

EXPOSITORY NOTES

JAMES

Gordon Lyons

Expository Notes

James

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New Testament Expository Notes

James

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Introduction and Background

The writer of this epistle is considered to be James the brother of the Lord Jesus, and one of the leaders or 'pillars' of the church at Jerusalem. (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:9) This James was also the brother of Jude, whose letter appears later in the NT canon. (Matt. 13:55; Jude 1:1) Another James—James the son of Zebedee—was executed by King Herod Agrippa some time earlier, thus excluding this James from being the author.

Together with his other brothers, James did not believe in the Lord Jesus during the early stages of his ministry. (John 7:5) His conversion must have followed later, possibly after seeing Jesus raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:7)

This is one of the 'catholic' (universal) or general epistles. It was not written to one particular church or individual, but was intended for general circulation; in this case, among widely dispersed groups of believers. James wrote this letter to the Jewish believers who had been scattered abroad from the land of Israel/Judea and were now living in various other parts of the Roman Empire.

It is a letter of encouragement and hope for these dispersed children of God, but it is also a letter emphasising the practical nature of true Christianity. For James, faith is essential to salvation; but, in his mind, this faith must be demonstrated daily by a person's behaviour or conduct. This, of course, follows the teaching of the Lord Jesus himself on this subject (especially at the Sermon on the Mount). However, it also agrees with the teaching of the apostle Paul, when Paul too emphasises the necessity of spiritual fruitfulness in every genuine believer's life.

Contrary to the opinion of some, James and Paul do not disagree over God's method of justification. When Paul speaks of justification by faith, he is speaking of a believer's initial and once-for-all justification by God. However, when James speaks of justification by works, he is speaking of the necessity for every believer to show the evidence of their salvation by bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit (including the performance of 'good works'). In relation to justification, Paul is speaking of an incident in Abraham's life that occurred many years before the incident to which James refers. (See the Notes on James 2:18ff for a fuller exposition. See also the Expository Notes on Galatians 3:6 for a further explanation and table).

James Chapter 1

Greetings

James 1:1-8

James 1:1

The writer of this letter is believed to be James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, and one of the 'pillars' in the early Christian church. (Matt. 13:55; Acts 1:13; 12:17; Gal. 1:19; 2:9) However, although related to the Lord Jesus and a principal leader of the Jerusalem church (along with Peter and John), James refers to himself as a 'servant' (Gk, *doulos*) of God and of the Lord Jesus: i.e., as no more than a hired servant or bondservant of the Father and the Son.

By linking the Father and the Son, James is demonstrating his belief in the equality of Father and Son.

The Lord's servant, James, is writing principally to believers of Jewish background. Because of persecution, these believers had been scattered abroad (cf. Acts 2:5; 8:1).

Asking God in Faith

James 1:2

These Jewish believers had been enduring much persecution for the sake of Christ's name. However, in his opening remarks to them, James tells them to rejoice in these sore trials and afflictions.

As the apostle Peter said, we are to rejoice in that we are counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ's name. We are to rejoice in that God is fulfilling his purposes for us—even through our trials. Whatever the nature of our sufferings, we ought not to lose hope, and we should never despair. God is working out our salvation—even through these very things that trouble us, try us, and test our faith and endurance to the very limit (cf. v.12; see also Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Pet. 1:6,7; 4:12-16).

Perhaps we are enduring persecution because of our faith in Christ. On the other hand, perhaps we are being tempted severely to sin against the Lord. Whatever the nature of our adversity, God is faithful. He will not permit us to be tempted beyond our ability to endure it. On every occasion, the Lord will provide us with a way of escape, or he will sustain us in the midst of the trials. Our God is able—and willing—to deliver us. In all our trials, we ought to rejoice, and keep on rejoicing. We ought to keep on trusting the Lord; casting all our heavy burdens upon him. (Isa. 43:1-4; 1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 2:10; 1 Pet. 5:7)

James 1:3

We have come to understand that the testing—or proving—of our faith develops perseverance. The more our faith is put to the test, the more we are driven to depend on the Lord. We cannot hope to stand in our own strength. In the strength of the Lord, however, we will certainly be upheld. (2 Chron. 20:20; Ps. 28:7-8; Isa. 40:29-31)

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This testing of our faith produces perseverance. Perseverance (KJV, *patience*) is that constancy, that endurance, that steadfastness of will and character that causes a person to hold fast to his faith—no matter how intensely he suffers. It is that state of mind by which a person commits himself wholly to the Lord, and determines with all his heart to continue following the Lord—regardless of the difficulties. (Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Thess. 1:4; Heb. 12:1-3)

Nothing shall turn him aside from the way of faith and righteousness. Through every trial, tribulation, sorrow, pain and grief, he perseveres in the faith. God is the strength of his arm. The Lord God Almighty enables him to stand. The indwelling Holy Spirit imparts to him God's ever-enduring grace and mercy.

Therefore, whenever we suffer, we ought to bear patiently with our tribulations. God is moulding our character with his powerful—but gentle—hands. (2 Cor. 4:17-18; Heb. 10:36)

James 1:4

Perseverance—or patience—however, must run its course. We cannot develop this characteristic overnight. Rather, we produce it by degrees through the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification and through the constant trying or proving of our faith. These trials are not designed to make us lose heart or become discouraged. On the contrary, God has designed these trials so that—by leaning ever more on him—we will experience ever more of his mighty love for us. We will experience in our own lives something of God's almighty power to sustain us through every difficulty. (Ps. 37:7; Gal. 6:9; Heb. 6:12)

Therefore, we must let perseverance finish the work that God has begun in us. We should not allow our afflictions to weary or discourage us. Nor should we yield to temptation. Giving way to temptation leads to a weakening of our character, and a lessening of our usefulness. Standing firm—by God's grace—strengthens our character, and increases our usefulness. By allowing perseverance to complete its work in our lives, we will become mature in the faith; and—in every respect—complete. (Gal. 5:22; James. 5:7-8,10-11)

James 1:5

All of us lack certain desirable qualities or characteristics in our lives. Our Father in heaven, however, is more than willing to supply that which is lacking. If, then, one of us lacks wisdom, understanding or discretion, we should ask God to provide it.

The wisdom to which James is referring, of course, is not the wisdom of the world, but that wisdom which comes from God above. It is that wisdom which causes us to seek the way of righteousness through the teaching of God's Word. It is that wisdom which comes as a result of our meditating upon, and laying up God's Word in our hearts. It is that wisdom which causes us to apply our knowledge of God's Word to our everyday lives. This is true, spiritual wisdom. (Prov. 2:1-6; 3:5-10; 9:10; James. 3:17)

When, however, we ask the Lord to grant us wisdom, we must ask and keep on asking. We should beseech the Lord to provide us with this most valuable characteristic. With all our hearts, we should desire true wisdom. God will certainly hear and answer this kind of prayer—for it is a prayer that accords with his will and purposes for our lives. Instead of finding fault for our perseverance in prayer, the Lord will meet our request abundantly and without reproach. (1 Kings 3:5-14; 1 John 5:14)

James 1:6

When, however, we ask the Lord to provide wisdom—or any other godly attribute—we must ask in faith. There is no point in petitioning God repeatedly for his blessings, if we do not believe that he will *give* us his blessings. God has promised to provide us with everything necessary for life and godliness. True wisdom is essential to true godliness. Therefore, it is certain that—if we lack wisdom—God will supply it when we ask in faith. (Matt. 21:22; 1 Pet. 1:3-4; Heb. 11:6)

According to James, however, those who doubt God's promises are like the restless sea billows. Unable to accept the truth of God, because unwilling to trust the Word of God, they become tossed about from here to yonder. Filled with doubt and uncertainty, they have little or no experience of answered prayer in their lives. They have never learned to trust God wholly. For this reason, their faith is shallow and their lives unfilled and unfruitful. (Cf. Eph. 4:14)

James 1:7

The person who cherishes doubt in his heart must not imagine that God will answer his prayers. First, he must learn to commit himself wholly to the Lord. He must learn to trust the Lord completely. He must learn to rest in the Lord; believe his Word, and act on his promises. Only those who trust him wholly will find him wholly true. (Cf. Ps. 37:5; Isa. 7:9b)

James 1:8

According to James, however, those who are unwilling to believe the Word and promises of God, or to trust him wholeheartedly, are double-minded individuals. Unsure of what to do or believe they vacillate between two opinions. Sometimes, they are inclined to believe the Lord, and hope to have their prayers answered. However, if God delays his answer, they shortly lose heart. Then, once more, doubts and uncertainties begin to arise in their minds. This principle of instability permeates their whole life. At times, they believe; at other times, they doubt. (1 Kings 18:21; Isa. 29:13; Matt. 6:24)

On the one hand, then, God does not answer the prayers of those who constantly waver between two opinions. Firstly, they must decide to follow the Lord wholeheartedly. On the other hand, however, God always answers the prayers of those who exercise simple, sincere and humble faith in him and in his Word. Although their faith be as minute as a grain of mustard seed, yet—if exercised from a sincere heart—God will honour that person's faith and hear that person's prayer. (James. 4:8; Mark 11:24; Acts 10:31)

Fading Riches**James 1:9-11****James 1:9**

The brother or sister, who, in material terms, lives in very modest or even poor circumstances, ought to rejoice in the Lord.

Though we may possess little of tangible value, yet, spiritually, we possess a priceless inheritance in heaven. We are the children of the King. We are sons and heirs with the King's own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. With him, we have been raised to inherit the heights of heaven. In him, we sit in these heavenly realms. Humble or poor we may be in

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the eyes of the world. Exalted and rich beyond measure we are in fact. (Rom. 8:16-17; Eph. 2:6; James. 2:5; see also Jer. 9:23-24; Luke 1:52-53)

Perhaps, also, circumstances in our lives have caused us to become depressed or filled with grief. Perhaps, on this account, we feel humbled in the sight of God. Nevertheless, whatever our circumstances, we remain God's children—and he loves us. Whatever the nature of the grief or sorrow we are presently enduring, our heavenly Father is aware of it. He knows what brings us low; but in his own time, he will lift us up. No humbling circumstances will prevail to create a barrier between us and the God whom we love. We are his, and his we will remain forever. (Matt. 6:25-34; 1 Pet. 5:6-7)

Thus, as James says to these dispersed believers, let each of us take pride (i.e., rejoice or glory) in our high position in Christ Jesus.

