

*Reigning Grace and the book of . . .*

James

# The Fruit of Faith

Readings from the  
Book of James



Waukesha Bible Church  
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# "The Fruit of Faith"

Readings from the Book of James  
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*Reigning Grace* is the Theology of Waukesha Bible Church

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## *Preface*

Since 1951 Waukesha Bible Church (WBC) has ministered to the Waukesha community. WBC is a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based Ministry. As a fellowship we are convinced that God is honored in the careful handling of His Word and in the acknowledgment that His Son, Jesus Christ, is enough for this life and in the life that is to come. We are equally convinced that God has entrusted us with this message. It is a message of life and not death; of freedom, not bondage. We wish to take this message to the ends of the earth until worshippers from every tribe, tongue, people and nation have been gathered to honor God.

### A Word of Introduction

Local Churches have received from God a sacred trust. This trust is a mission. This mission is defined for us in Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, and 2 Timothy 2:2. This same mission is pictured for us by the early church in the activity of the apostle Paul beginning in Acts 13:1. The mission is to duplicate herself in the lives of others. Church health is not defined by numerical size or budgetary well-being, but by the degree to which they are intentionally engaging in the reproducing of local churches. Churches birth churches. God's safeguard against doctrinal defect and pastoral apathy is through the strengthening and establishing of local churches.

### What is the Purpose of this Study?

The intent of all study is to ask the hard questions and to seek Biblical answers. Parroting standard answers without learning the truth first hand will produce an anemic faith. May it please our heavenly Father to open our eyes to the magnitude of His grace so that we might understand all that we are in His Son and all that He is for us.

### A word about Torn Veil Publications

Torn Veil Publications (TVP) is the distributing arm of WBC and exists to shout the supremacy of God in all things by finding, celebrating, and declaring that He is enough in this life and in the life to come through the systematic study of Scripture and to share Him with every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. It is all designed as part of the WBC vision to spread a Christ-Exalting, Word-Centered, Global-Impacting, Grace-Based message to others.

## *An Introduction*

The fruit of most prickly pears is edible. The branches that produce the prickly pear are also cooked and eaten as a vegetable. Because of the thorns on the branches, great care is required when harvesting or preparing prickly pear cactus. The book of James is like the prickly pear in that its fruit is surrounded by “stickers.” Care needs to be exercised when handling the book of James yet the “risk” is acceptable and the results are well worth the effort.

From its inception to its conclusion, James leaves no doubt as to where he stands concerning the hardships of life and the activity of God with his opening statement of “Consider it all joy, when you encounter various trials” (1:2) and his concluding remarks with “The Lord will raise him up” (5:15).

James cannot be viewed apart from a God-centered focus. Thirteen times James uses the word, “God.” Thirteen times he uses the word, “Lord.” And twice he uses “Jesus Christ.”

His intent is to provide for the reader a God-centered focus on *The Fruit of Faith*. It has often been said that “Works cannot save, but saving faith works.” The fruit of faith is never looked upon by the biblical writers as a work of man. It is always viewed as a fruit of the Holy Spirit (John 15:5; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12, 13; Gal. 5:22).

One of the “thorns” surrounding the fruit in James is our propensity to make harder what God says is “easy and light” (Matt. 11:28-30). We see the admonitions in James and take it upon ourselves to shoulder the unattainable burden of trying to produce what is clearly a revelation of Jesus Christ.

The fruit of faith is not something to be produced, but to be enjoyed. We participate in what God produces by resting in His finished work. As you read through James and use these short readings to perhaps guide you in your understanding of the book itself, I trust you will see Christ and His finished work in your behalf. May His work become your rest.

## *"An Opening Salutation - Reading Between the Lines"*



*"James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings." (James 1:1)*

Read James 1:1

As I begin reading the book of James, I cannot help but note what is left unsaid in the very first verse.

There are several individuals within the New Testament named "James." Most concur that the James named in 1:1 is a half-brother of Jesus Christ. We know that Jesus was the first-born son of Joseph and Mary. We also know Jesus had several brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55, 56). What we cannot imagine is the struggle it must have been to have a perfect brother. We use the term loosely when we say that someone is a perfect child or that a performance was perfect, yet never was there anyone like Jesus. He actually was perfect.

He never had a wrong thought, spoke ill of anything, had a misstep, did a wicked act with His hands, or looked on anyone with evil intent. He was the perfect child.

Then you have the rest of His siblings. They too were "perfect" . . . in as much as they did not give their parents too much grief and gray hair. Nonetheless, between their "perfection" and His, a great gulf existed.

I cannot fathom the struggle that existed in the hearts of Joseph and Mary. Feelings of favoritism and partiality were constant battles. Knowing that your firstborn was virgin born and the unique events accompanying His birth was enough to topple lesser people from becoming excessively proud.

I wonder how many times Mary or Joseph said to their children, "Why can't you be more like your brother Jesus," only to catch themselves and sit back with astonishment. Yet, it is this James, His half-brother who is now positioned as a follower of Jesus Christ, recipient of divine revelation, and an instrument in providing Scripture.

When considering the book of James, I believe it is significant for us to note three important foundational truths. These three truths will come into play as we examine each paragraph within the book.

**First**, the book of James is the first of the New Testament books written. The date assigned is usually around 46 AD.

**Second**, because of this, the New Testament church will be predominantly Jewish. James is writing to a non-Gentile audience.

**Third**, James is writing to a Jewish audience. The language and imagery he employs is very much rooted in the language of the Old Testament. We should expect nothing less.

**Finally**, it should be remembered that what James wrote is pre-Pauline. The message of James is consistent with the overall message of the New Testament. However, it will lack the Pauline emphasis on Christ and grace that colors all of Paul's letters.

The message of James will be strongly colored by the Gospel of Matthew. In fact, it will be noted how there exists many parallels between the book of James and the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

As we begin the book of James, let us keep in mind the initial guidelines for understanding his thoughts and let us learn to rejoice in the revelation James does provide for us of our Lord Jesus Christ ...his half-brother.

*"Counting It Joy"*  
"Consider it all joy, my brethren,  
when you encounter various trials." (James 1:2)

2

Read James 1:2-4

In this paragraph, James provides one of those paradoxical thoughts that the New Testament is so fond of placing before the people of God.

- To save your life, you must lose it (Mark 8:35)
- To bear fruit, you must die (John 12:24)
- To see the invisible (Heb. 11:27)
- To know the unknowable (Eph. 3:19)

In addition, we are, "to consider it all joy when you encounter various trials." I would venture a guess that most people find such a thought nigh impossible to implement. Just the opposite would probably be the most consistent response to a diversity of difficulty.

Nonetheless, the text exhorts us to consider it all joy. The idea of considering is to evaluate and judge. It is to weigh the outcome of the action and because of the consideration, it is found to be joy.

