

# JAMES

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Lecture Notes



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## THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1a. Canonicity

For a time, the Epistle of James was not unanimously considered as inspired scripture

#### 1b. Early Church (First 4 centuries)

1c. Muratorian Canon (c.170 A.D.). Did not include Epistle of James as part of canon.

2c. Eusebius (265-340 A.D.). In his *Church History* II:23, he acknowledged that there were doubts in those days whether the Epistle of James should be part of the canon: “in regard to James, who is said to be the author of the first of the so-called catholic epistles. But it is to be observed that it is disputed; at least, not many of the ancients have mentioned it, ... which is ... one of the seven so-called catholic epistles. Nevertheless we know that these also, with the rest, have been read publicly in very many churches.” (Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series, [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.], 1: 128) .

3c. 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. onwards. It is only from this time that the Epistle of James became recognized as part of the New Testament canon by:

1d. Individuals. Jerome (c.340-420), and Augustine (c.400).

2d. Canons. Apostolic (c.300), and Athanasian (c.367).

3d. Councils. Hippo (393), and Carthage (397, 419).

#### 2b. Protestant Reformation (16<sup>th</sup> century)

#### 1c. Martin Luther

Luther rejected the Epistle, “In fine, Saint John’s Gospel and his first Epistle, Saint Paul’s Epistles, especially those to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Saint Peter’s first Epistle,—these are the books which show thee Christ, and teach thee everything that is needful and blessed for thee to know even though thou never see or hear any other book or doctrine. *Therefore is Saint James’s Epistle a right strawy Epistle in comparison with them*, for it has no gospel character to it.” But Luther did say that although he would not have it in his Bible in the number of the proper chief books, he did not “intend thereby to forbid anyone to place and exalt it as he pleases, *for there is many a good saying in it.*” (italics mine, quoted from R.V.G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, TNTC [Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1983], 14).

#### 2c. John Calvin

Calvin had no problem accepting the Epistle. “There are also at this day

some who do not think it entitled to authority. I, however, am inclined to receive it without controversy, because I see no just cause for rejecting it. For what seems in the second chapter to be inconsistent with the doctrine of free justification, we shall easily explain in its own place. ... But this diversity should not make us to approve of one, and to condemn the other. Besides, among the evangelists themselves there is so much difference in setting forth the power of Christ, that the other three, compared with John, have hardly sparks of that full brightness which appears so conspicuous in him, and yet we commend them all alike.” (*Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans., and ed. John Owen [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.], 276). Tasker was correct to observe that the “master-commentator John Calvin understood this Epistle so much better than Martin Luther, and had the great gift of seeing the New Testament ‘steadily and seeing it whole.’” (*James*, 12) .

## 2a. Authorship

Who was the author of the Epistle of James? Chapter 1:1 is apparently clear enough when the author introduced himself as “*James*, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (italics mine). Although the name of the author is mentioned, yet his identity is still a problem because there are several men by the name of James in the Bible. Which one of them wrote this Epistle?

There are 3 legitimate candidates, (1) James, the son of Zebedee, (2) James, the Lord’s brother, and (3) James, the son of Alphaeus.

### lb. James, the Son of Zebedee

James, the son of Zebedee, is the brother of John, and one of the Apostles. He is mentioned quite frequently in the Gospels in Matt 4:21, 10:2, 17:1, Mark 1:19,29, 3:17, 5:37, 9:2, 10:35,41, 13:3, 14:33J Luke 5:10, 6:14, 8:51, 9:28,54, Acts 1:13, 12:2. He belonged to the inner group of Jesus’ disciples which consisted of only two others, namely, Peter and John (cf Mark 1:29-31, Luke 8:51, Matt 17:1, 26:37). The Lord chose these three to be closest to Him for a purpose. They saw and heard things from the Lord’s mouth which the rest did not. It is possible that the Lord chose them specially for a two-fold ministry of not only preaching but also writing His Word. Peter has his 2 epistles to his credit. John wrote the fourth gospel, his three epistles, and Revelation. What about James? It is unlikely that he was left out. We should consider James the son of Zebedee as a prime candidate for the authorship of this epistle.

Most scholars, though considering James the son of Zebedee to be the major candidate, doubt that he was the author of the book because he died early. James was killed in A.D. 44 by Herod Agrippa the First (Acts 12:1-2). The question however remains: Is it possible that the letter could have been written by him prior to his martyrdom?

The date of the Epistle needs to be ascertained. Was the letter written prior to A.D. 44 or after it? The date of the Epistle is a subject of much debate too. Some scholars place it in the early or middle 40s, while others say that it was written just before A.D. 62. The reason why it is A.D. 62 is because Josephus has it that James the Lord’s brother was martyred during that time. Those who reject that it was James the son of Zebedee who wrote the Epistle hold to the late date. However, there are those who regard James the Lord’s brother to be the author and yet hold to the early date, even before the Jerusalem Council which was held sometime between A.D. 45-48 (Acts 15). Thus, the late date is by no means certain. Tasker says that the Epistle could be dated

anytime between A.D. 40-60 (*James*, 31).

In any case, those who argue for the late date suggests that the Epistle portrays “too settled a condition of things. It is too concerned with laying foundations. The distinctive doctrines of Christianity are presupposed. For this reason the Epistle should be put as late as it can be put in the life-time of James” (W. Sanday cited in *ibid.*, 31). The above reasons are purely conjectural. Perhaps a stronger argument for the late date would be the word *diaspora* mentioned in Jas 1:1. Lange and Van Oosterzee insisted on the late date because the mention of the dispersion required “the spread of Christianity through the entire Jewish diaspora” (quoted by D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James: Tests of a Living Faith* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1979], 41). However, this argument is by no means fool-proof for the letter could have been written during the early part of the dispersion, and addressed to scattered Jews in the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem and Judea. The clause, “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” taken at face value, could refer to the dispersion of the Jews which followed the persecution that came about after Stephen’s death. These Jewish believers were said to have gone out of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1), Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:19). It is thus not necessary to conclude that the *diaspora* required a scattering throughout the whole Roman Empire. James could well be addressing dispersed Jews who were then residing in the neighbourhood of ancient Palestine.

There is evidence supporting the early date of the Epistle. Burdick delineates:

1c. The Jewish orientation of the epistle fits the earlier period much more naturally than the later. That the author does not refer to Gentiles or related subjects may well point to the time in history of the early church when Gentiles were only beginning to be reached with the gospel.

2c. The absence of any reference to the controversy concerning the Judaizers and their insistence on Gentile circumcision is best explained by the earlier date.

3c. The close affinity of the teaching of James to that of the OT and Christ is significant. If the epistle were later, one might expect to find a greater similarity to the writings of Paul, such as is apparent in 1 Peter, for example.

4c. Furthermore, the evidence of a simple church order favors the early date. The leaders are ‘teachers’ (3:1) and ‘elders’ (5:14).

5c. Finally the use of the Greek term *synagoge* (synagogue; NIV, ‘meeting’) to describe the church assembly or meeting place (2:2 *cf Acts 9:1-2* (italics mine)) points to the early period when Christianity was largely confined to Jewish circles (Donald W. Burdick, *James*, EBC [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1981], 12:162).

Since a date prior to the Jerusalem Council is not impossible, the likelihood that James the son of Zebedee could be the writer of the Epistle should not be easily dismissed. The fact that the Epistle reflects a close dependence on the words of Jesus suggests that the author was a close disciple of the Lord during His earthly ministry. Compare the following sayings found in Jas 1:5 and Matt 7:7, Luke 11:9; Jas 2:5 and Matt 5:3, Jas 3:18 and Matt 5:9, Jas 4:4 and Mark 8:38; Jas 5:1-4 and Luke 6:24; and Jas 5:12 and Matt 5:34-37 (See James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978], 38).

It is thus possible that James the son of Zebedee was the writer of the Epistle

just before he was martyred in A.D. 44, and before the Jerusalem Council of A.D. 45. The content of the Epistle does not militate against the view that the above author wrote it, and the early date of the Letter. If we accept this view, then James would have been the first epistle to be written. Also, there would be no question that it should be part of the NT canon.

## 2b. James, the Son of Alphaeus

Among the 12 disciples of the Lord Jesus, there were two Jameses, one was James the son of Zebedee and the other was James, the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10:3). He was also called James the younger, or James the less in order to distinguish him from the first James (Mark 15:10). Could this James be the author of the Epistle? It is important to take into account that one of the important principles for the early church's acceptance of a book as canonical was to ascertain whether it was written by an Apostle. If James the son of Zebedee did not write it, the baton must be passed to James the younger who was no less an Apostle.

It is entirely possible that James the son of Alphaeus could have written this Epistle. Calvin suggested that the author of the Epistle of James was the son of Alphaeus (*Catholic Epistles*, 227). There is an extreme view which argues that James the Lord's brother whom majority of scholars consider to be the author of the Epistle was really James the son of Alphaeus (See Thomas Manton, *A Commentary on James*, Geneva Series [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1693], 12). Harris however prefers identifying James of Alphaeus not as the brother, but *cousin* of the Lord. He explains how this was possible: "There are at least two James and two Judes in the New Testament—possibly three of each. James the brother of John and son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus, are both repeatedly mentioned as apostles. Judas Iscariot also was one of the Twelve, and another Jude, called the brother of James,' is mentioned in Luke 16:16 and Acts 1:13. Thus it appears that among the Twelve there were brothers named James and Jude. Also in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 a James and a Jude are mentioned among the "brethren of Jesus." For dogmatic reasons the Roman Catholic Church identified these two with the James and Jude who were among the Twelve. In any case, the father of the apostolic pair, Alphaeus, was married to Mary, the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus. At least comparison of John 19:25 with Mark 15:40 indicates that the two Marys, sisters, were at the Cross, and one is variously called the mother of James and the wife of Cleophas. It appears that Cleophas is to be identified with Alphaeus the father of James and Jude. So if there were half brothers of Jesus called James and Jude, they would have been cousins of the apostolic brothers James and Jude. This is the usual though not exclusive Protestant position. ... the Epistles of James and Jude, if genuine, are clearly apostolic. We should remember that according to the usual Protestant view, these Epistles, if genuine, may very well still be apostolic, written by the sons of Alphaeus" (R. Laird Harris, *The Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969], 261-2) .

## 3b. James, the Lord's Brother

James the Lord's brother is listed first among the brothers of Jesus. He is therefore the eldest of the sons of Joseph and Mary (Matt 13:55, Mark 6:3). The Apostle Paul mentioned him in Gal 1:19 as one of the two leaders he met in Jerusalem three years after his conversion. On the basis of the testimony of Clement of Alexandria who said that James the Lord's brother was the first bishop of Jerusalem, most scholars have concluded that he is the most likely candidate for the authorship of the Epistle since he

held such a powerful position in the Church and among the Jewish Christians. This view has support from the fact that there are some striking similarities between the Epistle of James and the book of Acts. For example, the word *chairein* (the usual epistolary greeting in Christian letters is *charis*) is used in both Jas 1:1 and in the letter James addressed to the churches in Acts 15:23. Other parallels are found in such rare words as *episkeptesthe* (Jas 1:27, Acts 15:14), *epistrephein* (Jas 5:19-20, Acts 15:19), *terein beanton* (Jas 1:27, Acts 15:29), and *agapetos* (Jas 1:16,19; 2:5, Acts 15:25). According to Guthrie, "These parallels are remarkable in that they all occur within so short a passage attributed to James in Acts and because they are of such a character that they cannot be explained by the common accidents of speech" (Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. [Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1990], 728). Although Guthrie highlighted the similarities, he did cautioned in a footnote that one should not placed too much weight on resemblances between Acts 15 and the Epistle of James (ibid).

Scholars who hold to this view of authorship assume that the James mentioned in Acts 12:17 and 15:13 is James the Lord's brother (See *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, s.v. "James, Epistle of," by W.T. Dayton). The problem is this: the two records above do not explicitly identify which James it is. The James of Acts could be James the son of Alphaeus. Furthermore, we cannot be absolutely certain that James the Lord's brother was the first bishop of Jerusalem as testified by Clement of Alexandria since his writings are sometimes more legendary than factual in nature.

Nevertheless, that James the Lord's brother was the author of the Epistle is the popular view, and held by the majority of Bible scholars today. According to Carson, Moo, and Morris: "James the brother of the Lord is the author of the letter. This is the natural implication of the letter's own claims, it is corroborated by New Testament and early Christian evidence, and it has no decisive argument against it" (D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992], 413).

#### 4b. Conclusion

All three of the above Jameses are valid candidates for the authorship of the Epistle of James. This writer hesitates in dogmatically asserting who the author was or should be. But if he is to make a choice, he would assign the authorship of the epistle to the Apostle James, the son of Zebedee.

### 3a. Classification

#### 1b. A Parenetic Epistle.

The Epistle of James has the characteristics of a epistle/letter, and those of a homily.

#### 1c. An Epistle

All epistles usually begin with an address and greeting. This we find in 1:1, "James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." The author (1) introduces himself, (2) identifies his addressees, and (3) intimates his well-wishes.

#### 2c. A Homily

James has characteristics of a sermon, or exhortation. As a matter of fact, he goes right into sermon style from v.2, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.” The Epistle also ends with an exhortational note, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him: Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (5:19-20). Kistemaker has observed that there are no less than 54 imperatives in the Epistle (Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle of James, and the Epistles of John*, NTC [Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1986], 5).

A Gramcord search lists a total of 47 occurrences of the personal pronoun in the 2d person (i.e. “you”). Direct application, a necessary element in sermons, is not wanting in James.

Stowers classified James as a parenetic letter (Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986], 96). A parenetic letter has 2 fundamental characteristics: (1) “The writer is the recipient’s friend or moral superior (e.g., older, wiser, more accomplished)” (ibid.). No matter which James one regards as the author of the Epistle, he fits this qualification. Two of the James were Apostles, and James the Lord’s brother was also called James the Just, no doubt, with reference to his moral integrity and Jewish piety. And (2) “The writer recommends habits of behavior and actions that conforms to a certain model of character and attempts to turn the recipient away from contrasting negative models of character” (ibid.). The Epistle is replete with such exhortation and dissuasion (i.e. be this...do not be that; cf 1:19-23, 3:1, 5:7-9).

## 2b. A Catholic Epistle

James is one of the Catholic or General Epistles. The word Catholic here does not mean Roman Catholic. The word catholic means universal. It is a universal epistle because it is not addressed to any specific local church, but to the church at large; in this case, to the dispersed Jewish Church (1:1).

The other Catholic Epistles are: 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. Plus James, there are a total of 7 Catholic Epistles. Although the latter 2 Epistles of John were addressed to an individual, they are classified as catholic because they are seen together with the first Johannine Epistle which addressed its readers as “little children” (2:1,18,28, 3:7,18, 4:26, i.e. Christians in general) which is the main or primary one.

## 4a. Occasion and Purpose

### lb. Occasion

The occasion for the letter was probably the rise of antinomianism or libertinism among the growing body of Jewish Christian churches. The Jewish churches probably misunderstood the doctrine of grace (i.e. they are no longer under law but grace) and misapply it by abrogating the moral law, refusing to obey it, and thinking that grace is licence to sin.

### 2b. Purpose

The purpose of the letter was thus to correct this incorrect principle and resultant practice. It was written to teach them the meaning of true or genuine faith. James’

purpose was “to goad his readers effectively to realize that a saving faith is a living, active faith, for ‘faith without works is dead’ (2:20)” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1979], 43).