James 1:10

In God's church, some people find themselves bountifully supplied with good things. These material blessings come from the hand of God. It is the responsibility of the recipient to act as a faithful steward of God's bounties. They should use God's gifts to the glory of his name. (Matt. 27:57; Luke 16:1-12)

If the Lord should take away the abundance that he has bestowed upon a person, where does this leave the rich individual? All that this person possesses has been granted to him by the Lord. The Lord has given him the health, strength, power and ability to work, to earn and to accumulate. Everything that that person receives therefore, and all he possesses, has come to him from the Lord. (Deut. 8:17-18; 1 Chron. 29:14-16)

Therefore, the rich man ought not to rejoice in his riches—but in the grace and providence of God toward him. The wealthy individual ought not to attribute his wealth or income to his own efforts, but to the grace and providence of God. The Lord who gave, can suddenly take away. Blessed be the name of the Lord! (Job 1:20-22; 1 Tim. 6:17-18)

Therefore, those who are materially rich in God's church ought not to take pride in their riches, but in their low position before God. Like the flowers of the field, riches will fade away. Humility, however, abides forever. In God's sight, humility of spirit is greater by far than all the riches of heaven or earth. (Isa. 57:15; Matt. 5:3; Phil. 3:8; Ps. 103:15)

James 1:11

In this verse, James expands on what he has just written. The sun rises with a searing heat withering the flowering plant, and destroying its beauty. In like manner, all the bounty of the rich man will come to nothing, even while he lives his everyday life.

We cannot take out of the world what we did not bring into the world. Those that are truly rich are those that are rich toward God and rich in good deeds. Such spiritual riches never spoil or fade away. (Eccl. 5:10-15; cf. Luke 12:16-21; 16:19-31; James. 5:1-6)

Persevering under Trial

James 1:12

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (NIV)

James began by speaking about perseverance under trial. Now, he returns to this topic. Happy indeed is that man or woman who patiently endures the trial of their faith. The righteous may have many afflictions, but the Lord delivers them through—or out of—they all. (Ps. 34:19)

Nevertheless, God's people can be sorely tempted and tried. If they should fail to trust their Father in heaven, they can be tempted to become despondent. In times of ill health, they may come near to despair. Yet, God has not forsaken his own people—and he never will. No matter how low they feel, they are never too low for God to lift them up. (Job 5:17-19; Ps. 94:12-14; James. 5:10-11)

A great reward awaits those who persevere faithfully and resolutely under trial and temptation. When they have stood the testing of their faith, God has promised to award to them the crown of life. This crown is the wreath of eternal life and blessedness, guaranteed to every true and faithful child of God. (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 2:5; 4:8; Heb. 10:32-36)

Tempted by Our Own Evil Desire

James 1:13-15

James 1:13

When tempted, no-one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; (NIV)

God sends trials into the lives of his beloved children, to prove them and to strengthen them in the faith. However, the Lord never sends sinful temptations or enticements to sin into the lives of his children.

At this point, we should observe the distinction between being tempted and yielding to temptation. It is not sin to be tempted. The Lord Jesus himself was tempted by the devil, but he did not yield and therefore did not sin. (Matt. 4:1-11) The believer may be tempted to sin on many occasions, but by resisting these temptations, he does not yield and therefore does not sin. (James 4:7)

Temptations to sin arise from within ourselves (i.e., from the old sinful nature), or they derive their origin from the devil. Temptation never comes from God. (Jer. 17:9-10; Matt. 15:19-20)

Therefore, says James, no one should ever say that God is tempting him:

- Firstly, because it is impossible for God himself to be tempted by evil.
- Secondly, because a holy, perfect and righteous God cannot possibly tempt anyone to sin. (Hab. 1:13)

James 1:14

but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. (NIV)

Temptation to sin *may* be of the devil. However, we cannot blame Satan for leading us into the majority of sins that we commit. In this verse, James makes it abundantly clear that—when we sin—we sin voluntarily and willingly. Each one of us submits voluntarily to temptation when—by our own evil cravings—we allow ourselves to be enticed and dragged away. We desire what God has forbidden. We permit ourselves to be tempted.

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We are lured by temptation into a sinful situation. We are enticed by the attractions of that temptation. By allowing our minds to dwell on the temptation, the temptation eventually overcomes us, and we sin. (Jos. 7:21; 2 Sam. 11:2-4; Matt. 5:28)

At every stage, however, we could have resisted the temptation—but we preferred to indulge in the pleasures of sin. We allowed ourselves to become ensnared. Therefore, we are responsible for yielding to temptation. On such occasions, we cannot blame the devil, and we most certainly cannot blame God. (Eph. 4:22-24; 1 John 2:16)

James 1:15

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (NIV)

In this verse, James continues the same thought. After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. The word 'conceived' here means to seize, to take hold of as a prisoner, or to seize for oneself. It is used metaphorically of those whose lusts lead them to indulge in sin, making them the permanent prisoners of sin. (Gen. 3:6; John 8:34; cf. Job 15:35; Isa. 59:4)

James continues, '*...and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.*' An apparent contradiction indeed! Sin gives *birth to death*! Yet, it is no contradiction. Conception is later followed by the birth of life into the world. However, in this case, the birth is lifeless—spiritually lifeless. The person is dead spiritually. If he continues in this condition, then, ultimately, physical and eternal death will follow. (Rom. 5:12; 6:23)

Therefore, infers James, shun temptation. Remember, sinful enticements lead inevitably to death. Seek spiritual life, vitality, health and strength in God. Seek the way of life and holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit. He alone has the power to sanctify us, to enable us to put to death the desires of the sinful nature, and to live a life pleasing to God. (Rom. 8:13; Col. 3:5)

Every Good Gift is from Above

James 1:16-18

James 1:16

Do not be led away into error and sin, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Shun temptation. Seek to live the righteous life that God requires. God will grant us everything that we need for life and godliness. Armed with the Word and infilled by his Holy Spirit, we will be able to resist temptation and to stand against the evil one. (Cf. Gal. 6:7-8; 2 Pet. 1:3-4)

James 1:17

Let us remember, says James, that every good gift that we receive comes to us from our Father above. He will never fail to answer our prayers for anything we need to help us in our Christian lives. He has already given us his Holy Spirit, and by his Spirit, he is sanctifying us. He is making us vessels fit for his service. (Prov. 2:6; Matt. 7:11; Rom. 12:6-8; James. 1:5; 3:17)

All good gifts come from God above. He is the Father of the light of heaven—the Author of heaven's purity, holiness and righteousness. His righteousness endures forever. He is not subject to change or variation. Our God is unchanging and sure. (Ps. 84:11; Mal. 3:6)

The Son of God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He will not answer our prayers today, and fail to answer them tomorrow. He will not hear us in one matter that accords with his will, and fail to hear us in another matter. If we delight ourselves in him, he will give us the desires of our heart. The desires of our hearts are the desires of God's heart for us. (Ps. 37:4-6; Matt. 7:7-11; Heb. 13:8; 1 John 5:14-15)

James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. (NIV)

Of his own will, God resolved to give us new spiritual birth, through the Word of Truth. By the sovereign purposes of God, his Holy Spirit brought us to repentance and faith in his Son, and regenerated our souls. Now, this same Holy Spirit sanctifies us and seals us to God. We are a kind of firstfruits of God's creation; i.e., we have become consecrated to God. We are holy to the Lord. (Eph. 1:4-5,11; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 12:23)

Christ has redeemed us by his atoning blood. Now, we belong to him—in body and soul. Now, we are the possession of the Lord. Therefore, since we have been consecrated to God, we ought to dedicate each part of our bodies and souls to God. We should consider each part of our body as holy to God. (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1)

Quick to Listen, Slow to Anger

James 1:19-21

James 1:19

We are consecrated to God in body and soul. Therefore, says James, we ought to take note of this: Each one of us should be quick to listen. We should listen attentively to what a person is saying before considering an answer. We should listen—and keep on listening—until we fully understand the situation. (Prov. 18:13; John 7:51)

James then says that we should be slow to speak. We should not jump to hasty conclusions, or give ill-advised replies. Every word we speak should be words carefully considered. Let us remember that the Lord will judge us for every idle word we have spoken. Therefore, let us speak words to encourage, to help and to heal. Let us, however, be extremely careful about speaking words that do not benefit the soul, or that we do not speak in love. On no account, should any unwholesome remark proceed out of our mouths. (Prov. 10:19; 13:3; 17:27-28; Matt. 12:36-37; James. 1:26)

Then James says we should be slow to become angry (KJV, *slow to wrath*). There is a place for anger among God's people—but only when it is fully justified. God is said to be a God of righteousness, justice, anger, wrath and fury. God's anger, however, is always holy and justified anger. He always directs his anger against sin and the practices of impenitent sinners. This is why God poured out his unremitting wrath upon his one and only Son. Jesus died as a substitute for sinners, bearing God's wrath in the sinner's place. (Prov. 14:29; 15:18; Matt. 5:22)

We, however, ought to be exceedingly slow to become angry. We cannot search and know a person's heart, as can God. We cannot assess a situation perfectly, as can the Lord. However, when anger is fully justified in the sight of the Lord, then we ought to express it. Even so, we ought to express our anger only within the bounds of God's Word, and with full restraint, lest our anger turn to sin. (Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:26-27, 31-32; Col. 3:15-16)

James 1:20

It can be extremely difficult for a man or woman to become angry about something, without their justified anger degenerating into sinful anger. Sinful anger, however, is reprehensible in God's sight. It is an expression of our old sinful nature: one of the deeds of the flesh. Such anger does not bring about the righteous life that God requires us to practise. On the contrary, it demonstrates unrighteousness of thought and life. (Num. 20:11-12; Ps. 37:8; Col. 3:8; 2 Tim. 2:24; cf. James 4:1-12)

James 1:21

Therefore, continues James, get rid of all moral filth. Get rid of sinful anger and everything else that wells up from our old sinful nature. All these deeds of the flesh are vile in the sight of God. We must get rid of them all. The Lord's people must get rid of all kinds of immoral behaviour and attitudes, and adopt the moral standards set forth by God in his Word. These standards ought to be displayed constantly in our lives, together with the fruit of the Spirit; i.e., love, joy, peace, etc. (Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:5-17; 1 Tim. 2:8)

In all humility, then—i.e., with gentleness of spirit—let us accept the teaching of God's Word. Let us hear what God is saying to us in his holy Word. Let us listen to his voice, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. This eternal Word has been implanted in our souls. Now, we must let the Holy Spirit germinate the seed of the living Word, to bring forth good fruit to the glory of God. It is to God's glory and praise when we listen to God's Word, and then put it into practice in our daily lives. (Neh. 8:1-12; 9:3; Prov. 8:33-36; Eccl. 5:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:15)

Doing What God's Word Says

James 1:22-25

James 1:22

Let us not, however, merely read God's Word, listening to his voice, but then failing to obey his voice, infers James. To hear the Word of God but neglect to put it into practice is wilful disobedience. This is no ordinary Word. This is the Word of the living God. If we will not do what God says in his Word, we are rebelling against God. To God, rebellion is as detestable as the sin of witchcraft or occultism. Therefore, insists James, when God's Word speaks about something that is true of our character or conduct, we must apply those teachings to our lives. (Luke 6:46-49; 1 John 2:3-5; 1 Sam. 15:23)

James 1:23-24

As for the one who *listens* to the teachings of God's Word, but fails to *apply* its teachings, that person is like one who looks at himself in a mirror. While he continues looking into the mirror, he sees himself as he really is—with all his faults and blemishes. However, whenever he stops looking into the mirror, he immediately forgets all about those faults and blemishes because they are no longer before his eyes.