The text makes a prediction. It does not say, "if," but "when." Encountering various trials or temptations is inevitable. Life is problematic. On every hand and at every turn all people everywhere will face temptations. It is a daily occurrence. Not every temptation is to the same degree in intensity or duration, but they are present throughout life. Peter refers to this in 1 Peter 4:12.

Temptations or trials test faith. Trials show faith for what it is. Trials purge faith of its dross. It removes the imperfections of sight living in a temporal, transitory world. Trials enable us to see past the shadow of our existence and into the eternal.

Much has been written attempting to distinguish between a temptation and a trial. Many argue that Satan tempts whereas God tests. However, the Bible does not necessarily make such a "clean" distinction between the two. The word used in James 1:2 is **Peirasmos**. It has a sister word and it is **Peirazo**. **Peirasmos** is the noun form and **Peirazo** is the verb form, but they are essentially the same word. I wish to note several passages using the above two words to assist us in understanding our trials.

We can count it all joy because as God continues to flawlessly work out His will, He shall bring His work to completion.

When our Lord Jesus was in the wilderness, the text tells us that the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert in order to be tempted (Matt. 4:1). In the Lord's Prayer, temptation is viewed as something God our Father leads us into (Matt. 6:13). First Corinthians 10:13 strongly suggests that God controls our temptation. Hebrews 11:17 speaks of Abraham's ordeal in offering up his son Isaac as a trial or temptation. Let us not forget who led him into the situation (Gen. 22:1, 2).

The Old Testament narrative is equally emphatic as to who is in control of what. God controls our lives. Every trial is a temptation and every temptation is a trial. If God is not somehow controlling the outworking of my life individually, then am I a free-floating element in a pool of cosmic dust? God is intimately and personally involved in every detail of my life. Nothing escapes His attention. He is Lord of the details. Please understand. There is great mystery behind the outworking of all this, but just because we see through the glass dimly does not mean we are completely blind.

It is for this reason James can say, “Consider it all joy.” In the face of adversity and an insurmountable barrier, we can count it all joy. We can count it all joy because as God continues to flawlessly work out His will, He shall bring His work to completion. The product of His hand will be “perfect and complete and will lack nothing.”

There is nothing mentioned in James 1:2-4 for us to do but believe that “faithful is He who called us who also will do it.” He will finish His work. The “work” is in believing this. It is for this reason, the next paragraph (1:5-8) begins with, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.” As we consider the mystery of life and the outworking of His will, let us ask Him for wisdom in understanding what we struggle to accept. As He opens our eyes and we embrace His will, then (and only then) will we find rest.

## "Asking God for Wisdom"

# 3

*"But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." (James 1:5)*

Read James 1:5-8

Verse five connects with the preceding thought. It is difficult to "Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials." Because of this, God invites us to ask for wisdom. Can you see the connection between the two thoughts? It is difficult to appreciate how my temptation/trial is working in me His will so that I "may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (v. 4). Asking for wisdom is trying to understand what we know to be true against the backdrop of my tangible reality. Knowing God is in control of each moment of each day allows me to rest in my decision making and the outworking of events.

Asking for wisdom is trying to understand what we know to be true against the backdrop of my tangible reality.

God, the one being asked, "gives to all generously and without reproach." James' source of confidence in God's response is rooted in the character of God. The word "generously" is only used in the New Testament. The thought is that of unconditional or simple.

"Without reproach" means He does not hold it against us. He does not give it to us expecting anything in return. It cannot be merited or paid back. There are no strings attached.

If we ask, we will receive. Verse six qualifies the asking. It must be done in faith. The contrast is between the one with faith and the one who doubts. The doubter continues to be identified as one who is "driven and tossed by the wind" (v. 6). He is "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (v. 8).

Who is this individual with faith? James uses the word "faith" in twelve verses (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5, 14, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26; 5:15).

James 1:3-4 reminds us that a genuine faith when tested shows it to be perfect, complete, and lacking nothing. The object of our faith is the Lord Jesus Christ (2:1). Those who have faith have been recipients of God's gifting (2:5). The classic passage on faith/works (2:14-26) clearly shows the inseparable link that exists between the two. A faith without works is a dead faith. It is a faith that is neither genuine nor salvific (2:20, 26). A living faith has offspring. The children of a living faith are works.

It is interesting to see how the offering up of Isaac by Abraham was a work that perfected faith (2:21, 22). The work was a temptation/trial. It is the same idea expressed in 1:2-4. We know from Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. We also know that the just live by faith (Heb. 10:38).

If James is using the word “faith” consistently, then the person of faith is a believer.

Who is this double-minded doubter? It is used only twice in the New Testament and both times are in James, 1:6 and 4:8. The word means literally, “double-souled,” a suggestive indication of the depths of this individual’s instability.

James 4:8 is interesting and we will note it in detail later. It is found in a series of contrasts (4:4-10). Inside of the contrasts the question needing to be asked and answered is this, “Does the New Testament ever identify those in Christ as being sinners and double-minded?”

Never in the New Testament is the word used for proud in James 4:6 used of the believer, always the unbeliever (Luke 1:51; Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:5).

There is a sense of an ongoing cleansing and purifying for the people of God who are already cleansed and purified (John 13; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 1:7, 9; 3:3), but they are never identified by the title sinner or double-minded.

Our greatest difficulty lies in trying to describe what we are experiencing with language that is scripturally accurate. To say a believer is a sinner or double-minded person might accurately depict their present behavior, but it is not what they are. Let us return to our present paragraph (1:5-8). If the believer is a person of faith, then God answers their request for wisdom. This appears to make sense. God answers only the prayer of His people. He does not answer the prayer of those who are not His people (except for salvation). Today as you wrestle with finding contentment in the outworking of His will, ask Him for wisdom and rest knowing He will both hear and answer your request.

# *"The Brother of Humble Circumstances is to Glory in His High Position"*

*"But the brother of humble circumstances  
is to glory in his high position." (James 1:9)*

# 4

Read James 1:9-11

James 1:9-11 is a study of contrasts and incomprehensibles . . . "Let the humble glory in their high position and let the rich glory in their humiliation." This is both contrasting and incomprehensible.

Why are the humble to glory in their high position? What makes necessity desirable? Why are the rich to glory in their humiliation? What makes abundance attractive? There is no question as to wealth's attraction, but the two are set against each other. The virtue of one's humiliation is its high position whereas the strength of wealth is its fleeting, temporal, transitory nature.

The word "humble" can mean, "depressed, humiliated" and thus, "low estate." One's humility is not always a result of "depression." The word describes our Lord Jesus (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). There is no question that God "elevates" the humble and "puts down" the proud (Luke 1:52; James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). God's grace comforts the "cast down" (2 Cor. 7:6). We are to identify with those who are of low estate (Rom. 12:16).

