



JAMES

A Verse-By-Verse Study

(Originally written one verse per day)

By Pastor Charlie Garrett

Copyright 2026, Emlen S. "Charlie" Garrett. All Rights reserved

SuperiorWord.org

(02/26)

CONTENTS

(Hyperlinked- Clicking the title will take you to that location)

The Book of James; an Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1	6
Chapter 2	60
Chapter 3	117
Chapter 4	152
Chapter 5	189

THE BOOK OF JAMES: AN INTRODUCTION

The book of James is the 59th book of the Bible. It is comprised of 5 chapters containing 108 verses. Therefore, a verse-per-day evaluation of James will take a bit over three months to complete.

James is believed to be the Lord's half-brother, born of Mary and Joseph. As there are four people named James in the New Testament, it is important to determine which one it is. The apostle James, the brother of John, died too early for the letter to have been written by him. His death is recorded in Acts 12. The other two men named James did not have a reputation which would make either a likely candidate for being the author. However, James, the Lord's half-brother, did.

He is mentioned first in Matthew 13:55 in a list of Jesus' other half-brothers. Therefore, he was probably the oldest of them. It is noted in John 7:5 that Jesus' brothers were originally among those who didn't believe in Him. Eventually, that changed, and James became the leader of the early church. He is noted as having been one who witnessed the resurrected Lord in 1 Corinthians 15:7.

Acts 15:12-21 is the passage from which we determine that James was the leader of the early church (not Peter, as suggested by the Roman Catholics). After hearing testimony from the entire group and specifically Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, it was James who made the final decision on the matter being discussed. Thus, it is a logical assumption that he was also the author of this letter.

Further, he was of such renown in the early church that Jude, also the Lord's half-brother, identified himself as a "brother of James." He is mentioned by Paul in Galatians 1:19 and 2:9, and he is mentioned at several other key points in the book of Acts.

As this book was written very early after the establishment of the church, around AD 48, the letter is addressed to Jewish believers. At this point, the number of non-Jewish believers would have been exceptionally small.

Also, as it was Paul's ministry that was directed to the Gentiles, it is no great leap to see that James is specifically writing to a solely Jewish audience. As the first verse of the epistle will note, he is writing to "the twelve tribes scattered abroad."

The Apostle Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 that, "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in

righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” So, in a real sense, the letter is, like all of Scripture, written to the people of the world. However, James is written specifically to the Hebrew people of the twelve tribes.

Due to its placement after Paul’s letters, and then after the book of Hebrews, it is evident, based on an evaluation of the structure of the Bible, that the Lord intends for this epistle, like Hebrews, to be a letter directed to the Hebrew people of the end times as much as it was directed to the early Jewish believers in the Lord. The very structure of the Bible gives us this hint of redemptive history.

The main theme of James is “The Necessity of Living Faith.” James includes works as a demonstration of faith, something which has brought the letter into theological question by many. Paul argues adamantly against works for justification, but James seems (but which is not correct) to argue exactly the opposite.

This is so much the case that the Roman Catholic church – misunderstanding important theological points raised by James 2 – states in Canon 10 of the Council of Trent that –

“If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.”

In other words, they state that man is not justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone, but also by their cooperating works. This will be addressed during the evaluation of this epistle. Martin Luther found little value in the book of James, having stated about it –

“In sum, St. John’s Gospel and his first epistle; St. Paul’s letters, especially the ones to the Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians; and St. Peter’s first epistle are all books that show you Christ, and they all teach which is necessary and salutary for you to know, even if you do not see or hear any other book or teaching. It is for this reason that James’s epistle is in comparison a real strawy epistle, for it has no evangelical character about it.”

In calling it a “real strawy epistle,” he was indicating (based on 1 Corinthians 3:12) that using James’ epistle for one’s doctrines is to use straw to build upon the foundation which is Jesus Christ. Is this true? Or did Martin Luther miss one of the principal points concerning James’ idea of faith and works? That too will be evaluated in this analysis.

In the Old Testament, there are five books known as wisdom literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In the New Testament, no book is considered specifically as wisdom literature, but James is the closest to the style and content of a book of wisdom.

As a short summary of the intent and purpose of the book, we should remember these points:

- 1) *Author*: James, the Lord's brother;
- 2) *Date*: Mid to late 40s;
- 3) *Theme*: The necessity of living faith;
- 4) *Purpose*: To remind the believers that genuine faith is seen in a life that is changed and which is produced by living according to God's wisdom;
- 5) *Presentation of Christ*: Our Wisdom.

Life application: We hope that you will spend the next 108 days of your life learning the book of James, one verse at a time. From there, we hope you will apply its truths to your life, molding yourself more each day into being a faithful and wholehearted follower of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.

Lord God, we are given sixty-six books of marvelous wonder to study in order to know Your heart and what You intend for us as we live out our short lives in Your presence. Help us not to fritter away our time with worthless pursuits, but to study Your word, apply it to our lives, and stand approved in Your eyes as we anticipate the Day when we will come before You for an evaluation of the days we have spent in these lives You have given us. Amen.

CHAPTER 1

**James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.** James 1:1

In his opening words, James (the Lord's brother and the early leader of the church) identifies himself. In Greek, the name is *Iakóbos*, or "Jacob." Somewhere along the line, the name "James" was used instead of Jacob, and that has continued since that time.

The first English translation, that of John Wycliffe in the 1380s, uses "James," and so it is assumed that he is the source of this change. James next states that he is "a bondservant of God."

The Greek word translated as "servant" is *doulos*. This indicates a person who is a slave or bondservant. Thus, he is a slave of God "and of the Lord Jesus Christ." In calling himself a bondservant, or slave, it is a voluntary act of submitting himself to God through Christ.

This does not mean that Jesus Christ is not God. Rather, He is a member of the Godhead, but He is both fully God and fully man. This then is a focus on His dual nature – both human and God.

Rather than proclaim himself "The brother of the Lord," he makes it absolutely clear that he is His servant first. There is no sense of high-handedness or boasting in his greeting, but rather a humble submission to his Lord. Next, he identifies his audience by saying, "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad."

The words fully identify his audience as being the Hebrew people, who are identified as the twelve sons of Israel. Though the epistle is written at a very early date, there were already Gentiles coming into the faith. But James' ministry was specifically to the circumcised, meaning the people of Israel. This is perfectly in line with Paul's words to the Galatians –

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised was to Peter ⁸ (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me

and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” Galatians 2:7-9

The words, “scattered abroad,” are more literally rendered, “in the Diaspora.” This refers to the Jewish people who dwelt outside of the land of Israel and who were dispersed among the Gentiles, usually living in small pockets around an area where a synagogue was built.

The very fact that James addresses the “twelve tribes” shows that there were not only two tribes left. That is a false understanding of the matter. It is claimed that only the tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained after the exile of the ten tribes by the Assyrians in 722BC.

However, that is incorrect. No tribes were missing. The term “twelve tribes” is not merely a technical term to describe Israel in general, but rather it is a designation which means exactly what it says. There were people from all twelve tribes who remained. After the dispersion of 722 BC, various individuals are named in Scripture from tribes other than Benjamin and Judah.

Further, Simeon was located within the territory of Judah and was never considered a lost tribe. Also, there are Levites and priests mentioned several times within the New Testament. One example of an individual from the tribe of Asher (which was one of the exiled tribes) is recorded in Luke 2:36 –

“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity.”

The fact that this woman is mentioned, and that she was from the tribe of Asher, means that not all of Asher was lost. Any number from a tribe means the tribe exists. This is certainly true with all twelve tribes.

The book of Revelation lists the twelve tribes by name, not because it is a symbolic counting of the people, but because He has preserved those tribes for His own sovereign purposes. It is to this group of people, the twelve tribes scattered abroad, that James next says, “Greetings.”

It is a primary verb which signifies “to be cheerful.” When one would meet or part from another, it was common to use the term. Thus, it gives the sense of “be well,” “be glad,”

“Godspeed,” etc. It is the same word used in the letter which was sent by James’ authority in Acts 15.

It thus ties the two together as both being letters from the same individual. Though the word is a common one in the New Testament, it is not used in this manner in any of the other apostolic epistles. James states this now to set the tone for his audience to be comfortable as they transition into the main body of the letter.

Life application: Lots of people, groups of people, denominations, and cults claim that they are the ten lost tribes of Israel. This is an attempt to set themselves apart as somehow special and worthy of note. But it is a very poor handling of Scripture.

It is true that the ten northern tribes were exiled and they were assimilated into the surrounding people wherever they were sent, but it is not true that there are “ten lost tribes” of which some group or another can then make the claim that they are those lost tribes.

If you hear a group claim this, be sure to know that they are wrong. Don’t get involved with nutty theology. Stick to what is right, sound, and proper. God has preserved His people, Israel, and Christ Jesus will return to rule among them at some point in the future.

Heavenly Father, open our eyes to the wonders of Your precious word. Help us to rightly divide it so that we don’t get sidetracked into unnecessary diversions or off onto wild tangents that can only distract us from the intent and purpose of the message. May You alone be glorified through our study and learning of the Bible. Amen!

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, James 1:2

James immediately further defines “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” that he just referred to by saying, “My brethren.”

Though a Jew may consider all Jews in this category, he is certainly referring to Jewish believers in Christ here. It is they who are brethren in the Lord. To them, he says to “count it all joy.”

The words are all inclusive of what will next be described. What he will identify is not to be considered a type of divine rebuke, divine punishment, or divine disfavor. Rather, we are to look at what he will next say as a source of complete joy.

In this, he uses the word *chara*, or “joy,” and thus he makes a word-play on the word of the previous verse translated as “Greetings.” That word was *chairó*. He will next explain what is to be counted “all joy,” which is “when you fall into various trials.”

The word “trials” is correctly rendered. It can be speaking of loss (be it monetary, a loved one, etc), suffering, sickness, frustrating circumstances, etc. Anything that comes one’s way which would otherwise rob his joy is to be considered a joyful thing. This seems counterintuitive, but the coming verses will explain why this attitude is to be expressed.

The words are given to prepare believers in Christ for their walk before God in a right and proper manner.

Life application: As is often the case with the Bible, and particularly the wisdom literature, what seems contradictory to us from a worldly perspective is what the Bible proclaims as that which is right. In our mortal bodies, we look at trials as something to distance ourselves from, hardships as undesirable, and pain as something to be avoided at all costs. However, the Bible puts these things in a different light and asks us to look beyond the immediate sensation to the purpose behind it.

Job, King David, Solomon, and others were tested in these ways and wrote about what happened. By referring to what they learned, we have a sound and reliable foundation upon which we can study and reflect on for our own trials. James received his instruction from these great men through the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, and he builds upon that foundation to help explain the Christian message in its fullness.

This is one of the reasons why it is so important to read your Bible. It has been building up and edifying the faithful believer for millennia and is a guide and a blueprint for the troubles of our lives.

Do you have physical pains? Look at the experience, although painful, with joy. It could be worse than it is. Do you have financial troubles? They could always be worse. Are you facing family problems now? If you endure through them, your relationship may be strengthened at the end.

Whatever trial you are facing, face it with the knowledge that God allowed it into your life for a set time and for a good purpose. In the end, you will see the wisdom of what has occurred.

Lord God – You are sovereign, and Your plans and purposes for our lives will come to pass whether we accept them or not. Because of this, help us to live joyfully in pleasure and in pain, in trial and in ease, in lack or in abundance. May we understand that such trials have been given us to teach us something beyond the moment. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. James 1:3

James began the general content of his letter with the previous verse. This verse finishes the thought. Together, they read –

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

James equates “various trials” with “the testing of your faith.” Understanding this, he states it in such a way that we are to learn a lesson from it. He states it as, “knowing that the testing of your faith.”

There is to be a mental acknowledgment that our trials of various sorts have purpose, and they are not merely random events. We can either take our trials badly, or we can “count it all joy” when they come.

Either way, the choice is ours because when they do come, they must be responded to. By taking the admonition of Scripture, and by counting with all joy that we have fallen into various trials, the result is that this test of the faith “produces patience.”

The verb used is one which signifies, “‘work *down* to the *end-point*,’ i.e. to an exact, definite conclusion” (HELPS Word Studies). In other words, there is a final point, an end goal, which is being worked for (or at least anticipated) when one is tested.

That is to bring forth patience. In this, one matures in his ability to endure other trials which are sure to come along, and they become an example to others of how to properly handle such matters as well. This logical progression of thought is also spoken of by Peter –

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,⁸ whom having not seen

you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,⁹ receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your souls*.” 1 Peter 1:6-9

Life application: When facing trials, the Lord already knows if our faith is genuine, so such a test isn't for Him to learn anything. If it were, what would be the point in salvation through faith? He would be looking for works to validate our faith, thus negating the faith. Further, He knows how much we can take, and He understands our limitations.

As we face more challenges, though, our ability to face those which are more intense will increase as well. Think of faith as a muscle. When we exercise our muscles, they grow and can withstand more and more work. Faith works in a similar fashion. Because of this, the Lord will challenge it to strengthen it.

In the end, your faith will be as strong as He believes is necessary for His sovereign purposes. And then some wonderful day, our faith will become sight. This will happen when Jesus appears to transform our bodies to be like His. That day is coming, but until it does, have faith... and work out your faith to His glory.

Lord, You know the truth of my faith. You know I love You and that I trust in You alone for my salvation. Increase my faith that I can have a long, strong, and stable walk with You. May You be glorified through the ever-increasing faith I display in You. Amen!

But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:4

Remember the progression of thought –

- 1) consider trials as pure joy;
- 2) because these test faith;
- 3) faith develops patience.

In this verse, we see what brings us to a state of fullness and maturity. This is not something which comes immediately, but rather it needs to be developed in us. As James says, “But let patience have *its* perfect work.”

Being patient is a part of the process of being molded into what the Lord knows is right for us to be fully developed. Without it, we may possess faith, but our attitude during trials will inevitably be seen as inappropriate to the situation.

Without patience, the devil will find a place to wear us down and bring about an undesirable outcome. And so we are to not only consider trials as pure joy, but to continue to do so, even if they continue on without any seeming hope of their coming to an end.

In this, the benefit is not only for us individually, but it is the Lord's intent that our patient attitude will become an example for others to see and emulate. This is reflected in the words of David –

“I waited patiently for the Lord;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
² He also brought me up out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.
³ He has put a new song in my mouth—
Praise to our God;
Many will see *it* and fear,
And will trust in the Lord.” Psalm 40:1-3

When we come to this point, we are lacking nothing in our faith. As James next says, we are to let patience work itself out so “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

The word translated as “perfect” is *teleios*. It signifies “full grown” or “of full age.” It is completion in all of its parts. It is what Jesus said in the beatitudes, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” There, the same word is used twice. Once it explains how we are to be, and then it reveals how our Father in heaven is.

We are to develop to such a state that we reflect the same maturity of person that is seen in our heavenly Father. It is a high calling indeed. The importance of patience is also spoken of directly in relation to the trials which were to be set before the disciples. Jesus said this to them –

“By your patience possess your souls.” Luke 21:19

Patience is something that reveals one of the aspects of God. He has patiently endured the troubles man has sent His way from the very beginning of our time on earth. And yet, He has preserved mankind despite our being bent towards wickedness. As God is so very patient, we are called to be so too. This, so that we can be perfect and mature in His presence.

In these verses of James, a training technique known as an *anadiplosis* is used. It is a style of writing, using repetition, where the last word of a clause, sentence, or section is then repeated at the beginning of the next clause, sentence, or section.

In James’ words, patience led to patience; perfect work led to perfect (in person); lacking nothing will lead to lacking wisdom; asking of the giving of God will lead to that being given; asking in faith and not doubting will lead to he who doubts. Pay attention to such literary devices as they will help you more fully understand what the author is revealing as he progresses.

Life application: What trial are you facing right now (or for even an extended period) in your life? Suppose you are facing a major health problem. This is testing your faith as you learn to trust the Lord in an issue that isn’t simply resolved by medicine or professional help.

As your faith in the Lord increases, you learn to persevere through this particular trial. But there is another important point to learn. All of the other matters which once seemed so burdensome no longer carry the same weight in your life.

You learn to discern what is truly of value and that which is trivial in nature. Once you come to trust in and rely on the Lord in this manner, you have become a mature Christian. James says you are not lacking anything.

God is our Creator. When we trust Him completely in every way and in all issues, we come to the final point of our faith relationship. We come to rely on the One whom we should have been relying on all along. He Created us, He is sustaining us even now, and He is aware of all things at all times.

There is nothing that will come our way which is outside of His knowledge or ability to control. It took Job about 40 chapters of the Bible to fully realize that, but when he did, he exclaimed –

“I know that You can do everything,
And that no purpose *of Yours* can be withheld from You.” Job 42:2

As this is so, then why be troubled over difficulties in health, finances, relationships, or any other aspects of which you may have no control? He can handle them, and He will in the way that is best. Have faith in His wisdom.

Lord, despite trials which are difficult, help us to persevere through them that our trust and faith in You will be built up to a perfect state. May we lack nothing in our faith as a testimony to our complete trust in Your splendid hand. In the end, may You receive the glory as we walk by faith in this world of trials and hardships. Amen.

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. James 1:5

There is a missed conjunction in the translation. It should read, “And if any,” or “But if any.” This is a necessary conjunction because it ties the verse in thought to the previous verse. Together, it should read –

“But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. ⁵And (or But), if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

James has just said that through patience having its perfect work, a person will lack nothing. However, lacking wisdom is lacking something. And so he implores his reader, if he is lacking wisdom, to “let him ask of God.”

Before asking God for wisdom, the context needs to be maintained. What is the lack of wisdom which is being spoken of? It is concerning the facing of various trials which test the faith of an individual. The asking of God for wisdom, then, is concerning such a situation.

As Albert Barnes notes, “...to enable them to bear them in a proper manner, for there is nothing in which Christians more feel the need of heavenly wisdom than in regard to the manner in which they should bear trials, and what they should do in the perplexities, and disappointments, and bereavements that come upon them.”

When wisdom is needed in such a situation, and it is then asked for of God, the individual is asking the One “who gives to all liberally and without reproach.”

The structure of the Greek states this in such a way that the act of giving represents an attribute of God. It more literally reads, "Let him ask of the giving God." The intent is, "God the giver." It is a way of defining His very nature.

This is defined further by "to all liberally and without reproach." Because He is the Giver, there is no pretense in His giving. He gives because He is good, and thus there is no mixing in of any evil intent, desire for gain or recognition, or any other such thing. He purely and simply gives in order to bless those who have, by faith, come to Him for the needed wisdom. As this is so, James says, "and it will be given to him."

The giving is tied into the asking. A need for wisdom is not to be anticipated if the need remains unexpressed. Like prayer, (such a request is a type of prayer), no response is to be expected when no request or petition is made. If a person is facing trials and says, "I need to work through this," God is excluded.

The granting of wisdom to rectify the situation is not to be expected, lest the individual be exalted in his own eyes through his own effort. The pattern holds true in salvation, prayer, and asking for wisdom.

One must express his desire in order for it to be acted upon. When it is expressed, God will respond according to His wisdom, and in a manner which is appropriate to the situation.

Life application: James 1:5 is probably the most misquoted verse in the book of James. Almost always, it is cited by itself without the context of the surrounding verses. This is not a blanket granting of wisdom for any and all circumstances.

As seen, it is a granting of wisdom for one who is facing trials. If you are facing trials and need to know how to properly respond to the situation, then you should lay your request before the Lord in anticipation of receiving the wisdom necessary to properly handle (not avoid) the situation.

Another point to keep in mind is that it is through the Bible that we understand God's intent and purposes for our lives. It would be silly to neglect a study of it and then to expect to receive wisdom apart from it when things get difficult. Instead, it would make much more sense that the general answer to the dilemma is recorded somewhere there already.

By praying for wisdom in the matter, we can normally expect that God has previously addressed it and that He will direct us to the place in His word where we can find the answer. As Deuteronomy 4:5, 6 says –

“Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. ⁶Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.’”

The more you study and know your Bible, the more you will be prepared for life’s trials. In the time of those trials, when your head may not be screwed on too tightly, we can ask God for wisdom, and He will direct us to the passage we forgot during the stress of the moment. Then we can apply it to the particular issue which is generally addressed in His word.

Well, Lord, we can see from Your word the importance of studying and knowing what Your word says. If we neglect it, we are neglecting the very source of wisdom You have made openly available to us. What a tragedy if we continue to neglect it. That is to our own hurt. Instead, may we desire to study and know it completely. Assist us in this goal – to Your glory. Amen.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. James 1:6

James just said that those who lack wisdom (speaking of during times of trial) should “ask of God, who gives to all liberally, and without reproach.” He now makes a statement concerning such a request that is a necessary part of it. When asking for this wisdom, the individual is to “ask in faith.”

First, in order to make a request of God, one must believe in God. Thus, the words are to be an act of faith in God. Many people who claim they don’t believe in God will cry out, “Oh God!” when something terrible happens. They may even ask for help at that time – “Oh God, what shall I do?”

In essence, they are asking, “Oh God, give me wisdom.” However, they may simply be reaching out in desperation, not having faith that the God they have always denied will hear and respond.

Secondly, the request must be made properly. If one calls out, “Oh God of Islam, give me wisdom,” he is not calling out in faith to the true God. Because of this, no response should be expected from the true God. It would be contradictory for God to give the worshiper of a false religion a response to their petition.

Thirdly, even when someone believes in the true God, he still needs to have faith that his words to Him will be heard and responded to. God is pleased with the prayers of His people. In the case of asking for wisdom, as noted in James, His word states that He will give it when it is asked of Him. However, the Bible elsewhere says –

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

-Hebrews 11:6

Therefore, in order for the request for wisdom to be effectual, it must be united with faith that God hears and that He will respond positively. This is in accord with the word of the Lord from the gospels. In Matthew 21:21, 22, we read –

“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, “Be removed and be cast into the sea,” it will be done.²² And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.’”

This is not speaking specifically of wisdom, but the principle holds true to what He said to these disciples. A petition to the Lord must be accompanied by faith in order for it to be realized.

James then goes further and says that it should be a request in faith “with no doubting.” This is not speaking of a lack of faith, but rather the word signifies a “back and forth judgment.” In other words, there is to be no vacillating or doubting in the mind.

In this, it reflects a firm conviction of “God has said this will be the case, and I accept that at face value. It will come to pass.” To not have this attitude would necessarily lead to a lack of accepting the wisdom which was afterward provided, and thus a mishandling of it.

To understand this, we can suppose that someone needs wisdom for a particular trial. He has faith that God will provide it, but he vacillates in whether it will meet the need or

maybe come up short, or maybe it will be wrong for the circumstances of the situation, etc.

If God were to give the wisdom needed to handle the trial while the same vacillating attitude existed, the person would still likely say, “I’m not sure that this is what God intended for me to consider in this matter.”

The vacillating in the request has naturally led to a doubting in the reception of the response. Thus, it would be pointless for God to provide His wisdom to the person in such a circumstance. And this is because, as James says, “for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”

The Greek words translated as “driven and tossed by the wind” are unique in Scripture. The first gives the sense of simply being blown by the wind, even the gentle winds. It reflects the person who is easily swayed and has no firm foundation. When the winds blow, he is moved.

The second word means “to fan” or “to make a breeze.” It is a person who gets pushed around by the breezes. One blows north, and he goes north. Another pushes west, and he is pushed west. Thus, he is tossed about without direction. He is all over the place.

The imagery is found several times in Scripture. In the 107th Psalm, the idea is beautifully expressed –

“For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
²⁶ They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths;
Their soul melts because of trouble.
²⁷ They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
And are at their wits’ end.
²⁸ Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He brings them out of their distresses.
²⁹ He calms the storm,
So that its waves are still.” Psalm 107:25-29

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul uses the imagery of someone who is unstable in his doctrine –

“...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”

The effects of bad doctrine are the same as the effects of praying for wisdom while doubting. One is blown and tossed about without direction. It is unproductive, and it is a wasteful use of that which God has provided.

Life application: James has told us to ask God for wisdom, and it will be given. The context of the verse indicates that this wisdom is to help us understand, handle, and endure trials. With this in mind, James says that we need to ask in faith and not doubt.

If you ask for wisdom in a trial and God provides it by showing you how to handle it, then it is up to you to take the step of following the wise path. As an example, but this applies to any situation, think on it from this perspective –

You have a disobedient child and don't know how to handle him or her. You ask God for wisdom in how to handle the situation. You are told there are verses in Proverbs that will help out, and you find this one –

“Foolishness *is* bound up in the heart of a child;
The rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Proverbs 22:15.

You also notice there are several other Proverbs which deal with this subject. Now, you have a couple choices. You can agree with the Bible and discipline your child in a godly manner, you can reject the Bible (which has been a standard of morality in society for thousands of years) and take the advice of someone who disagrees with spanking, or you can try to figure out your own method of restraining your child – which hasn't worked so far!

God has given you the instruction which you asked for – take it. Don't be like a wave which is tossed around by the wind, but stand firm on the Lord's advice. God, who created you and your child, knows what is right and best for you. When you doubt, you demonstrate a lack of faith in His counsel. Take His advice and don't be like a wave tossed by the wind.

Thank You, Lord, that the general issues of life addressed in the Bible can be applied to the specific issues of our lives. You have provided the wisdom; help us to accept it for

what it is – divine guidance meant for our good and for Your glory. Help us not to waiver in our convictions when we receive Your wonderful counsel. Amen.

For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; James 1:7

James now explains what a person who fails to ask for wisdom in faith is like. He had just said for a person to “ask in faith, with no doubting.” For one who doesn’t ask in faith and who does doubt, he says, “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.”

Who would go to a bank, fill out all the paperwork for a loan, and then hand the paperwork to the loan officer unless he thought there was a chance of getting a loan? It would be a waste of time and energy to do so. How much more then should a person have faith in God, who knows all things and who can do all things.

And how much more should he ask without doubting when he is told in advance in God’s word that he will receive the wisdom necessary for the trial at hand! But, as it says in Hebrews 11:6, “But without faith it is impossible to please *Him*.”

Faith is the key to salvation. Christ has done the work, and He offers life to us by grace through faith. Likewise, faith is the key to receiving the wisdom needed for each trial we face.

Life application: This is a chronic problem with us. We receive godly instruction at church through sermons, Bible studies, or personal meetings, and then we fail to believe the wisdom imparted to us.

Have you ever sat next to a family member in church who is going through a problem, and the pastor speaks to that exact problem that very day? He now has the information necessary to make his decision, and yet he doubts what he has heard.

The reason why this is so offensive is that God has created him, He has given him His guidance in an obvious way, and then He simply asks him to have faith that what he has received will be sufficient.

Instead, he goes home with his hands on his face in frustration – “Oh me, how will this all turn out?” This is the one “like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.” There is no anchor in such a life; there is no foundation for that soul.

Instead, he actually expects nothing from the Lord, and he will receive exactly what he expected...nothing. If this is you, don't be overly disheartened. We all face doubts in our lives to varying degrees.

But James says that as our faith grows, we become mature and complete. There is an end to doubt and worry; there is an end to the tempest. It is found in Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is found in the Bible.

This is why a daily study of the Bible is so important. Again and again, Jesus held the "word of God" and the "Scriptures" to the highest level. Why? Because those written prior to His coming point to Him, and those written after His coming explain what His coming means. Look for your firm foundation in its pages – you'll find it under the name "Jesus."

Glorious Heavenly Father, thank You for the wisdom You provide from Your word to meet our various trials and troubles. In the end, Your word speaks of Jesus, and so whether through life or death, if we are in Christ our Lord, we have the ultimate answer to our trials – life eternal because of Him. Thank You for this marvelous assurance. Amen.

...he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:8

In this verse, James describes the man who doubts when asking for wisdom. Such a person is "a double-minded man."

The word translated as double-minded is unique to James, being used here and in verse 4:8. It signifies someone who is undecided about things. He can't make up his mind and thus cannot commit to anything, whether sound or not. In the Old Testament, the heart is used as a metaphor for the mind. Thus, the same type of thought is conveyed in Psalm 12 –

"They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak." Psalm 12:2

In the case of the one James is describing, it is not referring to one who is deceitful, just vacillating and unsure.

Further, James says he is "unstable in all his ways."

The word translated as “unstable” is another word unique to James, being found here and in verse 3:8. It signifies someone who is not constant in his attitudes and actions because he is double-minded. What this is speaking of is a person who is this way by nature, not necessarily in his prayers for wisdom.

Such an attitude defines him. A person with this attitude will be this way in both his requests for wisdom and in his expectation concerning the approval of his requests. It is a pointless mindset which will result in no positive response from the Lord.

Here is why –

- 1) A person asks God for wisdom.
- 2) The very fact that one asks God for wisdom supposes that he believes in God.
- 3) If the One being petitioned is all-knowing, then the wisdom provided will be suitable to the request.
- 4) Therefore, the person who doubts such wisdom and continues to fret over the possible outcomes is double-minded.

In this scenario, the person is demonstrating a complete lack of faith in the Creator. The future is His responsibility. What is given for today is sufficient for today. It is for this reason that worry, in particular, is so damaging to a relationship with God. He asks us to trust that He is going to handle our lives in the appropriate way.

The wisdom He gives us for today will be sufficient for the here and now, but if we doubt it, then how can God find pleasure in us?

Life application: Trust isn't easy to come by – particularly between humans. But trusting is what establishes relationships. God has given us His word and asks us to trust that it is sufficient. When we doubt the promises of the Bible, then there is a rift in our relationship with the One who gave it in the first place.

Think it through, and you will see that all things occur by His providence and for His purposes. We simply need to trust this is so. Don't be double-minded by calling on God and then doubting Him or by worrying about what belongs to Him. Instead, have faith that He is in control.

Lord God, You know our weaknesses when it comes to trusting You. You also know that we can't see the future, which is yet unknown to us. Therefore, help us to direct our hearts, faith, and future to the care of Your hands – without doubt or worry – knowing that You have all things in Your control. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, James 1:9

In the Greek, there is a conjunction which is left out here. It says, “But let the lowly brother..”

The person referred to here is set in contrast to the double-minded person just mentioned. The “lowly brother” isn’t speaking of someone who is humble in spirit, as one might suppose.

Rather, it is referring to a person who is truly poor, in difficult straits, afflicted, etc. It is a literal state of lack which exists in his life. For such a person, James says that he should “glory in his exaltation.”

The idea here is not that he goes from his state of poverty to that of becoming wealthy, but rather that in his poverty, he has been exalted through the gospel. No matter what a person’s state is in this physical world, if he is a saved believer in Jesus Christ, that person can glory in his exaltation. He has acquired the greatest riches of all, which no amount of gold or silver could purchase.

Life application: What James is essentially saying here, and in the coming verse, is in line with literally dozens of verses of the Bible. Someone who lacks humility is there to please himself or to let others know how great he thinks he is.

Such a person can’t be pleasing to the Lord in any way. This is because a person like this thinks he “deserves” heaven. But we all fall short of God’s glory. A person who is humbled in his life’s estate will understand this. Moses was such a person –

“(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)” Numbers 12:3

Moses was exalted because he understood that he was just a mere man – no better than any others, and not deserving of any special consideration. The arrogant and boastful feel they deserve such consideration. The Psalms speak a good deal on humility, but in particular, this verse fits what James is saying quite nicely –

“For the Lord takes pleasure in His people;
He will beautify the humble with salvation.” Psalm 149:4

Only when we realize our own fallen and lowly state will we ever come to the foot of the cross and ask Jesus to save us. As long as we feel we merit God's favor, we will never do this. But by bowing down to Jesus, God crowns us with salvation.

Have you come to the end of your own arrogance and haughtiness? If not, God can't look upon you with favor. Hand over your boastfulness and acknowledge Jesus is your only hope... and He will satisfy your soul.

Lord, may our souls not be haughty or arrogant in Your presence, but rather may we understand our lowly position. You are God; we are the work of Your hands. May we never be presumptuous or boastful about that which You alone have bestowed upon us in our lives. In the end, may You alone be glorified through who we are and what we possess. Amen.

...but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.
James 1:10

Here we have the contrast to what the previous verse stated. Taken together, they read –

“Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,¹⁰ but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.”

Just as the lowly brother should glory in his exalted status in Christ, the rich should glory in his lowly status as a fallen being, redeemed solely by the blood of Christ. Thus, he should walk in humility and understand his lowly state.

His riches had no part in his salvation, and they mean nothing in God's sight. They are a temporary blessing from God, which he is expected to handle properly. His lowly state is then compared to the “flower of the field.”

God made the flower of the field, and it is beautiful, but it is also extremely temporary. This is just like the rich. God endowed him with his state and, like the flower, “he will pass away.” He will die and return to the dust, just as the poor will.

In this verse, James builds on what is said in Isaiah 40 and on what Jesus said in Luke 12–

“The grass withers, the flower fades,
Because the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
Surely the people *are* grass.

⁸The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever.” Isaiah 40:7, 8

“Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ²⁸If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more *will He clothe you, O you of little faith?*” Luke 12:27, 28

Wildflowers are extremely beautiful and come in an almost infinite number of sizes, colors, and shapes. They demonstrate God’s wisdom, gentleness, and love towards us, and yet they are so transitory that they pass away almost as quickly as they arrive. Their beauty lasts but a moment, and then they return to the soil, making compost for the next generation of beauty to rise and be adorned by the morning dew.

And this is what James compares the rich to. They are as lowly and transitory as the wildflower of the field. Just as God created the flower’s richness and beauty, so He granted some to be wealthy in this life. But even their wealth is fleeting, and their lives are a mere breath. Israel’s wealthiest and wisest king, Solomon, understood this precept–

“Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. ¹⁹And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 2:18, 19

Life application: If you are poor, or if you are one of the many who are struggling with finances, remember that God ordained your life for His glory. Your continued faith through your temporary lack will be rewarded with eternal abundance in Christ Jesus.

In the same manner, if you are in Christ, wealthy, and have been triply blessed, remember that your wealth will see an end and your life will fade into eternity – make sure your priorities lie in the eternal and not in the gold and silver you have here and now.

Surely, Lord, the lilies of the field reflect Your glory far more than we do. We fight for more money and more possessions rather than opening our hearts like flowers to praise You. Help us to be as beautiful as even the lowliest wildflower – reflecting Your majesty as we live our lives in Your perfect presence. Amen.

For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. James 1:11

This verse, among more to come, is one reason that the book of James is equated with wisdom literature. The style of stating something and then repeating it in a poetic form is common in the books of wisdom. The previous two verses spoke of the humble being exalted while the wealthy are made lowly. As an example, he provides these words.

He does this by explaining the nature of the “flower of the field” that he referred to there. He said that, like that flower, the rich “will pass away.” To further define what he meant, he says, “For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass.”

The style of the Greek, using the aorist tense, actually presents these words in a narrative form. Young’s Literal Translation shows this –

“for the sun did rise with the burning heat, and did wither the grass, and the flower of it fell, and the grace of its appearance did perish, so also the rich in his way shall fade away!”

It is as if an accomplished fact. The state of the rich man perished when “the sun did rise with the burning heat.” In the Greek, there is an article in front of “burning heat” which sets it apart as a particular heat resulting from the effects of the sun. With the coming of this burning heat, “it did wither the grass” (YLT).

The sun came up, and the grass could not bear up under its intense heat. The heat was strong enough to wither the flower before the sun had set. So it is with the rich man, whose life is as a passing day. In that day, “the flower of it fell” (YLT).

The beauty of the flower in the first morning light, so delightful to the eyes, perished without hope. The effects of the heat were worked out in the death of this intricate and magnificent work of God. Jesus spoke of such things in Matthew 6 –

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; ²⁹ and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, *will He* not much more *clothe* you, O you of little faith?” Matthew 6:28-30

James continues by noting that, with the falling of such a flower, “the grace of its appearance did perish.”

The colors of flowers are magnificent; they vary in size; they may have a certain smell; the number of petals and the shape each of them is unique to each flower, etc. Each is a demonstration of the wisdom of God, and the intricacy of each is beyond finding out. And yet, as quickly as it opens and reveals its glorious appearance, it perishes. And like that temporary flower, with the grace it received from God, “so also the rich in his way shall fade away!” (YLT).

The comparison is intended to open the minds of those who think they are something special. Instead, they should realize that whatever they are is because God so ordained it. The life of the rich man will end, the money he possesses will pass to another, and life will continue on without him.

Life application: The wildflower, though complex and beautiful, is a temporary adornment of God’s earth. In the Mideast, there is a particularly destructive wind which comes out of the east, which is known as the *khamsin*. It is exceptionally hot and dry. When it comes, everything is tested: man, animal, and plant alike.

Even without the *khamsin*, the sun in the Mideast is direct and torturous. When it comes up, only the heartiest plants can endure the day. The wildflowers in particular – being in the direct path of the sun’s rays and the wind’s force – will not stand the extreme weather. Despite being elegant and colorful, they quickly fade away.

In comparison, a rich person is usually bathed in ease and comfort. Should any unusual external pressure or trial be brought on him, he will find it hard – if not impossible – to stand the heat.

On the contrary, the land also has cacti. Despite being largely ignored or shunned, they are hearty and can endure whatever nature inflicts on them. As an interesting comparison, the term for cactus in Hebrew, *sabra*, is applied to a native-born Israelite. Such a person has normally grown up in otherwise humble circumstances and can endure the trials and pressures of the difficult life in Israel much more readily.

Are you a lovely but temporary wildflower, or are you a hearty, although less beautiful, cactus? If you are one of the lowly people of the world, rejoice in your exalted position. Jesus gives us life, which is truly life. In His garden, we will be forever fresh and filled with life!

Lord, as Your people, we may not be beautiful or wealthy by the world's standards, but we know that we are in Your eyes. Keep us safely in Your care, and fill us with Your life-giving water that we can withstand any test from the heat and pressure of life. Amen.

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

James 1:12

James now returns to the subject of verse 2. There it said –

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

Now he says, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation.”

The word used here, and translated as “temptation,” is the same as that used in verse 2, which said “trials.” In verse 2, James told his readers to view trials as an opportunity to grow in patience. Now, he looks to the reward which comes from rightly using that opportunity. In this, he says that he is “blessed” for enduring temptation. From there, he explains what that means, beginning with, “for when he has been approved.”

This is not speaking of the actual time of trial, meaning when it is finished, but of the results of the trial. The individual endures temptation, and he is found to have been faithful through it. In this, “he will receive the crown of life.”

The Greek actually reads, “the crown of the life.” The only other time the term is used is in Revelation 2:10, and it is also used with the article, meaning “the crown of the life.”

These are references to the true life which lies yet ahead and which is promised to those who are found to be in Christ. The tone of James’ words makes it sound like one must endure to the end, stand approved, and then be given the crown based on the deeds of the life during the trials.

In other words, one must personally merit the crown of life. But this is not so. Rather, he continues with the thought that those mentioned will receive the crown of the life “which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.”

The one who loves Christ is the person who has received Him as payment for their sins. They are given the gospel, understand its necessity in their lives to make them right before God, and then accept that.

James' words must be speaking in the broad sense of life's trials, not anything necessary for being made right with God. Some people face very few trials, some face a lifetime of difficulty. To face life, however, is to face trials. There is only one way to get to the end of them, and that is to get through life.

One cannot be approved until the trial is complete. Understanding this, it is what occurs during those trials – meaning receiving Christ – that one will show he “has been approved.” He has loved the Lord and has come to Him for restoration.

Life application: As is often the case with the Bible, and particularly the wisdom literature, what seems contradictory to us from a worldly perspective is what the Bible proclaims as that which is right.

In our mortal bodies, we look at trials as something to distance ourselves from, hardships as undesirable, and pain as something to be avoided at all costs. However, the Bible puts these things in a different light and asks us to look beyond the immediate sensation to the purpose behind it.

Job, King David, Solomon, and others were tested in these ways and wrote about what happened. By referring to what they learned, we have a sound and reliable foundation upon which we can study and reflect on our own trials. James received his instruction from these great men through the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, and he builds upon that foundation to help explain the Christian message in its fullness.

This is one of the reasons why it is so important to read your Bible. It has been building up and edifying the faithful believer for thousands of years, and it is a guide and a blueprint for the troubles of our lives.

James asks us to not only endure trials but to consider them joyfully, even as pure joy. Do you have physical pains? Look at the experience, although painful, with joy. It could be worse than it is. Do you have financial troubles? They could always be worse. Are you facing family problems now? If you endure through them, your relationship may be strengthened at the end.

Whatever trial you are facing, face it with the knowledge that God allowed it into your life for a set time and for a good purpose. In the end, you will see the wisdom of what has occurred.

Lord God – You are sovereign, and Your plans and purposes for our lives will come to pass whether we accept them or not. Because of this, help us to live joyfully in pleasure and in pain, in trial and ease, and in lack or abundance. May we understand that the trials have been given us to teach us something beyond the moment. This we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. James 1:13

James continues on with the matter of temptation, as in a trial which could lead one to fall short of what is right. In such a situation, he says, “Let no one say.”

Nobody has the right to do what he will state in this verse, and so no one should even think about uttering such a thing, thus bringing such a false accusation towards God. The state in which he is referring to is “when he is tempted.”

The word signifies to make proof of something. It can be a test or a temptation, and it is the context which determines which is being referred to. In this case, it is speaking of being tempted. In such a case, the person should not say, “I am tempted by God.”

The idea of being tempted is to allure one away from what is right. The sense of the Greek is “from God,” not “by God.” In other words, it is not speaking of God directly tempting someone, but rather by any type of temptation which could proceed from God. Matthew 4:1 makes this evident –

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

God will not be the active source of temptation. This doesn’t mean that temptation may not come, but it is not within the working of God to actively say, “I will tempt this person into sin.” Rather, the coming verse will show us where the source of that temptation lies. For now, James simply goes on to show that it is impossible for God to tempt someone with the words, “for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.”

Albert Barnes states, “The object seems to be to show that, in regard to the whole matter of temptation, it does not pertain to God.” There is nothing in God that would actively bring such a thing about. As the Creator, He is incapable of being tempted

because all things are from Him and belong to Him; there is nothing by which He can be tempted. He is perfectly complete in Himself.

The fact that temptations exist does not mean that they are a part of His intentions for us. This, however, does not mean that they are not unknown to Him. What is certain is that if the will of God is followed exactly, then being seduced by temptation is excluded; it can be completely overcome.

For example, in the Garden of Eden, there was enough abundance that Adam and Eve could have gone on forever and ever without being tempted. Instead, they were tempted, but it was not by God. If they had stuck to His word, they would still be in Eden and enjoying their lives there today. As noted, how temptation is brought forth will be explained by James in his words to come.

Life application: We can't blame God when we fall into sin – no matter what type of sin or what severity the sin is. Our temptation is not from God. Despite this, God is active in keeping us from greater temptation than we can bear –

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.”

-1 Corinthians 10:13

The source and the objects of our temptation are no greater than any others that people experience. In addition to this, God always provides a way out of our temptation – such as when Joseph was tempted by Potipher's wife. Therefore, if we fail to respond correctly and instead act on our inappropriate desires, we really only have ourselves to blame.

If you are being tempted by something right now, the best thing for you to do is to trust in God, pray for His help, and find the exit which the Bible promises God has already provided. Trust Him and His promises, and never accuse Him of being the One who has stirred up your evil desires.

Lord God, Your word reminds us of our struggles. From it, we know what we should do, but we also know the temptations that we constantly face. Open our eyes to the avenue of exit You have already provided for us when such times arise, and keep us from the sins which will surely result when we act upon our temptations. Strengthen us according to Your great mercy. Amen.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

James 1:14

James has been speaking of enduring temptation, and that anytime someone faces temptation, it cannot be attributed to God. As he said, “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.” Therefore, the question is, “If God isn’t tempting me, then where is the temptation coming from?” The answer is that “each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.”

More correctly, the word translated as “drawn away” is a present participle. It should read, “is being drawn away.” Likewise, the word translated as “enticed” is also a present participle. It should read, “is being enticed.” James is noting the progression of what is occurring in the person.

Here, James uses a word found only in this verse in Scripture, *exelkó*. It means “to draw out of the right place,” and thus to entice. It is a metaphor brought in from those who hunt and fish. Hunters may use a dead animal to lure an animal out of its den, or a fisherman may use a handmade fly or some other bait to lure a fish for the catch. This type of idea is what James now transfers to the tempting of man.

Our own desires are like a lure, enticing us and drawing us away. Once the lure is set, and the bait has been gone after, man is drawn away to his fate. Hence, although the temptation is based on something external, it is an internal force which impels us. Therefore, God – though He is the Creator of all things, and thus the Source of all things – cannot be held responsible for the temptation which arises. Rather, man goes beyond the divinely established parameters and falls into sin on his own.