Such are those whose true character and conduct is exposed by the light of God's Word, but who turn away from God's Word without putting right their sinful attitudes or behaviour. (Ezek. 33:30-33; Matt. 7:26-27)

James 1:25

There are those, however, who desire to hear and obey God's Word. They are the ones who look into that Word intently, or with the greatest diligence. They pore over the truths of God's Word, learning everything they can about love, righteousness and holiness. When they discover some truth of God's Word that is applicable to their lives, they do their level best to conform their lives to God's standards; the Holy Spirit meeting their earnest desires with the necessary grace. These are the people whose lives are pleasing to God, and who bring praise and glory to his great and holy Name. (Ps. 1:1-2; Isa. 8:20; Acts 2:42; 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15)

These, too, are the people who experience true freedom. This is not the freedom to do as we please, but to do as God pleases. These people do not forget the lessons they have learned from God's Word. On the contrary, by hearing and obeying God's truths, their Christian lives and service is enriched—truly and abundantly. (John 8:31-32; 1 Pet. 2:16)

Pure and Faultless Religion**James 1:26-27****James 1:26**

Now, continues James, if anyone believes himself to be godly or religious (pious), let him consider the meaning of the word. The person who is truly religious is the one who fears God—or who holds God in reverent awe. With fear and trembling, he approaches the presence of God, knowing that the Lord his God is holy. (2 Cor. 7:1)

Granted, we are told to approach the throne of God boldly, or with confidence. This confidence, however, must not be misplaced. We base our confidence, and our right of approach to God's throne, on the work of redemption. By grace we stand; and by grace we approach the throne of God. Yet, it is a glorious throne; a majestic throne; a holy and a righteous throne—or rather, these are the attributes of the One who sits on the throne. Therefore, let us remember what it means to be religious. It means to fear God, and to worship him acceptably with reverence and awe. (Heb. 4:16; 12:28-29)

Yet, infers James, if God is so highly exalted and so infinitely holy, why do some of us speak to God with sinful tongues? With our tongues, we have reproached our neighbour. With our tongues, we have spoken unkindly or uncharitably against a brother or sister. With our tongues, we have uttered all manner of ungodly words, or have indulged in idle or malicious gossip. (James. 3:9-10)

How, then, can we use that same tongue to worship God? What kind of religion allows a man to speak unjustly against his neighbour—and then to praise God, in whose image his neighbour was made? Such religion is vain. It is worthless. Any person holding to such a professed religion is utterly deceiving himself. As to his acceptability before a righteous and holy God, he is completely deluding himself.

James 1:27

Now, continues James, true religious worship consists in holiness of character and conduct. It consists in exercising complete self-control over our bodies and minds, and over every word that we utter. It consists in purity of thought, speech and act. Those who worship God from a pure heart are those whom God hears and blesses with all his glorious riches.

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In everyday terms, pure and faultless religion is that form of godliness that demonstrates love to God by its actions toward others. For example, we demonstrate true religion or godliness by our attitude toward orphans and widows. (Matt. 22:36-40)

Here are two groups of people in great distress of heart and mind. The orphan has been deprived of his parents; of their love and affection, and of his or her sense of belonging to them as to no one else. Similarly, the widow has been deprived of the love of her heart and life; of the God-ordained and inseparable bond between her and her husband, and of his constant communion and companionship. (Exodus 22:22-23; Ps. 68:5; 82:3)

Both groups suffer intense grief. Both orphans and widows need someone to care; someone to understand; someone to comfort; someone to help them in their hour of need. Both need someone to stand by them in their deep and prolonged sorrows. They need someone who will help provide those things that they cannot provide for themselves.

Therefore, infers James, if you help such people in their distress, and stand by them in their need, then you are demonstrating true religion. You are doing what the Lord himself would have done. You are showing by your love that you are truly the children of God. Although you do not seek it, your reward will be very great. (Isa. 58:5-11)

Yet, there is one other characteristic of true religion or godliness. It is to keep ourselves from being polluted—or contaminated—by the sins of the world. We cannot avoid mixing with the world. We must remember that the Lord Jesus mixed with sinners, yet he never became contaminated by their sin. (2 Cor. 6:16 - 7:1)

We, too, must not alienate ourselves from sinners. However, we must never involve ourselves in or with their sin. On the contrary, we must shun every temptation to sin. We must avoid the very places that would lead us into the paths of sin. We must remain pure in spirit. We must be filled constantly with the power of the Holy Spirit. Only by abiding in Jesus, and allowing his Holy Spirit to abide in us, will we be able to keep our souls free of worldly pollution or contamination.

We are all prone to sin and failure. Let us, therefore, walk in the light of God's Word, and in the love of God. Let us never grieve the Holy Spirit. Let us remember that our body is God's temple, and God's temple is holy. It is consecrated to the Lord. Let us use every part of body and soul, therefore, to worship the Lord and glorify his majestic and holy Name.

James Chapter 2

The Sin of Favouritism

James 2:1-4

James 2:1

In the sight of God, everyone is equal. All who believe on Christ are brothers or sisters in Christ. All believers are children of the same heavenly Father.

When he called us to himself, the Lord did not choose us because of what he saw in us, but because he loved us (Cf. Deut. 7:7-8). Now, all of us together share in the same love of Christ Jesus, and all of us are joint heirs of the same heavenly inheritance. Therefore, since God has demonstrated his everlasting love toward us, let us not fail to demonstrate our love toward others. However, infers James, if we truly love others—as God has loved us—we cannot show favouritism. We cannot prefer one person above another. We cannot do for one person what we would not be willing to do for another. (Lev. 19:15)

James 2:2

Now, then, continues James, suppose that someone comes into our meeting wearing a very expensive ring or other jewellery, and dressed in the most magnificent, expensive and fashionable style. This person can afford such fineries, for he possesses considerable wealth and lives in comfort and ease.

Suppose, also, that another person comes into our meeting. This person, however, is poor¹—very poor. Probably, his only income is that which he receives by begging (or, today, by the provision of welfare benefits). Certain it is that the person in question is quite destitute of any wealth, influence or position. Because of his poverty, this person may appear at the door of our meeting meagrely dressed. His clothing—such as it is—may be well worn and possibly even unlaundered. (Cf. Zech. 3:3-7)

This is the situation presenting itself to us. As children of God, how ought we to treat the two individuals who have just entered the door of our church meeting?

James 2:3

Perhaps, when we see the imposing and well-dressed individual standing before us, we feel we ought to treat him as his station appears to demand. Perhaps we think we ought to give him special attention, in case he is someone 'important,' or someone who might one day benefit the church of God. Therefore, we say to this person, 'Here's a good seat for you.' At the same time, we conduct him to a comfortable place within our meeting.

Then, turning our attention to the poor man, we observe his retiring demeanour and possibly his shabby, unclean clothes. In our hearts, we think that it would be better to separate him from other people in the church. Therefore, we tell him to stand there—pointing to a more isolated corner of the building. Alternatively, we may invite him to sit near us.

¹ *poor*. The word translated 'poor' (Gk., *ptochos*) here is the same word used by the Lord Jesus when he speaks of the 'poor' having the gospel preached to them, etc. (Matt. 11:5). See also the poor (Gk., *ptochos*) widow who cast her entire living into the treasury (Mark 12:42) (GL)

Expository Notes

However, we do not offer him our own seat or even the stool beneath our feet. Instead, we tell him to make himself comfortable by sitting on the floor! (Cf. 2 Cor. 8:9)

James continues by asking in verse 4:

James 2:4

...have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (NIV)

In taking this action, have we not made a distinction between one person and another? Have we not favoured one person above another? Have we not based our preference on these people's outward appearances? Have we not formed an opinion of their worth and character based on their physical appearance and manner of dress?

To make such a distinction, however, is to exercise unjust judgment. We have set ourselves up as those who are able to assess a person's character, simply by looking at what he wears. This ought not to be. Those who judge a person by the quality or condition of the clothes he wears, or by his bearing and appearance, are demonstrating that their own hearts are not right with God. Therefore, infers James, let us not become judges with evil thoughts. (Job 34:16-19; cf. John 7:24; Jas. 4:11-12)

Insulting the Poor

James 2:5-7

In verse 5, James declares:

James 2:5

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (NIV)

Listen—i.e., hear and pay very close attention to this, dear brothers. Is it not the case that God has chosen the poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith...?

