

AN EXPOSITION OF
JAMES

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An Exposition of the Book of James as Delivered in a
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Sovereign Grace Baptist Church, Cherokee, NC.

by

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May our God continue to make his “work appear unto [his] servants, and [his] glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” (Psalm 90:16-17).

INTRODUCTION

JAMES 1:1

1, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

The book of James has over the years, and especially since the reformation, been a subject of much debate. Martin Luther thought the book ought not be included in the Bible because he felt that James was saying that the believer is justified by works. Since the thrust of the reformation was “justification by faith” and the source of several martyrs who died for that truth, any suggestion that a man was justified otherwise was anathema. James is not putting forth any such doctrine, but extreme situations often bring about extreme responses.

Luther fervently fought to reform the Catholic Church of its practice of selling indulgences (pieces of the cross, Roman spikes, Simon’s foreskin) for the purpose of justifying their dearly departed and releasing them from purgatory. These indulgences were also, according to Catholic dogma, a means of justifying the living. Purchase one and you will be surer of heaven; purchase many and increase your chances. Knowing this, it is easier to understand Luther’s adverse response to the book of James.

The book of James addresses *one* thing in *many* ways. The theme of the book is the proper response of the believer to the

diverse trials, temptations, and tribulations that attend faith, or believing Christ and His Gospel. The principle of faith is *prominent* in this book, and it is ever viewed in light of its response to truth. There is no place where justification or righteousness is put forth as a result of faith. The issue is that faith in the believer produces works that have as their design the honor of God and his Son. These works which James reveals come in two basic categories. One is *faith's response to the believer in need*. The other is *faith's response to the abuse of the world*.

In these writings of James, we will find that he sometimes confronts the unbeliever, even rails on them, especially the rich (James 5:1-6¹). What needs to be remembered is that this epistle is written to the church in general, and it is unlikely that rich unbelievers would ever see the words, much less read them.

The question is why would James include the harsh words to or about unbelievers? I see only two possible reasons.

One would be to make believers suspicious of the rich, and account that rich people are innately evil. But that notion

¹ **James 5:1-6**, Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

does not set with the teaching of loving one's neighbor (James 2:8¹).

The second reason is that such words present the dangers of wealth and are designed to make the rich among believers to guard themselves against the natural bent to put trust and confidence in that which will soon pass away or left to another. If one trusts in the temporal, because it is ever changing, that trust and confidence can change to greed and avarice. Such things cause the one who trusts them to turn eyes inward and forget God. When that takes place, the one who trusts in the temporal will become exclusive rather than inclusive, and the natural progression will be to oppress the less fortunate by not caring for them. The fact that this issue is addressed, and because this book is written to the brethren, we cannot look at these words and discount them as meant only for the unbeliever.

These words are primarily for the believer and meant to give us pause to make sure that the faith we have been given results in caring for the household of faith that God might be honored. When we pick up our Bible, we must always remember to say to ourselves, "This is written to *me*, for *my* learning and *my* help, this is not to or about anyone else." So, for instance, when James speaks about the tongue being the most dangerous member of the body, he is *not* talking about the gossiper who lives down the street or the person in the church who has a loose tongue. He is, by the Spirit's inspiration, addressing the reader and the hearer—he is addressing me. Employing this approach, the book of James

¹ **James 2:8**, If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

will prove a great blessing to our hearts and engender a greater dedication to the gospel we love.

With this in mind, let us look at the salutation of the epistle (v. 1).

The writer declares himself as James. This name is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name, Jacob. There were two apostles that bore this name; James, the son of Zebedee and James, the son of Alphaeus. James, the Son of Zebedee was probably dead at the time this book was written. Herod put him to death in AD 44 and this book dates to around AD 62. James, the son of Alphaeus wrote this epistle. He is sometimes called the brother of our Lord, and it was he who spoke at Jerusalem in defense of Simon Peter when the Jews were pressing Paul to circumcise Gentile believers (See Acts 15:1-18). Some historical writers refer to him as James, the Just.

He describes himself as the “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” His reference to both Father and Son is inclusive and spoken to assure believers that one may not be served without serving the other. God is not a Father if he does not have a Son, and there is no Son without the Father. He is “a servant.” He uses the indefinite article to put himself on the same footing as every other servant of God. The word “servant” means “bond-slave” or one who has willingly given himself to the lifelong service of his Master whom he loves.

The letter is addressed to the “twelve tribes of Israel.” This is probably a two-fold address. First it includes those believers among the Jews. Secondly and primarily, it speaks to the entirety of the Israel of God—the church. The church is said to be “scattered abroad.” This is the manner by which God has spread His gospel to the world and is used in other

places to describe the church (1 Peter 1:1¹). His salutation is but one word, "Greeting." Some writers have thought that this was not much of a salutation but it is one used often (Matt. 28:9; Luke 1:28²). It is a Christian greeting that means rejoice, be well, thrive, prosper, and God's speed. This one word summarizes the tenor of this book and a proper understanding of it will bring these things about in every believer.

¹ **1 Peter 1:1**, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

² **Matt. 28:9**, And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.

Luke 1:28, And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.

THE TRIAL OF FAITH

JAMES 1:2-4

2, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

3, Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

4, But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

These three verses set the tone and theme of this entire book. The church in general (the twelve tribes of Israel) is undergoing a great time of trial. This epistle addresses numerous trials, but more, it addresses the believer's proper reaction to trials. Being sinful human beings, our first response to discomfort is to strike against it. This epistle, while comforting us in trial, warns us to guard against our natural, carnal responses.

The believer knows, in his heart, that the Lord God is in absolute control of all things because his God has given him the gift of faith by which he heartedly embraces the truth that is in Christ. The confidence that he has in the person and work of Christ is unshakable, but the events that come our way and cause us distress often result in us crying out against sovereign providence. Ultimately, every disapproving response to what might be called bad circumstance is evidence of unbelief and in truth is a carnal challenge to Christ and His Lordship. We all are plagued with unbelief

and though we are unbendable in the matter of doctrine, providence often calls into question our faith because of our reaction to the trials that are ordained for us.

There are two things to remember as we look at this epistle.

First, remember this letter is written to the church in general. This teaches us that what is being addressed is not an anomaly or an isolated event. This is every believer's situation.

Secondly, make it a point to remember, that salvation is by grace alone, and these trials are not trials of salvation but of faith, a gift given you by God whose "gifts and callings are without repentance." The trial of your faith is designed to bring you to utter dependence upon Christ. Providence designs all things to bring you to an expected end. Though they are always painful, pain is not their intent. The anguish and pain that accompany trials are but tools in the hand of the Benevolent Sovereign to bring you to the very best place, the feet of Christ (Jer. 29:11¹). Knowing this, we can better understand the words of James in these verses.

James begins these words by identifying those to whom he writes. He calls them "My brethren" (v. 2). This salutation is important because it distinguishes the basis upon which these trials come. These trials are not general such as those that are common to all men. These trials are those exclusive to the brethren, to believers, to those who have God given faith. Natural, carnal men cannot rejoice in these trials or any other

¹ **Jer. 29:11**, For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

for that matter (2 Cor. 7:10b¹). Since they are called trials of faith (v. 3), they cannot be separated from the object of faith, Jesus Christ and His gospel. The trials come to the believer because he believes the gospel.

In truth, these trials of faith are a testimony to God's faithfulness (1 Cor. 1:9²). The scripture is replete with the principle of *rejoicing* when you fall into temptations (Rom. 5:1-5; 8:28-30³). Paul even refers to such such temptation as a gift (2 Cor. 12:7-10⁴). They are "given." Note also the wording of verse 2. This does not say, "when you fall by temptations" or

¹ 2 Cor. 7:10b, . . . the sorrow of the world worketh death.

² 1 Cor. 1:9, God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

³ Rom. 5:1-5, Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. . . . 8:28-30, And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

⁴ 2 Cor. 12:7-10, And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

“when you fall because of temptations” but you are to rejoice when you fall “into” temptations.

The temptations are there, awaiting you. They are for *you*. Your reaction to them ought to be to rejoice because they are designed specifically to work patience in you. If then this is the design of the trials, it certainly points to a need in us and a necessity for us. If a survey could be taken of the things that most plagues the believer, at or near the top of the list would be failure to wait on God with patience. Paramount to rejoicing when we fall into temptations is to wait on God. You will notice that in verse 4, there is no given specific time for the temptation as to duration. If a timeline were given men would begin to invent ways to shorten it. The wording seems to suggest that, concerning temptations, the believer is simply to expect them and realize that when one has done its job, another is soon to follow until we slough off this mortal coil and enter into glory.

Beginning verse 4 with the conjunction “but” suggests that the temptations into which we have fallen have not yet worked in us the patience that is designed for us. This teaches that this experience of life is governed to bring us to this place of understanding; living in this world as a believer is a guarantee that our faith will be tried.

Among many things, the admonition to “let patience have her perfect work” teaches us that the end of patience, the end of the trial of faith is not known to us. The end is known only to God and will not necessarily be discernable by us. Can any of us point to a time when a trial has brought us to full maturity? They seem to run together as links in a chain. We will not know when the work of a particular trial is finished

because as long as we have the gift of faith, this is our necessary lot in life.

This is why the language is purposely vague. God will bring all things to their appointed end. Patience will have its perfect work; you will be made perfect (mature in faith), entire in patience, and want for nothing. I do not know or even grasp that possibility while I live in the body of this flesh. However, just as growth is sure to the living, yet it transpires unseen and unrecognized, so also might this increase and maturity in patience.

Until that day, it seems that the believer will go through this life falling into one temptation after another, and their faith will be tried in order to increase their patience. Until that day when all things are made new, we will look at the world and the events of life as our dear brother Solomon—the wisest of all men who said,

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all” (Eccl. 9:11)

“Let patience have her perfect work”.

ASK

JAMES 1:5-8

5, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6, But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7, For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8, A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

In the last study, we saw the life of the child of God is a life of temptations, trials and tribulation. We saw also that these struggles are trials of faith and therefore have to do with the object of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ. The design of these God ordained trials is to bring us to lay it all at the feet of our Sovereign Lord, who sends these things to wean us from this world and teach us not to murmur against providence.

The passage that we consider here addresses the fact that as these trials come, the believer sometimes has questions. Sadly, because we are born to the natural, works, free-will religion, our questions often reveal that we are not completely done with works and will. We wonder what we have done wrong in the past that might have brought such judgment upon us. Such thinking is wrong on many levels. First,

thinking that some sin in the past caused our trial is to think that we are not sinning in the present. It is to say, "I'm not sinning now." Secondly, such thinking reveals that we are in unbelief concerning the truth that all our judgment was finished on the cross. Thirdly, such thinking smacks of the notion that we might be able to undo the trial by some good and admirable deed.

The fact remains that these trials are necessary medicine for our ailing souls, and the language employed in verse 4 suggests there is no end of these trials until we leave our flesh in the grave. Nevertheless, our Lord in His grace, mercifully accounts that His tempted ones feel a need to understand.

Thus, we have the words "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (v. 5). The context makes that the wisdom lacked and to be asked for is not general but specific to the trial of your faith. This wisdom will bring us to rejoice when we fall into diverse temptations and teach us patience.

Because folks might stop here with just the first part of verse 5, our Lord goes on to quantify what it is to ask for wisdom.

First, notice the gracious guarantee that God gives to his seeking saints. The promise is full of mercy. God declares that He will give this wisdom liberally. Gill said this word "liberally" means "readily, at once, freely and cheerfully, and largely and abundantly; not grudgingly, sparingly, and with a strait hand, but with an open one, and in a very extensive manner." The believer can count on this. In the time of designated temptation, if he asks for this wisdom, God will give it freely and immediately.

Secondly, God will never hold this asking for wisdom against you. He “upbraideth not” means that though your asking suggests weakness and ignorance, our gracious and all-wise God will never charge you or reproach you for asking. This is true comfort to we who believe that God is absolutely sovereign because we often think that asking God during times of trouble is the same as questioning God. This verse puts that notion to rest!

The rest of this passage is a distinction concerning what this wisdom is and the way it is to be asked. The conjunction “but” (v. 6) suggests that seeking for wisdom might be done in the wrong way. The seeker must ask for this wisdom in faith. He must ask believing and not wavering. This restriction gives us true understanding of that wisdom that is sought. The word “wavering” suggests doubt or judgment. To not waver is to be centered in your understanding concerning the source of the trial. The Lord further restricts with the word “nothing.” Whatever the wisdom that is sought is singular and allows for no other wisdom and no additions to it. The wisdom sought is the only answer to bring you to understanding your trial.

A believer that wavers is like the waves of the sea, tossed about and driven by every wind. The word “wind” (v. 6) is important because of its use in scripture. It is often representative of the Spirit (Isa. 40:6-8¹). You will notice that some things are connected with the Spirit. The preacher is told

¹ Isa. 40:6-8, The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

to preach, and what he preaches is the Word of the Lord. This teaches us that the Spirit blows upon men with the word spoken through the preacher. Clearly the language of our text suggests that the wind that tossed and drives men to ask for wisdom wavering is not the Word of the Lord but another word (Eph. 4:14¹). Again, we are shown the exclusivity of that wisdom that is to be asked for.

If a person asks wavering, the Lord guarantees that he will receive nothing for the Lord (v. 7). This verse is still centered in the context. It is not a general statement, but rather concerns the wisdom that is to be sought. If you do not seek the only wisdom that God gives, you will receive nothing, and clearly you will not receive this wisdom liberally and without reproach.

The final restriction is the true nature of asking wisdom wavering. It is to be “double minded” (Psa. 12:2; Matt. 6:22-23²). The word of God is so wonderfully singular. The only way to not be double-minded is to be single minded. We are naturally double-minded because Adam, as our federal head, opted to add to his singular knowledge of good a second knowledge—that which was evil. Since then, we have been

¹ **Eph. 4:14**, That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

² **Psa. 12:2**, They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.

Matt. 6:22-23, The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

afflicted with this malady (Rom. 7:21, 23¹). The wisdom that is asked for cannot come from inside us. The wisdom asked cannot involve our participation.

This wisdom is singular; it must be sought in faith. This wisdom is the wisdom of God. This wisdom comes from outside us. This wisdom gives us understanding of our trials and allows us to count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations. This wisdom is the object of faith. This wisdom is Christ (James 3:17; 1 Cor. 1:23-24, 30²). In the midst of trial, ask for this wisdom in faith, not wavering. The understanding you will receive is that this happened for the Gospel's sake and for your good.

It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth good in his sight.

¹ **Rom. 7:21**, I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. . . **23**, But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

² **James 3:17**, But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

1 Cor. 1:23-24, But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. . . **30**, But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

OUR PLACE

JAMES 1:9-12

9, Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

10, But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

11, For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

12, Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Paul told the believers at Philippi that whatever state he was in, he had learned to be content. To a great degree, this is the same thing that James is saying here as he continues to teach the brethren about rejoicing when they fall into diverse temptations. In this passage he would have the brethren know that the specific estates in which the believer finds himself are to be dealt with in spiritual understanding. The two estates he addresses and the respective responses are utterly foreign to the natural thought processes.

The world's religion has jumped on the bandwagon of carnal logic and makes its living on what they call "blessings." To be poor, financially speaking, is accounted by much of religion as a proof of lack of faith. If one has faith, they say, he

could tap into unlimited natural resources such as health and wealth. They imply poverty is a revelation that God is not blessing you, and it is because you are not fully employing what faith avails to you. Ordination, predestination, purpose, or providence never enter their thinking because such things kill the notion that all you have to do is release your faith and the bounty of the world will beat a path to your door. That is not faith in Christ; it is faith in faith.

On the flip side of that, those who are rich and increased with goods, the profiteering pulpiteers, claim the blessing of God as “men of faith.” No one seems to consider that the rich preachers got their money by sapping the means of the poor with promises of ways to be rich (seed faith, faith partners, etc). They all claim a ministry to the hurting and somehow relieve their pain by making their wallets lighter. The world will never get what James is talking about in this passage.

Both poverty and riches can prove to be temptations, and because they are both attributed to the brethren, they are both blessings from the Lord. Whatever our situation, if we are believers, that is our blessed place. What has taken place in our existence is by grace, and that grace is the distinguishing factor that brings the rich *and* the poor among the brethren to a place of spiritual commonality. Paul said, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 cor. 15:10). The believer’s salvation is a common salvation. That is to say that the price of redemption is precisely the same for every one of the elect (Jude 1:3¹). The use of the rich *and* the poor brethren certainly

¹ **Jude 1:3**, Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that

are for the purpose of presenting us with two very recognizable extremes. One does not have to ponder this too much. Like black and white, light and darkness, life and death, rich and poor are diametrically opposite, and they also generate a specific response.

