

## Introduction

Interesting note: There is no mention of the Gospel, incarnation, life of Jesus, Jesus' death or resurrection, nor redemption through his blood. In fact, there are only two references to Christ. Yet, the book is filled with many good and wonderful 'helps' for Christian living.

There are four men named James in the New Testament. They are: (1) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, who was the first to suffer martyrdom (Acts 1:13); (2) James, the son of Alphaeus, an apostle known as James the Less (Matt.10:3); (3) James, the oldest half-brother of Jesus (Mk.6:3) and brother of Jude (Matt.13:55); and, (4) James, the father of Judas (the apostle), not Judas Iscariot (Lu.6:16). The question is raised: Which James was the author of this epistle? Inasmuch as no one has given serious consideration to James, the son of Alphaeus, or James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot) as being the writer, we are left with James, the son of Zebedee, and James, the half-brother of Jesus. Therefore, since James, Zebedee's son, was martyred in the early days of the church, it's believed by most that the likely writer is the Lord's brother. Prior to Jesus' death and resurrection, he, along with his brothers, did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah and Redeemer of mankind (Jn.7:5). Yet, it's likely that the Lord's post-resurrection appearance to him was that which brought about his conversion (I Cor.15:7).

He became a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18), and was called one of the 'pillars' of the church, along with Peter and John (Gal.2:9). Because of his devotion to righteousness, he was known as 'James the Just'.

The main theme of the Epistle is: 'Practical religion', or 'Practical Christian Living', manifesting itself in 'good works' rather than in 'profession', alone. God requires 'doing' as well as 'professing'.

Note: It's believed that James was an apostle to the Jews (the circumcision) along with Peter and John; James in Jerusalem, Palestine, and Syria; Peter in Babylon and the East; and John in Ephesus and Asia Minor.

Tradition concerning his death: Jewish priests and rulers forced him to the roof of the Temple; and when they demanded that he blaspheme Christ, he declared boldly that Jesus was the Son of God. He was then hurled from the Temple, and died.

## Chapter 1

V.1. James calls himself a 'servant (Gr. *doulos*, bond-servant) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'. Even though a brother of Christ and a 'pillar' in the early church, he refers to himself as only a servant. 'To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting'. James does not have in mind a particular congregation, but the church at large. He writes to the Jewish Christians of the Dispersion (Matt.26:31; Jn.11:52). In Acts 8:1), Luke says, '*And Saul was consenting unto his (Stephen's) death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles*'. Note: It's possible that some of those in the dispersion had once been members of the church in Jerusalem.

Vs.2-12. Purpose of Troubles, Trials, Tribulations, and Temptations (Why Christians often face such as this in life).

V.2. 'My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations'. The word 'temptation' (Gr. *peirasmos*) does not refer to enticements to sin; but to trials, persecutions, and afflictions from the world of Satan. In I Cor.10:13, the Apostle Paul said, 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it'. Example: You have an appointment to be interviewed for a good job, so you leave home early to give yourself plenty of time. You want to have a few minutes to get your thoughts together, but on the way you have a flat tire. Then, to add to your frustration, you discover the 'spare' is also flat. You do everything you know to do, hoping to get there for the interview. You even pray. Yet, you fail to make it in time. And consequently, you don't get the job. Questions: Are you upset? If so, with whom? Do you still believe 'that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose' (Rom.8:28)? We are not thrilled when troubles or trials come our way; but we have the assurance that 'God is faithful', and, he has 'sufficient grace' for every trial; whether a flat tire, the failure to get that good job, or whatever. Note: God has promised that there will be temptations in the life of a Christian. He is going to have a tried and tested people. Yet, Job said, 'when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold' (Job 23:10). We read in Heb.11:17, 'By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son'. It's good to pray 'Lead us not into temptation'; but if temptation comes, we, as Christians, can meet it with joy in our hearts (Matt.5:11,12).

Vs.3,4. 'Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience'. Trials cause us to see ourselves as we actually are, and reveals to us those places where we we need improvement. 'But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing' (lacking nothing). Note: Patience (Gr. *hypomone*) does not mean waiting without anxiety, but 'endurance', or 'perseverance', in the midst of the trial. In essence:

- It's enjoying a right relationship with God.
- It's loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- It's 'Christian perfection', living the 'sanctified life' (c.f. Fig.4, p.4).

Luke tells us, in Acts 5:41, that the disciples had been beaten and threatened, yet, 'they departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name'. Amen! That's the 'joy' that comes with living a life totally committed to the Lord, having given him our all. Too, it's times such as this (during troubles, trials, etc.) that many falter and fail. They feel as if the

Lord has let them down. And the answer for such, is to repent and come back to a proper relationship with the Master. He is the great 'reconciler'. Remember: The Bible doesn't teach that troubles and trials are always an indication that God is displeased with us (Matt.5:11,12; I Cor.10:13; I Pet.4:12-14).

Vs.5-8. Test of faith.

V.5. 'If any of you lack wisdom (to know what to do in the midst of troubling circumstances), let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him'. Note: (1) This is not the 'Gift of the Word of Wisdom' (one of the nine supernatural Gifts of the Spirit mentioned in I Cor.12). (2) It is wisdom to know that when trials or tests come our way, God has allowed them for our good; that we might learn better how to lean on him and trust him to see us through with victory. (3) It's the wisdom that helps us look at trials in the true light; to see them from God's point of view; and, to better understand what God is trying to accomplish through the difficulties. To be 'wise' in trying times is, without doubt, a gift of God.

V.6. 'But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering (with confidence in what God has promised in his Word, never doubting). For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed' (rising one moment, sinking the next). The person who doubts God's ability or willingness to provide such wisdom is like the restless sea, always going with the rising and falling of the tides, never able to get settled.

Vs.7,8, For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man (this is not speaking of an unsaved man, but he who has accepted Christ as Savior, yet carnal) is unstable in all his ways' (c.f. Fig.3, p.4). Example: You might have heard the story of the donkey that stood in the field between two stacks of hay, unable to choose from which stack he should eat. He had a divided mind, and consequently starved to death. Note: The wavering double minded man is saved, but not yet sanctified; does not have a 'single heart' and 'single mind'. Like the donkey, he is pulled between two decisions; torn between that which is 'carnal' (like the world) and that which is 'spiritual' (like Christ). That's why the Bible urges and exhorts every believer to 'go on to holiness'. In I Thes.4:3, the Apostle Paul said, *'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification'*.