To see this actively portrayed in Scripture, take time to read the words of Proverbs 7:6-27. There, you will see a poor young soul lured in by the trap, who then finds himself caught in it because he followed the enticement of his appetite instead of following the word of God, which is able to keep him from the sad path he set his feet upon.

It should be noted that the word “desires” comes from the Greek *epithumia*. It is used in both a good and a bad way elsewhere. For example, Jesus said, “With *ferve*nt desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” One can have great desire for a thing and not be sinning. Therefore, it is a matter of the heart which is being considered here. God looks upon the heart and discerns between right desires and those which are sinful.

Paul uses this term in Romans 7 to explain how the source of such desire is stirred into action –

“What shall we say then? *Is* the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.”⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin *was* dead.”

As one can see, the source of the desire is within. The law merely brings it forth. Paul speaks elsewhere of the law written on the heart (Romans 2:15). In this, we see that there are moral laws written within us, and there are laws given which are external to us.

The laws establish parameters which are set, and which then highlight the nature of the desire. Jesus’ desire (mentioned above) was within the parameters of what is allowed. However, when one steps outside of those parameters, the condition of his heart is shown forth as sinful. James will reveal this more clearly in the coming verse.

Life application: Can you remember someone blaming God for his misfortunes? Have you ever done this? It is inappropriate to ascribe evil or evil intent to God. Rather, our life and circumstances result from happenstance (read Ecclesiastes for a better understanding of this), from the devil and his demons, or from our own bad decisions. God intends only good for us, but He allows us to follow the paths of our own making.

In the end, this shows us the great mercy of God. Despite our evil desires leading us astray, God is willing to forgive us in Christ Jesus – if we call out to Him. In addition to this, God is willing to leave us here to continue to make mistakes even after our salvation. This is so that “that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).

Even after coming to Christ, we fail to please God again and again. When we stand in His presence and see His majesty, we will forever sing His praises. First, He saves us, and then He continues to put up with us! Let us attempt at every turn to be pleasing to Him – not gratifying the evil desires of our heart, but standing firm in Him. Rather than being dragged away by sin, let us be ever anchored to the strong and mighty Rock, who is Jesus Christ our Lord!

Lord God! Thank you for enduring us, even when we at times follow our own wayward actions. Yes, even when we are enticed and dragged away by our sins, You will have mercy upon us. But Lord, keep us from willful sin. And when we fail You, we have the surety that Jesus' precious blood covers our misdeeds. What a wonderful God You are for giving us forgiveness through Jesus! Amen.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. James 1:15

James equates the process of sin occurring to the way a person is conceived, born, and grows. In the previous verse, temptation was seen to draw the person away, enticing him (the union). When this occurs, that desire conceives (the state of being pregnant). Eventually, birth is the result, but the birth here is sin. From there, he says, "when it is full-grown." There is a point where sin's effects take hold. At that time, the inevitable state is that it "brings forth death."

James' words are not specifically given as a study on the concept of original sin, but rather he is using these images to show that what occurs does not find its origins in God. As is said in verse 1:13, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone." He is showing how the birth of sin comes about through our own improper desires, and how it is brought forth and matures.

In his words, James places an article before the word "desire." It says, "the desire." It is the particular desire which begins to foment in the person. There can be good desires and there can be bad desires. James is speaking of "the desire" which comes from being tempted, as mentioned in the previous verse. It is this which then continues the process of bringing forth death.

What James is speaking of here is similar to what Paul says in Romans 7:7-11. Paul's words, however, are meant to more specifically reveal the way that sin's effects arise from the giving of law, including the doctrine of original sin. James is showing how sin's effects well up in a person without God being the Source of what occurs. In the end, both speak of sin bringing forth death.

Paul's concept is of spiritual death, a disconnect from God. He refers to death, which is brought forth from the state of sin. James is referring to how sin will lead to death in whatever form it comes about. A person may be enticed to sleep with an adulterous woman. In this, he may be shot by an angry husband.

A person may be enticed to rob a bank. In this, he may be shot by an armed guard. A person may be enticed to get drunk and go carousing. In this, he might get run over, drown in a ditch, fall off a bridge, etc. He refers to death, which is brought forth from the act of sin.

Life application: The state of death because of sin, which Paul speaks of, dwells in us. It, in turn, leads to our being drawn into acts of sin, which bring forth physical death. Paul, like James, goes on to speak of this state in Romans 7:21-25, which he calls “this body of death.” It is a state which all people find themselves in.

Through receiving Christ, we are freed from the state of death (meaning the spiritual disconnect from God). Through living for Christ, we can be freed from the enticements of sin, which lead to harming ourselves (including death). Paul speaks of how to prevail in this struggle in Romans 12 –

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service.
²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:1, 2

Although the term “living sacrifice” seems like an oxymoron, and it very well may be to the unregenerate world, it should be a daily concept for us as we walk in the salvation we received through Jesus Christ our Lord. Our lives have been freed from the penalty of sin. Now we are to have our bodies considered dead to the desire to sin. It can be done through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God indeed! It is through Him that we are free from the sting of sin and death!

Lord, Your word is a mine of treasure for our lives. As we follow it in obedience, we can see how it will change us to be the people You created us to be. And so, give us the wisdom to be living sacrifices to You all of our days. In response to Your majesty, may we cry out always, “How great You are!” Amen.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. James 1:16

There are certain means of conveying an idea which permeate any culture or society. The words here show that this is the case with those at the time of James. The reason

this is so is that the same type of general statement is made by both Paul and John elsewhere. One example of this would be –

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The same pattern follows in 1 Corinthians 15:33, Galatians 6:7, and a similar pattern which is seen in 1 John 3:7. In each of these examples, there is a thought expressed which is understood as a certain truth. After the words, “Do not be deceived,” comes a thought which corrects an opinion or idea which is false.

As you can see from the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, the first statement is that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Then comes the “Do not be deceived.” This is followed by a list of people who will not inherit it. James is doing that now.

James has defined the process of sin and how it comes forth. He will next relay a correction of someone’s idea that God is the source of sin by showing what He is actually like instead. Paying attention to cues such as these will help correct faulty thinking which may exist in one’s mind.

James then closes the verse with, “my beloved brethren.” He is ensuring that his words are taken as they should be. They are given in a spirit of love and fraternity towards those who are in Christ and may simply need a correction of an incorrect impression about such things.

Life application: James’ words, “Do not be deceived,” remind us that when temptation comes it may appear alluring, right, acceptable, or even useful at first. This is no different than the temptation at the fall –

“Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” Genesis 3:4, 5

This temptation – the way it was presented – surely made disobedience seem right, acceptable, and even useful. Certainly it was alluring. However, it was a deception which

led to agony and sorrow for the world's fallen children. This is how Satan works to this day.

Think carefully about the things happening in your own life which seem so very right on a multitude of levels, but which you know deep inside are wrong. The end never justifies the means if it involves disobedience. Your deception will lead you to sadness and pain for yourself or others, and to a loss of fellowship with God.

Because of God's great love for those who are in Christ, forgiveness has already been obtained, but the consequences of the action will follow through regardless. Be wary and do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

Yes Lord, Your divine hand of wisdom is needed in our lives. The deceptions we face are often hard to discern, and temptation is hard to avoid. But grant us a spirit of understanding and give us the ability to choose the obedient exit rather than the door which is open to disobedience. This we pray in the name of Your beloved Son, our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. James 1:17

James has been talking about evil desires and how they produce sin; sin in turn produces death. Now he abruptly changes his angle and speaks of the good and perfect gifts which come down from the Father of the heavenly lights. This is done to contrast the death which we have earned through being enticed to sin. No such thing is to be found in that which comes from Him.

The first words of this verse form a hexameter. Some suppose that because of this, the words are part of an ancient poem. Or it could be that James was purposefully forming them in this way on his own. Either way, he starts this thought with this hexameter, "Every good gift and every perfect gift."

Two different words are both translated as "gift." The first is a verb which indicates the act of giving. The second is a noun which refers to the gift itself. A more literal and understandable translation would be, "Every good giving, and every perfect gift" (YLT).

In this, the contrast is made. Man falls into temptation through his own desires. He is enticed by them, and by them he sins. However, God only gives that which is beneficial and His act of giving is inherently good. And what He gives is perfect, meaning it is

complete in all its parts and it lacks nothing. Such gifts from God are (as James tells us) “from above.”

Though God is omnipresent, He is always considered above. In this, the imagery is that of a Father presenting gifts to His children who eagerly wait for them with outstretched arms. With this idea developed in the mind with the words “from above,” James then confirms it by saying, “and comes down from the Father of lights.”

The verb is a present participle. It reads, “and is coming down.” It speaks of something which is continuously repeated. God habitually provides that which is good and perfect because He is the “Father of lights.” The Greek has a definite article here. It reads, “Father of ‘the’ lights.”

It is speaking of the sun, moon, and stars as heavenly bodies. In the Greek translation of the Psalms and Jeremiah, the term is used when referring to the Lord. He is the Creator of them, and the One who sustains them even now. James then describes the heavenly Father by saying, “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

James had to pull out his science book to make this description, because the terms he uses here are technical in nature. The word translated as “variation” is *parallagé*. It is found only here in Scripture and it signifies a parallax. This is the effect “whereby the position or direction of an object appears to differ when viewed from different positions, e.g. through the viewfinder and the lens of a camera” (Online Dictionary).

The word describes a transmutation of phase or orbit. If you hold your thumb out in front of you and close your left eye first, and then your right eye, the position of your thumb will change slightly. This is a trigonometric parallax, or simply a parallax. The author seems to have chosen this word specifically for his audience to make it completely clear that there is no “shift” or “change” in God – even in the slightest.

A parallax will occur when a reference changes even minutely – such as in the atomic level. But in God there is simply no parallax at all. This is why the description “Father of lights” is chosen. If our field of view changes in the slightest, our view of the stars will change. But with God, who created and sustains the stars, there is no change at all. No matter how we view God, there will never be any change in Him.

This is further described by James with “shadow of turning.” As lights move, shadows will move in accord with the source of light. As heavenly bodies move, there will be eclipses of other bodies. However, there is no such change in, or obscuring of, the glory

of God. His radiance is not in any way affected by the creation. Rather, His glory transcends the creation because He is omnipresent.

This unchangeable nature of God is confirmed by several other verses of the Bible, such as Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8. This is also confirmed by philosophic considerations about God. As He created time, space, and matter, He is outside of those things. They have no bearing on Him. Therefore, He must be One (monotheism), and He must be unchanging.

Life application: If you sometimes have doubts or questions about your faith in the Christian God, don't! The Bible absolutely confirms God's nature; a nature we can determine from reason alone. You are on exactly the right path when you call on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – He is the image of the invisible God and our only path of restoration to our infinite, unchanging, and glorious Creator.

Lord God Almighty, You who alone are unchanging and beyond our ability to comprehend – thank You for every good and perfect gift in our lives. Thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ also. He who came to reveal You to us. May we never forget that He is the greatest expression of Your unfailing love for the fallen sons of Adam. In His name we pray. Amen.

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. James 1:18

James now speaks of the faith of the believer and how it comes about. The words here are to be contrasted to those of verse 15 –

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (15)

James had spoken of the bringing forth of death through one's own desires. Now he speaks of being brought forth (to life), as he says, "Of His own will." In other words, the contrast is between what man wills, with its resulting negative effects, and of what God wills, with its resulting positive effects.

An obvious question, and one which divides scholars, is "What does, 'Of His own will,' signify?" Does James mean that God's will is being worked out apart from man's will, or does it speak of God's will being followed by man in order to work out His determined end?

The first is known as monergism. Monergism comes from two words which signify “one work.” It signifies that God’s will is solely seen in the process of salvation – apart from man’s will. The second is known as synergism. This speaks of a cooperation of two or more agents to produce a combined effect. To determine which is correct, more needs to be considered.

James next says that it is of God’s own will that “He brought us forth.” The word used is the same as in verse 15. This now is its second and final use in Scripture. It is a medical or physical word which signifies the closing of a pregnancy. Thus it is to bring forth as a child.

In the course of nature, a child has no part in his bringing forth. If this were merely speaking of a physical birth, the answer to the question concerning man’s will would be clear. But James doesn’t stop there. He next says that this bringing forth is “by the word of truth.” To understand what James is referring to, a comparison to the same thought in 1 Peter is necessary –

“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,²³ having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,²⁴ because

“All flesh *is* as grass,

And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.

The grass withers,

And its flower falls away,

²⁵ But the word of the Lord endures forever.”

Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:22-25

Peter explains that “the word of truth” is speaking of the word of God, meaning Scripture, and specifically “the gospel.” Albert Barnes rightly states –

“With the word of truth - By the instrumentality of truth. It was not a mere creative act, but it was by truth as the seed or germ. There is no effect produced in our minds in regeneration which the truth is not fitted to produce, and the agency of God in the case is to secure its fair and full influence on the soul.”

James is showing the difference between choosing the natural inclination of man through desires and enticements and choosing that which God offers through the word

of truth. It is obvious, based on the presentation by James, that what is being spoken of here is a synergistic model.

God's will (Of His own will) is revealed in Scripture. However, that will can be accepted or rejected. If it is accepted, it brings forth the new being through the act of regeneration. The will receives the word and believes it and the Holy Spirit regenerates the man. James then says there is a purpose for this. It is so "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."

Another obvious question arises with these words, "Who is 'we' referring to?" James' words could be speaking of the Christians of the apostolic age only. He could be referring to all Christians at all times too. Or he could be referring to the believing Jews of his day.

First, the letter is written (as it says in verse 1:1) "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Secondly, the apostles had no idea what an "apostolic age" meant. They didn't know if Jesus was coming back before their deaths or not. The answer is that James is referring to the Jewish believers of his time as "a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."

It was understood, even at an early age, that Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ. This understanding led James to equate the Jews as "a kind" of firstfruits. It was already understood that Christ is "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." That is speaking of the resurrection of Christ. As Christ arose, so will those who are in Christ.

However, there were also firstfruit offerings brought forth at the time of Pentecost. The firstfruits indicate a portion of a whole which is taken and offered as representative of a greater portion.

These early Jewish believers were considered as the consecrated portion and the first of the Lord's brought-forth creatures. This is why he says, "a kind of firstfruits." It shows that he is speaking in figurative terms. The addressed portion is given to represent the whole.

Life application: James speaks here of being born again as is stated in John 3:3-6. Jesus didn't make it optional; you must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God. This doesn't mean rolling around on the floor or speaking in odd tongues. Rather, it means being born from above; from a divine source.

Hyper-dispensationalists say that the term “born again” only applies to Jews. Reformed theologians say that a person is “born again” first by the Spirit. In this, he is then enabled to believe. He then believes, and then he is saved. In other words, they separate the idea of being born again from being saved.

Both of these ideas are foreign to Scripture, and they both come from taking the words of Scripture completely out of context. It is sad too, because if someone says, “I’m a Christian, but not ‘born again,’” then he isn’t a Christian. The two are inseparable. Or, if a person believes that he is “regenerated in order to believe,” meaning born again first, then how can he know that he is really saved? Maybe his experience came from being light-headed because of not enough water to drink on a hot day.

Rather, we are given birth through the “word of truth.” Jesus is the Word of God and He is revealed in the word of God, meaning Scripture. It is through faith in Him alone that we receive this new birth. We are presented with the information, and then we have a choice to make.

This does not mean that God is denied glory. Salvation is wholly of the Lord. There is no deed of the flesh that merits it; no goodness good enough to satisfy the debt we owe. Instead, the transfer is made in Jesus Christ. We accept His cross and He gives us His righteousness. He did the work; we believe and receive.

The problem with monergism is that it fails to make a distinction between the work necessary for salvation, and the process of salvation. All work is accomplished by Jesus Christ. There is no “thing” that we can do to merit salvation.

However, the process of salvation says that man must believe in the work of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. Belief is not a work. James shows us this in his words of Chapter 1 of his epistle.

In the end, the process of salvation is so simple that many fail to understand it. Paul calls it a “stumbling block” because of its simplicity. Don’t trip over it yourself, but rather accept by faith what Jesus has done. Be certain of your eternal destiny; call on Jesus Christ today!

Thank You, O God, for Your sure word of truth that points us to the wonders Jesus has accomplished on our behalf. May we never take for granted the splendor of His work. Help us to be wise, understand what He did for us, and then receive that good news to

the saving of our souls. And then, help us to keep our eyes and our thoughts fixed on Him – to Your glory alone. Amen.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; James 1:19

James now enters into a section of exhortation by saying, “So then.” With a very small change in the first word, some manuscripts say, “Know this.” Thus, it would be stated as an imperative. Either way, the intent is that the reader is to call to mind the words of exhortation to follow.

James then repeats his words of verse 16, “my beloved brethren.” Again, as there, he wants to ensure that his words are taken as they should be. They are given in a spirit of love and fraternity towards those who are in Christ. They are intended to spur them on to right thinking and right living.

With that understood, he then says, “let every man be swift to hear.” The old saying that, “you were given two ears but only one mouth for a reason,” applies here. We are to listen to God through His word. We are to listen to others, assimilating what they have to say. We are to even listen to our own thoughts, thinking them over rather than pouncing upon the first thing that comes to our mind.

With that in mind, and as the baseline for what he will next say, James then continues with, “slow to speak.” One should listen first, contemplate what has been said, and only then engage the mouth. Anything less than that will cause a person to put forth words which were hasty and not well thought out. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes –

“Do not be rash with your mouth,
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;
Therefore let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 5:2

Job was so fed up with the hasty and not well-considered words of his friends that he cried out to them –

“Oh, that you would be silent,
And it would be your wisdom!” Job 13:5

In shutting their mouths, they would prove their wisdom above the babble that they had been spewing forth.

James then finishes with, “slow to wrath.” This could be considered a general guide for the conduct of life, but the intent here is more specific. James is speaking about listening and speaking.

Therefore, this is referring to wrath connected with discerning a matter, not specifically being an angry person in general. We are being exhorted to listen to a matter, speak only when we have thought it through, and then to not get angry as we discuss it. He will further define this in the second half of the sentence.

Life application: As has already been noted, James is the closest to a book of wisdom in the New Testament. This is because he uses ideas which permeate the wisdom literature and which are meant for general life guides as well as specific Christian life. In this verse, he mentions three particular ways of conduct:

- 1) Be quick to listen –
“He who answers a matter before he hears *it*,
It is folly and shame to him.” Proverbs 18:13

- 2) Be slow to speak –
“A fool’s mouth *is* his destruction,
And his lips *are* the snare of his soul.” Proverbs 18:7

- 3) Be slow to become angry –
“Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,
For anger rests in the bosom of fools.” Ecclesiastes 7:9

As you can see, each of these concepts has already been addressed in the Old Testament books of wisdom. Not only is this so, but each idea is brought up several times there. In order to properly understand God’s plan and purpose for our lives in its fullness, it really is necessary to dig into the entire Bible.

If you find reading certain areas of the Bible difficult, then join studies with others who might have less trouble with those particular areas. Also, make sure the church you attend is willing to speak on any subject or book of the Bible. By doing so, you will be a much more rounded believer and also able to handle the trials which arise in life’s walk.

What a wonderfully intricate treasure Your word is, O Lord! Thank You for the wise guidance and counsel You have provided in it. Help us to learn the lessons which it teaches and then apply them to our lives. Help us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. This we pray in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. James 1:20

James had just said that believers should be “slow to wrath.” He now explains this beginning with, “for the wrath of man.” In the Bible, the idea of wrath is found numerous times; quite often wrath is ascribed to God. His anger is said to rise, and it is then worked out in His correction of what brought about the wrath. But the wrath of God is a result of His just, righteous, and holy character.

There is nothing arbitrary or vindictive about it. In fact, in understanding the nature of God, we see that God doesn’t change. He doesn’t “get” angry in the way we think. Rather, it is man who changes in relation to Him, and that results in His corrective action.

However, man is not like God. He goes from one state to another. And such a change in man is often fraught with problems. Man can get angry over a lack of food, too much constant noise, by being needled by another, etc. At times, he can go from holding back his anger to a sudden outpouring of it without having given any clue that he was angry in the first place. His wrath can also be vindictive and arbitrary. In such demonstrations of emotion, James says that this wrath “does not produce the righteousness of God.”

When God’s wrath is displayed, it is because His law is violated. It is given to correct this. When man’s wrath is displayed, it will often cause a violation of God’s law. Thus, the exact opposite result is seen at times in man in comparison to that of God. In man’s wrath, God’s righteousness is not produced.

Instead, it is further violated. What is being spoken of here is not an increase in God’s righteousness, as if God can be affected by our actions, but rather it is speaking of a decrease of His righteous character in the one who displays wrath. God remains unchanged through the process.

For this reason, man needs to be “slow to wrath.” We are to display wrath only in a controlled way, and only when it will cause us to reflect God’s righteous character.

Life application: Generally, people who fail to listen and are quick to speak are also the type to burst into anger more readily. That may be because they want to control the situation with their words and when they can't, the next step is to blow up in anger.

But James says (and which is painfully obvious to those around such a person) that this doesn't bring about a righteous life. In fact, it normally demonstrates just the opposite.

When two people are debating an issue, the one who is calm and even normally (but not always) has the proper view on the matter. The one who is excited and verbally abusive normally doesn't have a leg to stand on and therefore he can only defend his position in this way. The language and actions belie any sense of righteousness or godly character.

To see this type of discourse close up, just turn on the news and watch two people debate a political issue – one will be from the left and one from the right. When one of them starts fidgeting, elevating his voice, making unwarranted accusations, and even becoming angry, that person is most likely attempting to defend an indefensible position and is also not living out a righteous life (at least at the moment) which God desires.

By watching people behave this way, we can learn what not to do – but be careful you don't get yourself sucked into the conversation and start yelling at your TV! When you engage in conversation, listen a lot, speak a little, and avoid ungodly anger. By doing so, you will demonstrate wisdom in your interactions.

Lord, You know what pushes our buttons and also those things which cause us to lose our cool. Give us wisdom when we speak so that we might not sin against You with our mouths. Help us to have salt in our speech and a gentle attitude towards those we may not agree with. This we pray so that You will be glorified, and that we will have peace in our conversations. Amen.

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21

James now says, "Therefore." That is given based on what he has been saying over the past verses concerning the temptation we face being something which comes from our own desires, not from God. As this is so, he implores the reader to "lay aside all filthiness."

Here is a word found nowhere else in the Bible, *rhuparia*. It properly means, "dirt." It is the dirt or filth that clings to a person. Thus, it is equated with moral filth that stains the

soul of a person. Peter uses a cognate noun, *rhupos*, in 1 Peter 3:21 which carries much the same sense. It is a grease-filth which soils everything it touches. James implores the reader, like Peter, to put away all such moral uncleanness.

Next, he adds in “and overflow of wickedness.” The idea of “overflow” here is that which exceeds normal expectations. There is wickedness in the heart which can be controlled, but there is wickedness which overflows from a man and which seems to exude from him in all he does. Again, James says that this needs to be laid aside so that only purity and that which is morally correct issues forth.

He then gives a positive exhortation by saying, “and receive with meekness the implanted word.” Again, James uses a word unique to Scripture, *emphutos*, or “implanted.” It signifies that which is inborn, congenital, and natural. This is not the same as the idea of grafting which Paul speaks of in Romans 11, and which some translations use here. That is a different concept where something unnatural is brought into a source of life. This signifies that which is rooted.

The gospel is that which is planted in a person, and it is the source of that “which is able to save your souls.” When the gospel is planted, it is what establishes the person as being “in Christ.” It is what makes it possible to do the other things James has stated in this verse. Paul referred to the power of the gospel in this same way in Romans 1 –

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:16, 17

The planting of the gospel, which then takes root and grows within man, is that which has the ability to save. And more, it is that which has the power to transform the one who is saved. James understood this, and his words are given so that his reader can as well.

Life application: James’ words were written over two thousand years ago. Immorality is nothing new. However, due to TV, the internet, etc. it has become a part of almost every living room in the world. We now no longer look with contempt upon someone who uses the name of God (or Jesus Christ – who is God) on a television show or a movie. Instead of walking out and refusing to watch that actor again, we ignore what we heard and continue on watching.

Further, the Bible clearly portrays homosexuality as moral perversion, and yet we condone it by watching such people on talk shows, reality shows, etc. without even batting an eyelid. But what we should do is turn that person off and refuse to give our attention to someone who so openly opposes the truth of what God says about such things.

Our lives are to be lived in holiness, not drunkenness; our speech should be seasoned with grace, not obscenities; our close friendships should reflect our character – never shunning the lost, but never condoning what is biblically inappropriate.

As Christians, we all must face the judgment seat of Christ. How will your judgment go? Will it be one of sadness and loss or one of expectation of joy and reward? The lost will face their own judgment and condemnation unless they come to Christ. But we cannot lead them to Christ if we are living like them and not drawing a line between what is acceptable and what isn't.

Keep the word close to you, learn it, live it, and understand that moral filth and evil will be judged for what it is.

Lord, certainly we fail You often in how we relate to the moral perversion which permeates our society. We let You down by not standing against those things which Your word forbids. May we be angry at sin and stand against it lest our morals grow cold and You be disappointed in the conduct of our lives. Help us to be vessels which are holy and set apart for Your good purposes. To Your glory alone. Amen.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1:22

James has just spoken of “the implanted word.” It is this, as he said, “which is able to save your souls.” He now builds upon that thought. It is the word which brings one to an understanding of the gospel (Paul says this in Romans 10:17 with the words, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”). Now James continues by saying, “But be doers of the word.”

In this, he is stating that believers don't simply hear the word and become holy. Rather, they are to act upon it. Again, it is the same thing that Paul said in Romans 12:12, 13 –

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³ (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.”)

In Romans, as here in James, there is the thought of applying the word to one's life, doing what it says. We are not to be "hearers only." The word translated as "hearer" is found only there in Romans 2 and three times here in James 1. This is James' first use of it, but he will repeat it in verses 23 and 25.

This is a clear indication that Paul and James are on the same page despite having seeming differences in their messages. These seeming differences are fine points which will be considered one at a time as they arise. Next, James says that when you are hearers only, you are "deceiving yourselves."

James makes a pun in the Greek which is not seen in our English translations. He uses the word *paralogizomai*. It comes from two words, *para*, meaning something which is contrary when it is compared side by side, and *logizomi*, meaning "to reason." That second word comes from the same noun as that which is translated as "word" in the first clause, *logos*.

His pun can be seen if we show his thought in an English paraphrase –

But be doers of the word.

And not hearers only, thus contrary-to-the-wording yourselves.

The word is what gives wisdom, but the word is also to be acted upon. In not acting upon the word, one fails to make use of the wisdom which the word provides. Thus, we are to 1) know the word (which can only come about through reading and studying the word), and 2) apply that same word to our lives, demonstrating that we have obtained the wisdom of the word, and are willing to act upon it.

Life application: James was written at a time when people would have heard the word spoken, but there weren't many copies of Scripture for personal use. So, when you read your Bible or daily devotional, keep this verse in mind as it applies as well. However, we will stick with the example given – listening to the word.

When you go to church, the pastor speaks on a given subject that he has studied and which is meant for you to listen to and then apply to your life. Many pastors add in real-life examples as they speak about the particular passage being analyzed.

At times, you may have thought, "This applies to exactly my situation today." Or, you may know someone in the congregation who really needed to hear a particular sermon because it applies to a situation in his life right at that time. However, he might walk out

of church having heard the word spoken directly to him, and yet he will continue down the same unhealthy path that he was on before going to church.

Surprisingly enough, you may even hear the guy who listens even comment on what a great sermon it was. It is as if the message went in one ear and out the other, having no effect at all on his life. James is asking us to not allow this to happen. When you hear the word which specifically applies to you, it is because the Lord is trying to wake you up! Don't merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Instead, do what it says!

Pay attention to your devotional each morning as it may be speaking to you, and pay attention to your morning Bible reading as it is certainly speaking to you. God sends His word out for your benefit. Pay attention to His word!

Lord God, we surely thank You for the times You prompt us to action through Your word – spoken or read. Give us wisdom and discerning hearts to apply the instructions we receive to our lives. Let us not simply deceive ourselves by hearing only, but let there be positive growth in us. All this is to Your glory alone. Amen.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; James 1:23

James just spoke of those who are “hearers only” and not “doers of the word.” He notes that such people only deceive themselves. Now he begins to explain that by saying, “For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer.”

The words speak of the person who hears the word read (or today, someone who has his own Bible and picks it up and reads it), but who then fails to apply what he has read. One might think of a person who gets something in the mail which requires assembly. He opens the box, reads the instruction, but then decides that his way is better. Or maybe he simply reads the instructions without actually mentally cataloging what he has read.

He will not do the things he has just read. The resulting damage will be irreparable. James says of a person who treats the word of God this way, hearing and not doing, that “he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror.”

The Greek actually reads, “this one is like a man.” He is being made an object lesson for all others by singling him out in a definite way. There is a peculiarity about him which

needs to be highlighted. James says he is like one who is “observing his natural face in a mirror.”

The Greek literally reads, “observing the face of his birth in a mirror.” The word is *genesis*, and it signifies his birth, lineage, or descent. It is the face he was born with and which carries the state he was in, even since birth. The idea here is that he is a man, a son of Adam. He is fallen and bears all of the nature of a fallen man.

What will this man do about that state? He sees it, but will he take action concerning his natural state? James will continue to explain what such a person is like in the coming verse.

Life application: The Bible teaches many points of doctrine. One of them is that of “original sin.” This teaches that the sin of Adam is transferred to all of humanity. Further, it teaches that original sin extends to all humanity at the moment of their conception. Humans are conceived in sin, are born as fallen beings, and – without God’s corrective measure – will die in that state. In this, they will be eternally separated from God.

There is nothing man can do to be reconciled to God because the defect already exists. The cure for it is only found in Jesus. He came to replace Adam as humanity’s new head. Without Jesus, man’s sin remains. But in coming to Jesus, the sin-debt is paid, life is granted, and sin is no longer imputed to man. Thus, he is free from any future condemnation. Jesus Christ is the answer. Come to Christ and be cured of the inherited-sin defect.

Lord God, thank You for Jesus who alone can take away our sin. As only He can do this, may we demonstrate wisdom and receive the pardon that He purchased through His shed blood. Yes, give us this wisdom to receive and then to share, O God. Amen.

...for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. James 1:24

The verse is part of a single thought which comprises the previous verse and this one –

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”

James says that this person is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror. The Greek gives a sudden, lively sense to what is said. The man “observes himself.” It is an aorist verb indicating a fleeting act – he observed himself. He next “goes away.”

It more literally reads, “and has gone away.” The perfect tense indicates a completed action but it continues into the present. From there it says, “and immediately forgets.” There is no remembrance at all of what he saw. He did see himself, but he neglected to consider what he saw, which is “what kind of man he was.” Young’s Literal Translation gives the sense of the Greek –

“for he did view himself, and hath gone away, and immediately he did forget of what kind he was.”

The repetition of the word “and” reveals the sudden and swift nature of what occurred, and it brings out an ironic element. The person saw the face of his birth, meaning the carnal man, and yet it left no impression on him.

What is being compared here is this man to the hearer of the word who fails to act upon what he hears. In other words, he can be equated to the person in the pew who hears the words of the preacher, sees himself reflected in what was said, and who then fails to act upon the words which clearly pointed to his own natural, fallen state. There is no change in him except that he is a moment older in time.

Life application: When a person gets up in the morning, looks at the shabby face in the mirror – unshaven, stuff in his eyes, hair all messy, etc – and then walks away not caring about his appearance, he shows that his natural, unkempt, and (to others) offensive looks mean nothing. The Bible is like a mirror to us. It gives us common sense life lessons and warnings that are meant to guide us. Take this proverb as an example –

“A soft answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1

Someone who reads this verse, contemplates it, and then lives by it will certainly benefit from the counsel. No matter how correct your argument is, if you present it harshly, you will only stir up anger and chase people away from your view. If you are the type who has trouble dealing calmly with others, applying this proverb to your life can only benefit you.

However, by rejecting its words, you are just like the disheveled person mentioned above. You should know your appearance will offend others, but instead of shaving your whiskers, combing your hair, and washing your face, you go out as you are and no one wants to be near you. Then you wonder why you're such a lonely guy.

Look into the Bible, absorb it, and then apply it to your life. Don't be the person James uses for this negative example. Instead, be the person whom the Lord exalts because of his faithful application of sound biblical advice. In the end, you will benefit more than you can possibly imagine.

Heavenly Father, may we be wise when listening to sermons, reading Your word, or contemplating daily devotionals. Help us to apply these valuable insights to our own lives, rather than walking away and forgetting what we have heard or read. In the end, we will certainly be the ones to suffer if we don't. So prompt us to be responsible and faithful followers of You and Your word. Amen.

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:25

James now contrasts the individual of verses 23 and 24 by describing the person who not only hears, but also does. To describe him, he begins with, "But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty."

The word translated as "looks" is one which signifies, to stoop and peer into. It was used three times in Luke and John, each concerning someone stooping and looking into the tomb where Christ had been laid. For example, in John it says –

"And he, **stooping down** and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying *there*; yet he did not go in." John 20:5

Again, a few verses later, it says –

"But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she **stooped down and looked** into the tomb." John 20:11

Being an aorist verb, it signifies one who "has looked into" the matter. It is done and yet it actively continues even after having looked (as will be noted). In the use of the particular verb, one gets the sense of peering into. The person doesn't just "hear" and

forget. He hears, and then in his mind he stoops over and peers intently into what he has heard. It is as if there is a well of life which can be mentally seen and accessed. This marvelous access is then described as being from “the perfect law of liberty.”

The previous verse spoke of the man who observes the “face of his birth,” meaning his carnal self which is the Adam in him. That person saw this and then failed to act on what he saw. This person looks into God’s perfect law and he finds the cure for his fallen nature in “the perfect law of liberty.”

Liberty defines the perfect law. It is what is obtained from it. And so, it is a law which is completely different than the bondage of sin leading to death which is found in Adam. It is the law which looks to Christ and it is a law of life leading to freedom. In peering into it, the glory of God revealed in His plan of the redemption of man is found. And this is because the person not only stoops down to look into it, but he “continues in it.”

The word translated as “continues” is a compound word which gives the sense of remaining close beside. He has stooped and peered. He then continues at that spot, peering into the perfect law of liberty, receiving its wellspring of instruction, and being renewed in his mind and soul. Such a person is then described by James as being “not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work.”

In the Greek, the word “hearer” is a noun, not a verb. And, there is no article in front of the word “work.” The words are more rightly translated as “not a hearer of forgetfulness, but a doer of work” (Ellicott). The contrast is obvious. One hears but is a person of forgetfulness. He walks away from what he has heard and there is no change in him. The other is a doer. He hears, and when he does, he becomes a doer of what he heard, changing his life from the image of Adam to that of Christ.

Finally, James says, “this one will be blessed in what he does.” In this, the Greek more literally reads, “this one will be blessed in his deed.” The peering into the perfect law of liberty, and the continuance of that, is considered a single deed because it is an ongoing act which leads to life. In this act, the soul is blessed.

Life application: Remember the guy who looked at his grubby face in the mirror and walked away not caring? He is the person who hears the word of God and doesn’t care enough to apply it to his life. James contrasts him with someone who has true wisdom. This person looks intently into the Bible; he listens closely to the Sunday sermon; he checks what he’s been told, and then he applies it to his life. As Solomon said –

“The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd.” Ecclesiastes 12:11

Goads are pointed sticks used to prod a cow along. The Bible should be like that to us. It should prod us in the right direction and toward our goal. When we look into the perfect law and then follow what we have read, it gives us a freedom we previously lacked.

The Bible isn't merely a rule book of things not to do; it is a guide for our souls. Not only should we follow its precepts, but we should continue to follow them daily as we continue on life's highway. By doing so, we will certainly be blessed in all we do.

This doesn't mean we will be free from troubles and trials, but unlike those whose trials never find a happy resolution, ours will. The Lord will restore all that is lost, heal all that is torn, and raise all who have died in Him.

How precious are Your words to our taste, O God. They are sweeter than honey to our mouths! Help us to learn them and then to apply them to our lives. And Lord, help us to continue in them all our days so that we will grow to maturity in You. We love You and praise You, our exalted King! Amen.

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. James 1:26

Here James moves from the person who hears the word but doesn't do it, to the person who deceives himself in his religiosity. He first says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious.”

James is speaking in general terms to all by saying “among you.” However, he is identifying individuals in that group. If there is anyone among his addressees (which, by default, includes anyone today as his letter is a part of God's word) who “thinks he is religious,” he is to pay heed.

The word James uses for “religious,” *thréskos*, is found only here in the Bible, and nowhere else in any Greek writings. Its origin is uncertain, but it has a kindred noun which occurs in Acts, Colossians, and James, and which deals with reverence or worship of the gods. Its meaning is probably that of a careful observance of the restrictions laid out in practicing one's religion. Do you feel this describes you? If so, pay attention to what James says.

Going on in his words, he says, “and does not bridle his tongue.” The word “bridle,” is introduced into the Bible here, and it is used only once in Scripture, again by James. It means to curb or restrain. Proper exercise of religion is an act of bringing the entire body into submission.

A person who submits to God in one way, but throws off His guidance in another has not fully restrained himself. Think of a horse being restrained and coming to a halt, but its tongue flies out of his mouth and keeps on neighing down the road. This is what James is referring to. Instead of restraining his tongue, he instead “deceives his own heart.”

When a person acts piously and does everything with a great show, he naturally thinks he is in tight with God. However, if his little tongue, which is still a part of his body, isn't restrained, then he has proven that he has simply deceived himself. Those around him can tell that he is not what he appears to be. And so, from there James says, “this one's religion *is* useless.”

The word translated as “useless” signifies vain or worthless. In his attempts to be religious he has failed in what he purposed. There is a defect in his conduct which demonstrates, with all clarity, that he is not the man he appears to be from a distance. The tongue has revealed what the heart is actually like. This is spoken of by Jesus on several occasions, such as in this parable –

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by *its* fruit. ³⁴ Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. ³⁵ A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. ³⁶ But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. ³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:33-37

Life application: We should be able to understand, quite clearly, that our words reflect our character. If we can't keep a rein on our tongues, then no one, including the Lord, will see us as anything other than irreligious.

Such is the case in almost every instance of someone who speaks too much. Eventually, he runs out of truths to tell and so he will keep on speaking with falsehoods. His words are meaningless because they have no truth or substance behind them. Solomon gives the cure –

“Do not be rash with your mouth,
And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
For God *is* in heaven, and you on earth;
Therefore let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 5:2

“For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there is* also vanity. But fear
God.” Ecclesiastes 5:7

Instead of dreaming about being religious, act and speak as one who really is. Have control over your tongue and stand in awe of God. When you speak, let your words reflect both love and respect for Him and for others. By doing so, they will also reflect what is actually going on in your own heart.

Lord Jesus, how often we fail to keep our tongues in check. As Your servants, give us wisdom when we speak and let our words be carefully selected to be truthful, uplifting, and above all – glorifying of You. Help us to be the type that people can come to when they want to hear only words of truth. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world. James 1:27

James spoke of the useless religion of a person in the previous verse. It belongs to someone who “does not bridle his tongue.” Now, he uses the same word to describe religion which is “[p]ure and undefiled.”

The Greek word translated as pure signifies that which is without admixture. There is no contamination in it. The word translated as undefiled signifies that which is unstained. There are no blotches upon it.

Understanding this, he goes on to show how one can identify such pure and undefiled religion “before God and the Father.” The Greek actually reads with the article before “God.” And so it says either “our God and Father,” or “the God and Father.” The article unites the two together. Separating them as is done in the NKJV translation is an unfortunate error which could lead to faulty theology.

With this correction, what James will next describe is that which is deemed as acceptable religion to the God and Father. Before stating it, he says that what is acceptable “is this.” The words do not mean that this is all that is acceptable, but that he

is giving an example of what is acceptable, just as he gave what was unacceptable in the previous verse.

Understanding that, he says that it is first “to visit orphans and widows in their trouble.” James uses this example because it is something that God has always found acceptable, regardless of the dispensation of time in which the act occurs. And the reason for this is that this conduct is a reflection of His own character. Time and time again, Scripture calls out this particular aspect of God. This is seen, for example, in Deuteronomy 10:17, 18 –

“For the Lord your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. ¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.”

Because God is this way, our conduct before God in a like-fashion is considered pure and undefiled before Him. And, James continues by saying, “*and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” The word translated as “unspotted” signifies unstained, and thus fully acceptable. It speaks of that which is morally pure and unblemished.

Therefore, there is an active working out of one’s care of others which is united with a moral purity within the person. A person may visit orphans and widows in their trouble and yet not be acceptable to God because he is morally impure at the same time. Without the moral purity, the act is – like all other such things – exposed as a fraud before the God who searches both the hearts and minds of man.

Life application: The words of this verse are referring to a person who has called on Jesus; not everyone in general. Bill Gates, for example, has donated billions of dollars to the AIDS funds as well as other notable causes. However, one cannot buy their way into heaven and no deed is, in itself, good enough to please the Lord. This verse cannot be taken out of the Christian context and applied to non-believers.

Further, faithful Christians will be known for what they do, not for what they claim to have done. This goes all the way back to Acts 5 where a couple named Ananias and Sapphira claimed to have accomplished a righteous deed, but hid the fact that what they claimed didn’t actually match what had happened.

As an example for later Christians, they were both “called home” for their wicked act. There is no reason to believe they weren’t part of the faithful believers, but their action was unacceptable.

When we care for orphans and widows, or when we do any other righteous deeds, we need to give the Lord the credit and not try to overstate what we accomplished on His behalf. In addition to this, we need to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world.

There are great disputes over what this means, and many congregations set rules based on their perception of it. This leads to legalism and a stuffy church. Instead, we need to maintain our Christian morals wherever we are and concerning whatever we are engaged in.

We have freedom in Christ to live properly in this world, just not freedom to sin while being here. When we do, we bring dishonor on the One who freed us from the power of sin. In essence, we are acting in a manner contradictory to the very message of freedom He has given to us.

Lord Jesus, it is hard to do good deeds in secret. You know our desires to be noticed, so give us a supernatural ability to overcome these feelings and to work to Your glory alone. Help our religion to be undefiled and free from the stain of sin. Give us the desire to help those who are truly in need while providing You with the credit. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality. James 2:1

With the words, “My brethren,” James is seen to be addressing believers, specifically Jewish believers, though (see verse 1:1). That he is not merely addressing Jews in general is confirmed by the next words of the verse, “do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ...” It is with certainty that he is speaking to those who are saved through faith in Christ Jesus, whom he then calls “*the Lord of glory.*”

The words “the Lord” have been inserted by the translators, but they are rightly inserted for clarity. Simply stated, though, it says, “of glory.” The Greek has an article before “glory,” and so it more accurately reads, “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of the glory.*” This then expresses the state which Christ possesses, which is above all things, and of which He spoke in John 17 –

“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵ And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”

Paul refers to Christ in the same manner, using the same descriptor, in 1 Corinthians 2 –

“which no one of the rulers of this age did know, for if they had known, the Lord of the glory they would not have crucified” (YLT).

James identifies Christ in this way, saying that we are not to hold to the faith of Him “with partiality.” This now helps to explain why he has focused on Christ as “the glory.” The scholar Bengel explains –

“Christ is Glory; and therefore faith in Him is glorious, and the faithful are glorious. This glory of the faithful is far above all worldly honor; no respecter of persons acknowledges it.”

In other words, if we show favoritism to one person over another when they are in the same type of human body as we are, then we are holding an earthly position of one over another despite the glory they possess because of being in Christ.

If one were to exalt a handful of unrefined ore over a cup of gold, it would make more sense than showing favoritism of one over another. A better example might be holding a bucket of the dust of the earth up and saying it has more value than that of a man.

Though man was brought forth from the dust, the sum of his parts, combined with the breath of life in him, makes him of far greater value than simply the materials of which he is comprised.

As this is so, then the separation of the believer because of the Spirit which dwells in him as a result of faith in Christ brings him to a state of glory which is not to be diminished by earthly comparisons.

Life application: Anytime we show favoritism, we are failing to live as Christ did. The Bible says that “all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.” It goes on to say, “but while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

There was no favoritism at all in this. Instead, Christ died for all. He made the example for us to follow. We are not to worry about those who reject Him because it is His right to avenge; they will receive their due penalty from His hand.