Clearly, within the brotherhood there are rich believers as well poor believers. In the truest sense, there is no difference between the two in a spiritual realm. They are believers and are spiritually equal, standing on the exact same footing. So, both have reason to rejoice. Though their circumstances greatly differ in the natural realm, their response is to be spiritual and will bring them to the single place where they can boast without pride and rejoice without jealousy or envy.

First, the brother of low degree concerning financial means is to rejoice in the fact that spiritually he has been raised to sit in heavenly places in Christ. Though he may be without anything of worth naturally, he is joint heir with him who is heir of all things. Though the world may view him in pity or disdain, he knows that he is a child of the king. His boast is in the Lord that has, by grace, given him exceedingly abundantly above what he can think or ask. He cannot boast in himself (Rom. 3:27¹). His sins are forgiven! He is made to be the righteousness of God. The law has no claim on him. His conscience has no ground upon which to accuse him. To the world's eyes he is poor, but to the eyes of faith he is rich beyond compare. He can rejoice because his circumstances

ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

¹ **Rom. 3:27**, Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

have nothing to do with his joy. His joy is that he has been elevated to perfection in Christ. He can rejoice because he knows that behind every circumstance is the smiling face of divine providence.

Secondly, the rich man is to rejoice because he has been humbled. He has been made to realize that his financial position has not aided or hindered his salvation. He has been brought low. He has been made to understand that promotion comes from neither east nor west; it comes from the Lord. He has been made to realize that his natural wealth is temporal, and he and his wealth will soon pass off the earth. He has had the truth of stripping grace revealed to him. He cannot boast in his riches because he knows where he got them (1 Cor. 4:7¹). This lowness does not have to do with the loss of wealth but rather the change of mind that, while rich, he is humbled to rest only in Christ (1 Tim. 6:17²). The glory of his condition is that when God has made him high, he is low in the thoughts of himself.

In both situations, the poor and the rich are brought to mind the things of the Spirit and not the things of the flesh. By faith, both are made to rejoice in the same person, even Christ. In Christ, all believers are equal. They are equally saved, equally holy, equally righteous, equally whole, equally rich, and equally poor. Their estate in temporal matters is by

¹ **1 Cor. 4:7**, For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

² **1 Tim. 6:17**, Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.

providential design and may differ greatly, but in Christ, they are all the same (Gal. 3:26-28; Coll. 3:10-11).

The temptations into which both poor and rich brethren fall are designed to bring them to unity and commonality in Christ. Rejoice brother, rejoice sister—you are in Christ (Jer. 9:23-24, 1 Cor. 1:26-31¹). You are blessed to endure temptations because while you are being tried you will be endued with life, crowned, made to know that the circumstances of this life are but a segment of your *eternal life*.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. . . Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the *crown of life*, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:2, 12).

“We know that *all things* work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

¹ Jer. 9:23-24, Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

1 Cor. 1:26-31, For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

TEMPTED

JAMES 1:13

13, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

In this verse James begins to explain what many might misunderstand about the concept of temptations. The temptations that he is about to address are not the same temptations that he has previously addressed in the first twelve verses. Those temptations are trials sent from the generous hand of our loving Lord and are designed to bring us to joy and peace in Christ. James is making a distinction here.

The temptations that James teaches us about in verse 13 are from another source altogether. These are “temptations” that proceed from the darkness of our own hearts. The word is basically the same, but the source, and therefore the end result, are diametrically opposed. If the source of the temptation is from God, it is by grace and is a trial designed to prove the believer’s faith. If the temptation come from within, then it is from sin and self and its result is to bring down and destroy.

The writer is setting things in their proper order so that no one, especially the believer can blame any outside source, for the evil that is in his bosom. If you are tempted to sin, God did not tempt you, and nothing either present or lacking in

your life is the source. The source is *your* sin, your *own* lust. God does not, will not, and has never tempted man to sin. What the apostle is teaching is that God cannot be charged with *your* sin because to do evil, in the sense of holding before you something that would hurt and destroy you, is completely inconsistent with His holy and gracious character.

This teaches us of the nature of *our* sinful heart. Since the subject is even addressed, there must be a problem with us in our willingness to blame our sin on something or someone outside ourselves. Sadly, for the believer, the target of our blame is often our God. This is proven by the words, "Let no man say," declaring that this is evidently what we say when we are tempted from our *own* lust. We evidently do a guilt transfer. Scripture is replete with examples of this; one being Aaron's making an idol of a golden calf.

"For they [the people] said unto me [Aaron], Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came[therefore came] out this calf" (Exo. 32:23-24).

The blame for his evil was placed on magic, something outside his control. In 1 Samuel 15:15, 24¹, Saul blamed his sin

¹ **1 Samuel 15:15**, And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. . . **24**, And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

on the lie that “he feared the people.” He was not to blame because he was afraid. The text makes it clear that we are to beware of these empty pretenses. They avail nothing but reveal much about our nature.

However, beyond the bent to blaming circumstances outside our control, the text is specific. Our general response to the disclosure of our sin, when we get caught, is to find a way to blame God for it. Far better for us to do as the leper is instructed in Leviticus 13:45¹. All was to be naked and bare but the upper lip. The lip was covered to signify that the leper was to make *no excuses*. To the Jew, covering the upper lip was the sign of *shameful conviction*. His words were to be simple and to the point. He was virtually pointing his finger at himself and saying, “It’s my fault—unclean, unclean.” This study text reveals that this is not our normal response, but it ought to be. Sin lies at *our* door and nowhere else.

How or in what manner do we blame God for our own inward lusts?

One way we blame God is by blaming providence, the state of affairs in the world, times, and the people around us. For the believer to do this, in order to relieve his guilt, is to say that his God is ordering the universe in a manner that would call him to sin (e.g., Adam and Eve’s alibis). The outward occasions and people the Lord puts in our path are for our good and will ultimately prove so, but some foul thing in us reacts sinfully to it. God is not to be blamed. It is *our* sin. There is beauty and pleasure in the world, things that in and

¹ **Leviticus 13:45**, And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean.

of themselves are wonderful. It takes *our* sinful lust to turn that which is good into sinful use. John summed this up when he wrote;

“For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

The world is seen in light of how we see it and use it. This lust is what makes the world to be a world that is not of God. It is a gift of God, created by God, but we can turn it to a bad thing that is not of God. Peter said basically the same thing in 2 Pet. 1:4.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

The world is only the object; the cause is the lust.

Another way we blame God is by attributing insufficiency to His grace. We are actually able to find ourselves in sin and somehow surmise that it was due to the *absence* of grace! (Prov. 19:3¹). The servant in Matthew 25:24 as much as blames his master for his own misuse of his given talent.

“Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping

¹ **Prov. 19:3**, The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.

where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed.”

Sometimes we use grace as an excuse for not doing what we ought. This is *our* sin; God is not to blame.

Sadly, one of the most often employed ways of blaming God is to abuse the beautiful concept of His Sovereign predestination. Though we cannot ever really grasp the truth of predestination, we can gain great comfort in the knowledge of it. What we do know is that it is about what God has done and is doing for his people by the person and work of Christ. What men usually attribute to sovereignty is fatalism. Man hears that God is in control of all things and then concludes that since God is in control, He should not find fault with a man as he is. After all, no one can resist Him (Rom. 9:19¹). These say that we will understand how things are when the smoke clears. Sovereignty is the character of God, the God who is good and always does what is right. Our lust can tempt us to blame God for our crookedness, to fix blame upon Him for what we lustfully got ourselves into by his sovereign control. This, to our shame, is part of our thinking.

“God cannot be tempted with evil,” He is immutable, good, holy, and above the power of temptation. He cannot tempt men to evil. Man is evil and will take the very gift of God and, through lust, use it for his own satisfaction and then blame God for his sin. God is never to blame for your sin. Neither is anything else. We must hang the cloth on our upper lip and cry “Unclean, Unclean”.

¹ **Rom. 9:19**, Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

SIN

JAMES 1:13

13, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

In our last study we saw that God does not tempt men *with* sin nor does He tempt them *to* sin. We know that he suffers men to fall in diverse temptations, but that speaks of trials of faith which are not designed to bring men to exercise their depravity but designed to bring men up, to edify them, and bring them to Christ. He orders providence, time, and tide for the good and pleasant end of the elect. However, when a man sins, that sin cannot be charged to God.

Before we move on to verse 14, I think it best to seek to answer a question that often arises when the subject of sin is addressed, especially as it relates to God's use of sinful men and their sinful acts to bring things to their appointed end.

The question is, "Is God the author of sin?" The crucifixion of Christ is perhaps the best example of this because it is clearly stated in the word of God that sinful men and their devices were employed to hang our Savior (Acts

2:23; 4:28; John 12:27-31¹). The cross was the *purpose* of God. It *would* take place. There was no possibility that it would not.

Yet God did *not* nail His Son to the cross. Wicked men, acting on their own vicious lusts, did the evil deed which eventuated in the salvation of all the elect. God did not make these men act this way; He merely suffered them to be themselves. He did not restrain their natural bent though He clearly could have, had He been so inclined (John 18:4-9²). He withheld common sovereign restraint, and they merely followed the dictates of their own lust. Unrestrained hate will always act specifically toward the demise of the one that is hated. To hate is murder in the heart, and the only thing that

¹ **Acts 2:23**, Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain. . . . **4:27-28**, For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

John 12:27-31, Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.

² **John 18:4-9**, Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them. As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.

keeps us from acting on our hate is the sovereign restraint of God.

If God's restraint is lifted, or withheld, we will merely act upon the nature that drives our very being. For God to control sinful humanity, he can either restrain it from the actions that its lust seeks or suffer it to act as sin must when not restrained. *We were there in our humanity; we sought to kill the Son of God; we wanted His blood upon our heads; we mocked and scourged him.* If we think we might have acted otherwise, we do not know what we are and will live a life of ingratitude for the restraint from heaven that keeps us from being what we would be. The truth is that the cross is not just the best example of God's employment of sinful men, it is *the* example, and if understood, we will clearly grasp that God is not the author of sin. We will also understand and perceive what sin is and can attest that God, while suffering it to be, is not the author of sin.

Another question I have been asked many times is "Why did God allow sin to exist or enter the picture." There is a basic weakness in this question, not necessarily in the asking, but in the presupposition that sin is somehow outside the realm of God's purpose. Sin is part of the plan because the cross is the plan. How then can it be part of the plan and God not be the author of it? The answer is a decisive, exacting declaration, "Neither tempteth He [God] any man [with evil]." God often suffers evil to be acted upon, but the end of it will be for the good of his people.

There are several scriptural illustrations of this fact.

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite

the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones" (Zech. 13:7).

Here, the cross is clearly in view, and God speaks of the revenge of the multitude by removing His restraint of dormancy and allowing them the hatred to be vented.

Another example.

"He turned their heart to hate his people, to deal subtilly with his servants" (Psa. 105:25).

Again, this points to the cross, the attending events, and the attitude of the people by using the Egyptians, released from the restraints of Joseph's time, to act upon their natural hatred and prejudice against the Jews. Why? Because there was deliverance by blood in the future of these Jews. It was all according to plan, but God did not make the Egyptians hate the Jews. He withheld the restraint that He had exercised during the time of Joseph (Gen. 15:13-14¹).

When such examples exist in scripture, weigh them in light of the cross, and you will understand that God is not the author of sin, though sin is part of His purpose. God is omniscient, so He had foreknowledge of sin. God is omnipotent, so sin falls within the purview of His Sovereign control. Sin's existence is according to His will. Providence

¹ **Gen. 15:13-14**, And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

employs sin with God enforcing men to do it, and it is a wonder of His majestic deity (Psa. 76:10¹). How so?

Sin exists and is employed by foreknowledge and predestination. Sin is because God intended it to be (Acts 2:23²). God both foreknew and deliberately delivered Christ to wicked men. There was no sin in His act, but the sinfulness of men played a necessary part in the great and good end that was accomplished by His foreknowledge and deliberate use of the sure actions of sinful men. The outcome was never in question. God's purpose could not be frustrated, and He did not force these men to act according to their carnal nature— He simply did not restrain them.

For God to have Israel end up in Egypt, even desire to be there, and eventually deliver them according to plan, He used the sinful jealousy and envy of Joseph's brethren (Gen. 50:19-20³). Their sinful nature was employed because 430 years hence they would be delivered from slavery. Their aim was wholly evil, following the dictates of their heart. God's aim was wholly good and employed their nature to providentially accomplish His will. He did not make them act the way they

¹ **Psa. 76:10**, Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

² **Acts 2:23**, Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

³ **Gen. 50:19-20**, And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

did, He merely did not restrain them from their natural bent (Acts 14:16; Psa. 81:12; Job 12:16¹).

Simply stated, sin serves God as all else does. His attributes are exalted by the presence of sin in the world. Could we speak of grace, mercy, propitiation, justice, redemption, righteousness, or salvation without the presence of sin? There would be no basis for it. The beautiful portrait of providence is more purely appreciated when the black lines of shadow and darkness are applied. We must never blame God for suffering sin to exist because every believer is better for having had sin remitted by Christ being made sin for us. Gregory described the fall of Adam as “felix culpa” or “happy fall” because it made the way for God to be glorified in being just and justifier. God is not the author of sin. He tempts no man to it.

So, “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed” (v. 14).

¹ **Acts 14:16**, Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

Psa. 81:12, So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.

Job 12:16, With him is strength and wisdom: the deceived and the deceiver are his.

SIN, MY DOING

JAMES 1:13-15

13, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

14, But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

15, Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

The apostle, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, has shown that God tempts no man to sin (v. 13). In the previous study we looked at the matter of providence, in which God suffers men to act according to their own lusts only as far as it serves His purpose, while neither causing nor participating in their vile actions. If God does not sovereignly restrain sinful men, they will simply act according to the dictates of their own hearts. According to scripture, "The wrath of man shall praise God, the rest He will restrain" (Psa. 76:10).

Verses 14 and 15 are an explanation of the process of being tempted to sin. We must remember that, primarily, it is the rejection of Christ and His claim on you. The diverse temptations that believers fall into are by design, and their intent and result is to bring the believer to trust in Christ. They are trials of faith. The temptations that come from inside the natural heart always drive men further from Christ and are

not of faith. Scripture declares, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

When a man is tempted to sin, to disregard Christ, God did not tempt him to do so. The onus falls on man alone and the dictates of his sinful nature. Verse 14 shows this temptation is a process. But every man is tempted (to sin). This is an inclusive statement because it addresses *every* man’s carnal nature. This is addressed to the flesh, the old nature, the old man that resides in all men, and is especially recognized in the believer (Rom. 7:25; Gal. 5:16-17¹).

In both of these verses, Paul makes it clear that the Spirit and the flesh never operate in the realm of the other. When a man is tempted to sin, the source of that temptation is not spiritual, it does not flow from the new man, it comes from the old man. This does not imply that we can ever be sure of the motive that drives us, save that God is not the author of our sin. “Every man” assures us that the believer is not excluded from such temptation. This passage is not about “the other guy.” This is written for our understanding. The way to approach this passage is to insert the personal pronoun “we” in the place of “every man.” When *we* are tempted to sin, to trust in ourselves, to mind the things of ourselves and not the things of Christ, the source of that temptation is our own hearts. *We* are to blame.

¹ **Rom. 7:25**, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Gal. 5:16-17, This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

The process which ends in death is set before us with three words. Verse 14 speaks of “temptation,” “lust” and “enticement.” Each of these words discount any notion that some outside thing is the cause of our problem. Things such as the world, riches, booze, and sex are not the problem. They become a problem to us because of how we perceive them and ultimately use or abuse them. If in the end we do abuse them, they are not to blame. We do so because we are tempted and respond to these things with our heart set on our satisfaction rather than the glory of God. We are tempted because our old nature, our flesh, responds to what is meant for good in a sinful manner.

We are tempted when we are drawn away by our own lust (v. 14). “Lust” here means our carnal nature, our flesh rather than our spirit. This is a revelation of the fact that our eyes are not fixed on Christ but on ourselves. Paul made it clear in his letter to the Galatians that if we walk in the Spirit (looking unto Jesus), while we are walking in the Spirit (with eyes on Christ), we shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

The words “drawn away” come from the concept of “dragging,” but here they refer more to the language of hunting or fishing with the use of a lure (the intent to trap or ensnare). It is also used in the sense of the harlots words. They are lies, but they hold out the promise of pleasure and gratification of the flesh (Prov. 7:10-14, 24-27¹). The lure or

¹ **Prov. 7:10-14**, And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart. (She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house: Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.) So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows. . . . **24-27**, Hearken

harlot is not the source of temptation; we are lured by our own lust. We desire to fulfill the desire and lust of our own heart. Note well, if you are driven to a passionate state so that you feel you *must* have something, then two things are true. You are not considering what you have, and you are not satisfied with what you have. Love is rest, ease, and peace; lust is unrest, disease, and turmoil. The blame for our temptation to sin is wholly wrapped up in our own lust. Nothing else can be blamed. God tempts no man to evil.