Vs.9-12. Test of Humility. (Poor rich, and Rich poor)

Vs.9,10. 'Let the brother of low degree (of a lowly economic or social status) rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away'. The believer who is poor can rejoice because God has called him to true riches. Too, he can rejoice 'in that he is exalted', that he is accounted a son and heir of Almighty God.

- The rich can be glad that God has revealed to him his 'spiritual poverty' (that without Christ we are nothing, and our riches amount to nothing). Note: The poor humble brother may be the richest man in church. - rich in grace, in love, in joy, in peace, in righteousness, in fellowship.

V.12. Test of Endurance. 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him'. Believers who successfully endure trials and temptations are truly happy. When preaching the 'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus said, *'Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven'* (Matt.5:11,12a). \*\* It is an honor to be dishonored for the sake of Christ.

- At this time, in the Greek games, the winning athlete was crowned with a victory wreath. Too. the Greek term suggests that this 'crown of life' for the believer, when he is approved, is actually 'the crown which is life'. Here, it denotes the believer's ultimate reward, 'eternal life', which God has promised.

Vs.13-15. Test of Temptation. 'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and is enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.'

- James now makes the transition from outward to inner trials, i.e., 'temptations'. The same Greek word translated 'trials' (vs.2-12) is also translated 'temptations' here. A question is raised concerning Gen.22:1, which says, *'And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham'*. This tempting was a trial of Abraham's faith, a testing - not a seducing or solicitation to sin. We must understand that any trial, or test, can become a temptation to do wrong, although God might have meant it for our spiritual growth, development, and perfection. **\*\*Everything that comes to the life of a Christian is a 'test'.**
- When a person yields to temptation, he, oftentimes, is eager to blame something, or someone, other than himself for his wrong-doing, his sin. Example. The disobedience of Adam and Eve outlined in Gen.3:11-13: Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. The tragedy is: Some blame God for their sinning; even blame Him for His having made them the person they are. How foolish! A question: Is an individual born into the world 'gay', or a 'pedophile', or an adulterer, or a drunkard? The answer is 'no'. If a man sins, he alone is responsible.
- 'Lust' flows from the 'inbred sin' in the heart of man, which has been passed down from Adam's 'fall'. That's why the double-minded man, the unsanctified (c.f. Fig.3. p.4), oftentimes falls into, and yields to, temptation. He is 'drawn away of his own lust, and enticed'. The 'lust' leads to 'sin', and ultimately to 'spiritual death' (eternal separation from God). Note: Some teach that such sin does not result in spiritual death for a believer, but will ultimately lead to physical death. (I disagree.)

Vs.16,17. Test of Appreciation. 'Do not err, ye beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' Christians must not make the mistake of blaming God rather than themselves for their sins. Instead of God being the source of temptation, as some were contending, He is the source of all good in the lives of men.

- The term 'Father of lights' is an ancient Jewish expression for God as Creator; with 'lights' referring to the sun, moon, and stars. From man's perspective, these celestial bodies have different phases of movement and rotation, they change from day to night, and, they vary in intensity and shadow. But God doesn't follow that pattern. He faithfully presides over the lives of his children, and provides everything good. He does not change. In Mal.3:6, he said, *'I am the Lord, I change not'*.

Vs. 18-27. Practical Christian Living.

- Remember: The first two chapters have to do with 'Christian Testings', with the writer giving the 'purpose' for such troubles, trials, and tests. It's that we may be 'perfect' and 'entire', 'wanting nothing'.

V.18. Test of Christian Experience - the New Birth. 'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures'. It is God's will that 'all be saved'. And the means whereby this is effected is the 'word of truth', the gospel. God's Word, working in conjunction with the Holy Spirit, are the two agents, working together, that draw a person to Christ and make him a new creation. . . through the blood of Jesus.

- Jn.3:16. *'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life'.*
- I Tim.2:4. *'Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth'.*
- II Pet.3:9. *'The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness: but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance'.*
- We must understand: 'repentance' is more than repeating the sinner's prayer, more than making a trip to the altar, and more than just believing that Jesus is the Son of God. It is being sorry enough for our sins to forsake them. Too often, tears are shed for having been caught rather than for sinning against God and having a repentant heart.
- 'That we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures'. The early Christians were called 'firstfruits' because they were the first evidence of God's new creation, the Church.

Vs.19-21. Test of Christian Living. The great need among professing Christians, is: that those who testify to being saved from sin, 'live right', live according to God's Word. Jesus said, *'If ye love me, keep my commandments'* (Jn. 14:15).

- 'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls'.
- These are 'perilous times'. And it's evident that many professing believers have failed to heed the warning Jesus gave during the 'Olivet discourse' when he said, *'Take heed that no man deceive you'* (Matt. 24:4). Yet, today, deception is rampant when it comes to the various teachings of God's Word. People are confused, perplexed, and have difficulty knowing what to believe. Having been deceived, many professing Christians live defeated lives, continuing in sin. Example: A professing Christian is bound by sin, has an evil habit, knows it to be against the Word of God, and lives with condemnation. He says he has prayed night and day for deliverance, but there has been no change. He is still in bondage to sin. But listen, for that to be so, (1) God didn't mean what he says in his Word, (2) the blood of Jesus has lost its power, or (3) the person has failed to obey God, and is deceived. We read in Num. 23:19, *'God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?'*
- We must never forget: (1) God is always true to his Word, (2) The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin, (3) Jesus breaks every fetter, and (4) All things are possible to him that believeth.
- It seems the writer is giving the admonition of Num.23 in connection with what he said in the previous verse having to do with salvation coming to man by means of the word of truth.
- 'Let every man be swift to hear (quick to listen to what God has to say, especially in times of troubles and trials). It's been said that 'poor listening will make poor preaching of a good sermon'. 'Slow to speak (have a cautious tongue; good people, at times, can cause trouble by speaking too quickly), slow to wrath (contain your anger; have a calm temper)'.

V.20. 'For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God'. A person's anger does not further the righteous purpose of God. If a Christian gives vent to wrath, it can safely be said that he is not, at that moment, imitating Christ; and is surely not producing 'fruit of the Spirit'. Note: I've known believers, after showing an intemperate spirit by giving someone a 'piece of their mind', say, 'It's the Irish in me', or, 'I inherited my mother's temper'. The truth is, it was the 'Adam nature' (inbred sin) within controlling the tongue. But the good news is: God has a remedy. It's found in Heb.13:12, *'Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate'* (c.f. Fig.3 & 4, p.4).