We, however, should attempt to never show favoritism when evangelizing, in church settings, or at any other time. Regardless of race, color, level of wealth, etc., we need to be about the same business with all. Pastors need to be careful of favoritism, which leads to exalting the wealthy above those who have less. Parents need to be careful of showing favoritism, or they will have one spoiled child and one angry child.

This list goes on – work partners, choosing friends, etc. The less favoritism we show, the better off we will be among others, and the fewer bad words and strife will be directed toward us.

Lord, help us to not show favoritism. Instead, give us a willing heart to accept all people as You do. You gave Your life on the cross for them despite their situation. We were all sinners, and yet You came for all. Level of wealth, looks, race, and so on are things we look at, but You do not. Help us to love all equally as we work towards leading them to You. How glorious You are, and may Your glory rest upon all of Your people! Amen.

For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, James 2:2

James now makes an interesting statement saying, “For if there should come into your assembly.”

The word translated as “assembly” is *sunagóge*, a synagogue. The word is seen fifty-six times in the New Testament, but this is its only use when speaking specifically of a gathering of believers in Christ Jesus.

It is used in the gospels and in Acts many times, but it speaks of a meeting of Jews in the ordinary sense. It is used twice in Revelation when speaking of the “synagogue of Satan,” meaning the Jewish assembly which rejects Christ throughout the church age. However, James writes now of the synagogue when referring to believers in Christ. Hence, it is a taste of what is seen in blooming in the world today, that of the “Messianic Synagogue.”

It is another good indication that James, though writing to believers in his own day, is an epistle which prophetically looks to the state of the world in the end times, just prior to the return of Christ.

Of that type of gathering, James notes that there may come in “a man with gold rings, in fine apparel.” The word “rings” is actually singular in the Greek – “a gold ring.” The word for “fine” is *lampra*, and it signifies “shining,” or “splendid.” It is an adjective which describes our modern-day “lamp.” This guy is really something. He is obviously wealthy.

However, along with him, someone else arrives. He is “a poor man in filthy clothes.” The word translated as “poor” signifies “bent over.” He is destitute and beggarly. His outward appearance may seem objectionable to those around him, especially because of the word translated as “filthy.”

It is a word found only here and in Revelation 22:11. It gives the sense of being foul or squalid. When used in regard to morals, it would be a wicked person. The appearance of these two is completely the opposite. James is comparing the external appearance of them to help us make the right judgments. This will continue for the next few verses.

Life application: What would you do if you faced this situation? Let’s add to it and ask, “What if the man in fine clothes smelled heavenly because of some great aromatic oil like patchouli, but the poor man in shabby clothes smelled worse than a cow stall in summer?”

How would you react if they both came to a Bible study in your living room? Pastors have to face this from time to time, and they have been known to fail... money is a great enticement.

People in the congregation are no different. We gravitate toward those whom we can benefit from or whom we don't find repulsive. However, the biblical model is that we should treat all equally and not respect one over another based on wealth.

It is the wealthy who look down on others, as if they are less worthy; it is the wealthy who look down on those who drive cheaper cars; and it is the wealthy who look down on those who live in a different and less affluent neighborhood. And yet, we gravitate towards them because we feel we can somehow improve our status by being around them.

The same is true of any movie star or radio personality. Despite having glamour and wealth, they are often the most mixed-up and insecure people around – having drug, alcohol, and family problems in abundance.

Instead of judging by appearance, we need to evaluate others based on who they are as individuals. In particular, we should look at their potential in Jesus Christ. If we do this, then the externals of those we encounter will fade away, and the true beauty or ugliness of that person will be evident.

Lord Jesus, give us hearts to deal fairly with others despite their external appearance or social status. May we not show preference to anyone because we can benefit from them, but let us deal with all men according to the wise principles we learn from Your word. This we ask so that You will be pleased with our hearts as we interact in all of our relationships. Amen.

...and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," James 2:3

The Greek word translated as "pay attention" gives the sense of a favorable viewing and showing preference. In comes this guy with a gold ring and shining clothes, and he is immediately regarded in a favorable light, even without knowing a thing about him. He could be an arrogant, controlling, manipulating person, but he is given high regard simply because of his fancy duds. And so you say to him, "You sit here in a good place."

The Greek more closely reads, “You sit here, honorably.” He is so seated simply because of his external appearance. This spot is what Jesus spoke of in Matthew 23 –

“But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. ⁶They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues.” Matthew 23:5,6

The person is given high regard based only on the fact that he looks good. On the other hand, in walks the poor guy in the stinky, filthy clothes. Without knowing a thing about him, you make a value judgment. He might be the nicest guy in town. He might be humble, caring, selfless, and honorable in all he does. But, because of his disgusting external appearance, you say to him, “You stand there.”

He isn’t even given a seat to sit on. But maybe he has been working all night, and that is why his clothes are filthy. Without even knowing his circumstances, he is made to stand through the meeting. This, while the other guy slept all night and had time to put on his nice clothes, eat a big breakfast, and then take a donkey-cab to the synagogue without being overworked in the slightest.

Or you might – fortunately – have a wee little room left for the poor guy to sit, and so you say, “Sit here at my footstool.” The Greek reads more closely, “You sit here under my footstool.”

How nice of you. You are elevated and have a footstool, and this poor guy sits not on your footstool, but in a position which is directly on the floor at a lower level than where your filthy feet are. He gets to look at your dirty feet, despite his beautiful nature, simply because he is wearing dirty clothes. However, the other guy, a real “jerk” by every sense of the word, sits honorably.

Life application: Once we find out who a person is, if we are caring of such things as good morals and an honorable character, the externals don’t matter to us. But our first impressions often guide us to want to be closer to those who are more presentable externally.

Without knowing anything else about people, we will naturally incline towards those who present themselves in a clean and orderly way. This is because we can make value judgments based on externals. However, taking these value judgments and acting on them alone can lead us to show inappropriate favoritism.

Let each of us be careful in how we evaluate others. Instead of jumping to snappy decisions based on externals alone, let us look deeper and try to determine the true quality and character of the inner man.

Lord God, help us to be people of character by being people who do not show favoritism towards others simply because of their external appearances. Fine clothes and gold jewelry don't make a person more respectable or honest. Dirty clothes don't mean a person has a bad character. Help us, Lord, to look deeper than externals when we meet people along life's highway. Amen.

...have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? James 2:4

James now completes his thoughts concerning “partiality,” which began in verse 2:1. The NKJV says, “have you not shown partiality among yourselves?” This makes it sound like he is confirming his idea in 2:1 concerning partiality. However, he gives an entirely different word here than there. In 2:1, he mentioned partiality with the word *prosópolémpsia*. He now speaks not of partiality, but of division by using the word *diakrinó*.

The thought is correctly reflected in the Aramaic Bible with, “are you not divided in your souls.” As Vincent’s Word Studies states, “The meaning here is, therefore, that, in making a distinction between the rich and the poor, they expressed a doubt concerning the faith which they professed, and which abolished such distinctions.”

He is referring not to the partiality of verse 2:1, but of the faith itself. The faith of the people is to say, “We are all one in Christ” (see Galatians 3:28), but by making decisions based on partiality, the faith itself is divided in the minds of the people. How can there be no distinction in Christ if we are making such distinctions? It shows a people who have two minds which are not in agreement.

Understanding this, he then says that this reflects that they have “become judges with evil thoughts.” Christ is one, and those in Christ are one. But in dividing believers as they have, they reflect a mind with evil thoughts concerning dividing the parts of a united whole.

A suitable example of what this is referring to might be displaying this attitude towards one of the fifty states within the United States of America. Each is to have equal representation in the Senate based on statehood – two senators. And each is to have

equal representation in the House based on population – 1 representative for a set amount of people within each state.

However, because one state has lots of representatives (equate this to the rich guy with the gold ring and the fancy duds), the president says to a senator representing that state, “You come sit here at my table.”

However, another state has only a few representatives (equate this to the guy in dirty clothes), the president says, “You wait over there in the chair by the door.” In so doing, he has shown partiality which is not supposed to exist in dealing with the states, and he has become divided in his mind concerning the intent and purpose of the constitution which frames the government. In this, he has become a judge with evil thoughts.

Life application: Be careful how you look upon others and accept them as God’s image-bearers, regardless of their status according to the world. Instead of degrading others, let us ever exalt the Lord. We all belong at the same level as we live in His presence and as we worship His glory –

“Let us go into His tabernacle;
Let us worship at His footstool.” Psalm 132:7

Lord Jesus, may we feel the conviction of having shown preference to others based on their position, dress, wealth, and so on over those who are less fortunate in this world. Give us the ability to see others as You see them – looking on the heart and beauty of the inner-man rather than the externals, which are so fading. May You be pleased with how we treat our fellow men. Amen.

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? James 2:5

James now appears to make a sudden departure from his previous words. It is not a departure in thought, though. Rather, it is a departure in style. He has been speaking about not demonstrating partiality. He then gave the example of showing favoritism by showing preference to a rich, well-dressed man over a poor, raggedly dressed man. His words, however, are not a departure.

Instead, they are given to expand upon that thought as he speaks of the customary attributes of the rich and the poor. From there, he will talk about precepts from the Law of Moses, and how those precepts pointed to the need for a merciful attitude, which will

then triumph over judgment – the exact thing he just spoke of in the previous verse, which was of a person who “judges with evil thoughts.”

Therefore, James’ coming words follow naturally to complete the very thought he has just conveyed. Understanding this, he begins with, “Listen, my beloved brethren.”

It is a call to attention, asking his audience to pay careful heed. Again, as he has already done, he used the term “brethren.” It is to believers in Christ that he is speaking. He next begins his statement to which he has called them to attention, by saying, “Has God not chosen the poor of this world...?”

The same idea is presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29. There, Paul explains why God has done this –

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence.”

Going on, James says that God has “chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith.”

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Rich people will often not take the time to hear something which detracts from their ability to get richer. Or they may feel so comfortable in their wealth that they don’t even need to waste their time with something that won’t profit them further in this world, which has handed them so much. They are so busy thinking about their life of ease that there is no need to think about things so trivial as an uncertain “hope” of something coming after death.

On the other hand, the poor are tired of the world – of being beaten up by the world, of fighting for every morsel of food, of being trivialized, and so on. They have no hope in this world, and so they are willing to consider that a better life ahead is their only hope of joy.

And so they seek after that possibility. Some think they find it in one religion or another, but those who find it in the truth of God’s word, which speaks of Christ, are truly blessed. They have come to the true Source of hope and joy. In this, they become rich in

faith, having obtained the eternal promise. They have, as James says, become “heirs of the kingdom.”

That which was promised at the very moments after the fall of man is realized in Christ. Adam was to reign over the world, having dominion over all the works of God’s hands which he sees. But he fell and lost that right. Christ Jesus retrieved it through His perfect obedience to the Father. Now, that kingdom is assured for all who have put their faith and trust in Him. Paul speaks of this kingdom often, such as –

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13, 14

It is this kingdom, as James says, “which He promised to those who love Him?” We have an explanation of the words, “those who love Him,” from the hand of John –

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:3

What John is speaking of here is not the commandments of the Law of Moses. Paul explicitly negates that premise in 1 Corinthians 7:19 when he says, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*” Paul says that “Circumcision is nothing.”

As circumcision was a command found within the Law of Moses, he cannot be speaking of the Law of Moses. Rather, to keep the commandments of Christ the Lord is to be obedient to the words of Christ. It is He who fulfilled the law, and it is He who established a New Covenant, setting aside the Old.

To those who love God, who are willing to put aside self, and who trust in the Lord Jesus alone for their salvation, God has promised His kingdom. And for those who have done so, the promise is obtained. It may be yet future, but it is surer than the wealth of the rich. Their riches will disappear with them, but the eternal riches which lie ahead in Christ will never fail.

As a point of doctrine, one could spend all day asking if God’s election of the “poor of this world” is active or passive, but there is no need. It is – as revealed throughout Scripture – passive. The rich people of the world are usually too caught up in the world to stop and consider their state before God.

The intelligent are too often “too smart to need God.” And so on. However, the poor don’t have such things, and their hope is placed in God for wisdom, intelligence, an inheritance, etc. In their coming to God through faith, they are then “chosen” by God.

James’ words do not negate the concept of free will. Rather, they establish it. How can we know this is true? Because there are some wealthy believers. There are some wise believers. There are some noble believers. And so on.

If the words of James and Paul were true across the board, then one might argue that God has purposefully picked only those in the categories mentioned. But such is not the case.

Life application: The words here contain one of the wonders of God’s workings in humanity. All people are separated from God because of their sins. This is just the way it is. But God sent His Son to reconcile us to Him. In order to receive this, we need to acknowledge that we can’t save ourselves and that we are totally dependent on His mercy through Jesus Christ.

The problem is that those who are rich naturally feel secure and also competent to handle all of life’s problems, including reconciliation with God. This leads to smugness about God and a careless attitude towards salvation – “I’ve got it all under control.”

In a similar fashion, people tend to feel that God will look on them differently than the next guy who has such obvious faults. But God doesn’t grade on a curve, and salvation is not of human origin. The poor will understand this.

And so it is that the poor, the weak, the lowly, and the broken are those who come to Jesus in faith, completely empty-handed. “O God, is there room for me?” It is when one comes to God through Jesus in this manner that God is exalted.

When someone arrives with a list of their great accomplishments, wealth, or fame, then God receives no glory – and they receive neither mercy nor salvation. God longs to look on the lost sinner and lavish His grace upon him, if he will only drop every pretense that blocks the way.

“Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you;
And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you.
For the Lord *is* a God of justice;
Blessed *are* all those who wait for Him.” Isaiah 30:18

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for looking down on us, even us. We are sinful souls and beggars with empty hands, and yet You have granted us Your salvation through the work You accomplished. May we never boast in anything but the cross You bore. This we ask that You alone will be exalted for Your great and mighty deliverance, wrought on our behalf. Amen.

But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? James 2:6

James has just spoken of those God has chosen, meaning “the poor of this world.” He went on to say that they are “rich in faith.” However, he now says to his audience, “But you have dishonored the poor man.”

The “you” is plural. He is making a general statement about the conduct of those even within the faith. In giving the example of the well-dressed man in contrast to the man in filthy clothes, he is calling out the conduct of those in the gathering.

In essence, “God has chosen this person because he is rich in faith, and yet you have humiliated him by treating him as a less-than-equal.” In this, he who should be most highly honored has been dishonored.

He then adds, “Do not the rich oppress you...?” The idea here is that the rich lord their status over others. In the streets, the poor would be made to get out of the way of the rich being carried on his palanquin. When buying food at the store, the rich would tell the store owner to take them first so that they wouldn’t have to stand in the heat.

Things such as this, which were surely as common then as they are now, were to alert the congregation that in showing preference to the rich man in the congregation, they were only feeding this type of attitude in a place where it should be completely starved.

And more, James continues with the fact that it is the rich who “drag you into the courts?” They had the money to hire lawyers, they had the wealth to bribe judges, and they had the social position to convince those who stood in judgment that they were in the right – even when they were in the wrong.

The rich were not the friends of his addressees. Rather, they were the ones who persecuted them. And so why should a rich man be given preference in a congregation of saints where those of the greatest faith (as a general rule) were those who were the poor of the world?

Life application: Even though it is the meek, the lowly, the humble, and the poor who will inherit the kingdom, these are the very same people we insult by our inappropriate judgments. We look down on others who have less than us and exalt those who have more than us.

But James says that the very people we look up to are the ones who are fighting against us as we live our lives. And the opposite is usually true of the poor. They will normally open their door for others, remain non-judgmental about things they disagree on, and generally live life in more contentment than the wealthy, who simply strive to become more wealthy and more “superior” to those around them.

Nothing has changed in these 2000 years since James wrote his words, and it is a warning to each of us every day. We need to keep away from insulting the poor and exalting the rich simply because of their station in life.

Heavenly Father, help us to see each man for his inner qualities and not his external riches. May we be fair judges of those around us so that we might not sin against You. Help our hearts to not show favoritism or partiality towards those we can benefit from. This we ask through Jesus, who looked with favor upon us, even in our time of greatest poverty. Amen.

Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? James 2:7

James, still speaking of the wealthy, asks another rhetorical question with the words, “Do they not blaspheme that noble name...?” The word “they” is in the emphatic position, and is thus to be stressed, “Do THEY not blaspheme that noble name?”

James has been speaking of those who come into the meeting of believers, and so it can be assumed that this is even speaking of someone who only claims to be such as well. And yet, he asks the question as if even the wealthy believer is known to do this. The word translated as blaspheme signifies to refuse to acknowledge good, meaning that which is worthy of respect. In this, it is a reversal of moral values.

What appears to be the case, because this is speaking of believers (or supposed believers), is that even in their state as such, they bring discredit upon the name of Christ by their refusal to acknowledge the equality of believers who are less wealthy than they are. That is seen in the words, “by which you are called.”

All believers have the name of Christ upon them. This type of thought goes back even to the Law of Moses. In the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 28:10, the name of the Lord is called upon the people of Israel –

“Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you.”

Likewise, the thought is seen several more times in the Old Testament, such as in Amos 9:12 –

“That they may possess the remnant of Edom,
And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,
Says the Lord who does this thing.”

James then cites this passage from Amos 9 in the decision rendered in Acts 15 concerning the inclusion of the Gentiles into the New Covenant. The name of Jesus is called upon His people, such as in the act of baptism, where believers are commanded to be baptized “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

The Greek of Matthew 28:19 refers to the “name” in the singular. In other words, there is one name which identifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. When a person is baptized, he is baptized into the name of the Triune God.

As this name rests upon all believers, and as the wealthy bring discredit upon the poor believers, then they are blaspheming the name which rests upon those same poor believers. The name rests upon them, and they are just as “in Christ” as any other person – regardless of any other distinction, including temporary, earthly wealth.

Life application: The rich and famous normally become so out of touch with reality that they begin to think of themselves as mini-gods. This will happen because people follow them around and throw themselves at them without a second thought. They are sought out for perceived wisdom even if they lack any true common sense or deep intelligence at all. The powerful, having such control over others, will also develop an aggravated sense of their own worth.

Look at the vast majority of those in power in Washington today. Their actions and votes indicate high arrogance; voting contrary to what is right in order to further their own petty goals.

Anyone who would actively support the murder of unborn children and call it good brings slander upon the name of the Creator. Those who attempt to control the free exercise of speech or faith likewise discredit the name of God. This is because it is the Christian's duty to spread the gospel in each and every possible circumstance.

When that right is hindered in any way, it slanders the name of the Lord because it was He who ordained that His message go forth. How much worse, then, is such an attitude when held by a supposed believer in Christ?

Don't look at the lesser issues or actions of those you admire. Instead, look at their treatment of the name and gospel of Jesus Christ. This is how you gauge the true person.

Heavenly Father, please give us discerning eyes to see the true person and not to look at superficial matters that can distract our attention. Help us never to show favoritism because of wealth, power, or position. Help us not to decide matters based upon the color of skin or ethnicity as well. Instead, keep our eyes focused on a person's admiration and exaltation of You as the true measure of who he is. Amen.

If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; James 2:8

James is now speaking to those who would presume to show preference to the rich within the congregation. In verse 2:6, he said, "But you have dishonored the poor man." He is making an example for each person to consider. He is not saying that each person has done this, but that it is an inclination that anyone could be prone to. Now, to contrast dishonoring the poor man, he says, "If you really fulfill the royal law."

Those who had shown preference had failed and had not done what was right. Now, he shows them how to correct this by fulfilling the "royal law." The meaning of the term "royal law" is debated, but Albert Barnes gives what is probably the best sense of what it signifies –

"It is called a 'royal law,' or kingly law, on account of its excellence or nobleness; not because it is ordained by God as a king, but because it has some such prominence and importance among other laws as a king has among other men; that is, it is majestic, noble, worthy of veneration. It is a law which ought to govern and direct us in all our intercourse with men - as a king rules his subjects."

He is correct in this. Jesus exalted this law to a preeminent position. When questioned by an expert in the law concerning which was the greatest commandment, we read –

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment.³⁹ And *the* second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40

Thus, as can be seen, from both the Old and New Testaments, this is “according to the Scripture.” Jesus placed loving God above all else, and then loving one’s neighbor as one loves himself. Thus, it is a “royal law,” having all of the weight and majesty of the very words of God and a precept worthy of our full attention and application to our lives.

In doing this, James says, “you do well.” In other words, there is commendation in store for you. If this precept is properly applied as given, then you are doing what is just, right, and acceptable in God’s eyes. The poor person is no less a neighbor than the rich, and so he is to be loved as a neighbor, despite his state.

Life application: The reference that James is quoting is Leviticus 19:18 –

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.”

This is a book that few people read, and this is a verse that is found in the middle of many other laws and rules. As one can see, though seemingly insignificant because of its placement, it is considered by the Lord as a part of the preeminent duties of man.

This shows us how important it is to be well-versed in the Old Testament as well as the New. It is in this that we can understand how Jesus came to utter His words as He did. Because James is dealing with treating others fairly as a sign of true Christian devotion, he repeats Jesus’ words.

If “all the Law and the Prophets” hang on these two commandments, then we need to be extremely careful how we treat others – particularly in matters of judgment about how we accept them. If Christ has accepted them, how much more should we?

One thing is for sure, Lord God, we don’t want to fight against You. So open our hearts to be accepting of our neighbors, and to love them, even as we love ourselves. And Lord, give us the ability to put You first in our lives every moment of every day; loving You with

our our hearts, souls, and minds. We know things will be in the proper perspective if we follow these holy guides. Amen.

...but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. James 2:9

James just cited the royal law, which is that “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” He now shows that “if you show partiality, you commit sin.” The word translated as “you show partiality” is found only here in the Bible. It indicates favoring an individual, and the idea is that of doing so over others.

God has given the royal law, which disallows any type of unjust partiality in our dealings with others. We are to treat all the same. In showing partiality, we therefore commit sin.

The word translated as “commit” is one which signifies “to work.” Therefore, it says more specifically, “you work sin.” Further, the word “sin” is in the emphatic position. The Greek reads, “sin you are working.”

There is a high stress on the consequences of showing partiality and the negative connotations which accompany such an act. In the commission of the act, James then says that you “are convicted by the law as transgressors.”

A person can show favoritism outwardly where others see it, or they can do so without anyone else knowing it. Thus, like coveting, this is as much a sin of the heart as it is something which can be actively committed. As the Lord reads the hearts and minds of men, there is no escaping the act, from the moment it germinates in the heart to the time that the act actually occurs.

In showing favoritism, we err against the written law of God. James will explain what this means in the next verse, but even without that further explanation, we can see the far-reaching and all-encompassing condemnation which surely arises from the Law of Moses. It is a “body of death” as Paul calls it in Romans 7:24.

We cannot escape the thoughts of our heart and the evil inclinations which are buried there. They come forth even when we try to extinguish them, and they bring about only condemnation. As Paul called out concerning this state, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” His answer comes in verse 7:25, “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Life application: Jesus Himself said that all the law and the prophets (the entire Old Covenant) hang on our loving God with all of our being and on loving our neighbors just as we would love ourselves. The impossibility of meeting these two laws is revealed in our daily breaking of the other points of the law in a thousand ways. The good news is that although we all have fallen short of this, Jesus didn't. As He said –

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Matthew 5:17

Be sure to understand what Jesus is saying. In His ministry, He was accused of violating the very law He came to fulfill. Instead, He fulfilled it. This was done on our behalf, and it is the reason that we are not under the law. The law was not made obsolete by Jesus' inaction; it was made obsolete by His actions.

This still doesn't excuse us when we show favoritism, but it allows forgiveness when we do. It should be our aim to live a life of honoring God and of loving our neighbor, but when we fall short, there is mercy and forgiveness in the blood of Christ.

James' words should convict every person that they have fallen short of God's glory and need an advocate. There is one! His name is Jesus, and He shows no favoritism. He is willing to forgive all who call on His name. Take time today to tell someone else about His wonderful gift.

Thank You so very much, O God, for Jesus! Though I've shown favoritism a thousand times and failed to love my neighbor as myself again and again, I know there is power in the wonder-working life of my Lord and Savior! Where I failed, He prevailed. And so to Him belongs my heart and my joy! Thank You, O God, for Jesus! Amen.

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.
James 2:10

James now explains what was left ready to be stated in the previous verses. He just spoke of the “royal law” in verse 8. That concerned loving one's neighbor as we love ourselves. From there, he said that if one follows through with this, he does well.

However, he says that if you show partiality (something we all have done), you “are convicted by the law as transgressors.” With that in mind, and knowing that we have all failed to love our neighbor as ourselves at one time or another, he says, “For whoever shall keep the whole law.”

The idea here is that of someone who has been meticulous in every precept of the Law of Moses, doing all that is required of him in a line-by-line adherence to what it says, but yet he is to “stumble in one *point*.” In this, there is a problem.

The imagery here is a person who is walking along through life, and during his walk, he is applying the Law of Moses to that walk perfectly. But while he was busy attempting to earn God’s favor through every minute precept, he fails to see the little rock in his path. It is a rock of loving his neighbor as himself, and he stumbles over it.

This person was so consumed with his own attempt at being righteous before God that he ignored the fact that there are others who are also living out their lives. Some are like him – well-dressed, meticulous in adherence to the law, and refraining from sin. But along comes someone who is shabby, who has failed to adhere to the law, and who has lived a life of sin.

However, this person knows that he has sinned, and he knows that he needs God’s mercy. Despite this, Mr. Meticulous shows favoritism against Frank Failure, knowing that he and his friends are so much more righteous than Frank. He has stumbled in a point of the very law he has been so faithful to adhere to. And the result? James says, “he is guilty of all.”

The meaning is that he is held fast by the condemning power of the law. The Law of Moses is a codified body of law. It is not merely a compilation of 613 laws that must be individually kept without connection to the others. Rather, it is one body of 613 laws. To break one is to break the entire body. As Charles Ellicott says –

“As a chain is snapped by failure of the weakest link, so the whole Law, in its harmony and completeness as beheld by God, is broken by one offence of one man; and the penalty falls, of its own natural weight and incidence, on the culprit.”

Jesus made this point perfectly clear when speaking to those of Israel who were like Mr. Meticulous –

““Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ ¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his*

eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!'¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"" Luke 18:9-14

The Pharisee looked to his own righteousness because he meticulously obeyed all of the precepts of the law, which could be externally evaluated. However, at the same time, he stood before God as a lawbreaker. He had violated a law which could only be read by God because it is a law of the heart. His heart revealed his true character, and the law was broken. In this, he became guilty of all.

Life application: When witnessing to others, this is one of the best verses to make a logical defense for their need for Jesus. Another verse which is often used is –

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

However, many will dismiss Romans 3:23 unless further explanation is given. In order to make this sink in, ask them a direct question such as, “Have you ever told a lie?” Only a liar would say, “No.” Almost everyone will say, “Yes, of course I have.” Once they admit this, you can introduce James 2:10. “Well, the Bible says if you stumble at just one point, you are guilty of breaking the whole law.”

When he hears this, it gives him a definite point to consider. Re-explaining the verse in another way will usually solidify your point. “The Ten Commandments form the basis of ‘the Law’ and they’re a unified whole. If you break any part of ‘the Law,’ you have broken the whole law.”

This is the point when most people begin to understand their separation from God. It doesn’t matter if you have lied, murdered, been disobedient to your parents, bowed down to an idol, or shown favoritism. Any infraction breaks the whole law.

Take time to memorize James 2:10, and consider how you can weave it into a proper application of a Gospel presentation. It truly can be a turning point in someone’s life. So think on it, use it, and then explain the great mercy of God who would forgive such a violation because of His great love for His people.

Lord God, thank You for those verses which convict us of our sin. When we understand that just one infraction of the law separates us from You, it helps us to understand how immense Your mercy is towards us. We have violated Your law so many times, and yet

because of Jesus, You grant us pardon. Thank You for the gift of Your Son Jesus, who reconciles us to You. Amen.

For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

James 2:11

James now reveals how the words of the previous verse are true. He had said, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” Now he says, “For he who said.”

This is speaking of the Lord, who is the Lawgiver. The law came through Moses, but it is the Lord who spoke it forth first. In fact, the two commands now cited were spoken directly from the Lord to the people at Mount Sinai –

“Do not commit adultery.”

“Do not murder.”

Because they both issue forth from the same Source, and because they are a part of one set of commands, breaking either is to break the whole body of law in which they are included. This is why James says, “Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder.”

Who is to say that doing one, but not the other, is acceptable? They both fall under the same law. And those commands which seem of less weight, such as coveting, can actually be the very source of violating the others. When one covets another’s wife, it can lead to adultery. When one covets another’s possessions, it can lead to theft or even to murder. Thus, in violating any precept of the law, “you have become a transgressor of the law.”

Leviticus 18:5, a part of the law, says to the people, “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the Lord.” Is there any person in Israel’s recorded history from the time of the giving of the law until the coming of Christ who is still alive? No. They are all dead. From Moses and Aaron and then through all of the judges, kings, and prophets, all are dead. They did not do the things of the law.

Only in the coming of Christ is found One who did the things of the law, and He lives. His death was not because of a violation of the law on His part. Rather, it was for violations

of the law by us. The fact that He came out of the grave demonstrates that He did not die for His own sin, but as a Substitute for ours.

It is we who are transgressors – or those who go beyond the line – of the law. It is we who need redemption from the law, and it is Christ who accomplished that for us by never going beyond the law.

Life application: Why would James pick such a seemingly harsh commandment, such as not committing murder, to be the standard he uses? Most people have obviously never committed murder. They would be aghast at even the thought of it. But in reality, we are all guilty of this sin. According to God’s standard, which Jesus revealed to us, it says –

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’²² But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.” Matthew 5:21, 22

God looks at the intent of our hearts. None of us have gone without hating another. Likewise, most of us have looked at another in lust and are guilty of adultery. Like coveting, the heart is what is evaluated by God, even if there is no external acting upon what the heart inclines toward.

All of this shows sin for what it is – utterly sinful. It also shows us our great need for Jesus’ perfect righteousness. Without His shed blood, we are utterly condemned, not just by our actions, but by our intent. O God, thank You for Jesus!

Lord, we have fallen so very short of Your perfection. Our thoughts are filled with that which is wrong, and our hearts have been intent on evil. Forgive us of our faults – not because we deserve it, but because of Jesus, our only Hope and our Savior. We place ourselves completely in His hands and accept what He did for us. Thank You, O God, for our Lord Jesus. Amen.

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. James 2:12

James now gives a summary statement based on what he has been speaking about for quite some time. He says, “So speak and so do.”

He had shown earlier in this chapter that those who speak with partiality sin, in particular, verses 2-4. He had written about being doers of the word at the end of the previous chapter, in particular, verses 22-27.

He now combines those thoughts to show that believers are to unite proper speaking with proper action. In this conduct, our speaking and our doing are to be considered as done by “those who will be judged by the law of liberty.” This takes the reader back to his words of verse 1:25 –

“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

The “law of liberty,” as explained in verse 1:25, is where liberty defines the perfect law. It is what is obtained from it. And so, it is a law which is completely different than the bondage of sin leading to death which is found in Adam. The law of liberty is the gospel where sin is not imputed.

Because this is so, the believer should strive all the more to conduct his affairs in holiness. Rather than a license to sin, he is given the freedom to act apart from sin, and it is that law of liberty by which we will be judged.

In this, we are to speak and to do in accord with our position in Christ. To understand what that means, James will continue on with further explanation. His words in the coming verses will combine the thought of speaking and doing with real, practical examples of what he means. But his words in the second half of this chapter are also some of the most debated over and misunderstood verses in the epistles, and so they must be carefully evaluated.

Life application: In evaluating James 2:12 & 13, the context needs to be considered. It is certain that if you have accepted Jesus Christ, you are forgiven –

“I write to you, little children,
Because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake.” 1 John 2:12

Forgiveness in Christ is a done deal. From the moment you receive Him, you are forgiven of every sin you have committed and of every sin you will yet commit. One cannot lose his salvation. However, judgment for a believer is based on rewards for faithfulness.

The law of Christ gives freedom from sin and condemnation, but it doesn't give freedom for licentiousness. It is most important to keep these things in their proper perspective, and this is what James is relaying to us in his words.

Saved believers will stand at the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards based on the life we live in Him. Because of this, we should speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. And how can we do anything else! Jesus gave His life for us.

Shouldn't we then do our utmost to bring Him the honor and glory He deserves? Live for Him today, tomorrow, and always!

Lord Jesus, give us the ability to be merciful to others, just as You have been to us! If You have forgiven all of our transgressions, then we should remember that others deserve the same. Remind us that when they turn and ask for forgiveness, we need to show the same mercy that we have been shown. Thank You, Lord, for Your goodness to us! Amen.

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. James 2:13

The Greek reads with more force than is presented here. It more rightly says, "For the judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy." It is a precept which permeates Scripture in various ways. Solomon says this in Proverbs -

"Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor
Will also cry himself and not be heard." Proverbs 21:13

James' words also remind the reader of the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21-35. Jesus shows there that mercy in us is something that is evaluated by God in our own judgment. David's words in 2 Samuel acknowledge this precept as well. There he says, "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful."

The reason for this is that mercy is an attribute of the Lord. It is a part of His very nature. In Exodus 34, when revealing His glory before Moses, the Lord proclaimed -

"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the

fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." Exodus 34:6

Later in Numbers, when the people of Israel sinned against the Lord, Moses appealed to Him for them. In his appeal, he said, "And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken." After that, he repeated the very words of the Lord from Exodus 34 as the prime example of how the Lord would most effectively reveal His great power—

"The Lord is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generation*.' ¹⁹ Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." Numbers 14:18, 19

Astonishingly, Moses saw the power of the Lord most fully demonstrated in His mercy and forgiveness. This is what the Lord had declared concerning Himself, and Moses grasped onto it, knowing that the Lord is unchangeable in His Being. As this is so, he appealed to that truth.

Moses is considered Israel's great lawgiver. A law demands justice, leading to punishment for transgression. But Moses saw the strength of the Lord in withholding that, and in its place granting mercy. Does that not sound like God working in Christ?

The greatest demonstration of all of God's power is found in the giving of His Son for sinful man. It is the very heart of the gospel, and the gospel is the very heart and purpose of all Scripture in regard to salvation. Paul says as much in Romans 1:16 —

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

The law and its penalties could not compare to the mercies of the Lord. And the Dispensation of Law was but a dark moment in redemptive history as it led to the gloriously revealed light of the Dispensation of Grace. Moses, understanding this precept above all else, then spoke out his petition to the Lord, and the Lord pardoned according to his plea.

This is why the judgment will be merciless to the one who has shown no mercy. It is because, in not showing mercy, we cast off one of the principal attributes of God, in

whose image we are created. But in being merciful, we too will find mercy. As James says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

God, who is merciful, will look upon us in mercy when we reflect His nature and demonstrate mercy.

Life application: James indicates that mercy is a powerful tool for good in our lives and for our eternal destiny. A good way to remember the meaning of mercy is to remember it along with the meaning of grace. Mercy is not getting what you do deserve; grace is getting what you do not deserve.

As Jesus speaks of this so poignantly in Matthew 18, take time today to read the entire parable and see how this confirms what James says. However, remember to take the entire subject of forgiveness in context. When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, all our sins are forgiven.

Therefore, in the context of the Christian’s life, being unmerciful will result in loss of rewards, not condemnation. Either way, being merciful will keep us from a greater judgment because we are acting as our Heavenly Father does when we stray.

Lord Jesus, it is not always easy to be merciful, but it reflects Your divine character when we are. Because of this, please grant us the ability to be more merciful to others so that we might be pleasing to You. May Your words sink into our lives and become our very nature – to Your glory! Amen.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? James 2:14

James is now going to discuss several verses on faith versus deeds. How these verses are interpreted sets the stage for how you believe your salvation is accomplished and completed in Jesus Christ. Also, these verses – in particular – provide a dividing line between Roman Catholicism and Protestant theology.

Did Jesus accomplish everything on our behalf in order to be saved, or do we need to “participate” in our justification before the Lord? And further, is “faith” considered a deed or not? The Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 put their side firmly in writing. Here is one of the applicable canons –

Canon 24: "If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema."

Roman Catholicism states that we can only preserve our faith by deeds. It implies that Jesus' work was insufficient in and of itself to justify us and maintain our justification.

Protestants hold to biblical doctrine, which states that man is justified by faith in Christ alone, but Roman Catholicism says that works are a cause of the increase of justification – without which one who has come to Christ can still be lost ("the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works").

In other words, and this is clearly stated by the Roman Catholic Church, that one must participate in their salvation – be it initial or continued salvation. As in everything dealing with the RCC, it is a "plus" religion – Jesus, plus Mary; faith, plus works; the Bible, plus the church decisions; etc.

Understanding this, attempts are made by protestants to weasel out of the words of James as well. They equivocate on the meaning of "works" in order to justify that James isn't saying what he is saying. For example, the Pulpit Commentary says –

"The two apostles use the word ἔργα [with] different senses. In St. Paul it always has a depreciatory sense, unless qualified by the adjective καλὰ or ἄγαθα. The works which he denies having any share in justification are '**legal works,**' **not** those which he elsewhere denominates the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22), which are the 'works' of which St. James speaks."

This doesn't resolve the matter at all. It further confuses it. This is because the issue at hand is not "works" but of someone being saved, which James states is what then justifies in verse 2:23.

Whether these are legal works or so-called "fruit of the Spirit" works doesn't change the matter of justification at all. Comparing Paul's words with what James will speak of from now until the end of the chapter comes down to one thought, and one thought alone – "Is man justified by faith alone, or is he justified by works?" Or can it be that they are referring to two sides of one coin, faith being equated with the work?

If by faith alone, then what is James speaking of when he says, "works?" Because "fruit of the Spirit" works doesn't really mean anything in justification. The reason for this is

that if one has the Spirit, that person is saved (Ephesians 1:13, 14). So how can “fruit of the Spirit” works be the basis for justification – meaning being deemed righteous before God and thus saved?

And so James begins with, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” The word “profit” is found only in 1 Corinthians 15:32, here in James 2:14, and again in James 2:26.

It signifies something heaped up or increased and thus, “cumulative advantage.” Can a person saying “I have faith” without there being some type of work to support it be a means of increase? From there, James defines what that “increase” or “profit” is – being saved. This is seen in the question, “Can faith save him?”

The question is, “Who is ‘him’?” It is almost universally accepted that “him” is referring to the person who has the faith. However, the Greek allows for it to be another. Instead of the individual with the faith, it is rather more likely speaking of the person who needs mercy.

James 2 is speaking of the relationship of one towards another (verses 2-4; verse 6; verse 8; and then verse 13). The person in verse 13 failed to show mercy to another and thus gets no mercy.

Further, the word *sózó*, translated as “save” here, does speak of salvation quite often, but it is also used in the gospels concerning healing (Matt 9:21, 22; Mark 5:23, 28, 34, etc). James will next speak of one who is in great need, and he asks if our faith alone can correct that need.

When James says “profit” here, who is it that he is referring to? The answer is found in verse 2:26. It is not speaking of the profit of the one with faith, but the one who has the need. And so, in essence, James is saying, “Can my faith profit another? Or do I need to demonstrate the faith I have in order for another to profit?”

James cannot be speaking of the profit of faith for the one with the faith because he himself has already told us that it does in Acts 15. Peter rose to address the council at Jerusalem, and he stated, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”

Peter called out openly what Paul proclaims in Ephesians 2:8, 9. That a person is saved by grace, and that is through faith in what Christ did, not in our own works. James

agreed to this and sent out a letter to the early church that the Gentiles were not bound to the law of Moses.

He also gave several recommendations to the churches in order to keep the congregation out of a greater dilemma, but these were not points of salvation. Rather, they were things to be done because of salvation until the time that they could be more fully explained by the epistles.

Life application: If we are (as Paul says) justified by faith alone apart from deeds of the law (Romans 3:28), but James says that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24), then the answer to this issue must be based not on the type of works, but the impetus behind them.

Consider this as you do your deeds before God. What is it that impels you to accomplish certain things, and what are you looking to obtain as a result of your works?

Heavenly Father, give us wisdom in discerning the truth of difficult passages in Scripture. At times, there are things which arise which are really tough for us to understand. May our doctrine be pure and may our hearts be in tune with living out the truth of Your word. This to Your honor and glory and to the saving of our souls. Amen.

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, James 2:15

James now gives an extreme example of how faith should be worked out in deeds. He just asked about someone not having works, while having faith. He asked, “Can faith save him?” In the commentary on the previous verse, it was questioned who “him” was speaking of.

James doesn’t specifically answer the question, but he proceeds to give his example, which closely reflects the sentiment of Matthew 25 concerning the judgment of the nations based on the treatment of those who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and in prison. His example is concerning a “brother or sister.”

James is speaking of a believer in Christ who sees another believer. In this, he says that person is “naked.” The word is rarely used to signify stark naked. Rather, it is a person who possesses only his undergarments, or who is poorly clothed in the extreme. James further says that he is “destitute of daily food.”

This is well translated. The word is *ephémeros*. It signifies that which occurs on the basis of a day. From day to day, this person lacks food. With this in mind, he will continue with the thought in the next verse.

Life application: Regardless of the issue of whether James is speaking of deeds resulting in salvation, or whether he is speaking of deeds accomplished in faith by those who are saved, shouldn't we consider the plight of others simply because they are also God's image-bearers?

Let us not lose sight of the trees for the forest. May we open our hearts to those who have such great needs as are spoken of by James in this verse.

Lord God, give us willing hearts to love and assist those who are destitute, caring for them and their needs according to our ability to do so. Help us not to turn a blind eye to our brother or sister who is in need when we are able to help in getting them back on their feet. May this be so in order that You will be glorified through the works we accomplish in Your name. To Your glory we pray. Amen.

...and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does* it profit?
James 2:16

James just spoke of the person who is "naked and destitute of daily food." Now, referring to those he is writing to, he says, "and one of you says to them."

It is a believer speaking to the person who is naked or destitute of daily food. There is an obvious understanding of the person's plight. Nobody could look at him and not understand the need which exists. And yet, instead of offering assistance, there is just a general greeting, "Depart in peace."

The words were a common way of sending another off. Three examples from the gospels and Acts will show this –

1. After Jesus forgave a woman of her sins, he said, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace." Luke 7:50
2. After he had healed a woman of her flow of blood, he said, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace." Luke 8:48
3. After Paul and Silas were released from captivity, the keeper of the prison said, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace."

In the case of James' example, the individual says this to the one in need, but then adds in "be warmed and filled."

It sounds like a noble blessing, and it is probably intended to make the one saying it feel good about himself, as if he had accomplished something. However, James continues with the words, "but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body."

If you notice in the three examples from the gospels and Acts, those who were told to depart in peace had received some tangible benefit. The woman who was a sinner was freed from her sin-debt. The woman who had the issue of blood was freed from her affliction. And the apostles who were jailed were allowed to depart without further charge or harm. For them, the words "Go in peace" were because they had been granted something that could provide them with the peace they needed.

On the other hand, the person who is in need in this example in James, has been given nothing but a word of encouragement. Of this, James asks what will that profit them? The answer is, "Nothing." In fact, it will only deepen the affliction they have through the knowledge that their destitute state doesn't matter to another believer at all.

Where is their love, empathy, or any care in their words? Has this person been healed in any way? Certainly not. But this is the purpose of our faith. It is to understand that we have been given mercy, and we are to then extend that mercy to others.

In his words, James uses the term *ophelos*, or profit. As in verse 2:14, he again asks, "what *does* it profit?" James is not speaking of the one with faith. Rather, he is speaking of the one in need. Therefore, the question of verse 2:14, "Can faith save him?", is not speaking of the person with faith, but of the one who is in need. It should say, "Can faith heal him?" The answer is, "Without deeds, 'No!'" That will continue to be explained in the next verses.

Life application: Doing good deeds for the name and for the cause of Christ – this is what James is speaking of today. How many times do we see a friend in need and feel sorry for him, but don't really do anything to help him? "Gee, I'm so sorry about that, Tom..."

Often, we feel helpless simply because the problem is something too big for us to handle, or it is out of our area of expertise. Or maybe we are just too busy to get involved. For whatever reason, we tell Tom, "I wish you well..." If our words aren't backed up with something more solid, they may really mean nothing to Tom.

Quite often, something more solid can simply be spending time with the person. A lot of the pain of difficult times is the isolation during them. If a friend is sick, getting divorced, financially ruined, etc., then it is true that we may not be able to help them with the main problem. But we may be able to lend an ear when they need to talk, or to take them out – away from their pains for a while – to dinner or a movie. What is seemingly unhelpful may be a great value to the person.