Out of the mass of irreligious mankind—including multitudes of rich people—God has especially chosen the poor. He has set his love upon such people, and he considers them dear to his heart. In his grace, he has opened the Scriptures of truth to those who are poor in heart and spirit, and has revealed to them the truths of his eternal kingdom. By his Holy Spirit, he has drawn them to faith in his Son and to all the riches of an inheritance in Christ Jesus. Theirs is the kingdom and the promises of God, for they have believed with a pure and sincere heart. (Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 10:21-22)

Let us not, therefore, look down on the poor, or think less of the beggar in our midst. Those who are least in the eyes of the world are often those who are closest to the heart of God. (Ps. 112:9; Prov. 14:31; see esp. Matt. 25:42-45)

James 2:6

By our treatment of these poor people, we have insulted them. We have degraded them. We have treated them as though their clothes determined their character, or as though fine clothes indicated righteousness of life, and shabby clothes indicated unrighteousness of life. (Prov. 17:5)

Alternatively, we may imagine that what a person wears indicates what a person is. We sit in judgment on one whom God has accepted and welcomed as his own. Yet, while we judge others, we fail to look within our own hearts—else we would never have thought ill of another person in our midst. (Matt. 7:1-5; John 7:24)

We forget too, says James, that the rich and powerful of this world exploit and oppress us. They persecute us for our faith. They invoke the law against us, and have us summonsed before the courts. They testify against God's people before magistrates and judges.

James 2:7

Again, the rich are guilty of slandering the name of Christ. Overall, they are the ones who despise Christ, and blaspheme that noble and glorious name of him to whom we belong.

Therefore, we should not imagine that because a person is rich and finely clothed, he stands in closer relationship to God than others, or that he deserves preferential treatment. Apart from Christ, all men and women—rich and poor alike—stand alienated from God, lost in sin and at enmity with God because of their sinful thoughts and deeds. There is no difference. All have sinned. All alike need to experience redemption as found in Christ Jesus. (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:23)

Therefore, let us not treat one person as though he was more acceptable to God than another. Let us not become guilty of showing Christ's love to one person, and withholding it from another.

Failing at Just One Point

James 2:8-11

James 2:8

In the Bible, one commandment stands above all others, and represents the fulfilling of God's law. This commandment says that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Then, God adds a second and inseparable commandment, which says: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' This is the royal law: to love our neighbour as completely as we love ourselves. This means we should provide for our *neighbour's* needs as though they were our *own* needs. (Matt. 22:36-40; Jas. 1:25; 2:12)

Someone may ask, 'Who is my neighbour?' Our neighbour is any person who stands in need. It is any person whom we meet—rich or poor—that we could assist. This assistance might be spiritual, material, emotional or physical. It is our duty and responsibility to do unto them as Christ would have done. We ought to express to them something of the love Christ has expressed to us. If this involves loving a rich person, then we must love that rich person for Christ. If it involves loving a poor person, then we must love that poor person for Christ—showing exactly the same kind of love and consideration toward both. (Luke 10:25-37; Gal. 6:2)

When we love God and love our neighbour, we are fulfilling the royal law—the law of God's kingdom of love, light and liberty in Christ Jesus. In this case, we are doing right. When we are doing these things, it becomes impossible for us to offend against God or against either a rich or a poor person who comes into our midst. (Rom. 13:8-10)

James 2:9

But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as law-breakers. (NIV)

If, however, instead of showing love impartially, we show favouritism to one person or the other, then we sin. We sin against the law of God and the law of love. We break the commandment that says we are to love our neighbour as ourselves. When we sin, we stand convicted by God's law as a law-breaker. We have become guilty of sin, and we have offended against the justice, holiness, righteousness and love of God. (Jas. 2:1)

James 2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. (NIV)

In showing partiality, and in breaking this one commandment, we have become guilty of breaking all of God's law. For the commandment that we broke was the commandment to love one another. Love, however, is the *fulfilling* of the entire law. Failing to love, therefore, must be the *breaking* of the entire law. (Deut. 27:26; Matt. 5:17-20; Gal. 3:10)

We may have failed only in a single point, but the point in which we failed was the point that encapsulates the entire law of God. It is impossible to keep any of God's law, without the love of Christ in our hearts. However, when we possess the love of Christ in our hearts, we will demonstrate that love by our actions.

James 2:11

{Cf. Exodus 20:14; Deut. 5:18; Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17}

James continues with two examples from the Ten Commandments—*adultery* and *murder*—both of which God expressly forbids in his law. However, if we were to keep one, and yet be guilty of the other, we would become guilty of violating the whole law of God. We would have violated the standard of unreserved love to God, and love to our fellow men and women.

We may not think that we could ever become guilty of adultery or murder. Nevertheless, if we look at a woman lustfully, we have committed adultery with her in our hearts. If we harbour bitterness, resentment or hatred against another person, then we have become guilty of murder in our hearts. In such cases, too, we have violated God's law and God's standard of love. By such violations, we have made ourselves law-breakers. (Matt. 5:21-28)

Judgment without Mercy

James 2:12-13

James 2:12

Therefore, implies James, when we speak, we should remember that, one day, God will hold us accountable for every word we utter. When we act, let us remember, that, one day, all our actions—or lack of them—will be accountable to the Lord. He will judge us for every thought, word and deed. However, the standard of judgment will be the law of liberty—that law that provides true freedom by enabling us to live to please Christ. Nevertheless, let us never imagine that we can think, say or do what we like. The Lord will judge us according to our deeds. (Matt. 12:36-37; Col. 3:17)

Thus, in verse 13, James writes:

James 2:13

...because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (NIV)

If we have failed to show love, mercy or compassion in our attitude toward others, then—when the Lord judges us—he will not show mercy toward us. If we have failed to show love and mercy by helping those in need, God will withhold the fulness of his love and mercy from us. God will judge the cold, hard, indifferent and unloving individual by a much stricter standard. (Gen. 42:21; Prov. 21:13)

Yet, God does not desire to apply this standard to any of his children. On the contrary, he desires that they show love to their neighbour, in which case God will show mercy to them in the Day of Judgment. Therefore, James writes, *“Mercy triumphs over judgment!”*

In Need of Food and Clothes**James 2:14-17****James 2:14**

What, continues James, is the use if a man claims to have faith in God or in the Lord Jesus Christ, but has no deeds? Where is the evidence of his faith if there is nothing in his life to show for it? Can this kind of faith save him? No, it cannot! Faith that does not result in actions cannot save anyone. Faith that does not show itself by deeds of love and mercy is not saving faith. (Matt. 7:21-27)

If we truly possess saving faith, then we will prove it by what we do. We will demonstrate the reality of our faith and of our love for God by what we do for our neighbour. This is the faith that saves—faith that produces deeds to the glory of God and to the benefit of mankind. Without such deeds, faith is worthless. (Eph. 2:8-10; 1 Thess. 1:3)

James 2:15-16

James continues with the practical example of a brother or sister in need—either of clothes or of daily food. Let us suppose that we meet such a needy person, and later part company with that person. In bidding them farewell, we encourage them to keep themselves warm and well fed. Yet—although we knew that they needed food to eat and clothing to keep warm—we offered them no practical help. We failed to provide the food for which they hungered. We failed to give them clothing to keep them warm and dry. (Job 31:16-23; Isa. 58:6-11)

These were our brothers and sisters in Christ—our own spiritual family—and we turned our backs on them. Like us, these were the children of our Father in heaven, and we did not share with them that which God had bestowed upon us. By our actions, we despised them. In their poverty, we mocked them. If ever we became guilty of such an offence, how could God’s love dwell in us? (Jas. 2:5-6)

This, then, is the very attitude we must studiously avoid. God detests this kind of sin. This sin amounts to treating with contempt those who are precious to the Lord. This sin amounts to treating those who stand greatly esteemed before God as though they were of little value, and their needs of little importance. If we would truly love God, then we must love our neighbour. However, if God requires us to love our neighbour and do good to him, how much more should we love our brother or sister in Christ and do good to them?

James 2:17

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (NIV)

Now, continues James, if this is the kind of faith we possess, then our faith is dead. It is inactive, because it does nothing to help those in need. However, if we do not possess a living faith, then we do not possess faith in the living God.

True faith is vital faith. True faith in Christ always results in doing what Christ would have done for his own in need. Those who possess this faith are living in union with the risen Saviour and Lord. Those who are living in union with him, automatically respond to the needs of those around them. Never will they send someone away without helping to satisfy their needs. They may have very little to give, but they will give all that they are able—and more. They will spend, and be spent, for the name and for the sake of Christ.

Those who thus put their faith into practice demonstrate the reality and power of their faith. These are they whom the Lord will bless.

No Faith without Deeds

James 2:18-19

James 2:18

Someone, however, may object to James' argument, saying that it is possible for one person to have faith and another to have deeds. Not so, counters James: It is impossible to have true faith devoid of deeds, and it is equally impossible to perform the works that God requires when detached from true faith.

Does this then mean that a person can achieve faith or salvation through his good deeds? No, not at all: No-one can achieve salvation by performing good deeds—nor by faith plus good deeds. Salvation is entirely a gift of God's sovereign grace, and not by good deeds or works in any shape or form. Nevertheless, the true believer must practise the kind of good works or deeds to which God has called him, and which have been prepared for him from eternity. Again, the one who practises the work of God—beginning with faith—is demonstrating that God has already justified him through faith. His deeds of righteousness are the evidence of the work of the Spirit in his life. (Eph. 2:8-10; see also John 6:28-29)

Therefore, James summarises by saying, "*Show me your faith without deeds*"—an utter impossibility concerning saving faith—"*and I will show you my faith by what I do.*" Faith without actions is dead. Faith that acts to help others is true, living, vital faith. This is the faith that saves. (Jas. 3:13)

James 2:19

Now, continues James, you would tell me that you have as much faith in God as I have. You assert your belief in the one true God and in Jesus Christ his only Son. Well, says James, there is nothing unique in this kind of faith. Even the demons believe this much.

The demons believe earnestly that there is only one true God. They believe earnestly that Jesus Christ is his one and only Son. They believe it because they have personally experienced the power of God. They have tasted the wrath of God against them in expelling them from heaven. (Mark 1:24; Luke 10:18; cf. Rev. 12:12-13)

The demons believe in the power of God's Son. They have experienced that power over them during the Lord's earthly ministry. (e.g., Mark 5:7) Yes, the demons believe that there is one God—and they shudder in fear. They believe; but they tremble in terror, because—for all their belief in God—this will not save them. Their faith will not deliver them from the wrath of God to come. Their faith will not spare them from a terrible and lost eternity in that lake of fire prepared for the devil and his (fallen) angels. (Matt. 25:41)

So, then, argues James, do not say that you have faith in the one and only true and living God, if the faith you possess is not a true and living faith. If you possess a true and living faith, that faith will prove itself by what it does for others.