V.21. 'Wherefore lay apart (put aside) all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness (every believer, when born again, brings with him into his new life much that is inconsistent with God's word), and receive with meekness (and with an humble spirit receive) the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls'. - The new believer in Christ is encouraged to allow the word, which has been newly planted in his heart, to grow and produce spiritual fruit.

Vs.22-25. Test of Obedience.

V.22. 'But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves'. The writer has mentioned the wisdom of 'good listening'. Now, he reveals the futility of mere listening, with no effort to put into practice that which has been heard. When a believer opens the Bible to read, he must intend to do what it says if he expects to enjoy the benefits. Note: The purpose of preaching and teaching is not that the hearers may be pleased, but that they may be profited, edified, and inspired to live righteously. It's been said that the 'highest praise' that can be bestowed upon a Christian minister is not in telling him how much his preaching is enjoyed, but to let him see how well it is being translated into righteous living.

Vs.23,24. 'For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was'. It is important to know what God's word says, but it's of greater importance to obey it. Here, James compares God's word to a glass (mirror), in which a man may behold his natural face. He hears the word, is convicted, realizes his need to draw closer to God, yet, soon forgets and continues as he was. 'As a looking glass shows us the spots and defilements upon our faces, that they may be remedied and washed off, so the word of God shows us our sins, that we may repent of them and have them pardoned' (Matthew Henry). The tragedy is, 'He sees himself, it is true, but he goes on with whatever he was doing without the slightest recollection of what sort of person he saw in the mirror' (Phillips).

V.25. 'But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed'. The ceremonial portion of the Jewish law was a yoke of bondage; the gospel of Christ is a law of liberty. The person who 'continues in the word' (Jn.8:31), 'continues in the grace of God' (Acts 13:43), and, 'continues in the faith' (Acts 14:22), shall be blessed, indeed.

Vs.26,27. Test of Pure Religion. 'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world'. The apostle now moves from that which is general, 'not hearers only but doers', to that which is more specific, 'not merely participating in religious worship'. The word 'religious'

actually means 'given to religious observances'. The context, here, refers to attendance at worship services and to other observances of religion; such as prayer, almsgiving, fasting, etc.. A man who is scrupulous in these observances, but fails to control his speech in everyday life, deceives himself, and his religion is vain (futile; meaningless). Note: The words of v.27 are not meant to be the 'definition of religion', but a statement which speaks of that which is better than external acts of worship. Christians are to show compassion for those without parents or husbands; those unable to reciprocate. Therefore, caring for these needy ones demonstrates true sacrificial Christian love.

- 'To keep himself unspotted from the world'. The apostle John said, *'Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world'* (1 Jn.2:15). Here, James exhorts believers to live, daily, in such a manner as to not be ashamed when the time comes to stand before the Lord. And, remember, it's 'God's will' that all be sanctified, which makes it possible to live and enjoy a life of holiness and victory. Amen!

## Chapter 2

Christian Testing (continued)Vs.1-9. Test of Brotherly Love

Vs.1-4. 'My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in godly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there; or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?'

- Jesus said, *'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another'* (Jn.13:34,35).
- There are three kinds of love:
  - (1) Erōt. Love between husband and wife,
  - (2) Phileo. Love between family members and friends, and,
  - (3) Agape. Love as Christ loved; given by Christ. Note: Here in these verses, James is speaking of agape love
- In today's society, we hear lots of 'talk' about love, but it seems there is too little real love practiced. No doubt, you have heard the saying: 'Talk is cheap'. It's true. But love is not talk. It's not just words. Love is deeds (action). The Apostle John said, *'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?'*

(1 Jn. 4:20).

Vs.1,2. When James begins a new thought with the term 'my brethren', it marks the transition to a new subject. He is about to point out something that his readers need to change in their daily lives. When he mentions 'the faith' (v.1), he is not referring to the 'act of believing', but to the entire Christian faith, the complete doctrine of Christ (cf. Jude 3). These brethren in Christ were showing partiality to certain individuals of the church; giving prominence to those with riches.

- It was a common practice in that day for Jews to wear rings, but only a few were able to afford those of gold. It's reported that those who were 'vain' wore rings on every finger, except the middle one. It was their way of making known their economic status. Too, some ancient sources indicate that there were even some 'Ring rental businesses'.
- The 'goodly apparel' of v.2 refers to 'bright garments'; but can also refer to flashy color and brilliant, glittering, sparkling ornamentation. Remember: James is writing his epistle in the early days of the church, and is not condemning these attendees at all for their manner of dress; but, is admonishing them for their having respect of persons (showing partiality).
- The Jews had come to look upon prosperity as a mark of divine favor, and poverty as a sign of God's disfavor. And because of such thinking, they treated those poor with little or no respect. But we must not forget, Jesus said one reason for his coming into this earth was to *'preach the gospel to the poor'* (Lu.4:18).

V.3. 'Sit thou here in a good place' (not just a more comfortable place, but a place of prominence and honor). In the first century, the assembly halls and synagogue usually had benches around the outside walls, and a couple benches in front. Most of the congregation either sat cross-legged on the floor or stood. The availability of good seats was limited. And according to Mk.12:38,39, these were the seats desired by the scribes and Pharisees.



V.4. Ye 'are become judges of evil thoughts'. Instead of accepting people based on their faith in Christ, they showed favoritism based on appearance and status.

Vs.5-9. 'Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of the world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors'.

V.5. The poor are special and precious to God. Therefore, they who show partiality (grant special treatment) to the rich fail to understand that God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich through their faith (singled them out for special blessings in both this life and that which is to come). Oftentimes, it is the poor of this world, whose only wealth is their faith, who are the richest among us.

V.6. 'But ye have despised (dishonored, mistreated, humiliated) the poor'.

- It is inconsistent to show special favor to the rich since they are the very ones who have been persecuting the Christians and dragging them into the law courts.

V.7. In his argument against favoring the rich, James says they even 'blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called'. Note: It is not the name 'Christian' that is blasphemed but the name of Jesus Christ.

V.8. 'If you fulfil the royal law according to the scripture'. The 'new covenant', which is the 'perfect law of liberty', is referred to here. Too, according to the statement in 2:5, this 'royal law' is both binding and supreme; and, is for those who are heirs of God's kingdom. The final words of the verse sum up the entire matter: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'. James is not advocating an emotional affection for self. We read in II Tim.3:2 that love such as that is sin.