5a. Outline

Identity of Writer and Recipient	1:1
The Writer	1: 1a
The Recipient	1:1b
The Christian and the Testing of His Faith	1: 2-18
The Approach Towards Trials	1:2-8
The attitude towards trials	1:2
The purpose of trials	1:3-4
The help in trials	1:5-8
The Situation Surrounding Trials	1:9-12
The situation of the poor man	1:9
The situation of the rich man for the patient man	1:10-11 1:12
The Source of Temptations and Good Gifts	1:13-18
The source of temptations is man	1:13-15
The source of good gifts is God	1:16-18
The Christian and the Manifestation of His Faith	1:19-4:18
True Faith is Manifested by an Obedient Reception of God’s Word	1:19-27
The need to hear God’s Word	1:19-21
to do God’s Word	1:22-25
meaning of true religion	1:26-27
True Faith is Manifested by Loving One’s Fellow-men	2:1-13
Rebuke for favouring the rich and despising the poor	2:1-4
The proper attitude towards one’s fellow-men	2:5-13
The divine favour upon both poor and rich	2:5-7
The absolute necessity of obeying the moral law	2:8-11
The admonishment to live in the light of those who will be judged by the moral law	2:12-13
True Faith is Manifested by the Production of Good Works	2:14-26
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The destructiveness of the tongue	3:1-6
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The wisdom from the world	3:13-16
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True Faith is Manifested by a Separation from the World	4:1-18
The nature of worldliness	4:1-6
It is characterised by greed	4:1-3
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Warning Against the Rich	5:1-6
Encouragement to the Afflicted	5:7-11
The exhortation to endure	5:7-9
The example of OT saints	5:10-11
Warning Against taking Oaths	5:12      Further
Encouragement to the Afflicted	5:13-18
The exhortation to pray	5:13-16
The example of Elijah	5:17-18
Concluding Remarks	5:19-20

## EXPOSITION

### la. Identity of Writer and Recipient (1:1)

#### lb. The Writer (1:1a).

For the identity of the author refer to the “INTRODUCTION” under “Authorship.” Personal opinion and preference is that James the son of Zebedee wrote this Epistle. It is interesting to note that some Greek manuscripts (e.g. 6<sup>th</sup> century P33) has the title as “The General Epistle of James the Apostle,” or “The General Epistle of the Holy Apostle James” (see discussion in Kistemaker, *James*, 27-8). The name “James” is *Iakobos* which can also be rendered “Jacob.” James described himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “servant” here is the Greek *doulos* which is a more humbling word than the usual *diakonos*, “servant.” *Doulos* literally means “bond slave.” It comes from the verbal root *deo* which means “to bind.” It is also a word from which the verb *douleuo* is derived which in modern Greek means “to work, and to work hard” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Work of Faith* [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1981], 15). A *doulos* is “one who is a slave in the sense of becoming the property of an owner” (Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene A. Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon*, 2 vols. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1988], 1:741). A bond slave is one who is totally given over to do the will and bidding of his master or lord (cf Matt 8:9). In this case, James is a *willing* bond slave belonging to Christ, ever ready to do His will. As Christians, we are bond slaves of Christ too. We should be diligent in obeying God’s Word, serving Him unconditionally, and doing our very best in any work He has assigned and called us to do.

#### 2b. The Recipient (1:1b)

James addressed his letter to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” Does it refer to the (1) Church, or (2) Israel? The “twelve tribes” is distinctly a Jewish term referring to Israel (Gen 49:28, Exod 28:21, Deut 1:23, Josh 3:12). The Church has been constantly called *ekklesia*, “an assembly,” instead of *phule*, “a tribe.” Moreover, the word *diaspora* is distinctively Jewish (See LXX: Deut 28:25, 30:4, Neh 1:9, Isa 49:6, Jer 13:4, Dan 12:2). James was thus addressing his Epistle to people of his own race—the Jews. The appeal to Abraham as “our father” (2:21), and other OT figures like Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), and Elijah (5:17) point to a Jewish audience. The writer assumes the familiarity of his readers to the OT Law (1:25, 2:8-13), and their meeting place as the synagogue (2:2).

It should be added that the addressees were Jews who professed to be believers. This we see from the context of the Epistle itself where the name of the Lord Jesus Christ has been invoked (1:1). James also called them “brethren” who are in “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1).

The “twelve tribes which are scattered abroad” thus refers to Christian Jews who have been scattered to other parts of the Roman Empire due to the persecution in Jerusalem. In Acts 11:19, we read that the Christian Jews in Jerusalem “were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen.” And they were dispersed “as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch.”

### 2a. The Christian and the Testing of His Faith (1:2-18)

#### lb. The Approach Towards Trials (1:2-8)

1c. The attitude towards trials (1:2)

“Consider (it) all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various temptations.” The author calls his readers, “brothers.” It can be taken in (1) the racial sense, since all Jews are brothers (Exod 2:11, Deut 15:3, Matt 5:47, Acts 13:26), (2) its ecclesial sense, since he was writing to fellow believers—Christians (1 Cor 5:11, 7:15, Gal 1:19, Col 1:1). James exhorts his readers very forcefully by an imperative, “consider,” “regard,” or “count” (so KJV). He commands them to be always joyful. The word “all” has the idea of totality or completeness (LN, 1:691). Believers are to consider it pure joy “whenever they fall into various temptations.” The word “temptation,” *peirasmos*, can either mean (1) testing (i.e. “to try to learn the nature or character of someone or something by submitting such to thorough and extensive testing,” LN 1:332), or (2) temptation (i.e. “to endeavour or attempt to cause someone to sin,” LN 1:775). The word “temptation” is used by James in 2 ways: (1) the trials and testings that afflict the Christian from without (1:2-12), and (2) the motivation and desire to sin that afflict the Christian from within (1:13-15). The temptations or rather trials of the first kind God allows in the life of believers to perfect or mature their faith, hence the cause for rejoicing (1:2). But the temptation of the second kind, namely the strong desire to sin, does not find its source in God but the sinful nature of depraved humanity (Jer 17:9, Rom 7:14-25).

Trials can come in many forms. The word *poikilois* means of various kinds. There are different kinds of trials or sufferings—bereavement, sickness, poverty etc. But each time such a temptation or trial that comes from without hits us, we should face it joyfully. In this case, the Christian Jews were facing persecution. They had to flee Jerusalem because of intense persecution from their own national brothers (e.g. Saul of Tarsus in whose hands Stephen died). The infant church of Jerusalem suffered no less than 5 persecutions as recorded in Acts: (1) 4:1-22, (2) 5:17-42, (3) 6:8-15, (4) 8:1-3, and (5) 12:1-4. Even in such situations, James says, “Count it pure joy.” “Man’s disappointments are God’s appointments.” There is a purpose in trials and testings.

2c. The purpose of trials (1:3-4)

“Knowing that the proof of your faith works fortitude.” The present tense of the word *ginosko*, “know,” “recognise,” or “understand,” is significant. The persecuted Jews were perhaps very dejected that they had to go through so much hardship. James here encourages them that they should begin to understand that there is a reason or purpose for such hardships in the Christian life.

God is putting our faith to the test. The faith spoken of here refers to the subjective faith (i.e. our belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation) of every Christian. The Epistle of James is really first of all an Epistle of faith. Faith is mentioned before works. There can be no works when there is no faith. Faith must always come first.

The word for “proof” is *dokimion*. It means “to try to learn the genuineness of something by examination and testing, often through actual use,” and may be translated “to test, to examine, to try to determine the genuineness of, testing” (LN, 1:332). By way of illustration, as a student of Far Eastern Bible College, you are required to go through a series of quizzes, tests, assignments,

papers, collateral readings, lectures, and examinations, to ascertain how much you have learned and how hard you have worked. When you pass all the tests, you will receive a diploma indicating that you have successfully completed your studies and that you are an approved or genuine student of the School.

The testing of one's faith produces *hupomone*, "fortitude." The word *hupomone* denotes the "capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances" (LN, 1:308). The word is made up of 2 words, the preposition *hupo* meaning "under," and *meno*, "to remain." It illustrates the capacity to remain under pressure. It is a "never say die" attitude. A person with such endurance will not give up easily even under extremely trying circumstances (cf 5:1 on the patience of Job).

"And let fortitude have a maturing work." The ability and capacity to endure is not an overnight work, but involves time. The word for "maturing" is the adjective *teleion*. It speaks of a process—a gradual and constant development towards spiritual maturity. This is explained by the subsequent purpose clause, "in order that you may be mature (*teleioi*) and whole (*holokleroi*), in nothing lacking" (v.4). The word "*teleios* has also the basic meaning of 'whole' in James. One is perfect, i.e. not lagging behind in any point (1:4), when one is patient and forbearing. Jas. calls the law of → freedom, by which he means the commandment to love one's neighbour (2:8), perfect (1:25), because this alone makes men really free (cf. Jn.8:31f.; Gal. 5:13). That God's gifts can be called perfect (1:17) goes without saying. According to Jas., the man who does not offend in his words is whole and without fault (3:2)" (NIDNTT, s.v. "Goal," by R Schippers, 2:62). The reason for trials is to increase the Christian's stamina to endure hardships. The capacity to endure will shape Christian character and make a man mature in Christ.

The word "whole," *holikleroi*, refers to "a totality, with special emphasis upon the entity as a whole" (LN, 1:597). James was referring to the person as a whole—in terms of his mental, emotional, physical, spiritual etc makeup. The man is both a physical and psychical or spiritual being. In all these areas, he should not be found lacking.

### 3c. The help in trials (1:5-8)

"But if anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God who gives to all simply and without reproach, and it shall be given to him" (v.5). The conditional clause "if..." is a 1st class or simple condition. In simple conditions, that which is described in the clause is assumed true or real (A.T. Robertson, and W. Hershey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek Testament*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed., [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958], 350). In other words, it is a fact that man needs wisdom. Some may need more, others less, but everyone needs wisdom. Everyone should recognize the need for wisdom.

What is this "wisdom?" James has been speaking of the necessity of trials and testings and the need to be thankful for them because of the spiritual good that comes out of it. To those who feel or think that this is a difficult truth to understand or accept, James tells them to ask the Lord for wisdom. According to Calvin, "to be wise is to submit to God in the endurance of evils, under a due conviction that he so orders all things as to promote our salvation; yet the sentence may be generally applied to every branch of right knowledge" (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.], 282). God alone is the Giver of wisdom. God assures

the one who seeks wisdom that He will give (1) *haplos* meaning “simply, sincerely, openly” (BAGD, 86), and (2) *me oneidizontos*, translated “without reproach,” “without reviling,” or “without heaping insults” (BAGD, 570). God will not turn away the sincere and genuine seeker. So the encouragement is: “If you don’t understand or can’t accept the truth just taught, don’t be afraid to ask God for help.” He knows our weakness and is ever ready to help us (Heb 4:14-16).

However, the seeker of wisdom must do so with a proper attitude. “But let him ask in faith doubting nothing; for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea which is being moved about by the wind and tossed about” (v.6). This verse instructs the Christian to pray in faith (i.e. trusting and believing that God is faithful to His promise, and will provide help whenever we ask for it in accordance to His will). This faith is an unwavering faith. The word “doubting” is the Greek *diakrinomenos* which is a compound comprising the preposition *dia*, “through,” and the verb *krino*, “to judge” or “to separate between two things.” Here it has the idea of having two minds, to be uncertain of God’s ability, to doubt that the thing prayed for will ever come to pass. Prayers offered with such an unbelieving mind and a trustless heart will not be heard by God: “For let not that man think that he shall receive anything from the Lord; a man doubleminded, unstable in all his ways” (v.7-8).

The Greek word for “doubleminded” here is significant. It is *dipsuchos*, literally, “two-souled.” This word makes its first appearance here in ancient Greek literature, and in the NT is found only in James (here and 4:8). Moulton and Milligan suggested that James could have coined the word: “If James really coined it—and the manner of its appearance in both passages is quite in keeping with such a supposition—its occurrence in i/A.D. (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.) writers reinforces many arguments for the early date of Jas.” (MM, 166; parenthesis mine).

2b. The Situation Surrounding Trials (1:9-12)

1c. The situation of the poor man (1:9)

“And let the humble brother take pride in his high position.” The word “humble” is *tapeinos* has the following semantic range: (1) positional lowliness, i.e. low position, or power; (2) emotional lowliness, i.e. dejected, downhearted, downcast; and (3) dispositional lowliness, i.e. humility, gentleness, softspokenness (see LN, 2:241, BAGD, 804). But context here allows for another category, namely, (4) financial lowliness, i.e. material poverty. The rich or wealthy (*plousios*) mentioned in v10 is contrasted with the poor or destitute (*tapeinos*) above. This is not surprising since Christian Jews became outcasts and outlaws of the religious and secular community on account of their faith. They were disowned by their own people, even families, and oftentimes their personal properties were confiscated (cf Acts 4:34-35, 1 Cor 16:3, 2 Cor 8:1-9:15). They also faced tremendous persecution from the Sanhedrin, Roman government, and general pagan populace (cf Acts 4:1, 16:19-24).

In such difficult times, James exhorts the Christians to “take pride.” Pride and boasting are often spoken of in negative terms in the Bible. How is it that James tells the Christians to “boast?” Like the word “anger,” or “jealousy, there are times when such words are used in the good sense, like righteous indignation, and godly jealousy. James is using the word “boast” in the legitimate sense here. The word *kauchaomai* means “to express an unusually high degree of confidence

in someone or something being exceptionally noteworthy” (LN, 1:431). Zodiates correctly commented, “It is to profess loudly something that you have the right to be proud of, the companionship of God in your trials, which while you are so low makes you so high” (Spiros Zodiates, *The Work of Faith* [Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1981], 46). It is not a boasting of self, but of Christ. It is to unashamedly proclaim the goodness of God for what He has done for us on the cross, for His ever present help in times of trouble, and for His preservation of us till He returns. Though we may be physically poor, we are spiritually rich.

2c. The situation of the rich man (1:10-11)

“But the rich man in his humiliation, because as a grass-flower he shall pass away. For the sun has risen with the scorching wind and it has dried up the grass, and its flower has fallen away and the beauty of its face ruined; thus even the rich in his journeys shall be wasted away.”

The rich is not as powerful as he thinks. In the sight of God, he is like the grass which withers away under the scorching heat of the sun. The illustration seeks to present 2 principles for the rich man: (1) Money is not everything. Riches cannot buy a man time. It cannot prevent him from dying when his time to go arrives. He will pass away. The word *pareleusetai*, “to pass away,” is written in the future tense. Here it is best taken as a progressive future. The rich man and his wealth will gradually be depleted as time goes on. Wealth, property and power are only temporary things. They will not last forever. The rich man will die without his riches. Man is really weak and frail, and wealth cannot protect him from the day of death and judgment. Someone has defined money this way: “Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven and as a universal provider of everything except happiness.”

(2) Money comes with responsibility. The rich man is likened to grass. The word *chorton* can also mean “a field,” or “a pasture.” a small patch of grass flowers and reproduces itself till it becomes a huge field. It is illustrative of the rich man who hoards his money for self gratification and never uses his wealth to help the poor and needy. The time will come when such riches will be of no use to anybody, or for anything. For while he goes about feverishly to make more money in one of his business trips (*poereiais*; cf 5:1-6), he wears himself out (*marantbesetai*). Sickness can strike anytime, and one’s riches would gradually be drained away.

3c. The reward for the patient man (1:12)

“Blessed is the man who stands up to temptations, that having become approved he shall receive the crown of life which he has promised to the ones who love him.” The temptations here are the same as those referred to above. They are trials and testings that hit the Christian from the outside like poverty, persecution, sickness etc. The beatitude (*makarios*, cf Matt 5:3-11, Luke 6:20-22) expressed is applied to the Christian who “stands up to” such difficult circumstances in life. The word “blessed” or “happy” has a special sense in the Christian context. In the NT “it refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God” (TDNT, s.v. “*makarios*,” by F. Hauck, 4:367). It is the spiritual ability to experience joy and peace even in times of adversity or calamity. It “is fortitude of

mind in enduring adversities” (Calvin, *Catholic*, 287).

The word “to stand up to” (*hupomenei*) is the verb form of the noun, *hupomone*, translated “fortitude” in v.3-4. There is a neat tie-up here in connection to v.3.

v.3	<i>dokimion</i>	→	<i>hupomonen</i>	=	purpose of testing
v.12	<i>hupomonei</i>	→	<i>dokimos</i>	=	result of testing

The exhortation began with the purpose and ends with the result of undergoing trials. God does not allow testings to come our way for no reason at all. The reason for testing is to prove the genuineness of our faith. In learning to patiently endure trials we become Christians who are proved, and mature in the faith. One evidence of a truly saved person is that he will not deny the faith even in the midst of trying circumstances and intense suffering. He will patiently overcome them and through it all come out a stronger Christian. Saving faith is *enduring* faith (Matt 10:22, 24:13, Mark 13:13).

The reward for the genuine Christian is “a crown of life.” The phrase may be translated as “a crown which is life.” The genitive is taken appositionally, i.e. “of life” explains what the “crown” is. This does not mean that a person has to earn eternal life. Eternal life is a free gift graciously granted to a person by God when he by faith believes in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Eph 2:8-9). Calvin commented that it is wrong to “infer that we by fighting merit the crown; for since God has gratuitously appointed it for us, our fighting only renders us fit to receive it.