The third word spoken that defines this process of temptation is “enticed” (v. 14). Again, this cannot be blamed on any source but our own lust. The word means “beguiled,” whose root word is “guile” or “evil.” We are beguiled because of our own guile. The flesh believes there will be a great reward if the lusts are followed. The flesh does what it does because it believes it will get something pleasurable and beneficial from the doing. Again, this is not a consideration of what we have, but a polluted notion of what we might have, and it smacks of dissatisfaction. Looking to Christ, we have all things; we are complete. Looking away means we are looking for something more, in disbelief that we indeed have all things. This most certainly addresses faith (Gal. 3:1-3¹).

unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.

¹ **Gal. 3:1-3**, O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Verse 15 brings us from the things within us that are the source of our temptation to the end of them. It speaks to acting upon what our own lust has conceived. Note the word “hath;” it speaks of a thing “done” or “finished.” The word “conceived” means “seized for one’s self.” When our inward being has laid hold, grabbed our temptation, the result is to act in order to have what we lust after. When lust has seized what we want in our heart, we then take it in our hands and fulfill the lust of our nature (Psa. 7:14¹).

When sin is finished, it brings forth death. The end of sin is death (Rom. 6:23²). Adam’s sin brought death upon all (Rom. 5:12³). But this passage speaks of another kind of death. One Jewish writer said concerning the incest of Lot’s daughters, “The concupiscent soul [or “lust”] stirs up the evil figment, and imagines by it, and it cleaves to every evil imagination, ‘until it conceives a little,’ and produces in the heart of man the evil thought, and cleaves to it; and as yet it is in his heart, and is not ‘finished’ to do it, until this desire or lust stirs up the strength of the body, first to cleave to the evil figment, and then, ‘sin is finished.’”

In the end, the cost of our lust kills something in us—relationships, trust, testimony. The term is purposely vague so that we might strongly consider the consequence of our sin.

¹ **Psa. 7:14**, Behold, he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.

² **Rom. 6:23**, For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

³ **Rom. 5:12**, Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

DO NOT ERR

JAMES 1:16-18

16, Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17, Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18, Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

This passage is the final point in James' argument against charging God with your sin. He has established the fact that when we sin, our sin in no way originates in God but in our own depraved heart. James wrote thus to distinguish between the trials of faith, temptations into which all believers fall that are sent from God with the intent, design, and result of bringing us to fix our hearts and mind on Christ alone, and those temptations to sin that originate in our own lusts and end in death. Because both saved *and* lost men are incapable of logically embracing the concept of absolute sovereignty, they have difficulty in rationalizing that God is in control of all things, yet they are held accountable for their own temptations to sin.

The apostle Paul responds to this logic in his letter to the Romans.

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will

have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? (Rom. 5:15-20).

Paul's response to the sure logic of the human mind is reiterated by James in the first three words of verse 16— "Do not err." Again we, as believers, are reminded to read these admonitions and warning for our selves and not to look for someone else to blame or straighten out. Since these words are spoken to the "beloved brethren," we can be sure that, as believers, the error that has been addressed is likely to be found in our thinking. The warning is plain, straightforward, and concise—"Do not err" in charging God with you sin.

The proof of this is in how God has dealt with the beloved brethren. Nothing He has done for us would tempt or cause us sin. Nothing that he has done for us has brought about the death that is a result of our own lust to sin. We cannot look at one thing that He has done to or for us, whether He bestowed upon us great grace and mercy or sent diverse temptations (trials of faith) and say that one of them tempted us to sin. *All* news after we hear the "good news" is nothing but good, very

good, and is designed for our good and His glory. “Do not err.”

If it is evil in us, it did not come from God because “every good and perfect gift is from above” (v. 17a). Remember, this is a statement of opposition to the origin of the temptation to sin (James 1:13-14¹). This is saying, “Do not err...what comes from God is good.” What comes from above are gifts. They are not merited by us; they are given to us. They are not offers or incentives; they are gifts. Gifts are given and received; otherwise, they would not qualify as gifts. They are good and perfect gifts, so they are *spiritual* gifts or blessings (Eph. 1:3²).

“Gift” is a generic term. It is nonspecific so that we can be sure that if it is good and perfect, no matter what it is, it is from above. It is spiritual and therefore has nothing to do with the flesh. Because of our flesh, we are not able to discern good and perfect gifts by looking at ourselves. This knowledge turns our eyes to Christ because when our affection is fixed there, we will see nothing but that which is good and perfect. Religion would have you look to yourself to find some gift or talent, but if you searched there until the end of time, you would find nothing. If you do find something looking to yourself, then you are in real trouble. The gift, the giving of the gift, is found in the unspeakable Gift (Rom. 8:32³). Every “good and perfect” comes with Christ, the perfect Gift.

¹ **James 1:13-14**, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

² **Eph. 1:3**, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

³ **Rom. 8:32**, He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

The origin of the good and perfect gift is from above. It comes down to the beloved brethren from the “Father of lights” (v. 17). This description of God is distinctive. Though He created darkness, good and perfect have nothing to do with darkness. Light may be used to describe many things in scripture, but they all relate in some way to Him who is the Light of the world (1 John 1:5-7¹). This light is the Word, that which we have handled and that which we declare unto you. The “Father of lights” is a description of God pertaining to the gospel of Christ. Light, the gospel, is the only understanding that a human being can have concerning God, and it is the understanding given to every one of the elect (1 John 5:20²). Outside of Christ, there is no knowledge of God at all (Col. 2:8³).

The assurance that no gift from God will ever eventuate in tempting us to sin, or being able to charge God with our sin, is that He, the giver of all good and perfect gifts, will never give the believer anything but good and perfect gifts. With Him, there is no possibility, no hint, no shadow of variableness, nor shadow of turning. Nothing that comes from Him will ever be anything other than good and perfect.

¹ **1 John 1:5-7**, This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

² **1 John 5:20**, And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

³ **Col. 2:8**, Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Time and eternity will not alter that fact! That is our salvation. Does He love his children? Then He always has, does now, and will never stop loving them (Mal. 3:6; 2 Peter 3:15a¹).

The final proof that the believer is given, that which will keep him from error about the source of his temptation, is his own experience of grace. Again, we are brought to the fact that we cannot discern or apply this to anyone else. The only person that we can *know* has experienced grace is ourselves. We cannot see faith or lack thereof in anyone else. God has been good and perfect toward His own. The believer knows this because God (the Father of lights) has, according to His own good will, begotten and birthed him into His family. He has done so with the Word of Truth, the gospel (v. 18).

This new birth is revealed in the gospel. The dynamics of it are a mystery, much like the wind, but where you find new birth, you find the gospel, and where you find faith, you find the gospel (1 Pet. 1:23-25²). Receiving Christ and believing Christ are inseparable, and time spent trying to discern a difference or a time lapse between life and faith is time ill spent (John 1:12-13³). This primary and foundational gift, new

¹ **Mal. 3:6**, For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

² **1 Peter 3:15a**, . . . account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

² **1 Pet. 1:23-25**, Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

³ **John 1:12-13**, But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

life in Christ, is the wellspring of all spiritual gifts, and once given, it will never be taken back (Rom. 11:29¹).

The new birth is evidence that you belong to God. As the firstfruits are His, so is everyone born of him. They are His, have always been His, and will always be His. That will never change, and it will never and can never be a source for our temptation to sin. "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

¹ **Rom. 11:29**, For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

CONCERNING THE WORD

JAMES 1:19-21

19, Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

20, For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21, Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Beginning with “Wherefore,” this passage has to do with the words of verses 17-18.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

In that passage James finished his proof that God cannot tempt men to sin because all things that come from God for his people are good and perfect gifts. The primary understanding of that fact is that God has birthed us into His family by His own will with the “word of truth.” What follows in the present study passage is an admonition concerning our (the believer’s) response to the word, the preaching of the Gospel. The “word’ is the instrument that

God employs to make us aware of what he has done for us (2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Cor. 2:9-12¹). The miracle of the preached word being instrumental in the new birth and the salvation of the soul remains a mystery—a mystery embraced by believing God and receiving it as simply so.

The word then, being the illumination of all good and perfect gifts and the instrument of our salvation, is at once the proof that God cannot be charged with our sin and is a guard against the error of thinking that He could ever be. “Wherefore,” this being the case, since the word is our guard against error and the means employed in our regeneration, our attitude in hearing the word must flow from a heart of thanksgiving and praise rather than anger and debate.

We are admonished in several ways and each of them has to do with our response to hearing the Word of God or the gospel. Our Lord said,

“Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given” (Mark 4:24).

¹ **2 Thess. 2:13-14**, If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

1 Cor. 2:9-12, But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Though He tells us to heed what we hear, the context reveals that He is teaching us “how” to hear. We are not to hear the gospel with a preconceived agenda. We are not to hear the gospel to prove our point of view but to find the truth. The only preconceived notion or desire we should have when we hear the gospel is “give me Christ.” No ancillary doctrine is to be used as a gage in hearing the gospel. The Bible addresses ecclesiology (church doctrine) but the Bible is not to be interpreted on the basis of church doctrine. The Bible addresses the last times or the last days, but the Bible is not to be interpreted on the basis of the last times. Concerning the Bible, Christ is the key to knowledge. He is the theme, the substance, the rhyme and reason, the grammar and syntax of Scripture. He is the Word made flesh.

The first thing that the “beloved brethren” are admonished to do concerning the word is to be “swift to hear” (v. 19). This has nothing to do with speed, but a readiness and willingness to avail yourself to the preaching of the word. It speaks to anticipation of hearing that which will under gird you for life. This language also suggests that when you come to hear, you check your opinions at the door. The believer comes to hear in order to worship God, not to further some cause he has.

Secondly, after you hear the gospel, you are admonished to be “slow to speak.” The context teaches that this particularly addresses being negative toward what you have heard. When the gospel is preached, it not only causes us to rejoice in our Savior’s great work, but it reminds us that it was our sin that nailed him to the tree. It also requires us to let go

of any notion of self. The gospel, because it is the truth, discounts and disallows our opinion. This does not sit well with our nature, and we are likely to have a negative response. Remember, with this being written here, the possibility of this being our response is real! So, we are admonished to be “slow to speak.”

Taking leave of the context for a moment, this principle is also one that is familiar to scripture (Job 40:4-5; Ecc. 5:1-2; Hab. 2:20; Zech. 2:13¹). We live in a day when the name of God is bandied about without much thought as to who He is. There seems to be a strange familiarity with God. These verses indicate, indeed command, that the creature is to revere God, bow to His deity and sovereignty, and to do so in silence! The Bible speaks a great deal about meditation, silently considering the God of Glory, silently meditating upon what you hear.

The third admonition is to be “slow to wrath.” This deals more particularly with our response to the possible negativity of others. There will be many times that when you rejoice in the truth, those around you will be filled with indignation.

¹ **Job 40:4-5**, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.

Ecc. 5:1-2, Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Hab. 2:20, But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

Zech. 2:13, Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

Our natural response is to go into battle mode and strike out. My dad often told me, “If you know you are right about something, you don’t need to prove it.” If you respond angrily to an attack on the truth, you are actually indicating that you are not so sure yourself. I will talk with anyone about the gospel, but experience has taught me that angry debate does not honor God.

Here, the total admonition should be applied. “Be swift to hear [listen], slow to speak [make sure your response is not about vindicating yourself] and slow to wrath [almost every occasion of self defense is really self-righteousness]” This is proven by the next verse. “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God” (v. 20). Your anger, even if it is in defense of the truth, will not further the cause of truth, nor engage nor encourage men to look to Christ. The certainty of this verse makes us to know that it is precisely exact. There is *no* occasion that the wrath of man worketh the righteousness of God (1 Tim. 2:8¹).

The first phrase of verse 21 is a true description of what our wrath really is. We might think that getting mad is just an adrenalin rush, but our Lord describes it as “filthiness” superfluity, and naughtiness” upon hearing the word; “Filthiness” being pride, vanity, wrath, and malice; “Superfluity” being excess, more than is needed or asked for, hyperbole, making a mountain out of a mole hill, overdramatic; “Naughtiness” being malice, maliciousness, evil, wicked.

¹ **1 Tim. 2:8**, I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Finally, the admonition brings us back to Christ. “Receive with meekness the engrafted word.” This teaches us that the Spirit put the Word in us. Receive it with “meekness.” Meekness is accepting God’s dealings with us not in fatalistic resignation but with thanksgiving and praise because we know that it is for our good and His glory. Hear the word, respond with meekness when confronted. This returns us to the experience of the new birth (James 1:18¹). It is this word (the gospel) that was the instrument that saved our souls or revealed that God had saved us.

Hear with meekness, be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

¹ **James 1:18**, Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

HEARERS AND DOERS

JAMES 1:22-25

22, But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23, For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

24, For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25, But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Verse 20 of this chapter reads, “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” It is one of those verses that are often lifted from their context by those who seek to bring men under the bondage of works for justification and righteousness—those who wrest the scriptures to their own destruction. The Bible is fertile ground for the unbeliever and full of snares for those who would use it to further their own agenda. These words are nonetheless very powerful words. The weight they carry speaks to self-deception (James 1:20, 26¹). There are three characters in this study text; those who hear and do nothing, those who do and

¹ **James 1:20, 26**, For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. . . **26**, If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

hear nothing, and those who hear and do. Only the last is acceptable.

In verse 22, the “word” referred to is the Word of God, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have tried to make the “word” to mean the “moral law,” which is a religious term used for the ten commandments. The law is not divided into moral and ceremonial, except by those who would make justification a work of the flesh. The word “moral” is not found in scripture. The purpose of the ten commandments is to condemn, and the ceremonies picture the remedy for sin—the blood of Christ. The law shows man a sinner; the ceremony reveals the Savior. The law is one, and it has been fulfilled and set aside by Christ in the new covenant.

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He

taketh away the first, that he may establish the second” (Heb. 10:1-9).

In the context of verse 22, the “word” is the same as the “word of truth” by which God has begotten us by “His own will” (James 1:18)—the same word that when received is “able to save your souls” (James 1:21). This being so, we can be assured that the things declared here do not diminish the “hearing” of the Word, but rather address the only acceptable response to it. Not only are we to be a hearer but also a doer of the Word. Otherwise, we deceive ourselves.

If verse 20 stood alone, it would leave a multitude of avenues for interpretation. Carnal men are not without guile, wit, and human logic. They, if left to themselves, would conjure all manner of things that would bring men under bondage, employing the Old Testament commandments, personal convictions, and numerous inventions to give the flesh evidence that they are *doing* the Word. But this verse does not stand alone, nor can anyone rightfully claim ignorance as to its meaning. We do not need to guess the meaning of being “doers and not hearers only.” In verses 23-24, our Lord tells us what it means to be a hearer but not a doer of the word. Verse 25 tells us what it means to be a hearer and doer of the word.

The thing being addressed is the only acceptable response to hearing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 1:4-10; 2:13¹). The gospel tells the truth about man and God and how

¹ **1 Thess. 1:4-10**, Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy

God glorifies Himself in the salvation of sinners by the bloody death of Jesus Christ. To hear the gospel is singularly the most profound and life altering thing that you will encounter in your life because it is the power of God unto salvation and will have an effect on you when you hear it. The gospel is not heard where it does not kill or make alive (2 Cor. 2:14-17¹). The gospel is not a religious dissertation; it is not a theological treatise; it is a reckoning, an apocalypse, a revelation of what is. Those to whom the gospel is the “savor of death” are those who are described as “hearers but not doers” of the word. It is important to note what those who are described are hearing— the true gospel, that which declares God and His salvation. A looking glass or mirror is employed as a

Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come. . . **2:13**, For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

¹ **2 Cor. 2:14-17**, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia. Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

metaphor for hearing the gospel. In other words, hearing the gospel is like looking into a mirror.

When you hear the gospel, you see yourself, and you see Christ. The person who is a hearer and not a doer of the word is like a man who beholds his face in a mirror. He sees something of himself and something of Christ but is not moved by what he sees. He may see a hint of his own depravity and catch a glimpse of the glory of the Savior, but as soon as it is over, he forgets all about it, goes his own way, and thinks of it no further. Hearing the Gospel may make him, for a moment, consider his sin. Hearing the gospel may make him, for a moment, consider Christ, but that is as far as it goes. Like Felix and those on Mars Hill told Paul, we will hear thee another day (Acts 24:25¹). To such a hearer, that which is a sweet savor to God is but a savor of death to them.