True humility is an attitude of spiritual want in the midst of material plenty. Humility says, "Regardless of what I possess or lack, He is all I need and want."

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Nonetheless, what makes a position of humility or necessity desirable? There are several statements within the New Testament providing an answer.

**First**, if Jesus is meek and lowly in heart, so shall those who follow Him (Matt. 11:29). This is the path leading to rest of soul.

**Second**, God exalts those who are of low degree (Matt. 23:12; Luke 1:52; 18:14).

**Third**, God comforts those that are cast-down (2 Cor. 7:6).

**Fourth**, the humble are recipients of God's grace (James 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

**Fifth**, the poor in spirit inherit the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3).

**Sixth**, the poor of this world are rich in faith (James 2:5).

True humility glories in personal poverty, necessity, weakness, and "failure," knowing that only in Jesus Christ is satisfaction, fulfillment, contentment, and "victory." This is Paul's point in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 and Galatians 6:13, 14. We are to glory in our weakness because in it His grace proves sufficient.

There is a sense in which the believer finds himself or herself in a hostile environment. The spiritual battle is no less real than experienced during any war. Many of us find ourselves oblivious to our surroundings, but the battle continues unabated. The enemy wants to deceive us into thinking that our tangible world is our reality, but God reminds us that loss is gain and that weakness is true strength. The Devil, the world's ideology, and our old flesh nature stand in ruthless opposition to who we are in Christ. Let us not kid ourselves and in so doing fall asleep when we should be praying, watching, and waiting. Let us embrace our weakness, regardless of how God might have prospered us, and in so doing openly declare that Jesus Christ is enough, in this life and in the life to come.

## *"He Himself Does Not Tempt Anyone"*

*"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God";  
for God cannot be tempted by evil,  
and He Himself does not tempt anyone." (James 1:13)*

5

Read James 1:12-18

There are few passages in the Word of God that are as intellectually stimulating as James 1:12-18. There is a vital connection between our present paragraph and what has proceeded. James 1:13 is the only verse that says that God does not tempt anyone. Everything else in Scripture would teach otherwise. I personally believe we need to look at this passage from a different perspective. It might still yield the same conclusion, but there are difficulties with the passage that we must be willing to face. The New Testament records for us twenty-one occurrences of the word "temptation." Its usage is revealing.

- ▶ God is the one who leads the individual into temptation (Matt. 6:13; 1 Cor. 10:13).

God has the power to lead into, as well as to deliver from temptation. First Corinthians 10:13 and 2 Peter 2:9 appear to say as much as Matthew 6:13 concerning God, the believer and temptation. God couples a means of escape with temptation in order that we may be able to bear it.

Such a thought is not foreign to James. James points out how we are to count it joy and to consider ourselves blessed as we endure temptation (1:2, 3, 12). Temptation's endurance is possible because God does lead us into the temptation and provides escape or deliverance from temptation.

This also appears to bring Genesis 22:1 into the picture, "And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, behold, here I am." This is also the idea found in the feeding of at least 5,000 men (John 6:6).

- ▶ The God-man Jesus Christ was tempted (Matt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18, 35; Luke 4:13; 22:28; Heb. 2:18; 4:15)
- ▶ There is reason to believe God uses secondary causation to "tempt" His people.

This is seen with Job and his trials (Job 1:12, 21; 2:6, 10). Job had no problem seeing his trials and tragedies as coming from the hand of God. Job had a proper world-view. Did God lead him into temptation? Yes.

It is also seen with David and the numbering of the people (1 Chron. 21:1, 7, 8; 2 Sam. 24:1, 10). Clearly the Chronicler puts God as the primary cause who chooses to use secondary means in leading David into a situation of temptation.

What is to be our relationship to temptation?

**First**, the Christian is exhorted to pray that he does not enter into temptation (Matt. 6:13; 26:41). Why are we to pray not to be led into temptation? We are to pray because our flesh is weak. This is in keeping with James 1:13. It is our flesh, not God which causes us to sin.

**Second**, the circumstances we call “temptation” are an opportunity for the old man to express itself (Luke 8:13).

**Third**, we are to consider it joy and blessedness when we fall into various types of temptations (James 1:2; 1 Pet. 4:12-13).

Why can we be joyful and consider ourselves blessed?

**First**, because it is a means of God showing Himself mighty in and through us (2 Cor. 12:7). This was Paul’s attitude toward his thorn in the flesh (Gal. 4:14; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). Paul’s thorn is seen as a messenger of Satan. God did not choose to deliver Paul from the temptation, but did provide a way of escape in the temptation. He caused Paul to see how His grace was sufficient. This is in keeping with James 1:2 and 12.

**Second**, because it is a means of God giving to us the crown of life (James 1:12).

**Third**, because it is a means of showing us that our faith is genuine (1 Pet. 1:6; Heb. 11-12).

Conclusion: In light of the above, how are we to understand James 1:12-17?

**First**, the context speaks of the compulsion to sin, not the circumstances that provide the opportunity to sin. It is our own internal lusting that produces the appetite to partake of temptation’s offer.

**Second**, the passage is telling us where the desire to sin comes from. It comes from within. Because of our sin nature we are driven to violate God’s ways. This is why Jesus could be tempted in all points yet without sin (Heb. 4:15). He had no fallen nature compelling Him to violate God’s ways.

Thus, James is not telling us that God will not lead us into any temptation. What James is telling us is when we do sin we do so because we want to. And such acts of sinning are never in violation of our own will. Each act of sin is a willful statement of rebellion against God.

Each act of sin is a willful statement of rebellion against God.
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Perhaps a better way of reading James 1:13 is from a theological perspective.

“Let no man say when he sins, God made me sin: for God cannot sin, neither does He cause any man to sin.”

Such a reading does justice to the overwhelming body of evidence found throughout the Bible. In fact without James 1:13, no one would say, “God does not lead anyone into temptation.” Because the evidence is contrary to such a thought, God does lead into temptation. Yet we can say with confidence based on James 1:13-17 that no one can blame God for his or her individual acts of sin. In fact, based on James 1:16-17, we are to consider temptation as one of God’s good gifts because of His design and purpose for temptation in the lives of His people.

## "In Humility Receive the Word Implanted"



*"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness,  
in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."  
(James 1:21)*

Read James 1:19-25

The passage before us is the pre-Pauline way of saying "Put off the old, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new" (Eph. 4:22-24).

James tells his audience

- To be quick to hear (1:19)
- Slow to speak (1:19)
- Slow to anger (1:19)
- To put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness
- In humility to receive the Word implanted
- To be doers of the Word
- Not to be hearers only

This appears to be a consistent thread throughout the book itself. James speaks of a faith without works being dead (2:17).