In James 2:16, the matter is something we could help with – a friend or stranger who is cold and hungry can easily be given something warm and some food. Wishing them well and spending a few minutes with them really doesn't help them at all. What they need is a Big Mac and a blanket.

If you have never helped out at a homeless shelter or an inner-city mission, you might try it. And you might realize that it is a blessing to you as much or more than for the people whom you have helped.

Try to help in whatever capacity is relevant to the situation. People don't normally forget kindness, and the Lord certainly remembers every good act done in His name.

Lord, give us hearts to help the helpless; give us the desire to assist the needy; grant us the ability to carry through with those intentions, and to provide us with the understanding that You are the one to receive the glory when the deed is done. May we be instruments of Your love to those who are suffering. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. James 2:17

James now shows that a person's faith needs to be expressed outwardly in acts which are of value in relation to the faith. What does that mean exactly? First, he says, "Thus also faith by itself."

The Greek actually is structured with "by itself" at the end of the verse. Further, "faith" has an article before it to show that he is speaking of the faith of the individual in the gospel. Not all types of faith require works to be alive –

"so also the faith, if it may not have works, is dead by itself." YLT

In this, James is showing that a professing Christian's faith, which never goes beyond that faith into some type of action, is a dead faith. One can think of a baby in a womb

which issues forth dead. It doesn't mean it isn't a baby, but it does mean that it has no purpose from that moment on. Such is true, James says, concerning the faith by itself.

He then adds in "if it does not have works." Again, the word "it" is speaking of "the faith," not all types of faith. One does not need to have works if he has faith in the strength of a chair to hold him. One does not need to have works if he has faith that his wife will cook dinner that evening. James is speaking of one who has faith in Christ, but who does not outwardly display that faith in acknowledgment of what they have received. For such a person, their faith "is dead."

The only person it does any good for is the individual. But it does nothing beyond him. But Christ worked in order to save him. What kind of appreciation is there in what He did, when a person isn't willing to extend what Christ did on to others in some manner?

But this brings in an obvious question. When James says, "if it does not have works," what is he talking about? "What works?" The Roman Catholic Church makes a great deal about works being necessary to be saved and to continue to be saved – cooperating in salvation with Christ. Reformed theologians speak of "works" as being a necessary demonstration of saving faith – the fruits of it.

But neither system defines what "works" somehow proves the saving faith – either for or because of salvation. Each just gives the statement, expecting adherents to somehow know what works justify them (RCC) or prove their justification (Reformed).

James will continue to reveal what he means, including what "works" demonstrate a faith which is alive.

Life application: Other than to hang a door, a doornail is pretty much useless. And so it is with a faith in Christ that isn't then exercised through accompanied action. James is going to give biblical examples of faith-based deeds in the verses ahead, and then he will provide a verse which has brought about argument and theological finger-pointing for eons.

Until we get there, let us just think about what it means to be saved and how we can know if we are. Paul says in Romans 10:9 –

“...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Either this is true or it is not. Paul then goes on to say –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

Again, if we are saved by the expression of faith in Romans 10, and then immediately marked with God’s Holy Spirit as indicated in Ephesians, then how can our faith later be considered dead?

Our faith is part of the gift of God for salvation, as is noted elsewhere in Ephesians. So what actions are necessary to ensure our faith is alive? Think on these things and understand that there is a satisfactory answer to them if we simply think on faith from a biblical perspective.

Heavenly Father, for those who have called on Jesus, we once lacked saving faith, but O! how sweet was the day we received the gift of grace through faith from You. May we never forget the glorious moment You brought our souls to life. We reached out and accepted what You offered – peace through Your precious Son, our Lord and Savior! Help us to never forget this, and to act with living faith because of it always. Amen.

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18

James now introduces a possible argument someone might make. It is a hypothetical to get his reader to consider the matter. Paul did this in 1 Corinthians 15:35 –

But someone will say, “How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?”

In this verse, James’ hypothetical is stated in relation to what was said in verse 2:14. There, James said, “What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” Can such faith bring help or healing to another? No. Not unless it is converted into works. In response, someone might say, “You have faith, and I have works.”

What is the source of the faith? What is the motivation behind the works? Also, what external benefit is one over the other? To stimulate thought on the matter, James then

says, “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

A more literal reading of this would be, “Show me your faith apart from your works, and I from my works will show you my faith.” Can a person’s faith without any deeds be demonstrated in the care of another? Obviously not. Faith is something that is within a person and which only concerns that person.

On the other hand, James argues that a person can demonstrate his faith by his works. The person in verse 15 who is naked or destitute, and who is helped out by someone, can see the faith of that person in action.

However, there is a problem. People do good deeds all the time, and they often do not do them in faith. They may do them for recognition, to make themselves feel better, for personal gain, and so on.

Good deeds may demonstrate faith in a true believer, but they also can be done by people who only claim to be believers, or who have nothing to do with the faith. James is only concerned with those of the faith who are willing to demonstrate their faith through good deeds. This will continue to be seen in the verses ahead.

Life application: James is working towards a goal in his thought process. He is coming to the conclusion that faith has an important part in our walk as Christians, but that deeds do as well. He still hasn’t indicated *what* deeds, or *what type* of deeds, other than to speak in the general terms of the previous verses.

In the coming verses, he will use several noted figures from the Bible to establish a baseline of what deeds are acceptable for the justification James refers to. Think on these people, and even do a quick personal study on them and where they are mentioned in Scripture, before those verses are evaluated.

Also, please think about the state of non-believers who do nifty deeds for others. Contemplate how they fit into the picture of the salvation Jesus provides. If deeds could increase our standing before God, can their deeds be credited for righteousness even though they don’t have faith in Jesus? Surely you realize now that they obviously can’t (see Romans 4:2), but it is important to consider their acts in comparison to those of Christians.

James stands and quotes someone who says, “You have faith and I have works.” He then agrees with that person by saying that he will show his faith by what he does. Can I do super things after becoming a Christian to increase my justification before God?

Paul says that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

For the believer, this is not a judgment of justification. Instead, it is a judgment for rewards and losses. Are our deeds done in conjunction with our faith? What deeds are you doing since you became a Christian? And what is the motivation behind them? Are you doing them for your own glory or that of Christ?

Heavenly Father, help us to want to be pleasing to You without pretense or for self-serving reasons. May our actions be a testimony to the salvation that Jesus worked out on our behalf, and may we not suppose that we are increasing our position in You above what He did, but let us trust in Him alone for our standing as Your servants. Amen.

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! James 2:19

The word “you” is singular and it is in the emphatic position, and so James – writing to a Jewish audience – implies that the individual is self-deceived if he claims to have faith and yet has no works. The structure of the first part of this verse varies a bit between manuscripts -

You believe that One is the God.

You believe that the God One is.

Either way, God is the formal object, and it is speaking of the oneness of God, not so much the fact that there is one God – although that is to be understood. This then is in line with the proclamation of Moses which is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4 –

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one!”

James uses this statement of faith in order to highlight the belief in the monotheistic God who is also Triune in nature – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In emphatically stating to each person in his audience that they believe God is One, he is preparing them for his

next words to show how little that actually means all by itself, even though it is a good thing. As he says, “You do well.”

Jews believed this all along, ever since Moses proclaimed it to the people. James says that this is commendable. It demonstrates faith in the words of Moses concerning God’s nature. However, that is only good to a certain point. He shows this by saying, “Even the demons believe.”

The Oneness of God is understood by the demons, just as it is to those humans who accept the premise. Both accept the same truth. However, James continues. They believe “and tremble!”

The word James uses is found only here in Scripture, *phrissó*. It originally meant “to be rough on the surface,” and thus “to bristle.” From this one gets the sense of hair standing on its end from terror. It is more than to tremble, but to shudder. It carries the sense of horror at the knowledge.

This is what James is referring to, and it is something that is intended to point to the Oneness of God, despite speaking of faith in Jesus. In other words, He is indicating that faith in Jesus is faith in God. This is confirmed by the accounts of demons being faced with the presence of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, such as –

“When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed *men*, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ And suddenly they cried out, saying, ‘What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?’” Matthew 8:28, 29

These demons had a knowledge of Jesus, including that He is fully God. As James says, “God is One.” But these are demons. James is saying to his audience that just because someone knows God is One, it doesn’t mean that their knowledge is backed up by anything of further value.

If the demons believed this and backed it up with action, they would not be demons set for destruction, but angels who would forever stand before God praising Him. James’ point is, “Where do you stand? On belief alone, or belief plus acting on your belief.”

Life application: Most rational people will believe there is one God, regardless of how they exercise that faith, so James is saying that this is nothing special. In fact, even the

demons believe this, but they shudder at that knowledge. Why? Because they believe in God from first-hand knowledge! Their belief is more than general faith, and that knowledge tells them they will receive their sentence in due time.

How many times have you heard someone say, “I believe in God,” and then you watch them live lives of ungodliness? This is irrational because someone who believes in God and lives that way hasn’t thought the whole thing through. However, the demons have. They know that judgment awaits, and yet they continue on their reckless path. This is what James is talking about.

Misdirected faith is wasted faith. If you are a Jehovah’s Witness, a Mormon, etc., then you obviously believe in God. However, your faith is misdirected and it is therefore useless. God isn’t contradictory and His word is not to be manipulated. Rather, it is to be believed as written.

You believe that God is One. Good! Don’t waste your faith in Him then. Exercise it appropriately unto salvation and proper action. Call on Jesus, who is God.

O God, we believe in You, and we believe that Your word is true. Give us wisdom in understanding it more each day. Grant us to know Your ways, faith that isn’t dead, and the desire to accomplish deeds that will be pleasing to You. May our lives be as examples to others of faithful Christians who honor You in all ways. Amen.

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? James 2:20

James has spoken of faith without works and works which demonstrate faith. From there, he used demons as an example of belief which is void of any value. They believe in God and yet they tremble.

One can believe in something without having faith in it. A person can believe that an arrangement of wood in the corner of a room is a chair, but he may not have faith that the chair is capable of holding his weight.

A person can believe in God, and yet he can also have no faith in that same God. A person can even believe in Jesus and yet not have faith that Jesus died for his sins and was resurrected proving His own sinlessness. James now asks a question to get his reader to think this matter through. He begins with, “But do you want to know, O foolish man.”

The word translated as “foolish” is *kenos*. It means “empty,” either literally or figuratively. It would indicate a man whose head is empty from not thinking clearly. He is lacking in moral content. To understand, one could think of almost any liberal in the world today. There is no substance behind their thought process.

James’ words are general, as if he is speaking to anyone who hasn’t figured out what he is saying. There needs to be faith behind knowledge. The two need to work in harmony with one another. And so in order to complete his question, he says “that faith without works is dead?”

The word translated as “works” is the same common word that he uses twelve times in this chapter alone, *ergon*. It is a deed which accomplishes what is initiated by an inner desire. James says that faith without such “is dead.” Here, there is a variance in some manuscripts. Some say *nekra*, or “dead,” while others say *arge*, or “worthless.” In the end, they come to substantially the same meaning.

A tree can have fruit which is shriveled up and dead, or it can have fruit which cannot be eaten for some reason. And so either way, the fruit is not able to accomplish that for which it was intended.

To support his statement, James will next give two examples directly from Scripture. He (and thus the Lord who inspired the words) obviously finds that these two examples (Abraham and Rahab) are sufficient to convey the exact intent of what he means here. As he does, so should we.

What is it that Scripture says about these two that James finds worthy of note, and what is it that Scripture itself also elsewhere says about these two which will help us to understand what James is conveying?

Of the concept of faith without works being dead, Albert Barnes says –

“That the faith which does not produce good works is useless in the matter of salvation. He does not mean to say that it would produce no effect, for in the case of the demons it did produce trembling and alarm; but that it would be valueless in the matter of salvation.”

Is this correct?

Two things need to be considered. First, it was argued in verse 2:14 that James' words, "Can faith save him?", were speaking of another, not the individual with the faith. That was substantiated by the fact the example which immediately followed the question was referring to helping another.

Secondly, even if this was speaking of the person with the faith, then to support Albert Barnes' statement, it would have to assume that in Genesis 15:6 Abraham was not yet "saved" (meaning declared righteous), in the sense of pleasing God and being justified by Him. As will be seen, this is entirely incorrect.

And so the question is, "If faith without works is dead, then what 'works' prove that the faith is alive?" Charles Ellicott, in line with almost all reformed thinkers, says, "Works are the natural fruit of faith, and without them it is evident that the tree is dead." This statement, however, explains nothing concerning "what works," demonstrate or prove saving faith.

How can a person read such things and feel any more secure in his walk than before he read them? He is left with nothing but a dubious sense of, "I need to do works to prove my faith."

From there, he goes and does and does and does, but his doing never satisfies because nobody told him what "works" are considered acceptable. One might as well go back to Roman Catholicism under such an explanation of "works which demonstrate saving faith."

Life application: Jesus said, "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22).

Raca means "empty-headed," and it is what James appears to be calling people here. But he is using the term in a general sense to explain how someone may not be thinking an issue through clearly.

Further, Jesus uses the term *moros*, when speaking of a fool (think of our modern term "moron"). Paul uses that term when speaking of others because the Bible already describes who a fool is for us, such as –

“The fool has said in his heart,
'There is no God.'
They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.” Psalm 14:1

Therefore, one valid definition of a fool is a person who denies the existence of God.

But, a person claiming to have faith and yet lacking the proper deeds of faith could also be considered foolish. Keep this in mind because it bears on the examples James is going to give and how we can know what deeds are relevant to saving faith.

One reason this is so important is that anyone can claim any deeds are necessary fruits of a converted person. If so, then if someone else doesn't do what the individual determines is necessary to prove his faith, finger-pointing and accusation results – “He can't be a Christian because...”

This is exactly what happens in churches and denominations all over the world. All because people set their own standards of “deeds of righteousness” rather than looking to the Bible to determine proper deeds which result from saving faith. We will determine what they are in the verses ahead. Sure we will... Have faith!

Lord Jesus, we know that You have accepted us because of our faith in Christ. We have this certainty because we called on You in faith and because You then sealed us with Your Holy Spirit as a guarantee. It was the sweetest moment ever! May our deeds now reflect this, all the days of our lives. Amen.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? James 2:21

James now introduces the first of the two examples which he inferred were coming by the question which comprised the previous verse. He asked, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” To affirm that it is the case, he begins his examples with, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works.” Albert Barnes states the following concerning this –

“Justified by works - That is, in the sense in which James is maintaining that a man professing religion is to be justified by his works. He does not affirm that the ground of acceptance with God is that we keep the law, or are perfect; or that our good works

make an atonement for our sins, and that it is on their account that we are pardoned; nor does he deny that it is necessary that a man should believe in order to be saved. In this sense he does not deny that men are justified by faith; and thus he does not contradict the doctrine of the apostle Paul. But he does teach that where there are no good works, or where there is not a holy life, there is no true religion; that that faith which is not productive of good works is of no value; that if a man has that faith only, it would be impossible that he could be regarded as justified, or could be saved and that consequently, in that large sense, a man is justified by his works that is, they are the evidence that he is a justified man, or is regarded and treated as righteous by his Maker. The point on which the apostle has his eye is the nature of saving faith; and his design is to show that a mere faith which would produce no more effect than that of the demons did, could not save.”

Barnes, as well as others, states that “faith which is not productive of good works is of no value.” This is true. However, he fails to state what “works” are acceptable to justify a man. As noted in the previous commentary, this will naturally cause a person to say, “I need to do works to prove my faith.” From there, he goes and does and does and does, but his doing never satisfies because nobody told him what “works” are considered acceptable.

Barnes then continues with, “that if a man has that faith only, it would be impossible that he could be regarded as justified.” That, unfortunately, entirely negates what Paul says concerning justification. Paul says that a man is justified apart from works of the law. He says that a person believes, and when he believes he is sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Consider the man who believes, is saved, and then dies – such as the man on the cross next to Christ. What works did he do? What about the person who is a quadriplegic and cannot do whatever supposed “works” someone thinks up as being necessary to be justified?

However, this was not the case with Abraham. God declared Abraham righteous in Genesis 15:6. The offering of Isaac was seven chapters and many years later. And yet, James questions, was not Abraham “justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?”

It begs a positive response. Is this the same work that is necessary for us? Obviously not. James will continue with his analysis of what Abraham did for the next few verses. He

will then move on to the prostitute Rahab. What is it about what they did that makes their works acceptable?

Life application: James remembers the great test of faith of the Hebrew people – that of Father Abraham offering up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. However, Paul also speaks of the righteousness of Abraham and how it was obtained by him.

Hebrews 11 speaks of this same account of the offering up of Isaac as well. Because of this, it must be incredibly important and a matter that needs to be considered carefully. Take time to read Genesis 22, Romans 4, and Galatians 3.

If you can understand these areas of the Bible, and also the account as mentioned in Hebrews 11:17-19, then you can more fully understand what is being spoken of by James concerning faith versus deeds. Together, these passages will take you about 15 minutes to finish but they contain a lifetime of wealth for us to remember.

In the end, the account of Abraham, Isaac foreshadows the Person and work of Jesus. He, the only begotten Son of the Father, climbed this same hill, with his own wood (the cross) on His back; and His Father allowed the sacrifice to continue. Because of what Jesus did, we are now reconciled to God the Father.

It is faith in this action and faith alone which justifies us in the sight of God. Don't be distressed at any foe that comes against you – Jesus is on your side and God the Father has approved of you because of faith in what His Son did. Be at peace!

Thank You Heavenly Father for the Gift of Your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thank You that He bore our sin and wrath on the cross so that we are now reconciled to You through His precious blood. We know that we can add nothing to this great work, but we simply need to accept it by faith alone. Praises, honor, and majesty belong to You alone! Amen.

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? James 2:22

James just cited the account of Abraham offering up Isaac on the altar to support his notion that “faith without works is dead.” With that in mind, he then says, “Do you see.”

Translations are divided on this. Some make it a question, “Do you see...?” Others make it a statement of fact, “You see...” Either way, the thought comes out the same in the end, which is, “that faith was working together with his works...”

In the Greek, James makes a play on words by saying that Abraham, “was working the works of him.” So, Abraham has works that he is working out together with his faith. The word is *sunergeó*, and it is key to understanding what is being relayed. It means “to cooperate” or “to work together.” It is where our modern word synergy is derived from. Of this, Albert Barnes says –

“The apostle does not say that, in regard to the merit which justifies, they came in for an equal share, for he makes no affirmation on that point; he does not deny that in the sight of God, who foresees and knows all things, he was regarded as a justified man the moment he believed, but he looks at the result as it was, at Abraham as he appeared under the trial of his faith, and says that in that result there was to be seen the co-operation of faith and good works. Both contributed to the end, as they do now in all cases where there is true religion.”

How can it be that Abraham “was regarded as a justified man the moment he believed,” and yet it also be true that a cooperation of faith and good works contributed to the end, if by “end” he means justification? Either one is justified and declared righteous, or he is not. The only thing that can be affected by his faith are the works (whatever works) that he does.

The works are not separated from his faith, but they are combined with it. James then confirms this by saying that “by works faith was made perfect.” It is not the justification that was made perfect.

Rather, that was something that occurred many years earlier. His later works had no bearing on that declaration – as Paul clearly shows in Romans 4:9-11. This is important to understand prior to arriving at verse 2:24. It is his faith that was made perfect.

Life application: Roman Catholicism claims that deeds of righteousness increase our standing before God and assist in our justification. Protestant theologians say they have no merit but only prove salvation. Paul, however, says we are justified by faith alone and that this occurred in Abraham’s case long before the time of Isaac. Therefore, the justification is by faith alone.

Was Abraham's deed of sacrifice meritorious in and of itself? Or was the action pointing to something else that hasn't yet been analyzed? If you studied the passage from Hebrews 11 which deals with Abraham, then you may have an inkling of what was really involved in Abraham's deed. Understanding what Hebrews 11 says is the key and it will resolve the matter.

No matter what the resolution is, what is important for now is that Abraham did what he was called to do. You also have a divine calling on your life – one to be holy, to honor the Lord, and to care for others in selfless ways. This calling, along with telling others about Jesus' wonderful salvation, is something you should be pursuing all the time. Have faith that the Lord will be with you as you do!

O God, how precious is the study of Your word! It is so wonderful to look into matters presented there and to know that You have provided all we need to know to live in a holy and Christ-honoring manner. In all ways, may our lives reflect Your plan and purpose...to the praise of Your glorious grace. Amen.

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.

James 2:23

James now goes to Scripture to support his claim concerning Abraham that "faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect." He says, "And the Scripture was fulfilled."

The word "fulfilled" is argued by some to mean "confirm" or something akin to that. But the meaning is properly "fulfilled," and it is rightly translated that way. With this understood, he then cites a verse from Genesis 15:6. There it says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Again, it must be remembered that Genesis 15:6 occurred many years before the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22. How could Scripture be "fulfilled" in the sense of justification when he was already declared righteous, as Paul clearly shows in Romans 4 & Galatians 3? But this is the common interpretation of the citing of this verse by James. However, there is no need to use the words "accounted to him for righteousness" as the fulfillment of the Scripture.

Rather, Genesis 15:4 says, “And behold, the word of the Lord *came* to him, saying, ‘This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.’”

The Lord told Abraham that his servant, Eliezer of Damascus, would not be his heir. Rather, it would be a child who issued directly from Abraham’s body. And yet, in sacrificing Isaac on the altar, how could he be the promised heir? But Abraham followed through, in faith, with the sacrifice.

He was only stopped by the call of God, and thus the Scripture – concerning a son from his own body being the heir – was fulfilled. Whether Isaac was actually sacrificed, which proved to be not necessary, or whether the Lord stopped the sacrifice at the last minute, Abraham was certain that Isaac would be the heir. How can this be? It is explained by the author of Hebrews –

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

-Hebrews 11:17-19

Despite Abraham’s attempt to follow through with the act, Abraham understood that Isaac was, and would remain, the son of promise. Thus, “the Scripture was fulfilled” is not speaking of the words, “and it was accounted to him for righteousness,” but of the words, “Abraham believed God.”

This declaration of righteousness is what the belief signified. Abraham believed God in Genesis 15, and his faith in what he was told then did not waiver in Genesis 22. The entire account comes back to one word – FAITH. And because of Abraham’s faith, James finishes the thought with, “And he was called the friend of God.”

What is it that pleases God? It is faith. Abraham had faith and he demonstrated his faith in action. However, there may be those who are not able to demonstrate faith in action due to some limitation. This does not negate their faith. God looks on the heart and motives behind any action.

Some actions are accomplished, but not in faith. Some have faith, but there are no actions to support it. Either way, faith is what is being referred to in regard to

justification. Concerning the notion of Abraham being called the friend of God, two notable verses confirm this –

“Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?” 2 Chronicles 20:7

*“But you, Israel, are My servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
The descendants of Abraham My friend.” Isaiah 41:8*

Life application: It is important to remember that Abraham’s declaration of righteousness was seven chapters and many long years before the account of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. Therefore, the crediting of righteousness can have nothing to do with what Abraham did at Mount Moriah. Abraham simply looked up at the stars, believed God’s promise, and it was credited as righteousness to him.

Was the deed then something that “naturally stems” from saving faith? Was it something that “added to” his righteousness? Or was it a deed of faith because Abraham was a man of faith – already declared righteous because of his faith? Clearly, it was the last: a deed of faith.

You should know and understand that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, and yet you are facing a trial or hardship, God has ordained it for you according to His great wisdom and for your benefit. Be at peace that, whatever you are facing, He is there with you. This is certain because of what Jesus did on your behalf.

Lord God, we often face difficulties and trials that we wish we didn’t have to face, but we know Your promises to us stand, and that all things are working together for our good because of Your love for us in Christ Jesus. Give us the strength to face every test and every trial just as You did for Abraham, our great father of faith. Amen.

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. James 2:24

James 2:24 is one of the most debated verses in the book of James, and even in the New Testament. It is in the indicative mood, and is likely a question, rather than a statement of fact. Thus, the Douay-Rheims Bible says –

“Do you see that by works a man is justified; and not by faith only?”

Further, the word “only,” is in the emphatic position. In essence, James asks it with a stress. He is arguing that someone who has faith only and is unwilling to exercise that faith, is missing a key element of the process of justification. As questioned before concerning works that justify, “What works?” Is there a set standard of works which defines justification? How is a person justified before God?

Concerning justification, Paul states, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28). Deeds of the law, meaning the law of Moses (or certainly whatever other law exists at the time, because the Law of Moses did not exist at the time of Abraham) cannot justify. Man is justified apart from deeds of the law.

Rather, our *faith alone* in what Jesus has done justifies us, apart from the law. However, what James has written seems, on the surface, to conflict with Paul’s idea of “faith alone” for justification.

Either there is a contradiction or James is speaking on an entirely different level concerning the same matter. Paul is very clear in what he means and repeats his stand of *faith alone* elsewhere. He makes the same exact claim four more times in his epistles: Romans 5:1, Galatians 2:16, Galatians 3:11, and Galatians 3:24.

These verses and their surrounding thoughts clearly point to justification (being declared righteous) by faith alone. In addition to this, his letters allude to this concept many other times.

Biblical commentaries will state that good works *stem necessarily* from salvation because of “true faith.” In other words, if you have true faith, you will naturally *do* “good works.” Therefore, the claim is that James is referring to good works as the “fruit” of justification or “proof of faith.”

In fact, many people judge another’s salvation based on the works they do; the claim is that if there are no works, there is no saving faith. This is shallow at best and fails to recognize two things:

- 1) That non-Christians – all over the world – are actively *doing* “good works.” Many times these are equal to or better than those of saved Christians. Even self-proclaimed “atheists” go out and do good stuff for other people. Such works simply cannot be what justifies us or “proves” our justification, in any way, shape,

or form. If they do, then non-believers have a right to look down on Christians who don't do what they do and at the same level of output.

- 2) This doesn't align at all with what James is saying. James is saying that a person is "justified by works," not that justification is somehow proved by what he does.

Good works as a demonstration of salvation may appear to be the biblical admonition, but it is not always the biblical norm. The entire book of 1 Corinthians is written to already-saved believers.

Paul never questions their salvation – even in the midst of gross immorality that was worse than the pagans. They are the most disorganized, haphazard bunch of people one can imagine. Good works are certainly lacking in the lives of these saved people... and yet they are saved – hence justified.

If one pursues works as evidence of true saving faith to its logical conclusion, then no known amount of good works could ever be enough to justify a person or prove that justification. In essence, one would be in a never-ending cycle of fret as to whether he has "appeased"

God enough to prove his faith. This is the dilemma that Martin Luther was caught in. Roman Catholicism completely controlled its adherents in this respect, of which he was one. In essence, he was in complete bondage to the strict edicts and demands of the Roman Catholic Church.

The extra-biblical teachings of depraved men grow abundantly in such an environment – indulgences, purgatory, prayers to the saints, adoration of Mary, legalism of all types, etc. are all the natural result of leaving behind the simplicity of the Gospel of Jesus which says we are justified by faith alone.

The RCC, in its official canons from the Council of Trent (which are in full effect today), goes beyond Scripture and actually implicitly declares the Apostle Paul anathema. This is because what is being stated in them is 100% contrary to what he wrote. Additionally, canon 23 directly contradicts Jesus' words and therefore, by default, proclaims Jesus anathema (oops):

Canon 9 "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of

Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.”

Canon 10 “If any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake, or that it is that confidence alone by which we are justified ... let him be accursed”

Canon 14 “If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema.”

Canon 23 “If any one saith, that a man once justified can sin no more, nor lose grace, and that therefore he that falls and sins was never truly justified; or, on the other hand, that he is able, during his whole life, to avoid all sins, even those that are venial,- except by a special privilege from God, as the Church holds in regard of the Blessed Virgin; let him be anathema.” *(Underlining added by me.)*

Canon 24 “If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.”

Canon 30 “If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.”

Canon 33 “If any one saith, that, by the Catholic doctrine touching Justification, by this holy Synod inset forth in this present decree, the glory of God, or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ are in any way derogated from, and not rather that the truth of our faith, and the glory in fine of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered (more) illustrious; let him be anathema.”

This council declares that if anyone disagrees with it, rather than the teachings of Scripture, they are damned.

If these official canons were true, then the message of eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ (by faith alone) would be false. Further, salvation would be entirely up to the

determination of the RCC. Thanks be to God, however, that the truth of the gospel is that we are saved, justified, sanctified, and glorified by Jesus' work alone.

However, this still doesn't resolve the apparent conflict between Romans 3:28 and James 2:24. Our arbitrary works cannot resolve the dilemma between what Paul said and what James said, and so the answer must not lie within us at all. Rather the good works which justify us according to James must be as Jesus declared.

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” John 6:29

This is because –

“He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.” John 12:44

Our faith in Jesus is the “work” that God requires. We believe in (have faith in) Jesus' earthly ministry and are justified as Paul says in Romans. Our justification in what we *do* then (according to James) must be our reliance on Jesus' works – His continued work on our behalf as the Mediator between God and man and the future promises which we wait patiently for. This is exactly what was seen in Abraham. He believed that his son, Isaac, would be the son of promise even though he was about to sacrifice him.

If this isn't the case, then we remain in a never-ending cycle of wondering if our “works” are justifying us – even though Paul says we are already justified. By necessity, it must all come back to Christ.

This is even confirmed by James –

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? ²² Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? James 2:20-22

Paul states in Romans 4 that Abraham was justified (declared righteous) by faith, and then he cites Genesis 15. But James cites Genesis 22 (seven chapters and many years after the declaration of righteousness made in Genesis 15). The Genesis 22 account (which James refers to) is explained in Hebrews 11:17-19 –

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸ of whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called,’ ¹⁹ concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense.”

Do you see? Abraham’s *faith* (By faith Abraham...) was made complete in what he did, as it was motivated by further faith in God. This was the very work that James is citing. The *deed* is the faith in God’s provision to bring Isaac back from the dead. It is not the sacrificing of Isaac, but the trust in God that is being spoken of in the words, “By faith Abraham.”

From first to last, our *declaration of justification* is from and of Jesus Christ – what He did on our behalf. Our *works of justification* are faith in Him and the works He is accomplishing and will accomplish on our behalf. Again –

“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” John 6:29

One argument against this could be that James, in most of chapter 2, is talking about actual, demonstrable deeds leading to righteousness. As an example –

“What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James 2:14-17

Counterargument – James gives a tangible example of food and clothing, but then turns to say, “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” However, no action is specified. We’ve already determined that the action required for justification is faith. Our faith justifies us through and through.

In the coming verse, James will cite another example of works justifying a person. Will that example align with what is presented here? We shall see when we get to it. For now, Romans 4 debunks any thought of boasting before God based on deeds. Take time to read the entire passage again to understand what it is saying. Understand that it fully supports what is presented here.

Life application: To say that justification leads naturally to good works and that they, therefore, *prove* salvation discounts the biblical example (which is cited in this note) and it also leads to a never-ending cycle of wondering which works count and which don't.

Rather, all good things come from Christ, belong to Christ, and are by necessity a result of what He alone has done, is doing, or will do for us. Have faith in Him and His salvation and you are secure in that...in that alone.

Concerning the gospel of Christ, Paul says –

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” Romans 1:17

“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” Romans 8:30

Have faith in Jesus Christ – what He did for you, what He is doing for you, and what He has promised to you. Your works of faith are a demonstration of your faith.

Lord God, the Bible says that Christ Jesus has done everything necessary for us to be saved, and that our faith alone is sufficient to reconcile us to You. Help us not to fall back onto a law which could never save, but to trust in the One who fulfilled that law for us. And then, Lord, help us to have faith that this is so, and that the promises He has made are sure and reliable. With this, You will certainly be pleased. Thank You for Jesus – the One who has saved us! Amen.

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? James 2:25

James now proceeds to his final example of being justified by works. Here, he uses the harlot Rahab as an example. Unlike Abraham, who is discussed in detail by Paul concerning being justified by faith alone, there is very little mention of Rahab in Scripture, and she is only mentioned three times in the New Testament.

The first of these three times is in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Her name is simply mentioned along with other names in the list. She is then mentioned in Hebrews 11 in a single verse. And now she is mentioned in this one verse by James. In the Old Testament, it tells of what she did in Joshua 2, and the results of that for her in Joshua 6.

On a cursory reading, everything about what she did in Joshua 2 appears to be an active work on her part. Because of this, James says, “was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works.”

This is James’ position, and it is recorded in Scripture. It must be true. As noted, the account of Joshua 2 tells what she did, and the account in Joshua 6 shows the result – the saving of her family and herself. James then explicitly cites the work that she did. It was “when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way.”

Here, like in the evaluation of the previous verse, someone might now argue that James is referring to actual, demonstrable deeds leading to righteousness. The idea (as the RCC would claim) is that Rahab has participated in her justification through her deeds. This is good news for people like Bill Gates who do lots of things to be considered philanthropic and caring. Maybe there is hope for him because of all he has done!

No. It doesn’t work that way. A man is justified by faith alone – apart from deeds of the law. This is what Paul speaks of, and it is actually – once again – supported by Hebrews 11–

“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” Hebrews 11:31

Hebrews 11, which is prior to the book of James for a reason in Scripture, cites the exact same deed that James now cites. And it says Rahab’s deed was a deed of faith. It was not separate from, but because of, her faith. Her faith saved her and it was expressed in her deed. In other words, a deed, not done in faith, is of no value in this equation.

Bill Gates cannot use James 2 to say he stands justified before God, and the RCC cannot say that a person’s arbitrary deeds increase their justification before God. It is by faith, and by faith alone, that one is justified before God. The deeds of faith are what James is referring to.

When someone says, “Good deeds are the fruit of faith,” the question to then be asked is, “What deeds?” Unless the answer is, “Deeds of faith,” then they have missed the mark of what Scripture is referring to. And the only One who can determine if a deed is of faith is God who reads the hearts and minds. Arbitrary standards of what constitutes “good deeds” are to be rejected. A person’s faith belongs to that person alone.

Life application: “By faith,” Rahab was saved. The faith justifies. The deed is merely an attachment to the faith. Many attempt to climb high mountains, but the lack of motivation to reach the summit will often outweigh the physical ability to do so; some will turn back without accomplishing their task.

In contrast, those who truly desire to reach the summit can do so – even if they have far less physical strength than those who couldn’t make it. Those with faith that they can do it will be those who prevail.

We often quit a task because we don’t have faith in a positive outcome. Those who do, even with fewer resources, will continue on and be successful. The outcome is attainable, but the faith is vital.

In Matthew 17, Jesus’ disciples couldn’t heal a boy with a demon. Jesus rebuked them by saying, “O faithless and perverse generation...” (Matthew 17:17). Later when they asked Him why they couldn’t drive out the demon, He responded –

“Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. ²¹ However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” Matthew 17:20, 21

The outcome then was possible, but they lacked the proper faith to bring it about. Rahab had saving faith in the God of Israel. Her words indicate this –

“And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He *is* God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” Joshua 2:11

Rahab understood the omnipotence of the LORD and put her trust in it. Today, if you are facing a difficult situation, remember that God is in complete control. Have faith that what He has planned is sufficient to accomplish the task according to His will and for your best interests.

Lord, if Rahab the harlot can demonstrate such immense faith despite the situation she faced, surely we can too. Be with us and strengthen our faith that we might stand in the times of testing and trial. Give us faith that can move mountains and the certainty that what we need to accomplish will occur if it is in accord with Your sovereign will. To Your glory and in Jesus’ name. Amen.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26

James closes out Chapter 2 with a clear and concise simile which sums up his thoughts on faith and works. He begins with, "For the body without the spirit is dead."

It is an obvious statement. When the spirit of a man departs, the body dies. This is seen throughout Scripture, including the most poignant example found in human history –

"So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." John 19:30

Jesus literally and truly died when His spirit left Him. His body could no longer perform the functions of a living being. This is true with all who die. Understanding that, and using a word translated as "as" for the comparison, James then says, "so faith without works is dead also."

Faith by itself serves no one. But when faith is moved into action, as when a spirit moves a body, so faith is alive. As throughout several verses already, the question comes down to "what works?" As this commentary is being evaluated, fingers are typing on a keyboard. It takes faith that the keyboard will transmit the signal to the computer. As the keyboard is battery-operated, it takes faith that the battery has sufficient energy in it to continue the commentary.

Though we don't think of this, it is always true concerning such things. Faith is defined in Hebrews 11:1 –

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The answer to the question of "What works?" is "Anything that carries the substance of the things hoped for into action." There is not an arbitrary set of rules or standards invented by man which say, "He is doing works that demonstrate saving faith," or "He cannot be saved because his works are not evident."

The only one who can do the works in faith is the individual with the faith. And the only One who can truly evaluate the works as to whether they are of faith or not is God. Is lying in a bed, completely paralyzed, and yet praying to God for others a deed of faith? Yes, of course it is. If the person is praying to God for others, it is because he has faith that his prayers are heard by God.

However, if that person is praying to the god of Islam, it is misdirected faith, and thus wasted faith. One must have properly directed faith in order for it to be accepted by God. All prayers are to go through God's Mediator, Jesus Christ. When this is done by the poor paralytic, his prayers of faith are credited to him as works of faith.

This is exactly why Paul says that one must confess Jesus as Lord –

“...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:9, 10

It is unreasonable to expect that a person who claims to have faith would be unwilling to do the one thing that all people can do – in faith – to be saved. Even a mute person can confess with his mouth. The sound may not be audible, but it is a confession, nonetheless.

Any deed done in faith (meaning in faith in relation to Jesus Christ) is a work of faith as spoken of by James in this chapter. Any deed not done in faith is not. It is that simple.

Life application: Concerning faith and works as spoken of by James, the two are inseparable. It all points back to the work of Jesus Christ – in the life of the unbeliever and in the life of the believer.

If you have acknowledged Jesus Christ as Lord, then your deeds of faith are to continue. Trust Him, and have faith that your life is being directed by Him to a good end for you. Any actual workings of deeds are to be done in faith that they are a part of His great plan in your life – just as Abraham offering up Isaac was; just as Rahab's faith in the God of Israel was; and just as was the case in every faithful figure mentioned (or remaining unmentioned but remembered) in Hebrews 11.

Heroes of the faith are those who live intimately connected to the Spirit of God and who exercise faith in all they do. Are you a hero of the faith? Do you honestly trust that the immense trial you are facing is for a good end and a glorious purpose?

What about the annoying things that happen throughout the day? Have you come to the realization that even these are molding you for your good and for His glory? Walk in His Spirit, trusting that what transpires is just as it should be, O child of the Living God.

Thank You Lord that all things – good and difficult – are being used to conform us to Your glorious image and to refine us both in this life and for the life to come. We will trust You, by faith, in everything that occurs – that You will be glorified through our lives. In Jesus' name! Amen.

CHAPTER 3

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. James 3:1

James now begins Chapter 3 by once again addressing fellow believers with the words, “My brethren.” He is concerned about the quality of understanding matters of doctrine within the fellowship, and so he says to them, “let not many of you become teachers.”

The word he uses signifies one competent in instruction. In this case, he is referring to a knowledge of Scripture and its right application, meaning proper theology. This is obvious because he is writing to an assembly of believers who are gathered as a synagogue (verse 2:2), meaning a group which has come together for this purpose.

His words indicate that a few who are qualified and knowledgeable in the word are far more preferable than having many teach, but who are unqualified. Indeed, there are many valid reasons for this, but James then goes on to give one main reason for the directive by saying, “knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

Using the first-person plural, James is including himself in being a teacher, and the consequences of this if his duties are not properly handled. As a teacher of the word, he has a concern even for his own state as a teacher. It shows a care and a concern that his doctrine and instruction are more important to him than merely holding the position.

The results of not having this care and concern for doctrine will lead to an unfavorable judgment. The KJV, unfortunately and incorrectly, translates this word as “condemnation” rather than “judgment.” As James is writing to believers (my brethren), and as this means that they are in Christ and are saved, there is a truth revealed elsewhere in Scripture concerning this matter – as is noted by Paul in Romans 8:1, 1 Corinthians 11:32, and elsewhere – which is that believers have gone from condemnation to salvation. Ours is a judgment not for condemnation, but for rewards and loss.

James’ point is that a teacher who is unqualified will not be excused because of his lack of knowledge, but will rather be held to a higher standard because of the position he has assumed. Instead of rewards for accepting the challenge, there will be loss for failing to bring honor to the position, sound instruction to those who listen, and glory to God through the instruction.

Life application: Having a proper understanding of the Bible before teaching ought to be the norm, but it is more often than not the exception. Very few ministers, pastors, and teachers have actually read through the Bible even once. Bible teachers will often use non-biblical texts for Bible study, something which defeats the purpose of the study.

Rather than the word itself, teachers are known to refer to A Purpose Driven Life, the Left Behind series, or one of a number of other non-biblical texts as if they were authoritative for successful living, or for an understanding of points of doctrine, such as end-times events.

If you want bad doctrine, just click on the internet and type in “Bible Study.” There are millions of sites containing such bad information that it simply isn’t possible to discern what is right and what is wrong without already knowing what the Bible actually says. Is it ok to drink alcohol? Only one answer is correct – Yes or No. But without having personally studied the issue, how can you know which is true?

What should be the truth about Christian giving – tithing or something else? What does the Bible really teach about tithing anyway? The list is long of such lesser issues which can lead people down faulty paths, and which will inevitably set our lives on unhappy courses. How much worse, then, with the greater issues such as justification, sanctification, proper conduct within the church, etc.?

Consider other major doctrines such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, the resurrection, etc. If you have gotten those wrong, your salvation very well may be in question. And yet there are millions of people who either deny these fundamental truths or don’t know where they stand on the issue.

If the masses who aren’t teachers are in trouble, then how much more will be the teachers of such heresies? Misdirected faith is wasted faith. Make sure you read your Bible and know the truth – eternity awaits.

Lord God, may You be our guide and our teacher through the word You have given. When we attend a Bible study or read a commentary, may You open our eyes to the truth of what is being taught. Give us proper biblical discernment as a gift to us so that we might not sin against You. This we ask in the beautiful name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. James 3:2

James just spoke of the need for people to not be hasty in becoming teachers, “knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” Now, to support that notion, he says, “For we all stumble in many things.” It is a universal statement, inclusive of himself, that people are prone to error. The word translated as “stumble” is the same word used in verse 2:10, where he noted –

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.”

His point is that all are guilty of breaking the law. It is something confirmed by Paul in the book of Romans –

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

Next, to further define what he means by “stumble,” he says, “If anyone does not stumble in word.” The idea here is that everyone is prone to stumble, and thus, people who desire to be teachers need to be properly trained in teaching. However, there are those whose point of stumbling is in their words. Such cannot keep watch over their tongues. This is a great error because the tongue is the very means by which the teaching is communicated.

Therefore, if the person’s words are not circumspect, there will be a negative impression brought upon the very word which is being taught. And yet, it is the word which is intended to bring life, restoration with God, and a proper walk before Him. A man who can guard his tongue is needed. In this, James says, “he *is* a perfect man.”

The word translated as “perfect” gives the sense of full maturity, being brought to the end of the development process so that there is a perfection of his verbal conduct. There will be no stumbling because he has trained himself in the word. It is reflective of what is said in Psalm 39:1 –

“I said, ‘I will guard my ways,
Lest I sin with my tongue;
I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle,
While the wicked are before me.’”

Finally, James describes such a perfect man by saying that he is “able also to bridle the whole body.” How can that be? The tongue is so small, and it is normally kept out of sight. And yet James says that in keeping the tongue in check, the whole body is bridled!

The word he uses is one only found here and in James 1:26, *chalinagógeó*, and it signifies “to curb,” “restrain,” or even “to bridle.” One puts a bridle in the mouth of a horse, and the horse can then be moved wherever the rider determines. This is the idea that James gives here. To bridle the tongue will keep the whole body moving in the desired path.

James will continue with his thoughts on the tongue in the verses ahead, warning all that the tongue must be properly restrained, or severe consequences will result.

Life application: Living a faultless life is a hard challenge and, as James indicates, we all stumble in many ways. There are certain sects and cults which claim that we can have total victory over sin even in this life. But 1 John 1:10 dispels that notion –

“If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

We cannot claim that we were or are yet free from sin. To make such a claim is to call the inspiration of Scripture into question. However, we can strive to be faultless in the use of our tongue. And this, in turn, will allow us to keep the rest of our actions in check as well.

Because of the large amount of effort James will dedicate to the subject of keeping watch over our tongues, we will demonstrate wisdom to take heed to his admonitions. In addition to James, the book of Proverbs deals with the subject of exercising care in the use of our mouths.