“He adds, that it is promised to those who love God. By speaking thus, he means not that the love of man is the cause of obtaining the crown, (for God anticipates us by his gratuitous love;) but he only intimates that the elect who love him are alone approved by God” (Ibid., 287). Yet our ability to love him and hence receive the reward is not intrinsic to us. The initiative of love is not ours but God’s: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). There is divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This is clearly stated in Phil 2:12, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

### 3b. The Source of Temptations and Good Gifts (1:13-18)

#### 1c. The source of temptations is man (1:13-15)

“Let no one who is being tempted say, “I am being tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one” (v.13). It is important to note that James is now talking of a different kind of temptation from that of v.12. The temptation of v.12 refers to trials and testings that hit the Christian from without. “It refers to adverse circumstances of life and not to something which you yourself are responsible” (Zodhiates, *Faith*, 58). The temptation of v.13 has to do with inner desires or lusts. It refers to our propensity to sin, our desire to yield to evil or lustful thoughts. It is the kind of temptation that stems from the sinful recesses of the human heart. It is the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Calvin himself wrote, “Here, no doubt, he speaks of another kind of temptation. It is abundantly evident that the external temptations, hitherto mentioned, are sent to us by God. In this way God tempted Abraham, (Gen. xxii.1.) and daily tempts us, that is, he

tries us as to what we are by laying down before us an occasion by which our hearts are made known. But to draw out what is hid in our hearts is a far different thing from inwardly alluring our hearts by wicked lusts.

“He then treats here of inward temptations, which are nothing else than the inordinate desires which entice to sin. He justly denies that God is the author of these, because they flow from the corruption of our nature” (*Catholic*, 288).

This understanding of the word “temptation” is supported by James’ explanation that (1) God is not the author of such temptations, and that (2) such temptations are evil or bad (*kakon*) in the moral or ethical sense (BAGD, 397). God is untemptable (*apeirastos* is a *hapax legomenon*), and He does not tempt man to sin.

“But each man is being tempted by his own desire, being lured and enticed” (v.14). The numerical adjective “each man” has a universal ring to it. Each man without exception experiences sinful cravings. The source of moral evil is in sinful man himself.

Every man born into this world is born in sin and will experience temptations. The fact that the word “tempted” is here written in the present tense (*peirazetai*) indicates that it is not a one time experience. Every human being will have to face temptations throughout the course of his earthly life. The source of the temptation is the individual himself. This is indicated by the preposition of direct agency *hupo*. Man is the active agent of his own temptation experience. The word *epithumias* is a strong word for desire. It is sometimes used in a good sense (Luke 22:15, Phil 1:23, 1 Thess 2:17), but it is usually used in the bad sense of lustful desires. Such lustful desires stem from within the heart of sinful man.

When a man is tempted by his own lusts, he is described as being lured and enticed (v.14 cf Prov 7). The 2 verbs are written in the passive voice. There is an external element involved in the temptation. The person is tempted by something he has seen, heard, or read. Something from without has triggered their sinful desires (e.g. David who saw Bathsheba bathing and was tempted to commit adultery [2 Sam 11:2]). The words “lured” and “enticed” were applied “to the hunter or, especially, the fisherman, who ‘lures’ his prey from its retreat (*exelkein*) and ‘entices’ it (*deleakein*) by bait (*delear*) to his trap, hook, or net” (J.H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978], 156).

Man’s own evil nature is the root of all his sinful thoughts, deeds, and words. Man is his own tempter; he tempts himself, and allows himself to be tempted by the devil.

“Then when the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and the sin, after it has come to maturity, gives birth to death” (v.15). The act of sin is a process. James uses the life-cycle of man as an analogy. The sin process involves (1) conception, (2) birth, (3) growth, (4) death. In other words, the effects of sin are sure and certain. If temptation is not arrested and resisted at the very outset it will germinate and ultimately produce destructive results.

## 2c. The source of good gifts is God (1:16-18)

“Do not be misled, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights, with whom there is neither variation nor shadow of change. Having willed, he brought us into being by the word of truth in order that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”

James commands his readers not to be misled or deceived into thinking that God is a tempter. God does not tempt anyone to sin. The present tense of the imperative *planasthe* with the negative *me* probably tells us that the prohibition deals with a situation that was already existing. The people were already thinking this way—that God tempts them with evil. James commands them to arrest immediately this false notion. The prohibition may be rendered thus, “Stop *being* misled.”

James goes on to explain the nature and character of God. What kind of God do Christians have? God is not a tempter but a giver. And what kind of gifts does He bestow? The gifts of God are described as “good” (*agathe*), and “perfect” (*teleion*). The gifts of God are morally good, and wholesome. The word *teleion* tells us the gifts that come from the Lord “has a purpose, has a goal. ... all of God’s gifts have as their end the accomplishment of God’s purpose in our lives, and that is perfection” (Zodhiates, *Faith*, 78). The Lord does not tempt but tries us so that we may be “perfect (*teleioi*) and entire, wanting nothing” (1:4). The gifts comes “from above,” that is, from heaven. There is no evil in heaven. All gifts that come from heaven are therefore pure, and are bestowed continually by God.

God gives good gifts because He is “the Father of lights.” The plural “lights” here indicates that God is not only (1) the Creator of the physical light, i.e. the sun, moon, and stars, but also (2) the Giver of spiritual light, i.e. knowledge, discernment, wisdom (cf. 1:5). 1 John 1:5 tells us that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” Only good can come out of God. When His children pray for certain things, the Lord will always do what is best, and grant what is good for them. If you have asked the Lord for wisdom in times of difficulty, the Lord will surely give it. Jesus Himself taught, “Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matt 7:7-11). What kind of wisdom does God give? James tells us in 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.”

James goes on to assure his readers that God, who is our heavenly Father, does not change. He is always good. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever (cf Heb 13:8). One will not find Him good one day, and evil the next. We can have confidence in the one living and true God who is unchangeable.

Now what good gift have we received from the Lord? What better gift is there than the gift of salvation—being made a child of God? James says that God has begotten us by means of the gospel. This verse is explained by John 1:12-13, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.” James says likewise with emphasis that we have been born into the family of God, not according to our merits, but solely “of his own will.” The clause, *bouletheis apekuesen hemas logo aletheias*, “denotes the resolute will of God as the motive force which gives new life by the word of truth” (TDNT, s.v. “*boulomai*,” by Gottlob Schrenk, 1:632). This is one proof text against the Arminian doctrine that it is not the will of God, but of man, that initiates man’s regeneration.

The purpose of making us His children is so that we might be a “kind of first fruits of his creatures.” The idea of “first fruits” goes back to the OT (e.g. Lev 23:10) where the first portion of the harvest is set apart for God. It is the most precious part of the harvest, and rightfully belongs to Him. In the same way, Christians are the choicest of all His creation.

3a. The Christian and the Manifestation of His Faith (1:19-4:18)

The Epistle of James is an extremely practical epistle—full of “do,” or “be” injunctions. There are those who claimed to be Christian but did not behave like one. This section deals with the main theme of the epistle: What are the evidences of genuine faith?

lb. True Faith is Manifested by an Obedient Reception of God’s Word (1:19-27)

The Word of God is central in this paragraph. The word *logos* appears 4 times here (vv.18, 21, 22, 23). Several figures are used for the Word: it is likened to (1) truth (v.18), (2) a seed (v.21), (3) a mirror (v.23), and (4) the Law (v.25).

1c. The need to hear God’s word (1:19-21)

“Thus, my beloved brothers; let every man be quick to the listening, slow to the speaking, slow to anger” (v.19).

The word “thus” links this passage to the previous verse (i.e. 18). Since the Lord has adopted us as His sons (note that James addressed them as his “beloved brethren.” This term “beloved” has been used by other NT writers to refer to believers [1 Cor 15:58, Heb 6:9, 2 Pet 3:17, 1 John 3:2, Jude 20]) through His Word of truth, having saved us, how ought we to behave as the children of God?

Firstly, James says that priority and emphasis should be placed on listening rather than speaking. This is taught in the OT especially in the wisdom literature written by Solomon—the wisest man ever to live on earth. With regard to hearing, we have (1) Prov 1:5, “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning: And a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.” (2) Prov 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.” (3) Prov 19:20, “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.” (4) Ps 62:11, “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard.

With regard to speaking, we have (1) Prov 10:19, “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise.” (2) Prov 13:3, “He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.” (3) Prov 17:27-28, “He that hath knowledge spareth his words: ... Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” (4) Prov 21:23, “Whoso keepeth his mouth and tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”

The above injunctions may be applied to 2 areas: (1) ecclesially, and (2) colloquially. James may be applying it to a Church situation where the Scripture is being read out loud and the congregation listens. James tells them to be quietly submissive to the words of Holy Writ; to assume the position of a pupil rather than a teacher. James will elaborate more on this when he addresses the problem of the tongue in chapter 3. The wisdom expressed in Eccl 5:1-2 applies, “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.” As a young boy in school I remember being warned against being talkative in class with the words, “Silence is golden.” This is good advice.

There may also be quite a lot of quarreling and disagreements in the churches. This may be due to the fact that the people are not hearing each other out. The aggression by some in pushing their opinions or ideas may have caused the unhappiness of many. Those who did a lot of talking did not do the same in listening. The tongue has to be controlled (Jas 3:6). Any personal disagreements should be settled lovingly and peaceably. Instead much anger has been aroused. That is why James pointed out that there is also a need to be “slow to wrath.” Prov 14:29 says, “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.” Eccl 7:9 states, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”

“For the anger of man does not bring about the righteousness of God” (v.20). James here gives the reason why a man should calm his temper. An angry man speaks on the basis of how he feels. He does not think before he speaks, nor does he listen to what others have to say. His outbursts are often without rationale and he becomes very unreasonable. The application here may again be twofold: with reference to (1) God, and (2) man. Calvin says that the anger here prevents this person from hearing God’s Word: “Wrath also, I think, is condemned with regard to the hearing which God demands to be given to him, as though making a tumult it disturbed and impeded him, for God cannot be heard except when the mind is calm and sedate. Hence, he adds, that as long as wrath bears rule there is no place for the righteousness of God. In short, except the heat of contention he [sic] banished, we shall never observe towards God that calm silence of which he has just spoken” (*Catholic*, 294).

This wrath may also be seen as directed against man. A man is angry at his fellow man because the latter is not impressed with his expressed opinions. How often in session or synod meetings do we hear of church leaders failing to come to an agreement because of anger? I have heard how one elder of a church when told of his error refused to admit his mistake, tells everyone to shut up, and accuses the session of treating him with disrespect. What was emotional almost became physical when he challenged the pastor to “step outside”. ... Surely “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Solomon observed, “The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools” (Eccl 9:17).

“Therefore, having put off every filth and excess of evil, in gentleness receive the implanted word which is powerful to save your souls” (v.21). What would be James’ advice to that wrathful elder? It would be v.21! He is to “lay apart all filthiness.” The word “lay apart” or “put off” is *apothemenoi* which is used elsewhere with reference to taking off of one’s dirty clothes (Acts 7:58). Paul is fond of using this word metaphorically to speak of the putting away of sins (Rom 13:12, Col 3:8, Eph 4:22,25). The filth that is spoken of here is moral impurity (LN 2:218).

Instead of being angry, a man ought to be gentle. Instead of being arrogant, he must be humble. The historical context of the epistle should not be ignored. James was addressing professing Christians who displayed no or very little spirituality in their lives. When confronted with their sins, they were likely to become angry. James says the correct response should be humility. The word of

God has laid down certain rules. The laws of God are meant to protect us. It is for our own good to obey them. The “implanted word” is powerful unto salvation. The Word of God has already been sown in their hearts. And if the seed has fallen on good soil, it would bring forth fruit (Matt 13:3-23). James was perhaps also hinting that those who do not manifest any Christian grace may not be in possession of the implanted Word. It is important to note that James considers salvation to come by means of receiving the Word of God and not by doing the works of the flesh. The Good Word comes before the good works.

2c. The need to do God’s Word (1:22-25)

“But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (v.22). God is not only concerned that we hear His Word, He also demands that we do His Word. Both mind and heart must be involved in the reception of God’s Word. The exercise of listening to and doing God’s Word is an ongoing one. It does not stop. The food that we eat is converted into energy. The spiritual process should be likewise.

If we only hear and do not do, we are deceiving ourselves. The word *paralogizomai*, “to deceive,” is used only twice in the NT. It is used in Col 2:4 of a deception that comes from the outside; “And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.” These are false teachers—“grievous wolves enter in ... not sparing the flock” (Acts 10:29). Here, it is referring to a deception that comes from the inside; we are beguiling ourselves. We become our own false teachers when we think that it is enough to hear God’s Word without obeying it.

“Because if a certain one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, this one is like a man studying the face of his birth in a mirror; for he studies himself and goes away and immediately forgets what he looked like” (vv.23-24). The word *katanoeo* translated in the KJV as “behold” implies more than a mere seeing. It means “to consider closely,” or “to understand completely” (LN, 2:134). It is more than a cursory look. This person who goes to the mirror, goes there to inspect his face. He knows exactly the condition of his face. It is dirty and he knows it. But he goes away without doing anything about it, thinking that it is clean when it is not. This is self delusion at the highest level.

“But the one who looks closely into the perfect law of freedom and continues (in it), being not a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this one shall be blessed in his doing” (v.25). The Greek *parakupto* means “to bend over.” (LN, 2:185). It has the idea of bending down in order to take a closer look (John 20:11). The hearer and doer of the Word is the one who takes the time and trouble to study the Bible carefully, and having studied it, sticks closely (*parameno*, “to continue,” “to remain”) to it. He seeks to observe every minute detail of the law of God. And the law of God is not a law of bondage, but a law of freedom. It is a law which sets one free from the bondage of sin when it is humbly received and obediently kept. Blessed is the man who is a doer of the law. The same beatitude is expressed in Rev 1:3, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (italics mine) .

3c. The meaning of true religion (1:26-27).

“If any man seems to be religious while not bridling his tongue but deceiving his heart, the religion of this man (is) empty” (v.26). The word *dokei*

may be translated in these 2 ways: (1) “If any man thinks he is religious,” or (2) “If any man appears to be religious.” It is better to take this word to mean appearance, for the word “religious” (*threskeos*) refers to the outward form of religion. James is speaking of the man who appears religious because he observes all the ceremonial duties of his religion. This form-based religion is only a show, it may not be real. James is looking for a faith-based religion which is manifested by a . person’s ability to control his tongue (i.e. not “slow to speak” v.19). Such outward religious show is deceptive, and empty.

Spirituality is not measured by the length of one’s prayer. It is not the performing of rituals but the controlling of the tongue that determines spiritual maturity. Pharisaical religion is false religion. James was reiterating the words of Jesus when he said, “Religion pure and undefiled in the eyes of God is this, to visit the orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep himself spotless from the world” (v.27). Jesus, denouncing the false religious leaders of Israel, said, “Woe, unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matt 23:14). These have “a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). True religion is seen in a faith that works, not a form with words (Jas 2:15-16).

2b. True Faith is Manifested by Loving One’s Fellow-men (2:1-13)

1c. Rebuke for favouring the rich and despising the poor (2:1-4).

“My brothers, hold not in partiality the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, (the Lord) of glory” (v.1). The writer assumes that the readers are in the faith thereby addressing them as brothers. By addressing them in such a way, James was in effect attempting to establish his case against them, namely, that of partiality. If you are truly in the faith, why is it then that there is discrimination among you. The Present Imperative *echete* with the negative *me* indicates that the problem was already existing, thus the command, “Remove right this moment your attitude of discrimination which is presently evident among you if you are truly Christian.”

James’ mentioning of Christ as the Lord of glory is significant. The very fact that God Himself was willing to forsake His glory to save a sinful and unloving people as us reveals His impartiality (Phil 2:5-8). There is no respect of persons with God (2 Chron 19:7, Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9, Col 3:25) .

When James mentioned the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, he must be referring to the privileged opportunity he had along with Peter and John in seeing the Lord transfigured before their very eyes. For a moment, they saw the shekinah glory of the living God. John spoke of that marvellous experience in his gospel in John 1:14, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father,) full of grace and truth.” Peter gave his testimony concerning the transfiguration in 2 Pet 1:16-17, “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” This may be seen as another reason why this Epistle should be taken as written by James the son of Zebedee.