The one who "in humility receives the word implanted" (1:21) is the one who "shows his faith by his works" (2:18). The one who "merely hears the word" (1:22) is the one whose "faith having no works is dead" (2:17, 26).

Not to act upon the Word is to have a faith that is dead and such an individual is "deluded." To be deluded is to have a false evaluation of who you are. It is to falsely evaluate who you are and where you stand with God.

Douglas Moo correctly notes in his commentary on James,

"Those who fail to *do* the word, who are *hearers only*, are guilty of a dangerous and potentially fatal self-delusion. If the gospel, by nature, contains both saving power and summons to obedience, those who relate to only one have not truly embraced the gospel. That is why James can say that people who only *hear* the word are *deceiving* themselves. They think that they have a relationship with God because they regularly attend church, go to Bible studies or read the Bible. But if their listening is not accompanied by obedience, their true situation before God is far different. 'Obedience', says Calvin, 'is the mother of true knowledge of God'". (82)

James places great emphasis on the volitional aspect of man's makeup (i.e. his ability to choose). To hear the Word and not to act on it is to show the emptiness of one's faith. An obedient lifestyle will

be manifested by those in whom and through whom God is working. Such obedience, however, is not something outside of or detached from saving faith, but a vital consequence or result of saving faith. An effectual doer is the pulse of life in a living faith.

Becoming a doer of the Word is a natural and spontaneous result of having received the word implanted with a humble spirit.

We are prone to make acts of obedience similar to trading cards, something to be collected, traded, showcased, and gained. Acts of obedience are not to be looked upon as things to be conquered. They are not notches in the handle of our Christianity.

Becoming a doer of the Word is a natural and spontaneous result of having received the word implanted with a humble spirit. It is not something more than this, nor is it anything less than this.

Those who receive the word are those who are blessed by God. The Word has an inherent blessing built into it by God Himself. To simply hear the word without having it change one's life is to show the emptiness of one's faith. James says it is a dead faith.

It is the Word of God that is powerful to save the soul. It is powerful in our justification, our sanctification, and in our glorification. It is the Spirit of God taking the Word of God and doing a sure work in the people of God.

As we consider such powerful passages, let us remember the greatness of our God and His lavish dispensing of unmerited grace. To recall such truths is to move from a forgetful hearer to an effectual doer and it is this life that is truly blessed of the Lord.

## *"Pure and undefiled Religion"*

*"This is pure and undefiled religion  
in the sight of [our] God and Father,  
to visit orphans and widows in their distress,  
[and] to keep oneself unstained by the world."* (James 1:27)



Read James 1:26, 27

The contrast in our text is between a worthless religion and a religion that is pure and undefiled. The word "religion" means, "ceremonial observance." The emphasis is on one's practice in light of his profession. This emphasis is in keeping with chapter two where James contrasts a faith without works with a faith with works and in chapter three where he begins with the spotlight on one's tongue.

A worthless faith is one in which the tongue is left unbridled. The word "unbridled" means, "to curb, to be a bit-leader." The emphasis is not on someone who talks all the time (though Proverbs 10:19 does warn us about the danger of too many words), but on the person whose speech is degrading and destructive. "By his very conversation this man shows that he cares nothing for God and His will." (Luck, James, 37)

James 1:26 is almost proverbial. It interlocks with our Lord's thoughts in Matthew 15:18-20.

"But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

It is the same idea in Proverbs 4:23, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it [flow] the springs of life." "It is possible to be very religious and yet unsaved." (Luck, 38)

It has been said that the tongue of man is the dipstick to the heart. It is interesting to consider the verse in light of what has been preceding it throughout chapter one.

The emphasis appears to be on trials and temptations. In the midst of these difficulties great tension is placed on the individual. As we come under the burden of our circumstances we are more prone to say and do things that are caustic and malicious, hurtful and unguarded. In a sense, the trial reveals our heart (cf. 1:13; Heb. 12:5; Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10); it proves the integrity of faith. James tells us that our faith is only as good as its endurance under pressure.

When everything  
around us is  
collapsing and  
chaos reigns,  
what will be our  
response?

It is in this same context that we read verse 27. When everything around us is collapsing and chaos reigns, what will be our response? The tendency is to focus on self, to protect self and to survive. Yet, the one whose faith is real pushes past self-preservation and seeks the welfare of the less fortunate (i.e., "visits orphans and widows in their distress") and does not seek sensual gratification (i.e., "keeps themselves unstained in their world"). "The real litmus test of religion is obedience - without it, religion is vain: empty, useless and profitless." (Moo, James, 86)

A faith that is real is incapable of being placed under a bushel (Matt. 5:15). Genuine faith shines (Matt. 5:16). This appears to be the consistent message of James.

Today let us rejoice knowing that God is completing what He began. In the midst of our trying times, let us give thanks to the author and finisher of our faith. May God grant us the joy of having a controlled tongue and may He use us in the visiting of the downcast and keep us blameless in our conduct. “A pure religion combines purity of heart with purity of action.” (Moo, 87) May this be said of us.

## *"Reigning Grace and Personal Favoritism"*



*"My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with [an attitude of] personal favoritism." (James 2:1)*

Read James 2:1-13

"This paragraph is the first in James that develops a single idea at any length" (Moo, James, 87). Verse 1 gives the opening proposition, verses 2 and 3 give an illustration, and verses 4-13 provide for us an application. It is direct and forthright, "as Christians we are not to be a respecter of men."

The exhortation is built on the idea that God Himself is not a respecter of persons (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Acts 10:34). This sounds so foreign to the ears of a culture that is both relativistic and pluralistic. In our quest for political correctness, we would never dream of showing disrespect to anyone or anything; yet, God is not a respecter of persons. What exactly does this mean? This does not mean God is "disrespectful," but it does mean that God is not impressed by whom you are, or what you have done or how much you possess. None of these things make an impact on Him. God is simply not impressed.

Why is being a respecter of persons contrary to biblical faith? It is highly inappropriate and inconsistent to hold to faith in Christ and to be a respecter of persons. The two are incompatible. But why? Verse 4 provides some insight as to why being a respecter of persons is wrong.

**First**, partiality makes distinctions among equals instead of celebrating diversity ("Have you not made distinctions among yourselves"). This is the point of Galatians 3:26-29.

<sup>26</sup> "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:26-29).

Paul's point in Galatians is not that such things do not exist, but that they do not matter. "A favoritism based on external considerations is inconsistent with faith in the One who came to break down the barriers of nationality, race, class, gender and religion." (Moo, James, 88). God has assigned each of us as members within one body. Our function might be different, but such functional distinctions were never meant to divide the body.

**Second**, partiality emphasizes condemnation through nonconformity instead of appreciation through diversity ("Have you not ... become judges with evil motives").