Let us make a concerted effort to use our mouths for praise and not cursing, adoration and not contempt, uplifting and not tearing down. If we do this, not only will those we address be blessed, but we will as well.

Negativity in life stores up in our souls and makes us bitter. So let us attempt to focus on the good aspects of others – to the extent possible, depending on the person. If there is nothing redeeming in the person, then don’t say anything at all. Why lower yourself to the level of a debased person? All things to the glory of the Lord! So let us watch our tongues closely.

Heavenly Father, we surely and openly admit to our inability to control our tongues in all situations. Therefore, we ask a heaping dose of restraint in this matter. Refresh us and give us the ability to overcome the use of inappropriate words. We ask this that You will be glorified in our lives and in the eyes of those around us. Amen.

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. James 3:3

James just spoke of not stumbling with our tongues, which leads to being able to bridle the whole body. He now will give a few examples which convey this same type of idea. The first is in line with what he just said, that of bridling a horse. In this, he exclaims, "Indeed."

Some manuscripts (and thus some translations) exclude the word and replace it with a less exciting "but if." However, assuming "indeed" belongs to the original, James excitedly pens the thought, knowing that it is a beautiful metaphor to convey his intent. As he continues, he says, "we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us."

The word "horses" is in the emphatic position, showing the greatness of the beast. It is large, swift, powerful, and it is most difficult to restrain. So majestic and filled with strength and bravado is the horse that the Lord joyfully called out its noble characteristics to Job –

"Have you given the horse strength?
Have you clothed his neck with thunder?
²⁰ Can you frighten him like a locust?
His majestic snorting strikes terror.
²¹ He paws in the valley, and rejoices in *his* strength;
He gallops into the clash of arms.
²² He mocks at fear, and is not frightened;
Nor does he turn back from the sword.
²³ The quiver rattles against him,
The glittering spear and javelin.
²⁴ He devours the distance with fierceness and rage;
Nor does he come to a halt because the trumpet *has* sounded.
²⁵ At *the blast of* the trumpet he says, 'Aha!'
He smells the battle from afar,
The thunder of captains and shouting." Job 39:19-25

James places the horse in the emphatic position for this reason, but then notes that a mere bit in the mouth can bring these splendid creatures into submission so "that they may obey us."

A teeny, little thing can subdue these marvelous beasts, and in this state, “we turn their whole body.” The obedience of the whole body is brought about by one small item, which is contained within the mouth. As this is so, the obvious connection to our tongue is made. If we can restrain it, then the whole body can be restrained by that action.

Life application: Watching our mouths is an important aspect of our lives in any situation, but as a teacher, it is even more so. Parents who don’t watch their tongues around their children are going to have children with evil mouths.

Teachers who flippantly talk about misguided subjects will only produce misguided students. And Bible teachers and pastors who make faulty analyses of biblical passages are going to produce students and congregations with faulty doctrine.

If you don’t think this is so, just examine your thoughts on any touchy subject from a biblical perspective. Either it is acceptable or it is not acceptable, but what you were trained is what you believe, regardless of what the truth really is.

Now, go do a study directly from the word and check it out for yourself – without presupposing the outcome. Continue this pattern with every doctrine you have learned. Don’t blindly accept what you are taught. Your teacher is more responsible, but you still bear responsibility in the matter.

Glorious heavenly Father – we can see that just as a large horse is moved about by a small bit in its mouth, so is the tongue in our Bible teachers’ mouths. Their tongues may not be fitted perfectly, and their doctrine may be lacking. Help us check out what we are taught. Please keep our doctrine pure by opening our eyes to what is correct. Amen.

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. James 3:4

James just wrote about the majestic horse, which can be brought into submission by a mere bit in its mouth. He now turns to a nautical theme, that of the ship. He says, “Look also at ships.”

One can read the excitement in his words as he considers this, and as he places an emphasis (in the Greek) upon the first clause. It may be better translated as “Behold!” Whether James had seen larger ships along the Mediterranean Sea or only smaller vessels on the Sea of Galilee, it hardly matters when considering the example he will give, which is that “although they are so large and driven by fierce winds.”

Even if James had only seen the smaller vessels at the Sea of Galilee, they would still be big enough to carry men and fishing equipment or passengers. And he would still have known of the amazingly fierce winds which would rush down through the Arbel Pass from the Mediterranean and then over the sea itself.

The shallow nature of the sea, combined with these rushing winds, would cause waves to increase to great size. As the winds whipped around, there would be chaos in the waters. It is reminiscent of what is recorded in Luke 8:22-24 –

“Now it happened, on a certain day, that He got into a boat with His disciples. And He said to them, ‘Let us cross over to the other side of the lake.’ And they launched out. ²³ But as they sailed He fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling *with water*, and were in jeopardy. ²⁴ And they came to Him and awoke Him, saying, ‘Master, Master, we are perishing!’”

James may have even taken a trip to the Mediterranean and seen the larger ships which conducted trading throughout the Middle East. In Acts, one that Paul traveled on carried 276 people. But even if James didn’t actually see such a ship, the Hebrew Scriptures refer to them on several occasions, such as in the book of Jonah, or as referred to in these words from the psalms –

“Those who go down to the sea in ships,
Who do business on great waters,
²⁴ They see the works of the Lord,
And His wonders in the deep.
²⁵ For He commands and raises the stormy wind,
Which lifts up the waves of the sea.
²⁶ They mount up to the heavens,
They go down again to the depths;
Their soul melts because of trouble.
²⁷ They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
And are at their wits’ end.
²⁸ Then they cry out to the Lord in their trouble,
And He brings them out of their distresses.
²⁹ He calms the storm,
So that its waves are still.
³⁰ Then they are glad because they are quiet;
So He guides them to their desired haven.” Psalm 107:23-30

James, like Jonah and the psalms, speaks of the fierce winds which can toss a ship about. And yet, the ship is not left without its own means of harnessing and then directing even such winds. As he says, “they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.”

Unless the winds are completely unmanageable, the ship is able to capture them in its sails, and then the boat – this massive home upon the seas – is directed by a rudder which is insignificant in comparison to the size of the ship. But despite its diminutive size, the pilot can choose his course and pursue it by turning this small device.

Here, in these words, James is comparing a ship to an individual. The winds are those things which impel us from within our minds, tossing us back and forth, and which need to be properly directed. And the rudder is compared to the tongue. Whichever way the tongue moves will impel the man in that direction – be it good or ill.

Life application: Imagine the massive size of modern ships – larger than football fields and able to carry loads of cargo more immense than most of us can actually imagine. And yet they can be steered by a rudder at the back of the ship, which is minuscule in comparison to the size of the ship with its load.

Add in strong winds which push against the gigantic sides of the ships and the waves which beat down the length of them, and it is astonishing that they can keep a true course all the way to their remote destinations. Now think on the even more immense direction of souls steered by a wayward preacher or leader. In 2 Peter 1:21, it says –

“...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.”

The words of prophecy which Peter refers to have come to be known as the Holy Bible. They were divinely inspired by God. In fact, this verse indicates that these men were “moved by the Holy Spirit,” even as a ship is carried along by the wind. Imagine now – even though these words were directed as if by a great wind moving the men as they received the words of God, it takes just a small rudder to distort them for one’s own evil purposes.

An effective distortion of God’s intent will direct the course of the lives of those who believe it – even onto the rocky shores of destruction. However, there is a lighthouse to direct us on the foaming seas; it is God’s Holy Spirit.

How important then is it to check what we have been taught and ask for illumination of the word by God so that we don't end in the depths of the ocean of deceitful instruction, tossed about by every wind of doctrine, or even cast upon the rocks of destruction.

Heavenly Father, as Your word unfolds before us, it gives us light and understanding – even to the simplest of us. Help us to yearn for Your word, desiring it as we do the very water we need on a hot and dry day. Have mercy upon us, because we love Your name and because we desire to be true to You. And so, as we walk along life's path, may Your word be our guide so that sin will not prevail among us. Amen.

**Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.
See how great a forest a little fire kindles!** James 3:5

James continues in this verse with the notion of something small which can affect something much larger. First, he revisits the issue of the tongue by saying, “Even so the tongue is a little member.”

The average tongue of a human is a couple of ounces. It is almost always hidden out of sight, and apart from sticking it out to demean someone else, or for a less-than-classy addition to a selfie, it seems more geared toward regulating things going on inside of the body.

And yet, it is the tongue which “boasts of great things.” We may not often think about the tongue as one of the main parts of the speech-making process, but it is. In fact, without a tongue, speech would be reduced to grunts and moans. But when the tongue operates properly, it is the very means of getting the words in our heads to be understood by those around us.

Here, James shows that this teeny part of the body is that which makes great boasts. From there, he hints at how damaging this is by equating it to something that can be hugely destructive by saying, “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”

This is a universally understood precept. Wherever fire is known, its destructive effects are also understood. A single spark can light a fire for cooking, or it can increase in size to bring down an entire forest. It is how the fire is contained that its usefulness or out-of-control nature is seen.

Likewise, the tongue can be contained, or it can be left unrestrained. The effects of each are also understood. James will continue with this analogy in the coming verse.

Life application: The tongue, which, although small in comparison to the rest of the body, can be a force of destruction for so much more than its size would intimate -

The tongue is from where our boasting proceeds.

The tongue is from where our cursing proceeds.

The tongue is from where our blessings proceed.

The tongue is from where our instruction for others proceeds.

The tongue is from where the proclamation for our salvation proceeds.

As Paul says –

“...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Romans 10:9, 10

Our tongue is a force for both good and evil depending on how it is used. When it is used improperly, it – just like a small spark in the forest – can cause immense destruction.

Think on the misspoken words in political history which have cost millions of lives. Likewise, think of the words which issue from the mouths of false prophets, which have led to the eternal condemnation of souls around the world and throughout history. If humanity were a forest and a false teacher were a spark, the recipients of his fiery message would be compared to dry tinder, which is so easily consumed.

This is why it is so very important to replenish oneself from the well of Living Water, which gives life and protection from this inferno. Read your Bible, study your Bible, and know your Bible better than you know yourself. In doing this, the Water of Life will guard your limbs, your trunk, and your roots from the wiles of the evil one.

Lord God, may we each be like the man the Bible speaks of who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not stand in the way of sinners, and who does not sit in the seat of mockers. Instead, may our delight be in Your law, and may we meditate on it day and night. In this, we will be like trees planted by streams of water. Our fruit will yield in its season, and our leaves shall not wither. Amen.

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. James 3:6

For this verse, James pulled out his Greek lexicon and used several words which are rarely found, or only found here. He just said in the previous verse, “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!”

Now, building upon that thought, he says, “And the tongue *is* a fire.” He has made a direct comparison of a fire, which is small and yet it can burn down a whole forest, to the tongue, which is small. It implies that the tongue can also do an immense amount of damage. He will further explain this. Before doing so, he says that the fire, which the tongue is, can be equated to “a world of iniquity.”

The word for “world” is a common one, *kosmos*. It generally signifies an orderly arrangement, which the physical world certainly is. In this, he is saying that the tongue “is an organism containing within itself all evil essence, which from it permeates the entire man” (Vincent’s Word Studies). It is an orderly arrangement of that which is contrary to God’s righteousness and His righteous judgments.

Understanding this now, James continues with, “The tongue is so set among our members.” The word translated as “is so set” is not uncommon, but it is more than a simple “is.” It signifies to “set in order,” or “appoint.” One can think of the tongue being put in charge or having authority. With this setting of authority within our members, James then says, “that it defiles the whole body.”

Here is another new word in Scripture, *spiloó*. It signifies to stain, spot, or soil. One can see the root of our modern-day word “spill” in it. When one spills something, it can stain something else. This word will only be seen again in Jude 1:23.

The tongue, like the little fire of the previous verse, goes forth and puts a stain upon the whole body. As the verb is a present participle, it literally reads, “defiling the whole body.” It is active, and it spreads like a cancer to every member. Once this happens, James says that it “sets on fire the course of nature.”

Here, James uses two new words. The first is *phlogizó*. It is a verb used twice here in James 3:6, and nowhere else. It means “to cause to blaze.” It is also a present participle, and so it more literally reads, “setting on fire.” The tongue actively is setting on fire “the course of nature.”

Here is the second new word, and it is found only here in the Bible: *trochos*. It signifies a wheel. It is that which moves on a circular track, and thus it speaks of a circuit representing the “moral axis” on which our lives turn. Along with this, James ties the word “wheel” in with the word *genesis*, signifying one’s birth or lineage. Because of the unusual nature of the words, translations vary widely –

- “the whole course of one's life” (NIV)
- “your whole life” (NLT)
- “the course of nature” (BLB)
- “the entire course of our existence” (GNT)
- “the course of human existence” (NET Bible)
- “the successions of generations” (Aramaic)
- “the wheel of nature” (ASV)
- “the wheel of our nativity” (Douay-Rheims)
- “the whole round of our lives” (WNT)

Probably, the Douay-Rheims gets the closest to what James had on his mind. We are born into the world and, from that point on, our life turns on an axis like a wheel. This “wheel of nativity” is set on fire by our very small tongue. For example, the baby who was born in an obscure area of Upper Austria turned into a raging monster who exterminated countless lives in a war which spanned the earth.

Upon his death, nothing is remembered of his supposedly innocent birth. Rather, his tongue brought him to a state of infamy as it brought destruction and ruin. He is but one example of every human who has come into existence, with but one exception.

Our tongues can be an uncontrollable fire from the moment we are born until the last breath we take. James is warning us of this and calling us to pay heed. The “wheel of nativity” is a vivid description of the state of human life.

James finishes with the thought that this small and yet terribly powerful part of the body “is set on fire by hell.” Here, he uses the same word as before for “set on fire,” and it is again a present participle. Hell itself is setting the tongue on fire, causing it to blaze like an inferno. But the word translated as hell is the word *Geenna*, or as the Hebrew calls it, *Gehenna*.

The word comes from two Hebrew words, *gay* (pronounced *gah-ee*) & *Hinnom*. Thus, it is the Valley of *Hinnom*, a valley west and south of Jerusalem, where the trash of the city

was burned, including the bodies of the slain. It was a place of putrefaction and burning heat. Thus, it is symbolic of the final place of punishment for the ungodly.

The tongue receives its power to defile from hell, and it leads those who use it for this purpose directly to the place from where its power was derived. The wheel of nativity, for some, goes from the control of the devil back to the place where the devil and all ungodly will be forever banished to.

Life application: When a person is corrupted, everything he or she comes into contact with is also affected by that corruption. Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, rejected the words of Paul in Galatians 1:6-8 and proclaimed, “another gospel.”

In this, he has deceived millions of people in successive generations by his false teachings. Paul quite clearly calls any gospel other than the one he proclaims “anathema,” or worthy of eternal condemnation.

Adolph Hitler invoked the name of “Jehovah” when railing against the Jewish people. His evil words led to the destruction of many millions of Jews, Christians, and other “undesirable” people in the lands he controlled. His words came not from God, but from hell itself. His tongue received the instruction of the devil and repeated it to the destruction of not only the lives of those he fought against, but the lives of his own people.

Germany was laid waste by one small tongue – a spark in an immense forest. These examples only touch on the evil found in the history of mankind. Today, we face evil in the form of Islam and the Islamic imams who speak of, and participate in the destruction of Western society. Israel is to be “wiped off the map” according to these lunatics. Their words stir up billions of Muslims and are leading us down the path to Armageddon.

Such large examples tend to make us overlook our own destructive tongues, though. Let us, even in our small circles of life, conduct our tongues in reverence of God, in building up our friends, and in the tender care of our children. May our own tongues be especially careful to always be salted from heaven and not spiced with the fires of hell.

Lord God, our tongues have not always been a tool for blessing – You know this all too well. Please help us to control them so that they will be used for goodness rather than evil, for blessing rather than cursing, for godly counsel rather than wickedness. Hear our petition and our prayer – made in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. James 3:7

James now takes the example of an unrestrained tongue, and he contrasts it to the beasts of the earth, some of which are incredibly wild, some ferocious, some plainly stupid, some bearing various types of intelligence, and so on. He begins with, "For every kind."

This should read, "For every nature." He is not comparing individual men with particular beasts. Instead, he is referring to a general relation between man's nature and the nature of various creatures. And, as noted, this is not the same in all creatures. Understanding this, he lists various categories for us to consider. The first is of beasts and birds (it is plural in the Greek).

The word translated as "beast" is one which is not used of sacrifices. Those are generally herding animals which have been tamed since the earliest recorded pages of Scripture. Rather, this is a general term for wild animals that would otherwise seem untamable.

We could think of a raccoon or a wild hog, maybe. The word for "bird" signifies any flying animal in general. Simply because they do not naturally exist in the land of Israel, we could think of a macaw or a toucan.

James continues with reptiles and sea things (again, the Greek is plural). The word for "reptile" signifies a creeping creature, quite often a serpent. For the sake of rarity, one could think of the monitor lizard. The word for those things in the sea is found only here in Scripture, *enhalios*. The prefix *en* means in, and *hals* signifies the sea. Thus, it is anything in the sea. Maybe a sea otter or a porpoise would suffice for our examples.

James says that, of these various categories, each "is tamed and has been tamed by mankind." The word translated as "tamed" signifies being subdued, but that state involves obedience and restraint. Humans have exercised dominion over the beasts of the earth in this manner.

Some of these are massive in size, some have claws and teeth which are very dangerous, others may have quills that can shoot at a man or have poisons which can kill immediately. And yet, they have been subdued by man. How unlike the description of the tongue of the previous verse. James will continue with this line of thought in the verses ahead.

Life application: Though we can tame all kinds of animals, we find it hard to tame our own tongues. What an indictment! Unreasoning animals are better students than we are in some respects. Let us make a concerted effort to speak words which are soothing and healing, rather than of evil and poison. In the end, when we speak flippantly of others, we degrade ourselves as well.

Lord God, just as we need help controlling our tongues against that which is vile, so we pray that You will help us to actively use them for that which is wholesome and edifying. May our tongues not be tools of destruction, but rather implements of blessing and love. Be with us in this challenge to improve our words so that we will increase our praises of others and our blessings in Your name. Thank You for hearing our prayer. Amen.

But no man can tame the tongue. *It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

James 3:8

In the previous verse, James spoke of the taming of “every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea.” Man has subdued life on the earth so much so that he has massive elephants standing on balls in the circus, and killer whales bouncing balls off their noses in large aquariums.

Other than the Loch Ness monster, which still remains rather elusive, almost every imaginable animal, bird, or sea creature is found in some type of zoo or aquarium. These things have been tamed or subdued. And yet, as James continues, he says that “no man can tame the tongue.”

The expression he uses is very strong in the Greek, “no one of men.” He is stating that nobody has been fully able to restrain the tongue. We have had 6000 years of human history, and yet the tongue remains unbridled and it freely wags about, causing harm to self and pain to others. As he then writes, “*It is an unruly evil.*”

The word translated as “unruly” was introduced in James 1:8 when referring to the man who is “unstable” in all his ways. This is its last use in Scripture. The word signifies that which is unstable or unsettled, but even those words fall short. Unruly is better. It is an almost anarchic display. The tongue casts off the rule of the mind and follows its own destructive course.

This is truly evident when seeing someone shout out something totally outside of their normal character. It is as if the words sprang from hell, the source of chaos itself. What issues forth is simply uncontrolled evil, and it is “full of deadly poison.”

Here, James uses a word found elsewhere in classical Greek and in the Apocrypha, but which is found only here in Scripture. It signifies “death-bearing,” or “death-bringing.” In other words, the poison that is contained in the tongue can, and often does, lead to death.

James’ words are true. Both as recorded in Scripture and as has been evidenced throughout history. A simple misuse of the tongue has landed people on the gallows or before a firing squad.

In 2 Samuel 1, an Amalekite came to David and boasted that he had killed Saul, king of Israel. His words were a lie, but he made the claim in order to ingratiate himself to David. Thinking his tongue had brought him honor, he found out that it was the bringer of death to him –

“So David said to him, ‘How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?’ ¹⁵ Then David called one of the young men and said, ‘Go near, *and* execute him!’ And he struck him so that he died. ¹⁶ So David said to him, ‘Your blood *is* on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, “I have killed the Lord’s anointed.”’” 2 Samuel 1:14-16

Life application: Watch your tongue.

Lord God, our tongues sure can get us into a bad patch. When we engage our mouths before engaging our brains, it can lead us into a world of hurt – both for ourselves and for those around us. Help us to stop... and then to think. Only after this, then should we open our mouths and speak. Be with us in this, O God. The tongue is an unruly evil. Help us to keep it in check – to Your glory. Amen.

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. James 3:9

James, having just spoken about man’s inability to tame the tongue, goes on to write, “With it we bless our God and Father.” Some manuscripts say, “Lord and Father.” If the rendering is “Lord,” there is already a precedent for calling Him “Father” in Isaiah 9:6. If “God” is correct, it is speaking of God as Father, not God the Father. Whichever is correct, the intent of the words is obvious. We praise our Creator with our tongues.

This is the purpose of man. It is to glorify God with every fiber of our substance, including with our tongues. He is worthy of it, and it is right and fitting that we do so.

And yet, at the same time, James continues with, “and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.”

Rather than “who,” the translation would be better stated as, “which have been made in the similitude of God.” It is not that some men have been so made and others have not. Even the most fallen and depraved men bear God’s image. As this is so, James is calling out the logical contradiction which arises in blessing God and then in cursing those made in His image.

The scholar Bengel notes that even though Absalom fell from his father’s favor, he remained the king’s son. That never changed. The same is true with man. Though we have fallen from God’s favor, the image of God in man has not been erased. Therefore, we should not curse man and presume to turn around and bless God.

Instead, we should bless. It is a hard thing to do at times, but it is what James logically calls for. And which he will continue to confirm in the next verse.

Life application: James’ thought goes back to the first page of the Bible –

“So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:27

The very next words in the Genesis account are, “Then God blessed them...” Man is God’s image-bearer and has been blessed by God; therefore, we show disrespect to God when we curse others, whom He has blessed.

Any curses on man are at God’s prerogative – violations of His law, for example. But for us to flippantly curse our leaders because we disagree with them, our supervisors because they are overbearing, our neighbors because we are tired of them, or any others for whatever reason, we only bring discredit upon ourselves.

Instead of curses, let us shower our enemies with blessings. This is what Jesus expects of us in Luke 6:28 and is what Paul repeats in Romans 12:14. Bless, and do not curse.

Lord God, in Your word, a tough challenge has been placed before us. We are asked to bless others because they bear Your image. Even if our mouths don’t curse others, our hearts often do. And sometimes it wells up and comes out of our mouths. Give our hearts a hefty cleansing and take away the evil thoughts they produce towards others. May our mouths reflect pure hearts, and may we shower others with blessings. Amen.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. James 3:10

The previous thought from James is that with our mouths we both bless our God and Father, and with it we also curse men who were created in God's image. Now he shows how inappropriate that is by saying that "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing."

Here, he gives a general repeat of what he has just said in order to show that these things do, in fact, occur. We do bless God while at the same time we do curse men made in His image. It is no longer an abstract example of what might be, but a concrete statement of what happens. However, though this is the case, he continues with, "My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

The verb translated as "to be" is in a form which signifies something like, "these things should not come to pass in this way." This is what is known as a litotes, which is an ironic understatement where something spoken as a negative is making an affirmative statement. If someone says, "You won't be sorry," he actually means, "You will be happy about the result."

This is what James is doing. In saying that such things should not come about, he is indicating that they do come about, and that it is inappropriate that such things occur. Charles Ellicott notes the following concerning the term, "ought not" –

"The Greek equivalent for this is only found here in the New Testament, and seems strangely weak when we reflect on the usual vehemence of the writer. Was he sadly conscious of the failure beforehand of his protest? At least, there seems no trace of satire in the sorrowful cadence of his lines, 'Out of the same mouth!'"

In other words, though this matter is spoken against, it is almost a given that it does occur and will continue to occur. It seems to be a sad resignation that man finds himself unable to curb his tongue. Even James, then, must have felt the conviction of the offense as he wrote.

Life application: One of the many contradictions of our lives is set before us here by James. We bless one person, of whom we are favorably disposed toward, and we then turn around to tear down another person we dislike. We praise God with our lips on Sunday morning and then speak words which diminish His glorious name on Monday.

All are guilty of this to some extent. But suppose we don't directly speak the Lord's name in a profane way – do we still allow ourselves to watch movies that do? It's hard to see a movie today that has a PG rating or higher that doesn't contain profanity of some sort, and most of them include the use of the name of Jesus or God in a profane way.

Although we're not actively cursing in this way, we are passively receiving this when we watch. Each of us needs to evaluate this and come to a decision about what we will and won't allow into our lives. We should then stick to it as best as we can.

These are only some examples of the myriad of them that we demonstrate each day, but they do indicate what our walk with the Lord is like to others. When they see us using demeaning words towards others, they know the state of our hearts. When we allow our lips to diminish the name of the Lord, we condone such talk in their lives as well.

We should make every effort to carefully use our tongues towards others and allow them to only speak praises, not smears; blessings, not curses. When we fail, as we certainly will, let us remember to acknowledge our fault and do our best to go forward with the determination to not continue down that path.

O Lord, our tongues are not always free from words that are impure or which diminish Your glory in the eyes of others. We fail to bless and instead we curse. We fail to praise and instead we smear. No matter what others do, give us the strength to prevail over this error which so easily arises in our daily lives. We love You, and want that love to be apparent to all through the words of our mouths and through our daily lives. Amen.

Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening?

James 3:11

James now turns to a rhetorical question. In the Greek, the question begins with an interrogative particle which implies that a negative response is expected. To get a further sense of the language, he uses a definite article before “spring.”

He says, “the spring.” This is given to emphatically generalize the question. Next, the word translated as “send forth” is *bruó*. It means to gush forth. This is an active spring that is sending forth water in a voluminous amount, and which does not fail. One can think of the words of Isaiah –

“The Lord will guide you continually,
And satisfy your soul in drought,

And strengthen your bones;
You shall be like a watered garden,
And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.” Isaiah 58:11

Next, the word translated as “fresh” is *glukus*. It is a new word to Scripture, which will be seen four times, twice here in James 3, and twice in Revelation when referring to honey. It means “sweet.” It is where our modern word “glucose” comes from. And also, the word translated as “bitter” is *pikros*.

It is another new word which will be seen only here and in verse 3:14. It signifies that which is acrid. Finally, the word translated as “opening” is *opé*. This is the second and last use in Scripture. It is where our modern word “open” is derived from. It is a hole or a crevice.

So, more literally, James asks, “Does the spring gush forth sweet and acrid from the same opening?” The expected answer is, “Obviously not!” Nothing like this is found in nature, and nothing like this should then be found in man.

Here, we have the spring, which symbolizes the heart of man, and the opening looks to the mouth of man. A heart that is bitter will put forth bitter, and a heart that is sweet will put forth sweet. But there is confusion in man, and we tend to put forth both. It thus confuses that which is found in the natural realm, and we therefore become our own self-contradiction. It is something we need to work on, and it is something that we need to correct.

Life application: There is a problem with the water which flows forth from a crevice. Normally, one cannot tell just by looking at it if it is good or not. Sometimes even a taste can miss harmful impurities.

If one goes to Yellowstone National Park, he can see crystal clear water coming from the earth, but it can’t be consumed. Likewise, if you look at water from a tap in the Philippines, which looks clear and fresh, you might assume it is good. In this, you are likely to have bad stomach problems because of the bacteria living in it. So it is with our mouths.

Good speech comes from a good heart, and bad speech comes from a bad heart. How can we, saying we have a right heart with God, utter forth profanities and curses? The two are incompatible.

Likewise, preachers may have a message which sounds good, but if it is tainted with bad doctrine, their followers will end up in destruction. The message may come from the heart, but it is often hard to tell from mere appearances.

Take time to reflect on both the message and the messenger – and then compare them against the only proper standard – the Holy Bible. Don't trust any message, messenger, or combination without verifying it with God's word. Take time to read these two accounts today. They tell of tainted water that was purified by the Lord –

- 1) Exodus 15:22-25
- 2) 2 Kings 2:19-22

Now think on one more source of Water – the Living Water of Jesus Christ. This gives everlasting life to wells full of impurities, and it cleanses them so that they will never be tainted again. How great is our Lord! Have faith and trust that He can purify your hearts and lips today.

O Lord, we were corrupted wells which put forth bad waters. But You purified us at the source and have healed us. Help us to now put forth only that which is pure and wholesome. We stand in awe of the work You have done, and are doing, in our lives. Continue to cleanse us daily so that we may be springs of purity, flowing out into a world which needs healing. May Your Spirit overflow from us and lead others to the salvation found in You. Amen.

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. James 3:12

James continues with more rhetorical questions, again demanding negative answers. He questions, "Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives"? This takes the student of the Bible back to the first page of Scripture –

"Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed, *and* the fruit tree *that* yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed *is* in itself, on the earth'; and it was so. ¹² And the earth brought forth grass, the herb *that* yields seed according to its kind, and the tree *that* yields fruit, whose seed *is* in itself according to its kind.'" Genesis 1:11, 12

The answer to the question is, "No, such cannot occur." The reason for the answer is that God has ordained it this way. He has made each fruit tree according to its kind, and

it bears fruit which is according to its kind. The fruit contains a seed which corresponds to the fruit, and that seed will bear a new tree, according to its kind. And to ensure that the reader continues to think on these lines, James continues with, “or a grapevine bear figs?”

Again, the answer is, “No.” The reason for asking the same type of question as before is the same reason we do this today. In asking a second question concerning the same matter, it asks us to continue with the process in our own minds for all such occurrences as they come to mind. “Can a coconut tree bear durian fruit?” “Can an orange tree bear bananas?” By asking twice, we are encouraged to think the matter through to its logical and complete conclusion.

Knowing that this is the case, James then goes back to answer the question of the previous verse. He had asked, “Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening?” His answer is, “Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.”

In these words, he includes one which is only found here in Scripture, *halukos*. It signifies “salty.” A spring cannot issue forth salty and fresh. As this is so, and as the words are intended to be tied into what issues from the mouth of man, James shows the illogical and inconsistent thought of blessing and cursing issuing forth from the same mouth.

Life application: Considering the early Genesis account in relation to the coming of Jesus, it gives us an insight into the mystery of Christ. He was born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary. Therefore, He is the unique God/Man – fully God through the Holy Spirit and fully Man through Mary. Therefore, He alone is qualified to change our nature from corruption to life – from a bitter salt spring to one which issues forth fresh water.

By nature, we are at enmity with God, and we cannot produce anything pleasing to Him. Sin separates us from Him. But by accepting Christ, our very nature is changed, and we can now be pleasing to Him – not because of anything inherent in us, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you have not yet accepted Christ, no matter how you feel about your good deeds, your separation from God makes them futile. Put your trust in the Lord, and He will change you into a spring of fresh water.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of the Water of Life – the renewing of our souls through the power of the Holy Spirit. We ask that You fill us daily with Your goodness so

that we will be continual springs of fresh water to those around us. Thank You for Jesus, thank You for Your Spirit, and thank You for Your great love. Amen.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that his works are done* in the meekness of wisdom. James 3:13

James has been speaking of the tongue, and in particular, that of it issuing forth both blessings and curses. He shows that this is contradictory and illogical. Now, he turns that into a question. “Who *is* wise and understanding among you?”

It is James’ way of stimulating thought, “If it is contradictory and illogical to issue forth blessings to God and yet also curse men created in God’s image, then who will learn from my words now? It is the one who is wise and understanding.”

The words are well translated. The first one is *sophos*. It is a primary word which indicates being learned, skilled, clever, and so on. The second word, *epistémón*, is found only here. As *sophos* is a general wisdom, *epistémón* is a more precise knowledge of something. It signifies being skillful or experienced.

Between the two, one might think of a person who can fix lots of things – a jack of all trades. He is wise. And yet, he is also especially good at repairing intricate mechanical things. He has understanding. This is who James is directing his words to. If there is such a person, “Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.”

Obviously, James is speaking of moral wisdom and understanding. And more especially, he is still referring to those who would purpose to be teachers (see James 3:1). He then shows that by demonstrating good conduct, he is wise. And that by having his works done in the meekness of wisdom, he is showing understanding.

The word “wisdom” in here is *sophia*. It signifies insight, intelligence, etc. It is the root of our words “sophistication” and “philosophy.” It is one who takes the wisdom and uses it properly, as an art form.

The intent is that a person who is wise and understanding will go through his life (signified by the word “works”) being careful to display good conduct, and this walk is to be in meekness (humility), which requires wisdom. In other words, it is almost a form of art to turn his wisdom to proper living and proper instruction.

Life application: The Psalmist of old reflects in his words the same concept of wisdom as James does –

“Whoever *is* wise will observe these *things*,
And they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.” Psalm 107:43

This is the final verse of a psalm which speaks of the greatness of God and his marvelous deeds done among the sons of men – both directly and through creation.

For the person James addresses, the good conduct of his works, which are done in the meekness of wisdom, are those that acknowledge and consider the great love of the Lord. If we can keep what we are doing in that perspective, then our deeds will truly be deeds of righteousness. This is because they show both wisdom and understanding about the nature of God, which leads to an obedient life in Him.

By the very nature of loving the Lord, and considering His continual and undying love for us, we can then respond to others in faith and in good deeds toward them. Ultimately, what benefit is it to do deeds of goodness for others without considering God? In the end, they are shallow and meaningless.

A philanthropist, for example, can give billions of dollars for AIDS funding, but without faith in God and considering His hand in our existence, the gesture has only a temporary benefit. Only the body, which perishes, is relieved. But the soul of the sinner isn't changed at all. In fact, its allegiance has actually been directed further away from God.

By giving credit to the philanthropist, or those who worked in the process, the Lord is denied the credit He is due. However, if the person did these things in the name of the Lord, then He would be rightly considered as the true Donor of the goodness.

When using our tongue in speaking the deeds we have accomplished, remember to humbly acknowledge and consider the Lord's hand in the process, deferring the credit to Him.

Lord Jesus, it is hard to accomplish our deeds and not want credit for them. But Lord, give us the ability to pass the honor on to You. May You alone be acknowledged for the works accomplished in the course of human events, even the small portion of them that we add to that stream of events. Yes, Lord, may all of the glory rightly be lifted to You. Amen.

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. James 3:14

James, still addressing teachers, has just said that the wise among them should “show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” Now, he shows a state which is contrary to that by saying, “But if you have bitter envy.”

The word translated as “envy” is one which can have a positive or a negative connotation, *zelos*. It is where the word zealous is derived from. Attaching the word “bitter” to this shows that it is a negative zeal. Instead of good conduct, there is bitter envy.

Along with that, he says, “and self-seeking in your hearts.” The word translated as “self-seeking” signifies seeking followers by the means of gifts. Thus, it is one who is self-seeking or who looks to divide into factions. This then is in contrast to the meekness of wisdom mentioned in the previous verse.

James says that if someone has such attitudes in his heart, he shouldn’t “boast.” This is exactly the type of spirit which disqualifies a person to teach. Rather than boasting, he should get a shovel and learn to dig ditches. Such a person is unqualified for the more perfect duties of teaching the word of God.

James then finishes with the thought that such a person should not “lie against the truth.” His words in this verse will be explained in the next verses. In understanding what they say, it is seen that “the truth” here isn’t just a simple statement concerning general truth. Rather, it is speaking of the truth of God in Christ. That will be made perfectly evident.

Therefore, this person’s “lie against the truth” is a lie against Christ Jesus – who is the embodiment of truth. It is He who is revealed in Scripture, and this person James speaks of is such a self-seeking teacher who is ultimately lying against. He is engaged in a war to divide the body for self-interest. As the church is the body of Christ (Colossians 1:18), this person will be held accountable for his unholy attempt to draw souls away from what belongs to Christ.

Life application: If we are truly humble in our hearts, then what we do will naturally be for the benefit of others, and there won’t be any envy or ambitious intent which satisfies the selfish soul. As Eliphaz the Temanite says in the book of Job –

“For wrath kills a foolish man,
And envy slays a simple one.” Job 5:2

When we are self-seeking, several things occur all in the same action:

- 1) We dishonor God by attempting to draw recognition, power, and glory to ourselves rather than directing our efforts towards glorifying Him.
- 2) We dishonor our neighbor whom we are trying to subjugate to our own faction, rather than directing him towards the truth of God in Christ. In this, we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. Rather, we are attempting to rule our neighbor for ourselves.

As James said in Chapter 2, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well” (verse 8).

Paul, likewise, acknowledges this in Romans 13:10 with, “Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love *is* the fulfillment of the law.”

James’ words show that if we act contrary to this, we should neither deny it nor boast about it. What is needed is a heart change and a new attitude. If you are suffering from envy or selfish ambition, you need to lay it before the Lord and seek instead to glorify Him.

Lord Jesus, help us to be satisfied with the life and blessings we have received. Take away our envious eyes and our selfish hearts and replace them with loving hands which build bridges, caring words which edify others, and gentle, thankful spirits which bring honor to You. This we pray that You will be glorified. Amen.

This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic.

James 3:15

The previous verse spoke of having bitter envy and self-seeking in one’s heart. James now states that those things are opposed to that which is heavenly or godly. Rather, the opposite is true. He says, “This wisdom does not descend from above.”

The translation surely fails to convey the intended meaning. By saying “This wisdom,” it is implying that it is a type of wisdom, when it is, in fact, just the opposite. Rather, there

is an article before “wisdom” and the Greek appears to more correctly read, “That is not the wisdom which comes down from above” (Weymouth NT).

One way to retain the truth while maintaining the same basic structure of the NKJV would be to emphasize the word “wisdom” as the NIV does. They say, “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven.” Thus, it sets it apart as actually not being a type of wisdom.

Either way, there is a need to show that calling such an attitude “wisdom” is actually profaning the idea of the true wisdom which comes from God. What James referred to in the previous verse does not come from above, but rather is “earthly.”

The idea here is that which is temporary and fading. That which is heavenly is eternal and will never change. When one looks to the earthly, he will grasp onto that which can benefit him “right now.” There is nothing truly long-term because this life is short and uncertain. Therefore, that which is earthly is naturally self-seeking.

He next says that it is “sensual.” This means that what is conveyed finds its source in what will fill the unspiritual, carnal desires of man, rather than that which is logical and/or spiritual. It comes about from one’s inappropriate passions rather than a proper attitude concerning what is godly.

James then finishes with the thought that it is “demonic.” It is an adjective found only here in Scripture. It signifies that which resembles a demon or which is influenced by a demon. As Albert Barnes notes, “There may be indeed talent in it, but there is the intermingling of malignant passions, and it leads to contentions, strifes, divisions, and ‘every evil work.’”

One can see the three divisions of body, soul, and spirit here. The “spirit” is not so much a separate entity, but it is the connection of the body and soul to God, or a lack of such a connection. If one is rightly connected to God, there will be no influence of the devil or demons. When he is not, there can be attacks upon the person, even a saved person.

Life application: Really think on those you look to for spiritual guidance. What are their motivations? You can’t always tell, and most people would not intentionally follow a deceiver. But it is right to evaluate each person carefully. Do you perceive them as pure and selfless? Would they be willing to stand in the same position if the money stopped flowing in or if there was no notoriety? We need to be extremely careful about who we follow and why.

Good looks fade, bad financial decisions bring about disaster, and political winds change. Preaching the gospel may go from something desirable and lucrative to something punishable by law. Those who stood in the pulpit because of selfish ambition will certainly fall away under conditions like these.

Likewise, envy can also motivate our clergy's decisions. If one perceives others in higher positions, nicer locations, or closely aligned with political leaders, he may engage in unspiritual talk about them. James says this attitude certainly doesn't come from heaven, but from a love of the world.

Those who are in spiritual positions may be motivated from an unspiritual source. Instead of being inspired by a love of God, their hearts may be motivated by the lure of the devil.

Stand back and evaluate those you follow from time to time and make sure their guidance is biblical and godly and that the source of their motivation hasn't been corrupted by money or fame. If you see them taking a bad turn, talk to them about it. Everyone needs accountability, and no one is above temptation.

Heavenly Father, today we take the time to pray for the men who are our pastors, preachers, and teachers of the word. We pray that those we turn to for spiritual guidance will be godly men. Keep them from the wiles of the devil, from envy of others, and from selfish deceit. Fill them with Your wisdom and pure hearts for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus. Amen.

For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

James 3:16

James now ties verses 14 and 15 together in thought –

14 – But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 – This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

16 – For where envy and self-seeking (14) *exist*, confusion (connected to the false wisdom of verse 15a) and every evil thing (15b) *are* there.

The thoughts are all drawn together in a masterful explanation of the matter. If there is envy and self-seeking, there cannot be order and harmony. Rather, only confusion will

result. The word translated as “confusion” is one that speaks almost of anarchy. There is a breakdown of the moral sphere, and the result is disorder and a situation where anything is up for grabs.

In addition to, this “every evil thing” will be there. The word translated as “evil” gives the sense of that which is vile. The breakdown of morality will inevitably lead to an unholy state, and actions which are completely opposed to that which is pure, moral, and upright.

Looking at the actions of those on the left in political matters forms an exceptionally good picture of what James has in mind. They deny that life in the womb is actually human life, and they vilify those who accept God’s norms of male and female as binding. On and on they continue down avenues of depravity, and it all began with envy and a self-seeking attitude.

James will contrast such things in the coming verses.

Life application: James has pretty much summed up the entire case for evil in the world – from the fall of man down to current times. It was envy of man’s favorable position as God’s image-bearer, and also selfish ambition that he could usurp God’s authority, which prompted the devil to bring about his rebellion. Likewise, Adam was tempted with prideful, selfish ambition, and he was enticed to sin –

“You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:4, 5

Since that time, man has been enticed into every evil practice through envy and/or selfish ambition. We now live in a relativistic world where ultimate truth is considered a myth and “all paths lead to God.” But this thought process stems directly from selfish ambition as well.

Rather than believing in man as having been created in God’s image, we follow a god created in man’s imagination. We do this because we ourselves want to be the ruler of our own fate, and thus we become our own “god.” This only produces more disorder, which in turn produces more evil practices. Eventually, this can only lead to further chaos and discord.

This is where the world is heading, and the results are recorded in the book of Revelation – judgment on an unrepentant world. God has shown us His path to

reconciliation; His one path. Outside of Jesus, there is only death and destruction, but in Him, there is forgiveness and reconciliation. In Him alone are light, order, and every good thing.

Lord God, help us to be wise and discerning in our thoughts. Take away the darkness of envy and selfish ambition and replace it with the light of contentment and peace that is found in Jesus our Lord. This we pray so that others may come to understand the truth of Your gospel through us. Amen.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

James 3:17

The previous verse spoke of confusion and every evil thing being present when one is envious and/or self-seeking. James now contrasts that with true wisdom. He says, “But the wisdom that is from above.” This then is heavenly wisdom. It is that which comes from God, and it is that which the follower of Christ is to apply to his life.

The first of such attributes is that it is “pure.” The word is *hagnos*. It signifies that which is free from ceremonial defilement. In the sacrificial system of Israel, all animals presented to the Lord were to be without blemish.

Such animals looked forward in a physical reality to the spiritually pure Messiah to come. Christ came, born without sin, and He was perfectly pure and without any defilement. Thus, when He was presented to Israel, John the Baptist proclaimed in John 1:29, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Next, the wisdom from above is “peaceable.” It is a word which results from knowing the Lord’s will and then obeying it. It is reflective of Christ Jesus who said, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). Christ Jesus both knew the will of His Father, and He was obedient to that will. This, then, is our model to emulate.

James then adds that such wisdom is “gentle.” It gives the sense of being equitable. It is gentle, as in being truly fair and following the spirit of the law, because it notes what is really at stake. One can see this time and again in Christ, who looked beyond the words themselves to an understanding of why the words were given, because He gave them.

For example, He said in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” Further in Matthew 12, He said, “But if you had known what *this* means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

James next adds to his list, “willing to yield.” It is a single word in the Greek which is found only here in the Bible. It signifies an attitude which is easy to come to terms with due to already being willing. One might say, “reasonable.” This does not mean, however, that it is a willingness to do something wrong in order to appease. Rather, it is always willing to yield in order to continue that which is right. A great example of this is found in Paul –

“For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰ and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; ²¹ to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; ²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. ²³ Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.” 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

James continues with, “full of mercy.” One needs look no further than the example of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 to see this quality on display. It was Jesus, the Incarnate Lord, who gave the law. And yet, when asked how the matter should be handled, He chose to have the people around Him evaluate themselves first. After they did, and realizing that they too were all guilty, we read –

“And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’

¹¹ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’

And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”

-John 8:9-11

James moves next to “without partiality.” This is an extremely rare word. It is found only here in the Bible, and it is also rare even in classical Greek. It signifies “indistinguishable.” There is nothing uncertain or ambiguous involved. This is seen in the Lord when He would call out the fault of leaders while highlighting the right conduct of the common people.