Example of Abraham

James 2:20-24

James 2:20-21

This should be enough to convince you of the futility of dead faith, or 'faith' apart from deeds. Yet, some of you insist on further evidence that both faith and deeds are essential to daily Christian experience. Consider, then, the example of our ancestor Abraham. God had already reckoned Abraham righteous in his sight when he believed his promise to make of the patriarch a great nation—even when he had no son. (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:1-3; Heb. 11:11-12)

In course of time, God's promised son (Isaac) was born to Abraham and Sarah. Many years later, however, God put Abraham's faith to the test. When Isaac had become a young man, the LORD commanded Abraham to offer up his son upon the altar of sacrifice. Believing God's promise concerning his son, Abraham obeyed. He took his son to the appointed mount, bound him, laid him on the altar and was about to kill him. At this point, however, the angel of the LORD intervened. God prevented him from harming his son, and instead provided a ram as a substitute for the sacrifice. (Gen. 22:1-17)

James 2:22

By this act of obedience, Abraham proved the reality of his faith. Remember that—years earlier—God had already pronounced Abraham righteous by faith, when he had believed the LORD's promise to give him a son and to make of him a great nation. Now, however, Abraham demonstrated his faith in God by what he did—or was prepared to do. Therefore, God pronounced him righteous—righteous this time in the sense of obeying God and putting his faith into practice. (Heb. 11:17-19)

The righteousness, therefore, of which James speaks and that of which Paul speaks is in some respects different and complementary. They are not, however, contradictory.

James 2:23

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. (NIV)

Therefore, continues James, the Scripture was fulfilled which says that Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Abraham's initial act of *faith* had been proved genuine by his subsequent act of *obedience*. By this act of obedience, his faith was shown to be real, true, living faith. However, without this act of obedience to, and trust in God, his faith would have been a faith without deeds. It would have been a dead faith, a worthless faith, and a faith that could not save.

James 2:24

Therefore, we can see that a person's faith is vindicated or proved to be true faith by what he does. His actions do not merit or contribute toward his salvation. Even so, his actions are the evidence that his faith is real. It is his faith that justifies him in God's sight. However, his actions prove his justification in the sight of men. In this sense, then, a person is justified by a faith complemented by actions.

Example of Rahab

James 2:25-26

James 2:25

Similarly, the prostitute Rahab was seen to be justified by her actions. Although she did not belong to the Israelite nation, Rahab believed God. She believed what God was about to do for Israel. Therefore, she put her faith into practice. She took the Israelite spies who had entered the city of Jericho, afforded them food and shelter, and then sent them off in safety. Rahab proved the reality of her faith in God's word by her deeds. In this sense, therefore, Rahab is said to be justified by the kind of faith that results in fruit, action or works—works that are pleasing to God, and beneficial to others. (Jos. 2:1-13; Heb. 11:30-31)

James 2:26

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (NIV)

Therefore, concludes James, the body without the spirit is dead. It is merely a lifeless corpse. A corpse is incapable of exercising faith or of doing anything good or bad. In the same way, faith without fruit, action or deeds is merely a lifeless faith—a dead faith.

Those, however, whose faith is dead or devoid of fruit or good deeds, are those who are devoid of true spiritual life. The faith they possess is not the faith that comes from God. The faith that comes from God always redounds to the praise, honour and glory of God through the deeds it performs in his name and for his sake. (Gal. 5:22)

Therefore, infers James to these dispersed believers, prove the reality of your faith in Christ by what you do for the name and for the sake of Christ. However, do everything from a heart of love, compassion, mercy and understanding.

James Chapter 3

Teachers Will Be Judged More Strictly

James 3:1-2

James 3:1

In the church, the Lord has given to each of his people different gifts, talents or abilities. Included among these gifts is the gift of teaching. However, says James, when it comes to teaching the truths of God's Word, we must be very careful. Firstly, we must not presume to teach God's Word if God has not equipped us to teach his Word. Secondly, we must not presume to teach the truths of God's Word to others, if we have not applied these same truths to our own lives. (1 Cor. 12:28-31; Eph. 4:11-13)

Teaching is indeed essential to the wellbeing of the church and to the edifying of the church in love. Even so, we must base our teaching on a thoroughgoing spiritual knowledge and understanding of God's Word. Our teaching must be the result—not merely of learning—but of communion with God. It should be the fruit of time spent with God in prayer and meditation on his holy Word. Again, we must interpret God's Word correctly—by comparing Scripture with Scripture. (2 Tim. 2:15)

Those who teach the Word of God will be judged more stringently than others. The Lord will judge us by a higher standard. Not only will he assess rigorously the quality of our *teaching*, but he will also assess rigorously the quality of our *lives*. In teaching others, we must ever remember that people learn much more from what we are, than from what we say. Actions speak louder than words. Words fill pages, but actions fill volumes. (1 Cor. 3:5-15)

James 3:2

At some time or another, says James, all of us stumble into sin. We offend against God, and we offend in many different ways. By our offences, we make ourselves guilty and miserable. Yet, God knows our weaknesses better than we know ourselves. Through the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our Father in heaven grants us his forgiveness. (Eccl. 7:20; Jas. 1:26; 1 John 1:8-10; 2:1-2)

If, however, a person could be found who was never at fault in anything he said, then this person would be a perfect individual. He would be perfect, because if he was faultless in speech and action, then he must be faultless in thought. Being perfect in thought, speech and act, such a person would have total control over his whole body. Apart from the Son of God, however, no such person has ever lived.

The Tongue Boasts Great Things

James 3:3-6

James 3:3-4

Using an everyday analogy, we place a bit into a horse's mouth to exercise control over the animal, and to direct it in the way we want it to go. One tiny piece of metal controls the actions of the whole animal. Similarly, a pilot steers a large ship by means of a very small rudder. Even although the wind and waves may buffet the ship severely, the small rudder located at ship's stern makes it possible for the pilot to steer his vessel in any direction.

James 3:5

So also is the tongue within our bodies. The tongue forms a very small part of our bodies, but it boasts great things. It usurps itself above the other necessary parts of our bodies. It endeavours to control the direction of body and soul. It is a very small member. Remember, too, how a tiny spark can set ablaze a vast forest.

James 3:6

Like a tiny spark that ignites the mighty forest, so is our tongue. It is a world of evil among the parts of our body. Like a blazing fire, it is consuming; it is destructive; it is wasteful; it produces nothing but burnt embers and ashes. It corrupts the whole person and personality. It sets on fire the whole course of a person's life. It is itself set on fire by hell: this world of evil has its origin in the corruption of our sinful nature. Satan uses this sinful nature to his advantage. (Prov. 26:20-28; cf. John 8:44)

James says that the tongue is a world of evil, and he attributes far-reaching and destructive powers to this part of the body. Effectively, however, he is saying that our tongue is revealing the kind of person we really are. In other words, it is manifesting the thoughts and intents of our old sinful nature. This is because everything we say with our tongue derives from that evil nature. This old nature, however, has been crucified with Christ. We ought, therefore, to count it dead. We should never use our tongue, therefore, to express the sinful thoughts of our minds (or 'heart'). Instead of using our tongues to criticise and attack other people, we should use it to exhort and encourage them. (Matt. 15:10-20; Rom. 6:6,13-14)

The Tongue is a Restless Evil

James 3:7-8

Mankind has tamed—or is taming—all sorts of animals, birds, reptiles and marine creatures. However, of his own abilities or with his own resources, no one has been able to tame the tongue. Humanly speaking, the tongue is untameable. It is uncontrollable. It is a restless or unruly evil—an evil that no one can restrain. It is a pernicious evil—injurious not only to the person and to his or her personality, but to many other people as well (cf. Mark 5:3-4).

Like a venomous snake, the tongue is filled with deadly poison; and, like a snake, that poisonous venom is directed against others. Among the parts of our bodies, our tongue is a destructive—and self-destructing—evil.

A Salt Spring Cannot Produce Fresh Water

James 3:9-12

James 3:9

Ironically, we use the tongue that God has given us to praise his great and holy name. With it, we sing his praises, and with it, we bless his name. With it, we pray to our Father in heaven, and with it, we offer worship and thanksgiving. (Ps. 35:28; Matt. 6:9-13)

Yet, with the same tongue that God has given us, we curse men. We think and speak unkindly of our neighbour. We utter unkind remarks concerning our brother or sister in the Lord. We criticise someone unjustly or whisper behind his or her back. (Isa. 29:13; 2 Cor. 12:20; 3 John 10)

James 3:10-11

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.... No wonder James says, *My brothers, this should not be*. If our heart has been truly sanctified, how can our tongue utter unsanctified remarks? How can the heart that praises God, be the heart that speaks unkindly of one another? *Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same stream?* asks James. No! How, then, can we express praise to God and cursing to men—in whose image mankind was made? (Rom. 12:14; 1 Pet. 3:9-12; 1 Tim. 5:13)

James 3:12

It is contrary to nature for a fig tree to yield a crop of olives. Similarly, it is contrary to nature for a grapevine to produce figs. In exactly the same way, it is contrary to nature for a salt spring to produce fresh water. If salt is produced, then the water is not fresh. Similarly, if our tongue expresses thoughts that are contrary to the new nature, then clearly these expressions do not originate from the new nature. (Luke 6:43-45)

The Fruit of Earthly Wisdom

James 2:13-16

James 3:13

Who among us is truly wise? Who among us possesses true spiritual insight or understanding? Let him show it by his good life. Let him demonstrate it by the deeds that he performs—in humility and true spiritual wisdom. (Titus 3:1-2) This humility is the kind of humility that shows itself by a mild disposition, by gentleness of spirit, or by meekness of character. This is the kind of humility shown by the Saviour himself, and approved of by God the Father. (Jer. 9:23-24)

Again, let this person's wisdom be the wisdom that comes from God above. Let it be the wisdom that comes from a thorough knowledge of the Word and will of God, and of everything necessary to godly and upright living.

