberg:** Elijah knew that he was acting **within God's will** in both the initial pronouncement and the final prayer.

**Alec Motyer:** This is part of the wonder of the way of prayer. Those who by grace have been given the status of righteousness in God's sight have been brought into the realm where effective prayer operates and have been given the right to exercise a ministry of prayer.

**(:19-20) DEALING WITH RECONCILING UNBELIEVERS**

**A. (:19) Encouragement that Those Who Stray Can Be Rescued**

*"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back"*

**George Guthrie:** Thus the truth does connote right belief concerning the gospel, but for James, of course, the truth is something that is ultimately manifested in **right living (3:14)**. In the NT, the figurative use of *"wandering"* as wandering from right thinking and, therefore, into deeper levels of wrong living occurs at numerous points (**Mt 22:29; 2Ti 3:13; Tit 3:3; 2Pe 2:15**). So James speaks of wandering from the truth as a wandering into sin (**Moo, 249; Johnson, 337**).

**John MacArthur:** The concluding two verses describe a different group from the weary, weak, persecuted believers who need to be ministered to by the elders. To the ministry of restoring struggling believers James adds the ministry of reconciling the unsaved in the church. . .

“*Strays*” is from *planao*, which means “to wander,” “to go astray” “to apostatize.” It frequently describes the condition of the **unsaved (Matt. 22:29; Titus 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:25)**. . .

In the New Testament the term *sinner* invariably describes those outside the kingdom of God (**Matt. 9:13; Luke 15:7, 10; Luke 18:13-14; Rom. 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:15**).

**B. (:20) Encouragement that the Benefits of Saving the Perishing are Enormous**

*"let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins"*

**John MacArthur:** Realizing the terrible fate that awaits unrepentant sinners should motivate believers to call to salvation those who stray from the truth. Nothing less than each person’s eternal soul is at stake – his most priceless possession (cf. **Mark 8:36-37**). *Psuche* (*soul*) refers to the whole person (the Septuagint uses it in **Gen. 2:7**), particularly the inner, immortal person who lives in the mortal body. . .

God has granted to all believers the ministry of reconciling wandering souls to Himself. When the evidence indicates a professed believer’s faith is not real, true Christians, knowing the terrible threat of eternal death that person faces, must make it their goal to turn him back from his sin to genuine saving faith in God.

**Peter Davids:** James, then, concludes with the purpose of his work. He does not discuss sins simply to moralize or condemn. He discusses sin to point out to erring community members the results of their behavior and to bring them to repentance. He hopes to save them from damnation and procure forgiveness for their sins. It is this apostolic goal he urges on his readers, and having encouraged them to follow in his steps and take up where he ends, he concludes the epistle (cf. **1 Jn. 5:21**).

**Daniel Doriani:** These final thoughts of James unite several themes of his epistle. To pursue a sinner in order to win him to Christ is a proper response to a trial (**James 1:2–12**). It is a form of kindness to a brother (**2:14–26**), a proper use of speech (**3:1–12**), and it leads people to humble themselves before the Lord (**4:6–10**). James summons us to do the word and reap the blessings (**1:22–25**). One more time, James reminds us that sin leads to death, and that the gospel, the word of truth, saves the soul (**1:15, 21**).

\* \* \* \* \*

**DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- 1) How much do we depend upon prayer as the channel for seeking God's deliverance and blessing? What have we experienced about praying in faith, about praying fervently, about praying effectually?
- 2) How does this passage shed light on the modern day phenomenon of "faith healers"? To what extent are the elders of the local church involved in the ministry of these individuals?
- 3) What type of confession of sins is appropriate? How do the Roman Catholics use this verse to justify confession to a priest? What is the actual emphasis of this passage? When is public confession potentially harmful and unnecessary?
- 4) Am I perceptive of when a brother is starting to backslide and wander from the truth? Am I proactive to approach him in the right spirit before it is too late? What is my attitude towards such an individual? Am I judgmental? Do I gossip about his problems?