Our uniqueness within the body is our strength. It is our diversity that should be celebrated. Verse 4 uses the word "to judge." I believe we are to be discerning as noted in Hebrews 5:14 and I do not

believe Matthew 7:1-6 forbids us to be discerning (i.e., judging); however we must always remember that such an assessment on our part is partial and limited. Our judgment can never be final or absolute. Only God can function as the final and absolute judge over all things.

The evils of partiality are clearly spelled out in verses 8 through 11. Those who practice partiality are no different than those who commit adultery and murder.

The interesting thing about James 2:1-13 is that the “judgment” is based on one’s social status — James forbids this and so must we. We have no right to judge someone based on their appearance or social position. How often do we overlook those within the body who make us slightly uncomfortable and gravitate toward those who appear to “have it all” and are “successful?” To do so is to show partiality and to be a respecter of persons.

How are we to combat partiality in our fellowship? James gives us the answer in verses 8-13. We are to embrace the royal law (v. 8), the law of liberty (v. 12), by loving our neighbor as ourselves. Why, because “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (partiality, v. 13). It is only as we live in light of a reigning grace that we can conquer partiality.

The entire law, regardless as to which dispensation we find ourselves in, is summarized in these two commandments, “To love the Lord thy God and to love your neighbor as yourself.” Loving God is the cause that produces the consequence of loving your neighbor as yourself. It is as we fall deeply in love with the person of Christ and begin to understand just how lavish His grace is towards us that we can begin to love our neighbor as ourselves. And in this we will find that “grace always triumphs over partiality.” Thus, let grace reign.

## *"Faith Without Works is Dead"*

*"For just as the body without [the] spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2:26)*

# 9

Read James 2:14-26

Can a faith that exists in the absence of works save? That is the question posed by the author of the book of James. This is perhaps one of the most fundamental passages in the New Testament concerning justification by faith and the inevitable outworking of sanctification.

What are we to say to the individual who professes to know Christ and yet does not manifest any fruit of the Spirit but rather is characterized by the works of the flesh? Is it possible that such a faith is saving? That is the question on the table as stated in verse 14. Verses 15 and 16 provide a working illustration of the situation. Verse 17 provides the answer and conclusion. A non-working faith is dead. A dead faith is a non-living faith. A dead faith is only a shell of what it is suppose to be. A dead faith is no faith at all. You can have dead works without a living faith, but you cannot have a living faith without a resulting work.

"It must be noted that in verse 14 the discussion is about a person who only asserts that he has faith. This person has no real faith, since his faith does not find expression in deeds. The author does not take issue with faith itself, but with a superficial conception of it which permits faith to be only a formal confession. He desires to point out that a Christianity of mere words does not lead to salvation." (Bo Reicke, *THE ANCHOR BIBLE, James*, 32)

A dead faith is no faith at all. You can have dead works without a living faith, but you cannot have a living faith without a resulting work.

Theologically, this is where we see the union of one's justification with one's sanctification. These two areas are inseparably linked. If the two can exist independent of each other then you can have a faith without a work.

This is where I understand Philippians 1:6, 2:12, 13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, and Jude 24 to come into play.

Philippians 1:6

[For I am] confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:12, 13

<sup>12</sup> So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for [His] good pleasure.

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

<sup>23</sup> Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul

and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>  
Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

Jude 24

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy

All of these speak of the Christian walk, its progressive unfolding, and the certainty of God's faithfulness to complete that which He has begun.

Faith and its resultant fruit (i.e. work) are unbreakable. They are indivisible pieces of a much larger whole. The work shows faith. We have a tendency to make the work a man-centered or generated action, but just the opposite is to be embraced. The work manifested in us and through us to those around us is His work. The work is not *for* faith, but *from* faith.

If one does not make the necessary distinction of a work coming *from* faith instead of working *for* faith, then salvation from sin is impossible.

The work manifested in us and through us to those around us is His work.  
The work is not *for* faith, but *from* faith.

This was the Reformer Martin Luther's contention against any who would make "works" a means of securing God's grace. He wrote a preface to James claiming it "contradicts Paul by teaching justification by works." In the earliest editions, Luther wrote his now famous comment: "St. James Epistle is really an epistle of straw compared to [St. Paul's letters], for it lacks this evangelical character." Luther however, never declared James or any other New Testament book non-canonical. He quotes from James occasionally.

Douglas Moo correctly notes how, "The difference between Paul and James consists in the *sequence* of works and conversion: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works, but James is pleading for the absolute necessity of post-conversion works." (Moo, *James*, 102)

In James 2:23, the faith spoken of is found in the context of Genesis 15:6 where Abraham is offered a contract by God and he accepts it. The outworking of that "contract" (i.e. Abrahamic Covenant) is the challenge presented to him in Genesis 22 (James 2:21). The other Old Testament illustration is in Joshua 2:1 where Rahab the harlot hid the spies. It was not their works that saved them. God saved them. Their faith appropriated the promises of God for the saving of their eternal souls. Because they believed God, they were willing to obey God. Both Abraham and Rahab were in a life or death situation.

Both of the stories presented could have had alternate endings. We are not to assume that either one was 100% obedient. Faith and works will not work that way. The people of God do fail, stumble, and, at times, crash . . . God is faithful.

The works of faith are not for us to determine who is or is not saved. The works of faith testify to the faithfulness of God to fulfill His promises. Faith's work glorifies the Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Faith's work is His work in us and through us to those around us.

Let us rejoice at what God is doing in and through the body of Christ. It is a wonderful thing to see the work of faith. And let us never forget that this is His work.

## *"Let Not Many of You Become Teachers"*

# 10

*"Let not many [of you] become teachers, my brethren,  
knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment." (James 3:1)*

Read James 3:1-12

James begins by warning his audience about becoming teachers for in so doing they will invite a stricter judgment. So far this does not seem to be putting a positive slant on teacher recruitment. What exactly is his point? What James says in verse 1 is explained in verses 2-12. The issue with teaching is the tongue.

There is no question that the tongue is an indicator of the heart (James 3:9-12). What, however, is the stricter judgment mentioned in 3:1? Is this judgment by God or men? Personally, because God though seeing my sin does not attribute sin to my account, I see the judgment as coming from the audience. Those who "speak" are constantly being evaluated and judged by the audience.

Those who "speak" are constantly being evaluated and judged by the audience.

Two passages leap from the biblical treasure trove of passages. First is Proverbs 10:19, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise." The second is Luke 6:45, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil [man] out of the evil [treasure] brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart."

Public speakers in general never lack for something to say. In any discussion there is characteristically a landslide of words, thoughts, ideas, and concepts. Teaching makes the individual vulnerable. They are exposed and susceptible to being misunderstood and misrepresented. It lays the person out for all to see, hear, examine, scrutinize, and evaluate. As such, teachers "incur a stricter judgment."