V.9. James once again warns against having 'respect of persons', saying that the person who does such is 'convinced (convicted) of the law as transgressors'.

Vs.10-13. Test of Perfection.

- 'For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment'.

Vs.10-12. The following statement, recorded in 'The Thought of St. James' and written by A. Cadoux, says it well, 'James looks on the law, not as a number of injunctions, but as a personal relationship, not like an examination, where nine right answers will secure a pass, despite a wrong one, but like a friendship, where a hundred faithfulnesses cannot be set against one treachery'. The apostle is not saying a person breaks all the commandments when he fails in one; nor is he saying that all sins are equal, that one sin is as evil as another. He is saying that a person does not have to break all the laws to become a lawbreaker. Just one offense places him in that category. One transgression of the law of God can damn a soul. But 'thank God' there's a remedy! It's called 'repentance'. The apostle

John wrote, *'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'* (1 Jn.2:1). Amen!

- Disobedience to the will of God constitutes the essence of sin. Therefore, the only hope for the believer who sins is in the grace and forgiveness of God.

V.13. The doctrine of judgment to the unmerciful is emphasized in many parts of Scripture. The person who shows no mercy need not expect to receive mercy from God. Yet, the writer adds, 'Mercy rejoiceth against' (triumphs over) judgment'.

- Those who receive God's mercies, and show mercy to others, can rejoice that they will not face the final judgment.

Vs.14-26. Test of Good Works. Believers are to demonstrate their faith.

V.14. 'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?' Questions. How can these words be reconciled with those of the Apostle Paul mentioned in Eph.2:8,9 - *'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest any man should boast'*? Is James saying that works are required in order to be saved? (No. Yet, they are necessary in order to stay saved.) James doesn't say this person has faith, but that he claims to have faith. Too, James opposes the notion that saving faith is nothing more than an intellectual exercise of the mind.

- Faith, like love, must involve action. Without demonstration, each is dead.

Vs.15-17. 'If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.'

- James gives an illustration concerning the matter. He said, it is nothing more than mockery for a man, who is himself living comfortably, to say to a cold starving brother, 'Depart in peace. Don't be discouraged, God has said He will never forsake his people. He will give his angels charge concerning you, and I myself will pray for you.' How sad! Lip service is not compassion. James compares 'faith without works' to be the same as 'words of compassion without acts of compassion'.

V.18. 'Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my work.' Note: Some have taken this verse to mean that justification is by works rather than by faith alone (as stated by Paul in Rom.3:28). Good works cannot earn salvation, but true faith will always produce good works, because true faith causes a born-again person to want to please God. Charles Spurgeon said, "The child of God works not for life, but from life; he does not work to be saved, he works because he is saved."

Vs.19,20. 'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' Believing there is one God is not proof of saving and keeping faith, nor, of justification. The demons are not atheists. They believe, and yet they are demons - and condemned. The unclean spirits whom Jesus cast out had plenty of knowledge and belief regarding God and Christ. But their believing such caused them shudder, because they knew his day of judgment is coming. It's been said that demons are 'orthodox' in their doctrine concerning 'one God'. Even so, they are without faith, but are destined to eternal doom and damnation.

- In the final verses of this chapter James gives two examples of 'genuine faith'.

Vs.21-23. 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God.'

- From Paul's writings in Gal.3:6-29, Abraham was considered to be the ancestor of all true believers in Christ. Yet the word 'justified', used here in v.21, must not be confused with Paul's use of the term in relation to Abraham (cf.Rom.4:1-5). Paul speaks of Abraham's initial justification when he *'believed God, and it was counted (reckoned) unto him for righteousness'* (Gen.15:6). Here, James speaks of an event which took place years later, at the time when Abraham was instructed by God to offer up his son Isaac. It's a beautiful example of faith and works operating hand in hand. Abraham's works was that which brought his faith to completion.

V.24. 'Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only.' Just as a fruit tree has not arrived at its goal until it bears fruit, faith has not reached its end until it demonstrates itself in righteous living.

Vs.25,26. 'Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.'

- James' second example of 'genuine faith' stands in marked contrast to the patriarch Abraham. Rahab, even though a woman, a Gentile, and a prostitute, was chosen by the Holy Spirit to show the truth of James' writing concerning faith and works. She, like Abraham, demonstrated her evidence of justification by action (cf. Josh.2:1-21). She demonstrated the reality of her faith (that of saving her life and that of her family), when, at great personal risk, she protected the messengers of God.
- The concluding statement shows that the relation between faith and works is as close as that between the body and the spirit. Life is the result of the union in both instances. When the two elements are separated, death results.

## Chapter 3

Vs.1-12. The Christian and the Tongue

V.1. 'My brethren, be not many masters (teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation' (will be judged by a more severe standard; no one has a more serious responsibility than those who teach God's Word). Earlier, in 1:19, James admonishes believers to be 'slow to speak'. Evidently, there were those who loved to talk, or, possibly, talked too much. But here, the apostle writes of those who had wrong motives for wanting to teach. 'The office of a teacher is a noble one: but few are fit for it. Few govern the tongue well, and only such as can govern it are fit for the office' (Jamerson, Faussett & Brown Comm.).

Teaching is important. It must be done. It's a part of the 'Great Commission' given by Christ to the church (Matt.28:19,20). In reality, teachers of the Word are doctors of the mind and heart. Not only do they deal with issues of life and death, but more importantly, of eternal life and eternal damnation.

V.2. 'For in many things we offend all (we often stumble and make mistakes, every one of us). If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.' Jesus said, *'Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh'* (Matt.12:34). Since that is true, it's not so much a tongue problem as it is a heart problem. In order not to offend in word, we must become 'perfect in Christ' (Matt.5:48), which is made possible by being 'sanctified wholly' (c.f. Figs. 3 & 4, p.4). In essence, sanctification, which is the *'will of God'* for every believer' (I Thes.4:3), enables a person to fulfill the commandment of Christ, when he said, *'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength'* (Mk.12:30). It's then, and only then, that a man can control his tongue. This is the 'perfect man' (I Cor.2:6a).

Vs.3-6. The Nature of the Tongue

'Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!'

By giving several analogies, James shows how the tongue, although small, has power to control one's whole person and influence everything in his life. The bridle is a small thing, but the rider is able to control the whole body of the horse with it. The rudder (helm) is very small, but it enables the steersman to guide a large ship. A tiny spark may set a huge forest on fire. Likewise, the tongue is a very small member of the body, but victory over it can save man from many evils.