What did James mean when he said that Christians should be impartial?

In order to make himself clear, James cites a case for illustration: “For if a man enters into your assembly with a gold ring, in luxurious clothes, and there enters also a poor man in dirty clothes, And you look at the one who wears the expensive clothes and say, You, be seated here in a good place, and to the poor you say, You, stand there or be seated by my footstool” (vv.2-3). There is always this tendency of depraved humanity to adore the rich and despise the poor.

“Have you not been discriminated in yourselves and have become judges with reasonings (that are) evil?” (v.4). “Now just for a moment (James is saying in effect), you who have acted in such a way, do you know what you are really guilty of? Are you not distinguishing or dividing in yourselves and become judges of wicked thoughts? That is indeed a great indictment. James returns to the idea of Christians being double minded or two-souled. As a friend remarked who read the exposition of James 1:6, where the same verb, *diakrinomai*, is used, this is ‘Christian schizophrenia.’ You classify people in your mind, not according to their real spiritual worth, but according to their outward physical appearance. If you are a spiritual being, as you ought to be, you had better go all the way. The faith of Jesus Christ cannot possibly have one standard for the rich and another for the poor. All are saved the same way and all occupy the same position before God. Furthermore, with this indictment James clearly indicates that this outward behavior...has its roots inside, in the heart, in the mind, and it tends to rob one of his blessedness and happiness in Christ. A man should not profess to be a Christian and have worldly standards of judgment at the same time. Let us remember to look at the inner man, first in ourselves and then in others.

“If we act in such a way, James declares, we have become judges of wicked thoughts. What does this mean? In our mind when we ushered the rich and luxuriously dressed worshiper to the best seat in the assembly, we did so for the sake of expediency. Perhaps one day we might need this rich man for a personal favor. Our favoritism stems from selfishness when we come down to it. That is one of those sins which creeps into our hearts, often quite unconsciously. We are so saturated with self that even our preferential treatment of others has self in the background. Who cares about the poor? We can never expect anything of him. But the rich—we never know when we are going to need him” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Work of Faith*, 158).

2c. The proper attitude towards one another (2:5-13)

1d. The divine favour upon both poor and rich (2:5-7)

“Hear, my beloved brothers; has not God chosen the poor in the world rich in faith and inheritors of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?” (v.5). This question introduced by the negative *ouk* expects the answer “Yes” (Blass-Debrunner, 220). The phrase “in the world” describes in what sense “the poor” are poor. They are poor in the eyes of the world. The poor socially (e.g. widows, orphans, physically handicapped, etc; cf 1:27), intellectually (e.g. slow-learners, under-achievers, those with no diplomas or degrees to show for, etc), and materially (e.g. beggars, or low earners), are often despised by the world. The rich tend to look down on the poor, and the poor try to hide their low status.

But God is no respecter of persons. He does not discriminate against the poor and pass them by in favour of the rich. On the contrary,

we find that the poor in the church far outnumber the rich. God was pleased, before the foundation of the world, to choose more of the poor than of the rich to be His sons and daughters in the faith. The Apostle Paul himself observed, “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 that 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” (1 Cor 1:26-28). Jesus Himself commented that the rich will find it extremely difficult, even impossible, to enter the kingdom of heaven on account of their love for wealth, “how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24-25). It is the poor or the poor in spirit who will enter the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20, Matt 5:3). The evangelists were not referring to physical poverty here but spiritual poverty—total denial of self, and absolute dependence on God for salvation. The poor are more receptive to the gospel because they have been taught a spiritual lesson through their low estate—that the cruel world offers no help; help comes from above. Salvation in this life and the next is sourced in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Though the poor may be poor in goods, but they are rich in faith. The phrase “rich in faith” may be translated “rich on account of faith.” Although they are poor physically, they are rich spiritually because they have found true riches in Christ. Life in this world is only temporary. It is only for a short time as compared to eternity in the life hereafter. The heavenly joys drown the sorrows of this earthly life. Christians may be beggars now, but they shall be princes in the world to come (Rev 20:6).

“But you have insulted the poor. Do not the rich oppress you and they themselves drag you to law-courts? Do not they themselves blaspheme the good name which has been given to you?” (v.6-7). There are 2 rhetorical questions here, both expecting the answer yes (the negative *ou* is used again). Yes, the rich have been oppressing the poor and blaspheming the name of Christ. In view of the contempt the rich have for those beneath them, James finds it strange that they should imitate their behaviour, and curry their favour. Calvin commented that through selfish ambition they have “honoured their executioners, and in the meantime injured their own friends.”

It must be understood that “James was not denouncing wealth per se as evil. Neither was he advocating reverse discrimination, whereby the poor are to be favored at the expense of the rich. He was arguing against favoritism of any kind” (Kent, 82). As God is impartial, so must we be (Gal 3:26-29).

2d. The absolute necessity of obeying the moral law (2:8-11)

“If really the royal law you are accomplishing according to the Scripture—‘Love your neighbour as yourself’—you are doing well.” The

word *mentoi* can either be translated in either its (1) adversative sense, “however,” “howbeit,” or (2) emphatic sense, “actually,” “really.” The rendering of it in the adversative sense would imply that James was anticipating an excuse from his readers that their treatment of the rich was in keeping with the scriptural commandment of loving one’s neighbour as oneself. This is unlikely since it is a conditional clause of the first class which considers the conditions stated in the protasis to be real. In other words, James was trying to say, “If you are really accomplishing the royal law of love (which some of you really are),...you are doing well.” It would thus be in keeping with the first class condition that *mentoi* be seen with its emphatic force. James was thus not taking for granted that everyone was guilty of the sin of partiality. Some had dealt kindly with the rich out of a pure heart desiring to obey the law of love.

Why is this law of love called the royal law? It is called royal because it is a divine law. It is issued by the King of kings and Lord of lords. Love is such a comprehensive commandment that it fulfills all other laws. The Lord Jesus when asked which is the foremost commandment of the law replied, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*” (Matt 22:36-40, italics supplied). The ten commandments (Exod 20) can be summarized by the two-fold commandment of love. The first 5 commandments: (1) Thou shalt have no other gods before me, (2) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, (3) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain, (4) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy, and (5) Honour thy father and thy mother (divine representatives on earth), address our love for God; and the second set of 5: (1) Thou shalt not kill, (2) Thou shalt not commit adultery, (3) Thou shalt not steal, (4) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour, and (5) Thou shalt not covet, speaks of love towards man. That is why Paul said, “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom 13:10). And if anyone were to ask, “Who is my neighbour?” We have Jesus’ parable of the good Samaritan for an answer. My neighbour is not just the rich, but also the poor. “But if you show favouritism, you are committing sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors” (v.9).

“For whoever has kept the whole law, but stumbled over one point, he has become liable to all. For the one who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not commit murder, and if you are not committing adultery, but you are committing murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (vv.10-11). The ten commandments are a unit. A violation of one commandment entails a violation of all. There is no such thing as venial sins (small sins which are permissible, excusable, and pardonable), and mortal sins (big sins which incur the penalty of spiritual death). Every sin whether big or small deserves hell-fire. Even though one has been a model citizen, but at some point in time violates the law, he is considered a criminal; his good record in the past notwithstanding. The readers cannot say that they love God if they love only the rich and not the poor. When they ill-treat the poor, they ill-treat God.

3d. The admonishment to live in the light of those who will be

judged by the moral law (2:12-13)

“So speak and so do as those who are about to be judged by the law of freedom” (v.12). The words “speak,” and “do” are written in the imperative mood. This is not something that the readers can choose to do or not to do. As Christians, they ought to live according to the duties laid down in the perfect law of liberty. The present tense of both commands indicate the need for a daily, habitual regulation of speech and deed. The word *boutos* is attached to both “speak” and “do.” It is not enough just to speak good; it is equally important to do good. Profession of faith must be accompanied by the performance of it. Christians should live in the light of the coming judgment. This is not the judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev 20:11), but the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). It is not the judgment of sinners, but of saints who have been released from the bondage of sin to obey the law of liberty (cf 1:25).

However, James does not take for granted that all his readers are born again. So, he issues a warning. “For the one who has shown no mercy, the judgment without mercy (he shall receive); (but) mercy overrides judgment” (v.13). Those who show no mercy to their fellowmen will receive no mercy from God. This is exactly what Jesus taught, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt 5:7). “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matt 6:14-15). “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” (Matt 7:1-2). Jesus’ parable of the compassionate king and the merciless servant (Matt 18:21-35) illustrates this wonderful truth admirably.

A true believer who has received the grace of God would and should show himself gracious to others. Those who show no mercy to others reveal a Christless heart. Unless they repent of their sins, and allow the grace of God to come into their lives, they will receive no mercy in the coming judgment. And that judgment is the judgment of the Great White Throne where God will condemn sinners to hell. But if a person manifests the fruits of regeneration (being merciful is one of them), there is no need to fear the judgment to come.

### 3b. True Faith is Manifested by the Production of Good Works (2:14-26)

Chapter 2:14-26 is the key passage of the book of James. The relationship between faith and works is clearly explained in this passage. The thesis of the whole epistle is stated in verse 20, “faith without works is dead.” As a matter of fact, the words *pistis*, “faith,” and *ergon*, “work,” occur no less than 10 times in these 13 verses.

How do faith and works relate? “James insists that a living faith will authenticate itself in the production of works. There is no antagonism between faith and works. They are not two totally distinct concepts, but rather two inseparable elements in salvation” (Hiebert, *James*, 173-4).

Although this relationship between faith and works—faith is the root of salvation, and works is the fruit of salvation—is clear enough, not everyone agrees that it should be seen in that light. On the one hand, we have those who advocate that the root of salvation involves faith and works (faith + works salvation). On the other hand, there

are the Antinomians who say that it is only faith that counts, and thus quite alright for one to live as one pleases after salvation (faith = salvation → no works). In between the above heretical views is the orthodox view that genuine faith which brings about salvation will result in a changed life (faith = salvation → good works).

In the time of the Apostles, there were (1) the Judaizers who taught a faith-plus-works salvation, and (2) the Gnostics who taught a salvation that requires faith, but not a changed life. The former was ably refuted by Paul who called it “another gospel” (Gal 1:8), and the latter by James who contended that “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:20,26).

In the time of the Reformers, there were (1) the Roman Catholic Priests who insisted that works are required for salvation and (2) the Libertines who offered the gospel as a free ticket for sinful living. Martin Luther fought the Roman Catholic Church proclaiming, “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). John Calvin not only fought the Papacy but also the Libertines when he preached against licentious living, and refused to administer the Holy Communion to those who abandoned a sanctified life.

Today, the same issues on grace versus law, and faith versus works are being debated. Although the lines between orthodoxy and heresy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, have been clearly drawn, the debate still continues within evangelical circles along finer points of controversy. The battle is now fought between (1) dispensationalists who say that the ten commandments have been abrogated since the time of Christ and need not be observed by the NT Church today, and (2) covenant theologians who insist that the demands of the moral law, being a reflection of God’s holy character, applies for all time. FEBC takes the view that the decalogue or ten commandments continues to be effective today. All Christians are obliged to keep them. For a critique of the dispensational view of the moral law, read Timothy Tow, *The Law of Moses and of Jesus* (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986). The following are important works that the student might want to refer to if he wants to probe further into the intricacies of the dispensational and covenantal systems of theology: (1) For a general overview, see Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), and Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987). (2) For detailed treatment on each area of the debate, read John S. Feinberg, ed. *Continuity and Discontinuity* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1988) especially chapter IV, “Salvation and the Testaments,” and chapter V, “The Law and the Testaments”; and Craig A. Blaising, and Darrel L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), in particular, “Christ, the End of the Law in Romans 10:4,” by David K. Lowery (chapter 7), and “Christ the Fulfillment of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” by John A. Martin (chapter 8).

To make the controversy of law and grace even more complicated, there arose in the last two decades a movement called “Christian Reconstruction” or “Theonomy” (literally meaning “the law of God”) within the reformed camp. What is theonomy? Theonomy advocates the necessity of implementing OT law in NT life. It stresses “the continued normativity not only of the moral law but also the judicial law of Old Testament Israel, including its penal sanctions; and belief that the Old Testament judicial law applies not only to Israel, but also to Gentile nations,...so that it is the duty of the civil government to enforce that law and execute its penalties” (William S. Barker, and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990], 9-10). Gentry defines theonomy as “the application of God’s Law to modern society and government, while holding at the same time to the postmillennial hope that promises that Christianity will win the world to Christ through the gospel, which is ‘the power of God unto salvation’” (Kenneth L. Gentry, *God’s Law in the Modern World* [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1993], 11).

However, to what extent the OT law is to be applied in modern society is not agreed by all theonomists. Is the Mosaic Law, involving its judicial, ceremonial, and moral parts, applicable only to the theocratic nation of Israel, or does it apply to the Gentile nations as well? If it does, how much of it, and to what degree? Rousas J. Rushdoony, the father of Christian Reconstructionism, says that it is not the purpose of the Christian Reconstruction movement to impose forcibly Old Testament laws onto today's society. He says that it would be a disaster and very wrong to do so. He clarifies, "the only way God's law is going to be enforceable in this world is as converted men, regenerate men, women and children, say 'God's word is binding upon me, and as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.' As they do so they will bring their lives under the dominion of Christ and little by little extend it" ("An Interview with R.J. Rushdoony," by Stephen C. Perks, *Calvinism Today* 2 [1992]: 13). This lecturer sees the continuing validity of the law for godly living in this present age, but does not agree to a postmillennial eschatology. A man's perfect obedience to the law, and Christ's complete dominion over the earth will be realised only after Christ's personal return to destroy this present evil world system, and set up His perfect kingdom on earth.

Lately, the battle between law and grace is fought among dispensationalists concerning the Lordship of Christ in salvation. John MacArthur in his book, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Panorama City: Word of Grace, 1988), strongly propounded that salvation involves receiving Jesus not only as Saviour, but also as Lord. In his book, MacArthur attacked the views of Zane Hodges, and Charles Ryrie who were professors of Dallas Theological Seminary. A year later, Hodges published *Absolutely Free* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1989) in reply to MacArthur's Gospel. Ryrie also had something to say. In the same year, he published *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989). These 3 books are representative of the debate. MacArthur represents the Pro-Lordship view, Hodges the Radical Non-Lordship view, and Ryrie the Non-Lordship view. Edward N Gross has written an excellent defense of Lordship Salvation in *Christianity Without a King* (Columbus: Brentwood Christian Press, 1992). See also Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Lord of the Saved: Getting to the Heart of the Lordship Debate* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1992). Hodges' radical non-lordship view ought to be rejected. However, Ryrie's presentation of the non-lordship position should be taken into consideration. As it is in the case of the Epistles of Romans and James, James was not opposing, but complementing Paul. Paul was focusing on the cause of salvation, while James the effect of salvation. It was Paul's intention to present the gospel to lost sinners so that they may obtain salvation in Christ, while it was James' intention to rebuke professing believers who claim to be Christian but showed no repentance in their lives.

1c. The emptiness of professed faith without good works (2:14-17)

"What is the use, my brothers, if a certain man confesses to have faith but does not have works? Is faith able to save him?" (v.14). Apparently, there are those in the Church who profess to believe in Christ, and confidently claim to be saved, but in their lives Christlikeness is not evident. Can *this kind of faith* save him? The answer, of course, is in the negative. James is not denying that faith does indeed save. What James is questioning is not genuine faith, for true faith will bring forth good works, but false faith which is only in word but not in deed. The word "faith" in the second interrogative clause has the definite article. The article points back to the faith of the first interrogative sentence—the faith that "does not have works." James is not saying that faith in general does not save. He is trying to say that *that kind of faith* (i.e. an empty faith) does not save.

Having noted this, it should be pointed out that “James was not arguing for two salvation requirements: faith plus works. He was not saying that some people have only arrived at the halfway point and now must add appropriate works to their faith. Neither was he contradicting Paul, as though Paul taught salvation by faith, and James taught salvation by works.