This was not showing favoritism of one category over the other, but He was bringing the state of both to a point where the leaders could see that they were, in fact, no better than those they judged unfairly – whether they acknowledged it or not. This was called for, explicitly, in the Law of Moses –

“You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment *is* God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.”

-Deuteronomy 1:17

James finishes his list with “without hypocrisy.” The Greek word gives us a taste of the root of our modern word hypocrisy – *anupokritos*. It signifies that which is sincere and genuine. There is no hidden agenda behind the actions of the individual. The exact opposite is found in those who challenged Christ Jesus. In Luke 20:20, it says –

“So they watched *Him*, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.”

They pretended to be righteous in order to trap the Lord. On the contrary, Christ was always perfectly straightforward in all of His dealings with them and with all people. James asks us to act in a like manner in this, and in all of the other characteristics he has noted.

Life application: In a short roundup of these words, we should seek the glory of God first and foremost. We should demonstrate the peace-loving attitude that wisdom cries out for; our motives are pure. We should always demonstrate humility and a willingness to submit to those around us. By doing so, we show consideration for their station. This will, in turn, lead to peace in us.

Further, are we withholding our hand from bringing judgment on others even when they deserve it? God has been infinitely merciful to us, and we need to act likewise to the greatest extent possible. Also, in Galatians 5, Paul says the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Are these qualities evident in our lives?

James would also have us consider if we cover our eyes to status, color, wealth, etc., in other people when we make decisions? Christ did. He forgave men of every tribe, nation, and tongue. Let us demonstrate impartiality in all of our dealings with others.

And in this, rather than selfish ambition, we should always demonstrate an attitude of complete sincerity when dealing with others. In the end, only God knows the truth of your sincerity, so make sure it is sincere even to the very core of your existence, and He will reward you.

Yes, Lord, fill us with the fruits of Your Spirit so that we may demonstrate the wisdom that comes from heaven. Take away our envy and selfish ambition and replace those things with the goodness that can only come from You. This we pray in the exalted and glorious name of Jesus! Amen.

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. James 3:18

In the previous verse, James described “the wisdom that is from above.” In his list, he said that it is “full of mercy and good fruits.” Now he takes that concept to discuss one of those fruits, beginning with, “Now the fruit of righteousness.”

This is a term found first in the book of Proverbs. There Solomon says –

“The fruit of the righteous *is a tree of life,*
And he who wins souls *is wise.*” Proverbs 11:30

It is seen again in Amos –

“Do horses run on rocks?
Does *one* plow *there* with oxen?
Yet you have turned justice into gall,
And the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.” Amos 6:12

The term is found elsewhere in the Old Testament in various forms, and it is found several more times in various forms in the New Testament. Paul speaks of it in Philippians 1:11 –

“...being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

James is taking these examples from the body of literature he was aware of (meaning the Old Testament), and he is using them to express in his own way the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount. There, Jesus said –

“Blessed *are* the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

Jesus speaks of those who make peace and the result of that. This continues with James’ words, which explain that the fruit of righteousness “is sown in peace by those who make peace.” One must sow in order to have something come up from the soil. When one plants in peace (contrasted to the “envy and self-seeking” of verse 3:15), the fruit of righteousness will spring forth.

The sense of James’ words is that there is a plant (or tree) called “Righteousness.” That is what will spring forth when planted by those who make peace. When peace is made, the sowing of Righteousness is done in peace, and the result of that process issues forth Righteousness. This is the heavenly wisdom which arises, and it is revealed in the many traits mentioned in verse 3:17.

Life application: Just as a sower needs good soil and the right conditions for his grain to be plentiful, James says that we will produce a harvest of righteousness when we sow in peace. Sowing seed in an environment of envy and self-seeking leads to chaos and complete dissatisfaction in our lives.

But if we turn our attitude towards peace and contentment instead, what will spring forth is a righteous life which is honoring to God. The amazing thing about this is that so many people hear this type of admonition week after week in sermons and then walk out of the church with their ears still closed to the very message that can actually bring about the joy they are missing in their lives.

Jesus didn’t speak His words for “somebody else,” and James isn’t relaying this message for “another time and place.” These things pertain to our lives, right here and right now. The world we live in is materialistically centered, and our priorities get completely out of whack with envy as new innovations come out almost daily. Our eyes are never satisfied with what we have, and there is simply no peace in our lives.

But if we can just set aside these motivations and seek after peace and contentment, there we will find the better harvest James speaks about. We are only given one chance to get this life right, so look to the wisdom James relates – your harvest will be wonderful.

Glorious God – turn us into peacemakers who bear good fruit in this life. May we not spend our time rushing after worldly possessions and chasing after the latest things. It is

time for us to direct our eyes, our hearts, and our souls to raising a harvest of righteousness which will be to Your glory and for our eternal happiness. Hear our prayer, O God. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for pleasure that war in your members*? James 4:1

James has been contrasting that which is heavenly wisdom from that which is earthly and reflects no true wisdom at all. He has shown what the results of the two are as well. He now asks, “Where do wars and fights *come* from among you?”

Is he referring to actual wars and fights among the Jewish believers? Or does this extend to all of the Jewish people as a collective whole? Or is this a general statement concerning the cause of such things in humanity? The answer is probably the latter. Humans are humans, regardless of race, culture, nationality, etc.

Further, the word translated as “wars” is one which speaks of actual battles. It can be used figuratively as well, but it is speaking in a broad term about the impetus behind such a war. The word translated as “fights” governs a whole sphere of words, and so it signifies strife, contention, quarreling, and so on.

The two words are given to include the whole round of such violent interactions between people. James is asking his audience where these things arise from. His answer is, “Do they not *come* from your *desires for pleasure*?” Here, the word translated as “pleasure” is *hédoné*.

One can see the source of our modern word “hedonistic.” This is speaking of sensuous pleasure, and that pleasure which is looked to as an end in itself. It is not a godly pleasure, but one which is opposed to godliness.

Such desires well up in man, and they cause all kinds of vile urges and motivations which can easily lead to wars and fights. As James says, it is these which “war in your members.”

The verb here is a present participle. The war is ongoing and active. The word goes beyond just the act of fighting, but in everything that is involved in serving in the military. It is the service of a soldier which is warring inside of us because of our desires for pleasure.

Even Plato understood this precept. In *Phaedo* 66c, he says, “The body and its desires are the only cause of wars and factions and battles; for all wars arise for the sake of

gaining money, and we are compelled to gain money.” It may even be that James was aware of Plato’s words and used the idea in his epistle. Paul cited Greek philosophers on several occasions. These are universally understood precepts because they come directly from the state of humanity.

James will continue with this line of thought, and he will also speak of the cure for it in his words ahead.

Life application: Think about it, if we didn’t have pride, we wouldn’t care if we were offended, and the fight would never get started. If we didn’t want things we didn’t have, we wouldn’t envy others and steal, kill, or lie to get them.

Admittedly, desire can also be used as a force for good; innovation comes from a desire for these things as well, but it is being channeled properly rather than improperly. Motivation causes us to work within our means for a good purpose, but envy causes us to go beyond our means to attain the same thing. Such is the case concerning the battle within us. We need to quench unhealthy desires and emotions and work towards our goals using proper levels of motivation.

Think on any issue where sin is involved, and you will see that the problem could have been resolved from within the person by merely handling what happened differently.

When a candidate for public office lies about his qualifications, he is working outside of his true-life story to achieve a goal. However, he could just as easily use the same precept as a point of complement to those who actually have such qualifications. This is just one example which reflects the nature of sin in all of us. We need to be extremely careful that when the internal battle begins, we quench the unhealthy desires before sin gets a foothold.

Lord, Your word is like a mirror that we hold up in order to see ourselves, and right in it, we can see our own failings exposed. We often lose those battles we face, and that in turn ends in sin. Please give us the wisdom, the courage, and the fortitude to fight the battle and to prevail in it before sin is released in our lives. In this, You will be exalted through our faithful Christian walk. Amen.

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. James 4:2

James turns to a literary technique known as an anaphora to reveal what is going on inside man. This is a technique which consists of repeating various words or sets of words, particularly at the beginning of each sequence of clauses, in order to produce emphasis. In this verse, he begins with, “You lust and do not have.”

The idea here is that of a person desiring something that is outside of his normal ability to obtain. The word translated as “lust” signifies something that is truly yearned for. On the night before the crucifixion, Jesus said, “With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

It is the same word as James uses here. And so it can be positive or negative. What James is speaking of is this intense desire, but the individual does not possess what is desired, and the implication is that it is beyond him to possess it.

Next, he says, “You murder and covet and cannot obtain.” The result of the lusting has led to the next step of the process. The idea here is that the person is willing to go as far as murder to obtain what he has. The subject “you” throughout the thoughts in this verse is plural.

It is a general thought that any person he is addressing is liable to fall into this pattern. There is the intent to murder being worked out in the person based on the coveting. The violation of the Tenth Commandment results in a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Again, what is desired remains out of the ability to obtain.

James next says, “You fight and war.” The localized “murder” turns into a general battle as part of a greater war. The word translated as “war” is introduced here, and it will next be seen six times in the book of Revelation.

The increasing measure of destruction in James’ words shows that man is never satisfied with what he has. We lust after something, we will kill for it because we covet it, and after that, we are willing to go into battle for it. And all of this, James says, remains elusive. His final thought of the verse is, “Yet you do not have because you do not ask.”

What we know does not belong to us, and which is forbidden to us (such as another man’s wife), is the last thing that we would ask for from God. He has already told us that what we seek after is not available.

However, if we come to God and desire for His will in what we ask, then we will be given what we desire – which is His will. He will not give us another man’s wife because it is

His will that we do not have what we lust after. However, for that which is in accord with His will, when we ask for it in prayer, we can be sure that He will provide it.

The problem with us is that when we ask for something in His will, we are looking for what we want, not knowing what His will for us is. And so when we don't get what we want, we assume God did not provide according to our prayer. But the exact opposite is true. We prayed for His will, He provided what is in accord with His will (even if we received nothing physical or tangible), and whatever we now have is exactly what He intended for us to have.

Praying for God's will in a matter means that whatever comes our way after that prayer of faith is God's will for us at that time. From there, we cannot go out and do something which is against God's will (as stated in His word) and claim that it was given to us according to His will. What comes our way in life, if it is in accord with His will, must always be in accord with the word. We can never go around His word and say that what we have is in accord with His will for us in our lives.

If we have cancer, and we pray for God's will to be done, and then the cancer spreads, can we blame God? The very cancer in our body is a part of the unfolding of our life. It was no surprise to Him at all. We can pray for the cancer to be removed, but we are to accept that it may not be. All must be accepted as being according to His will. James will continue to explain this in the verses ahead.

Life application: Normally, a counselor won't be so direct with his words, but will rather talk around a subject and allow the one being counseled to come to an understanding of the problem through questioning. But James pulls out his boxing gloves and gives the old one-two across the chin.

"You're a stubborn mule. You want things and don't get them, and here's why." He explains that we would rather kill and covet, quarrel and fight than merely ask God for the things we desire. Why would we do this? James will give us good reasons in the verses ahead, but it should be painfully obvious that if we are willing to kill for something we don't receive, then one of the reasons is that it is something we shouldn't have in the first place.

If we have to go to such extreme measures to obtain a desired object, relationship, job, etc., then we've made it an idol in the place of God. One main purpose of God's commandment to not covet was to tell the people that what He provides is sufficient. We should be content with that.

A second purpose is to show us our immense need for something greater, because by our very nature we cannot fulfill the law, “Do not covet.” As Paul said, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

The law makes nothing perfect. It was merely given to lead us to a realization of how sinful we truly are. Once we get that, then we can finally see our need for Jesus. If you’re struggling with overwhelming desires, hand them over to the Lord and ask for His strength in dealing with them. He prevailed, and through Him, you can too.

Lord God, desiring things that we don’t have seems to be the norm in our lives. Help us to be content with what You have given us. When there is something we don’t have, but which we hope for, give us the patience to work for it rather than burn with unhealthy desire leading to coveting or worse. Grant us this wisdom so that we might not sin against You. Amen.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. James 4:3

James just said, “...you do not have because you do not ask.” Now, implying that the person has asked, he continues with, “You ask and do not receive.” He is developing his words from one thing to the next in order to show how all things must be in accord with the will of God.

We fight after what we want and we don’t receive it. We have asked for it, but we do not obtain it because the same spirit of coveting existed in our asking as existed in our fighting for what we desired. He says that not receiving (meaning from the Lord) occurs “because you ask amiss.”

The word translated as “amiss” is an adverb which signifies that which is evil – “You ask evilly.” He then defines that by saying, “that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.” The intent behind the prayer is not that which is godly. Rather, it is self-seeking, and it is worldly.

He again uses the word *hédoné* from verse 4:1. It is a worldly pleasure with a strongly negative connotation. It is pleasure that is made an end in itself. When asking something from the Lord which is contrary to the nature of the Lord, it is obvious that the request will not be granted by Him.

In these words of James, it appears that what he says contradicts what Jesus says in Matthew 7:7, 8 –

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”

However, Jesus elsewhere clarifies this, such as in Matthew 21:22. One must have faith in what they ask for. James, under inspiration of the Spirit, also now qualifies what is stated. Not only are we to have faith that what we request will come about, but we are to have our requests in line with the nature and will of God.

Unfortunately, people take single verses of Scripture, such as Matthew 7:7, and they build entire doctrines around them without taking into consideration the whole body of Scripture.

Life application: God is infinitely gracious. It is in His very nature to bestow on His children the things they desire and especially the things they need. However, we tend to ask for things we do not need and with the wrong motives as well.

“Oh Lord, I really need a cell phone.” The fact is that a few short years ago, there was no such thing as a cell phone. For six thousand years, man got along just fine without them. Some people still do. Is the cell phone needed, or is the desire to have one based on a misdirected desire? Intent drives the appropriate nature of the request.

“Oh Lord, I really want to retire at 65.” Until the age of Social Security, people worked until they couldn’t work anymore, regardless of age. After that, families pulled together and took care of the elderly. People who retired at a set age, such as 65, were the exception and not the rule. Now we want to retire at 65 and spend many golden years playing golf. What is our motivation for retirement at a specific age?

Often, these aren’t true needs, but depending on how we prioritize them, they may merely be our selfish desires. The vast majority of what we pray for is exactly that, something to fulfill our wish list.

Selfless prayers ask for others’ needs to be met, for peaceable living in our circumstances, and for our own daily bread. Above all, selfless prayers ask that God be glorified through our lives, regardless of level of wealth, location of home, or amount of free time to play.

In all ways, may Jesus Christ be seen in our lives and exalted in the eyes of those who see us. And may He be the Lord over everything we have, do, and interact with. When we pray for Jesus to be the recipient of glory in the meeting of our needs, we will receive the thing which will accomplish this, in abundance. He is infinitely worthy; so, at the end of every prayer of request, make sure you add in a thought that asks for Him to be glorified through the petition.

Lord, our hearts are heavy for those around us; may You bless them. Lord, our stomachs need to be filled; may You fill them. Lord, our nation's leaders have strayed from Your word; please restore them to right sense and turn them back to it. But, Lord, in all that we ask for, may You be glorified above all else. Amen.

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4

There is a difference between source texts here –

Adulterers and adulteresses! (NKJV, et al)

You adulteresses! (BSB, et al)

The latter of the two is probably correct. Somewhere along the line, someone not understanding the uses of the feminine probably added in the masculine. But James is speaking to the believers in Christ who comprise His bride. In Matthew 12:39, Jesus uses similar terminology and equates the people of Israel as a “wicked and adulterous generation.” It implies that they are like an unfaithful wife.

The word translated as “adulteresses” is exactly translated. It signifies not only a married woman who commits adultery, but it also speaks of people who worship any other than the true God. The same terminology is used of Israel throughout the Old Testament. The adulterous nature of the people against their Husband is highlighted.

James shows that this continues on in the body of believers in the Messiah. Even Paul alludes to the bridal covenant, speaking of the Gentiles who are included in it, as a group who are espoused to a husband (2 Corinthians 11:2). Once espoused, the one so espoused is obligated to the betrothal and bears the full responsibility of fidelity.

With the terminology rightly understood, James then asks, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” The “friendship with the world” speaks

of placing the things of the world in a position above one's allegiance to the Lord. A spouse is to put her affections on her husband first and foremost. If she spends her time chasing after other men, she is failing to commit to her husband.

This does not mean that people cannot interact with the world around them. Paul makes that perfectly clear in 1 Corinthians 5 –

“I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ Yet I certainly *did* not *mean* with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person.”

What is obvious from Paul's words is that there are two ways that a believer may approach the world around him. The first is living in the world, associating with it, and using it in a manner which is customary to all human interaction. Nothing is forbidden in this. However, the second way is for the believer to act as the world acts.

He lists such ways – sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry, reviling, drunkenness, being an extortioner, etc. The latter are acting as an unfaithful bride because they are placing a higher priority on what the world offers than on their allegiance to the Lord.

But note that Paul calls them believers, and he later says they are “inside,” meaning of the body, which is the bride. He does not call into question their status, position, or salvation, but he does call into question their allegiance. For this, they will be judged – not for condemnation, but for reward and loss.

James next states explicitly, “Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” He shows that intent is equal to action. It is the heart which is being evaluated. It is not necessary for a person to actually be a friend of the world to be at enmity with God.

Rather, whoever “wants to be” has already set the wall between himself and God. This is what Israel desired, and it is even what they did, but the Lord said that, despite their ways, as a Husband, He would cause it to cease. Follow the similarity in terminology in Ezekiel to what James is saying here –

“Thus says the Lord God: ‘Are you defiling yourselves in the manner of your fathers, and committing harlotry according to their abominations?’³¹ For when you offer your gifts and make your sons pass through the fire, you defile yourselves with all your idols, even to this day. So shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I will not be inquired of by you.’³² What you have in your mind shall never be, when you say, “We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.”” Ezekiel 20:30-32

As is evidenced, Israel did – in fact – commit harlotry against the Lord. But the Lord, rather than rejecting Israel forever, twice sent her into exile. And yet, in her exile, He has remained faithful to the covenant which He established with them.

What occurs with Israel is a type and picture of how God deals with all of those who come to Him in faith through the New Covenant. We may, in fact, commit harlotry against the Lord, but He will treat us in the New Covenant as He continues to treat Israel under the Old, meaning with perfect faithfulness.

Our friendship with the world does not bring about our excision from the body. But it does bring us into temporal judgment in this world, and it will bring us into negative judgment at the Bema Seat of Christ – a judgment of reward and loss. It is a judgment of salvation, not for condemnation.

James’ words do not speak of a loss of salvation, but of what is a proper standing of believers before God. In the coming verses, this will become painfully evident to those who believe that Christians can lose their salvation.

Life application: One should not get upset at James because of his tone. He is writing as if he were an honest pastor speaking to his audience – in general, but direct terms. What is being said applies to all of us, but he is not simply pointing his finger at everyone else and claiming superiority over them.

His point is that the envy and selfish ambition he describes show a love of the world – the system of the world and all it entails. This would be different than the “world” mentioned in John 3:16, which speaks of the people of the world. When we put the love of the world ahead of our love for God, we are – by nature – at enmity with Him.

As Jesus said in Matthew 6:24 concerning money, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Devotion to God must be absolute. However, it doesn't mean removing yourself from the world. This is what monks and other ascetics do, but the Bible doesn't teach this either. We are to live in the world but not be "of" the world. We can freely use what is around us, but it is temporary and passing away.

Putting our hope in things rather than God separates us from intimacy with Him. What is stealing your joy? If it is a material possession, then you need to let it go because you have lost your focus on God. In all things, remember to put God first and not be distracted by things of the world.

Lord God, we must admit that Your word often speaks directly of us. We often get sidetracked by the things of the world, and we even allow them to steal our joy. In the end, such things only separate us from intimacy with You, so please help us to keep our eyes, hearts, and thoughts on You at all times. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? James 4:5

The words of James 4:5 are highly debated, and manuscripts and translations vary widely in what is stated. Some say that the spirit referred to is the spirit of man. Others say it is referring to the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit, some say that the Spirit "lusts against envy," thus tying it in with Galatians 5:17 –

"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

In other words, this view says that the Spirit "lusts against" or wars against envy, which is a fleshly emotion. Others will say (as the NKJV) that "the Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealousy." The meaning is that because we are sealed with the Spirit, there is a yearning for us to do that which is right, and that the "Spirit which He implanted yearns tenderly over us" (Cambridge).

On the other hand, if it is speaking of the spirit in man (not the Holy Spirit), then one might agree with Albert Barnes –

"The more obvious interpretation is to refer it to our spirit or disposition as we are by nature, and it is equivalent to saying that we are naturally prone to envy."

The Aramaic Bible would agree with Barnes –

“And perhaps you think the Scripture says in vain, ‘The spirit that dwells within us lusts with jealousy.’”

The first main problem lies in the fact that James begins with, “Or do you think that Scripture says in vain?” The dilemma with this is that there is no verse which can be cited as the source for this. However, the Greek term used, *hē graphē*, is always used to indicate a quote from the recognized Jewish canon, with the exception of Peter speaking of Paul’s words and equating them to Scripture.

Many attempts to resolve this have been made. One is that it is a general principle found throughout Scripture, and not any specific quote. The noun, however, is singular, implying one quote from a single part of Scripture. For every suggested answer, there is a corresponding difficulty which seems to speak against it. Thus, there are many translations.

One thing is for certain: James is writing to fellow believers. This can be seen, again, in verse 4:11 where he notes that they are “brethren.” Further, one cannot be an adulteress (see previous verse) if that person is not married to a husband.

If believers are married, they have a sign of that union. For them, that sign is the Holy Spirit. It was given first at Pentecost, and it comes to any believer since then as a seal and guarantee (Ephesians 1:13, 14) when he believes.

What makes the most sense, simply because of the context (being married to the Lord and having the seal of the marriage), is that this is speaking of the Holy Spirit in us, and that it is yearning jealousy over our actions.

This would then explain the first part of the verse concerning what the Scripture says. The Lord, again and again in the Old Testament, refers to His jealous nature. It doesn’t need to be referring to all of Scripture (meaning the noun must be plural), such as, “as it is written in the Scriptures.” Rather, it can simply be referring to any single occasion, such as –

“They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign *gods*;
With abominations they provoked Him to anger.” Deuteronomy 32:16

In this, it then would be an obvious reference to the fact that the Spirit is God, a member of the Trinity. The same God who yearned jealously over the people of Israel due to their adulterous ways now yearns jealously within each saved believer who acts

in an adulterous manner. This view on James' words is in accord with what will next be stated by him.

Life application: Surprisingly enough, this is a good verse for getting doctrine concerning the Spirit straight – not just on the issue of jealousy, but in other areas as well. God caused the Spirit to live in us. This, when taken in context, shows that the Spirit indwells the believer. Paul says this occurs the moment we believe –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13, 14

There is no “separate” baptism of the Holy Spirit, and there is no sign necessary to know that He resides in you (such as a specific “prayer language”). The believer is given the Holy Spirit by faith in Christ.

Another area this verse deals with indirectly is eternal salvation. If we have the Spirit of God living in us and He envies intensely, then it implies that despite our failings, He never leaves us. As Hebrews says, Jesus is the author of “eternal salvation.”

The Holy Spirit will never depart the believer in Christ. As this is so, shouldn't we live in a manner that honors God rather than bringing about discipline for our envy, selfish ambition, strife, and other wayward conflicts?

Take time today to reflect on the nature of your salvation and the eternal rewards that it implies.

Great Lord and God! Thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit, and thank You that He will never leave us once we have trusted in the work of Jesus. Because of Jesus' cross, we are free from condemnation, and we live with Your presence ever within us! Glory to You in the highest. Amen.

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:

“God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6

The difficulty of the previous verse is more surely resolved in the words of this verse. As was seen, it is highly debated if the “spirit” referred to in the previous verse was that of man, or if it was speaking of the Holy Spirit. As James is speaking to “brethren,” and as

he is referring to “adulteresses,” which implies being in a covenant relationship (because one cannot be an adulteress otherwise), then the previous verse was surely referring to the Holy Spirit.

Having that clarified, James then says of God, “But He gives more grace.” The thought here is based on what he has said already. Because God is jealous, and because we are in a covenant relationship with Him, which provokes that jealousy when we stray, one would expect His hand of stern discipline to come down upon us. But instead, because of His love for those who have come to Him, and in whom His Spirit dwells, He is willing to extend us grace when we redirect ourselves toward Him and away from that which is contrary to rightly worshiping Him.

With this understood, James then writes, “Therefore He says.” James now will cite scripture to support his line of reasoning concerning the whole passage thus far. “Therefore” is a way of summing up the way to deal with such things. Knowing this, he next cites the proverbs. This is a citation of Proverbs 3:34. The Hebrew of this proverb says –

“Surely He scorns the scornful,
But gives grace to the humble.” Proverbs 3:34

James cites not the Hebrew, but the Greek translation. It is a word-for-word citation. The difference between the Hebrew and Greek is minimal. Those who are “proud” are often “scornful” of God’s chosen path. Therefore, the meaning between the Hebrew and Greek is not drastically changed.

What James is saying is that by dropping one’s prideful attitude, and by pursuing the course laid out by God rather than that of this world, God’s grace can and will be fully realized. This thought looks to the working of the Spirit in the person when he is walking as he should in the covenant relationship with God.

Peter also cites this same proverb in 1 Peter 5:5. In his words, he is also speaking to saved believers and how they should conduct themselves before the elders and towards one another, but more especially how they should humble themselves “under the mighty hand of God.” James and Peter are in one accord concerning this precept.

Life application: Throughout the ages, man has fallen short of the glory of God. Even after the coming of Christ and the forgiveness of sins through His precious blood, man continues to falter and fall into sin – but He gives more grace.

There is no end to the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. And no sin you commit after trusting in Him can ever separate you again from the bonds of adoption – because He gives more grace.

Have you struggled with something that you feel is hindering your walk with God? Don't try to hide it, He knows full well your limitations and... He gives more grace. Hand your weakness over to Him and ask Him to walk with you during the struggle. He will because... He gives more grace. When you demonstrate your humility through confession and supplication, God is pleased to lavish His grace upon you. Humility opens the doors of heaven to the children of God and restores God's favor on you.

But God opposes the proud. This is the very reason why Christ Jesus is the only way to salvation. Confessing "Jesus is Lord" means that a person has said, "I can't do it; I can't save myself." At the moment one comes to this realization and calls out, by faith, on the name of Jesus, then God is pleased to give the unmerited favor – the grace – that we so desperately need.

At the same moment, God gives us mercy by forgiving us of our transgressions and sins. Unfortunately, if we fail to come to this point, God's wrath remains, and only an expectation of judgment and condemnation is left. If you have called on Jesus and are again stuck in the bonds of sin – call out for help to the Lord. He gives more grace. Thanks be to God – He gives more grace.

Heavenly Father, we surely need Your grace. When we called on Jesus, we knew we were lost. Since then, we have failed You in a million ways. But we know Your grace is greater than all our sins. Cleanse us anew with the precious and eternally purifying blood of our Lord. And we will endeavor to please You all of our days. Amen.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. James 4:7

James, having just quoted the proverb which says that God resists the proud but that He gives grace to the humble, now shows how to practically work that precept out. Starting out with "Therefore," is given to show this, and also to sum up the other precepts he stated, such as that the person who wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

These things lead naturally to the need for instruction concerning what to do in order to be pleasing to God. And so he says, "Therefore, submit to God." The word conveys the idea of subjection. Vincent's Word Studies says –

“The verb means to place or arrange under; as resist (James 4:6) is to array against. God sets himself in array against the proud; therefore, array yourselves under God, that ye may withstand the devil.”

One can see a connection to what Paul says in Ephesians 6:10, 11 here –

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

And this is what James continues to convey. There is a war against the devil going on. Paul gives his insights into this, and James does so as well. He says, “Resist the devil.” This is standing against him and what he puts before us in this fallen world. Because he is working out his devices in this world, it explains why James said (as noted above) that friendship with the world is enmity with God. When we align ourselves with the world, we align ourselves with what the devil offers.

In this, the believer is to make a public and conspicuous stand against what the devil offers, holding fast to the ground on which he should stand, which is the word of God and faith in Christ Jesus. In such a state of mind and with such firm conviction, James says of the devil that “he will flee from you.”

This is what Jesus did in His times of being tempted by the devil. He stood on the word of God and in the glorification of His Father. He prevailed over the devil by resisting him and standing fast. The contrast between Adam and Christ is recorded in Scripture to give us examples that we are to learn from. We can allow our old Adamic nature to rule in us, or we can allow Christ’s nature to rule in us.

Life application: By having a relationship with the world, we place ourselves in a position of enmity with God. But James gives us the remedy, which is to submit ourselves to God. One might think this applies to the general sense of looking up and praying to the unknown Creator as people of any faith would do – but the initial problem of sin isn’t dealt with by “religion.”

Instead, the problem is dealt with by Jesus Christ. This verse must be taken in the Christian context. Buddhists, Muslims, etc., cannot bridge the divide by submission to a god that has failed to deal with the overarching problem of sin.

Interestingly, “Islam” means submission, but it isn’t submission that brings restoration. Instead, the devil is still in complete control of them because the divide hasn’t been crossed.

Jesus – fully God and fully Man – can lay His hand on the Father and on each of us and restore felicity between the two. Once this is done, we need to continue to submit to God and resist the devil all our days.

As we do so, the devil will be on the run. When covered by the precious blood of Christ and living in the power of the Holy Spirit, the devil has no way to lay hold on us. The great power of God in Christ causes him to “Run devil,,, ruuuuun” in the opposite direction. Forrest Gump couldn’t run any faster.

If you have come to Christ, then you have the power and force needed to resist the devil. Rely on the Holy Spirit to lead you, protect you, and give you wisdom in dealing with the devil. On your own, you will only live in the flesh and at enmity with God.

Heavenly Father, thank You so very much for the gift of Your Holy Spirit! Give us the wisdom to rely on Him and His power as we walk in this darkened world. May He protect us from the afflictions of the devil and carry us safely through our earthly walk until we come to that heavenly abode that we long to see – the place where Your glory dwells. Amen.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. James 4:8

In the previous verse, James told his audience to “submit to God.” He now tells them to go further. Not only should they submit to Him, but they are to “Draw near” to Him. But, this is also tied in with his second statement of the previous verse, which was that they were to “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

One can see the contrast –

Resist the devil / he will flee

Draw near to God / He will draw near to you

The thing is that one will actually result in the other. If one (assuming he is saved) resists the devil, he is drawing near to God. The morally bad will make an exit, and he who is morally good will draw near. Likewise, if one embraces the devil, God will – by default –

move away from him. This obviously means in a relationship sense. God is omnipresent. It is not that God's actual presence moves away, but the sense of a moral connection is lost.

James then gives two thoughts on how one can accomplish these things. He first says, "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." The idea here is similar to that which is presented by Isaiah as he opened his book –

"When you spread out your hands,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers,
I will not hear.
Your hands are full of blood.
¹⁶ Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.
Cease to do evil,
¹⁷ Learn to do good;
Seek justice,
Rebuke the oppressor;
Defend the fatherless,
Plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:15-17

One can see how Isaiah takes a literal thing (that of washing the hands), and he makes a spiritual application (ending evil). He then provides examples of what good is. By doing the good, one resists the devil and draws himself near to the Lord. In this, the Lord naturally draws near to him.

This is what James is referring to. Cleansing of the hands implies that sinful lives need to be purged. He then continues with, "and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Here, as is seen throughout the Bible, the heart speaks of the mind of man. In purifying one's heart, there is moving from that which is unreasonable and chaotic to that which is right and reasonable.

The word translated as "purify" is one which speaks of ceremonial purification. For example, in John 11:55, it refers to those who want to purify themselves so that they can participate in the Passover.

James is using this idea in a similar way. Moses, in Deuteronomy 10:16, told the people, “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.” One cannot literally circumcise his heart.

But in doing that which is right, and in accord with what physical circumcision was meant to imply, he would symbolically purify the heart. This is what James is conveying now. In this purifying of the heart, the people will cure their state of being “double-minded.”

This is a word, *dipsuchos*, which is only seen here and previously in James 1:8. It is probably a word invented by James. HELPS Word Studies identifies such a person as being a “spiritual schizophrenic.” It is a person with two minds which waver back and forth because of the impure heart, meaning a mind which is not clear and willing to reason.

Life application: Drawing near to God is a common Old Testament theme which is repeated several times in the New. Moses drew near to God at Mt. Sinai. God was said to be near the people, Israel, because of the covenant. The people were told to draw near to God in the Psalms, in Isaiah, and elsewhere. Towards the end of the Old Testament, we read –

“She has not obeyed *His* voice,
She has not received correction;
She has not trusted in the Lord,
She has not drawn near to her God.” Zephaniah 3:2

Will this also be said of you? James and other New Testament writers reach out to us and ask us – like the prophets of old – to draw near to God. But someday there will be no remedy. Those who fail to do so will receive their just due. However, if we are to draw near to Him now, James asks us to wash our hands and purify our hearts. And what is the benefit of this? It is seen in the psalms –

“Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully.
5 He shall receive blessing from the Lord,
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.” Psalm 24:3-5

Let us not lift up our souls to idols, and let us only speak what is true and right. May our actions cleanse our hands and purify our hearts.

Lord God, may our prayers be set before You as incense, and may the lifting up of our hands be as the evening sacrifice to You. Set a guard over the door of our lips and keep our hearts from being lifted up to idols. May our eyes be on You and may our souls be satisfied from Your hand alone. Amen.

Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. James 4:9

It is likely that James had a passage from the book of Ecclesiastes on his mind –

“A good name *is* better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one’s birth;
² Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.
³ Sorrow *is* better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
⁴ The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.
⁵ *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.
⁶ For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So *is* the laughter of the fool.
This also is vanity.
⁷ Surely oppression destroys a wise *man’s* reason,
And a bribe debases the heart.” Ecclesiastes 7:1-7

James is speaking to the “sinners” and the “double-minded” of the previous verse. Instead of rejoicing and shouting for joy, he tells them to “Lament and mourn and weep!” The idea is similar to Jesus’ words from Matthew 5 as well. There, right at the beginning of the sermon on the mount, He says –

“Blessed *are* the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed *are* those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:3, 4

Solomon and the Lord both understood that when one is filled with laughter and a spirit which is overflowing with the joys of life, he will not take time to consider the world around him in its proper perspective.

There may be joy, but judgment lies ahead. There may be life and abundance, but death is the inevitable end of all men. A man filled with the things of the world will not take time to consider these deeper issues, but the man who weeps and mourns will.

Therefore, continuing on, James says, “Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” The word James uses, which is translated as “gloom,” is found only here in the Bible. It signifies having one’s eyes downcast, indicating sorrow. One can see a state of true repentance over sin for the sinner, and a refocusing on what is godly and proper for the double-minded.

Nobody with a right mind will stand over the coffin of a friend and say, “I’m glad I won’t end up there.” Rather, he is reminded of the mortality we all face, and he will (if wise) take it to heart.

The sorrow which James is speaking about is not sorrow for the one in the box. Rather, he is referring to the sorrow a person feels as he considers his own fate, mourning over what he can do about his personal misdeeds in the presence of God.

Life application: In Ecclesiastes, Solomon explains what James assumes his readers already know. In other words, James is writing to first-century Jews and reminding them of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. They would have been very familiar with what Solomon was saying because Ecclesiastes was read openly every year during the Feast of Tabernacles.

If you have not read Ecclesiastes before, take time to read it today. It will only take you a few minutes. It is an extremely beautiful book – full of wisdom. Ultimately, there will be everlasting joy for the redeemed of the Lord. But, in this present life, there are times when mourning is better than feasting, where displaying sorrow rather than laughter is right, and where weeping is more appropriate than mirth.

Have discernment, and know when and how you are to display your emotions in order to be pleasing both to those around you and to the Lord who searches your heart.

Lord, thank You for the wisdom found in the Bible. Help us to discern when to laugh and when to mourn, when to feast and when to fast. Give us hearts which mourn over our sin, and which rejoice in Your cleansing from it. May our actions bring You honor, and be a comfort to those around us. Let our lives reflect Your wisdom at all times. Amen.

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. James 4:10

The thought here is found throughout Scripture. When one is prideful before the Lord (Genesis 3, for example), there is a fall. However, the cure for that comes from the words of Scripture from that point on. After Adam fell, he did humble himself. It is not explicitly stated as such, but it does say, “And Adam called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living” (Genesis 3:20). The name Havah, or Eve, means “life.”

The Lord told Adam that on the day that he ate of the fruit, he would die. He did. The spiritual connection to God, which is true life, died. But in the curse upon Adam and his wife, there was also a promise of restoration. Adam humbled himself through faith and believed, naming his wife “Life” as a sign of his belief. In this, the very next verse says, “And Jehovah Elohim made Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothed them” (Darby).

The Lord accepted Adam’s act of faith and covered him. The picture is that of the Lord covering Adam and his wife with a substitutionary atonement. An innocent life died in order for its skin to be used. It is a picture of the innocent Christ covering His people in His own sinlessness.

From this point on, the idea of humbling oneself before the Lord is seen again and again. Jesus gave a beautiful picture of the difference between pride and humility in Luke 18 –

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ ¹³ And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise *his* eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:10-14

Arrogance and self-righteousness are abominations to the Lord. But humility before Him is something that He notes as commendable. As James says, “and He will lift you up.” In

a state of humility, one will mourn over sin, have awed fear of God who can and will judge that sin, and will have a repentant attitude concerning his state. The Lord will look upon one in this condition and restore him, clothe him in His righteousness, and cover over the sin.

Peter follows in the same line of thought as well –

“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.”

-1 Peter 5:6-7

Life application: When we are confident in ourselves, we demonstrate an arrogance which cannot be overcome by heaven itself. The gap already exists between God and us because of our sin. Therefore, to boast in anything we have done, or think we can do, makes no sense.

If we could bridge the gap, there would have been no need for the law, for the prophets, and especially for Jesus. But God, who is rich in mercy, is willing to reach down to us through Jesus and lift us up – if we will only allow Him.

Stop trusting in your own goodness and look to the cross. The cross is what we deserve, but Jesus took it instead. What could you add to that? Humble yourselves, and God Himself will lift you up.

Lord God, because of Jesus, You have brought us together again. Instead of hell, You offer heaven. Instead of Your back, You turn to us Your face. Where we deserve a cross, You sent Jesus to take our place – and He willingly bore that burden. How can we trust in our own righteousness when it doesn't exist? Instead, let us come and worship You, through Christ our Lord. In Him is found our righteousness. Hallelujah and Amen.

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. James 4:11

In James 2, he spoke of showing partiality, dishonoring others through a judgmental attitude, fulfilling the royal law, etc. This same type of thought is seen again here. There is a standard which is given in the law (whatever law applies). However, by our judgments of others in regard to that law, we become judges of the law. In this case, there is the law of God. This will be made explicit in the next verse.

Within the Bible, there have been various laws given by God. He gave a law to Adam. He gave a law to Noah. He gave a law through Moses, etc. In Christ, a New Covenant is established. It is what comes through Christ which James is referring to. As there is a law, there is a Giver of that law. One precept in particular, which is understood within the law, is to love one another. This is what is on James' mind. Jesus summed up the Law of Moses by saying –

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment.³⁹ And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 22:37-40

Within the New Covenant, love continues to be a predominant theme. To ensure that this precept is held fast, and to ensure that we do not step over the boundaries of authority of the law, he now says, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.”

To speak evil of one another is not a means of demonstrating love. As he is addressing the brethren, this is a problem which is found within the body of believers, and it is something James determines to correct. It is a precept also found in Paul's writings (Ephesians 4:31, for example), and by the hand of Peter as well (see 1 Peter 2:1).

There should not be evil-speaking about one another because, as James says, “He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law.”

James has given the royal law in James 2:8, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It is a precept which extends beyond the Law of Moses, and it is one which carries through to all times. But by speaking evil of a brother, one is not loving that person. Rather, he both speaks evil of him to his harm, and he speaks evil of the law.

This is because the law has said to love the neighbor. By not doing so, that person is speaking evil of the law itself. Therefore, he “judges the law.” He is sitting as an arbiter of the very law that the Lawgiver has given. That is a most unhappy position to be in!

To sum up the thought, and to finish his words, he then says, “But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.” The Lord has given the law. We are under the law. But if we judge (a verb) the law, then we are not one who is doing the law. Rather, we have become a judge (a noun).

As the Lord gave the law, and we are not doing the law, then we stand under the law's judgment. At some point, we will face the Lord who gave the law, and we will be held accountable for having failed to do the law. In the Christian context, this does not mean a loss of salvation, but a judgment of reward and loss. And there can be no reward for actions which are outside of the law which has been given.

Life application: Context is important when reading verses like this one from James, and also the one in Matthew 7:1, 2 –

“Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Quite often, we may hear or see this verse quoted by people who are attempting to defend the inappropriate lifestyle they live – in other words, “Who are you to judge me, didn't Jesus tell you not to do that?” However, just a few verses down in that same passage, we are told to make judgments and right moral decisions.

Inappropriate judgment comes in the form of continuously pointing the finger at others and finding fault when there is no sound basis for it. It is also found in failing to be loving in our attitude and actions towards others. Allowing someone to continue in sin is not loving.

The law is written (whatever law that may be). When someone breaks the law, we know what the violation is and can make a sound decision concerning the offense. But when we sit as a judge of the law – speaking against one another without the weight of the law – then we sit in judgment of the law. For the New Covenant, it is the Lord who gave the law. Therefore, we have no right to sit in judgment on it. We can only apply it to ourselves and to others when a violation of it occurs.

Be careful not to quote such verses out of context because by doing so, we actually violate the very verses we are quoting. To accuse someone who is properly handling the law of mishandling it, is the same as sitting as a judge over that person's correct application of it. Always check the context of a verse, or you might wind up using it incorrectly.

Lord Jesus, help us to rightly divide Your word, taking everything in its proper context. It is certain that when we misapply what You have given us, we ourselves then violate the very precepts we say that we are upholding. So, Lord, give us wisdom when we live by and quote Your precious word. Amen.

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? James 4:12

The word “one” is in the emphatic position in the Greek. It states, “One is the Lawgiver Who is able to save and destroy.” The words remind the reader of Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:28 –

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

At that time, Jesus didn’t get into a great theological discussion about the nature of the judgment which would result in such an action. He simply stated that God is to be feared and that He has the power to take action according to His judgment.

However, it is obvious here that James is referring to Christ Jesus, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Paul says in Romans 2:16 that it is God who “will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” He is the same Lord who gave forth the covenant at Sinai, and who then – through His incarnation – fulfilled that law and established the New Covenant in His blood.

In the capacity as Lawgiver, it is He alone “who is able to save and to destroy.” As this is so, then James now makes evident the contrast to what he wrote in the previous verse. There, he spoke of the one who judges the law. In doing so, that person “is not a doer of the law but a judge.”

However, since “One is the Lawgiver,” then such a person has wrongfully stepped into a supposed position of authority. Because of this, James asks, “Who are you to judge another?” As Albert Barnes says of this –

“There is nothing more decidedly condemned in the Scriptures than the habit of pronouncing a judgment on the motives and conduct of others. There is nothing in which we are more liable to err, or to indulge in wrong feelings; and there is nothing which God claims more for himself as his peculiar prerogative.”

He is correct. We are not in the position to pronounce our self-determined judgments upon another. We do not set the standard. When we do, we usurp the right of the Lord who alone possesses that authority.

Having said that, He has expressed the standard in His word. This is one purpose of Scripture. And, therefore, we are given the authority to make right judgments which are in accord with that word. This is painfully evident throughout the epistles as well. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 5:9-13 show this.

James makes this evident in the final two verses of his epistle. John tells us to make right judgments in 2 John 1:10. These are just a few examples which call believers to judge according to the word which has been given. The Lawgiver has given His law; His people are to conduct their judgments in accord with that law.

Life application: It is Jesus who is able to save and destroy. This is because He authored the law and then fulfilled the law. Therefore, He is both qualified to judge infractions of the law and also to pardon infractions committed. Why? It is because He, after fulfilling the law – completely and perfectly – received the punishment of the law on our behalf.