The tongue *'set on fire of hell'* is the tongue of the unsaved, the tongue controlled by Satan. Note: The tongue is a powerful member of man's body. It can bring comfort to the dying or destroy the living. It can be a blessing or a curse. The tongue can be *'set on fire of hell'*; yet, it can also be touched by a live coal from God's altar (Isa.6), and be purged (sanctified). Remember: It was *'tongues like as of fire'* that sat upon the heads of believers that Sunday morning in Jerusalem when some ten dozen believers were filled with the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:3,4).

Vs.7,8. The Tongue is Uncontrollable by Those Unsaved

'For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison'. In Gen.1:26, God commanded man that he was to *'have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth'* has been successfully carried out. We marvel at that which man has been able to accomplish in this endeavor. Yet, the apostle says, *'the tongue can no man tame'*. Note: This is a picture of the tongue in its natural state; the tongue of the unregenerated (unsaved; not yet born again). Yet, the tongue of man doesn't have to continue as *'an unruly evil, full of deadly poison'*. It can be brought under control by God. No doubt, this was a reason why the Holy Spirit had the Apostle Paul to write, *'For this is the will of God, even your sanctification'* (1 Thes.4:3). The sanctified tongue is a by-product of a sanctified heart. Jesus said, *'for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh'* (Matt.12:34).

Vs.9-12. Ungodly Use of the Tongue

Vs.9,10. 'Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be'.

The tongue is inconsistent and hypocritical. It is used to fulfill its highest purpose, namely to bless God, giving him honor and glory; but is also used to curse men made in God's image. James shows the hypocrisy of such as this. Even though he is writing to those he calls *'My brethren'*, he wants them to know such actions are contrary to God's will and unbecoming to someone professing to love the Lord.

*'These things ought not so to be'.*

Vs.11,12. 'Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh'.

The inconsistency found in man (he who is made in the image of God) is not found in the world of nature. A spring of water cannot go beyond the law of its nature. It's an ultimate impossibility for it to yield both sweet water and bitter. Too, a fruit tree can only produce fruit according to its kind. Note: In the case of a person who has experienced the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit, this unnatural inconsistency of speech, mentioned in vs.9,10, ought not to be; and neither does it need to be.

Spurgeon said, 'Unless you are regenerated, born from above by a new and heavenly birth, you are not Christians, whatever you may be called, and you cannot produce the fruit which is acceptable to God any more than a fig tree can produce olive berries'. Jesus said, *'Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit: but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit'* (Matt.7:17,18). Note: An untamed slanderous tongue injures three classes, or individuals: (1) the person who utters the slander, (2) the one who listens to such, and (3) the one about whom the slander is told.

Vs.13-18. The Two Wisdoms. James shows the contrast between earthly and heavenly wisdom, with people's lives reflecting the source of their wisdom.

V.13. 'Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom'. God-given wisdom shows us how to do good

works. Having knowledge does not mean that someone is automatically wise. The wise man is the one who can use his knowledge for the greatest moral and spiritual good. Too, this man's wisdom will be seen in his good life, in acts of holiness done in meekness.

- V.14. 'But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth'. 'Pride of knowledge in the case of James' readers gave vent to bitter jealousy, which resulted in boasting and being thus false to the truth' (RSV).
- V.15. 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish'. Such a person shows a wisdom that is of the world and the devil, rather than of God. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above (1:17), but this 'so-called wisdom' is of earthly origin. It is sensual, having the nature of the senses as opposed to spirituality.
- V.16. 'For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work'. Note: The conjunction 'for' at the beginning of the verse indicates that what follows is proof for that which has just been said. The wisdom of the world, the flesh, and the devil may be able to accomplish many things, but always with the ultimate fruit of disharmony, along with all other kinds of evil.
- Vs.17,18. 'But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness (the fruit which is righteousness) is sown in peace of them that make peace'. The qualities of true and godly wisdom are produced by a sincere reception of the truth. Such qualities are in direct contrast to what James said about false or earthly wisdom. The wisdom '*that is from above*' is the gift of God; it is practical wisdom; wisdom, first of all, that is pure, and that which preserves unity and peace. Note: Some commentators have concluded that this wisdom is in reality Christ.

In the above verses, the writer divides wisdom into two categories: Man's wisdom and God's wisdom.

(1) Human wisdom (that of the natural, or carnal man):

- (a) Envious
- (b) Strife in the heart
- (c) Glory in profession
- (d) Earthly, having this life only in view
- (e) Sensual, living only to satisfy basic animal appetites
- (f) Devilish, inspired by the devil and his demons
- (g) Confusion
- (h) Every evil work

(2) Divine wisdom:

- (a) Pure. Holy and clean
- (b) Peaceable
- (c) Gentle. Meek
- (d) Easily entreated; not stubborn
- (e) Full of mercy. Forgiving; kind.
- (f) Full of good fruit
- (g) Without partiality
- (h) Without hypocrisy

## Chapter 4

Vs.1-10. The Test of Worldly IndulgenceVs.1-3. Reasons for strife in the Christian community.

'From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members (within you; your heart, soul, mind, etc.)? Ye lust (desire pleasure, recognition, honor, power, possessions, etc., rather than God), and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not (they did not ask God, who alone can satisfy human desires). Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts'.

James is addressing his remarks to Jewish Christians at about the same time, in Judea, when Jews made insurrection against the Roman government under the pretense of defending their religious beliefs and procuring their way of life. There were many factions among them, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Essences, Zealots, and Samaritans, who fought violently among themselves.

These Jewish Christians were believers in Christ, yet, were carnal. They were still struggling with the 'Adam nature', the 'inbred sin' within (c.f. Fig.3, p.4). They were double-minded. In essence, they were allowing 'worldly wisdom' to dominate their lives rather than 'heavenly wisdom'.

The main reason for the prayers of a Christian to go unanswered is 'unbelief'. Yet, many prayers of Christians are unanswered because they are asked with wrong motives. God will not listen to the one whose heart is filled with worldly and selfish desires (c.f. I Jn.2:14,15). Note: It is right, and proper, to pray for our daily bread, provided we do our daily tasks in order to earn our daily bread. God does not mean prayer to be a substitute for work. We pray for God to supply our needs. He does, by giving health and strength so that we might get a job, go to work, and earn the money necessary to pay for whatever that need might be. God will not give to us anything that will build up the sinful nature within. Remember: It's the prayer of the righteous that God accepts; it's those who call upon him in truth. David said, *'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread'* (Ps.37:25).