“What James was contrasting was true faith, which inevitably produces action because it is alive, versus a mere claim to faith, which is profession only and has no life-changing power. Such a claim is spiritually dead; it is powerless to produce any works. It is not a faith that entrusts the soul to God’s provision of grace in Christ” (Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith that Works* [Winona Lake: BMH Books, 1986],90).

“If a brother or sister being naked and lacking food for the day, and a certain one of you say, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be satisfied with food,’ but does not give to them the things necessary for the body, what is the use?” (vv.15-16). James now cites a case to illustrate in practical terms what faith without works is like. A brother or sister comes to you for help, needing food and shelter, and only kind words are given. Are words able to satisfy the hunger and provide warmth to the ones in need? Such is the kind of faith some of the readers had. A faith that pays only lip service. It supplies no action. It is an empty faith. As the cliché goes, “action speaks louder than words.”

“And so faith, if it does not have works, is dead in itself” (v.17). The QED of the above analogy is this: *that kind of* (demonstrative use of the definite article) faith, a faith which is not characterised by works—a workless faith—shows itself to be a dead or false faith. A corpse can produce no action. When James says that faith is dead, he is simply saying that anyone who claims to have faith but does not produce good works is actually devoid of it.

The phrase *kath heauten* translated “being alone” in the KJV may be rendered in either of these 3 ways: (1) By itself. This may be taken to mean that faith *per se* is not enough for salvation. Good works must be *added* to faith if one desires to be saved. Of course, this was not what James was trying to bring across. James was not trying to say that faith is not enough for salvation. He was merely trying to point out what kind of faith saves. The faith that saves is a productive faith. (2) In itself, or (3) according to itself. “In itself” would give the idea of the inward disposition, or essence of faith. “The point would be that such a faith is not only outwardly unproductive but is also inwardly dead. It is not a matter of adding works to such a faith. It is rather the wrong kind of faith” (Kent, *Faith that Works*, 94). Lenski prefers the translation “according to itself.” In other words, this faith is dead “according to its own showing.” “Having a special and an easy opportunity to show its life, it shows the very opposite. A dead tree, a dead branch fails to show life by not bearing fruit. ... It cannot be more than a mere *notitia* and *assensus*, matter that was in the head, that dried up there and did not enter and vivify the heart” (R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966], 579-80). There is no *fiducia*. Saving faith (*fides salvifica*) consists of these 3 elements: “(1) *notitia*, knowledge, the actual content of the gospel and the promises of God; (2) *assensus*, assent, by which the intellect acknowledges the truth of *notitia*, apart from any personal trust or saving appropriation of that knowledge; (3) *fiducia*, trust, or *apprehensio fiducialis*, faithful apprehension, which appropriates savingly, by an act of the will, the true knowledge of the promises of God in Christ. Saving faith, therefore cannot be merely intellectual; it must also be volitional” (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*



beyond the works. The works prove that he has faith, for without that faith he could not do them” (*James*, 185-6).

In any case, whichever view one takes, it is clear that James is teaching that true faith will result in good works. Saving faith is not dead but alive. How can one know a tree is alive and productive unless it has green leaves and bears fruit? So, faith that is void of works is worthless.

“You are believing that God is one, you are doing well; even the demons are believing and are shuddering” (v.19). True faith is not credal faith, but obedient faith. The Jew may be able to recite the great OT *Shema*, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut 6:4), but mere mental acknowledgement of the *Shema* is no guarantee of salvation. For even the rebellious angels know of, agree to, and tremble over this fact, but are not saved. It is saying ‘yes’ but at the same time shaking instead of nodding one’s head. That the demons have no doubts that Jesus is God and that there is but one God is clearly seen in the Lord’s encounter with the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1-10, Luke 8:26-33). The evil spirits readily confessed God’s existence and omnipotence. But their confession had nothing to do with their rebellious inward disposition. As a matter of fact, the “faith” of the demons was more alive than that of so-called Christians who professed faith, for the devils believe and tremble. The word “tremble” is *phrissousin* which literally means “to bristle.” It conveys the picture of horror that causes the hair to stand on end. Those who professed faith say that they believe but in their lives they show no fear of the Lord, and persist in a sinful lifestyle. Such faith—being dead—can never save. Credal faith involves the (1) *notitia*, and (2) *assensus* only. Saving faith consists of not only the #1 and #2 but also *fiducia* (see above 1c).

## 2d. The example of Abraham (2:20-24)

“But are you willing to know, O empty man, that faith without works is useless?” (v.20). James is not taking for granted that the readers are already won over by his previous discussion on the relationship of faith and works. He desires to prove his thesis that “faith without works is dead.” The question which he has posed may be translated this way, “Do you want convincing?” Kent phrases it this way, “Do you really want clear proof?” (*Faith That Works*, 100). James anticipates the opposition’s demand for biblical proof of his doctrine that faith without works is dead. Those who insist that faith need not be accompanied by works, James accuses of being foolishly ignorant (*kene*). He now seeks to help them understand what is true faith by citing some biblical examples. He begins with Abraham.

“Abraham our father, was not he justified by works, having offered up Isaac his son upon the altar? You see that faith working together with his works and by works faith has been perfected; and the Scripture which says, ‘And Abraham believed in God, and it was considered to him for righteousness’ has been fulfilled, and a friend of God he has been called. Understand that out of works a man is being justified, and not out of faith only” (vv.21-24). Abraham was a very important person in the Old Testament. Jews look up to him as the father of the Hebrew nation (Isa 52:2, Matt 3:9), and Christians look up to him

as their patriarch of faith (Rom 4:12,16, Gal 3:7-9). What kind of faith did Abraham have? Was it a faith without works, or a faith that works? The question, “was not Abraham justified by works?”, is rhetorical. It expects the answer “yes.” This should not be taken to mean that Abraham was saved because he worked for it. It must be categorically stated that only faith saves (*sola fide*). Paul, in no uncertain terms, said, “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9).

So what did James mean when he said that Abraham was justified by works? This statement seems to contradict what Paul said in Rom 4:2-3, “For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. And what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” This apparent conflict with Pauline soteriology has led some to believe that James should not be a part of Holy Writ. This is an unfortunate and erroneous conclusion. Martin Luther, for instance, called it a “book of straw.” He was reluctant to accept it as part of inspired Scripture because he thought that James advocated salvation by works (Jas 2:21-22, 24-25). From a superficial reading, James seems to be saying something different from Paul.

There is really no difficulty between Paul and James. They were saying the same things albeit from different angles. Paul was responding to the question: “What is it that saves?” And the answer is, “It is faith alone that saves, not works. On the other hand, James is responding to the question, “What kind of faith saves?” The answer is, “It is not a *notitia-assensus* faith, but a *notitia-assensus-fiducia* faith.”

James’ emphasis on works as a proof of true faith complements rather than contradicts Paul. When Paul talks about works in his epistles, he is speaking of it as a *means of salvation*. Can a sinner be saved by means of good works? The answer is absolutely and positively no (Rom 5:1, Eph 2:8). When Paul discusses works, he is speaking of works *before conversion*. Good works do not save. Only Jesus saves. James, on the other hand, was talking about works as a *manifestation of salvation*. Is a professing Christian saved if his life displays no sign of transformation or repentance? This person had better examine his faith, whether it is saving faith or not. Genuine faith will produce good works. A believer who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit will produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). When James discusses works, he is referring to works *after conversion*. An empty faith does not save. Only an active, living faith—a faith that works—saves.

This kind of faith—a living faith—may be observed in the life of Abraham, when commanded by the Lord, obediently offered up Isaac as sacrifice. It must be said that Abraham was not saved because of this act. Paul tells us that he was saved prior to this event. Abraham was saved when he believed in the promise of God when He said, “Get thee out of thy country, from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land

that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). This promise was repeated in Gen 17:6-8, “And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” When Abraham heard these gracious words of God, he believed. Paul commented, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3, Gal 3:6) which is affirmed by James (Jas 2:23). What does this mean? Paul explained in Rom 4:9-12 that Abraham was saved before circumcision, and in Rom 4:13-22 that he was saved apart from the law. Abraham “was fully persuaded that, what he had promised (that he will have a son as a centenarian), he was able to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom 4:21-22 cf Gen 17:17; parenthesis mine). Abraham was saved because he took God at His Word (Heb 11:8-19). “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-18) came after he was saved. By his willingness to offer up Isaac when God told him to do so, Abraham revealed that he had real faith. It was a faith which trusted God in every circumstance—good or bad—no matter what. So when James said that Abraham was “justified by works. ... how faith wrought with his works” he was not saying that faith plus works saves. Calvin commented that the word “justified” has a twofold meaning, “Paul means by it the gratuitous imputation of righteousness before the tribunal of God; and James, the manifestation of righteousness by the conduct” (*James*, 314-5). Kent explains likewise, “When James observed that Abraham’s faith ‘was working with his works,’ it was obvious that he was not arguing for works alone. In fact, he was reflecting exactly the same understanding as Paul, who wrote about ‘faith working through love’ (Gal 5:6). But neither should it be supposed that faith and works are equal partners in the quest for righteousness. If James were viewed as teaching such equality, he would be in contradiction with Paul, who has taught clearly that faith alone saves (Eph 2:8-9). James’s point was that faith that saves is a faith that yields results. If there are no results, it was not real faith” (*Faith that Works*, 104).

Then how should we understand the clause, “by works was faith made perfect?” It seems to imply that faith by itself is insufficient for salvation, that it requires works. The word *eteleiothe*, “perfect,” is significant. It “comes from the noun *telos*, which means ‘goal.’ This indicates to us that faith has a certain goal in the providence of God. Faith does not need perfection, for since faith is a gift of God, it has to be perfect, without flaw. It would be theologically and Scripturally unsound even to think of faith, a gift of God, as being imperfect. Faith...has a goal that it is supposed to reach” (Zodhiates, *The Labor of Love*, 46). In other words, faith is the source of salvation, while works the

goal of salvation. Paul expresses the same thought when he said that believers are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10). Faith, in and of itself, is the only requirement for salvation. But whether one’s faith is real or not is ascertained by whether it comes to fruition or not.

3d. The example of Rahab (2:25-26)

“And similarly also, Rahab the prostitute, was she not justified by works having entertained the messengers, and sent them away by another way? For as the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (vv.25-26). The story of Rahab is recorded in Josh 2. Rahab was not saved by works but by faith. We know this from Josh 2:9-11 where we have her testimony, “I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the’ Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” Rahab had heard of the God of Israel who had powerfully delivered His people out of the hand of Pharaoh, opened up the Red Sea, and given them victory over the transjordanian kings. It is interesting to note that when she spoke of God, she used His covenant name *Yahweh* (vv.9,12). She acknowledged that Jehovah was the one living and true God, and desired His salvation.

Rahab demonstrated her faith in Jehovah by protecting the spies. Heb 11:31 says, “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” She could have easily betrayed her guests to the king of Jericho and by so doing receive a handsome reward, but she did not. She proved her faith by her works. She honoured the Lord, and the Lord honoured her. Matt 1:5 lists her as one of those who belonged to the lineage of the Messiah.

Not all human bodies are alive. Some bodies are no more than corpses. The body is there, but there is no life. Bodies that are alive have lungs that are breathing, hearts that are pumping, and brains that are thinking. They are alive and kicking. In the same way, only a faith that is alive justifies. An empty faith is dead. Just like a lifeless body that has no breath, so also is the faith that produces no works.

4b. True Faith is Manifested by a Control of the Tongue (3:1-12)

There is a cliché which goes this way, “A tongue six inches long can kill a man six feet tall.” The power of the tongue to heal or to kill should not be underestimated. One way whereby a man may know whether his faith is genuine or not is to see whether he is able to guard his speech. Jesus warned, “But I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matt 12:36-37). The thesis of this chapter is found quite early in the Epistle—in 1:26—where James said, “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.” What good is it to merely tell someone who is

hungry and cold, “be warmed and filled,” and do nothing about it (Jas 2:16). Words are easy to say, but what really counts are the deeds.

1c. The destructiveness of the tongue (3:1-6)

“Be not many teachers, my brothers, knowing that greater judgment we shall receive. For many things we are all stumbling. If a certain man in word is not stumbling, this one (is) a perfect man, able to bridle even the whole body” (vv.1-2).

This section on the tongue is particularly addressed to teachers. James may be addressing a problem in the Church where practically everyone is more concerned for the *position* rather than the *content* of teaching. Young converts were becoming rabbis teaching that since there is freedom in the Christian faith, there is no need to observe the moral law of Moses; faith is enough, there is no need for works (Jas 2:14). There is within most of us this unwholesome desire to teach even when we are unqualified to do so. The sinful self wants to tell others what to do rather than to be told what to do. It is vital that we first be students of the Word before we become teachers. If we do not know our theology thoroughly, we may unwittingly teach heresy. I spent 8 years in full-time theological training, and still feel extremely inadequate to teach from the sacred pages of Holy Scripture. I realised that the more I studied, the more ignorant I was. I am still in the process of learning. If you are not ready to teach, do not assume the position of teacher.

Calvin understood the term *didaskaloi*, “teachers,” from a different angle. His commentary reads, “The common and almost universal interpretation of this passage is, that the Apostle discourages the desire for the office of teaching, and for this reason, because it is dangerous, and exposes one to a heavier judgment, in case he transgresses: and they think that he said, Be not many masters, because there ought to have been some. But I take masters not to be those who performed a public duty in the Church, but such as took upon them the right of passing judgment upon others: for such reprovers sought to be accounted as masters of morals. ...

“And that he forbade them to be many, it was done for this reason, because many everywhere did thrust in themselves; for it is, as it were, an innate disease in mankind to seek reputation by blaming others. And, in this respect, a twofold vice prevails,—though few excel in wisdom, yet all intrude indiscriminately into the office of masters; and then few are influenced by a right feeling, for hypocrisy and ambition stimulate them, and not a care for the salvation of their brethren. For it is to be observed, that James does not discourage those brotherly admonitions, which the Spirit so often and so much recommends to us, but that immoderate desire to condemn, which proceeds from ambition and pride, when any one exalts himself against his neighbour, slanders, carps, bites, and malignantly seeks for what he may turn to a sinister purpose: for this is usually done when impertinent censors of this kind insolently boast themselves in the work of exposing the vices of others.

“From this outrage and annoyance James recalls us; and he adds a reason, because they who are thus severe towards others shall undergo a heavier judgment: for he imposes a hard law on himself, who tries the words and deeds of others according to the rule of extreme rigour; nor does he deserve pardon, who will pardon none. This truth ought to be carefully observed, that they who are too rigid towards their brethren, provoke against themselves the severity of

God” (*James*, 3:17-18). The warning is this: those who judge others can expect to be judged more severely by God, and those who condemn must be prepared to receive greater condemnation. So be careful how you judge, and do not be quick to condemn. Jesus Himself warned, “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).

We ought not to be quick to judge or condemn others because we are not sinlessly perfect. All of us (not just teachers in particular, but Christians in general) often stumble in sin. We do not have all knowledge, and are not morally pure. Our judgments are prone to error. But this does not mean that no judgments whatsoever may be made. James was trying to prevent hasty and groundless judgments. Judgments ought to be left to spiritually mature (*teleios*) men who are able to make sound decisions. The word *teleios* translated in the KJV as “perfect,” can also mean morally perfect, genuine, physically perfect, complete, mature, adult, initiated (LN, 2:243). Here, it has the idea of spiritual maturity, i.e. “pertaining to being mature in one’s behaviour (ibid., 1:753). In other words, James was trying to say that if a man is able to control his tongue, he is a spiritually mature person, no longer a babe in Christ. In his speech, he knows when to say what has to be said, and how to say it. The tongue does not control him, he controls the tongue.

“And if the bits to the mouths of the horses we are putting in order that they may be persuaded by us, and their whole body we are steering. Behold also the boats which are so big and are being driven by rough winds are being led elsewhere by a very small rudder where the impulse of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small member and boasts great things. Behold, how small a fire sets alight how great a wood” (vv.2-5). To illustrate the fact that the tongue is such a powerful instrument, James compares the tongue with (1) the bit that bridles the horse (v.3), (2) the rudder that steers the ship (v.4), and (3) a spark that lights up a log (v.5) In the first 2 cases, the comparison has to do with the remarkable ability of tiny parts to control huge vessels. The bit and rudder determine the movement of the horse and ship respectively. In like manner, the tongue is a very small part of the body, yet it exercises such great influence on the whole man, and his life. There is therefore a need to control the tongue so as to ensure its proper use.