Because of the nature of what teachers do, it behooves them "to bridle the tongue." There have been countless times when I wish I could retract what was said or how it was said. With all of the negative comments concerning the tongue in James 3:1-12 and 1:26, you would think most would be scared off from ever wanting to be a teacher, but alas, teaching is a gift. Those who are called to be elders are called to teach. If anyone seeks the role of teacher because of prestige, power, or popularity, I would exhort them to reconsider. Teaching is demanding and leaves the teacher at risk.

But ... and this is an enormous qualifier, there is nothing as gratifying as teaching. To teach is to touch the future. Teaching touches lives. I trust the gratification that comes from using any spiritual gift is equally satisfying for the participant and the recipient. I have had the privilege of teaching for over two decades. My last decade has been in a more structured and formal setting and there is nothing that is as soul-gratifying as teaching.

Yet teaching is a trust, a stewardship, a burden and a weight. It can be as light as a feather and as

heavy as an enormous boulder. It can send the spirit soaring in the clouds or plummet it into the pit of despair. Teaching is like this; when done well nothing compares and when done poorly . . . nothing compares. Teaching is an investment of time and energy for the teacher and the student.

James warns those who teach to guard their tongue. Truer words have never been spoken. Today, let us pray for all those who teach at any level. More than any other title our Lord was identified as “Rabbi” . . . Teacher. As we aspire to be teachers, let us not forget the warning before us and let us trust Him to do that which only He can do.

## *"The Wisdom from Above is First . . . "*

*"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable,  
gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits,  
unwavering, without hypocrisy." (James 3:17)*

# 11

Read James 3:13-18

James uses the adjective for wisdom (**Sophia**) four times in the book (1:5; 3:13, 15, 17) and the noun (**Sophos**) only once (3:13). Our present paragraph is a concentration within the book of James on the idea of wisdom. It is interesting how James begins his thought, "Who among you is wise . . . let him show" (v.13). Though a noun, wisdom is very much verbal. Someone who is wise demonstrates such wisdom through their actions either by sitting still or actively moving, speaking when appropriate or keeping their mouth closed. Yet in either action, wisdom can be seen.

Notice the contrast between the divine and the devilish. The contrast is really between the fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh.

### Divine "Wisdom"

Wise  
Understanding  
Good behavior  
Gentleness of wisdom  
Pure  
Peaceable  
Gentle  
Reasonable  
Full of mercy  
Good fruits  
Unwavering  
Without hypocrisy

### Devilish "Wisdom"

Bitter jealousy  
Selfish ambition  
Arrogant  
Lies against the truth  
Not that which comes from above  
Earthly  
Natural  
Demonic

The outcome of divine wisdom is righteousness and peace (v. 18), whereas the outcome of a devilish wisdom is disorder and every evil thing (v. 16).

The outcome of divine wisdom is righteousness and peace, whereas the outcome of a devilish wisdom is disorder and every evil thing.

The contrast in James is between the old nature and the new nature. As believers, our old nature has been crucified with Christ. No longer are we to be characterized by such things as "selfish ambition, arrogance, and lying against the truth." The outcome of such actions in any relationship is disorder and every evil thing. First Corinthians 14:33 assures us that God is not the author of disorder or confusion. It is only as the Spirit produces in us and through us His fruit that we live in righteousness and peace.

May we be noted as a fellowship of peace as we continue to sow the seeds of peace. The seed whose fruit is righteousness is the seed sown from above in the hearts of His people. May God grant to us as His people a place where righteousness reigns and peace is experienced.

## "God Is Opposed to the Proud"

"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says,  
'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD,  
BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'" (James 4:6)

# 12

Read James 4:1-10

The theology of James is somewhat perplexing because it is the first of the New Testament letters (46 A.D.). His targeted group was the Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the region (1:1).

He begins by noting that we are often our own worst enemy (vv. 1-3). It is often our own internal "lusting" (vv. 1, 3) that keeps us from living in peace and having answered prayer.

The language James uses is difficult. The descriptions used are never used elsewhere in the New Testament of believers.

- v. 4 Adulteresses
- v. 4 Friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
- v. 6 GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD,
- v. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
- v. 8 Cleanse your hands, you sinners;
- v. 8 Purify your hearts, you double-minded.
- v. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.
- v.10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

The idea of being an adulteress is used four times in the New Testament (Luke 18:11; 1 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 13:4; James 4:4). There is nothing in the other occurrences that would warrant it referring to believers. What is interesting is that in the Old Testament the nation of Israel is identified as being an adulterous wife (Jer. 3:8, 9; Ezek. 23:37).

Never is the child of God identified as the enemy of God (Rom. 5:10). Pride is something that marks the unbeliever (Rom. 1:30; 2 Tim. 3:2).

The only way a believer can "draw near" to God is by reflecting on what is already true.

How does one draw near to God? It is only as we humble ourselves before Him in submission that we can draw near to Him who is already there. Such actions as humbling and submitting are inseparably linked. Those who are submitting to God are resisting the devil. It is through the actions of humility and submission that the devil is resisted.

We come to God for salvation through the humbling and submitting actions and we are sanctified by God through the humbling and submitting actions. The only way a believer can "draw near" to God is by reflecting on what is already true.

Because of the language employed by James, it has left me with two options. Either the individuals being addressed are unbelievers who are being called to salvation or they are believers being called to put off the old nature through mind renewal.

For the believer, it is possible to become “distant” from God by a failure to think on Him. The distance is an issue of the mind. Our actions and life often reflect the affections of our heart. When we focus on Him, our actions and life reflect such a focus. When we are not focused on Him, then it is the clutter of life that separates us from Him. It is only as we focus on Him that we enjoy the experience of His nearness. To know that regardless of our successes or failures He is there, dispensing grace, upholding the feeble, encouraging the faint-hearted, walking beside the weak, caring for the down-trodden . . . this is our strength and our sufficiency. Do not let the distractions of this life draw you away from knowing Him. For the believer, you are as close to God as you will ever be. Embrace this truth and live in light of it. Cherish Him. Be in passionate pursuit of Him. Do not let Him slip from your mind. For the unbeliever, God awaits with open arms. He stands inviting, calling, encouraging, and waiting. May we as a fellowship truly joy in Him today.

For the believer, you are as close to God as you will ever be.
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## *"Who Are You Who Judge Your Neighbor?"*

# 13

*"There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy;  
but who are you who judge your neighbor?" (James 4:12)*

Read James 4:11-12

I marvel at the frankness of James' remarks. Regardless as to what time period one might find oneself, judging, gossiping, backbiting, harsh words, and evil speech will always characterize the old nature and will have the potential of being displayed inside of the body of Christ. Neither you nor I have the right to judge another person. Only the Law has the right to judge. It is not our role to judge. James 4:12 correctly notes, "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy."