Vs.4-6. A rebuke of worldliness and compromise among Christians.

'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Spiritual adultery was mentioned often in the Old Testament. It had to do, primarily, with God's chosen people forsaking him and turning to idolatry. As James saw it here, their covetousness was idolatry and friendship with the world. Note: As believers, we were delivered from 'enmity with God' when we accepted Christ as Savior. Therefore, it is foolish to have an affair with the world, and once again experience enmity with God in our hearts and lives. Even the desire to be a friend (wanting to be a friend) of the world makes a person an enemy of God.

The Holy Spirit, Who has taken up residence in the heart of the believer in Christ, wants the undivided devotion of every heart. He yearns jealously over us. 'He loves men with such a passion that he cannot bear any other love within the hearts of men' (Barclay). The difficulties of living wholly for God in a wicked world are many, but to those who will humble themselves, *'he giveth more grace'*, making it possible for us to serve God as we should.

Vs.7-10. Practical Advice.

V.7. 'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. It seems as if 'submitting' to the authority or control of another is one of the most difficult things for man to do. The proud person will find this to be the ultimate challenge. Yet, if we hope to enjoy the blessings and benefits promised in the Scriptures, James says, *'Submit yourselves therefore to God'*. This means to 'line up under', 'be subject to', 'surrender all to' God. A man must decide whether or not God is to rule his life. It is either self or God. Notice: The call for submission is followed by a command to *'resist the devil'* (take your stand against him). We resist the devil by refusing to yield to him. And that is made possible by having *'on the whole armour of God'* and *'praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit'* (Eph.6). It's then that *'he will flee from you'*. One writer said, 'Stand up to the devil, and he will turn and run'. The question is asked: If that is true, why is it that so many professing Christians seem to have such little victory, and are almost always defeated? Yet, the statement is true! But too many who accept Christ as Savior fail to live in submission to him. Therefore, when Satan comes against them they falter and fail.

V.8. 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.' This is more than a submitting to God and resisting the devil. It's the redeemed longing for communion with his God; desiring to abide in him. 'When a soul sets out to seek God, God sets out to meet that soul; so that while we are drawing near to him, he is drawing near to us' (A. Clarke).

'Cleanse your hands, ye sinners ('hands', here, speak of the sinner's evil deeds; need to repent), and purify your hearts, ye double minded' (ye who are saved, but yet carnal, go on to holiness; believe God to sanctify you). That's his will for every believer (C.f. 1:8 & Figs.2,3,4 - p.4). Note: The double minded man, he who is born again but experiencing a continued warfare within his soul (a battle between 'his will' and 'God's will'), will never know the joys of living a victorious life until he is sanctified wholly. It's then, and only then, that he can love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. This is the meaning of Jesus' words in Matt.5:48, when he said, *'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'*

Vs.9,10. 'Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep (This is the state of those truly broken concerning their sin. True repentance will always bring the mercy of God): let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.' Note: This is the only time the word 'laughter' is mentioned in the New Testament. Here, it signifies the light-hearted flippant laughter of those foolishly indulging in worldly pleasures. It's a picture of those who give little or no thought to God, life, death, sin, judgment, holiness, or eternity. Yet, God in his love calls them to mourn over their sins. God is pleased with our mouths being filled with laughter when our hearts are filled with joy. But if sin has the upper hand in our hearts; if we are not right with God; if we have a divided heart, we ought to *'be afflicted (grieve), and mourn, and weep'*. It is only through repentance in true humility that God will lift us up to sit with him in 'heavenly places'.

Vs.11-17. Rebukes and CommandsVs.11,12. Rebuke to self-appointed judges.

'Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgeth another?' James is not saying that it is wrong to confront a brother who has fallen into sin. We are commanded to do such (Matt.18). Here, James condemns careless, critical, derogatory, and slanderous accusations against others. Note: When we are right with others, it will manifest itself in



the way we talk to them or about them. To speak evil against a brother, or to judge him, is to speak evil against the law. If we judge our brother, we put ourselves in the same place as the law (judging the law). This is something we have no right to do. God is the one law-giver who is able to save or destroy. Man has no right to usurp this authority. It's God alone who has the authority to save from sin, or, to destroy those who refuse to repent.

Vs.13-17. Sinful Self-confidence.

Vs.13,14. 'Go to now, ye that say, To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.' James, here, refers to merchants who went from city to city displaying their goods in bazaars; boasting of their buying and selling; and, speaking as to what they will do in those cities. The apostle is not condemning those who make plans for the future, but those who make such plans apart from reliance on God. Solomon said, *'Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth'* (Prov.27:1). Spurgeon said, 'There are two great certainties about things that shall come to pass - one is that God knows, and the other is that we do not know.' The question is raised: 'For what is your life?' Since the lifespan of man is uncertain (pictured by James to be as a 'vapour'; nothing more than a mist), it would be wise for all to heed the words of the Psalmist, who said, *'so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom'* (Ps.90:12).

Vs.15,16. 'For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.' Man has no promise of tomorrow. Life can be snuffed out in a moment's time. And since that is true, we should say, 'If the Lord will, I shall live and do this or that.' But rather than some, to whom James was writing, acknowledging their dependence upon God, they boasted in their arrogance. And the apostle says that such prideful boasting is wrong (evil).

V.17. 'Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.' It's not only good to know what God's Word has to say, we are 'to live what we know'. Believers are not only to be 'hearers', but 'doers' of the Word. Note: The devil often uses the words of this verse to cause Christians to have doubts concerning their salvation. He wants them to have guilt feelings. Regardless of how much a person loves the Lord, or what his relationship might be with his Master, the devil always pictures it as not being enough. But that's not what James was saying here. He was speaking of the brother in Christ who fails to obey God or live righteously. Those who find themselves in this category are guilty of willful sin. A sin of 'omission' can be as deadly as the sin of 'commission'.

## Chapter 5

Vs.1-6. A Rebuke of the Unscrupulous Rich.

Vs.1-3. 'Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.'