Hearing and not doing the word is foremost a careless attitude upon hearing the gospel. One may think that such an attitude is simply a matter of opinion and feel that he has committed no crime in exercising his, so called, right to choose, but in truth, hearing the Gospel is a matter of life and death (Prov. 8:36; 1 John 5:10-12²). Hearing the Gospel and not being a doer is seeing Christ, seeing yourself, and turning

¹ **Acts 24:25**, And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

² **Prov. 8:36**, But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

1 John 5:10-12, He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

away forgetting what manner of man you are. In being confronted with eternal things, you deceive yourself and count them but temporal persuasions possessing no more importance than your reflection in a mirror—a thing only regarded when you are looking. This is precisely how our Lord describes what it is to be a hearer and not a doer of the word.

What then is it to be a hearer and a doer of the word?

“. . . whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (v. 25).

Here, the mirror (the gospel) is described as the “perfect law of liberty.” A hearer and a doer of the word sees more than a glimpse of Christ and himself. He sees that something has been accomplished concerning Christ and himself. He looks into the “perfect law of liberty” (Rom. 8:1-4¹). He sees Christ as having accomplished his salvation and setting him free. That being so, duty becomes pleasure, and responding to the gospel thusly relates to the hearer that he is not *bound* to do

¹ **Rom. 8:1-4**, There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

but *free* to do (Gal. 5:1-6, 22-23¹). He is free; he is the Lord's freeman (1 Cor. 7:22-23²). The hearer and doer of the Word is one who hears the gospel and is changed by it. He attends to the ordinances of the gospel—baptism and the Lord's Table. He, in faith takes hold of eternal life. He loves God and his neighbor (James 2:8³). He weighs his deeds and actions considering his relationship with Christ. He is blessed in his deeds (Eph. 1:3⁴). He is not a forgetter. He is rememberer. He is a doer of the work.

What is the work? What does he do upon hearing the Gospel? He looks into the perfect law of liberty (the gospel) and continues there. To hear and do is to abide in the doctrine of Christ, to continue in the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2; Col. 1:19-23; 2 John 1:9⁵).

¹ **Gal. 5:1-6**, Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. . . **22-23**, But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

² **1 Cor. 7:22-23**, For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

³ **James 2:8**, If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

⁴ **Eph. 1:3**, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

⁵ **1 Cor. 15:1-2**, Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By

which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

Col. 1:19-20, For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

2 John 1:9, Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

DISTINCTION

JAMES 1:26-27

26, If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27, Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

These two verses set forth the final word concerning the fact that God is not the author of sin, that when a man sins, the fault lies entirely at his own door. There are two characters represented here, and they are representative of the two characters we viewed in the last study, those who looked into the Gospel and were unaffected by it, and those who looked and were completely affected by it. The one (an unbeliever) was a forgetful hearer and therefore not a doer of the word, deceiving himself. The other (a believer) is a remembering hearer and therefore a doer of the word.

Part of that doing is *remembering* what manner of people we are, which primarily involves two undeniable truths. First, we are sinners, and as much as we would like to think otherwise, that is our station in this life. Secondly, Christ is the savior and the only hope of sinners. To look into the perfect law of liberty and to and continue therein is to be reminded and to remember these two things. To venture from

this knowledge as the basis for all that we do is to err, and the result will be loss of the enjoyment of our salvation.

Since we are sinners, even though we are completely saved by grace, we are fraught with problems of pride and self-will. We are apt to use what we know in an improper way. We can and often do use the very gospel of peace as the proverbial blunt instrument to bludgeon our enemies into submission. The gospel is great power, but it is the power of God, not men. The sad truth is that man is incapable of wielding power without self-interest. So, the writer is inspired to address the thing that gets us in the most trouble, our tongue. David was sorely aware of this problem when he said, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psa. 141:3). Our text is probably an allusion to those words of David. Bridling the tongue is, in this context, the same as looking into the gospel and continuing therein or being a hearer and a doer of the word.

The first character mention is the opposite (v. 26). This speaks of one who *seems* religious. The word "seem" can be a little misleading. For someone to seem a certain way requires a second party to deem it so. This word, in its root meaning, has to do with what a person thinks of himself. Thus, we have the description of this as "deceiving his own heart." It would better read, "If a man thinks himself religious or thinks himself a worshipper of God." When I was in military service and made a mistake, I would usually try to excuse myself by starting a sentence with "I thought." I cannot number the times a superior told me, "You ain't paid to think." It is safe to say, when we think something of ourselves, that we will soon find that it ain't like we thought it was. Such

contradiction is dealt with throughout scripture (1 John 2:9; 1 Cor. 8:2; Gal. 6:3; 2 Tim. 3:5; Rom. 2:20¹).

If a man thinks he is a true worshipper and does not bridle his tongue, he deceives his own heart, and his worship is in vain— empty and groundless. This is very precise language. If the gospel does not affect you in the matter of the tongue, no matter what you might think of yourself, your thoughts are entirely in error. One might ask, why is such emphasis and import placed on bridling the tongue? The tongue reveals the heart, the seat of affection—what or who someone loves (Matt. 12:34; Luke 6:45²). To use what you see in the gospel as a means of exalting yourself at the expense of others is the foundation of hypocrisy, love of self. To look into the mirror of the word (the gospel) and turn away, forgetting what manner of person you are, is evidenced by an evil tongue.

¹ **1 John 2:9**, He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.

1 Cor. 8:2, And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

Gal. 6:3, For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

2 Tim. 3:5, Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Rom. 2:20, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

² **Matt. 12:34**, O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

Luke 6:45, A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

This is an accurate description of the person found previously in verses 23-24¹.

Verse 27 describes the person found in James 1:25². The character described in verse 27 is the person who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues therein. He is a *hearer* and a *doer* of the word. In opposition to the false professor, the true worshipper is here declared. This is a lovely passage of scripture. It is plain and full of gospel truth. The first thing that is noteworthy is that in the description of pure religion (worship), there is no mention of bridling the tongue. The reason is that in pure worship, bridling the tongue is a given (James 1:19³). The reason so is the underlying principle that is the heart of pure religion. The underlying principle of pure religion, religion that is undefiled before God, is love (Rom. 13:10⁴).

Love is only understood in the light of God's love. We love him because He first loved us. We are to love as he loved us, freely, fully, unconditionally, forgivingly, and forever. Love bridles the tongue. Even weak human love bridles the tongue. A good measure of whom we love is assessed in our ease with speaking ill of someone, or accepting ill words spoken against someone. Spiritual love bridles the tongue

¹ **verses 23-24**, For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

² **James 1:25**, But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

³ **James 1:19**, Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

⁴ **Rom. 13:10**, Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

because of love for Christ. When we see Him, it is not easy to speak ill of one for whom He died.

This pure religion is described in two ways.

First, pure religion, pure worship of God is visiting “the fatherless and widows in their affliction” (v. 27). Visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction is a principle found throughout the Bible (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 14:29; 24:17, 19; Psa. 68:5¹). Pure religion is compassion for those who are afflicted (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26²).

Secondly, pure religion is keeping yourself “unspotted from the world” (v. 27). Remember, the world is not the problem; it is our lust, or illicit abuse of it (2 Peter 1:4³). The principle of keeping ourselves unspotted is the same as we have seen in looking at mortifying the deeds of the flesh

¹ Ex. 22:22, Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

Deut. 14:29, And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest. **24:17**, Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge. . . **19**, When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

Psa. 68:5, A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.

² **Rom. 12:15**, Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

1 Cor. 12:26, And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

³ **2 Peter 1:4**, Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

through the Spirit. It is looking to Christ and the things of the world growing strangely dim (Jude 1:21-25; 1 John 1:7¹).

These two things mark pure religion, and they are two things that every believer is familiar with. They are just another way of saying what our Lord said is the fulfillment of the law (Matt. 22:36-40; Gal. 5:13-14). To love God is to keep yourself unspotted from the world. To love your neighbor is to visit the fatherless and the widows.

¹ **Jude 1:21-25**, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

1 John 1:7, But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

THE LAW OF FAITH

JAMES 2:1

1, My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

The second chapter of James contains many things which the enemies of salvation by grace through faith grasp in an effort to bring men back under the Old Covenant, back under the law to prove that they have some evidence that they are saved. That which is addressed in this chapter is not a diversion from that which is taught in chapter one.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

Chapter two is an illumination of that pure religion that is undefiled before God. The law being addressed in this chapter is that “perfect law of liberty” found in James 1:25 and referred to as the “royal law” in James 2:8, the “whole law” in 2:10, and the “law of liberty” in 2:12. These are different descriptions of the gospel or what Paul declares to be the

“law” by which men are justified in Romans 3:24-28¹ — “the law of faith.” The use of the word “law” concerns an absolute principle. The law of faith eventuates in certain positive actions and thoughts based on the principle of believing the gospel. Certain things are not to be present in the life of the child of God and certain things are.

As we consider these verses, we must remember this book begins with our Lord teaching us to rejoice when we fall into diverse temptations (trials of faith) because the end of these trials will bring us to maturity, entirety and want for nothing (James 1:2-4²). The trials that have been addressed thus far have not been scourging or martyrdom but things that flow from the wickedness of the old man, the flesh, the inherent depravity of our old nature. Our struggles are not with outward kingdoms but with inner sin that causes us to think what we should not and therefore act as we should not.

One trial that we all endure as children of God is that we may overtly or covertly blame God for our sin. Another temptation is to be quicker to speak than to listen. Another temptation is to use our unbridled tongue to destroy rather

¹ **Rom. 3:24-28**, Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

² **James 1:2-4**, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

than edify. These may seem like small things to the world and its religion, but the chief struggles of the child of God are those of the mind and the heart, battles that go on in dark places and are never, in this life, fully won (2 Cor. 10:3-6¹).

Another thing to remember as we look at this chapter is that when James speaks of something that does not belong with faith, he is still speaking of one who is a hearer but not a doer of the word. When he speaks of things that belong to faith, he is referring to one who is a hearer and a doer of the word. One forgets what he is, and the other never forgets what he is. The impact of the gospel on the believer is that he never forgets that he is a sinner saved by grace alone. Such a correct view of self automatically causes the believer to view others in that light. It is an essential reaction to the gospel and truly sets things right in our relationships with the household of faith and everyone else.

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2:1-4).

¹ **2 Cor. 10:3-6**, For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

The things that are taught us in this chapter are things that operate on the basis of the effect of the gospel on the believer, particularly as it relates to our estimation and treatment of the children of God.

James writes these things to the “brethren.” He is addressing things that do not *become* faith. The tenor of the language in verse one does not speak to absolutes in the sense that the believer will *never* do what is admonished against. The fact that respect of persons is warned against suggests the possibility that the problem exists. The believer is to seek to have no respect of persons because the believer professes faith in Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. Having respect of persons calls into question the validity of faith. It is important to note that having faith “with respect of persons” is the same as having “faith without works.” These things will be addressed in the studies to come.

In the remainder of this lesson, I want us to consider this matter of “respect of persons.”

Because this verse is used for all manner of rebellion and taken out of context can invigorate the basest attributes of our depravity, it is first necessary to look at what this phrase does *not* mean.

First, it does not mean that we are to respect no one. There are those among humanity whom God has ordained that we should and are bound to respect (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17-18¹).

¹ **Rom. 13:1-7**, Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist

The very concept of loving your neighbor carries with it certain respect for the one loved as we saw in Philippians 2. So, this does not mean respect for no one.

Secondly, some who despise the teaching of election charge God with respect of persons because he chose some to salvation and not others. This hardly seems worth addressing. Election is proof that God does not respect persons. Because election is of grace, the individual's goodness, status, or lack thereof played no part in that election. God has not chosen many wise, rich, or strong, but he has chosen some. But, whether rich or poor, everyone is part with justly condemned humanity. Election does not prevent the salvation of anyone; it assures the salvation of some. Respect of persons has nothing to do with election, at all.

In this context and every other context which this principle is employed, this phrase "respect of persons" has to do with equity—righteous judgment. If you profess faith in Christ, it is wrong to assess the value of a person on any other

shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

1 Pet. 2:17-18, Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

basis than Jesus Christ. To respect a person in this context its to ascribe to anyone a special place or standing in the church because of his status. To respect a *person* is to look on the outward appearance and not on the heart. All believers are equal in Christ (Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 3:10-11¹). The rich and the poor are redeemed with the same sacrifice.

Faith is called into question when a person in the church is elevated because of external glories (Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; Prov. 17:5a²). Our Lord's enemies (unknowingly) commended our Lord for having no respect for persons, though they said what they said trying to "catch" or trip Him up (Mark 12:13-14³). The mark of the Pharisee was respect for

¹ **Gal. 3:27-29**, For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Col. 3:10-11, And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

² **Lev. 19:15**, Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

Deut. 1:17, Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.

Prov. 17:5a, Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker.

³ **Mark 12:13-14**, And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?

persons (John 7:45-48; Jude 1:16¹). This principle is illustrated throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Every sinner has the same standing in Adam. Every saint has the same standing in Christ. To judge or respect on any other basis than being “in Christ” is to call into question the existence of faith.

Brethren, have not the faith of Christ with respect of persons. .

¹ **John 7:45-48**, Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?

Jude 1:16, These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

FAITH WORKS

JAMES 2:1-13

1, My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

2, For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3, And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4, Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5, Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

6, But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7, Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8, If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9, But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

10, For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

11, For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

12, So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

13, For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

These verses are further explanation of the pure religion declared in the last verse in chapter 1, which is summed up in the effects of the gospel on those who have received the gift of faith. To love God and love your neighbor discounts any notion of partiality based on societal status. Love for God is singularly specific, and love for your neighbor is general and universal.

James sets forth this truth as a matter of law. This use of the concept of law does not refer to the Old Covenant as a rule of life, but rather it is employed in a strict sense. A law is an absolute and is used here to say that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ absolutely produces works and that without partiality (vv. 1-7). We, as believers, read these words and are immediately convicted by our consummate failures (v. 10).

Who among us can truthfully say that we love God with all our hearts and love our neighbor as ourselves? This brings us to the subject of this passage; having the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. That God-given faith centers in the truth that Christ alone has made perfect obedience to God. So, the knowledge of our failures serves to cause us to do some things. First, it causes us to look away from our efforts at obedience as evidence that we have faith. Secondly, it drives us to Christ who alone has obeyed God. Thirdly, we will not

look to our faith as producer of works but the channel for works because we are but branches, and the source of fruit is the vine.

Also, the concept of “law” is not viewed as a condemnation but as an absolute principle of *freedom* to do what is right, even though we do it imperfectly. None of these things release us from loving our neighbor with absolute diligence. Rather, they ensure the faith we have been given will eventuate in the works that identify or justify it (Eph. 2:10¹). Our faith is grounded in the perfect law (absolute principle) of liberty. That perfect law is the gospel, the good news, and glad tidings that what God has required, He has accomplished. So, believers are free to love God and love their neighbor.

To prove the principle, James brings all that is involved to a single principle that covers the ideal of loving your neighbor. Love for your neighbor absolutely assures that you will not be partial to any neighbor based on societal status. Love is the great equalizer. Love never works ill to his neighbor, and since “neighbor” is a generic term that not only involves the household of faith but also all men, then partiality in reference to status is forbidden. However, James does not here deal with the *universal* aspect of love for neighbor but rather addresses respect of persons as it relates to the family of God, the *church*. He speaks to “brethren” (v. 1), to “beloved brethren” (v. 5). He speaks to all who profess faith in Christ. He is not speaking of losing salvation, but he speaks to the fact that where partiality exists, faith in Christ is

¹ **Eph. 2:10**, For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

called into question. The issue is not the *loss* of faith but the *existence* of faith. He is leading us to the place that reveals true faith—faith that works by love.

The more I consider the wonder of faith, the more I see that only spiritual understanding may even begin to grasp what it is. Faith cannot be proved by anything, but it can be disproved by many things. Loving our neighbor does not prove the existence of faith, but not loving our brother disproves faith. Faith produces works, but works can be done without faith. Men may love without faith, but none can have faith without love. This truth is addressed in the latter part of this chapter. The words of the passage we are addressing here are a precursor to James' final words on the matter.

James is setting up a scenario of what it means to have faith in Christ. He is using the “if “ and “then” method of teaching. If you have faith, then you love your brethren. If you say you have faith and show respect to persons, then, at worst, you have not faith, and at least, your faith is suspect. In this light, though numerous examples are used, the message is plain and singular. Faith works by love without any show of partiality.

Respect of persons relative to status denies the spiritual estate of all whom Christ has chosen to save (vv. 1-7). God has chosen *some* who are rich in the natural realm and *some* who are poor, but *all* He has chosen are spiritually bankrupt in nature. Rich or poor are not considerations in eternal election. All whom God has chosen have nothing by which they can recommend themselves to God. Thus, to show respect to one and not another is to “blaspheme that worthy name by the

which ye are called" (v. 7). To do so is to make distinctions by evil thoughts and processes (v. 4).