Because this is true the question begging to be asked is, "Who are you who judge your neighbor?" Perhaps the most quoted passage concerning this idea is found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:1 and following. Here, however, the issue is not judging as an absolute, but judging someone hypocritically (7:2). This appears to be the same idea in John 7:24. Absolute judgment is found only in Jesus Christ (John 5:22; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5). This is the same thought in 1 Corinthians 4:5. Revelation 20:12 and 13 speak of the final day of judgment at the Great White Throne when all judgment will cease.

First Corinthians 6 speaks of the local church "judging" those who within their fellowship are walking in opposition to the direct statements of Scripture.

Yet the idea of judgment, though multi-faceted, still perplexes us as a people. The judgment of James 4:11 and 12 speaks of a judgment that is not ours to make. To judge another in the absence of the Word is to grant to the one judging a position or status they are not to occupy. It is not our role to lord it over people. Such a judgment makes us Pharisees. In such a role we are adding to the Word our own interpretation and begin to legislate in areas the Scripture never intended us to go. In so doing, we become legalists.

There are no actions so contrary to the truths of grace as judging others and works based acceptance. Both actions, though distinct, are inseparably linked. Because of our preconceived ideas of divine acceptance we expect and begin to demand conformity to our own ideals. It is through this we create a works based acceptance toward us and before God. Failure to comply is met with the sternest judgment by the controlling group or authority. When there is a failure to conform to our standards, we are made to believe that somehow we have fallen out of favor with God and until the necessary corrections are made, He will never be able to "bless" our lives.

There are no actions so contrary to the truths of grace as judging others and works based acceptance.

To judge someone else when it is not our role to judge, is to engage in a most insidious form of spiritual atrocities against the body of Christ. In His body, “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” (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).

Judging your neighbor is so menacing because such judging leads to spiritual bondage and body division. I am always amazed at how quickly we judge another brother or sister in Christ when such judging leads to “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, and factions” (Gal. 5:20). Are we so blinded by our own spiritual pride that we cannot see our own spiritual failure?

As a pastor, I have found nothing to be as hurtful to myself and to the life of our local church body, than when people judge me individually and us collectively. Their judgment is flawed and divisive. Because I believe in God, I am convinced such a judgment is not only wrong, but somehow He is using it to make us stronger as a family, both individually and collectively.

Friend, may we never be found judging other people or another fellowship. There is no value in attacking the body of Christ. Today, let us see that “there is only one lawgiver and judge” and His name is Jesus Christ. May we embrace His people as His body and serve them as we love Him.

*"If The Lord Wills, We Will Live  
And Also Do This Or That"*

14

*"Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live  
and also do this or that.'" (James 4:15)*

Read James 4:13-17

James 4:13-17 bows the knee before the uncertainty of life and the certainty of God's watch-care over the details of it. To absent God from the smallest areas of one's life is to play the fool. This appears to be the idea in Luke 12:20, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"

The uncertainty of life is contained in its brevity. "What is your life?" James answers the question for us, "You are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (v. 14). How foolish to live this life as if it is all there is. Even the longest life is but a vapor when contrasted to that of eternity. Not only is life short, it is equally fragile.

The answer to life's brevity and uncertainty is to turn to the One who holds life in His hands. It is according to the Lord's will that we will live and do this or that. Whatever the "this or that" is, is rooted in the will of the Lord. Every detail is part of a plan foreseen by Him who is eternal. Our God is never caught off guard. He is never reacting to man's actions. It is always difficult to comprehend the vastness of our God's will and the degree to which He is working it out. However, at some point something must give. Either we are or He is in control.

The answer to life's  
brevity and  
uncertainty is to  
turn to the One  
who holds life in  
His hands.

Regardless as to what one might will to do, God is always in control. Remember King Nebuchadnezzar? Remember when God caused him to graze in the fields like a wild beast? Remember what his words were when God graciously restored to him his senses?

Daniel 4:34-35

"But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

Remember Psalm 115:3?

"But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases."

Remember Psalm 135:6?

“Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.”

Remember Isaiah 40:12-18?

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the heavens by the span, and calculated the dust of the earth by the measure, and weighed the mountains in a balance and the hills in a pair of scales? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and who gave Him understanding? And who taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge and informed Him of the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; Behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust. Even Lebanon is not enough to burn, nor its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing and meaningless. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him?”

Man as an image-bearer clearly has a choice. You and I choose every day based on the options before us and our strongest desires. From our finite and marred perspective, we are always acting freely and choose our strongest desires. Yet does this in any way diminish the absolute sovereignty of God as depicted in the Scripture?

James 4:13-17 clearly shows the futility of a life lived independent of a God consciousness. How foolish for us to think we live in isolation of Him. Regardless as to the degree we acknowledge His control, will, desires, or plan, God rules and will have His way.

Regardless as to the degree we acknowledge His control, will, desires, or plan, God rules and will have His way.

Every business transaction, every job transfer, every financial investment, every monetary purchase bows before Him. He is not waiting to see what will happen.

Let us not forget Isaiah 46:9 and 10.

“Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’”

Today, as His people, let us bow before Him. Let us offer our moments to Him as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, 2). Let us in bowing before Him, worship. May we never be found to be fighting against what He has willed as so.

May this quicken our steps and may it brighten our days as we live in the light of His gracious, merciful and loving will.

*"Come Now, You Rich,  
Weep and Howl. . ."*

15

*"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries  
which are coming upon you." (James 5:1)*

Read James 5:1-6

Often we find ourselves wanting more than we have. To be free of financial obligations would perhaps be a lot less stressful, yet the New Testament speaks of wealth or riches as being a liability more than an asset. Paul echoes this same sentiment in 1 Timothy 6:8-10.

1 Timothy 6:8-10

"if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

Wealth is a stewardship to be used properly. It is possible to believe that wealth can do something for you that Jesus Christ cannot. However, wealth as we know it is a gift from God and is to be used for His purposes. Wealth because of its power has a corrupting influence. It is alright to possess wealth, but often it is the wealth that ends up controlling us. It is the wealth that ends up possessing the individual. Part of wealth's damning influence is the actions of greed and dishonesty.

James 5:1-3 speaks of the character of wealth as it exists in time. All wealth has a "shelf life." There is an expiration date on everything we possess. It is imperative that we use wealth before its expiration date. Sometimes it is short lived and at other times it will outlive us, but be assured of this, the material object that was the focus of our affection will one day be torn from our grip. This idea coincides with our Lord's comments concerning our treasures in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:19-24). In both passages (James and Matthew) wealth is seen as having an eternal value. Its eternal consequence can either be good or bad. All wealth has an eternal value; whether or not that value will be good or bad will depend on how it was used.