The third illustration of how a little fire can light up a great log seeks to point out the destructive nature of the tongue. “And the tongue (is) a fire; the world of wickedness. The tongue is being appointed among our members which pollutes the whole body and sets aflame the wheel of birth and is being set aflame by Gehenna” (v.6). This verse is difficult to interpret especially the phrase “the world of wickedness.” According to Ropes, “no satisfactory interpretation is possible for this phrase in this context” (*James*, 233). What technical exegetes often fail to explain, devotional expositors like Matthew Henry clearly enlightens, “There is such an abundance of sin in the tongue, that it may be called *a world of iniquity*. How many defilements does it occasion! How many and dreadful flames does it kindle! So is *the tongue among the members, that it defileth the whole body*. Observe from hence, There is a great pollution and defilement in sins of the tongue.

Defiling passions are kindled, vented, and cherished by this unruly member. And the whole body is often drawn into sin and guilt by the tongue. Therefore Solomon says, *Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*, Eccles v.6. The snares which men are sometimes led by the tongue, are insufferable to themselves, and destructive to others. It *setteth on fire the course of nature*. The affairs of mankind and of societies are often thrown into confusion, and all is on a flame, by the tongues of men. ... And it is set on fire of hell. Observe from hence, Hell has more to do in promoting the fire of the tongue than men are generally aware of. It is from some diabolical temptations, and to serve some diabolical designs, that men's tongues are inflamed. The devil is expressly called a *liar*, a *murderer*, an *accuser of the brethren*; and whenever men's tongues are employed any of these ways, they are set on *fire of hell*. The Holy Ghost indeed once descended in *cloven tongues as of fire*, Acts ii. And where the tongue is thus guided and wrought upon by a fire from heaven, there it kindleth good thoughts, holy affections, and ardent devotions. But when it is set on fire of hell, as in all undue heats it is, there it is mischievous; producing rage and hatred, and those things which serve the purposes and designs of the devil" (*An Exposition with Practical Observations of the General Epistle of James*, vol 2 [Willmington: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972], 1297). How did the devil fall into sin and damnation? It was by his proud words as recorded in Isa 14:13-14. Note his 5 "I will"s, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." Because of these rebellious words, God cursed him, "Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" (Isa 14:15).

### 2c. The wildness of the tongue (3:7-8)

"For all kinds of animals, not only birds, but also reptiles and sea creatures, is being subdued and has been subdued in nature by mankind" (v.7). If you visit the Singapore zoological gardens, there are special animal shows where you will be entertained by trained animals—sea lions, elephants, orang utans, and powerful birds of prey like the eagles. Although man can tame such wild creatures, man cannot tame his tongue.

The word *damazo* means "to reduce to stillness or quietness" (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* [Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1992], 397). It is only used one other time in Mark 5:4 with reference to the subjugation of a demon-possessed man. It has the idea of putting someone or something under subjection by way of intense physical pressure or exertion.

"But the tongue. no one is able to subdue of men, a restless evil, full of deadly poison" (v.8). Man is able to tame all kinds of wild animals, but the wildness of his own tongue, he is utterly helpless. The qualifier "of men" indicates that the subjugation of the tongue is *humanly* impossible. If the tongue is to be controlled, there needs to be *divine* intervention. Only God can do it. And if man is ever going to control his speech, he needs God to help him. How can the tongue be stopped except by God when it is such a destructive and poisonous organ. It does not rest in doing harm, and when it strikes the injury inflicted is often fatal.

### 3c. The hypocrisy of the tongue (3:9-12)

By it we bless the Lord and Father and by it we curse men who have been made in the likeness of God, out of the same mouth comes out blessing and cursing. (It) ought not, my brothers, these things so to be” (vv.9-10). The hypocrisy of the tongue may be seen in the many times we sing, “I love you Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you. ...” and yet after the service we criticise the pastor and his sermon. What is the use of lips which are full of praises to God, but void of kind words to men who are made in the image of God. This double talk or double walk is pharisaical. Jesus warned his disciples, “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt 23:3). The Lord cursed the Pharisees because their walk did not match their talk, “Woe unto you, scribes, and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matt 23:14).

“Does the spring of water out of her opening gushes with sweet and bitter? My brothers, is a fig tree able to produce olives or a vine figs? Neither salty sweet water to produce” (vv.11-12). These are rhetorical questions expecting a strong negative answer—“indeed not.” To put it positively, the verse may be read this way, “Surely, a fountain cannot produce both sweet and bitter water at the same time!” And “surely, it is impossible for a fig tree to yield the olive fruit or vice versa!” James’ argument by analogy here is really a restatement of Jesus’ words in Matt 7:17, “Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Neither can one find fresh water from the Dead Sea. Nothing lives in the Dead Sea. This is because the water is extremely dense containing about 25% of solid matter. The Dead Sea receives from the Jordan and other tributaries, but has no outlet whatsoever. Evaporation takes away the water but the solids are left behind causing it to be increasingly saturated with minerals. Rather than salty, the water tastes bitter. It is undrinkable and incapable of sustaining life. As much as one cannot find fresh water from the Dead Sea, one would find it hard-pressed to find good works out of a dead faith.

5b. True Faith is Manifested by Heavenly Wisdom (3:13-18)

James has already mentioned the need for divine wisdom in Christian conduct in 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.” In this passage, he elaborates on what this wisdom from above is all about.

1c. The wisdom from the world (3:13-16)

“Who is the wise and understanding man among you? Let him show out of the good way of life his works in the gentleness of wisdom” (v.13). James is giving further reasons why we should not be quick to teach, or according to Calvin, to judge. A teacher or a judge must not only be armed with information (knowledge), he must also be endued with understanding (wisdom). There needs to be a combination of *gnosis* and *sophia*, the *what* and the *how*, the *theory* and the *praxis*. A good teacher does not only impart facts, he also explains how the student should correctly apply the things learned. A qualified judge will not be

quick to pass sentence, but will examine and assess the situation thoroughly before he gives his verdict. A truly wise man will “be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (1:19). “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels. ... The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge/wisdom” (Prov 1:5,7, 9:10). And what is the fear of the Lord? “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate” (Prov 8:13). True wisdom involves the humble reception and correct application of God’s Word.

The word *epistemon* is a *hapax legomenon* (i.e. it only appears here in the NT). The word is however found in the Septuagint (LXX) and is used together with wisdom in Deut 1:13, “Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you.” “In Jewish usage, ‘wise (*sophos*)’ described the individual who possessed moral insight and skill in deciding practical issues of conduct, a wisdom derived from his personal knowledge of God. ... ‘Understanding’ (*epistemon*), ... was used of one having the knowledge of an expert, a specialist able to apply his fuller knowledge to practical situations. The two terms are synonymous, and suggested precise distinctions are not certain. Probably the first denotes a moral quality and the second an intellectual. The call is for an individual who possesses not merely academic learning but also practical moral and spiritual insight” (Hiebert, *James*, 227).

If anyone claims to have such wisdom, let him not just say it, but show it. Wisdom is not only measured by words, but by works. A wise man will most definitely lead a morally good life. Prov 3:19-23 speaks of an intrinsic connection between wisdom and conduct, “The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion: So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.”

Wisdom is seen by kind words and gentle actions. A truly wise teacher or judge will not be proud or arrogant, but humble and courteous to others. He will not flaunt his knowledge or make others look stupid. When others have erred in their ways, he is not judgmental but instructive. Such wisdom may be seen in how the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11). The Pharisees displayed a self-righteous attitude and was quick to condemn the woman for her sin. They were out to destroy this woman. Although a sin has been committed, Jesus did not seek to destroy but to heal. And when He had put to silence the accusations of the Pharisees, He asked the woman, “Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.” Jesus manifested “the gentleness of wisdom” spoken of by James. Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).

“But if we have bitter jealousy and ambition in our heart, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom is not coming down from above, but is earthly, natural, diabolical. For where jealousy and ambition, there disorder, and every worthless deed” (vv.14-16). False wisdom shows itself in the following ways: (1) *Zelon pikron*, which means, “harsh zeal” (Ropes, *James*, 245). Zeal is good. There is nothing wrong with it. The Bible encourages us to be zealous

(John 2:17, Rom 10:2, 2 Cor 7:7, 11:2, Phil 3:6). But zeal wrongly applied becomes bad. “The problem is that zeal can easily become blind fanaticism, bitter strife, or a disguised form of rivalry and thus jealousy; the person sees himself as jealous for the truth, but God and others see the bitterness, rigidity, and personal pride which are far from the truth” (Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982], 151).

(2) *Eritheian* is used a total of 7 times in the NT and always negatively. It has been translated in the KJV as “contention,” or “strife” (Rom 2:8, 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, Phil 1:16, 2:3, Jas 3:14,16). It is really “selfish ambition” (Kent, *Faith that Works*, 130). This word has been used in ancient Greek literature to depict “a self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means” (BAGD, 309). It speaks of an intense desire to grab power, or become popular by speaking evil of others unjustly. This person boastfully and aggressively imposes himself on others, and does things which are contrary to the Word of God. A person with such ambition schemes to put others down so that he can become number one.

This kind of wisdom is not heavenly, spiritual, or godly, but “earthly, sensual, devilish.” It is energised and motivated by “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). The wisdom of the world causes “confusion and every evil work.” This is clearly seen in the Corinthian Church where worldly wisdom had caused it to be divided into several factions, each of them jockeying for power (1 Cor 1:11-2:8). The Church was also plagued by all kinds of doctrinal (e.g. eating of food offered to idols, misusing the spiritual gifts, denying the resurrection) and moral (e.g. visiting the temple prostitutes, sleeping with one’s stepmother) problems.

## 2c. The wisdom from God (3:17-18)

The wisdom of God, however, will have the opposite effect. “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, considerate, obedient, full of mercy, and of good fruits, impartial, without pretence” (v.17). If there is one word to describe divine wisdom, it is this: pure. The word “pure” here is the Greek *hagne* which describes persons or things that are “without moral defect or blemish and hence pure” (LN, 1:746). In 1 John 3:3, this adjective is applied to God Himself. Since God is pure, the gift of wisdom that comes from Him must also be pure. If we possess His wisdom, we should also necessarily possess His purity. The word “pure” contains an ethical emphasis and refers to the inner quality of a Christian which keeps him from being stained by the impurities of the world. It is a wisdom which produces righteous behaviour. This inward purity begets 7 outward qualities, namely, (1) *eirenike*, “peace loving” (Donald W. Burdick, *James*, EBC [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1981], 12:191). (2) *epieikes*, “unassertive,” (SZ, 626), (3) *eupetheis*, “ready to obey,” “willing to yield” (Ropes, *James*, 249), (4) *meste eleous*, (5) *karpon agapon*, “practical mercy or concern for the suffering that manifests itself in alms (i.e. bears “good fruit”)” (Davids, *James*, 154), (6) *adiakritos*, “without discrimination,” (7) *anupokritos*, “without hypocrisy.” The list is by no means exhaustive. Unlike worldly wisdom which breeds all kinds of evil works (v.16), divine wisdom produces only good works. “And the fruit of righteousness in peace is being sown by the ones who are making peace” (v.18). *Dikaiosune*, “righteousness,” may be defined as “the act of doing what God requires” (LN, 1:744). The word “righteousness” here is connected to the word “fruit.” The phrase “fruit of righteousness” may be understood in 2 ways: A (1) genitive of apposition, i.e. the fruit which is

righteousness, or (2) subjective genitive, i.e. the fruit produced by righteousness. Usage #2 is preferred in light of 1:20 where James said, “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” If righteousness does not produce wrath, what does it produce? Well, it is peace; the righteousness of God produces the fruit of peace in man.

6b. True Faith is Manifested by a Separation from the World (4:1-18)

In chapter 4, James continues to describe the destructive fruit of earthly-sensual-devilish wisdom (3:15) which is basically self-seeking and self-indulgent. Here, James further describes the (1) lust of the flesh (v.1), (2) lust of the eyes (v.4), and (3) pride of life (vv.5-6) that characterizes worldly wisdom.

1c. The nature of worldliness (4:1-6)

1d. It is characterised by greed (4:1-3)

“From where wars and from where fightings among you? Are they not from here, out of your pleasures which are warring among your members?” (v.1). James is speaking of fightings within the Church. Two words are used to describe the conflicts that are found in the Church, (1) *Polemoi*—where we get the English word, “polemics”—which means “wars,” and (2) *machai*—which is a more specific term than *polemos*—meaning “all kinds of battles” in the plural (cf Tit 3:9, 1 Tim 6:4). There existed a polemical, belligerent spirit in the Church which resulted in many verbal and perhaps physical clashes.

These fightings are external manifestations of an internal problem. The problem lies with the depraved heart which incessantly seeks to please its carnal lusts. The word for “pleasures” here is the Greek *hedonon* where the term “hedonism” is derived. Hedonism is “the doctrine that pleasure is the highest good” (Chambers). If by killing someone you derive pleasure, then killing is good. *Hedone* is used 5 times in the NT and all speak of evil desire (Luke 8:14, Tit 3:3, Jas 4:3, 2 Pet 2:13). The list of sinful pleasures “range from unrestrained sexuality through all the symptoms of lack of self-discipline to a self-centred indifference to one’s fellow-man” (NIDNTT, s.v. “Desire,” by E. Beyreuther).

What is gained from a hedonistic lifestyle? Nothing! “You desire and do not have, you murder and covet and are not able to attain, you fight and go to war, (yet) you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, in order that you might spend (it) in your pleasures” (vv.2-3). Covetousness does not bring satisfaction. A man who covets will not cease to want more. The more he gets, the more he wants. That is why he will never come to a point where he is said to have. Calvin has difficulty accepting the word *phoneuete*, “you kill” in the text “for the verb, to kill, does in no way suit the context,” and prefers to read it as *phthoneite*, “you envy” (James, 329). There is no real difficulty in taking the text as it is for murder is often a product of covetousness. This may be seen in the case of David who coveted Bathsheba, and in an attempt to hide his adulterous affair, he murdered her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11).

The Lord has encouraged His children to pray. He has promised to hear and answer their prayers. Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth: and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt 7:7-8). “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:14). There are times we do not receive what we need because we did not pray. Instead of trusting in God to provide, we seek to obtain by sinful means—stealing, cheating, etc. Although Jesus promised to answer our prayers, it ought to be noted that Jesus was not offering a blank cheque. There are certain qualifications in prayer. James tells us that we ask and do not receive because we ask amiss. What does “amiss” mean? The word translated “amiss” here by the KJV is the adverb *kakos* which literally means “badly.” This word has a moral connotation. Asking amiss is to ask with sinful motives, or to ask

for things which are morally wrong. When Jesus promised to answer all our prayers, He also said that (1) we should pray in His name (John 14:14). Only prayers that are made in Christ's name are answered. "Such prayers, of course, are not selfish but in the interest of God's kingdom. They proceed from faith, are in accordance with God's will—ever implying, 'Not our will, but thy will be done'—, and to his glory. A prayer in Christ's name is a prayer that is in harmony with whatever Christ has revealed concerning himself" (William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954], 2:274). Moreover, John 14:13 says that Jesus only answer prayers that will glorify the Father. Any request that is not in keeping with the moral standards of God, which will put Him in a bad light will not be answered.

Jesus also said that (2) God will only give that which is good to us (Matt 7:11). The word "good" is *agathos*; it "describes that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect" (W.E. Vine, *A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Original Greek Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers* [Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.], 503). In other words, God's gifts are not only morally good, they will also bring about good results. He will not give us things that will cause us to sin, that will do us physical and spiritual harm. He will not give us money to spend on lustful pleasures.

2d. It is characterised by pride (4:4-6)

"Adulterers and adulteresses (so Textus Receptus), do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wishes to be a friend of the world, an enemy of God he constitutes himself" (v.4). The adultery that is spoken of here does not refer to marital infidelity but to spiritual infidelity or spiritual adultery. Christ is the Bridegroom (Matt 9,25), and the Church is His bride (2 Cor 11:2). Adultery is committed when the Church has an affair with the world. This is a case of the unequal yoke. The Lord has commanded, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor 6:14-16). We can only have one husband, and one master. Jesus said, "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 6:24).