\* \* \* \* \*

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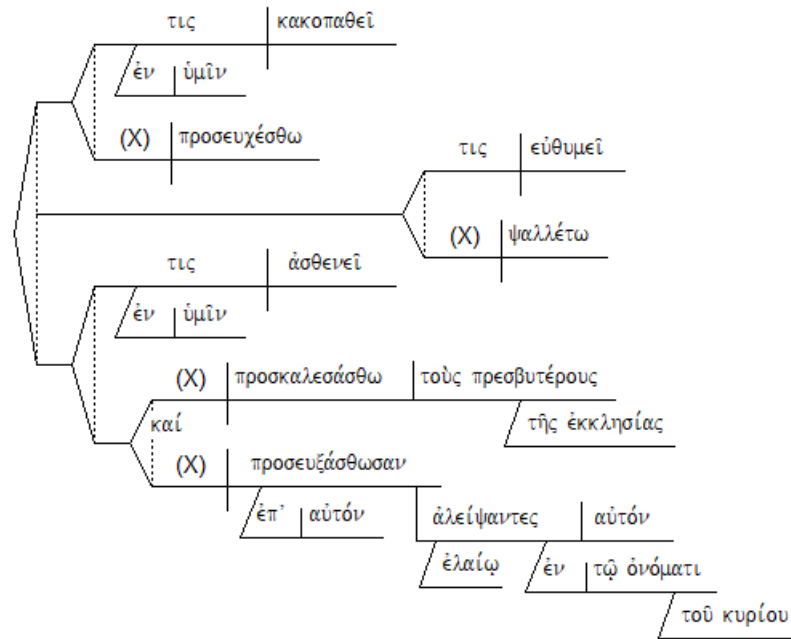
**William Barclay:** Here in this passage there is set down the great differentiating characteristic of Christian truth. Christian truth is something from which a man can wander. Christian truth is not only intellectual, philosophical, speculative, abstract; Christian truth is always moral truth. Christian truth, is, therefore, not something about which a man may merely be mistaken in opinion; it is something from which he can wander in action.

**Ralph Martin:** The pericope of vv 13–18 is one unit, moving in a succession of ideas (Vouga, 143). The human conditions of joy and sorrow are occasions for divine intervention. But God uses one's fellow believers, whether church officials or the assembled congregation (v 16), and the external means of oil to minister his grace in both restoration and forgiveness. Prayer that moves the human exigency to conform to the divine plan is seen to be the appropriate attitude expressing faith and confidence. Hence the import of the phrase in v 14b: ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου, which is not a magical or mechanical talisman and not an exorcistic form of words; rather it is the phrase that marks out the sphere of faith in which God's perfect will is acknowledged and trusted as the best—whatever the outcome.

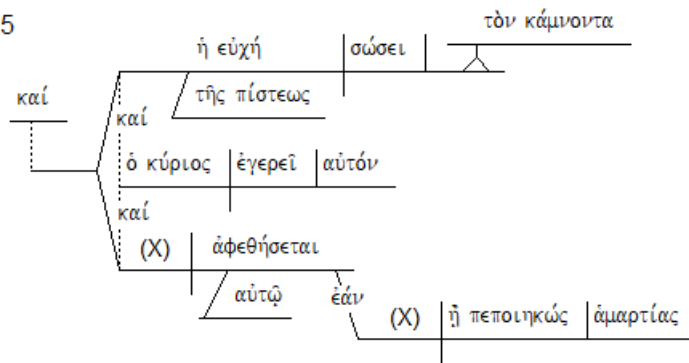


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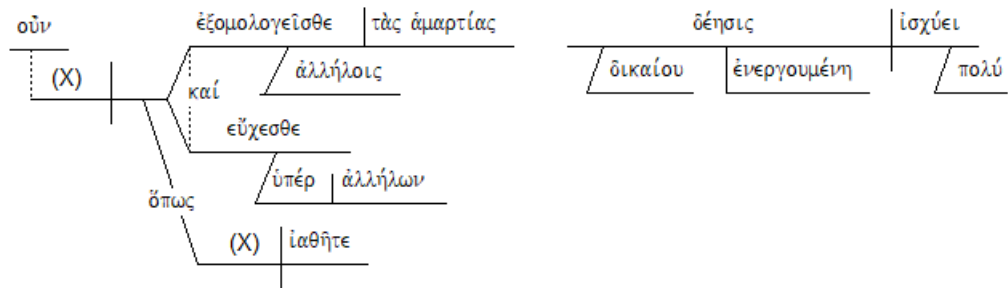
Jam 5:13-14