James 3:14

If, however, we harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts, we must not boast about it or deny the truth. Envy, or contentious rivalry, or bitter jealousy, is sinful in the sight of God. These are examples of the sins of the old nature. They ought never to appear in the life of the believer. (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20)

Similarly, selfish ambition is evil in the sight of God. It is usurping our place, and pushing ourselves forward contrary to God's intended plan and purposes for our lives. It involves selfishness, and often results in strife. Again, this is an example of the works of the flesh. Such evils, however, ought not to occupy any place in the lives of God's redeemed and holy children. (Phil 2:3)

If, therefore, we have been guilty of such sins, infers James, we must never glory in them or boast about them. Rather, we should be ashamed. We should be ashamed of the dishonour we have brought to the name of Christ, and of the hurt that we have caused to other believers. (Jas. 4:1-5) Harbours bitter envy and selfish ambition is a denial of the truth concerning our true character. We may claim to be in the right. God's Word, however, asserts that we are in the wrong when we become guilty of such offences.

James 3:15

Such wisdom (so-called) does not exemplify the wisdom that comes from God above. Such behaviour derives from worldly wisdom—the kind of wisdom that is foolishness with God. Worldly wisdom, however, is of this earth. It is unspiritual, and therefore wholly inappropriate to the child of God. Again, worldly wisdom originates with the devil. It is the kind of wisdom that the devil's children (unregenerate mankind) apply to their lives. Never should the children of God make use of worldly wisdom. It leads only to the achievement of sinful or selfish ambitions, and all other sorts of unspiritual attitudes and behaviour. (Rom. 1:22-23; 1 Cor. 1:20)

James 3:16

Where envy and selfish ambition exist, there also we find disorder. Yet, God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. He is not a God of disharmony and disunity, but of concord and unity. Again, where envy and selfish ambition exist, there also we find every evil practice. Sin breeds sin. One sin leads to other sins, and then sins multiply in profusion. All these result from the sins of envy and selfish ambition. (1 Cor. 14:33)

The Fruit of Heavenly Wisdom

James 3:17-18

James 3:17

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, sub-missive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
(NIV)

Yet, there is a wisdom that is appropriate to the children of God. It is the wisdom that derives and descends from the Father above. This is true wisdom. Concerning wisdom from God, James says it is first of all *pure*. It is free from contamination or fault. It is spiritual. Morally and ethically, it is unsullied. (Luke 21:15; 1 Cor. 2:6-10; Jas. 1:5,17)

Then, says James, this wisdom is *peace-loving*. Those who possess this wisdom seek peace and pursue it. They desire to achieve their ends through peaceful and harmonious means. Those means agree with God's will and purposes, and therefore create no disturbances among fellow believers.

Then James says the wisdom from God is *considerate*. It is gentle in dealing with others. It is equitable in all its dealings. It is fair to everyone, and it is exercised from a mild disposition.

Next, says James, this wisdom is *submissive*. It is easily entreated. It is readily obedient to the Word and will of God. It is compliant to everything that God says.

Then, it is *full of mercy*. It is filled with goodwill toward the afflicted. It is willing to share with them in their afflictions, and to minister to their needs.

It is *[full of...]* *good fruit*. Deeds conjoined to the wisdom of God, are deeds of righteousness. They are the fruit of the Spirit.

This wisdom is *impartial*. It is exercised without wrangling or unfair discrimination. It is practised without dubiousness, ambiguity or uncertainty—for it revolves around the sure and certain promises of God.

Finally, the wisdom from God is *sincere*. It is free of all hypocrisy or of all suggestion of double standards. It is completely honest in its application—for it comes from a God of total integrity and veracity.

James 3:18

By applying this wisdom from God, the peacemakers who sow the seeds of peace, concord, unity and harmony reap the rich harvest of righteousness. This is the righteousness of which God approves. This is the kind of life-style that he desires his people to emulate. We are to live our lives in the peace of God—governed by the wisdom of God, and harmonised by the Spirit of God. By hearing God's Word, obeying his Word, and seeking to apply his Word in true spiritual wisdom, we bring forth a rich harvest of godly living, and we create harmony between our fellow believers. (Prov. 11:18,30; Isa. 32:16-17; Matt. 5:9; Heb. 12:11)

James Chapter 4

The Cause of Quarrels and Fights

James 4:1-3

James 4:1

As the children of God, there ought to be complete unity and harmony among us. No cause for discord or disunity should ever be found among God's redeemed people. Yet, sadly, such discord does exist at times.

James recognises this when he asks, '*What causes fights and quarrels among you?*' That is, why do you engage in arguments and strife? Why do you contend and dispute with one another? These attitudes do not come from the Spirit of God. On the contrary, they arise from the old evil nature within us. As such, they should have no place in the life of the believer. (Jas. 3:14-16; Mark 7:21-23)

Concerning why such discord arises, James further asks, '*Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?*' Although we should reckon the old sinful nature as dead, yet its evil desires still battle against our renewed souls. When we fail to walk by the Spirit, our old nature seeks to re-assert itself. Consequently, our attitudes toward other people change. Instead of being governed by love for one another, we begin to entertain harmful or evil thoughts and attitudes toward each other. From these evil attitudes, our evil actions flow. (Rom. 8:7-8; Gal. 5:19-21)

James 4:2

James continues: '*You want something but don't get it....*' We long for something with an intense and eager longing. We covet something in our hearts, and we determine to get that object at all costs. Greed (covetousness), lust and idolatry stand intimately related; and by becoming guilty of the one, we become guilty of the others. (Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; cf. 1 Tim. 6:6-11)

James says, '*You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want...*' So great is the evil desire in our hearts, that we are prepared to stop at nothing to attain our goal. Even if this means being insensitive to other people, then we will do so. Even if it means despising others and putting them down to get what we want, we will do so. Again, if it means causing the death of someone by our evil intentions, then we will not stop even at this. So great has become the evil within our hearts.

We may object that we are hardly likely to kill someone to attain our covetous goals. Yet, we must remember the principles of God's Word. If, in our hearts, we harbour hatred against our neighbour, we have become guilty of murder. Therefore, if we hold a grudge against someone, then we have become guilty of murder in our hearts. (Cf. Matt. 5:21-22)

James continues: '*You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.*' The disputing, quarrelling, fighting continues unabated. Strife leads to further strife and to divisions among the members. Such things, of course, ought not to be. We do not get the things we want because we do not ask God for them. We do not ask God for them be-

cause we know in our hearts that God would never give them to us. Therefore, we make up our minds to get them for ourselves. This, however, brings us into conflict not only with our brothers and with sisters in Christ, but also with the Lord himself.

James 4:3

At times, we may dare to ask God for the things that we covet. Yet, God does not provide. We have asked amiss. We have asked with wrong motives. We wanted the Lord to provide us with something that we intended to spend on our own pleasures. The Lord does not provide those things that we intend to waste on ourselves or spend on our own covetous lusts or pleasures. (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 1:15-20; cf. 1 John 3:22; 5:14)

Friendship with the World

James 4:4-6

James 4:4

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (NIV)

James now points out the truth of the matter. If we entertain such evil longings in our hearts after material or physical pleasures, we have become unfaithful to God. That is, we have become guilty of spiritual adultery. We have forsaken our first love in preference for another. (Deut. 10:12; Rev. 2:4-5)

Yet, asks James, *'don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?'* Are you not aware that conforming yourselves to the world's standards of behaviour alienates you from fellowship with God? Certain it is that you cannot walk with the Lord, and walk with the world as well. Thus, James adds, *'Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.'*

We have the choice. Either we follow the Lord and serve him only, or we follow Baal—the world—and serve idols (the sinful attractions of the world) within our hearts. We cannot serve both. Therefore, let us choose whom we will serve, and let us follow him with all our heart and soul. (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Kings 18:21,39)

James 4:5

There are two points of difficulty in this verse. The first is this: It is uncertain which passage of Scripture James is quoting from here. He appears to be citing Old Testament Scripture, but no OT passage matches his words. However, James may not have been intending to quote a single passage. Rather, he may have been combining the thoughts of two or more passages, or paraphrasing the Scriptures, as do other writers occasionally. In any event, James' words remain the inspired words of God's Holy Spirit.

The second point of difficulty in this verse is the word translated 'spirit' (Gk. *pneuma*). In context, this would appear to refer to the human spirit, rather than the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit cannot be conceived of as 'envying intensely' in the sense required by this passage. Had James not been speaking of covetousness and strife, then it might have been possible to consider the 'intense envying' of the spirit as the Holy Spirit yearning jealously that we remain faithful to God.

However, if this latter interpretation be preferred, then James would be arguing something like this: Why, infers James, do we think that the Holy Spirit within us jealously desires that we remain utterly faithful to him? It is because he is the Spirit of the living God. He is God, dwelling in our very bodies. However, the Lord our God is a jealous God. He will not tolerate any rivals in our hearts. He alone must occupy our hearts and lives, and to this end, his Holy Spirit jealously guards his sanctuary (our bodies) from any intruding idols. Therefore, when we set our hearts on other things (or other interests), this creates a conflict with the indwelling Spirit of God who requires our wholehearted consecration to himself. (Cf. Exodus 20:1-6; Col. 3:5)

James 4:6

Yet, at such times, God multiplies his grace toward us. God knows the evil tendencies that arise in our hearts, and he always provides grace sufficient to overcome these tendencies. If, however, these tendencies overcome *us*, it is because we have not made use of the grace God has given us. God provided us with a way of escape, but we chose not to use it. We preferred to follow our evil desires instead of the desires of the Spirit of holiness and of grace. Yet, in so doing, we rebelled against God. In our hearts, we became proud, and attempted to defend our wayward attitudes and behaviour. (1 Cor. 10:7-14; 2 Cor. 12:9)

To this end, James quotes from Proverbs 3:34: “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” God, as it were, ranges himself in battle against the proud, the wilful, and the stubborn. The Lord utterly detests those who disobey his will; those who set themselves above others; or those who despise others or treat them with disdain. All forms of sinful pride and arrogance are utterly abhorrent to the Lord. Those who behave in this way God resists and opposes with an outstretched arm. (Ps. 138:6; Dan. 4:20-37; 5:20; see also 1 Pet. 5:5-6)

Conversely, God gives an ever-plenteous supply of grace to those who submit humbly to his will and who obey his teaching. God bestows all his benefits, all his bounties, upon those who are of low degree—those who are humble and contrite in heart. It is they who stand closest to the heart of God. It is they—before all others—whose prayers God hears and answers. It is they who enjoy the blessings of the Lord and the fulness of his love, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit. This is because nothing exists in their lives to cause grief to the Holy Spirit, or to set up a conflict between holy and unholy desires. (Ps. 25:9; 51:17; Prov. 3:34)