Whoever befriends the world makes God his enemy. The word *kosmos* here refers to "The present world, the present order of things, as opposed to the kingdom of Christ; and hence, always with the idea of transience, worthlessness, and evil both physical and moral, the seat of cares, temptations, irregular desires" (SZ, 881). Whoever becomes a friend of the world, becomes a friend of the devil since Satan is the god of this world (John 14:30). He is no friend of God who succumbs to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15).

Homer Kent suggests that James was perhaps "implying a contrast here to Abraham, whom he was earlier called 'friend of God' (2:23)"

(Faith that Works, 145). Abraham was a friend of God because his affections were not set on this world but in the world to come. Heb 11:13-16 tells us that Abraham with all the other OT saints “died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.”

“Or do you suppose that the Scripture emptily says, ‘To envy the Spirit which dwells in us yearns,’ and does he not give more grace? Therefore he says, ‘God opposes the arrogant, but gives grace to the humble’” (vv.5-6). Is the *pneuma* that dwells in us referring to the (1) human spirit, or (2) Holy Spirit? If we take it to be the human spirit, then the statement should be understood negatively, i.e. the human spirit is evil and plagued with envy and strife. If we take it to be the Holy Spirit, then the statement is to be seen positively, i.e. the Holy Spirit jealously desires our complete devotion. The absence of an emphatic “but” like *alla* before the question “does he not give more grace” favours interpretation #2. The word “he” naturally refers to God. It thus explains that the spirit is not human but divine. The Holy Spirit not only desires that we yield to His sanctifying work, He also supplies the grace to help us do so.

However, grace is only given to those who would humble themselves before God and acknowledge their utter helplessness to overcome sin, the world, and Satan. God cannot help those who would not want His help. Ps 138:6 says, “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.”

2c. The cure for worldliness (4:7-12)

1d. The need for humility (4:7-10)

“Submit therefore to God, and resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse hands, O sinners, and purify hearts, O double-minded ones” (vv.7-8). A chiasm may be found in verses 6-7,

God (Divine Example)

A       resists the proud (Negative)

B       gives grace to the humble (Positive)

You (Human Response)

B1     submit to God (Positive)

A1     resist the devil (Negative)

(1) Observation: Divine/Human responses: (a) Divine: negatively, resisting the proud; positively giving grace to the humble. (b) Human: positively, submitting to God; negatively, resisting the devil. (2) Implication: Divine sovereignty/Human responsibility: (a) God resists the

proud because pride is of the devil, and man should follow His example by doing likewise. (b) God promises to give grace to the humble, and man receives it when he submits to God.

The word “submit” (*hupotagete*) literally means “put under.” It means more than “obey.” It involves “the surrender of the will to the leadership of another” (Kent, *Faith That Works*, 149). As stated before, true faith consists of not just the *notitia* and *assensus*, but also *fiducia*—surrender of one’s will to the leadership of Christ.

The word “resist” (*antistete*) literally means “stand against.” It is not an offensive but defensive word. The Christian is not told to be the aggressor. He is not to initiate a confrontation with and overtly declare war against the devil (read Jude 8-10). The devil will do the attacking. We are told to defend ourselves by putting on the whole armour of God” (Eph 6:11).

A two-fold promise is issued: (1) Resist devil, devil flees; (2) submit to God, God draws near. There is no two ways about it. A two-fold warning is equally valid: (1) Submit to devil, devil draws near; (2) resist God, God departs. It is either absolute loyalty to Satan or absolute loyalty to Jesus. Light and darkness like oil and water do not mix. There is no blessing for double-mindedness. This brings us back to 1:6-10 where James says that the double-minded man is unstable in all his ways and can expect to receive nothing from the Lord.

“Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up” (vv.9-10). The prevailing adulterous affair that the Church is having with the world is no cause for joy but grief. It is abnormal for a Christian to feel good when sin is committed. They ought to be utterly miserable (*talaiporeo*). There should be tears of repentance. “For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation” (2 Cor 7:10). Sin is not to be presumptuously laughed off, but mournfully confessed before God. Jesus said, “Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted” (Matt 5:4). “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Calvin said, “the grace of God will then be ready to raise us up, when he sees that our proud spirits are laid aside. We emulate and envy, because we desire to be eminent. This is a way wholly unreasonable, for it is God’s peculiar work to raise up the lowly, and especially those who willingly humble themselves. Whosoever, than, seeks a firm elevation, let him be cast down under a sense of his own infirmity, and think humbly of himself. Augustine well observes somewhere, As a tree must strike deep roots downwards, that it may grow upwards, so every one who has not his soul fixed deep in humility, exalts himself to his own ruin” (*James*, 336).

2d. The practice of humility (4:11-17)

1e. Do not be censorious (4:11-12)

“Do not speak ill of one another, brothers. The one who speaks ill of a brother or the one who judges his brother speaks ill

of the law and judges the law; and if you are judging the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. The Law-giver is one even the judge who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you, the one who is judging the neighbour?" (v.11). James comes back to the subject of the tongue—our speech. There are frequent quarreling in the Church. The unholy desire to be on top has led to false accusations being leveled against one another. Many in the Church have adopted a judgmental spirit (3:1). They have been cursing one another (3:10). There is bitter envying and strife in the Church (3:14). This critical spirit is destructive and has to stop. The word *katalaleo* literally "to speak against" is used 3 times here, and in all 3 times it is written in the present tense. The present tense denotes continual action. They have been *continually* speaking evil of one another. So the command here may be translated, "Stop right this moment your habitual act of speaking ill of one another."

By speaking evil of one's brother, one is really going against God's law, namely, the law of love. They have been cursing one another for no reason other than to promote themselves. It was taught by Jewish theologians that a man should "love his neighbour, and hate his enemy" (Nat 5:43). God never taught His people to hate their enemies. Exod 23:4 says, "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again." Prov 24:17 states, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth." God tells His people to love their enemies. Jesus commanded, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt 5:44). If they are to love their enemies who are outside the faith, how much more they should love their own brothers in the faith.

What did James mean when he said that the people have become judges of the law. It simply means that in justifying their habitual conduct of verbally abusing one, they are in effect saying that the law is wrong. They have become judges of the law by interpreting the law in ways that would be convenient to them. The law of God becomes relative to them, rather than absolute.

There is only one Judge of the law, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who issued it. It is He who will judge (1) saints at the Judgment Seat—*Bema* for their works (2 Cor 5:10), and (2) reprobates at the Judgment of the Great White Throne for their sin (Rev 20:11). However, the doers of the law are many. Those who set themselves up as judges, are usurping a position that belongs only to God. This censorious spirit is of the devil for he is said to be an accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10).

"It must be understood, however, that James was not intending to prohibit believers from making any kind of moral judgments regarding each other. James himself has evaluated some instances of faulty conduct and called the perpetrators 'sinners' (4:8). Even more severely does he castigate certain rich men (5:1-3). Scripture actually commands believers to evaluate

the conduct of others and take appropriate action. Jesus told His followers not to treat spiritual truth carelessly by casting their ‘pearls before swine’ (Matt. 7:6). Paul told the Corinthian Christians to judge sinfulness in their midst and excommunicate offenders (1 Cor. 5:1-5). They were to reject association with so-called brothers who persisted in immoral living (1 Cor. 5:11). John instructed his readers to put visiting teachers to the test and make appropriate decisions about them (1 John 4:1). Teachers of falsehood were to be refused any kind of welcome or support (2 John 10-11). What James was therefore prohibiting was a judgmental spirit that usurped authority belonging to God” (Kent, *Faith That Works*, 159).

2e. Do not be presumptuous (4:13-17)

“Come now the ones who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and we shall spend a year there and do business and make money; you who are such that you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For of what sort (is) your life? For a vapour it is which appears for a little while, and then it disappears’ (vv.13, 14 [TR]). One of the ways whereby the readers have befriended the world and made the Lord their enemy was their total disregard for God in their business decisions and engagements. “These energetic Jewish traders have precisely scheduled their travel plans (“today and tomorrow”), the exact location of their enterprise (“such and such a city”—can you not visualize a finger pointing it out on the map?), the duration of this intended operation (“spend a year there”), the precise nature of their activity (“engage in business” [KJV, “buy and sell”]), and the anticipated outcome (“make a profit”)” (Kent, *Faith That Works*, 160).

Such diligent and meticulous planning is not wrong in itself. It is wrong when we do not take God into consideration. Questions like, “Does the Lord want us to go here?”, “Will He be pleased if we do this?”, “What can we do to extend the kingdom of God in our business trips?” were never asked. Making money is the number one priority. In discussing business, do not bring in religion. James had to remind these presumptuous businessmen that their lives were not in their hands. They subsist and are able to engage in such ventures because God has graciously allowed them to. For our life is like a vapour or mist which appears but for a while and is gone. As much as we are not able to control the amount of time a vapour will last, neither can we determine how long we live. If we continue to live our lives without due regard for God and His Word, He may cut short our time here on earth. There is a lesson in Jesus’ parable of the rich fool. To the rich *townsman* who told himself to enjoy life, and take it easy, God said, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided. So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21). We should rather “seek ye first the kingdom of

God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33).

“Instead you should say, If the Lord wills, and we shall live then we shall do this or that” (v.15). Instead of arrogantly saying, “I will do this,” or “I will do that,” Christians should always seek the will of God, and humbly include the words, “The Lord willing.”

Not only in the planning of business trips but also mission trips, and even more so in the latter God should be consulted. This may be seen in the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. Paul told the Ephesians that “if God will” he will pay them a second visit” (Acts 18:20). He said the same to the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:19, 16:7), and to the Philippians (Phil 2:19).

“But now you boast in your airs of arrogance; all such boasting is evil” (v.16). There are business executives who show off their five-year, or ten-year plans. Some Christians are impressed by such godless planning, and adopt such worldly methods for the Church. It ought always to be remembered that “Man proposes, but God disposes.” Our planning must never be independent of God, and should be short term ones. We must never go ahead of God. As God opens the door, we enter. And God opens doors one at a time. He leads us a step at a time. This causes us to be ever dependent on Him for guidance each step of the way. That is why God does not reveal to us the exact time of His coming. He wants us to be mindful that He may come any time, hence, we have to be prepared all the time (Matt 24:30,42, 25:13). Sinful man is such that if he had known the exact moment of Christ’s return, he would plan to live according to his pleasure till it is five minutes to midnight!

“Therefore to the one who knows to do good and does not, it is sin to him” (v.17). The word “good” (*kalon*) speaks of that which is morally excellent and praiseworthy. The word “do” (*poiein*) is written in the present tense indicating that good is something to be done continually. As Rev Dr Timothy Tow says, we ought to “do something good for Jesus every day.” Not once in a while, but all the time. A person may sin in two basic ways: by (1) violating, or (2) ignoring the Word of God. Both types of sin—commission and omission—are equally wrong. James here issues a warning. He has shown them the error of their ways, and the correct paths they ought to take. If they refuse to do that which is good—to heed his words—they have shown contempt for the Word of God. This may be an unpardonable sin—the sin of contempt—for “faith without *good* works is dead.” Having heard the Word of God, we must do the Word of God.

#### 4a. Final Warnings and Encouragements (5:1-20)

It is not money that is the root of all evil but *the love of it* (1 Tim 6:10). There is nothing wrong in being rich, but there is everything wrong in trusting in riches. In chapter 5, James is continuing his discussion on worldliness (4:1-4). He now zeroes in on one very real problem—the worship of money. Adultery against God is committed when one makes money one’s god.

Instead of seeking “to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.1), their philosophy of life was to “buy and sell, and get gain” (4:12). James was compelled to warn them against taking this road of self-destruction.

lb. Warning Against the Rich (5:1-6)

“Come now the rich ones, weep while howling upon your miseries which are coming upon (you). Your wealth has rotted and your clothes have become moth-eaten, your gold even the silver has been covered with rust and their rust shall be for a testimony against you and it will consume your flesh as fire. You have stored up in the last days. Behold the wages of the workmen who have mowed your fields which have been withheld by you is crying aloud, and the shouts of the reapers have come into the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived in luxury upon the earth and have indulged in pleasure, you have nourished your hearts in the day of slaughter, you have condemned, you have murdered the righteous, he does not oppose you” (vv.1-6).

James here speaks to the rich who merely professed Christ, but really do not possess Him. These were first mentioned in 1:10-11 where James said that their wealthy estate was only temporary. They may be rich now in their life on earth, but they will be poor in the life hereafter.

This was also the gloomy picture Jesus painted for the wealthy in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. James could have had this story in mind when he wrote his words against the rich. Let us study closely that story found in Luke 16:19-31. This is not a parable, but a true story. Tertullian argued that the name “Lazarus” is proof that the narrative is not a parable but history. Calvin likewise concluded, “because He mentions Lazarus by name. I judge that he is telling a true story” (John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels*, vol. 2, trans T.H.L. Parker [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972], 116).

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is intrinsically tied to the parables of the lost items, and the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 15:1-16:18). It is the climax of Jesus’ teaching concerning wrong attitudes toward possessions (Luke 15), and toward people (Luke 16). The story is particularly directed to the Pharisees for their adverse response to Jesus’ statement that, “No servant 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” (Luke 16:13).

Luke informs us that the Pharisees were a covetous lot (Luke 16:14). The Pharisees were worshipping money and not God. They were no doubt indignant of Jesus’ revelation of the true nature of their greedy hearts. It is with the purpose of rebuking the Pharisees for their false piety that Jesus is telling the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The tone of the story is one of warning or threat.

Jesus is also attempting to underscore the importance of correctly understanding and applying the Law (Luke 16:16-18). The Pharisees were the Jewish lawyers, the experts in the interpretation of the Law, but they have shown themselves to be blind teachers. For example, concerning the issue of marriage and divorce. Rabbi Hillel taught that a husband had the right to divorce his wife if she was a poor cook. Rabbi Akiba even allowed a husband to divorce his wife if he found someone prettier. This is definitely contrary to the Law of Moses (cf Matt 5:31-32, 19:3-9). The Pharisees whose overwhelming interest is in looking for signs and wonders were not hearkening to the law and the Prophets (cf Luke 11:29, and 16:31).

The theme of the story is therefore two-fold: (1) The sin of covetousness, and (2) the disobedience of the Law.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus offers a two-tiered scenario: (1) The scene

on earth (Luke 16:19-21), and (2) the scene in heaven (Luke 16:22-31).

*The Scene on Earth.* As already noted, the story of the rich man and Lazarus is set within the context of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees who were (1) not following the OT Scriptures (i.e. the "Law and the Prophets" Luke 16:17-18 cf 16:29,31), and (2) not building up treasures in heaven but material wealth on earth (Luke 16:13-14 cf 16:19). The scene on earth introduces 2 characters: (1) The rich man who was well-dressed and well fed. Luke described him as one who "was clothed in purple and fine linen" (v.19). In those days, the colour purple signified high rank and nobility. This is because only the very rich or the very powerful were able to afford the purple dye used on expensive clothes. This rich man was totally oblivious to spiritual matters for he was thoroughly obsessed with physical pleasures. Hendriksen commented, "He was not just rich. He belonged to that class of people to whom the epithet filthy rich is often applied, and not without reason. His living day by day in dazzling splendor marks him as a show-off, a strutting peacock. He wanted everybody to know that he was rich. He was in love ... with himself" (William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, NTC [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978], 782). He may be likened to the rich fool of Luke 12:19 who said to himself, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." The words of God to the rich fool is relevant to the rich man as well, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided" (Luke 12:20). The divine warning applies here too, "So is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

(2) The second character in this story is the beggar by the name of Lazarus. Jesus said that he was "laid at his gate, full of sores," obviously in great pain and suffering (Luke 16:20). This was an opportunity for the rich man to show some kindness to Lazarus who was laying at the doorsteps of his mansion "desiring to be fed." The word "desiring" used here is *epithumeo* which means "to desire greatly," or "to lust." It is a very strong word for physical desires. It is often used with reference to sexual lust (Matt 5:28). Here it indicates a tremendous craving for food so that hunger might be satisfied (LN, 1:291-2). The word is also written in the present tense. Lazarus is thus described as *continuously* longing for food from the rich man. Lazarus was probably starving to death. The begging was not a momentary affair. Lazarus was there pleading for food daily. The fact that he was laying by the gate implies that he was unable to walk. But all this while the rich man was indifferent to the plight of Lazarus and considered him no better than a dog fit only to feed upon the crumbs which fell off from its master's table. These crumbs were "pieces of bread which the guests dipped in the dish, wiped their hands with and then threw under the table" (Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 2d rev. ed. [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972], 184). Note that it does not say that Lazarus was actually fed with crumbs. It simply says that Lazarus was hoping to be fed with crumbs. He was in all probability still laying outside at the gate starving to death, with his sores being repeatedly licked by stray dogs.