The royal law, the gospel, is absolute. If you fulfill it by loving your neighbor, you do well (v. 8). You are a doer of the word and not a hearer only. But again, we are reminded of the fact that this is an absolute principle as is described in (v. 9-10). The law being addressed is the law of liberty (the gospel). To show the absoluteness of it, James uses the Law of Sinai to explain it (vv. 10-11). This is *not* bringing the believer back under the Old Covenant. It is merely used to show that the law is one, and to transgress in one aspect, while keeping the other, is as if you transgressed the whole thing. To say you have faith (believe the perfect law of liberty) and yet have respect of persons is to be guilty of unbelief.

The gospel is the judge (v. 12; John 12:48; Rom. 2:16¹). The perfect law of liberty is the expression of liberality, and mercy. If you show partiality, respect of persons, you have no mercy. Faith does not operate through partiality. Faith works by love and therefore mercy. It is the absolute law of liberty. To profess faith and show no mercy is to be judged by the gospel you profess to believe. To profess faith and show no mercy is to be free to do well toward your brother or sister and yet do evil.

The believer shows mercy. He looks into the perfect law of liberty and remembers what manner of man his is and continues therein. He is not partial, and therefore he does not

¹ **John 12:48**, He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.

Rom. 2:16, In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

fear the judgment (Matt. 25:34-36; 1 John 4:17¹). Trust Christ, look to Christ, and you will not have respect of persons.

Our substitute did this perfectly.

¹ **Matt. 25:34-36**, Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

1 John 4:17, Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

DEAD OR ALIVE

JAMES 2:14-26

14, What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15, If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17, Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

18, Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

19, Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

20, But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

21, Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

22, Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

23, And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

24, Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

25, Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

26, For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

This is James' final argument that God-given faith is a living principle that is always followed by works. James is not arguing that one can look at a person's works and conclude that the person has faith. He is arguing an absolute, a principle, a law, if you will, that faith works, and where no works exist, neither does faith. He is not addressing action. He is addressing understanding.

As we consider the last verses in this chapter, we need to pay attention to the manner in which he sets forth his argument. Though in verse 18 he uses the first-person singular pronoun "I", nowhere in this context does he point to himself or his works as proof that faith exists. In fact, the entire argument of this chapter is spoken in the third person. That is important because he is not seeking to prove he has faith, but rather that faith operates in a particular way. You will find this principle set forth throughout scripture. Writers never say look at me, for the simple reason that it smacks of self-righteousness and a lack of humility. Even when Paul pointed to himself as laboring more than others he prefaced and qualified those words with a double disclaimer (1 Cor. 15:10¹). So, as we look at this final argument, do not look to yourselves to see if you meet the standard, rather consider

¹ 1 Cor. 15:10, But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

that the subject is faith, and James would have you understand that where faith is, it is followed by works.

In verse 14-17, James illuminates the principle that faith operates in mercy and love (Gal. 5:6¹). Again, he approaches the subject from a negative proof and on the basis of profession—“though a man say” (v. 14). He does not say “brethren, *if you say*” because the brethren are not the subject being addressed—faith is. These verses are a scenario about the general truth of what faith produces. Faith is followed by acts of mercy (James 2:13²). The profit here is not that faith profits but that others profit where faith exists, otherwise faith does not exist, and no matter the profession of it, faith that does not help a brother in need is dead because true faith does not stand alone. It always works by love (1 John 3:16-18³). Where mercy and love does not exist, neither does faith even though a man says he has it.

The word “yea” that begins verse 18 means “moreover.” James is saying “for example.” This again is a scenario. He uses two men speaking to each other as an example. One says, “I have faith,” intimating his faith is sufficient though he has no works. The other says “I have works,” intimating his works are sufficient to show that he has faith. “Not so fast,” says James, “you can no more show me your works apart

¹ **Gal. 5:6**, For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

² **James 2:13**, For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

³ **1 John 3:16-18**, Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

from your faith than I can show you my faith apart from my works" (v. 18). Faith and works, works and faith, fit together hand in glove. Faith without works is nothing more than giving mental assent to historical truths. It is the same faith that devils possess, and in them, at least, produces fear (v. 19; Luke 4:3, 41, Acts 19:15¹).

In verse 20, James asks a question of the man who says he has faith without works. The question would read in today's vernacular, "You who say that a person can have faith without works—Do you want proof that faith without works is dead?"

His first example is Abraham's faith. Again, remember that the subject is not Abraham, but rather Abraham's faith as an example of faith being dead without works. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" We know that this does not speak of the justification of his person (Rom. 4:2²). This is also seen by the works that are revealed concerning Abraham. Abraham was accounted as righteous before Isaac was even born (Gen. 15:6³). Abraham was a man of faith and that faith eventuated in works, namely obediently offering up his son. His faith was shown to be true faith because he obeyed the command to offer up his only son (v. 22).

¹ **Luke 4:3**, And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. . . **41**, And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.

Acts 19:15, And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?

² **Rom. 4:2**, For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

³ **Gen. 15:6**, And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

Abraham offered up Isaac because he had faith, because he believed God (Heb. 11:17-19¹). Abraham's faith was justified by works, showing that faith without works is dead. Abraham was himself justified by faith (v. 23; Rom. 4:5-8²). So, we see this prime example of the truth that faith without works is dead. Abraham had faith and it was revealed in that he obeyed God. His works did not make him righteous; his faith did, but that faith was alive and real as exemplified by his works. If he had not willingly offered up Isaac, his faith would have been dead, standing alone (v. 24).

The second example of faith without works being dead is the faith of Rahab. Rahab (her faith) was justified (shown to be true faith) when she took in the messengers. We conclude that Rahab had true faith because she acted upon faith (Heb. 11:31³).

The final word is simple. It is a declaration of an absolute, a principle—a law (v. 26). A body that has no breath is dead. Faith that has no works is dead. This is not a test for you to begin to assess your faith by your works. This is merely a statement of fact concerning what is true faith. It is not a *gauge*

¹ **Heb. 11:17-19**, By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

² **Rom. 4:5-8**, But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

³ **Heb. 11:31**, By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

to judge yourself or others; it is a *description* of true faith. Faith without works is dead, standing alone.

MASTERS

JAMES 3:1-5

1, My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

2, For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

3, Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

4, Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

5, Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

James has finished his argument concerning good works that began in verse 27 of chapter 1. Here in chapter three, he takes up the theme that he began in chapter 1 and verse 26.

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain” (1:26).

However, this chapter is not wholly divorced from his words on good works because the subject matter deals with

looking down on certain of the brethren, which is against the teaching of the gospel. But the words of our text bring us back to the truth of being more ready to hear than to speak or bridling of the tongue (James 1:19¹). Particularly, James is addressing a haughty or prideful spirit that lords knowledge over others even though such knowledge never intimates a degree of superiority. In his words concerning works justifying faith, James used the scenario of giving a higher place to someone based on their social status or their comparative affluence. It is not a stretch to transfer this thinking to its origin—self. Those who vainly boast of their own faith are most likely to censure others. Those who pretend at religion are prone to, with great ease, be rigid and bitter against the error of their brethren. James no longer sets up scenarios to prove a truth. He brings us to where the rubber hits the road. He speaks to the individual about his personal tongue and warns every believer about its improper employment.

He addresses the “brethren” and refers to them in the sense of putting himself in the same category (v. 1). He says, “My Brethren, be not many masters.” These words are written to “my brethren.” Though James often uses this salutation in a general sense expressing familiarity, he now uses it to note some particulars about the subject of which he is dealing. First, it is a fact that sometimes believer can use too much liberty over the failings of others. Secondly, he seeks to be at peace with the brethren, and he uses this affectionate term to greatly prepare them for the coming rebuke. Thirdly, the title

¹ **James 1:19**, Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

“brethren” sets up the argument. The terms “brethren” and “masters” do not fit together well. One seems the contradiction of the other.

“Be not many masters” (v. 1). This word “master” is used many ways in scripture. It may be used of one who has absolute power, as in the case of our Lord’s headship of the church (Matt. 23:10¹). It may suggest a teacher who ought to understand the things of God, as with Nicodemus (John 3:10²). Here, in our text, the word is used in its worst sense. James uses “master” as one who acts as a magistrate though he is not and has neither right nor warrant to be so.

“Master,” in this text speaks of a brother that has arrogantly put himself in the position of high reprovor. It speaks of one who has promoted himself to the judgment chair and feels that he may freely and openly rebuke the practices of others. The use of the word “master” does not preclude the private rebuke of a brother that is offered out of love and care. This text speaks entirely of the brother who sets himself up as the one who is there to straighten out the brethren.

The fact that he uses brethren and masters in the same sentence is a warning. We all, given the right circumstances, can have this itch. This is a warning not to scratch it. To some degree the use of this word “masters’ suggests that the one on the receiving end of the rebuke is a slave and as such must

¹ **Matt. 23:10**, Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.

² **John 3:10**, Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

give due obedience to the master. It is easy to see the danger (Ecc. 7:16¹).

Brethren, if we take the place of master in this sense, we shall receive the greater condemnation. This is sin and sin runs its own course.

“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:14-15, [Matt. 7:1-5²]).

This sin reveals a base ingratitude, and in condemning others we condemn ourselves (Rom. 2:1³; see also Matt. 18:23).

To prevent any of us from shirking off this admonition or seeking to find someone else to blame, James includes himself in the warning; “*we* offend” (v. 2). This is to keep any of us from switching the blame from ourselves. Many who hear such an admonition begin to look at others who might have rebuked them and put the blame on them. “*We* offend” makes it clear that this is not about someone else. It is “*we*” who are warned not to be many “masters.” The first phrase of verse 2,

¹ **Ecc. 7:16**, Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?

² **Matt. 7:1-5**, Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

³ **Rom. 2:1**, Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

“For in many things we offend all,” is a general statement that sets up a particular distinction. Being sinners and prone to a thousand failures a day, we cannot help but offend. Though we seek to put our best foot forward we still do things and say things that offend others. This kind of offense is not what is being addressed here. Though we offend this way, we are to be very careful and diligent not to offend by setting ourselves up as the rebuker of others.

We are to be careful not to offend with words of rebuke that put our brethren beneath us (Matt. 18:10¹). This is the danger of the tongue, and this is how James introduces the subject. As he further considers the nature of the tongue, it must be remembered that he does not speak in generic terms. What ever he says about the tongue has to do with the pride and arrogance of placing yourself as a master and lording your mastery over other brethren.

The brother who is able to offend not in word is a mature brother because he is able to bridle his tongue (v. 2). If he is able to bridle his tongue, he will be able to live a life of temperance or self-control. The wording of verse 2 suggests that the inclination to rebuke with words is in all of us because we are to seek to bridle it. The difficulty of this is set forth in verses 3-5. We have, as human beings, tamed animals by putting bits in their mouths and bringing them to obedience. We can even steer huge ships with a small rudder. But the tongue, as small a member as it is, is not tamable. It boasts great things, is used for supposed mastery, and like a single

¹ **Matt. 18:10**, Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

match can destroy much. “My brethren, be not many masters” (1:26).

A WORLD OF INIQUITY

JAMES 3:6-8

6, And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

7, For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

8, But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

As we have seen since we began this study in James, it is imperative that we look at these warnings and admonitions for *ourselves*. We must take them personally and seek to abstain from applying these words to anyone but ourselves. From the moment that bridling the tongue was first mentioned, I have heard the words of my grandmother and mother ringing in my ears, “Bite your tongue,” “Watch your mouth,” “I’ll wash your mouth out with soap.” These words usually came on the heels of some expletive I had rendered, but often they had to do with speaking ill of others, which was rude and unacceptable. Back then, it seems that folks understood the power of words to harm and injure. Though physical pain can be forgotten and forgiven, words are planted in the brain like vines that grow in the memory as the years pass. We all remember things that

were said to us, or things we said, that live today as fresh as when they were spoken. The power of words is that we cannot un-remember them. Our memory of them does not seem as history but as if they were spoken just moments ago.

This is the meaning of bridling the tongue. The “tongue” refers to utilization of words. James has prefaced this text with many examples thus far with the word “say.”

James 2:

3, And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and *say* to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

12, So *speak* ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

14, What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man *say* he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

16, And one of you *say* unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

18, Yea, a man may *say*, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Some might read the verses of this study text and think the effect of the tongue is even exaggerated. The language used to describe the possible effects of misusing words seems hyperbolic. Remember that these words are inspired by God, and if He uses such words, they are meant to teach and instruct us that our words can do much more damage than

we can even begin to imagine. What this text teaches us in a sure and certain way is that though we may think our words to be of little consequence, they are in truth much bigger and much more powerful than we are. They can defile our entire being, and they are beyond our own ability to subdue, recall, or tame. In our text, there is a sense of something horrible being unleashed, a kind of evil that once it is out of its cage cannot be captured, caught, or arrested. We may apologize and we should, but no apology, no “*mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*” can undo what evil words have done.

Would to God that these words could be taken immediately to heart and the principles warned against could teach us to bridle our tongues. Unfortunately, because we *cannot* tame our tongues, the lessons learned are gained by experience and generally at the cost of loved ones, folks who are damaged by our words and can never come to trust us. May God give us the grace of understanding to hear these words. Pray that He will plant them in our hearts and set them as a bulwark in our minds, that our thoughts may be so fenced in that they never reach our lips. There is ample admonition and warning about these things in scripture.

“An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire” (Prov. 16:27).

“He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit” (Psa. 17:27).

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife” (Psa. 26:20-21).

“My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue” (Psa. 39:3).

“Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue” (Psa.52:4).

“Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips” (Psa. 106:33).

“Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Psa. 141:3).

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John. 8:44).

“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire” (Matt. 5:22).

When Paul set forth the principles of depravity in Romans 3, he made three references to the tongue as a vital and despicable element of the vileness of carnal humanity.

“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13-14).

The description of the misuse of words is found in verse 6 of our text. “The tongue is a fire.” Ill spent words may seem a harmless spark, but once released it brings about a

conflagration of evil. It burns, brings pain, and consumes all that is in its path. Fire rarely burns only one thing. It spreads and torches everything it encounters. Your words unleashed at one brother will soon burn its way to others. It is an inescapable truth.

The tongue is a “world of iniquity.” Consider the magnitude of these words. This is not hyperbole, this is metaphor. The damage done by the tongue is like a “world,” a universe that operates with its own natural laws, its own weather, its own day, its own night, its own planetary system revolving around its own sun. Like any world, its inhabitants are not in control but at the mercy of the world itself. We have no power over our words once they are spoken. They become, by comparison to us, an enormous world, a world whose elements govern us and not the other way around. The misuse of words “defiles our whole [being].” No element of our being is untouched (Mark 7:20-23¹).

The tongue “sets on fire the course of nature.” The tongue is like a virus, which, when it finds a host, spreads malignantly to every cell. It is a “world of iniquity.” This word “course” means “wheel.” “Nature” here means “nativity.” Together, they mean “the beginning of the rolling thing called life” (Psa. 58:3²). Our tongue “speaking lies” is what sets our life in the direction it will roll. That is why Paul

¹ **Mark 7:20-23**, And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

² **Psa. 58:3**, The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.

was inspired to write, “Let God be true but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4). A lying tongue is not an anomaly of nature; it is the wheel on which nature rolls.

The use of the word “course” also gives the sense of a continuing and repeating cycle. We use this kind of language when we say something like “what goes around, comes around.” One ancient king, upon seeing the chariot wheels of his conqueror, smiled, and said, “The upper spokes will come down again.”

The tongue “is set on fire of hell.” This has to do with origin (John 8:44¹). The word used for “hell” is “Gehenna.” It refers to a gorge outside Jerusalem where garbage, animal carcasses, and other refuse was burned. It was a stinking, vile place and is often used in Scripture to represent eternal punishment and suffering. But here it has to do with origin rather than culmination. An evil tongue does not proceed from above but from a place of death, ruin, vileness, and filth. For a brother to use such words against a brother does not flow from wisdom but from the garbage dump of the natural mind and heart.

Mark well this description of the tongue because James uses it as a catalyst for all that follows.

The gist of the entire description of the ill-used tongue is to teach us a simple yet profound truth found in the comparative language of verses 7-8. No man can tame the tongue. Once again, we are shut up to grace. If God does not

¹ **John 8:44**, Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

tame our tongue, we will remain defiled by the “little member” in us that is a “world of iniquity.”

A CHRISTIAN?

JAMES 3:8-13

8, But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

9, Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

10, Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

11, Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

12, Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

13, Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.

Though James might be called the definitive book on good works, it is anything but a treatise on religious good works for salvation. James is written, as is the rest of the Bible, to and for believers. There is a notion among much of religion that when a person comes to know Christ, he is either immediately done with sin or begins a life that will enable him to eventually be done with sin. It is the ignorance of unbelief that causes men to dream that a person can reach such a high estate that he is done with the problem of sin. It is

every believer's desire to be without sin, but the human will simply lacks the power to overcome his own carnal flesh (Rom. 7:25¹). That fact is plainly stated to believers in verse 8.