Humble Yourselves before the Lord

James 4:7-10

James 4:7

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
(NIV)

Do we want to experience the abundant grace of God in our lives? Then, says James, ‘*Submit yourselves...to God.*’ So long as we continue to oppose God’s will, God will continue to oppose us and to withhold his tokens of grace from us. However, when we submit to the Lord’s will, and do what he requires of us, then he will provide us with the grace necessary for every need and eventuality. Though we may be tried severely, yet God’s grace will prove sufficient. (2 Chron. 30:8-9; Heb. 12:9)

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James continues: *'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.'* We must not give in to the devil's wiles. We know that he is the father (or author) of lies and deceit. We know he will attempt to make us believe it is right to pursue our own ambitions or to seek our own goals—independently of God's purposes for us. We must resist him—and his lies—fiercely and vigorously. We must listen to the voice of the Lord our God, not the voice of Satan. If, in the strength of the Lord, we stand firm against the devil, he will flee from us. (Eph. 4:27; 6:10-18; 1 Pet. 5:8-10)

We should heed God's Word and put it into practice. If we do this, God will give us the victory over evil and covetous attitudes and tendencies. If we love God above all others, we will love our neighbour as well. If we love our neighbour, we will not think, say or do anything that will harm our neighbour. (Matt. 7:24,27; Rom. 13:8-10)

James 4:8

'Come near to God,' then, *'and he will come near to you.'* However, to come near to God, we must forsake those sinful attitudes and tendencies that cut us off from God. We must abandon our proud and wilful spirit, and come near to God in humility and contrition. Certain it is that if we do not come humbly and sincerely, we cannot come near at all. (Isa. 66:2)

James continues by exhorting his readers to wash their hands...and purify their hearts.... Cleanse away the defilement of sin: Not, however, in an outward manner, as washing with water might suggest. Rather, we are to cleanse ourselves inwardly. We are to seek cleansing—or purification—for our hearts. (Isa. 1:16; cf. Jer. 4:14)

From where does this cleansing come? It comes only from the Lord. It comes only through the atoning blood of the Lamb. However, to receive forgiveness and cleansing we must acknowledge our sin to our Father in heaven, and forsake that sin utterly. We cannot seek purification of our soul, if we do not intend to change our attitudes. (1 John 1:9; 2:2)

James 4:9

To this end, James says in verse 9: *'Grieve, mourn and wail....'* This is the type of heartfelt attitude we must exhibit toward God, if we would experience his forgiveness. We must grieve over our sin. We must feel afflicted and miserable for the evil attitudes within our hearts, and for our evil words and actions. We must mourn and wail over our sinfulness. We must feel the pain of grief for our sin, earnestly and deeply. (Ps. 51:1-19)

James continues: *'Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.'* Gloom is heaviness of spirit. We must become ashamed of what we have thought, said or done. We must be willing to seek forgiveness for our offences—both of God, and of others. Only under such circumstances can we come near to God. However, if indeed we draw near to God in repentance, and with a humble and contrite heart, then assuredly God will draw near to us. (2 Cor. 7:10-11; cf. Zech. 12:10)

James 4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (NIV)

Thus, James says, *'Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.'* Come in godly sorrow unto repentance. Come in humility to the Lord. Seek his face, and seek his forgiveness. When the Lord has dealt with our sin and with our sinful attitudes, then certainly he will lift us up. He will exalt us to walk with him again and to experience the overflowing love, joy and peace of the Holy Spirit. He will restore to us the years of waste—the

years that the locusts have eaten and destroyed. (Joel 2:12-13,25-32; Luke 18:14; 1 Pet. 5:6)

Do Not Judge Your Neighbour

James 4:11-12

James 4:11

Therefore, infers James, in view of all that I have said, *'do not slander one another.'* Do not speak evil of a brother or sister in Christ. Do not speak unkindly of anyone. If we were to insist on unjustly criticising or passing judgment on a fellow believer, we would become guilty of criticising or judging God's standard of perfect righteousness; i.e., his holy law. However, we ourselves have proved unable to keep that law. Yet, we would set ourselves up as judges of our neighbours. In doing so, however, we are sitting in judgment upon the law of God. (Eph. 4:31; 1 Pet. 2:1; Matt. 7:1-2; Rom. 2:1,13)

James 4:12

'There is only one Lawgiver and Judge.' There is only one who is competent to judge the thoughts, motives and intents of other people. There is only one who is fit and able to pass just judgment. He is the Lord our God: the one who is able to save and to destroy. But who are we—mere sinful human beings—to sit in judgment upon our neighbour? Who are we to criticise our neighbour's actions? If we cannot speak *well* of them, we should refrain from speaking *ill* of them. (Isa. 33:22; Matt. 10:28; Rom. 14:4,13)

Do Not Boast About Tomorrow

James 4:13-17

James 4:13-15

James now considers another situation: failing to acknowledge the sovereignty and providence of God over our lives. Take heed, you who say, 'Soon we are going to such and such a place. We will spend a year or so making money there.' No, says the Word of the Lord. We ought not to think in these terms. Our lives are not in our hands to do with as we please. Our life—our very breath—is in God's hands. If it is God's will, we will be able to go here or there—but not otherwise. (Prov. 27:1; Luke 12:16-21; Job 12:10; Acts 17:25,28)

Therefore, before we make plans for the future, let us seek the will of God. Before we carry out our plans, let us acknowledge that whatever we may seek to accomplish, it will be according to the sovereign purposes of God. Therefore, if in his providence, God permits us to fulfil our plans, let us thank God for all he has enabled us to do or to achieve. In thanking him, however, let us remember to offer to him from our increase that which is his due. (Prov. 19:21; Lam. 3:37-38)

James 4:16

Instead, however, of acknowledging God's sovereign rule over our lives, infers James, we boast and brag of our own accomplishments—as though God had no part in them! We talk of what we have achieved—failing to acknowledge the providence of God, or to return God thanks for his abundant blessings. We say that we attained these things by our own effort. Yet, God's Word tells us that we could not exert our own effort if God had not pro-

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vided us with the means. It tells us that our health, strength and abilities are all gifts of God's providence. (Deut. 8:17-20; 1 Chron. 29:13-14,16)

How, then, can anyone claim to have attained these things by his own effort? Such a claim despises the providential gifts of God. Therefore, says James, all such boasting—all such self-glorying or self-congratulation—is evil. It does not derive from God, but from the evil still within our hearts.

James 4:17

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (NIV)

God has the right of absolute dominion over our lives. All that we seek to do, and every plan that we make, ought to take into account God's sovereignty over our lives. When we submit ourselves and our plans to the providence and will of God, then God will keep us in the good and the right way. When we acknowledge that it is the Lord who directs our steps, and who provides us with all that we are and have, then he will surely bless us according to his will. (Prov. 16:9; 21:30)

However, if in spite of our knowledge of these things, we choose to ignore God's sovereignty or God's providence in our lives, and act according to our own plans, then we sin. This is why James says, '*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*' Anyone who acts against the clear teaching or instructions of God's Word, is sinning against the Lord. Those who sin, however, God will chastise. (Luke 12:47)

James Chapter 5

Rich Hoarders and Oppressors

James 5:1-6

James 5:1

On the assumption that he was addressing certain Jewish Christians here, rather than unbelievers, James might have presented his case as follows: Take heed to this. Pay close attention to what I am about to say. God has blessed you with wealth and plenty. You, however, have not used your wealth to the glory of God or to the benefit of others. On the contrary, you have accumulated riches for your own benefit. You have gathered an abundance of goods for yourselves. However, in doing so, you have proved yourselves unfaithful stewards of the Lord's provisions. You have not been rich toward God. You have not been generous toward your neighbour. (Deut. 8:11-20; Luke 12:15-21)

Therefore, weep and wail because of the misery that will certainly come upon you—and you will not escape. Weep and mourn, as one mourns and grieves for the dead. Turn now in repentance toward God, seeking his mercy and forgiveness. Plead with the Lord to give you opportunity to make good use of the wealth he has given you—lest it be too late. (Eccl. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 6:7-10; Jas. 1:11)

James 5:2-3

Even now, your wealth has rotted and your gold and silver has corroded. You have wasted your wealth by your own mismanagement and misappropriation of the Lord's money. Unless you act swiftly, the rot that has set in will consume all that you possess. (Jer. 17:11; Matt. 6:19-21; 25:14-30)

Look at your abundant supply of clothing. You possess so much by way of clothing, that you cannot possibly use it all. Moths, however, are consuming your surplus clothing. It is going to waste. Could you not have made better use of it by giving it to those in need? What have you done with the provisions of the Lord? (Luke 3:11; 12:33-34)

James 5:4

Look at what you have done to your hired workers! You pledged to pay them what was due for their labours. Yet, when they had completed their work, you delayed paying or withheld their wages from them. You defrauded them of that which was theirs by right. Others you short-changed. You paid less than the labourer's work was worth. He, too, was defrauded at your hands. (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15)

Yet, God has not overlooked your dishonesty and deceit. The injustice, of which you have been guilty, has come to the notice of the Judge of all the earth. The Lord Almighty will repay you as your deeds deserve. Repent, then, and seek his mercy. Pay in full all that you owe to your workers—lest in seeking the mercy of God, God treats you as you have treated them. (Mal. 3:5; cf. Exodus 2:23-25)

James 5:5

Your conduct has been a disgrace. You have lived on earth in sheer self-indulgence. You have spent grand sums to gratify your own pleasures. You have satisfied the lusts of the body to the detriment of your soul. You have fattened yourselves as in a day of slaughter. In other words, you have said in your hearts, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry—for tomorrow we die!' (Isa. 22:13; 1 Cor. 15:32; cf. Luke 16: 19-31)

James 5:6

Not only have you been guilty of withholding the wages of your hired workers, but you have been guilty also of much greater offences. You have condemned innocent men—men who were not in any way harming or opposing you. Yet, you have condemned and murdered them.