There are different opinions as to who these 'rich men' might be. (1) 'The rich addressed here are not Christians but, nevertheless, the warning sounded applies to all men, including Christians' (Wycliffe Bible Com.). 'These are the wicked wealthy who profess Christian faith and have associated themselves with the church' (The MacArthur Bible Com.). 'He (James) speaks of them not simply as rich (for riches and grace sometimes may go together) but as wicked, not only wallowing in wealth, but abusing it to pride, luxury, oppression, and cruelty' (Poole). 'The rich people to whom this word of warning was sent were not such as professed the Christian religion, but the worldly and unbelieving Jews' (Matthew Henry's Comm.) Some believed all those rich were wicked. Even today, there are those who believe that it's a sin to be rich. (2) Most Jews, in Bible times, believed that 'wealth' was a sign of God's favor. Therefore, to have riches was proof that a person was enjoying a close relationship with God. Some believe the writer is rebuking professing Christians within the church for their worldliness. James is indirectly warning his double-minded Christian readers of the lifestyle they approach' (King James Bible Com.).

Note: To be 'rich' is to have more than is needed to live comfortably. Yet, to be rich is not a sin. Jesus had many friends and followers who were wealthy, but he always dealt plainly and honestly with them. He had no respect of persons, regardless of their status or position in life.

*'Weep (sob bitterly, lament) and howl (cry out loudly without restraint) for your miseries (hardships, woes) that shall come upon you'* (there's a day of judgment and reckoning ahead). We must understand; 'the weeping and howling are not signs of repentance but expressions of remorse in the face of judgment' (Wycliffe Bible Comm.).

In vs.2 & 3, James refers to the destruction of three kinds of wealth. Stores of food are corrupted (rotted, putrid), garments are moth-eaten (full of holes, ruined), and gold and silver is cankered (corroded, rusted over). He speaks of the foolishness of hoarding, whether it be food, expensive clothing, or money. All were subject to decay, theft, fire, or some other form of loss. Note: In the East, rich garments were handed down as heirlooms from one generation to another . . . and oftentimes, they represented a goodly portion of a person's wealth.

*'And the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days'*. The corruptible nature of the rich man's wealth will witness against him on the day of judgment. It will then be revealed that he has lived his life for self, rather than for God and others. Pitiful is the man *'that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God'* (Lu.12:21). Jesus said, *'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'* (Matt.6:21).

V.4. 'Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.'

When laborers are content with their wages and pleased in their work-place they often sing, or express their joy and happiness in some other manner. But the cries of the laborers, here, are of a different manner. These laborers are angry and resentful because they have been defrauded (wronged) by those who should have been looking out for their welfare, those for whom they had

labored. The 'hire of the laborers' reminds us of the proverb, *'The laborer is worthy of his hire'* (Lu.10:7).

The cries of the laborers were heard by the Lord of sabaoth ('of hosts', or 'armies'). This speaks of God (the Lord of hosts) as being the commander of all the armies of heaven. In Mal.3:5, God said, *'I will be a swift witness against . . . those that oppress the hireling in his wages'*.

V.5. 'Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.'

After robbing the hired workers to accumulate riches for themselves, they indulged in an extravagant lifestyle. Note: When a person becomes consumed with the pursuit of pleasure (living without a sense of self-restraint), his life soon becomes out of control.

These Jewish plutocrats had become wealthy through the blood and sweat of those doing the labor. And their lavish life styles caused the wronged workers to be angered even more. The rich lived in luxurious extravagancy while the unpaid laborers suffered hunger. James condemns such, and likens them to fatted cattle being prepared for slaughter.

V.6. 'Ye have condemned (sentenced) and killed the just (upright, righteous); and he doth not resist you.'

Note: These words have been taken by some to refer to the death of Jesus. In charging the Jews for Christ's death, Peter said, *'But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you'* (Acts 3:14). And Stephen used similar language in Acts 7:52. But I believe James is writing of the good laborer, he who was just and righteous, being taken advantage of . . . yet, without offering resistance.

V.7. 'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.'

The apostle now turns from addressing the 'wicked rich' to counseling the 'oppressed poor'. And he admonishes them to 'be patient'. Patience is the virtue of enduring injustices, sufferings, hardships, troubles, etc., while trusting God, by faith, to make all things right. James, here, is speaking of being patient with people (cf. I Thess. 5:14), not trials and difficult circumstances (as in 1:3). In reality, he is encouraging them to have patience with the rich oppressors 'unto the coming of the Lord'. Two thoughts: (1) Until the Lord intervenes to deliver from the trouble; or (2) Until the Lord's final coming at the close of the age as the judge of all. At the of the Millennial Reign of Christ, he will put an end, forever, to wrong and injustice. Note: As an example of one who must exercise patience, James cites the case of the farmer who waits patiently *'for the precious fruit of the earth'*. There is one thing every farmer can tell you: The crop takes time to mature. You can't rush it.

In Palestine, the 'early rain' (October-November) came after the crops were planted, and the 'latter rain' (April-May) when they were maturing. Both were crucial for the success of the crop. Too, it's interesting to note that the 'early spiritual rain' fell at the time of the founding of the church (Acts 2), and the 'latter spiritual rain' will be poured out at the end of this age, when the complete harvest of the church age will be gathered.

V.8. 'Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.' James calls for his brethren in Christ to take courage. Be committed. Hold on. When writing to Corinthian believers, Paul said, *'Be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord'* (I Cor.15:58). The motive for patience and perseverance in the faith is the imminent coming of the Lord. 'Maranatha' - our Lord cometh.

V.9. 'Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.' It is altogether too easy to blame others for our troubles. The word 'grudge', used in this verse, means to grumble or complain against a brother or sister in Christ. The apostle pictures Christ as a 'judge' about to open the door to the courtroom and convene his court. Knowing that the strain of persecution and hardships could lead to grumbling and complaining, James cautions his readers against such. The Apostle Paul said, *'Do all things without murmurings and disputings'* (Phil.2:14). The motive for patience and perseverance in the faith is the imminent coming of the Lord. He, as judge, 'standeth at the door'.

Vs.10,11. 'Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure (we call those who showed such endurance, happy). Ye have heard of the patience of Job (the only place in the New Testament where Job is mentioned), and have seen the end of the Lord (have seen how it all turns out in the end); that the Lord is very pitiful (compassionate), and of tender mercy.'

James cites the Old Testament prophets as illustrations, and reminds us that they suffered hardships and afflictions, yet practiced patient endurance.

When we first read of Job, it could be easy to think that God was cruel to him. Yet, as we read on, we readily understand that rather than being cruel, God was compassionate and merciful.

- He allowed Job's suffering for a very good reason.
- He limited Satan as to what he could do against Job.
- He sustained Job throughout the time of his severe affliction.
- He rewarded Job for his faithfulness. Note: Job was a better man at the end of God's allowing Satan to afflict him than he was at the start. *'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning'* (Job 42:12). A favorite verse of Scripture is, *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose'* (Rom.8:28). Amen! It's true.