Man, believing man, cannot tame his own tongue. He is unable to keep what is in his heart from being turned into words. If the tongue is to be subdued in the life of the child of God, the act of subduing it must be by the power of one whose will is accompanied with power to perform. The believer knows and is made painfully aware that as long as he is flesh, there is no possibility of ceasing to run off at the mouth., By this fact and many other evidences, the believer is shut up to the sovereign grace of God, not only to save him but to subdue his carnal flesh. This does not suggest that the believer ceases to try to do good and avoid evil. It simply declares that he will be utterly unsuccessful in himself and thus continually driven to Him who is, alone, his entire help.

Verses 9-10 are a statement of fact much like the words of Paul in Romans 7:25 and ample proof that the tongue is indeed untamable. Note that James uses the collective pronoun "we" further proving that, for the believer, our flesh and our spirit operate in opposite realms, from different places. It is not the infidel that uses his tongue to bless God and curse men, who though fallen, still retains some of the image of God—it is the believer (we) who do this. This is plain and an uncomfortable truth.

Verses 11 -13 further proves there is nothing in nature that does this but a fallen man who is recovered by grace. It is no wonder that Paul tells the Corinthian church that the spiritual

¹ **Rom. 7:25**, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

man is not discerned by anyone. The believer is a paradoxical enigma. With the same tongue, a believer can at times praise God, and at other times curse men (vv. 9-10). When they curse men, they are, in fact, cursing God, who is the cause of men existing and who retain some modicum of the image of their creator. These things ought not to be so (v. 10). He does not say they can be otherwise but declares that we *ought* to seek to have it not so. We ought to seek to bridle our tongue.

I believe that a simple premise is being stated in verse 10, underlying that which is clearly spoken. It relates to time, like the bitter waters of Mara were made sweet when a tree was cast into them; the tongue can utter bitter words, words of envy and strife at one time, and at another time utter words of praise to God. The difference is the *tree*. The allusion is to the *cross*. When we see Christ and him crucified for our sins as well as the sins of the brethren, we will utter words of praise, will love our brethren, and see them as forgiven and righteous. When we take our eyes from our savior, we will see our brethren without the benefit of grace, and we will curse them. However, we are convinced of this sin in that we, in ourselves, are sadly able to bless and curse at the same time. When we would do good, evil is present with us!

Of all things in creation, the believer alone possesses this crippling attribute. To show this fact, James takes us to nature to reveal the believer's sadly unique capability (vv.11-12). He asks some rhetorical questions, questions that contain the answer in the question itself. James is teaching us that the dilemma of being righteous and being evil, of doing good and doing evil at the same time, is found in only one creature, or created thing. Does a fountain send forth sweet water and

bitter at the same time, from the same hole? Of course not! Can a fig tree bear anything other than figs? Of course not! Can a berry vine bear figs? Of course not! No fountain can yield fresh water and salt water at the same time. Such a thing is entirely unseen and absent in nature. This condition belongs only to the believer. He can and does do both, and that is precisely why the tongue cannot be tamed by any man.

By these metaphors, James is showing that the blessing and the cursing come from two different places, two different sources commonly referred to in Scripture as the “old man” and “new man,” the flesh and the spirit, above and below (Col. 3:9-10¹). The wise man (v. 13) is to show out of a good conversation (seeking to live in a good way) his works with meekness and wisdom because bitterness and strife in the heart (quickly to migrate to the tongue) is vain glory and is lying against the truth that you are indeed a believer (James 3:14²). This bitterness and strife relates back to how we are to treat our brethren, whether rich or poor. They are to be treated the same and not given a higher or lower place in the economy of God as to status. To give one a higher place is to cause strife; it is to yield with the mouth both blessing and cursing at the same time. When we (the believer) curse our brother, that act (wisdom) does not come from above (where our spiritual life is hid with God in Christ), but from below (our flesh, our carnal nature). It is earthly, devilish (Satan-

¹ **Col. 3:9-10**, Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.

² **James 3:14**, But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

like), and sensual, which denotes that we get some fleshly delight from it.

The result of cursing (showing preference to one brother above another) is born of envy, produces strife, and causes confusion. Confusion comes when the effect of the blood of Christ is diminished by showing preference to one above another when both have the exact same standing before God. The flesh, that which is below, is the source of every evil work.

Next, we will see that good works do not flow from the new man but from a source outside the new man, to and through the new man. Man simply will never get glory for any good thing he does because there is a member of his body that cannot be tamed.

DOUBLE

JAMES 3:14-18

14, But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

15, This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

16, For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

17, But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

18, And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

In the admonitions and warnings that James has issued thus far, there has emerged a repetitive theme. Inspired by the Spirit of God, he is addressing that which has its origin in the fall of man in the garden. On that fateful day, a second thing was added to Adam's life that would, like leaven, permeate his entire frame, every thought, and every action that he performed throughout his days and would do the same for all that proceeded from his loins. That second thing was added to all that he had known. Until that day all he knew was good, but the second thing added was evil, and the course of human history was set on a career of utter ruin. This sad estate would be called by many names throughout the Bible, but they all reference the result of that single act of

rebellion. Instead of good alone, there would be evil. With light there would be darkness, with peace there would be war, with joy there would be sorrow, with spirit there would be flesh and with righteousness there would be sin.

James has used this duality to reveal the errors that plague us as believers in this life. In James 1:23 we see *hearers* but *not doers*. In 1:26 and 2:18 we see *seeming* but *not being* and *saying* but *not doing*. In 2:2-3 we see two brothers, one to whom respect is shown and another to whom respect is not shown. We have seen the forked tongue both blessing and cursing. This all speaks to that double (second) thing inherited in the fall, about which the Lord has some things to say.

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”
(James 1:8).

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8).

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and

mammon" (Matt. 6:22-24). (Note: this is in reference to treasure above and below, Matt. 6:19-21¹).

These two opposing things make up the way James finalizes his words in this chapter. He uses the concept of above and below to show us that the double mind and the double tongue does not find its origin in God but in man, not in the Spirit but in the flesh (v. 15; 1 John 2:15-17²). James' use of the word "wisdom" in verse 15 is either the language tool of sarcasm or is (probably) a reference to the doomed wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1:19-24³).

The lesson that James teaches is universal to the scriptures. The flesh and the Spirit are always contrary to each other so that we can never do what we would. If our dilemma is set and will not change, then why do we have this warning?

¹ **Matt. 6:19-21**, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

² **1 John 2:15-17**, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

³ **1 Cor. 1:19-24**, For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

It is the dilemma and constant struggle of the child of God. It is also the place where the believer constantly errs. The message is plain. *When we sin, when we are hearers and not doers of the word, when we have respect of persons, when we bless and curse out of the same mouth, we are operating in the flesh and not the Spirit.* This is a rule then, one that comes without exception or mitigating circumstance. If our eyes turn from the singular object of faith, we introduce another thing to our vision and we are thus in the flesh.

We may with our mouth bless God and at the same time curse men, but as this transpires, our doings do not come from above. They are earthy, sensual, devilish, and cause nothing but confusion and every evil work. There is no exception here and no possibility of change. So, it is addressed in this manner that we might ever be mindful of our constant, unending, utter dependence on Christ. Therefore, seek to do good. Do not be weary in well-doing. The dilemma will remain. We will always know that when we would do good, evil is with us. Our hope is Christ, and if we accomplish anything good it will be to His glory and not ours. Thus, to do right has nothing to do with reward. We seek to do right because it is right and for no other reason.

If such a desire, if such intent is in us, it does not come from us (v. 17). It comes from above. There are several things mentioned here regarding the wisdom that is from above. We know that Christ is the wisdom of God or the wisdom from above (1 Cor. 1:24, 30¹). So, these many things all speak of

¹ **1 Cor. 1:24**, But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. . . **30**, But of him are ye in Christ

some aspect of the singular thing that is to be the seat of our affection, the object of our faith—Christ. If it is from above, it is spiritual and not of the flesh.

What will you see when you look to Christ? First you will see that which is pure, without spot or blemish. He is the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. Secondly you see Him who is peaceable. He is the Prince of Peace. He is our peace. He gives us His peace. He has made peace with the blood of His cross. You will see the gentle One. He carries His lambs in his bosom and gently leads those that are with young. He is meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. You will see the One who is easy to be entreated, which means He is ready to obey. Though He thought it not robbery to be equal with God, he was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

You will see Him who is full of mercy (Mic. 7:18¹). You will see Him who is full of good fruits. He is the source of all good fruits (John 15:5, 16; Hosea 14:8²). You will see Him who is without partiality. All His loved ones are equal before His

Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

¹ **Mic. 7:18**, Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

² **John 15:5**, I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. . . **16**, Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

Hosea 14:8, Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found.

eyes. He will never esteem one above or below another. Though their functions in the body may differ, they all have the same standing in the economy of God (Gal. 3:26-28; Col. 3:10-11¹). You will see the One who is true and singular. He is without hypocrisy. He is not two faced. He is one faced (2 Cor. 4:5-6²). In Him there is no double eye or double mind. This is the wisdom that is from above (See Prov. 8:12-36).

Looking to Christ our eye will be single, and the fruit of righteousness, eternal life in and by Christ, will be sown in peace by those who have experienced this peace established by the blood of His cross (1 Cor. 3:5-6; Isa. 32:17-18³).

¹ **Gal. 3:26-28**, For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Col. 3:10-11, And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

² **2 Cor. 4:5-6**, For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

³ **1 Cor. 3:5-6**, Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

Isa. 32:17-18, And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

WARS

JAMES 4:1-5

1, From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

2, Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

3, Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

4, Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

5, Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

James has established the truth of the malady that afflicts the soul of every believer. The flesh and the spirit are in a constant state of disagreement and battle within the bosom of everyone who is born of God. Unbelievers have struggles of conscience and often battle within themselves, but those are conflicts that fall under the pale of the law and tend toward establishing personal merit. Conflicts in the flesh are real but have nothing to do with the Spirit and never serve to bring a person to the feet of Christ. Such conflicts are the bread and butter of religion.

Religion thrives on conflicts of the conscience because it operates in the realm of the law. Its intent is to create convictions based on behavior and dictate measures that bring men to reformation that they substitute for regeneration, which the law nor the conscience can ever produce. Religion knows nothing of what James addresses here because he speaks to those who have been regenerated, those who are spiritual and whose struggles are not of the conscience and the law, but of the flesh and the spirit. Religious conflicts leave a man feeling better about himself and play to his pride and self-righteousness. The conflicts of the spirit and the flesh leave a man humble, defeated and drive him to the feet of Christ. This gives the believer reason to rejoice when he falls into diverse temptations or trials because the result of this trying of faith will cause him to grow (James 1:2-4¹). This growth, this maturity will be downward in self and upward in Christ. Only in the truth of spirituality can humility and meekness be seen as growth. Only as the Spirit strips the flesh of its dominion is the flesh brought down and a person brought to despise even the “garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23).

We know by what we have seen in this study of James, and in various other treatments of this subject, that this dilemma is constant, unrelenting, and defines the life of the child of God while he remains in this body (Rom. 7:25²). A

¹ **James 1:2-4**, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

² **Rom. 7:25**, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

believer cannot and will not accomplish any spiritual thing in the flesh, and our Lord has devised the means whereby every effort of the flesh will end in ruin. In this chapter, our Lord gives us warning, explains the results of our fleshly efforts, and gives us admonitions that are reminders of where our help is found.

The description of the inward struggles of the believer is “wars.” Verse 1 has nothing to do with nations or tribes. This battle is waged in the inward man, the soul of every believer. The war rages because of our lusts (2 Cor. 10:3-5¹). No outside force or influence can be blamed for the conflict. It finds its ruinous motivation in the dark recesses of our own heart (James 1:13-14²). These wars within leak out and are vented toward the brethren. They result in evil choices based on status, in speaking out of both sides of our mouth, and in showing partiality and hypocrisy.

“Ye lust and have not” (v. 2). This is a reiteration of what was spoken in verse 1. We lose out on the joy of salvation; we put ourselves into deep holes because we lust. This does not refer to sexual lust but lust for power, status, and recognition that is achieved at the expense of our brothers and sisters. What we gain is just vapor. We may think we have gained

¹ **2 Cor. 10:3-5**, For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

² **James 1:13-14**, Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

something by raising ourselves up on the backs of our brethren but we “have not.”

“We kill” means that we envy and despise. It means that we desire other than what God has given. We covet a status that we imagine another has, when the fact is that no such hierarchy operates in the church of God. When we are operating in the power of the flesh, we obtain nothing! We fight and war, seeking to gain ground, but wind up empty “because [we] ask not.” We do not *seek help from the Lord*. We do not ask. This language relates us back to seeking wisdom and understanding concerning our trials (James 1:5¹). This tells us something about the response of the flesh to the pain of our trials. The flesh wishes relief and responds by showing respect to those whom we presumptuously assign status at the expense of others. We say caring words but offer no help to those in need because that would detract us from finding a way out of our troubles. We praise God and curse our brethren with the same tongue, praising at the forefront to cover our efforts in the flesh. All of this is driven by our lusts and prevent us from asking God for help.

This does *not* mean the believer forsakes seeking God (v. 3). “We ask.” We continue to pray, but our prayers are not offered for the praise of God, or from a heart of thanksgiving, or for the edification of the brethren. We ask for relief from our trial rather than grace to sustain us. We ask for God to justify our evil doings and to use our efforts in the flesh to accomplish what can only be achieved in the Spirit. We “ask and receive not.” We ask amiss because the intent of our

¹ **James 1:5**, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

prayers is for relief from what is *ordained for our good*. We ask for the sole purpose of satisfying our flesh. This is a prime example of the duality of the tongue which is able to set the course of nature afire, and a reminder that the flesh and the spirit are always contrary to one another so that we cannot do what we would.

This is adulterous behavior (v. 4). Again, this does *not* speak of the betrayal of a husband to his natural wife, or vice versa. This is *spiritual* adultery. It is betrayal of God for love of the world or self (1 John 2:15-17¹). Our old man (our carnality) is at enmity with God. When we apply to the flesh (our lusts) it is to fulfill the desires that we have toward self rather than God.

When we seek to undo what God has sent to us for our good by applying to the flesh, we are a “friend of the world” and an “enemy of God.” This is ample proof that this is a constant evil companion in our hearts (v. 5; Job. 5:6; Prov. 21:10; Gal 5:17; Rom. 7:25²). This is why Rahab (though a saint, saved by grace) is referred to throughout scripture as Rahab the harlot. These words serve to remind us of what we *will* do

¹ **1 John 2:15-17**, Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

² **Prov. 21:10**, The soul of the wicked desireth evil: his neighbour findeth no favour in his eyes.

Gal 5:17, For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Rom. 7:25, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

until patience has her perfect work. God will bring us to the end of ourselves in His good time but not before we are made to see that our hope is entirely in His grace (James 4:6; Rom. 5:20-21¹).

¹ **James 4: 6**, But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

Rom. 5:20-21, Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

JAMES 4:6-10

6, But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

7, Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8, Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

9, Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.

10, Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

This study has been an eye-opener to me. Things that I thought I understood have become much clearer to me. James has especially been helpful in opening the practical facts of the relationship of the flesh and the Spirit that defines the life of the believer. All the elements that have been covered bring us to this singular truth. Hearers and not doers, respect of persons, saying and not being, the source of our sin, and the forked tongue are all compounded to declare the estate of the child of God in this world, and further compounded to make us aware that without the grace of God we would be utterly and justly condemned.

It is also clear that the reason for our trials, and the reason we should be thankful for them, is that by the grace of God,

our flesh is subdued and the understanding of our need for grace increases. The patience that is the end product of our trials is that which causes us to know that the trials that come our way are necessary and are to be endured because we desperately need them. The concept of the refiner's fire addresses this matter of flesh and spirit in terms of dross to be consumed and gold to be refined. The reason for our trials is clear. We cannot improve ourselves. Our hope lies outside ourselves and beyond our ability. When the trials subdue the flesh, our spirit falls on Christ.

Since the flesh and the spirit are always contrary to each other, preventing us from doing what we would in the realm of either, it makes doing good an honorable pursuit. Doing good, seeking to be the kind of person we want to be, will not ever free us from the struggle. This knowledge, gained through trial, will give us patience, knowing that when the trial has run its course, we will be at the feet of our Savior. These trials are testings of faith, and we will find, when the trial has done its job, that what we have left is faith. And the object of faith is Christ.

We will find that *believing and not doing is how we overcome the world, and how our flesh is subdued* (1 John 4:4-5¹). To be not only a hearer of the word but a doer also, is to *believe* (John 6:28-29²). The design of the trial of your faith is to have you believe. In the face of all this evidence to the contrary, all the

¹ **1 John 4:4-5**, Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.

² **John 6:28-29**, Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

painful reminders of our carnality which the Lord has inspired James to remind us of, we (believers) are also spiritual. It is that life, the life of faith, the life that we cannot see, the life that is hid with Christ, the life that we cannot prove; it is that life that is the source of faith and hope.