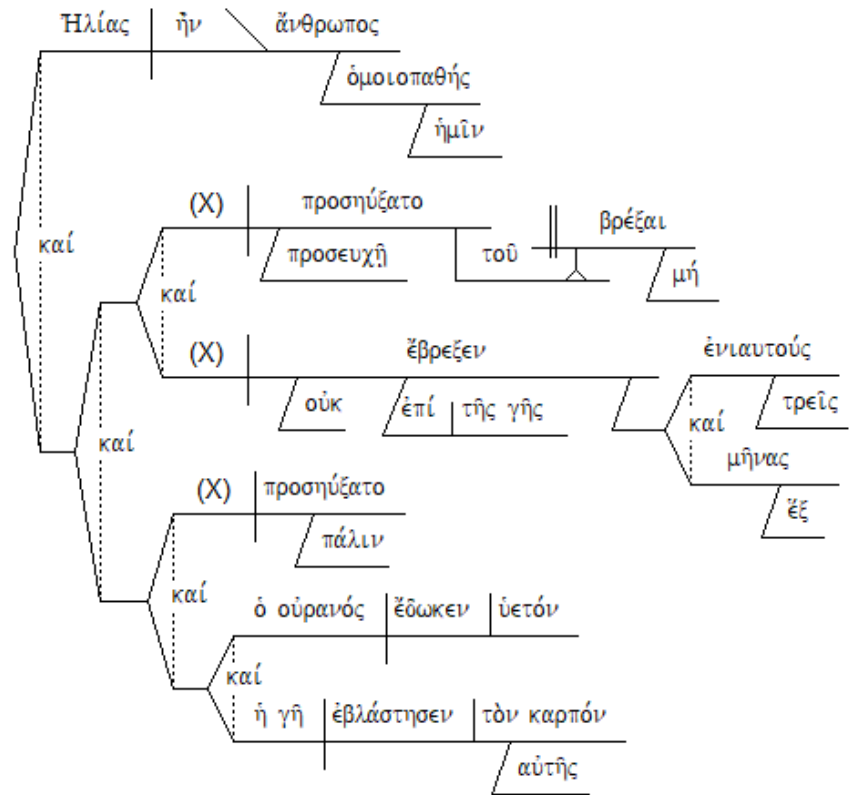
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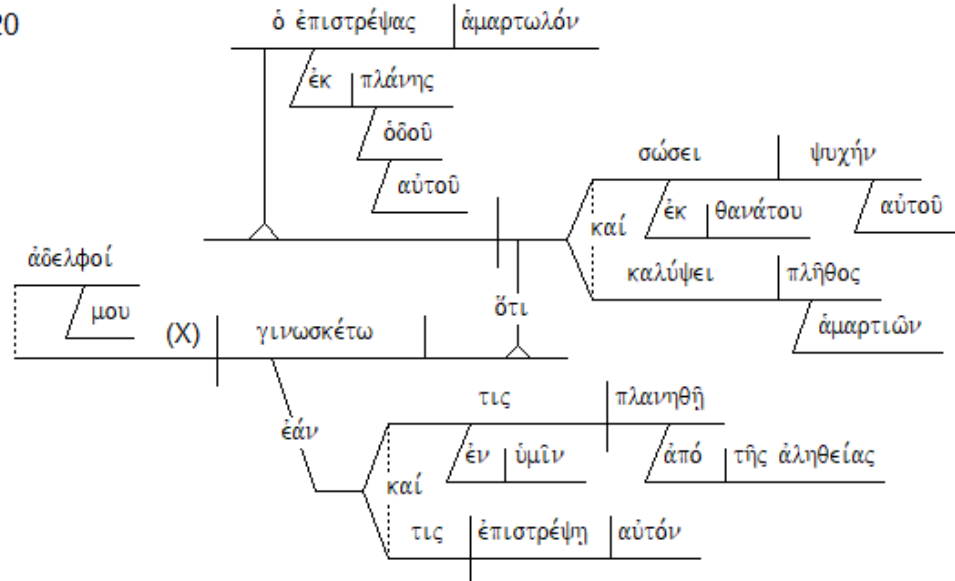
Jam 5:16



Jam 5:17-18



Jam 5:19-20



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