It is of equal interest to note how wealth has the power to cloud our vision to the degree that we give it our loyalties. It is for this reason our Lord gives this exhortation in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

James 5:4 and 5 show a practical application of wealth's corruptive powers by one's treatment of employees. This same principle is seen in Colossians 3:25-4:1 and Ephesians 6:9. When you do not treat employees justly and in fairness, you are violating God's pattern in the relationship and you are misusing your wealth.

The strong statements of the passage show us that our handling of His wealth (It is His wealth, for we are only stewards) reflects the affections of our heart. It is for this reason Matthew 6:21 says, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Greed and selfishness are not determined by the size of one’s wealth but by the smallness of one’s heart.

The issue of wealth is not how much, but what is my attitude with what I do have? Greed and selfishness are not determined by the size of one’s wealth but by the smallness of one’s heart. How do I avoid the end of the individual in James 5?

- **First**, see all wealth as a gift from God and yourself as a steward of His wealth (1 Tim. 6:17).
- **Second**, be content with what you do possess and do not be envious of those with more (Phil. 4:11; 1 Tim. 6:8).
- **Third**, when you give, give gladly and willingly (2 Cor. 9:7). Learn to give as an act of worship before God.
- **Finally**, give regularly and proportionately to your local church for the expansion of His work (1 Cor. 16:2).

Giving to the local church is for the purpose of fulfilling His promise to build His church. When I give, I am not subtracting from my wealth, but adding to it. God has all the wealth He needs to accomplish His purposes in and through His people. It is a matter of harnessing the resources entrusted to us and seeing it move forward through the local church for the expansion of His body and for the glory of His name.

*"Be Patient . . .  
Until the Coming of the Lord"*

*"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.  
The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it,  
until it gets the early and late rains." (James 5:7)*

Read James 5:7-12

The "therefore" of verse seven forces us back to our previous paragraph. In James 5:1-6 an exhortation was given for those with wealth to guard against its destructive and deceptive power. What follows in James 5:7-12 is a series of exhortations concerning personal conduct in the midst of injustice. The injustice could be at the hands of those who would seek to exploit people (vv. 4-6).

Our hope for  
the present  
rests in the  
future.

Those who suffer at the hands of the unjust shall one day receive their reward. Yet, such a reward is still future. James exhorts his audience to be "long-spirited" (vv. 7, 8). James does not promise deliverance in this life but rather in the life that is to come. Our hope for the present rests in the future.

To resist the working of the Lord in the present by grumbling over your immediate circumstances is to reap the consequences of such a sin (v. 9). God has attached a providential demerit to all sin and this includes grumbling. James provides for his audience an illustration of those who in the midst of suffering endured (vv. 10-11). No one is guaranteed an ending like Job's, but regardless as to one's ending "The Lord is full of compassion and is merciful" (v. 11). The statement, "full of compassion" is one extended word in the Greek language and means, "extremely compassionate." God is always lavish or excessive when it is in the dispensing of mercy, compassion, love and kindness.

Often, when we find ourselves in the middle of adversity we begin to do and say things that are inappropriate. We become rash and flippant with our words. James 5:12 warns us against such offhanded affirmations or denials.

It is important to remember as well that James writes to his Jewish brothers who have been scattered abroad. Perhaps many were finding themselves in adverse circumstances. It is in light of this that James pens these words. We too should listen attentively to what James has to say. In the midst of our adverse circumstances, let us guard our speech by staying focused on the sufficiency and satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

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## *"Is Anyone Among You Sick?"*

*"Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." (James 5:14)*

17

Read James 5:13-20

The book of James is heavy on exhortation and application. He is calling his audience to a particular code of conduct or pattern of life. Chapter five is no exception to this thought. Verses 1-6 address those who are in a position to abuse those under them. Verses 7-12 address those who are abused. Here in verses 13-20 there is a two-fold address. First, there is a word to those who are suffering and second, there is a word to those who have strayed from the truth. It would appear that those who are suffering could be the same ones in verses 7-12 and it would appear that those who have strayed from the truth could be the same ones in verses 1-6. The application can be much broader than this, but there does appear to be a direct link to the previous thought.

The response to the circumstance is direct:

- Let the suffering pray (v. 13a)
- Let the cheerful sing (v. 13b)
- Let the sick call for the elders (v. 14)

Whether or not this is to be a normative truth for today has always been debated. However, the idea of calling for the elders of a fellowship in order to pray for the individuals who are sick is not out of order.

Whether or not God will choose to raise those who have been afflicted is always left up to God. If we begin to think that it is our prayer of faith that raised them then we digress into error.

It appears from verse 15 that physical health and spiritual forgiveness are in parallel. The restoration of health says, "your sins have been forgiven." Apparently it was because of one's sins that they were now experiencing poor health. What are we to make of this?

All sickness is the result of the fall. Without the fall there would be no sickness. Some sickness is a result of a specific and direct sin. In such a case when healing has taken place, the healing can be viewed as the consequence of the sin being forgiven. It has already been "spiritually" forgiven. The healing is a "physical" forgiveness.

For example, a person consumes too much alcohol over an extended period of time and destroys his liver. He is sick and looks like he is going to die. He calls for the elders of the church, he repents of his sinful pattern and God chooses to restore his health. In restoring his health God is forgiving him of the consequences of his alcoholism/drunkenness. His sins had already been forgiven at Calvary. The physical consequences of his drunkenness were now being forgiven in time.

It is as we confess our sins to one another that there is a potential hope of being delivered from their intrinsic demerit. What follows in verses 16 through 18 is an illustration of one who prayed in accordance with God's will and found his prayers as a channel through which God chose to work. The story of Elijah praying for it not to rain is based on the curse element within the Mosaic Code. Elijah did not simply pray a prayer "out of the blue." What he prayed was in keeping with God's written revelation (Deut. 11:17).

God is never obligated to answer our prayers. The prayers He answers are those that are within His will (John 14:13, 14; 15:16; 1 John 5:14). It is not the action of prayer but the content of prayer that moves Him to act. The same is true in James 5. We are to pray for those who are sick because God has chosen prayer as a means of accomplishing His will in the healing of the sick.

The end of James leaves us with an encouraging note. Those who are involved in the restoration of errant behavior and or unregenerate people are "turning sinners from the error of their ways and will save their souls from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

## *A Final Word*

So . . . where does the book of James leave you? Are you exhausted or rested, depleted or invigorated? The cross of Christ destroys our personal ambition and leaves us exhausted of pride, self-worth, and pompous self-deception.

We are nothing but “dogs fed from the crumbs of His table.” Friend, I pray you see Him. Rest cannot be secured in this life until we see Him. He is everything we need and one day He will be everything we want.

I trust as you pilgrim through this life you will find others who are of a kindred spirit whose only desire is to see Him in the fullness of His cross-work in your behalf.