Our carnality, our flesh insists that there is some way to escape what we are, to become better people, more personally holy. The spirit of God teaches us that just the opposite is true. We will not become better, more holy, more able to overcome, or better Christians. Our efforts in the spirit are accompanied by evil. Our efforts at evil are checked somewhat by the spirit. That we *want* to be better is the work of the *Spirit*. That we think by doing something we will be better is the work of the *flesh*. There is no instance in our life where one operates without the presence and the influence of the other.

Thank God that he gives “more grace” (v. 6). The use of the word “more” is a real encouragement. We might ask, “More grace than what?” He gives more grace than our flesh is able overcome. The flesh is our pride, and the “more grace” that He gives does not enable us to resist our pride. It is that He resists our pride and gives us grace to believe. Faith is synonymous with humility because faith confesses that our help and our hope is not in ourselves, but in Christ alone. Humility is not an affectation or a posture. It is *believing* God in the face of the fact of our carnality.

The admonitions given in the following verses define this humility and teach us what we are to seek after. The first admonition is to “submit” (v. 7). Submission is the absence of work or effort. It is giving up, saying “uncle”—it is believing

(Rom. 4:1-5¹)! Submitting is resisting the Devil. Submission will cause him to flee. Since the beginning, the Devil is about deceiving you to believe that by “doing” you will be better. To submit (to believe God) subdues the flesh and gives him no ground upon which he can seduce you. Resisting the Devil is not quitting this behavior or starting that behavior! “Doing” is his playground, and he is extremely efficient in his realm. To cease from doing and only believing puts him on the run. This makes no sense to religion; it is even a struggle to the believer, but it is the only way.

Drawing nigh to God is believing (v. 8). He is omnipresent. In Him we live and move and have our being. This is not a physical nearness; it is a spiritual nearness. Our flesh always drives us away from God. It is always *we* who leave. We leave Him in our mind and heart. “Cleansing of hands” and “purifying of hearts” are only accomplished by faith. “Hands” represent works of the flesh. “Hearts” represent affections. “Hearts” is plural; thus we are “double minded” (v. 8). How are the hands cleansed? They are cleansed by submission—by faith or spiritually (Rom. 6:12-14²). The affections are turned to affection by faith. The

¹ **Rom. 4:1-5**, What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

² **Rom. 6:12-14**, Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are

purification is the subduing of the *second* affection (Col. 3; 1-4; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 John 1:7¹).

How are you to afflict yourself, mourn and weep, cease from mirth (v. 9)? Only by believing (Lev. 16:29, 31²). Resting in Christ is believing, not laboring in the flesh. Christ is our Sabbath. He is the believer's rest. It is referred to as affliction, mourning, weeping, and ceasing from laughter because it is painful to pride and to self to lay our efforts in the dust. It was painful for Abraham to get rid of Ishmael; he loved the product of his flesh, and so do we. It afflicts our flesh; we weep and mourn its demise when we acknowledge that it has nothing to do with our standing before God. We want to think that our praying, giving, and attendance gives us a leg up, and when we see that they have nothing to do with our

alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

¹ **Col. 3, 1-4**, If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

1 Tim. 1:5, Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

2 Tim. 2:22, Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

1 John 1:7, But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

² **Lev. 16:29**, And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you. . . **31**, It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever.

salvation and that we are a product of grace, the realization can afflict us. Why, because we cannot be what we are not. We are flesh and spirit, and there is no dotted line to make us aware of which is which.

Believing is humbling yourself and being lifted to sit in heavenly places with Christ (v. 10).

SELF EXALTATION

JAMES 4:11-12

11, Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

12, There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The remainder of chapter 4 addresses what is opposite of the instruction in verse 10. In that verse we are told to humble ourselves, and the Lord will lift us up. What follows in our text are examples of self-exaltation or lifting up oneself. The warning and admonitions are given because of our natural bent toward endeavoring to do in the flesh that which can only be accomplished by God. These two verses relate back to the words of chapter 3:8-16. The words of our text do not deal with consequence, rather they are a revelation of a carnal attitude and are further a statement of presumed station.

In verse 11, we are admonished to speak not evil of our brethren because to do so is to judge our brethren. We know this to be forbidden from the words of our Lord.

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And

why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7:1-5).

Those words deal with the fact that we should first judge ourselves before we go about judging our brethren. We, if we judge ourselves, will find ample evil to occupy our time to the point that we will not have occasion to judge our brother or sister.

In this study text however, the words deal with what judging our brethren is truly about. It is about presuming to lift ourselves to a position that can never, has never, and will never belong to us.

The language is specific here as it deals with the *tongue*. We are judging our brother when we "speak evil" of him. Herein lies a dilemma. There is no doubt that our brothers and sister will disappoint us just as we disappoint them. We, because of how we are made, are incapable of not making judgments. We cannot shut down our brains. We may see a brother or sister take up an activity or follow a course that we know will lead them into dangerous territory. We may see our brother or sister do something we know to be wrong and will bring them sadness or woe. Our natural tendency will almost always be to judge and condemn even though we know better.

The admonition in our text is to seek to prevent our judgments from reaching our lips. When we *speak* evil of our

brother, we judge him publicly. Judgment leaves the area of our fertile brain and enters the public arena. Once that takes place, it cannot ever be retrieved. Once such judgment has entered the ears of other brethren, it makes it almost impossible to look at or hear the judged brother in the same way. Whether true or not, once it reaches the ear, it raises suspicion. Sadly, I know of what I speak. Pray God to prevent your judgments of a brother or sister from finding a voice. Better for it to remain in you until God puts it to rest than for it to get out and do damage that cannot be undone (James 3:6, 8¹).

When we speak evil of our brethren we are said to “speak evil of the law” (v. 11). Is James speaking of the Law of Moses? Is he speaking as if the believer has anything to do with that Old Covenant? No! He has not changed the subject of his book from the trials of faith to a treatise on works of the law. Nor is he suggesting that the believer is to apply to the law for remedy of this sinful attitude. The “law” we are judging, when we speak evil of the law, is the perfect law of liberty or the royal law (James 1:25, 2:8²). To judge a brother is to judge the gospel. It is to speak evil of the gospel.

To understand this, we must view it in light of what the gospel has accomplished for our brother. Through the gospel,

¹ **James 3:6**, And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. . . 8, But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

² **James 1:25**, But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. . . 2:8, If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well.

the declaration of the glorious successful work of Christ, our brother's sins have been put away. They will be remembered no more, nor will he ever be charged with them. Because of the work of Christ, sin will never be imputed to our brother. Likewise, because of that glorious work, our brother has been made the very righteousness of God in Christ. Christ is our brother's righteousness.

To speak evil of our brother, to judge our brother, is to declare that Christ did not actually accomplish all these things. To speak evil of a brother is to charge him with evil. To charge him with evil is to bring up what Christ has put away. It is to judge that the gospel of Christ (the law) met God's requirement but not yours. Though God has made him to be righteousness, you do not see him as such. To speak evil of a brother is to disallow the success of the Christ. To do so makes you a judge of the gospel rather than a doer (James 1:22-25¹).

Another thing that takes place when you judge and speak evil of a brother is to declare that you have some input in the work of Christ. You set yourself as a final arbiter concerning the truth of the gospel. You say, though the gospel declares your brother is righteous, you have somewhat to offer about that. Rather than humbling yourself before God, you have put yourself in the place of God. There is but one lawgiver—just

¹ **James 1:22-25**, But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

one who is author of the gospel. Either what He declares in the gospel is true or not true. If true, if He indeed is the only one who can make a judgment concerning sin, then any input you presume to inject puts you above Him and what He has said.

Only He is able to save and destroy (v. 12). This speaks of eternal things. God alone is able to save and destroy. Therefore, these things of God do not belong to you. To judge a brother belongs to God alone, and He has already done that in the substitution of Christ. He is satisfied with your brother. He has accepted your brother. He has forgiven your brother, and your brother is righteous in His eyes. There is no place for you in this transaction. You simply do not belong; therefore you have neither right nor warrant to speak evil of your brother.

The final phrase addresses the presumption of such an attitude. "Who art thou that judgest another." If we speak evil of our brother, we are judging our brother, and this is not our place. It is obvious that we are not humbling ourselves before God. We are not believing God; we are trying to be God. We simply do not qualify for the job. And to think otherwise is the height of presumption and a revelation of the depths of our natural depravity (Psa. 19:13; 1 Peter 2:10¹).

¹ **Psa. 19:13**, Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.

¹ **1 Peter 2:10**, Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

COME ON NOW!

JAMES 4:13-17

13, Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:

14, Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

15, For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

16, But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

17, Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

The words, “Go to now” have no true equivalent in today’s English. They are a kind of conclusive command, or a command based on conclusive evidence. We might phrase it “Come now” or below the Mason Dixon line “Come on now.” The idea is that legitimate proof has been presented that believers are guilty of being hearers and not doers of the royal law, of giving one brother a higher standing because of presumed status, of wishing a brother well who needs are more than a kind gesture, of praising God while at the same time cursing our brethren, of exalting ourselves even to the place of God, and of becoming judges of the gospel when we speak evil of the brethren. These things

are sensual and devilish. These things do not come from God but from the adventures and inventions of our carnal flesh. They reveal our unbelief, and when they occur, we are looking to self and at our brethren rather than to Christ.

Based upon that information, James confronts us all. It seems that he is changing subjects as he deals with the presumption of planning the future without considering that we are not promised tomorrow (v. 13). James is not changing subjects. He is addressing a concept that is required to exercise unbelief in the way that has been declared. To be guilty of these categorized sins requires a sense of future gain. The sad fact of our carnality is that in the flesh, we do nothing unless we believe that it will benefit us at some later date. To look in the mirror of the gospel and not remain there, but turn away and forget what manner of men we are, not only suggests a diminished respect for the truth but also that there is no sense of urgency. This attitude suggests that there is time left to do something about our condition.

The same principle relates to all the other things we are guilty of. If we pat a brother in need on the back, yet do nothing to ease his pain, we are saying by our lack of action that his desperate condition can be handled later and perhaps by someone else. To that James replies, "Come on now, you who say tomorrow we will do such and such."

This is addressed as the pinnacle of unbelief (v. 14). The fact is that we are not promised tomorrow. Not only that, we have no idea what tomorrow might bring and may not even be around to see it. The past is gone. It is over and nothing can change it. We may not see tomorrow. What we have is now, only now, the moment in which we now live and exist. James

illuminates this truth by declaring a simple yet profound truth. This is not metaphorical language; it is statement of fact. Our life is a breath, a vapor, an invisible thing that if withheld will bring about our immediate demise (Job 7:6; 9:25; 12:10; Isa. 2:22¹). It is the height of audacity to presume a future when our life hangs on a spider's web. We have now, but a second from now we may be gone. The decider is God (Prov. 27:1²).

This unbelief affects our very being. We really do not believe that we might not see tomorrow. It is the nature of the flesh since we in the moment feel life that we cannot imagine that our estate will change. We know mentally that we will die (someday). We know from scripture that our death is immanent. However, we cannot really wrap our minds around the fact. The proof is in the fact that we, with relative ease, treat our brethren as if tomorrow is a sure thing.

What if we really knew that we would not see tomorrow? What if we *really* believed it in our hearts and our minds *really* embraced the fact? Do you think that your life would be different? Would you, as a dying man or woman, be able to look into the gospel, turn away, and forget what manner of man or woman you are? Would you, who will leave all you have to someone else, discount your brother in need? Would

¹ **Job 7:6**, My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. . . **9:25**, Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good. . . **12:10**, In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

Isa. 2:22, Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?

² **Prov. 27:1**, Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

you even consider the difference in status from one brother to another? Would you be able to, with ease, praise God and at the same time curse your brethren? Would you deign to put yourself in the place of *deity* and judge your brother? You know the answer. Scott Richardson once said, "Rehearse your death." Indeed, do, and you may well begin to live. Dying people shuck all the dainties, all the grudges, and think only of what awaits them after death. If you and I really laid hold of our imminent death, the fragility of life, and the speed with which we approach the grave, how would we live? What would be precious to us? The things James has proved show us that we think there is plenty of time to do what's right.

Such an attitude also reveals that when we are in this state of unbelief, we do not consider the Lord (v. 15). When we see the words "we ought," it simply means that we are *not* doing what "we ought." Our desire ought to be to bow to the Lord's will rather than take our lives in our own hands. The fact is that our existence now and beyond now is entirely up to the Lord.

The root of that which James has proven is found in verse 16. It is self-exalting pride. To do any and all of what James has revealed about us is actually *boasting*. Not only is it boasting, but our sin is also compounded by the fact that we enjoy it. Place just one thing in this category for instance—speaking evil of your brother. Though in the end when the trial is finished there will be a conflict in our hearts, while the evil speaking is going on, God (who cannot lie) declares that we are enjoying it, rejoicing in it. It seems our depravity knows no bounds. It exalts the flesh and makes us joyful to despise our brethren. We would like to be able to deny this,

but we know and can remember the way it made us feel when we looked down on others. We know better. We know it is not right to do these things. We *know* they are evil. And there you have it.

This is where James has brought us (v. 17). If you and I know better and do not do better, it is sin.

We are to blame.

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:13-15).

It is not good and perfect.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

It is not from above.

“This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:15-18).

Come on now.

RICH MEN

JAMES 5:1-6

1, Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2, Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.

3, Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

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

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

6, Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

There is temptation to read these words and apply them in a general way as if they say that being rich is the same as being evil. Such thinking plays into the hands of social reformers and certain theories of economics, but to use this scripture in that way is error. The context makes it clear that “rich men” who live in the manner described, who think and act in the manner described, are the only ones being addressed. Being rich is not analogous with criminality;

indeed, if you are rich, the power to gain earthly wealth does not even belong to you (Deut. 8:18; Psa. 75:6-7¹).

It is the use of riches and what one feels about his riches that is addressed in our text, as well as throughout the entire Word of God. Riches do not corrupt. Men corrupt the purpose of riches. Riches do not make men sin, but riches do open numerous avenues and doors of which men would be better off not to avail themselves.

To understand the meaning of this part of James' message, we must remember that this epistle is to the church in general. This being the case, the rich folk described are either members of the church (though perhaps false professors), or their activities are a source of persecuting the church. In either case, their attitude is wrong, and with the employment of the negative attributes of these rich men, James conversely teaches the proper use and attitude toward riches for those who possess them.

Looking at these verses and the context in which we find them, it appears that these rich men, if professors, are false professors (James 1:26-27²). The things ascribed to pure religion are not found in the description of these rich men. In fact, the words and sentiments used by James are found in

¹ **Deut. 8:18**, But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Psa. 75:6-7, For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

² **James 1:26-27**, If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

other passages and generally are descriptive of religious fools. They certainly fall into the category of those described in the latter part of chapter four.

“Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:13-14).

The same phrase is used in verse 1 of our study text that is used in verse 13, “Go to now.” Again, this is an indictment based on incontrovertible evidence. Note well that none of the things revealed in these verses are admonitions; they are statements of fact concerning the behavior of these rich men. Verse 1 alludes to James 4:13-14. These rich men evidently feel that they are immortal. To their minds, their riches ensure that there awaits them many days to come. James declares the riches they possess, in which they trust, will be the source of great sorrow. What awaits them is not a flowery bed of ease but a short bed with narrow covers (Isa. 28:20¹).

Verses 2-3 describes these rich men as having invested their trust in things of no eternal weight or value (Matt. 6:19-21²; See Luke 12:13-21). Their attitude toward riches is in fact

¹ **Isa. 28:20**, For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.

² **Matt. 6:19-21**, Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

foolish! Nothing we have is ours unless we can take it with us when we leave this world (Job 1:21). We will leave all we have to another, and if truth be told, if we could rise from the grave, it is unlikely that those to whom we left our stuff would be enthusiastic to return it. Notice the personal possessive pronouns, “your” riches, “your” gold, “your” garments. These things in themselves are not corrupt; they are corrupted by the one who possess them. Corruption is in the world through lust (1:14-15; 2 Peter 1:4¹).

“Ye shall eat your flesh as it were fire” (v. 3) addresses the mindset of the rich man once he has learned that all he loved is wasted and stands as a witness against them. That which ought to be pleasurable will prove nothing but pain. Temporary joy will be turned to eternal sorrow, anguish, and the fiery sting of conscience. Every breath will be a reminder of his foolishness because what he thought was gain was in fact loss, and what he thought was securing his future was actually heaping up judgment against him (Rom. 2:5²).

Verse 4 probably relates to the way these rich men treated the brethren. They have defrauded those brethren who have been in their employ. The reason I say this speaks to the treatment of brethren is because of who hears their cries of injustice. “The cries of them which have reaped are entered

¹ **James 1:14-15**, But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

² **Peter 1:4**, Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

² **Rom. 2:5**, But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.” This title “sabaoth” means hosts. It means the “Lord of Hosts,” but particularly, it refers to the Lord as the protector of His people. These rich men, by their fraudulent behavior toward God’s people, have found themselves in contention with the people’s sovereign protector. For them, the outcome will be disaster.