The cross, leading to His death, was just punishment for any infraction of the law. When we trust in Jesus Christ, we accept both His fulfillment of the law and the pardon offered through His substitutionary death (a precept allowed under the law). In other words, the punishment we deserve was also fulfilled by Him.

America's founding fathers understood the concept of both pardon and single trial for punishment of an offense, and laid them out in the Constitution –

“The President ... shall have Power to Grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States...”

“No person shall be... subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb...”

We all have sinned; we all deserve death for our sins. Jesus fulfilled the law by not sinning and then was crucified under the law. However, death could not hold Him because death results from sin (of which He had none). Now, when we trust Him, we are free from the law because He received the trial and judgment in Himself on our behalf. We can now stand pardoned through His shed blood. What a bargain!

It is hard to imagine, Lord Jesus, that You were willing to live the life we cannot live. You then gave Yourself as a sacrifice of atonement for our failings. How can we not accept Your pardon and receive Your mercy! You are our Lord and we will follow You all of our days. Glory to You, O Lord Jesus! Amen.

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; James 4:13

James is beginning a fourth thought in this one chapter. He started out by speaking about pride and how it affects our relationship with God in verses 1-6. He then went on to the idea of submitting to God through humility in verses 7-10.

This was given as a cure for the pride of the first section. After that, he wrote two verses concerning judging others. And now, he will write about arrogant boasting concerning our future when our future is wholly unknown to us.

To open this thought, he begins with, “Come now.” It is a phrase given to grab the attention of the reader. Today, when we want to capture someone’s attention, we might say, “Check this out,” or “Get a load of this.” This is the same type of thought here. James is calling the mind to attention in order to make his new point.

He then speaks of anyone to whom the interjection might apply by saying, “you who say.” Whoever the coming statement applies to at any time is who is being spoken of here. It is his way of saying, “Does this apply to you?” If it does, then that person needs to consider James’ words. And the thought that may apply to any given person is, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, and make a profit.”

This sounds like a rather innocuous thing to say. It is certainly something that anyone might say at any time about any matter –

“Next year, we will take a trip to Israel.”

“I retire in three more years, and then I will start a new career.”

“I will be attending my daughter’s graduation in June.”

James is asking us to reflect on this type of thought so that he can correct our boastful attitude. He will begin to explain what he means in the next verse.

As a side note, the word translated as “buy and sell” is *emporeuomai*. It is used only here and in 1 Peter 2:3. It is the root of our modern word “emporium,” and it especially means “to trade.”

If you have not read James before, what part of the statement do you think he is calling attention to? Is it the time reference? Is it the idea of traveling? Or, is it one (or all) of the

three desired actions of 1) spending a year at the city, 2) buying and selling, or 3) making a profit?

Life application: Until the full idea of what James is referring to is revealed, let us simply remember that business and making money are part of our lives. From the very fall of man, the toil of labor to sustain ourselves has been something intended for man to do –

“Cursed *is* the ground for your sake;
In toil you shall eat *of* it
All the days of your life.
¹⁸ Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,
And you shall eat the herb of the field.
¹⁹ In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you *are*,
And to dust you shall return.” Genesis 3:17-19

Therefore, to sit around idly accepting handouts when there is gainful work to be had is actually a violation of our intended purpose. There are times when work can't be found or when a man is physically limited, but this is the exception and not the norm. Almost everyone can be productive, and there is always something to accomplish if one wants to put his foot forward and accept responsibility.

As the Bible says, it is the sluggard who complains that there is a lion in the streets (meaning the slothful man will find ANY reason to stay inside and watch TV rather than getting out and working).

If you are not producing according to your abilities (other than such reasons as a poor economy, ill-health, etc.), then you are bringing discredit upon yourself. Have respect for yourself – there is no lion in the street.

Heavenly Father, please give each of us the ability, the desire, and the opportunities to be productive. May we not whittle away our years doing nothing. Instead, may our works be such that they bring You great glory. And as we are blessed to be productive, remind us to turn and cheerfully give a portion back to You – in gratitude for what You have done for us. Amen.

...whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. James 4:14

James now builds upon what he had just said. The readers (whoever they may be) were presumptuous and said, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit.”

The words were presumptuous and boastful because they made a claim upon a matter as if it had already been settled, but which they had no right to the claim in the first place. As James tells them, “whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow.”

Our next breath, much less what will happen later in the day or on the next day, is not guaranteed. To assume that we have control over time is to put ourselves in the place of God, who alone knows the future. What He is fully aware of is completely unknown to us. This is a concept that Solomon spoke of centuries before –

“Do not boast about tomorrow,
For you do not know what a day may bring forth.” Proverbs 27:1

A day may bring an earthquake. It may bring forth a heart attack. It may bring forth a car crash or a snake bite. We have no idea what lies ahead of us, and so to lay claim to “tomorrow,” when we are still unsure about “today,” is the height of arrogance. James then asks his reader to consider this –

“For what *is* your life?”

The question is a broad one that could be answered in a million ways, but he has already set the parameters for the expected answer. He is speaking of time, and so the answer to the question should likewise be dealing with time, particularly the present. One could ask, “What is your life at this very moment in time?”

Again, he is not asking about the condition or quality of life at this moment in time, but rather of its relation to the future. And so the question could then be further refined as, “Is the beating of your heart now (signifying life which exists) any determining factor of it still being beating in a day, or in an hour, or in one minute?”

Again, Solomon reflected on this same type of thought in the book of Ecclesiastes –

“For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?” Ecclesiastes 6:12

Man doesn't know what the state of his existence will be from moment to moment, and he certainly can't tell what will happen after him, when his existence ends. And that could be at any moment. A shadow passes as the sun moves, and the sun constantly moves.

Further, a shadow can also move as a body moves in relation to the sun. And some bodies move very quickly. Therefore, a shadow can come and go in a heartbeat. Because of this, James says something akin to what Solomon said with the words, “It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”

The verbs are present participles. Young's translates them, “for it is a vapour that is appearing for a little, and then is vanishing.” There is no set timeframe for the event. It happens, and then it ends as it is happening. One can think of Solomon's words, which appear right at the opening of the book of Ecclesiastes –

havel havelim ha'kol havel – “Vapor of vapors the all *is* vapor.” One can walk outside on a cold morning and see his breath. It is a vapor which appears, and within a short moment, the vapor disappears. This is what Solomon says everything is, and this is what James says our life (which is our personal “everything”) is. It is appearing and it is vanishing.

Solomon's admonition for this condition is found in Ecclesiastes 12. Jesus gives a thought concerning the matter in Luke 12:13-21. Take time to read those passages today.

Life application: James says our life is like a mist. It comes and it is gone before our eyes. Job says –

“Man *who is* born of woman
Is of few days and full of trouble.
² He comes forth like a flower and fades away;
He flees like a shadow and does not continue.” Job 14:1, 2

The Bible speaks of our life as fragile and temporary many, many times. Because of this, it implores us to seek God while we can. More often than not, those who face death will try to find religion quickly.

The problem is that we may not find the truth in the religion we seek. In such desperation, our minds become over-taxed with the stress of the moment, and we may grab onto a faith which is misdirected.

However, God has given us a wonderful plan of redemption, and it is available to all people. To call on God in the wrong way is to fail to call on God at all, so we need to pursue His offering now, while our heads and thoughts are clear.

Because your life is so very temporary, make the best of your time in the present by seeking after God and calling on the Lord Jesus for your salvation. As Paul states as clearly as possible –

“In an acceptable time I have heard you,
And in the day of salvation I have helped you.” 2 Corinthians 6:2

A voice says, “Cry out.” And I said, “What shall I cry?” “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.” Amen.

Instead you *ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.”

James 4:15

James just spoke of the life of man being a mere vapor, which appears for a short time and then fades away. Because of this, it is boastful to claim that we will do something or another in the future. Now he instructs us on how we should state any future decision or goal, beginning with, “Instead you *ought* to say.” This is set in contrast to the words of verse 13 –

“Come now, you who say...”
“Instead you *ought* to say...”

Those in verse 13 proceeded to speak boastfully about what they would do. In fact, however, they didn’t know if they would be taking their next breath. James corrects this by showing that we should approach the future with humility by saying, “If the Lord wills.”

Other than the moment in which we presently exist, we have no idea what will transpire next. The ground could quake under us, and the roof could then fall on us – life over. The

future is known only to God, and we are to leave that unknown sea of time up to His will. In invoking His will, we can then say, “we shall live and do this or that.”

Both life and what is done with that life are up to His allowance. However, this is not a fatalistic approach to the future by any stretch of the imagination. Two things are occurring here –

- 1) If the Lord wills, we shall live (solely a decision of the Lord).
- 2) If the Lord wills, we shall do this or that (based on the granting of the first statement that we shall live, we will then act with freedom to choose what we will do).

The concept of free will in man is seen throughout Scripture, and it is revealed even in our acknowledging His sovereignty over the future. The Bible does not portray the fatalistic view of Islam or various other religions. Nor does it portray the autocratic rule of God – even in salvation – which is held to by Calvinism.

Instead, it reveals that God is wholly sovereign over all things, and yet He has factored in our free will desires and actions. This is seen, for example, in Paul’s words, such as in 1 Corinthians 4:19 –

“But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power.”

Paul freely chooses to come to those in Corinth, and yet He understands that the Lord may not will him to do so. There is a synergism which is being displayed in the life of man who works within the confines of God’s overall sovereignty.

Life application: If you are ever talking with someone about future plans like traveling, starting a business, etc., and that person says, “I’ll be doing that, the Lord willing,” you can know that they are obeying this particular verse of the Bible. Instead of speaking as if the plans are certain, this individual is willing to acknowledge that God is sovereign and our decisions and hopes are based solely on His allowance of them coming to completion.

This attitude does several things –

- 1) It rightly gives credit to the Lord for achievements in our life.

- 2) It removes from us an aspect of the stain of failure should our plans not come to fruition.
- 3) It keeps us living in the Spirit because we are ever-conscious of His guiding power in all matters.

As God allows or restrains the intentions of the wicked, how can we expect to land safely at the next airport without the Lord's protection? As God is in control of the natural forces, how can we expect to climb a mountain during an earthquake?

As God is in control of our very heartbeat and breath, how can we make plans to see our children's marriage apart from His allowance of it? As God likewise controls the lives of others, how can we expect even one more visit from our father or mother? Every moment is precious, and every moment is controlled completely by Him.

Therefore, whatever we plan, it should be with the understanding that it will only come about if the Lord allows it to occur.

Lord, forgive us for looking to the future and thinking that we have any control over it. We can only hope to have what we wish for, but in the end, we must rely on Your open hand to provide it. Please remind us to be sure to acknowledge Your sovereign hand over all things when we speak of our plans for the future. Amen.

But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. James 4:16

James is still speaking of the same subject, which goes back to verse 13. It is the boasting which arises out of the assumption that we have the future in control, and that we can say, "Today or tomorrow we will do this and that." Without including the Lord in the matter, we are boasting of possessing that to which we have no right to claim. As he noted in the previous verse, we should say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

However, we fail to do this. In our failure, he says, "But now you boast in your arrogance." We have, in fact, attempted to lay hold of that which belongs to the Lord alone. It is boastful, and it is arrogant.

This is the final use of the word translated as "boastful" in the New Testament. It is a noun which has been used by Paul 10 times. It is variously translated as boasting, confidence, glorying, and rejoicing. It can be positive (about God's grace) or negative (about self) based on the context. Here, it is obviously a negative boast.

The word translated as “arrogance” is found only here and in 1 John 2:16. It properly means “a vagabond (‘quack’), making empty boasts about having ‘cures’ to rid people of all their ills (even by producing ‘wonders,’ etc.)” (HELPS Word Studies). Such quackery attempts to set a person in a favorable light concerning matters of which he has no ability or authority.

In this state, James says that “All such boasting is evil.” This is so because it is based on a completely unfounded view of who we are as individuals. We are the created. We are the dependent. We are the unknowing. And yet, we speak in an evil way – as if we are in the place of God – grabbing onto a future which is wholly and solely at His authority.

A single moment may destroy our hope of any future at all, and we are to therefore place our lives – from moment to moment – under the caring guidance of God. We are to submit ourselves to His unfurling of the sails which take us from the shores of the present into the endless expanse of the future which lies before us.

Life application: Why is boasting or bragging evil? Think it through and you will see. If a woman is exceptionally lovely, wasn’t it a gift of her birth? What if she highlights herself to look beautiful – then isn’t this temporary and false?

If someone is a natural musician, how can he brag about what he was born with? Suppose he worked hard to become a musician because he lacked natural talent – where did the time, circumstance, and drive to learn the skill come from?

If you are born into a wealthy family, what did you do to deserve it? But what if you became wealthy by playing the lottery – wasn’t this providence and beyond yourself? Or, what if you worked hard and made great wealth? Again, where did the ability, time, and circumstance come from to allow you to become rich?

It doesn’t matter what the issue, what the circumstance, or what the possession, it all ultimately came from one Source – the Creator. Likewise, each breath we take is from His goodness to us. Every heartbeat is under His control. If you don’t believe this, then go back and watch videos of the 911 attack, or click on any of a host of YouTube videos that caught death in the act.

None of those people expected what was coming, and their plans for the next moment were in vain. How much more tenuous are our long-term plans! Each moment is precious, and every sunrise is a gift. Don’t squander your life pursuing the wind, but instead consider Solomon’s sound advice –

“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
‘I have no pleasure in them.’” Ecclesiastes 12:1

From this, Solomon goes on to point out the many ways death arrives. Now is the time of God’s favor; remember Him now.

Forgive us, O Lord, for taking credit for the blessings You have provided. Forgive us also for boasting about a future which is within Your control alone. Give each of us a sound and wise attitude toward those things which You have provided. May we ever acknowledge that all things stem from You, belong to You, and are at Your disposal. Amen.

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin. James 4:17

The words here are not unlike those of Paul in Romans 14:23 –

“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat* from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.”

Doubting, faith, to know – these things are internal, and yet we are shown that we are held accountable for doubting when we do not eat in faith. And faith is something that must be read from the heart. Likewise, knowing to do good may be something that we alone know about, and yet if we do not act on that good thing that we are aware of, we sin.

James begins with, “Therefore.” He is summing up his thoughts concerning the future. The fact is that none of us knows what the future holds except in general brushstrokes of how God has revealed it in Scripture, or as can be logically deduced based on past experience. But ultimately, the future, and our personal interaction with it, is an impenetrable wall. We are bound to the present.

Because of this, James says, “to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.” The meaning – in the context of making plans – is that we must submit our future actions to the will of the Lord. This is especially so when we interact with others. If we speak of the future as our own possession, we sin. We have laid hold to that which belongs to the Lord alone. Therefore, we are to include the Lord’s will in our future claims, subordinating what we say to His will.

This statement of James, however, is a general statement as well. It is one which carries truth in it all by itself. When we fail to perform a duty that we know is right, it is no less sinful than committing a known sin. In both, we commit an offense.

Jesus speaks of this in Luke 12. In verse 47, He says, “And that servant who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare *himself* or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.”

When evil will occur because of our inaction, we cannot say, “I didn’t act and therefore I am safe.” Either way, our conduct is an inconsistency in the eyes of God, which then results in sin.

Life application: Sin can be divided up in multiple ways, but the three main categories of all sin are:

- 1) Sins of commission
- 2) Sins of omission
- 3) Sins of the mind

We often focus on *sins of commission* – things that we actively do which are wrong, like stealing, adultery, lying, etc. These make for great sermons and are what the law is mostly based on. The majority of The Ten Commandments are things we are told not to do. Do not lie, for example. When we do, we commit a sin of commission.

Sins of the mind are good to use when witnessing to others –

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’²⁸ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:27, 28

Our thoughts reveal our corrupt nature and show us how far we really are from holiness. Even if we don’t actually commit adultery or murder, our intent condemns us. The commandment “Do not covet” falls under this category.

The third type of sin, which is that of *omission*, is no less wrong and covers a vast part of the sin in our lives. We know we should do something – that it is morally right to do it – and yet we make excuses to avoid doing it. James says that when this occurs, it is sin. What does all this tell us? It reveals to us that we really, really need Jesus.

We may not have committed adultery, but we sure have thought about it. We may not have stolen, but we failed to stop the person accompanying us when they stole. Such sins separate us from God, and only Jesus can restore us. Praise the Lord for Jesus!

Lord, surely we admit that we have committed every type of sin imaginable. We have done that which we ought not to have done. We have left undone those things we should have done. We have also intended evil in our hearts towards others. Yes, all of this is sin, and we can only thank You and praise You for Your great mercy revealed in Jesus. It is He alone who cleanses us from all unrighteousness! Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Come now, *you* rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon *you*!

James 5:1

James now speaks in a manner similar to verse 4:13. There he said, “Come now, you who say...” Here he begins with, “Come now, *you* rich.”

This is his way of calling to attention an error in thinking that needs to be corrected. In 4:13, it was to the boastful. Here, it is to the rich who trust that their riches mean they are in God’s favor, and/or that their riches will save them in the day of disaster. Both are decidedly errors in thinking. To show how true this is, he will continue with this thought until verse 5:6.

For those who are rich, he says, “weep and howl.” This is similar to what he has already said in verse 4:9, “Lament and mourn and weep!” James is showing that haughtiness in the Lord’s presence is unacceptable. As he later said, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

This is the same thought process that he will continue with here. In this verse, the Greek more precisely reads, “weep, howling...” The thought is active and alive. The word translated as “weep” is the standard and common word signifying sobbing or wailing aloud.

However, the word for “howl” is used only here in Scripture, *ololuzó*. It is an onomatopoeic expression (the sound resembles what it signifies), which means to cry out audibly in order to express feelings which are too intense for mere words. One can think of the mid-eastern sound still made by Arabs today as they wail in agony or shriek for joy – olololololololo (or, ulululululululu).

James tells the rich to sob out and howl in this way because of “your miseries that are coming upon *you*!” For those who trust in riches, their end will be misery. This is a thought which echoes the words of the prophets. For example, Isaiah says of the coming judgment of Babylon –

“Wail, for the day of the Lord *is* at hand!

It will come as destruction from the Almighty.” Isaiah 13:6

Ezekiel shows the folly of believing there is value in being wealthy when the judgment of the Lord comes –

“They will throw their silver into the streets,
And their gold will be like refuse;
Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them
In the day of the wrath of the Lord;
They will not satisfy their souls,
Nor fill their stomachs,
Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity.” Ezekiel 7:19

Such imagery is found in numerous places in Scripture. This is now what James also begins to explain to those who are wealthy in the world, but who have not taken their state before the Lord into consideration.

Life application: One of the great mistakes of our society, and one from which Christians are not immune, is to make assumptions based on wealth:

- 1) God favors me because I’m rich.
- 2) I am important because I’m rich.
- 3) My wealth will save me during times of crisis.

On today’s TV, there are hosts of companies and commercials which speak of the security of gold. But when the ball drops and the economy collapses, that gold will be useless – just as it was in Ezekiel’s time.

What is the time of the Lord’s wrath? Read the terrifying words of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Such was the case for the Lord’s wrath upon Israel, and such will be the case on a worldwide scale someday. They are words so appalling that despite the gruesome horror of movies we may sit and watch, those shows can’t even compare to the reality of God’s wrath –

“The tender and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because of her delicateness and sensitivity, will refuse to the husband of her bosom, and to her son and her daughter, ⁵⁷ her placenta which comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of everything in the siege and desperate straits in which your enemy shall distress you at all your gates.”
Deuteronomy 28:56, 57

Horror lies ahead for those who fail to come to Christ and be healed from their lives of sin. If you are trusting in wealth, gold and silver, or fancy objects, then your trust is in vain. Weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Instead, be secure in the joyous covering of Christ and in the hope of the rapture of the saints. Those left behind will face unimaginable sorrow.

Lord Jesus, may our souls delight in You alone. May our very lives be dedicated to You and Your service. And Lord, may our eyes never stray from Your glory to any lesser object – no, not even gold or gems. All wealth is perishing, and a trust in riches is vanity. But for those who place their trust in You, there is safety and life. Thank You for the hope of life that we possess because of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. James 5:2

In the previous verse, James spoke of the miseries coming upon the rich. Here, he begins to describe what that entails, beginning with, “Your riches are corrupted.”

The word *sépo*, translated as “corrupted,” is found only here in the New Testament. One can see a hint of the modern word “septic” in it. It signifies “to putrefy.” In it, there is a process of rotting and its associated negative happenings – smell, touch, taste, and sight are each brought into the equation.

The reason for this is that the wealth of the rich in ancient times did not only consist of metals and gems, but also of the storing up of food, wine, oil, garments, etc. Jesus spoke of this type of amassed wealth in Luke 12 –

“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?”¹⁸ So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry.’”’” Luke 12:16-19

Grains and the like, when they get damp, will begin to putrefy. Wine begins to turn to vinegar when its storage is improperly affected. Solomon speaks of the ruining of oil in Ecclesiastes 10:1 –

“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment,
And cause it to give off a foul odor;
So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.”

As the rot – whatever type it might be – sets in, the taste, smell, feel, and sight of the once-valuable commodity is turned to corruption. It is good for nothing. James also says, “and your garments are moth-eaten.”

Today, this doesn’t really bother us as much as it did even a short time ago. Throughout history, people generally had very few garments. So important was the single garment of many individuals, that the Lord spoke out this in the Exodus 22:26, 27 –

“If you ever take your neighbor’s garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. ²⁷ For that *is* his only covering, it *is* his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I *am* gracious.”

The wealthy would have more garments, and of varying qualities and materials. However, they needed to be carefully stored to avoid being destroyed. These would be treated as precious commodities which could be traded or sold, and thus they were their own type of wealth. James shows that such wealth is transitory and can come to an end very quickly. Such sources of wealth that the rich man trusted in are actually not trustworthy at all.

Jesus spoke of exactly this, and where true wealth is –

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21

Life application: In this verse, and in the verses to come, James really goes on the attack against worldly wealth. The very thing most people treasure above all else is the thing that is often most fleeting. People who once possessed millions of dollars are found homeless and eating out of dumpsters.

Wealthy traders have lost everything in a single afternoon, leading them to jump out of their high-rise apartments rather than face poverty. Money simply cannot be relied on as a good indicator of what our status will be in 24 hours.

In the past, to flaunting flashy outfits was similar to flaunting lots of money. It showed an arrogance which, unfortunately, hasn't changed even today. Instead, we put value in labels and designers. To wear something by a noted designer often leads to feelings of superiority over others. But James states that this type of attitude is shallow and reflects poor priorities.

Instead of trusting in money or fancy clothing, let us trust wholeheartedly in the Lord – the Everlasting God.

Heavenly Father, we need forgiveness for our times of trusting in wealth, cars, clothing, or any other thing which is so temporary and uncertain. Give us wisdom to use these things without loving them; to enjoy them without clinging to them; and to trust in no earthly thing, but rather in You alone. This we ask that You will be glorified and that we will be found faultless in Your eyes. Amen.

Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. James 5:3

James continues with the thought from the previous verse, starting with, “Your gold and silver are corroded.”

The word translated as “corroded” is found only here in the Bible. It comes from a root, *ios*, meaning either rust or poison. That word, *ios*, is used in the next clause and is translated as “corrosion.” That, in turn, comes from a word which signifies “to send.”

A viper will send forth poison (as is the idea in both Romans 3:13 and James 3:8, where the same word is used as in this verse). The gold and silver will wear, sending away their mass. This is important to understand because gold neither rusts nor tarnishes. Therefore, saying “worn away,” or “corroded,” rather than “rust” is appropriate.

The idea is that gold and silver may have value, but to trust in them is a fool's choice. They will wear away, they can be stolen, they can be lost, etc. In the end, they cannot save a person from his final day of reckoning. Instead, James says that “their corrosion will be a witness against you.”

The intent of these words is that whatever is left of the gold and silver, if anything, will be insufficient to save the soul of the man. Their properties, which are wearing away, mean that they are earthly – even if precious by earthly standards. The fool will hope in that which is created; the wise will hope in the Creator.

Throughout Scripture, this is seen. When the people rebelled against the Lord and made a golden calf, Moses says, “Then I took your sin, the calf which you had made, and burned it with fire and crushed it *and* ground *it* very small, until it was as fine as dust; and I threw its dust into the brook that descended from the mountain” (Deuteronomy 9:21).

In Exodus, it then says that he then made the people drink of the water. In Joshua, Achan sinned against the Lord by taking gold and silver during the battle of Jericho. It stood as a witness against him, and it cost him his life. He, his family, and all of his possessions – along with the gold and silver – were stoned and then burned.

Following the progression of these and other such incidents in Scripture shows that placing one’s trust in silver or gold is unwise. Such treasure “will eat your flesh like fire.”

This is exactly what happened to Achan, and it is a type and picture of what will happen to all who so trust in earthly riches. In the final judgment, the gold and silver they thought could save them will be shown to be a false hope. For them, it will be an eternal swim in the Lake of Fire. For those who are saved and still cling to such things, their judgment at the Bema Seat of Christ will be one of loss and not reward.

James finishes with, “You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” The age of grace has come, and that grace is found in Jesus Christ. He is the only true source of hope, and yet people in these last days (meaning since His resurrection) continue going about pursuing worldly wealth to the exclusion of a relationship with God through Him. This is a false hope indeed.

There is nothing wrong with earning wealth, and the proverbs instruct the wise to save for their children’s children. But this is for use in this temporary world, not for salvation in the next. There is an eternal difference between the two.

Life application: Imagine the final moments of the victims of the volcano at Pompeii. The volcano exploded, and the fire and ash came at the people like a freight train. The wealthy, along with the poor, were snuffed out within a few seconds. That moment in

time is recorded for the ages – people grasping their children; people dying in their rooms; people holding onto... their gold.

The last moments of many people's lives are spent grasping for something they simply cannot take with them. It is certainly the case that if some had not tried to hold on to their money, they may have escaped with their lives. But, as Forrest Gump correctly put it, "Stupid is as stupid does."

People trust in wealth, they boast about wealth, and they die because of their wealth. In the end, it did them no good at all – a few moments of history spent in leisure ended in futility. Solomon speaks about the life of the laborer and the life of the rich. Really, who has it better? The man who sleeps well, even if a little hungry, or the man who can't sleep though he is filled with cake and ice cream?

"The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet,
Whether he eats little or much;
But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.
¹³ There is a severe evil *which* I have seen under the sun:
Riches kept for their owner to his hurt." Ecclesiastes 5:12, 13

Wealth, fancy living, gold, silver, flashy cars, and a life of leisure will testify against us when it is our hope. There is nothing wrong with wealth and abundance as long as it is kept in proper perspective. But when it consumes our lives, it becomes sin to us.

Let us be careful where we put our hopes and concerning what we are reaching for as we head into eternity. Where is your anchor set as you hurtle toward the day of your death? Let it be in Christ Jesus alone.

Lord, we thank You for the wonderful abundance You have given us in this life. We are grateful for the things You have blessed us with. But Lord, may these things never take our hearts and eyes away from You. Help us to keep our priorities straight. When we reach out for the last time, may our hands reach out for You. Amen.

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. James 5:4

James, still speaking to the rich, now directs his words to their ill-treatment of others, beginning with those who are in their employ. They obviously treat their workers

unfairly, as is evidenced beginning with the words, “Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields.”

These are people within the employ of the rich. The word “wages” implies one who is hired, not a slave. An agreement for payment for a certain type or amount of work has been made. In this case, it is for those who mow. The word is found only here in Scripture, *amaó*. It means to mow or reap.

Next, the word translated as “fields” is not the usual one. It is a common word, but it usually refers to a country. In this sense, it is a larger area than a normal field. It is only used two other times in this fashion. One of those two times, it also speaks of the fields of a rich man –

“Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.’” Luke 12:16

James notes that the rich man has large swaths of land, and he has hired laborers out to tend to them. However, referring to the wages he owes, James says, “which you have kept back by fraud.” The word used signifies to defraud another. The rich man may have changed the conditions which had originally been agreed upon.

He may have claimed payment was made when it wasn’t, he may have claimed the job wasn’t performed as required, even when it was, or he may have simply withheld payment because he figured he could get away with it. Whatever the reason, the laborer has been denied his rightfully due wages.

James says that these wages “cry out.” The word is *krazó*. It is an onomatopoeic expression where a natural sound which is heard reflects the sound of the word itself. It is derived from the raven’s cry, which pierces the air, and thus it signifies a loud shriek which uses inarticulate sounds of deeply affected emotions. The wages themselves are personified as they cry out to heaven for justice.

James then says that “the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” A different word for “cries” is seen only here in the Bible, *boé*. Again, it is an onomatopoeic expression. It signifies visceral sounds of concentrated exclamations. The cries of the workers are a heartfelt and expressive petition for relief. They are so pained that the Lord of Sabaoth becomes attentive to them.

This is a title for the Lord found only here and in Romans 9:29. In Romans, Paul is citing the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Here, James simply uses the word without citation. The title “Sabaoth” is derived from the Hebrew word *tsaba*, meaning war, warfare, or army. In this form, then, it signifies “the Lord of Hosts.”

He is the Commander of the armies of heaven, and His ears have heard what the rich man has done. Can anyone imagine that He will shut His hearing to such cries?

Life application: James lived in a time when almost all work was physical, and a large percentage of that was agrarian. In fact, throughout its pages, the Bible deals with agricultural themes to make spiritual applications.

When Jesus speaks of the wheat harvest, He is referring to the harvest of human souls prepared for the kingdom. When we read of the grape harvest, it is referring to God’s wrath being poured out on His enemies as He stomps them in His fury.

This verse in James is not necessarily spiritual in nature, and we need to be careful not to over spiritualize every verse. Rather, James is following along in the same line he has spoken of for the past few verses – greed. Instead of paying the workers their wages, the wealthy were holding onto their money longer than necessary.

Perhaps they were saying to the workers, “I’ll pay you when you finish the job.” However, just like today, the common people relied on having their pay immediately. To withhold the day’s wages was to deprive them of their evening meal.

Imagine if your boss originally promised to give you a paycheck each Friday. Later, however, he arbitrarily changed that to bi-weekly. At the end of the second week, he comes again and says, “I’m going to give you one big check at the end of the month.” You would rightfully be very upset as you agreed to work for a weekly paycheck.

James says that conducting affairs in such a manner is sin. If you are in a position of handling other people’s pay, make sure you deal fairly with them, lest you be found a sinner as well. Though under the Law of Moses, the following words reflect a precept which should be remembered by all –

“You shall not oppress a hired servant *who is* poor and needy, *whether* one of your brethren or one of the aliens who *is* in your land within your gates. ¹⁵ Each day you shall give *him* his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he *is* poor and has

set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you.”
Deuteronomy 24:14, 15

Heavenly Father, it is wonderful to read Your word and to see how tenderly You care for Your people. Give us hearts to care for others even as You do, and keep us from the sin of greed. May we never act deceitfully toward others over money, and may we especially be generous to share Your word with others – Your precious word of life. Amen.

You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. James 5:5

The thought continues from the previous verses. James has been addressing the rich, condemning them for their abusive lifestyles. After mentioning how the rich man harms others, he now turns to how they treat themselves, beginning with, “You have lived on the earth in pleasure.” Here is a word found only this once in Scripture. It signifies living in a self-indulgent manner. As HELPS Word Studies describes it –

“‘Dainty living’ in NT times included going to the public baths (‘wash houses’), typically decked out with ornate furnishings (e.g., decorated baths made of marble, etc.) They eventually became huge recreation centers with an adjoining gymnasium and library.”

So, these rich were withholding the wages of their laborers (see previous verse), and they instead head to the public bathhouses to relax. It is a truly criminal act against those in their employ – stealing their labor so that they can find “pleasure and luxury.”

The word translated as “luxury” is also a rare word, being seen only here and in 1 Timothy 5:6. It gives the idea of indulging in unneeded surplus. James Strong describes it as being voluptuous. In this uncaring, self-indulgent, and wanton lifestyle, James says to the rich that “you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter.”

The idea here of fattening one’s heart is that of fattening oneself. The heart stands for the person – his reason, intellect, and mind. Here is this person, set on self-indulgence, who has become either –

- 1) fat from the life he lives, and who is ripe for being slaughtered like an animal, or
- 2) fat from acting as one would in the day of slaughter. When an animal is slaughtered, there is great feasting for those who participate in the meal.

If the latter, which is not unlikely, it means that the laborer – whose wages were withheld – was treated as a sacrificial animal. He was slaughtered by the withholding of his wages, and the rich then live off his life-blood, pictured by the wages which were needed to sustain him.

Either way, the imagery is one of over-indulgence, greed, and an uncaring attitude for anything beyond immediate self-absorption.

Life application: James reached back to the Song of Moses for the thought he presents in this verse –

“But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked;
You grew fat, you grew thick,
You are obese!
Then he forsook God *who* made him,
And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” Deuteronomy 32:15

James is writing to the first-century Jewish community and reminding them of the fulfillment of what was prophesied by Moses. Don't miss the significance of the greater picture, though. Just as the Jewish people had become well-fed and fat, and just as they had kicked, so have the nations that once followed the Lord. As prosperity comes, so along with it comes ease and a dulling of the senses concerning the things of God.

So it is in the world today. As prosperity, luxury, and self-indulgence have become a way of life, in equal measure have come immorality, turning from the truth of the Bible, and a more liberal approach to life, politics, friendships, etc. Hard work is no longer rewarded, but instead is taxed to feed the lazy.

National feelings of devotion are replaced with a desire to burn the flag and complain about even the thought of defending against aggression. Murderers are given light sentences, and abortionists are given honors and accolades.

Likewise, preachers water down the truth of Scripture and breathe out easy messages of prosperity and comfort. Surely we have fattened ourselves in the day of slaughter. We must repent and turn back to God, or we will be consumed in our unrighteousness. Take time today to pray for repentance and revival in your land.

Heavenly Father, what Your word proclaims is true – that which has been will be again. Just as Israel grew fat and kicked, so have the nations which once proclaimed Your

message. Likewise, denominations that once held to the truth of the Bible now dismiss it as myth. Turn our hearts back to You before Your great and awesome Day of Judgment arrives. Help us to be faithful in a world of wickedness and turmoil. Amen.

You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. James 5:6

James is still speaking to the rich of verse 1. He has rightfully pointed out the failings which the rich are commonly guilty of. What he says is a general commentary on the state of those who are rich and who use their wealth without taking their position before God into consideration. As has been seen, such people go from bad to worse in their actions and in their treatment of others. He now goes so far as to say, "You have condemned."

The Greek of these words is a single compound verb which signifies, "to pass sentence upon." It is an aorist verb, signifying something like, "You are accustomed to condemning the just." It is as if the rich were a judge who had judged the poor. What is understood is that the judgment is based upon his wealth alone. There is no true basis for the condemnation except an exalted feeling of personal worth.

From there, James continues with, "you have murdered the just." Here, "the just" is in the singular. It is speaking of an individual. It is debated who is being referred to. Some think he is referring to the crucifixion of Christ.

As it is the highest example of one who is just being murdered, it is the example which can be applied universally to all such cases. In essence, "You (whoever 'you' might be) have murdered Christ through your actions."

Others suppose that it is speaking of any just man who is improperly condemned and murdered. The singular stands for the whole.

Or it could specifically be referring to the laborers of verse 4. The rich man condemned him, as if in a trial and in withholding his wages, he had murdered him. If so, the singular again stands for the whole. Any rich man who has so condemned and murdered his laborers is being referred to.

No matter which, the principle is clearly understood. There is the guilt of blood because the rich have unlawfully sat as a judge, pronounced sentence, and deprived a just man of his life. And this is all the more poignant because, says James, "he does not resist you."

The very fact that the man is termed “just” shows that he has a legitimate right to resist his treatment, and yet he does not. Christ did not resist His accusers, though He was without fault. The just laborer who has earned his pay may ask for it, but when he doesn’t receive it, he doesn’t come after the rich with murderous intent. Instead, he cries out in his misery (verse 4).

There is no resistance. Likewise, there is no fear on the part of the rich, and yet they take action to silence the man who has done rightly so that they can continue to oppress whoever stands in the way of their obtaining more.

Life application: It is easy for us to look at the oppressors of the world and judge them for their actions, but in the end, don’t the words of James also point back to us? Each of us has participated in the crucifixion of Christ. It is our sin, our greed, and our wayward lives which necessitated His cross.

In the movie The Passion of the Christ, there is a short clip of a Roman soldier’s hand bringing the hammer down on the nail which was piercing Jesus’ hand. During the shooting of the film, Mel Gibson came forward, grabbed the hammer, and the shot was filmed with his hand being portrayed as the Roman soldier’s hand. He said that his life made him a participant in the death of Jesus. This was his way of acknowledging that. As troubling as it may seem, we have condemned and murdered the just and innocent One – Jesus our Lord.

We should contemplate the sin in our lives which brought about such a terrible demonstration of its penalty. Likewise, we should look with gratitude to our Heavenly Father who loved us enough to offer His Son in our place. Jesus took our stripes, our mocking, and our cross. And after the turmoil of His soul, He saw the light of life – having prevailed over death.

It is with grateful hearts that we can anticipate freedom from the bonds of death as well. The murdered innocent One has prevailed.

Lord God, what are we that You saw it fit to send Christ Jesus to die for us? How can such love exist? Thank You for Christ Jesus our Lord, who has brought us back to You. Amen.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. James 5:7

The word “Therefore,” which begins this verse, is given to sum up the things described in the previous section. In essence, “Since these things are this way...” From there, James says, “be patient.”

The word signifies long-suffering. It is the type of patience which will only express itself in anger as the Lord directs, in a logical and reasonable way. It never responds in a quick-tempered, emotional way. Vincent’s Word Studies, citing earlier scholar says it is –

“...as a tumultuous welling up of the whole spirit; a mighty emotion which seizes and moves the whole inner man. Hence the restraint implied ... is most correctly expressed by long-suffering, which is its usual rendering in the New Testament. It is a patient holding out under trial; a long-protracted restraint of the soul from yielding to passion, especially the passion of anger.”

With this type of attitude, James then says, “brethren.” The reason is two-fold. First, he is addressing believers, and secondly, he is contrasting them to those who would oppose them from the previous six verses. He then tells his readers how long they should be patient. It is “until the coming of the Lord.”

What this means is that as long as we walk in this life, and until this life ends with the Lord coming to His people – either through death, rapture, or second advent (depending on whichever applies), they are to continue to be long-suffering. Then, to give a concrete example of the idea, he next says, “See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth.”

Israel, which was formed under the Old Covenant, was an agrarian society. They would perfectly understand James’ words. There was a cycle to life which could not be hurried, nor could it be changed through anxiety, frustration, or anger. The farmer lived by the cycle, and he learned to wait for it to come to its next anticipated stage.

If bills were owed, and it was four months until the harvest, his anxiety would not change the situation. If he was owed money, and it was not yet harvesting time, his anger at his neighbor for being late on the agreed payment schedule would not change a thing.

The grain would be sown, the cycle of growth would begin, and it would eventually be time to reap the grain. During the entire cycle, he could only watch the process unfold and busy himself with other duties to keep himself and his family going. As the days turned to weeks and then into months, he would be “waiting patiently for it.”

As noted already, he could do nothing to change the cycle, and if he allowed anger at the slowness of the process to enter his soul, only he would suffer. It would show a truly unwise streak in him to be angry at something he had absolutely no control over. This is just as true with the events which occurred during the wait as it was with the time of the wait itself. And for each crop, this was “until it receives the early and latter rain.”

There are two rains which prevail in the annual cycle of Israel. The early rain and the latter. They are also known as the autumnal and spring rains. The early (or autumnal) rains would come around October and November. They would last through February. The latter rains would come from March through April. Vincent’s Word Studies notes of these rains –

“The early rain fell in October, November, and December, and extended into January and February. These rains do not come suddenly, but by degrees, so that the farmer can sow his wheat or barley. The rains are mostly from the west or southwest (Luke 12:54), continuing two or three days at a time, and falling mostly in the night. Then the wind shifts to the north or east, and fine weather ensues (Proverbs 25:23). The latter rains, which are much lighter, fall in March and April.”

This was how the cycle normally occurred. To have rain out of this cycle was considered miraculous and even a sign of divine displeasure. That is noted in 1 Samuel 12:16,17 –

“Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the Lord will do before your eyes: ¹⁷ *Is* today not the wheat harvest? I will call to the Lord, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness *is* great, which you have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking a king for yourselves.”

After the destruction of Israel by the Romans, and in the exile of the people of Israel, the land was so devastated that it actually changed this normal cycle, and for the next 2000 years, Albert Barnes notes –

“At the present time there are not any particular periods of rain, or successions of showers, which might be regarded as distinct rainy seasons. The whole period from October to March now constitutes only one continued rainy season, without any regularly intervening time of prolonged fair weather.”

In other words, the early and latter rains that governed the cycle of life in Israel ceased to occur. When the Romans came in to destroy, they cut down all the trees in the land

for building siege-works. It is this which changed the climate so that the rains became irregular.

The land went into upheaval, and it became a desert in most places and unusable marshes in others. Everything became chaotic and unmanageable. However, with Israel returned to her land, the cycle has returned to that noted in Scripture. Since the Jewish people have returned, they have drained the swamps, cleared the land, and planted millions of trees.

Because of this, the land now receives both the autumn and spring rains once again. The rains are predictable, the land is flourishing, and the farmer can again sow and reap.

Thus, James' words are a prophetic clue to the return of the Lord. This will be seen in the coming verse. Paul speaks of this same type of patient attitude for believers during the church age –

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” Galatians 6:9

Life application: Compared to the Old Testament, there is not a great deal of predictive prophecy in the New. Most of it comes from Jesus' words and from the book of Revelation. Along with these, there are a few passages in Acts and the Epistles which tell us about coming events. For the most part, James is not a book of prophecy, but his word here very well may be an indication of when the Lord's coming is drawing near.

James tells his readers to be patient until the Lord's coming. This is because Jesus isn't going to return when we want, but only when the time of harvest has come. Are the return of the early and latter rains to Israel an indication that Jesus also will be coming soon?

If you want to know the times, there is no better place to look than to the land of Israel. As events there unfold, the stage is again being set for the people to take a prominent position in world events, culminating in a rebuilt temple, seven years of tribulation on earth, and climaxing in the glorious return of Jesus.

Before these things happen, though, the rapture will occur. Are you ready? Jesus is coming.

Lord God, You have set a prophetic marker into the stream of human history. It is an indication that the times are coming to their fulfillment, and that the return of our Lord is soon. Your word said that it would happen, and it has come about as You spoke. Israel has returned to her land. Surely the coming of the Lord is at hand! We wait with eager anticipation for that day. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

James 5:8

James repeats his words of the previous verse. They are set in parallel –

vs7- Therefore be patient, brethren

vs8- You also be patient

The meaning of “You also be patient” is based on what he said about the farmer in verse 7, that he waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and that his waiting is based on the coming of the former and latter rains. Each thing is interconnected, and there is nothing the farmer can do about what lies ahead once the seed is sown. Likewise, James says, “Establish your hearts.”

The word translated as “establish” gives the sense of strengthening, being steadfast, or being fixed and firm. Here, James says that the hearts of the believers are to be so established. They are not to waver. In the Bible, the heart is not speaking of the physical heart which pumps blood, but of the mind, which is the seat of moral reasoning.

One can see that he is basing this exhortation on the treatment from the rich, which was mentioned in the first six verses of the chapter. There is fraud and there is deceit in the world, but it does not mean that the Lord will never show up to correct it.

The time of the coming forth of “the precious fruit of the earth” of the previous verse is a part of a fixed cycle which will come about in its due time. Thus, the admonition to establish the heart is set in parallel to those words concerning the ripening of the fruit –

vs7- See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth

vs8- Establish your hearts

Paul made a similar encouraging exhortation to the saints at Thessalonica –

“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you, ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in

holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13

James then explains why his reader is to establish his heart. It is because “the coming of the Lord is at hand.” Again, this is set in parallel to the words of verse 7 –

vs7- Waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

vs8- For the coming of the Lord is at hand.

James is equating the coming of the early and latter rain directly to the coming of the Lord, meaning His second coming. Why would he do this when Israel was receiving these rains when he wrote this epistle? It is because it was prophesied by the prophet Hosea.

Hosea prophesied 700+ years before James of a time when Israel would return to the Lord. The obvious meaning is that they must first turn from the Lord. The prophecy of Hosea shows this, but it also shows more –

“Come, and let us return to the Lord;
For He has torn, but He will heal us;
He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

²After two days He will revive us;
On the third day He will raise us up,
That we may live in His sight.