V.12. The Test of Truthfulness: Reverence for God's Name.

'But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (judgment).' Earlier, James emphasized that a person's speech (how he used his tongue) provided a glimpse into the condition of the person's heart. Here, he says, 'swear not'. "Many Jewish people, in the time James wrote, made distinction between 'binding oaths' and 'non-binding oaths'. Oaths that did not include the name of God were considered non-binding, and to use such oaths was a way of 'crossing your fingers behind your back' when telling a lie. It is these kinds of oaths that James condemned" (Gusik). James is saying, just as Jesus did in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt.5:37), let your honesty be such that 'your word is your bond'. Let your 'yes' be simply 'yes', and your 'no' simply 'no'. To speak otherwise is to invite the judgment of God.

Vs.13-15. Christians are exhorted to pray for one another.

'Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.'

James makes an appeal to believers that they let 'prayer' and 'praise' saturate every aspect of their lives. In so doing, he mentioned three classes of people: the 'suffering' (afflicted), the 'cheerful' (merry), and the 'sick'. Those suffering need to pray, the cheerful should sing psalms of praise, and the sick should call for the church elders to pray for them.

The term, 'afflictions', is often misunderstood. It has greater meaning than bodily sickness. It would be those with any kind of trouble, whether physical or mental; personal or domestic; or those arising from ordinary trials, spiritual battles, or religious persecution. The Greek word means 'to suffer misfortune; to have hard experiences. Ex. Paul mentioned it to be 'suffering hardship as a good soldier' in II Tim.2:3,9. The solution is 'prayer'.

Those 'merry' (cheerful, happy, in good spirits) are to 'sing psalms', giving vent to their feelings. A good example of this is noticed in the final five chapters of the Book of Psalms, where the writer begins and ends each chapter with the words, '*Praise ye the Lord*'. Note: It's been said that there were times during the preaching of 'Wesley' and 'Whitefield' that those in the congregation were 'carried to excess of emotion'. I'm not sure to what extent their emotions might have been, but I'm convinced that it was preferred over 'dead dry formalism'.

Finally, the third class mentioned, is the 'sick' of the church, those weakened by their suffering. They are to 'call for the elders of the church'. Too often, people are hesitant to ask for or to seek prayer from those in leadership of the church. Yet, this is the wonderful privilege of all believers in Christ.

Notice four things' the elders are to do for the sick:

- (1) Pray
- (2) Anoint with oil. Note: It was customary among Jews to carry olive oil with them in their journeys to anoint their bodies, and, to soothe their wounds and bruises (c.f. Lu.10:34). In some cases oil may have medicinal value, but in most cases its use is best understood as an 'aid to faith', an emblem of the Holy Spirit's presence and power. Too, it's noted by Matthew Henry that 'expositors generally confine this anointing with oil to such as had power of working miracles; and, when miracles ceased, this institution ceased also.' (I totally disagree with such teaching.)
- (3) Invoke the name of the Lord. In Jn.14:14, Jesus said, '*If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it*'. Then, in Jn.16:23, Jesus said, '*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you*'.
- (4) Pray the 'prayer of faith'. The question is raised: What is the 'prayer of faith' that saves the sick? (a) Many modern-day theologians do not believe Divine healing is for today. Therefore, since 'anointing with oil' is mentioned in connection with the praying, they suppose the healing comes entirely through medical means. (b) One noted scholar said, 'The best that we still know on this subject of healing is: Prayer and medicine, or, God and the doctor'. (c) Some believe this is speaking of the ministry of the medical missionary. (d) Others interpret it as a reference to ultimate resurrection; that James has in mind a spiritual work and healing, not necessarily a physical healing. (e) It's believed by many that the 'prayer of faith', in this instance, is a prayer for physical healing. (I agree.)

'And if he (a brother in Christ), have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.' It's important to understand that sins are not automatically forgiven when a sick person is prayed for by the church elders. Yet, when the sick calls for the elders to pray, it's a sign of faith. The faith of the elders can bring physical healing, but it takes faith on the part of the individual who has committed sins to be forgiven.

V.16a. 'Confess your faults (transgressions) one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.' This is one reason why healings often go lacking in the Christian community. The person who is unwilling to confess his sin against another must understand that God will not forgive him. Until sin is confessed, it cannot be forgiven. Note: It's been said that 'confession of sins lightens as much as concealment aggravates them'.

V.16b. 'The effectual fervent (marked by great intensity of feeling; impassioned) prayer of a righteous man availeth much.' This is true whether he pray for himself or for others. The Christian's most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. And the results are often greater than we thought possible. 'The prayers of the righteous have a powerful effect' (Moffat).

Vs.17,18. 'Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave forth her fruit.'

Elijah had an extraordinary personality and was a mighty prophet of God (called by some the most famous and dramatic of Israel's prophets), but he was by no means divine. He was subject to disorder in his passions as well as others. Yet, he knew how to pray. He could touch the heart of God. On the occasion mentioned here he prayed for God to withhold rain from the earth for a period of three and one-half years. God answered. Afterwards, he prayed again. and the heaven gave rain. Amen! A wonderful illustration as to what the results might be when a righteous person prays earnestly and fervently in the will of God.

Two thoughts of interest: (1) James uses four characters from the Old Testament to illustrate his point. They are Abraham (2:21-24), Rehab (2:25), Job (5:11), and here, Elijah (5:17,18). (2) The prayers of Elijah brought both the drought and its end, yet, his prayers are not mentioned in the Old Testament account. Too, the length of the drought as being three and one half years is not found in the Old Testament story of this event (I Kings 17,18).

Vs.19,20. 'Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.'

It's important to understand that a believer in Christ (a Christian) can err from the truth (wander away; fall into sin), and need forgiveness. Most Christians who err from the truth don't deliberately wander away, it just sort of happens. But if not soon corrected, it will lead to death (eternal separation from God).

The Apostle John, writing with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said, *'My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'* (I Jn.3:1). It's for that reason James urges believers to confront those who have wandered from the truth; to help them get back on track (to repent, be forgiven, and be reconciled to God). The one who loves his erring brother enough to do this saves a brother's soul from death and covers a multitude of sins. Note: 'The salvation of a wandering brother or sister should always be a high priority in the Christian community' (Full Life Study Bible). Amen.