Though these men have thought they were living well, they were actually as the calf that has been fattened for the slaughter (v. 5). Think of coming to the end of life to find that all you thought was gain for self has, in truth, been God filling your coffers and fattening your souls to bring you to the slaughterhouse. By their proximity to the brethren, it can be suggested that they have heard the testimony of the gospel. This, too, readies them for the slaughter (Isa. 6:9-10, Matt. 13:14-16¹).

These rich men are said to have condemned and killed the just (v. 6)—the justified, the believer, those who are justified by the blood of Christ. Whether by using their riches to bring them before judges who condemn and sentence them to death, or by withholding what is justly owed to them, and

¹ **Isa. 6:9-10**, And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Matt. 13:14-16, And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

thus preventing them from providing for themselves, the charge against them is *murder*. These “condemned and killed” ones are easy targets for these rich men because the saints bow willingly to providence and return evil with good. But a reckoning is coming to those rich men who act in this manner toward the children of God.

As I said in the beginning of this study, by omission, the attitudes revealed in this text teach those who are rich proper behavior. There is a French term, “noblesse oblige.” It means “nobility obligates,” or benevolent, honorable behavior is considered to be the responsibility of persons of high birth or rank. This principle applies to the rich, especially those who are saints (James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:16-18; Eph. 4:28; Rom. 12:13¹).

¹ **James 2:15-16**, If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

1 John 3:16-18, Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

Eph. 4:28, Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Rom. 12:13, Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

WHEN AFFLICTED

JAMES 5:7-11

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

8, Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

9, Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

10, Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

11, Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

The words of this passage are spoken to those brethren described in the last phrase of James 5:6¹. James has confronted the rich men who have maltreated the brethren by defrauding them. These evil acts are exacerbated by the fact that those who have been abused have not fought back or railed against their tormentors nor resisted them as they did them evil.

¹ James 5:6, Ye have condemned and killed the just; and *he doth not resist you*.

James now turns his attention to those who have received and are possibly still receiving the abuse from those rich men he described in the first 6 verses. Having declared that they did not resist these cruel taskmasters, he, with these words, assures them that they had acted correctly and encourages them to continue their non-resisting behavior.

Of all the things that the brethren are admonished to do, the principles of faith revealed in these words fly in the face of our flesh. The immediate reaction of the flesh, when a real or perceived affront takes place, is to strike out in self defense, self justification, or the basic drive of self preservation. This is revealed in the doctrine of first mention. When mankind fell into sin, it was not long until this element of our flesh was revealed (Gen. 3:12-13, 4:8¹). There is no doubt that what follows in our text relates back to James' teaching concerning bridling the tongue. a thing that no man, of himself, can accomplish (James 3:8²).

The words of verses 7-11 are admonitions about proper behavior when suffering the ill treatment of others. These words are to be taken personally, and only personally. This is not about the defense of a brother, a sister, or any other loved one. Love requires the defense of a brother or sister just as we are set for the defense of the gospel. Like all the commands

¹ **Gen. 3:12-13**, And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. . . **4:8**, And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

² **James 3:8**, But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

given to the brethren, they come as individual admonitions and are not to be used to get anyone but ourselves to behave. If we see a brother or sister answer mistreatment, we are not to employ these admonitions to straighten him or her out. These are for us as individual brothers and sisters.

When we perceive that we are being mistreated or defrauded, we are to be patient “unto the coming of the Lord” (v. 7). This does not speak of until He comes, though that is certainly a viable truth. This speaks of reacting in a manner that reveals our interest is invested in something and someone more important than our temporary discomfort. What awaits us as believers far outweighs any particular unhappy occurrence (Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 4:17¹). Remember, this book is about trials and our response to them. The first words of this book assure us that our sufferings are a result of being blessed of God (Matt. 5:9-12; Luke 6 :27-29; 1 Peter 2:21-23²).

¹ **Rom. 8:17-18**, And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

² **2 Cor. 4:17**, For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

² **Matt. 5:9-12**, Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Luke 6 :27-29, But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which

This first admonition (v. 7) declares the only way a believer can actually obey it. Once again, we are brought to the truth that our eyes are to be upon our Lord. The only way to be patient when we suffer persecution is to not look at the persecutor but at Christ. The example of the “husbandman” is given; the farmer who waits for the fruit to come, waiting in patience for the former and latter rain. The former and latter rain, again, points us to Christ (Joel 2:23–margin¹).

In verse 8, we are again admonished to be patient and to establish our hearts. This speaks more to long-term endurance or perseverance, but also speaks of a readiness of establishing the heart with grace because the Lord will soon appear. Because the Lord’s coming is nigh, we are to take care not to act in a wrong manner toward those who maltreat us (v. 9). Grieving, groaning (margin), or begrudging is the opposite of being patient.

The consequence of such an attitude is condemnation. We know that for those who are in Christ there is no condemnation (Rom. 8:1²). So, what does this condemnation

despitefully use you. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

1 Peter 2:21-23, For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

¹ **Joel 2:23**, Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. (Margin: “for he hath given to you the teacher of righteousness.”)

² **Rom. 8:1**, There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

refer to? Again, it refers to the improper use of the tongue. To grieve, or groan, or begrudge our persecutor reveals self righteousness and self defense. Any time we assert our righteousness, we condemn ourselves (Job. 9:20¹). The term “the judge [is at the] door” refers to the coming of Christ and relates back to the fact that we should act in a manner (especially concerning persecution) as men and women who are looking for that day (See 2 Pet. 3:10-18).

Verse 11 returns us to the theme of this book. “We count them happy which endure” (James 1:2-4²). While Paul was under the accusation of Tertullus and with men seeking his death, he said these words, “I think myself happy” (Acts 26:2).

Finally, to illustrate what he is saying, James points the believer to the one character in scripture whose name is synonymous with patience (v. 11). Job suffered greatly. He was assaulted by Satan and had to bear the ignominy of the so-called friends who assaulted him and defamed his God. This was endured while he suffered in body and mind at the loss of his health and his entire family, and James tells us, that we have seen “the end of the Lord.”

What was the end of the Lord for Job?

“The LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came there unto him all his brethren,

¹ **Job. 9:20**, If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.

² **James 1:2-4**, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

and all his sisters, and all they that had been of his acquaintance before, and did eat bread with him in his house: and they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him: every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one an earring of gold. So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters” (Job 42:10-13).

At the end of a trial, we will find that we have been the object of mercy and pity from of Lord (Psa. 103:8-14¹).

¹ Psa. 103:8-14, The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

PATIENCE IN TRIAL

JAMES 5:12-16

12, But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

13, Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14, Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

15, And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

16, Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

These final verses in James are often taken out of context and used as a “list” of things that will give men power over evil and sickness by the exercise of their faith. But these admonitions and promises are the other bookend of the first words of this book. To understand and apply these words we must see them in light of the truth of the believer’s trials. Trials come to the believer because they are *needed*. They are needed because we continually find ourselves reverting to the flesh, and the only way to bring us back to the

feet of Christ is under the pressure of a trial. These trails are the loving chastisement of the Lord. They are not punishment for our already forgiven sin but rather acts of correcting grace, pity, and tender mercy (James 5:11; Heb. 12:5-11¹). The warnings, admonitions and promises given here are instruction for those who have fallen into diverse temptations (James 1:2-3²). They are directions in the exercise of patience (James 5:10-11³).

It is not strange that the first warning given concerns the tongue (v. 12). We are warned against swearing by anything or giving an oath while going through a trial. The reason for this warning is that such behavior smacks of impatience, which we are to seek to embrace during trials. Thinking of

¹ **James 5:11**, Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Heb. 12:5-11, And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

² **James 1:2-3**, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

³ **James 5:10-11**, Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

trials and the duress involved with them, we can understand and probably even remember what it is to swear by something or make an oath. It is not beyond any of us to swear that we will do better if the Lord would just lift the trial. This swearing and promising never comes to fruition because patience must have her perfect work, but even if the Lord were to lift the trial, we would not honor our oath. To swear by something is to suggest that we hold confidence in that thing, that it will stand. Swearing, in this sense, is merely a revelation of unbelief, which has no place in the trial of faith.

Verse 13 is an admonition to be real or genuine. Human beings are great pretenders. They may think that suffering is somehow indicative of true faith. So, they will appear sad and broken even when everything is going well. To them, this means their suffering is meritorious. But it is false and disingenuous. The Lord admonishes us to pray when we are in trial, pray for grace, and mercy to see it through. But if all is well, do not act as if you are somberly enduring great suffering.

The other side of that coin is the false “happy face” when you are troubled. Many feel that to exhibit sorrow in times of trial is a sign of weakness, or even a sign of unbelief. So, they “buck up” and pretend that they are strong enough for anything that comes their way. This is false. The Lord says we are to sing psalms when we are merry but pray when we are afflicted. We are to react genuinely to whatever state we are in (Ecc. 3:4¹).

¹ **Ecc. 3:4**, A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

In verses 14-15, we see sickness as a particular trial of faith. This is sometimes the manner of the Lord's trying of His people. This is how this must be viewed, or we will misuse these verses. There is nothing wrong with calling for the elders if you are sick and asking for anointing with oil and prayer, but if that sickness is a common malady, or a sickness that is unto death, this prayer and anointing does not fit. Since we are not privy to the will of God in this sickness, it is reasonable to call for the elders, but it will only prove effectual if the sickness is a trial of faith. Anointing with oil during the times of this writing was often a form of medication, a thing used to soothe the spirit.

Religion and superstition have attributed mystical powers to this practice because it has been removed from its context. The prayer of faith by the elders and the one who is sick, will save or raise up the sick if that sickness is a trial of faith. This is explained further in the last phrase. If this man's sin is the cause of this trial of sickness and he and the elders pray, that which was the cause of the trial will be forgiven. This is proof that patience has had her perfect work. Such a sick one cannot apply to the flesh for it is weak. Finally, he has been brought to the place to call on the Lord for help (James 1:3-5¹). This is the ultimate design of every trial of faith (1 Pet. 1:5-9²).

¹ **James 1:3-5**, Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

² **1 Pet. 1:5-9**, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though

Verse 16 is a kind of summary of the verses we have considered in this study. Again, remember that this has to do with trials of faith. This is not a general admonition. When we or a brother or sister have fallen into diverse temptation, it is a true comfort when one who has been through such a trial joins with us in the understanding that it is our sin, our efforts in the flesh that has brought us to this place of sorrow. He understands because he has experienced the same. False friends will remind us of our faults, true friends will remind us of theirs (2 Cor. 1:3-7¹).

We are admonished to pray for one another (v. 16b). This is interesting because of the reason given. Pray for one another "that ye may be healed." This is spoken to the one who is being tried. He is to pray for his brethren. In verse 11, Job is mentioned, and I think the Lord inspires James to write this phrase in direct reference to Job.

now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

¹ **2 Cor. 1:3-7**, Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

The last phrase of verse 16 is one that cannot be understood outside the context of the trial of faith. Many take this to mean that if you are living right and being holy, your prayers will make things happen. First, this has nothing to do with what men would call personal righteousness. Remember, these words are spoken to those whose sin and faults have brought them this trial. The righteous man is the man to whom the Lord has imputed righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21¹). The righteous man is the believing man whose faith is being tried because of some manifestation of unbelief. It is the trial that brings the believer to such effectual (determinate) fervency (importunity). That man’s prayer will “availeth much.” The “much” that is availed is the patience that is needed. When the trial brings you to camp at mercy’s door, it will have accomplished its design. The prayer will not alter purpose, or stop the trial before it is finished, but it will change you. It will turn your eyes from yourself, the trial, and everything but Christ who is your hope (1 Cor. 10:13²).

¹ **1 Cor. 1:30**, But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

² **2 Cor. 5:21**, For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

² **1 Cor. 10:13**, There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

PRAYER

JAMES 5: 17-20

17, Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.

18, And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

19, Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

20, Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

These remaining verses continue the theme of verse 16, concerning "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man." As we saw in the last study, the righteous man is not so personally but is one who is *made* righteous by the effectual *work* of Christ, that one to whom Christ has been made to be his righteousness. The prayer of *that* man "availeth" much. The subject is still, availing yourself to those who are going through trials; praying for them, supporting them, and identifying with them (v. 16).

Verses 17-18 are inspired proof that the righteousness referred to in verse 16 is not personal righteousness but imputed righteousness. The man who is declared as an example of the righteous, effectual, fervently praying man is said to be a man that is "subject to like passions as we are."

This declares that Elijah was just a man, a man who suffered as we suffer, failed as we fail, and sinned as we sin. Elijah prayed and the Lord shut up the heavens, and when he prayed again, the Lord opened the heavens because he was accepted in the beloved and righteous in Christ. His prayers were answered. This does not mean that if we pray, God will cause it to stop raining. Those prayers were specific as judgment against Israel. The prayers addressed here concerning our own trial, or that of a brother or sister, address seeking the Lord for help to endure the trial. These prayers are not general. They are specific to the situation.

The situation is the trial of sickness and the deliverance of the brother from erroneous thoughts and actions that often attend us when we are in pain. It is a prayer to set the suffering one to look to Christ that he may endure the trial with patience. The specificity of this prayer is also suggested by the words, "effectual fervent." These may not only mean "importunate;" the words can also mean "inspired" or "inwrought" suggesting that God sent the prayer to the heart of the righteous man. The wonder of this is that God, in His sovereign majesty, uses prayer to accomplish His purpose, and He uses prayer because He inspires the prayer in the first place. The last phrase of verse 16 could well read, "The inspired, *inwrought* prayer of the righteous man availeth much". The truth of this principle can be seen in the words of David.

"For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee" (2 Sam. 7:27).

The last two verses are often used outside their context as "proof texts" for multitudes of error. The word "convert," we know, is a word that is often attached to salvation. Likewise, "save a soul" is a phrase that often speaks of salvation. But in this context, neither conversion nor saving a soul has to do with *eternal* salvation. That great thing was accomplished by Christ alone and is the clear and unadulterated proclamation of Scripture. No man is a part of spiritual conversion or eternal salvation of the soul. These terms apply to the help and aide given to those in times of trial, through prayer and affectionate identification. The effectual, fervent, inspired, inwrought prayer of the righteous man, in this context, converts and saves the soul of the brother or sister in the throes of a trial.

The first words of verse 19 set things in proper order. Here, James addresses the brethren, those who are the eternally redeemed and sanctified by Christ. His words leave no room for anything other than this interpretation. "If any of you do err" envelops all believers and especially those righteous men who pray. The truth is, when in the midst of trial, we all often err. This "error" is the same as the "sins" in James 5:15¹. The truth against which the brethren err is the essential truth; the trial is sent for our good and is necessary chastisement to bring us where we need to be— at the feet of Christ (James 5:12²). *This "conversion" is turning our eyes back*

¹ **James 5:15**, And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

² **James 5:12**, But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

to where they should be. *This* "conversion" is turning from the efforts of the flesh to spiritual understanding. *This* "conversion" is the prayer of faith that saves the sick (v. 15). Our Lord used conversion in the same sense when He said,

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:32).

"Let him know" (v. 20) is a word of encouragement from the Lord to pray for and aide the brother in trial. The Lord is letting us know that our labor in prayer and supplication is not in vain. Our prayers for a brother, or for ourselves in the midst of trial, saves the sick and availeth much. It converts the sinner from error. Again, be reminded that we are the one who has erred (v. 19a).

The inwrought prayer of the righteous man, offered on behalf of the one whose trouble is a result of chastisement for the sin that brought the trial, will save his soul from death (v. 20). Here the language is metaphorical. The apostle Paul spoke in a manner similar.

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Tim. 4:16).

Though this can be applied to the brother for whom we are praying, this could again relate back to Job. Several versions of the scriptures interpret the word "his" from verse 20 as "his own," or "himself. Either way this speaks of directing the eyes of faith to Christ. The use of the word "soul"

speaks metaphorically of the seat of emotions or the affection of the heart. The saving of the soul here refers to delivering the affections, turning them to things above and not things of the earth. Metaphorically, “death” here means the despair that accompanies suffering. Our Lord here guarantees us that, in this situation, the prayers of the saints will deliver (save the soul of) the tried one from his despair. The only deliverance from despair is hope (Psa. 42:5, 11¹).

The final thing said which draws the book of James to a close is a reminder of the effect upon us as we pray for our brethren in trial. When we pray for each other, we do not call to remembrance the faults of our brethren in seeking to find or announce their sin. We consider them in Christ as one whose sins are hidden, put away, to be remembered no more.

The book of James is “the book of instruction” for when we fall into diverse temptations.

¹ **Psa. 42:5**, Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. . . **11**, Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