*The Scene in Heaven.* The beggar died and was found in heaven, and the rich man died and was found in hell. There is a reversal of roles. Lazarus is now enjoying bliss, while the rich man is experiencing torment. Abraham's words aptly describe the situation. He told the rich man, "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25). Lazarus is borne by the angels to Paradise (cf Luke 23:43). He is said to be in "Abraham's bosom." "Just as Abraham is called the father of believers because the covenant of eternal life was entrusted to his care, first to keep faithfully for his own children and then to hand on to all the nations, and all the heirs of the promise are called his children, so those who receive with him the fruit of the same faith are said

to be gathered into his bosom after they die. It is a metaphor taken from children returning, as it were, to the bosom of their father when they meet at home in the evening after their day's work. God's children are strangers and pilgrims in the world, and as during their present course they follow the faith of their father Abraham, so when they die they withdraw to that blessed rest where he awaits them" (Calvin, Harmony, 118). Lazarus is where Abraham is and there is close fellowship between the two. Lazarus who was deprived of eating at the rich man's table is now seated with Abraham at the heavenly banquet.

The rich man, on the other hand, is found in hades. The place of the departed dead. He is described as "being in torment" (Luke 16:23). The Greek *basanois* denotes "severe pain associated with torture and torment" (LN, 1:287). He himself confessed, "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24). The place where unregenerate sinners are consigned is throughout Scripture described as a fiery abode (Isa 33:14, 66:24, Matt 3:12, 5:22, 13:40,42,50, 18:8,9, 25:41, Mark 9:43-48, Luke 3:17, Jude 7, Rev 14:20, 20:10,14,15, 21:8). The flames have caused him to be so thirsty that he now assumes the role of a beggar; he begs for Abraham to allow Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool his tongue (Luke 16:24). But this was impossible. Abraham responded by saying that (1) he got what he deserved (Luke 16:25), and (2) there exists "a great gulf" which prevented movement either way (Luke 26:26). The word for "gulf" here is the Greek *chasma* where the English "chasm" is derived. It is "a deep, unbridgeable valley or trough between two points" (LN, 1:12).

At this point, the rich man became very evangelistic. He requested that Lazarus be sent to his father's house because he had 5 brothers who were not believers. The rich man wished his brothers to be converted so that they will not experience the horrors of hell (Luke 16:27-28). But Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them" (Luke 16:29). In other words, Abraham was saying that the OT Scriptures is sufficient for men to prevent themselves from ending up in eternal damnation. Moses (Deut 18:15 and the Prophets (Isa 53) have pointed forward to the redemptive work of the Messiah—"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Furthermore, the Law and the Prophets have instructed that true faith will manifest itself in good works; "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" (Jas 1:27 cf Mic 6:8). This no doubt was a direct rebuke against the Pharisees who were not only blind towards their Messiah, but also towards the needs of their fellow men (Matt 23:1-36). If these men will not listen to the Word of God, neither will they be convinced by a miracle of such magnitude as that of a man returning from the dead (Luke 16:31). The story of the rich man and Lazarus should cause us to reconsider, and reexamine our priorities in life and ministry. In salvation and in service, it is either absolute allegiance to God or not at all. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13). Jesus also said, "what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36); and "whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). This story also teaches us human responsibility. It is not enough just to profess faith. Faith must be expressed in deeds, for "faith without works is dead" (Jas 2:20). Micah, the prophet, likewise said, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic 6:8). It is not enough to hear God's Word, we must also do it.

2b. Encouragement to the Afflicted (5:7-11)

1c. The exhortation to endure (5:7-9)

“Be longsuffering therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth being longsuffering over it until he has received the early rain and the latter rain. You also be longsuffering, stabilize your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has drawn near” (vv.7-8). The word *makrothumeo*, translated “be patient” by KJV is used 3 times in verses 7-8. It should be noted that the “patience” here is different from that of 1:2-4. In the first chapter James was talking about patience as a result of undergoing trials and testings. The word used there is *hupomone* which is the “capacity to continue to bear up under difficult circumstances” (LN, 1:308). The word for “patience” in 5:7 literally means “longsuffering.” It describes “a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaint or irritation” (LN, 1:306). The same word is used again in verse 10 where it describes the patience of the prophets who endured much persecution and affliction. It has the idea of endurance during times of suffering. These 2 words, *makrothumia* and *hupomone*, belong to the same semantic range and may be used interchangeably. However, Zodhiates points out the distinction between the 2 words here, “‘Longsuffering’ is found to express patience in respect of persons. James has been speaking of injurious persons who have been taking advantage of the poor and the just. The Christian ought to be possessed with long-suffering toward these persons in spite of what they do to him. He should not permit himself to be easily provoked by them or to flare up in anger. ...

“On the other hand, if we turn to the first chapter of James’ epistle, we find that he exhorts us to have ‘patience,’ and there it has to do with things, with circumstances of life, and not with persons. A man is said to be patient who, under a great seige of trials, bears up and does not lose heart or courage” (*The Patience of Hope*, 78).

In encouraging the afflicted believers to be longsuffering, he uses the illustration of a farmer who has to wait patiently for “the early rain and the latter rain.” “The ‘early rain’ normally begins in Palestine in late October or early November, and is anxiously awaited because, being necessary for the germination of the seed, it is the signal for sowing. In the spring the maturing of the grain depends on the ‘late rain,’ light showers falling in April and May. Without these even heavy winter rains will not prevent the failure of crops” (Ropes, *James*, 295). We must patiently endure our difficult sojourn here on earth, constantly trusting in the Lord for grace to carry us through. Saving faith is enduring faith. That is why Jesus said, “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matt 24:13).

In the time of James, and even today, many Christians undergo tremendous hardship and persecution for the sake of the gospel, especially in countries which are hostile towards Christianity. Many believers worship the Lord underground. Many others are imprisoned for believing in Christ. Under such trying circumstances, “The second coming of the Lord Jesus to take His own unto Himself must have been the greatest hope of the Christian Church” (Zodhiates, *The Patience of Hope*, 81).

“Do not groan, brothers, against one another in order that you might not be judged; behold the judge is standing at the doors” (v.9). The positive command to be longsuffering, is followed by a negative injunction to stop groaning against one another. James tells the Christian to suffer silently the injustices that have been done against him. Although the Christian has been injured unjustly, he is not to judge, nor retaliate against the offender. God has

said, “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste” (Deut 32:35).

As they suffer silently, they should not harbour any feelings of bitterness or hatred. The word “groan” here is the Greek *stenazete* which has to do with “a feeling internal and largely unexpressed because of a condition one is suffering from and longs to be free of (Rom 8:23-26)” (Kent, *Faith That Works*, 178). Here it refers to grumblings that are not spoken by the mouth, but in the heart. Such feelings of animosity should go.

2c. The example of OT saints (5:10-11)

“An example receive brothers, of the endurance and the longsuffering of the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord” (v.10).

James is telling the Christian Jews he was writing to that they were not alone in their sufferings. The prophets who were before them had to go through tremendous hardships as God’s spokesmen. We think of Elijah who had to flee from Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:1-7), Jeremiah—the weeping prophet—who was not only beaten and imprisoned, but also thrown into the sewage hole (Jer 38:6), and not forgetting John the baptizer who was beheaded by Herod to amuse the daughter of Herodias (Luke 9:9). The NT abound with references to the persecution of the OT prophets (Matt 5:12, 21:35-36, 22:6, 23:29-37, Luke 13:33, Acts 7:51-52, Rom 11:3, 1 Thes 2:15, Heb 11:32-38, Rev 16:6, 18:24).

We ought to follow after their steps. They are a pattern for us to follow. “Behold, we call happy the ones who have have endured; you have heard the patience of Job and you have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is full of pity and compassionate” (v.11). Those who have endured persecution are called happy by the Lord, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for their’s 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” (Matt 5:10-12).

Not only the prophets, but consider Job as well. His intense suffering was matched by an equally immense ability to endure. Today, we remember him for this very quality of enduring patience. In the midst of personal calamities which came one after the other he was still able to say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). When we are able to humble ourselves before God like Job, the Lord promised to give more grace. He “is full of pity, and of tender mercy.” “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” (1 Cor 10:13).

3b. Warning against taking oaths (5:12)

“But above all, my brothers, do not swear, neither the heaven, nor the earth, nor any other oath; but let your ‘Yes’ yes and ‘No’ no, in order that you might not fall under judgment.” The author has already warned that we ought to be extremely careful how we use our tongue. Here is another prohibition for the tongue, namely, unnecessary or frivolous oath-taking. This is taught by Moses in Lev 19:12, “And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord.”

Positively, Deut 6:13 commands, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him, and shalt swear by His name.” The Jewish theologians have, by their subtle interpretations of the law, tried to get around those 2 negative-positive commands. They argued that the Lord only forbade them to swear by His name, but did not prevent them from swearing by other things. So they made themselves believe that swearing by heaven, or by earth, or by any thing under the sun, freed them from sin and judgment.

Jesus in no uncertain terms spoke against such swearings in Matt 5:34-37, “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven for it is God’s throne: Nor by earth; for it is his stool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great king. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, yea, yea; Nay, nor: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.” When they swear by heaven or earth, they are in fact swearing by the name of God. This is “because the glory of God is everywhere inscribed, and everywhere shines forth: nay, men take the words, heaven and earth, in their oaths, in no other sense and for no other purpose, than if they named God himself; for by thus speaking they only designate the Worker by his works” (Calvin, *James*, 353).

Is oath-taking, or making promises absolutely forbidden in all cases? Calvin says no, “It then appears evident that both by Christ and by James the puerile astuteness of those is reprov’d who taught that they could swear with impunity, provided they adopted some circuitous expressions. That we may, then, understanding the meaning of James, we must understand first the precept of the law, ‘Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain.’ It hence appears clear, that there is a right and lawful use of God’s name” (Ibid.). The Westminster Confession of Faith devotes a whole chapter on “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows” (XXII).

Oath-taking in itself is not wrong when it is taken seriously and with due regard for the name of God. It is therefore alright to take an oath in law-courts, or to exchange wedding vows. But such must be done sincerely and soberly.

#### 4b. Further Encouragement to the Afflicted (5:13-18)

Afflictions in this life come from without (e.g. wars, natural disasters, persecutions, etc), and from within (e.g. sickness, disease, etc). James now gives advice for the latter. How may we find help in times of physical illness?

##### 1c. The exhortation to pray (5:13-16)

“A certain one among you is suffering hardship, let him pray; a certain one is in good spirits, let him sing praises; a certain one is ill among you, let him call the elders of the church and let them pray for him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (vv.13-14). What should the Christian do when he becomes physically ill? The word *asthenei* here has to do with bodily maladies, i.e. “to be sick, and as a result, in a state of weakness, and incapacity” (LN, 1:270). He should call for the elders (*presbyterous*), referring to the office of a senior church official) of the church which he is attending, and the elders will (1) pray for him (it is the Lord, the Physician of physicians, who can heal us), and (2) anoint him with oil in the name of Christ. The word “anoint” here is not the usual *chrio* (the regular term for anointing, where the title “Christ” [“Anointed One”] is derived), but the word *aleipho* which means “to rub.” This word has never been used in the sense of sacred anointing. It has been used with reference to the anointing of the body of Jesus for burial (Mark 16:1), and the use of perfume on the feet of Jesus in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:38,46). The

word *aleipho* here is better translated “to oil.” What is the purpose of this oiling? It is for medicinal purposes. Olive oil, which is abundant in the Middle East, is often used for such oiling in order to soothe the tired or weak body.

“And the prayer of faith shall save the weary and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, to him it shall be forgiven. Confess therefore to one another the sins and pray for one another in order that you might be cured. Much strength the prayer of a righteous man being effective” (vv.15-16). James is not promoting faith healing as we understand it today. When James wrote this letter, the sign gift of healing was still available, but only to the Apostles (2 Cor 12:12). Now, James here speaks of the prayer by the elders, not Apostles. He thus was not referring to miraculous healing by the hand of the latter, but healing directly from the Lord in response to faith (i.e. seeking God’s help in prayer) and duty (i.e. taking the proper medical measures). “Self help with God’s help is the best help” (Rev Timothy Tow). The Lord will then by His power heal us physically (sickness cured), and spiritually (sins forgiven).

In verse 16, the first clause reads, “Therefore confess to one another the sins and pray for one another.” The verbs “confess,” and “pray” are written in the present imperative. In other words, James is commanding that Christians make a habit of confessing their sins to one another. The reciprocal pronouns *allelais* and *allelon* speak of mutual confessions, and prayers to and for one another. It cannot be used as a proof text for sacerdotal or auricular confession by a member to his priest as found in the Roman Catholic Church. John Calvin has this to say, “Wonderful, indeed, is the folly or the insincerity of the Papists, who strive to build their whispering confession on this passage. For it would be easy to infer from the words of James, that the priests alone ought to confess. For since a mutual, or to speak more plainly, a reciprocal confession is demanded here, no others are bidden to confess their own sins, but those who in their turn are fit to hear the confession of others; but this the priests claim for themselves alone. Then confession is required of them alone. But since their puerilities do not deserve a refutation, let the true and genuine explanation already given be deemed sufficient for us” (*James*, 358-9).

Now, what does the clause, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (so KJV) mean? Calvin says that the prayer of a righteous man (i.e. a Christian) “avails much, because it is effectual” (*Ibid.*, 359).

## 2c. The example of Elijah (5:17-18)

“Elijah was a man with the same feelings as us, and he prayed earnestly in order that it might not rain, and it did not rain on the earth three years and six months; and again he prayed, and the heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.” Elijah was a famous prophet in the OT—sometimes known as the “prophet of fire” because he was able to call fire down from heaven—and was popular not only among the Jewish people at that time but also among us today. We love to read the story of his dramatic battle with the 450 prophets of Baal on Carmel in 1 Kgs 18. Although mightily used by the Lord, Elijah was plagued with the same frailties of the flesh that we have. This may be seen in the fact that after he had defeated the 450 prophets of Baal he ran for his life non-step from Carmel to Beersheba when Jezebel threatened him. He slew 450 Baal prophets, but fled from one woman. Yet his prayers were effective because he was a righteous man, i.e. a Christian whose sins have been cleansed and forgiven by the blood of Christ, and who have put on the righteousness of Christ. The Lord only

hears and answers the prayers of His children. He will not receive any request from unbelievers. Ps 66:18 says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” Calvin says, “God does not hear the ungodly; nor is access to God open, except through a good conscience: not that our prayers are founded on our own worthiness, but because the heart must be cleansed by faith before we can present ourselves before God” (*James*, 359). The only prayer the Lord will hear from an unbeliever is his prayer for salvation, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.”

5b. Concluding Remarks (5:19-20)

“My brothers, if a certain one among you should wander from the truth and a certain one should turn him back, let him know that he who has turned a sinner back from the error of his way shall save his soul from death and shall cover a multitude of sins.” This is an appropriate conclusion to a letter full of practical admonitions and encouragements. The term “brothers” here need not necessarily refer to *Christian* brothers. Since it has been addressed primarily to “the twelve tribes” (1:1), namely, Israel, it is possible that James was’ addressing his *Jewish* brothers. He is very concerned for Jews who claimed to have believed in the Lord but show no evidence of it in their lives. They were still unregenerate, and needed to be told what it means to be a Christian.

Of course, he is also addressing true believers who may have backslided. The warnings against partiality, evil speaking, worldliness, etc apply to them as well. The salvific results apply to both groups as well. If the unbeliever heeds the words of this epistle, he will be saved from eternal death. “Faith without works is dead.” The reverse is equally true, *works without faith is dead* (Jas 1:17-18, 2:5). To those who believe the gospel, the Lord promised to cover all their sins—past, present, future. Ps 32:1-2 states, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.”

The carnal Christian if he repents of his sinful ways will be saved from physical death. The punitive will of God involves sickness (Jas 5:15), but also includes death for those who persist in and do not confess their sin (cf 1 Cor 11:30-32). If he repents, his sins will be forgiven, and the punishment will be lifted.