This not only or necessarily means that you have been guilty of putting such individuals to death. It also means that—by holding a grudge, or by harbouring bitterness, resentment or hatred in your hearts against these individuals—you have become guilty of their murder. In your hearts, you have effectively killed them. You have become consumed with all manner of murderous thoughts and attitudes concerning them—even although they have done you no wrong. (Matt. 5:21-24)

Waiting Patiently

James 5:7-9

James 5:7-8

Therefore, says James, do not emulate such wicked behaviour or attitudes. Wait patiently on the Lord, and obey him wholeheartedly. Do not lose heart. Keep on doing what God has given you to do. Persevere in your work for the Lord, and bear patiently with suffering and disappointment. The Lord is faithful. Whatever we do faithfully for him will reap a sure reward. (Gal. 6:9-10)

Remember, however, that God does not promise instant results for our labours. Think of the farmer. He faithfully sows the precious seed on the land, looking forward to a valuable crop. Yet, he must wait patiently for the seed to germinate, take root and grow. He must wait the Lord's time. Before the crop is ready for harvesting, it must be nourished by the soil and watered by the autumn and spring rains. Only then, does the crop begin to appear. Only after it has reached full maturity will it ready for harvesting. Only then, will the farmer be able to bring his sheaves into the granary. (Luke 8:15; Heb. 6:15)

So it is with us. We must carry out the Lord's work faithfully, diligently and with great patience. We must pray over that work, believing that the Lord will regenerate, nourish and water the seed through the Holy Spirit's energising power. At the right time, the crop will begin to appear. At the right time, this crop will become ready for the harvest. Therefore, keep on sowing; keep on praying, and keep on waiting patiently on the Lord.

Indeed, let us keep on working in his field until the day that the Lord appears, or until he calls us into his presence. Then, we will be with him forever. At his coming, he will send forth his angels to gather in the harvest of souls for eternity. Then, will we see the full fruit of our labours for the Lord—all those whom he has called to himself through our faithful sowing of the seed, and praying with patience and perseverance. (Ps. 126:5-6)

James 5:9

Therefore, infers James, be patient regarding the outcome of your work for the Lord. Be patient also with your fellow believers. Do not complain or grumble against one another. Do not hold grudges or grievances against your brothers or sisters in the Lord. Do not go around sighing or groaning in your hearts about the injustices done to you by your fellow believers. (Lev. 19:18; Gal. 5:14-15,26; Jas. 4:11-12)

It is not for us to pass private judgment upon one another. If we do, God will judge us. The Lord will judge us by exactly the same standards as we have used to pass judgment on others. The one who will be our Judge, however, stands even now at the very door. At any moment, he may summons us to his judgment hall and arraign us before the bar. Even in this life, God judges his people as their deeds deserve. (Matt. 7:1-5; 1 Cor. 4:5)

Examples of Patience in Suffering***(The Prophets and Job)*****James 5:10-11****James 5:10**

Now, says James, to take a practical example of patient endurance in the face of intense suffering, consider the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name. Think of what these men endured for their faithfulness to God's Word. For the most part, the people despised them. They scorned and rejected the prophets' words. Indeed, the people were guilty of scorning and rejecting God, whose word the prophets proclaimed! The people were guilty of shamefully treating and abusing God's prophets. The people rejected these faithful servants of God. They afflicted God's servants. Some were tortured. Some were killed. Yet, these men of God endured with much patience the threats and injustices of the people to whom God had sent them. (2 Chron. 36:16; Matt. 21:34-39; 23:34-35)

The LORD required his prophets to condemn the people's sins. Yet, at the same time, they proclaimed forgiveness and mercy upon the people's repentance and the forsaking of their sin. In the face of many afflictions, the prophets of God endured patiently throughout the years of their ministry. Many did not live to see a response to their message, but they remained faithful to God and patient in his service.

Like the prophets of old, we too must remain patient with others, faithful to the Lord, and patient in his service. (Matt. 5:11-13; Heb. 11:32-40)

James 5:11

Those who persevere in the faith, we consider blessed indeed. The fires of affliction have purified their lives and strengthened their faith. By their experiences, they have come to know a peace with God that far surpasses anything that others experience. Their trials have drawn them closer to God, causing them to cast themselves wholly upon their loving heavenly Father. They have not been disappointed. In all their tribulations, the Lord has upheld them. He has carried them through the fire and the flood. He has delivered them from all their distresses. (Ps. 34:6-7,19-22; Jas. 1:12)

Consider the example of Job. Here was a man rich toward God and—by the providence of God—rich in material things. Yet, we know how severely Job's faith was tried. We know what afflictions befell him. Apart from his wife, everything was taken from him. He lost his wealth and property. He lost his children. He lost his health. It seemed that his troubles would never end. (Job 1:1-21 2:1-10; 13:15; 23:10)

Yet, we know too what the Lord finally accomplished in Job's life. God blessed Job's latter days more abundantly than his former days. God accomplished his purposes for Job through all his trials. Although he had suffered most severely, yet Job came to see the abundant compassion and mercy of the Lord toward him. By his perseverance, he experienced the richest blessings of the Lord. (Job 42:10-17)

Do Not Swear

James 5:12

Now, says James, there is one other matter that I would like to mention—and it is a matter of primary importance. It concerns swearing, or taking a solemn oath. In the course of everyday conversations, do not swear on oath either by heaven, which is the throne of God, or by the earth, which is God's footstool. (Matt. 5:33-37)

As Christians, there is no need for us to resort to oaths to confirm the truthfulness of our word. As the people of God, we ought always to speak truthfully—without recourse to solemn oaths or oaths invoking the name of God. Solemn oaths have their place—but *not in everyday conversation*. In everyday conversation, we ought to keep to a straightforward “Yes” or “No.” Anything else may lead us into sin, and for this, we will stand condemned. (Eph. 4:25; cf. Heb. 6:16-17)

Believing Prayer and Joyful Praise

James 5:13-16

James 5:13

In verse 13, James asks, ‘*Is any one of you in trouble?*’ Then let him pray to God. God knows every trouble that comes into our lives. He knows and he cares. Let us, therefore, bring our troubles to the Lord in prayer. The Lord who loves us and who hears the prayers of his dear children will assuredly answer the petitions of their hearts. Trust him to act in the best possible way. (2 Chron. 33:12-13; Hosea 6:1)

Then James asks, ‘*Is anyone happy?*’ When we are happy, we ought to thank God that we feel this way. We ought to show our gratitude to God for the abundance of his mercies by singing songs of praise. Let us rejoice in the Lord. Let us sing the songs of Zion. Let us praise and worship his majestic and holy Name—for great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised. (Ps. 95:1-2; 118:14-24; Acts 16:25; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16-17)

Our Father in heaven loves to see his children happy, and he loves to hear them rejoicing in their salvation. Therefore, let us sing his praises with all our hearts and souls. Even when it is not possible to sing aloud, we can still sing the praises of God in our hearts. (Rom. 5:2-3,11; Phil. 4:4; 1 Pet. 4:13)

James 5:14

‘*Is any one of you sick?*’ Is anyone ill or diseased in body or mind? Let him call for the elders of the church. Let the leaders of the church pray over the sick brother or sister, anointing him with oil in the Lord's name. The Lord is not only able to heal the sick—as he demonstrated so frequently while on earth—he is more than willing. (Mark 6:13; John 5:5-9; Acts 28:8-9)

Yet, the Lord will not stretch out his hand of healing before his purposes for this dear saint have been accomplished fully. Perhaps this sickness was for a particular reason. Perhaps this saint needed to be laid aside, so that the Lord could speak to him or her. Perhaps this

believer needed to rest his or her weary body. Perhaps this person has brought this affliction upon himself or herself because of some sin in their life. Perhaps there were other reasons why sickness or disease afflicted him. (Cf. Ps. 107:17-22)

Our lives and our times are in God's hands. Not even sickness can come upon us unless it be according to God's sovereign decrees.

James 5:15

The prayer that is offered in faith will result in the healing of the sick person. Once the Lord has accomplished his purposes, he will restore that person to health and strength. If he has been guilty of sin, the Lord will forgive him and will cleanse him from all unrighteousness. In all respects, the Lord will make him whole. Such is the situation for everyone who is sick, and who seeks the prayers of the leaders of the church. (Cf. Matt. 17:19-20)

James 5:16

Let nothing hinder your prayers to God or your fellowship with one another. Confess your sins—or your faults—to each other. Pray earnestly and sincerely for each other. Your prayers on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ will effect your own healing. (Cf. Matt. 18:15)

'The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective,' says James. A righteous man or woman is the man or woman whom God has justified or pronounced righteous. It is the man or woman who seeks to live a righteous life in humility and honour. The prayers of such a person avail much. (Gen. 20:17; see also Exodus 17:11)

Example of Believing Prayer

(Elijah)

James 5:17-18

James 5:17-18

Consider, for instance, the prophet Elijah. Elijah was a man just like us. Although he was God's servant, he was subject to all the same passions and failings as we are. Even so, God used him. Then, when Elijah prayed earnestly that it would not rain, the Lord God answered his prayers. For three-and-a-half years, no rain fell on the land. (1 Kings 17:1; cf. Rev. 11:6)

After this period, Elijah again prayed earnestly to God. In response to his prayers, the Lord opened the heavens sending down an abundance of rain. Consequently, the earth again produced its crops. Such is the nature of effective, fervent and believing prayer. (1 Kings 18:1,41-45)

Restoring the Straying Believer

James 5:19-20

James 5:19-20

(19) My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, (20) remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the er-

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ror of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. (NIV)

If someone should stray into error or false teaching, let others pray fervently for that person. Let them keep on praying that he may see the error of his ways. Let them show him—in love—where he has gone astray. Let them show him what God's Word says. Show him the truth. Show him the correct interpretation. Lead him gently into the right way—the way of righteousness, holiness and truth. (1 Tim. 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:16-18)

If, by the grace of God, someone succeeds in bringing this person back to the truth, he will save that soul from death. He will be restored to the Lord. Those people who were instrumental in bringing about this person's restoration will have covered over a multitude of sins. Whatever sins he may have committed through the error of his ways, these will be forgiven him. Whenever he returns to the Lord in humility, repentance and contrition, he will find him abundantly merciful and full of compassion. (Ezek. 34:16; Gal. 6:1-2; Jude 22-23)

Let us remember, however, that we too could one day stray into error. To prevent this, it is essential that we live daily in the light of God's Word, and that we constantly apply the teachings of God's Word to our lives. It is imperative that we commune daily with God in prayer, and that we meet together regularly with other believers to worship in his name. (Jude 24-25)