³Let us know,
Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.” Hosea 6:1-3

Hosea said that “After two days He will revive us,” and “On the third day, He will raise us up.” This is actually a prophecy of the ending of Israel’s second, extended exile. As the Bible records in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8, a day to the Lord is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day, this is a prophecy that Israel would be exiled for 2000 years and then revived, and in the third day (the third millennium) Israel would be raised up.

Hosea then equates the coming of the Lord to be “like the rain,” and “Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth.” As noted in the commentary in the previous verse, these rains were interrupted in Israel after their exile. The land became barren and unproductive.

Only with the return of Israel, their draining of the swamps and planting of millions of trees, etc., have these cyclical rains returned. It is a sign – a prophetic sign to the world, and believers in particular – that “the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

Life application: Never mind that this was written 2000 years ago. The verse needs to be taken in its proper context. James was talking to the recipients of his letter about being patient, just as the farmer is patient. The body of believers is to wait on the Lord for His return through any time-frame, be it 100 years or 25000 years.

Considering that the church is made up of individuals, the Lord’s coming for each of us really isn’t that far away, regardless of when He actually returns to earth. We will each be called home after a short walk on this earth. We need, therefore, to stand firm and be patient each day we live. None of us knows the hour of our death, nor do we know the time of the Lord’s second coming. So we simply need to be about His business at all times.

Don’t be misguided by preachers or Bible teachers who deny the rapture of the church. Christ is coming for His church at the rapture. This will be followed by a 7-year period known as the tribulation, during which Israel will be the center of attention.

After this, there will be a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth known as the millennium. These verses are to be taken literally, but they are often dismissed as allegory because they otherwise differentiate between the church and Israel. If you believe the church replaced Israel, then you will inevitably come to the wrong conclusion about future events.

But if you believe, as the Bible teaches, that Israel has a specific role which is yet to be fulfilled, then you will be able to understand the other future events in their proper context.

Lord, open our eyes to understand where our doctrine is wrong. And then, help us to not be stubborn, but to correct it according to the truth of Your word. May our thoughts on what is revealed concerning Jesus, salvation, and those things which are to come align properly with what You have given us. And Lord, help us to defend the integrity of Your word concerning all of these glorious things! Amen.

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! James 5:9

James now gives words of instruction for the wait,, which will end at “the coming of the Lord” as stated in verse 7. It could be a long one, and during that period, he instructs the brethren to “not grumble against one another.” The word used signifies a sigh or a groan. By saying, “against one another,” it then signifies to grumble or complain.

This is certainly referring to being impatient, envious, grumpy, haughty, and the like. When we are in such a condition, we may grumble against other brothers, but this is inappropriate. Further, it signifies that we feel we have no one to whom we are accountable in our grumbling. We might say in our minds, “Jesus is a long way off,” and because of this, we will tend to forget how we are expected to act. In this, James says, “lest you be condemned.”

Here, there is a variance in manuscripts. Some translate it as “condemned,” while others translate it as “judged.” Judged is certainly the more likely. First, it is the exact words of Matthew 7:1 where “judged” is used. Secondly, there is the truth that there is “now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus is not coming to condemn His people, but to judge them. And this is what James then says to those who forget that this is so. He calls out, “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”

He just said in the previous verse that “the coming of the Lord is at hand.” In the previous chapter, he spoke of those who boastfully speak of “tomorrow” as if they have a claim to it. But James said that it is otherwise.

We don’t know our next breath, nor do we know if our heart will beat again. Likewise, we do not know when Christ will return. There was to be a constant anticipation of His return from the moment he left. And that is still true today.

Christ stands at the door, and His people are to be ever-mindful of this, not grumbling against one another, not boasting about tomorrow, and simply waiting patiently for His perfect timing. And more, the idea of Jesus standing at the door as Judge is reflected in the words of Revelation 3:20 –

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

Christ is the Judge for salvation or condemnation of those who either will or will not come to Him, and He is the Judge of those who do come to Him for reward and loss. At all times, He is the Judge, and He stands at the door.

Life application: In this chapter, James has admonished us concerning the following –

- 1) We are told to be patient until the Lord's coming. This tells us it is something that must be waited on and can refer to any amount of time. It is indeterminate in nature.
- 2) The farmer waits on the time of harvest, and the Bible speaks of the work of the Lord through various types of harvests.
- 3) Just as the farmer needs to be patient for the rains to come, so the people waiting on the Lord should wait. If James' words concerning the coming of the spring and autumn rains refer to the return of both rains to the land of Israel, which has finally happened after 2000 years, then the return of these rains may indicate the general time of the Lord's return.
- 4) As we wait, we need to not grumble – judgment, though seemingly a long way off, is certainly coming. And,
- 5) When the times indicated arrive, the Judge will be standing at the door. This could be referring to the rapture as indicated in Revelation 4:1 –

“After these things I looked, and behold, a door *standing* open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard *was* like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, ‘Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this.’”

At the rapture, the trumpet will sound, the door to heaven will be open, and the people of God will be translated in the twinkling of an eye. Then the door will be closed, and judgment will fall on the unbelieving, unrepentant world.

Are we close to the return of Jesus? Well, one thing is for certain – we're 2000 years closer than when the New Testament was penned! Keep looking up, Jesus is coming – be it soon or be it a while more, Jesus is coming.

O God! What a great and glorious hope we have in Christ. Just to see Your face, Lord Jesus. Just to see Your face! We wait on You with antici..... pation! Until then, give us

patient hearts. The wait will be worth it when the trumpet sounds and the call is made. Even so, Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. James 5:10

James has said that “the coming of the Lord is at hand” (verse 8). However, he also said that his audience is to be patient. What is true, then, is that the coming of the Lord being “at hand” means at any given time, but not specifically in a short amount of time. It is obvious now, two thousand years after he wrote this, that this is true. And as a part of the wait – no matter how long it will be – the brethren can expect trials. And in those trials, there is to be an acknowledgment that they are not unknown to the Lord.

Understanding this, he says, “My brethren.” As he has done numerous times, he indicates that his letter is written to believers who are “brethren” in Christ. This is not without importance, because he next says, “take the prophets.” He is making a connection between the prophets of old and the brethren in the church. In essence, “As they were, so you should be.”

He then further clarifies who “the prophets” are that he is speaking of by saying, “who spoke in the name of the Lord.” He is obviously referring to the true prophets, not the lengthy list of false prophets recorded in books such as Jeremiah.

Were the true prophets exempt from difficulties which extended for unknown durations of time? No! Rather, they faced the same limitations as anyone else. And they also faced suffering like anyone else. But James says to look to them “as an example of suffering and patience.”

The meaning of this is that they suffered, but that they were also patient in their suffering. Patience here implies not knowing how long they would suffer, but they bore up through their trials. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet, and at the time of his calling, he was told that things would be tough –

“They will fight against you,
But they shall not prevail against you.
For I *am* with you,’ says the Lord, ‘to deliver you.’” Jeremiah 1:19

Daniel faced the lions, his three friends faced the fiery furnace, Isaiah was told to go about naked and barefoot, Ezekiel’s wife was taken from him, and he was instructed to

not mourn over her. On and on, the record of the prophets reflected that of difficulty, trial, and suffering. And yet they were patient in their affliction because they knew the Lord was with them. And the believers in Christ have this same guarantee –

“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”
Hebrews 13:5

James is imploring his audience to understand that the same Lord of the prophets is the Lord of the church. Believers in Him have the same assurance of affliction that the prophets did, but they also have the same promise of His faithfulness that the prophets possessed. Paul was told this right at the beginning of his ministry –

“But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” Acts 9:15, 16

Paul knew that suffering lay ahead, and yet he accepted his commission (see Acts 26:19) without reservation. James is asking his readers to consider these things, to understand that suffering is a part of the human experience of which believers are not exempt, and to be patient through that suffering – no matter how long it will continue.

Life application: So much for the “prosperity gospel” where everyone gets wealthy and lives carefree after accepting Jesus! James reminds us that the very people who received God’s word were often the ones who suffered the most. The Lord’s chosen were placed in stocks, stoned, deprived of food, and tortured.

These great heroes of the faith accepted what God chose for them because they understood that God is sovereign. He created them and has every right to portion out both blessings and hardships. Likewise, we need to accept the good and the bad, the joyous and that which saddens, and prosperity and poverty.

We can carry a like attitude during all circumstances when we have a strong and grounded faith. It is this type of faith that God is pleased with and which He acknowledges with favor. When we can look beyond the moment and see the eternal rewards in store, then we have truly come to that comfortable spot where nothing can steal our joy.

As the Psalmist of old said –

“I called on the Lord in distress;
The Lord answered me *and set me* in a broad place.
⁶The Lord *is* on my side;
I will not fear.
What can man do to me?” Psalm 118:5, 6

Heavenly Father, it is easy to read words of courage and strength during suffering, but it is much harder to actually live that way ourselves. Give us the ability to praise You and to accept what You have given us – good or bad – that we may be true children of faith. May You be the One who is glorified through our lives. Amen.

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by* the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. James 5:11

In the previous verse, James spoke of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, using them as his example of suffering and patience. He now states of such people, “Indeed we count them blessed who endure.” He uses a verb found only here and in Luke 1:48, where Mary says that all future generations would call her blessed.

There is a blessing for faithful endurance through suffering, and James highlights that in his thoughts. It is a commendable thing to bear up under suffering when it is for the glory of the Lord. Such was the case with the Old Testament’s premier example of suffering, Job. James brings him into his thoughts now by saying, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job.”

Though not a Hebrew, Job was known for his faithful endurance through suffering, even among the Jews. The book which bears his name is an integral part of their canon of Scripture, and it reflects the high regard that the Lord had for Job as a person of righteousness and as a person willing to maintain his composure before the Lord, even in the most difficult times of suffering, loss, and sadness.

Because of this, James then says, “and seen the end *intended by* the Lord.” The words “intended by” are inserted for clarity. James makes this unusual statement to show that the sufferings of Job came about not because of God’s displeasure, but because He is sovereign over His creation, and this was His means of teaching both Job and those who read his account about the good end which He has purposed for His people, despite their sufferings. And that good end is found in the fact “that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

The word translated as “very compassionate” is found only here in Scripture, and it is believed that James invented the word for this particular statement. It is one which means “many-boweled.” The bowels are considered the place of the deepest emotions, and thus, they signify the multi-faceted and heartfelt emotions of God towards His people.

The other word, translated as “merciful,” is found here and twice in Luke 6:36. All three instances are speaking of the mercy of God. As HELPS Word Studies says of this word, it signifies “experiencing deep pity (lamentation) as God has for people who look to Him for help in their difficult situations.”

One can see that these two words signify both the feelings of the Lord and the act by the Lord in relation to those feelings. He is very compassionate, and that state is worked out in His being merciful.

In remembering that this is based on the sufferings of His people, James is showing us (his audience) that this is what we too can expect from the Lord, despite any sufferings we face or may face in the future. The Lord is aware of those things, and He is with us in our woeful state, bringing us to a good end.

Life application: Most people know at least a portion of the story of Job. The book begins with –

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name *was* Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. ²And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. ³Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.” Job 1:1-3

Very quickly, the narrative shows that he lost everything mentioned here and was left with only a nagging wife and boils covering his body from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. Despite this, Job never swayed in his convictions and continued to praise and exalt God. He understood that God truly is “very compassionate and merciful.”

Towards the end of the book of Job, it records –

“Now the Lord blessed the latter *days* of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. ¹³ He also had seven sons and three daughters.”

-Job 42:12, 13

As you can see, Job was given a double portion of everything he had lost; God restored to him and added more. The sadness and pain of the time between his loss and restoration were swept away. The Lord promises to have this same compassion and mercy upon us as well.

Despite facing trials, loss, and death, we can have complete confidence that all wrongs will be righted. This is not a guarantee for prosperity in this life. Instead, we have a greater guarantee – that of eternal life and no lack or want forever. This has been guaranteed to all who follow Jesus Christ.

If you are facing years of trial, sadness, or loss, just remember they have an end. The Lord is ever gracious and merciful, and He knows how to care for His beloved children. Let’s praise Him for this –

Yes Lord! We praise You and give You glory and honor for Your tenderness and care. Despite our trials and hardships, we know that You have promised full and complete restoration. May You be praised! May You be praised! Glory, honor, and majesty to You! May You be praised! Amen.

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment. James 5:12

James now steps onto another path of warning and command. He begins with “But above all.” The Greek reads, “However, before all *things*.” It is the preeminent thought that must be considered. After this, he again (for the fourteenth time in the epistle) addresses the “brethren,” calling them the personal “my brethren.”

With this note of importance and yet with a personal touch to indicate that this is a matter from his heart to theirs, he says, “do not swear.” This is not speaking of profanity, but rather it refers to the taking of an oath of some sort, be it a promise or a vow, or the like.

From there, he then says, “neither by heaven or by earth.” It is an all-inclusive statement concerning the created order. Nothing which is a part of creation should be considered as a point of making an oath, such as, “I swear by the stars,” or “I swear by my bank account.” The reason for this is that it is idolatry. It places a value and an importance upon something less than God, which is reserved to God alone.

From there, he says, “or with any other oath.” Someone may simply swear an oath without attaching something of value to it – “I swear that I will do this thing.” James says that we are not even to do this. There are two reasons for this. The first is that it implies that our vow stems from a point of self-worth. In other words, the idolatry of self is actually involved in it. Secondly, there should be no need for such a vow.

When we speak, our words should simply be taken at face value as reliable. As James then says, “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and *your* ‘No,’ ‘No.’” The words from our mouths should be clear enough to be understood without ambiguity, and they should be reliable enough that when another hears us speak, he should understand that the word is confirmed by the character of the man.

James then explains why this is so by saying, “lest you fall into judgment.” He is referring to the entire thought. Judgment will come if we turn our vow into an idolatrous one by swearing when it is connected to something else – be it a created thing, or even self.

Judgment will also come if we speak Yes or No, and yet we are not truthful in our words. We have both lied, and we have proven that we cannot be trusted. How much worse is this when we speak as Christians and thus bring discredit upon the name of the Lord because of that title which we bear!

Jesus explains this same precept in Matthew 5 –

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne;³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”
Matthew 5:33-37

Understanding these things, this verse is unfortunately taken to an unintended extreme by those who attempt to appear more pious than the Bible intends. The way they do this

is to refuse to make any vows at all. First, this is contradictory to Scripture because vows are found not only under the law but in other dispensations as well. Secondly, when a vow or an oath is made under the law (which Jesus would not contradict the law in His words), the people of Israel were instructed to take their oaths in the name of the Lord –

“You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name.” Deuteronomy 6:13

“You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.” Deuteronomy 10:20

The reason why this is both acceptable and appropriate is that it is rightly placing the Lord as the surety of the vow. It is not idolatry because it is acknowledging that He is the source of all things, and that He alone is worthy of this honor.

If Jesus and James had intended for their words to be exclusive of this precept, they would have explicitly said so. But instead, they focused on that which is created and left the precept concerning the Creator untouched, and thus confirmed, as an appropriate precept.

Life application: We have gone through four and one-half chapters of James, imploring his reader to live in certain ways, reject various evil attitudes and practices, and be careful in all kinds of situations. And yet, he comes to this thought and says, “But above all.” In other words, this is hugely important and will guide us to where we can easily attain the other admonitions he has already given us.

Think on how terrific life would be if everyone stuck to James’ words and could be trusted with their simple words of Yes or No! Instead, when someone makes a claim, he will often add in, “Really, I swear!” James says this is sin. If you can’t be trusted with the statement without such a vow, then you can’t be trusted when you make it with such a vow.

Adding in more only makes it worse – “Really, I swear on my mother’s grave!” Now, he has not only added folly to his statement by swearing, but he has committed idolatry by including an oath connected to something other than the Creator.

By doing this, he has exalted his “mother’s grave” above God! The Lord mandated that vows be made in His name because they are the only oaths which can be acceptable.

There is no higher vow that can be made. This is also why the testimony of atheists is of no value. Their moral corruption can never be trusted under any circumstances.

The state of Tennessee understood this precept and included in its constitution this statement – “No person who denies the being of God, or a future state of rewards and punishments, shall hold any office in the civil department of this State.” If a person denies God, then nothing he says can be trusted.

When you speak, may your words be of such a high caliber that you can be trusted with a mere “Yes” or “No.”

Lord, we know people who possess high integrity, and we wish to be considered among their ranks. Give us wisdom when we speak so that we will utter words that can be trusted by all. And give us the greater wisdom to follow through with the words we have spoken – confirming the trust placed in our words by others. Amen.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.
James 5:13

James is now going to give a few verses of instruction for specific instances which may arise in the life of the believer. Although he states several of these almost as foregone conclusions concerning the results which can be expected, they are not necessarily to be taken in that light. This will be seen in the coming verses, such as praying for healing. James seems to indicate that taking certain actions will definitely result in receiving the desired healing. This, however, is certainly not the case.

For now, he begins with two questions, each of which is followed by an exhortation. His first question is, “Is anyone among you suffering?” The word translated as “suffering” is used twice by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:9 and then 2 Timothy 4:5. It signifies the experiencing of painful hardships.

The purpose of prayer in such an instance is to find relief or strength. It is certain that if one believes in the Lord and His ever-present nature with His people, then finding comfort and strength is going to happen. One cannot logically pray to God for comfort in his affliction and then not feel peace that the request has been heard. However, if relief from the suffering is what is desired, that may not come about.

Paul’s uses of the word imply that the suffering is ongoing. In fact, using the same word, Paul tells Timothy to “endure afflictions.” Therefore, it is expected that they will

continue and not be taken away. James' exhortation is one which is surely general in nature, and must be directed more to finding comfort in the affliction rather than it is for the affliction to be removed.

He then asks, "Is anyone cheerful?" The word here is opposite to the state of suffering which has just been stated, and so the exhortation is suited to the state. This is the last of three uses of the word in Scripture, and it gives the sense of being in good spirits. James says that if one is in good spirits, he should sing psalms.

It is a single word, *psalló*. It signifies playing on a stringed instrument, plucking on it, such as on a harp. It can also signify making music in general, or even the simple act of singing. It is where our word "psalm" comes from. The word comes from a root meaning "to rub." Thus, one gets the sense of vibrations which turn into sound. Paul uses the word four times, all in relation to singing. This is its last use in Scripture.

James would have the person who is in good spirits make an external display of his state before God and man, returning music to the One who brought him to such a state.

Life application: The words of this verse ought to be the norm and not the exception, but as is too often the case among us, we fail to put the admonitions of the Bible into practice. Instead of praying when we have trouble, we tend to fret, worry, lose sleep, get angry, etc. James tells us that when we face trouble, we should pray. This should be the first and not the last thing we do when troubles come.

When times of joy and happiness come, we should sing songs of praise. Too often, we skip this step and go on to celebrating with friends, reveling in our prosperity, and being excited about how well things are going. But the first thing we should do, and the thing we should constantly do, is to sing songs of praise.

How often do you stop and really thank the Lord when something good comes your way? How often do you simply break out in a song of gratitude for the wonders that keep showing up on the doorstep of your life?

This isn't something that only James thought of. Paul tells us to express our joy in this way in his writings. One example is found in Colossians –

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Colossians 3:16

If you are facing troubles, get on your knees and pray. Ask friends to join you down there if the problem is big enough. God listens and He responds to the prayers of His children according to His wisdom.

And when things get corrected and life hands you blessings and happiness, don't forget to respond to the Lord with songs of joy and psalms of thanksgiving. He is worthy of the praise you send His way!

Heavenly Father, how often we fret, worry, and have stress when we ought to be sending our prayers to You. And likewise, how unfaithful we are to take time to acknowledge Your goodness to us with simple words of thanks or even songs of praise. Forgive us for our thoughtlessness, and turn our thoughts to correct priorities in the future. To Your honor, we pray. Amen.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

James now prescribes treatment for those who are sick. He first asks a question concerning the matter, "Is anyone sick among you?" It is a general question directed to his readers. It cannot be that he is only speaking to the people alive at the time because the epistle is included in the Bible. However, this does not mean that it is an all-encompassing thought which can expect universal results. This is evident from other parts of Scripture.

However, as a general rule, he gives guidance concerning the sick person by saying, "Let him call for the elders of the church." The word here is *presbuteros*. It signifies an elder, a mature man who is wise in judgment. The feminine singular of the word, *presbytera*, does not occur in Scripture. The feminine plural, *presbyteras*, is seen once in 1 Timothy 5:2, and it is referring to older women in the church, not women in a leadership capacity.

Noting these elder men here, however, does not mean that churches were bound to a certain type of structure. Variations of church structure are noted in Acts and in the epistles, and none is placed as the premier example of how a church is to be structured. In this case, James cites what he knows is the case with his audience, probably because the churches whose attendees were mostly Jewish would be structured in a manner similar to the synagogues.

And so, he continues by saying of the elders, "and let them pray over him." Prayer is a thing which obviously assumes free will in man. These elders are told to pray, and they

may do so or not. If they pray, their prayers are expected to be heard. And if heard, there will be hopes of a favorable result.

God knows the end from the beginning, and the outcome of all things is known to Him in advance. And yet, if we are told to pray, then it means that God must have factored in the prayers of people before they were ever uttered.

James then says, “anointing him with oil.” This is a practice referred to in Isaiah 1:6, where he speaks of soothing wounds and bruises with ointment. Jesus referred to it in Luke 10:34, in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Mark again notes this in Mark 6:13, where it says that the apostles “cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed *them*.”

James then adds in that the oil is to be anointed “in the name of the Lord.” This is then in conjunction with the prayers themselves. The people are to pray, the afflicted area (or the afflicted one) is to be anointed with oil, and the name of the Lord is to be invoked in the process. James is relying on this means of treatment, combined with prayer, to obtain an expected result. That expected result will be seen in the next verse.

Life application: James’ words in this verse and the following two produce lots of tension and disagreement in denominations around the world. A conservative reading of these and all such verses is probably the best approach. Oil was used in ancient times as a healing agent just as Neosporin or Vicks VapoRub is today. This is the significance of Jesus’ words in Luke 10:34, referred to above. There it says –

“So he went to *him* and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.”

Therefore, when it says that the elders of the church are to take the actions given in the verse, they should be read in the context of the time and situation. They were to pray over the afflicted person as indicated. Prayer is the Christian’s single most effective tool in the battle against illness.

No matter how potent the medicine, no matter how skilled the doctor, no matter how tender the hands of the nurses – without the Lord’s providential blessing, no healing will result.

Concerning the oil, however, as this is shown to be an ancient remedy for healing, the symbolism of the gesture is that, in addition to prayer, effective medicines are to be

given to the person. To assume that an application of oil is definitely going to produce the healing effects will lead to over-spiritualization of the account and even to disappointment and confusion if healing is not effected.

Oil of whatever type does not have any particular magic qualities, so be careful that the credit for any healing is directed to the Lord and that appropriate medical attention is given as well.

Christians need to exercise wisdom concerning illness, disease, and physical trauma which may occur. We are not to forsake the intelligence we have been given concerning seeking out trained doctors and other healthcare officials. Likewise, we should not discount medicines which have been produced to bring about healing.

Above all, however, let us never forget that prayer should be our first and last offering during the healing process.

Lord God, help us to be wise in seeking out cures for the healing of our afflictions. May we not assume that a supposed "faith-healer" has the answer to whatever ails us. Your word tells us to pray for healing, and we shall do so. But we also have the obvious responsibility to seek out those things which have been developed for our healing as well. Give us wisdom concerning the care of our bodies when such times arise. Amen.

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. James 5:15

This continues on from what James said in the previous verse. Taken together, these two verses read –

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.”

Understanding the context, James begins with the words, “And the prayer of faith.” According to Paul, whatever is not from faith is sin (see Romans 14:23). James is obviously speaking of believers and that they have confidence in their prayers for healing and restoration. To waffle in such confidence would be a sin, and the prayer would be wasted breath.

But even what “faith” means here must be understood properly. Is James saying, “You must have faith that the prayer is sufficient to heal”? In other words, is the faith referring to confidence in the fact that the person will be healed? No, this cannot be. That would make the prayer the effective means of healing. But prayer is to be to God, and it is God who heals. Therefore, the one who prays must have full confidence in God and in His ability to heal – whether He does so or not.

From there, James says that “the prayer of faith will save the sick.” The thought here is that when the prayer is made, it is made with confidence in God that He does hear, has heard, and will heal the one who is afflicted. James then says, “and the Lord will raise him up.”

Note that it is the elders of the previous verse who have prayed, but it is the Lord who does the raising up. How vastly different than what is seen in Charismatic churches. Though they claim to heal in Jesus’ name, the focus is on the healer. The Lord is an afterthought.

James then adds in a second thought by saying, “And if he has committed sins.” The structure of the Greek indicates “‘be in a state of having committed sins,’ that is, be under the consequences of sins committed” (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown). In other words, if the person was a drunkard, and that was the cause of his affliction, or if the person is sick because of illegal drugs, then the idea is that forgiveness is seen in the healing.

Having noted these things, the words here say, “will save the sick,” and “will raise him up.” These adamant words (many translations say “shall”) are to be taken in the light of God’s sovereignty. One cannot know if God intends for the sickness to continue in order to bring Him glory through it. It would be presumptuous and inappropriate to claim healing over the person. That is an implicit demand that God must respond according to our will, not His.

God did heal through the apostles. Such is true with Paul, who is seen to have been the means of healing, raising a dead person, etc. However, Paul also almost lost a person, Epaphroditus, through sickness. The context of his words implies that he had no ability to bring about healing. That account is seen in Philippians 2:25-30.

Again, Paul is said to have left Trophimus sick in Miletus. That is found in 2 Timothy 4:20. And Paul also did not heal Timothy of his frequent stomach problems. Instead, he told Timothy to drink wine instead of just water (1 Timothy 5:23).

Further, Paul had his own affliction in his body (see 2 Corinthians 12 and Galatians 4) that he desired to be removed. He asked the Lord three times to remove it, but in the end, it remained. Instead, he noted that the Lord's grace was sufficient.

These are given to show us that James' words here are not to be taken in the absolute sense, but are to allow room for God to decide what the outcome will be.

Life application: From the references to sicknesses which were not healed, it is clear that not all illnesses are covered in James' words. All things are in the Lord's providence, and if it is His will to heal, then healing will come about.

There is no such thing as a "faith healer," but there is "faith healing." God responds according to His sovereign plan and not according to the wiles of TV evangelists and unscrupulous charlatans. Likewise, it is imprudent at best to hold to the doctrines of denominations that forbid medicines, surgery, and the healing hand of trained physicians.

Be careful to take all things in context and, above all, to acknowledge the Lord's sovereignty in the healing process. Always let your prayers reflect that His will be done.

Heavenly Father, forgive us for not allowing Your hand of providence to rule our hearts when dealing with sickness, disease, and even death. Yes, You have instructed us to pray for healing and restoration, but too often we pray according to our desires without including Your will. Help us to always remember this in the future that You may be glorified. Amen.

Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16

The words of James assume that this is referring to sickness, which is a result of some sort of sin. Paul refers to such a situation in his first letter to the Corinthians –

“For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.”³⁰ For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” 1 Corinthians 11:29, 30

John goes so far as to note sins that lead to death –

“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. ¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.” 1 John 5:16, 17

For this reason, meaning sickness, James says first to “Confess your trespasses to one another.” Vincent's Word Studies notes that “The preposition ἐξ, forth, out, implies full, frank, open confession, and so in every case of its use in the New Testament.” There is to be honesty in the confession by the one who is confessing. When one hides a matter, there can be no trust.

Therefore, a full confession of the sin to one another is needed so that the prayers are unhindered. If those praying don't have a knowledge of what is to be prayed for, how can healing for that particular affliction be brought before the Lord?

In James' words, there can be no doubt that he is tying the sickness to some type of committed sin. But is this a particular punishment that God has brought upon the person because of the sin, or is it merely a consequence of the sin? In other words, if someone is doing something he should not be doing, like over-drinking, is this leading to the sickness? Or could it also be that the conscience is its own means of bringing about sickness? A guilty conscience can bring about all kinds of other health problems as well.

What is probably the case is that all three possibilities are on James' mind. He notes that there is sickness, he notes that there is sin in the person's life, and he notes that the two are connected. The actual reason for the sin leading to sickness is less important than the fact that the two are, in fact, connected. He calls for confession, he then calls for prayers by those who have heard the confession, and he says that healing can be effected through this.

With this understood, he then says that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The Greek rightly puts the stress elsewhere. The English Revised Version says, “The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.” It is the working of a prayer in this regard which brings much about. Using the word “effective” does not convey the sense of operation, but the outcome of it, which is simply a truth which is then conveyed by the words “avails much.”

The idea here is that the prayer of “a righteous man,” meaning a believer in Christ, has great ability to bring about change. But it must be understood that God does not

change. Therefore, a prayer is something that God knew would happen or would not happen. It is asked, “If God does not change, then why pray?”

The answer is that God responds to prayers in the sense of having prefigured them into His unfolding plans. Just because God knows the outcome of things does not mean that those things do not need to occur. Prayer is what we do in the stream of time. The response to a prayer is what God has done outside of time. So be sure to pray. A prayer not made is a prayer that will not be responded to.

Life application: This verse pretty much sums up the entire biblical basis for Roman Catholic confessionals and priests serving as intermediaries in the forgiveness process. It is one verse, taken out of context, to justify this unscriptural practice.

Rather, the Bible very clearly proclaims in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For *there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*” If Christ is our Mediator, then there is absolutely no need for priests to serve in this manner.

Further, confession in a confessional is not what is implied here. Instead, healing and restoration can come about by simply getting the matter out, instead of carrying it inside – something that leads to stress, ulcers, neuroses, etc. Although descriptive in nature, the following account from Acts is what James is referring to –

“And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. ¹⁹ Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned *them* in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and *it* totaled fifty thousand *pieces* of silver.” Acts 19:18, 19

As you can see, these people openly confessed their wrongdoing. The result was that the “word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.” This is the goal of confession and prayers for healing – that the Lord may be glorified and that we may be healed.

Take all things in context and do not be kept in bondage by misapplication of verses, which leads to the gain of those who misapply them.

Thank You, Jesus, for being our Mediator! Help us to remember that it is God who forgives and it is You who sends our petitions to the Father. You are the Bridge of restoration and healing. All glory to You – our precious Mediator and Advocate on high! Amen.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. James 5:17

James just said in the previous verse that “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Now, to show that this is supported by Scripture, he turns back to the idea of rains which he spoke of in verse 5:7. This time, it is concerning a drought upon the land at the time of Elijah. He says, “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.”

Here, James uses a word found only elsewhere in Acts 14:15. It signifies similar passions or feelings. Thus, Elijah was just like anyone else. Being called as a prophet of God does not change the fact that he carried the same propensities, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes as any other person. And yet, despite his standard human nature, James says that “he prayed earnestly that it would not rain.”

The Greek reads in a standard Hebraic way of expression, saying, “he prayed with a prayer.” Such repetition is a way of intensifying what is said. The prayer is not recorded in Scripture, but his statement that it would not rain is. There is no reason to assume that James is adding to Scripture by saying this. Any such drought would come as a response to Elijah’s prayer.

In John 11, Jesus said that Lazarus would rise. He could have simply called out for him to do so, but before He did, it says that He spoke to the Father in a prayer of thanks. James has made a logical deduction, based on the words of Elijah, that a prayer was what initiated the extended drought over the land. This becomes more obvious based on what will be said in the next verse, where James refers to Elijah’s prayer, which ended the famine.

Finally, James shows the effectiveness of the prayer of this man whose nature was just like ours. He notes that “it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” This is a treasure for us in the New Testament. The account of Elijah and the drought in 1 Kings doesn’t give the amount of time that the drought lasted; it merely says first in 1 Kings 17 –

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.’” 1 Kings 17:1

It next says in 1 Kings 18 –

“And it came to pass *after* many days that the word of the Lord came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, ‘Go, present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth.’” 1 Kings 18:1

All it says is “in the third year.” However, Jesus says in Luke 4 –

“But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; ²⁶ but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, *in the region* of Sidon, to a woman *who was* a widow.” Luke 4:25, 26

James repeats the words of Jesus, but this must have been commonly understood by the people. If Jesus erred in His words, He would have been called out by the people for His inaccuracy. As both Jesus and James give a specific time period, and as there is no record of their words being called into question, then there must be a reasonable explanation for the specificity of what they have said. Albert Barnes provides an obvious conclusion concerning the matter –

“Three years and six months - From 1 Kings 18:1, 1 Kings 18:45, it would seem that the rain fell on the ‘third year’ - that is, at the ‘end’ of the third year after the rain had ceased to fall at the usual time.

There were two seasons of the year when rains fell in Judea - in October and April, called the ‘early’ and ‘latter’ rain; consequently there was an interval between them of six months. To the three years, therefore, when rain was withheld ‘at the usual times,’ are to be added the previous six months, when no rain fell as a matter of course, and consequently three years ‘and six months’ elapsed without rain.”

What Albert Barnes rightly deduces is that the land normally did not receive rain for six months each year. At the end of those six months, the people would be in high anticipation of the coming rains.

However, Elijah told the people that the anticipated rains would not come. Instead, there would be a famine. This continued until the beginning of the normal rain season three years later. Thus, the entire period of there being no rain came to be three years and six months.

One cannot say that James is incorrect when he says, “and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months.” Elijah did

not say, “It will not rain for three years and six months.” He simply said, “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.”

It is irrelevant that the drought was three years from the time he spoke. What matters is that he spoke, and the rains were withheld. The first six months, being a normal cycle of no rain, are simply added to his words, thus making a total of forty-two months for Israel’s time of famine.

Thus, the rains which finally came for Israel would have been the standard rains, normally expected at that time of year. The lesson had been given, the people were taught their lesson, and the normal cycle of life would – from that time forward – begin once again.

Life application: There are quite a few instances in the Bible where it is important to read both testaments in order to get the full picture of a particular issue. Certain psalms which record no author in the Old Testament are credited to David in the New. Various facts about Abraham and other OT figures can only be known by studying Acts, Hebrews, etc.

The point is that Elijah was merely a man. He may have been a prophet chosen by God, but he is only a man. By his word, it didn’t rain. James is saying that we are humans just like Elijah and therefore have the ability, by faith, to have effective prayer lives which can truly move mountains.

If you feel your prayers are not being answered, make sure they align with God’s will and then have faith that they are heard and will be responded to according to His great plan for us.

In 2007 in Georgia, rainfall stopped, and water became scarce. The leader of the state, Sonny Perdue, spoke these words on the Capitol steps, “We do believe in miracles. We believe you are the miracle Creator – the Creator that established the water and the land, and the air, and even us. God, we need You, we need rain.” The next day it rained. Yes, God hears and responds to the prayers of His people when they humble themselves.

What a great and awesome God You are! That You would bend Your ear to the people You created and respond according to their pleas is simply amazing! How can we not praise You and give You the glory You are due! Thank You for the rain, thank You for healing, thank You for attending to our every need when asked in faith, and when it is according to Your will. Glory to You, O God! Amen.

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

James 5:18

These words are still referring to Elijah. As James noted, he was a man with a nature like ours, and yet through his prayer, the rain did not come upon the land for three years and six months. Now James adds, “And he prayed again.”

Though the first prayer is not given in Scripture, it is evident that he prayed. All that is recorded is the statement in 1 Kings 17 that it would not rain except by his word –

“And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.’” 1 Kings 17:1

From there, it is not until 1 Kings 18:41 that this is confirmed –

“Then Elijah said to Ahab, ‘Go up, eat and drink; for *there is* the sound of abundance of rain.’”

After saying this to Ahab, it then says the following in 1 Kings 18:42, 43 –

“So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees,⁴³ and said to his servant, ‘Go up now, look toward the sea.’”

The fact that the initial prayer is not recorded leads some to question the reliability of James’ words. But that is a faulty assumption. The Bible doesn’t record everything in the Old Testament that is stated in the New Testament. It often makes logical assumptions based on the context.

Elijah said there would be no rain, and there was no rain. Elijah then told the same person that rain was finally coming. It then records that he prayed, and the rains came. The logical assumption is that he also prayed for the rain to be withheld.

Elijah’s prayer was for the rain to come, and James notes that “the heaven gave rain.” This is exactly what occurred as is seen towards the close of 1 Kings 18 –

“Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and

wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel.”

-1 Kings 18:45

After that, James finishes his verse with, “and the earth produced its fruit.” Like the first prayer, this is not stated in the Old Testament. It is a logical assumption made by James. When it rains, the earth produces fruit. Later accounts in 1 Kings show that life continued on, demonstrating that the famine had ended and the people did not perish. Instead, we can logically continue to deduce from James’ words that things went back to the normal cycle of life.

Life application: If you take the time to read the full account of 1 Kings 17 & 18 (why don’t you stop right here and do so – it will be healthy for your brain cells), you will notice that Elijah prayed seven times before the cloud appeared. This should be a lesson to us all.

If our prayers seem to have gone unheard the first time, we need to get on our knees and make them again, and again, and... again if necessary. Perseverance demonstrates a heartfelt desire. It also demonstrates faith that you believe your prayer is effective.

If we quit praying after the first round, what does that say about our faith? “Oh well, I guess God isn’t listening.” But repeated and heartfelt prayers indicate that we really believe God is capable of granting our petition. If we did not believe this, we would not continue to pray.

So have faith, be persistent, and wear out the knees of your pants if necessary. God does hear and God does respond to the faithful prayers of His children.

Lord God, forgive us for giving up so quickly when our prayers seem to have been unanswered. Give us a determined and dogged approach to our prayer life – something so powerful that heaven hears and the rains come upon the dry land. And when they do, may You give us the wisdom and the sense to turn and thank You for the blessing of a favorable response. Amen.

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back,
James 5:19

This is the opening to the final thought in the book of James. Many Greek manuscripts say, “My brethren” here. This is more likely based on how he opened his epistle. In verse

1:2, it uses the word “my,” and that is probably the true rendering here. Either way, he then begins his final thoughts with, “if any among you wanders from the truth.”

The word is not uncommon, and it is variously translated elsewhere as deceived, misguided, go astray, wander, mistaken, and so on. It signifies going off course or deviating from the correct path.

The word is *planaó*, and it is the root of our word “planet.” As the planets are wandering bodies in the heavenlies, this word is fitting for someone who is not fixed and grounded, but who has swayed from the truth. This can be both in doctrine or in simple logic. It can also be in straying morally from what is right, and so on. If such is the case, James then says, “and someone turns him back.”

The idea here is not specifically of someone who has never been saved. It could be a saved person or even an unsaved person. Either way, the individual is someone who is following the wrong path. One can think of someone truly looking for proper faith, and yet he wanders into a Jehovah’s Witnesses assembly. Or it could be someone who has faith in Christ, but who then wanders into the Hebrew Roots movement. The person was heading towards the truth and got misdirected.

A perfect example of this, right from Scripture, is found in Galatians 2 where Paul had to redirect Peter to the truth of the gospel. Peter was fully aware of the freedom found in Christ, but he strayed from that truth. Eventually, he got his feet properly directed and returned from the Heresy Highway to Right Doctrine Road.

Life application: Even though this verse is incomplete without verse 20, lessons can still be learned from it.

- 1) People do wander from the truth after having accepted it. Peter, in his second epistle, states that some people can actually forget that they have been saved, and yet he notes that they remain saved. It is a point that cries out for the doctrine of eternal salvation.
- 2) Those who have strayed from the truth can be brought back. They have not lost their salvation, nor have they committed some unpardonable sin by straying.

However, in the coming verse, we will see what some of the consequences are when we do fall away. Are you “keeping an eye” out concerning your walk with Christ? It is so easy

to let a day go by without reading the Bible, then another, and then another. Likewise, when we let our prayers lapse, it is so easy to continue down that path.

And, even if you are walking with Christ faithfully, are you making sure your family and friends are as well? Keep an eye on those you love and help them to walk with the Lord and not stray. Turn them back, and you will be doing them a favor and be found pleasing to the Lord as well.

Lord, help us to be watchful over our walk with You. Also, help us to keep our eyes on our family and friends. We all need to be re-directed from time to time, so help us to be watchful and faithful servants so that we may be there when others stumble in their walk. To Your glory, O Lord! Amen.

...let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. James 5:20

James finishes his epistle on a sudden, even abrupt, note. It is also one which is highly debated as to who and what James is referring to. In other words, it is a complicated set of words. As it is only a part of a greater thought, the verse must be taken together with the previous one –

“Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

As he is speaking to the brethren, the first words of the verse are directed to believers. It is any believer who turns another back from wandering from the truth. Such a person is to understand “that he who turns a sinner.” This “sinner” is referring to the one who has wandered from the truth. A believer has shown the sinner his error and has returned him to the right path and from “the error of his way.”

To this point, nothing overly complicated is seen. A person has wandered off on a bad path. A believer has intervened and returned the person from that bad path to the way which is right. From there, it says he “will save a soul from death.”

The soul is that which animates the body. It is that part which continues on, even after a body is dead (as in Revelation 6:9, etc.). The word death signifies the cessation of life. The debate begins with the question of “whose soul?” Is it the one who is turned, or is it the one who is the instrumental cause of the turning, meaning the person who turns the

other from the error of his way? The words of Paul in 1 Timothy 4:16 leave the matter unresolved –

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16

The word “save” can mean various things at various times, but in the case of James’ words, it is probably not referring to the salvation of a soul, but to saving from physical death.

The natural assumption is that he is speaking about the one who has been turned. He is on a wayward path, and it will lead to death. He may be into drugs or some other sin which will lead to death (see 1 John 5:16, 17).

From there, James then says, “and cover a multitude of sins.” Once again, it is debated what this means. The question of “whose sins” arises. Is it the one who strayed, or the one who brings him back from straying? And further, what is the meaning of “cover?” The word is not used in the sense of atonement elsewhere in the New Testament, unless this is what Peter, who uses the same Greek word, is also referring to –

“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” 1 Peter 4:8

The words that both James and Peter are referring to come from Proverbs 10 –

“Hatred stirs up strife,
But love covers all sins.” Proverbs 10:12

There, like in the Greek of the New Testament, the word is not used in the sense of atonement, but rather something which is covered and hidden from sight. However, in Psalm 32:1 and in Psalm 85:2, the same Hebrew word is used along with another clause which refers to the forgiveness of sins, which are then covered –

“Blessed *is he* whose transgression *is* forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.” Psalm 32:1

“You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin. *Selah*” Psalm 85:2

And so, the question then arises as to whether James and Peter are speaking of forgiveness of sins by God, which are then covered, or are they simply speaking of sins which are forgotten by the parties involved. The safest interpretation is that this is speaking of the sinner's life being saved from death, and the sinner's sins being those referred to. This would be in line with, for example, Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

They sinned and died because of it. The passage concerning Ananias and Sapphira forms a descriptive example of what could happen to those caught in sin. They strayed from the path, and they died because of it.

The covering of the sinner's sins is another matter. In Christ, there is a one-time for all time judicial atonement of sin. If James is referring to a non-believer, then his words here refer to that. However, taken in connection with Peter's words, who is certainly speaking of believers, it appears that the covering of the sins is not speaking of forgiveness by God in Christ, but by the overlooking of the sins of the sinner. They are covered and forgotten.

As an example, Tom becomes a compulsive gambler. He starts to borrow money and does not pay it back. Jim intervenes and corrects Tom's way of life. Tom is saved from death (probably from getting killed by the people he had been borrowing from) and also from whatever other events have arisen from his walk down this wayward path.

In the process, his sins are covered (forgotten) by those who see his life-change. His debts are forgiven, and he is brought to a whole state once again. Further, a multitude of sins which otherwise would have been committed as he continued down his wayward path have been averted.

They have been covered by the change in his course. And this was because of the love of one for another. Thus, the loving act saved his soul from death and covered a multitude of his sins.

Life application: There are a multitude of blessings which come about from leading a soul back to the proper path, so look around you with open eyes, and when you discover a backslider, help them back to restoration. The Lord will be glorified, and the wayward soul will be saved from death. Be responsible in your care and attention of your fellow believers.

This is the last verse of the book of James. 1 Peter begins next. So take time today to tell others about this magnificent coming event, and encourage them to join in.

Thank You, O God, for the wonderful lessons of Your precious word. It is a book which provides abundant learning and growth in what You would have for Your people, if they would just read, pay heed, and apply Your word to their lives. And so, may we take to heart the lessons found there and always bring great glory to You through their right application. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.