

INTRODUCTION TO THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

This marvelous little book, just 108 verses in 5 chapters, is among the most practical in the entire Bible! Written by the half-brother of our Lord Jesus around middle of 1st century, it is probably the earliest Christian epistle. It has a truly Jewish flavor. 1:1 mentions the “12 tribes.” 2:2 references the “Synagogue.” 7 times the “Law” is mentioned in the book. Over 50 Imperative verbs give it a taste of “Authority” and “Action.” The noun translated “faith” is found 16 times in this book of “works.” The verb rendered “believe” is also found 3 times. Read it to be wise, and practice it to be holy. While addressed generally to Jews, it has great doctrinal and practical importance for all believers in all ages.

Who was this man James, author of the book that bears his name? “James” is an Anglicized form of “Yacov” or “Jacob.” It was a common male name in Israel, honoring the great Patriarch. Four such men are known to the NT: 1) James, the apostle, brother of John (Lk 6:14); 2) James (also an apostle), son of Alphaeus (Lk 6:15); 3) James, father of a Judas [not Iscariot] (Lk 6:16); and 4) James, the half-brother of our Lord (Mt 13:55). Almost universally it is understood that this last one is our author. He was the leader of the Jerusalem Church by the time of the first church council recorded in Acts 15 (see especially verse 13).

Paul’s letters are written to churches, groups of churches, or individuals. This epistle lacks any such designation, and it is therefore referred to as a “General Epistle.” 1:1 calls his readers “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.” His clear intention is that the primary readers are Jewish believers. “Believers” because some form of the word “brother” is used 19 times. These believing Jews were in what we call the “*diaspora*,” the dispersion of Jews from Israel because of persecution. The great commission assumed that believers (most of whom were Jews in the early going) would scatter and carry the Gospel with them. The persecutions by their fellow (unbelieving) Jews accomplished this scattering.

Reviewing the teaching and admonitions of James’ book will reveal some of the problems that existed among those to whom he wrote. He did teach them, and he also chided them. Paul wrote to Timothy to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Some distinguish between what they call “teaching” and “preaching.” James combined them thoroughly in his epistle. Truth is eternal, and what James wrote is applicable for today - in fact his descriptions of his readers could be a biography of many churches and church members today.

The book of James is often likened to the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Scriptures. The language is indeed similar, and the emphasis on wisdom is certainly a parallel. There is also a striking resemblance to some of Jesus’ teachings in the sermon on the mount. Dr. Wiersbe points out some of the similarities in a list of verses from James and Jesus:

James 1:2—Matthew 5:10–12
James 1:4—Matthew 5:48
James 1:5—Matthew 7:7–12
James 1:22—Matthew 7:21–27
James 4:11–12—Matthew 7:1–5

Finally, some have tried to set James and Paul at odds with one another. They might claim that Paul emphasized grace while James put great value on works. They would even suggest that these men had different ideas about justification, Paul seeing it as a fruit of faith and James stating that it comes by works. Such thinking surely misunderstands them both. Paul had more than a little to say about the importance of good works (Eph 2:10, Titus 2:14, and more); James, as we shall see in the study, was only saying that our works **demonstrate** our faith, not that works **replace** faith. These great teachers were quite in harmony with one another, and we must not imagine them at odds.

Let us enjoy the study of this most practical of epistles as we work through it together. Let us discover together **HOW BELIEF SHOULD BEHAVE!**

JAMES, CHAPTER ONE

Chapter 1 is about faith “Winning in Trials.” The Mature Man, the Man of Faith is Patient in Testing.

HOW TO WIN IN TRIALS, TO SUCCEED WHEN FACING TRIALS OF OUR FAITH...

I. REALIZE THEIR PURPOSE (1:1-4)

THAT WE MAY DEMONSTRATE ENDURANCE AND GROW INTO MATURITY

1) The author is the half-brother of Jesus, but he doesn't boast of that privileged position. He rather refers to himself as the “servant” of Christ - no name-dropping here. His readers are Jewish believers who have been scattered - what we call the *diaspora*. Notice that there are no “lost ten tribes.” Persecutions have sent the children of Abraham into the four compass directions, but one day they will all come home to the land of Israel.

2) Matthew Henry said here, “The gold is put into the furnace, that it may be purified.” God is at work in our lives, and as He often works by trials, James prepares us with a challenge to joy. We do not naturally rejoice in difficulty, but we may if we understand its source and its purpose. James will write that God sends testing to make us better.

3) Believers know that they are being tested for genuineness, and that testing produces endurance, perseverance - the ability to “abide under” (literal meaning of the word translated “endure”) the weight of difficulty and not flee from it. The tendency to quit is an impurity in life, and the refiner's fire of testing helps to burn it away. Spiritual stamina is a sign of maturity in the soul. God give us durability!

4) A key theme in James is “maturity.” Trials lead to perseverance, which in turn, leads to maturity and a well-rounded life. If we flee the test, perseverance never runs its course - we short-circuit God's process and are kept from realizing the end result. This paragraph is an explanation of the modern expression, “no pain, no gain.”

II. RELY ON PRAYER (1:5-8)

TO ENDURE TAKES WISDOM; GOD GIVES IT WHEN WE UNWAVERINGLY PRAY IN FAITH

5) The context here concerns trials in the believer's life. Wisdom *in* a trial is far better than escape *from* it. For those of us who lack such wisdom, James has instruction - ask God! The promise is that God, Who is generous and not grudging, **will** give it! We need not fear refusal or rebuke for seeking this gift from our “giving God.”

6), 7), 8) When we seek something from God, we receive it, if it is His will for us to have it. This

obtaining wisdom is clearly His will - He promises to give it. James now introduces a second of the criteria for effective praying, the matter of faith. Reuben was said by Jacob to be as "unstable as water." James borrows that illustration of instability and applies it here to the person who would pray with doubt rather than faith. While God repeatedly promises to answer prayer in Old and New Testaments, James here qualifies that by arguing that the untrusting prayer will not get the desired result. To doubt when we pray is to stagger at the promise of God in unbelief. He is fully able to make us wise for the trial, and we must approach Him with confidence that He will, because He said so! To ask God for something and then doubt His ability and willingness to provide it is to have a double mind. Vacillating like that prevents productive praying. Unbelief on the part of man ties the hands of Omnipotence. "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith." We are to have a single mind in seeking wisdom from God for the trials of life that we face, the single mind of faith.

III. RESPECT THE POOR (1:9-11)

NEITHER POVERTY NOR RICHES MAKE US MORE OR LESS MATURE IN CHRIST

9), 10) As a good Hebrew, James employs the Hebrew poetry of the Proverbs - the rhyming of ideas and the setting in pairs things that compare and contrast. The "brother" is a Jew who is completed in Christ, who has found his Messiah. Very often such a decision would lead him to be excluded from the economic community, and his circumstances would indeed become humble. But he may be justly proud of his "high position" in Christ! Gaining spiritual riches transcends the loss of material wealth. Whether the rich person is a believer or not, his wealth is transient, but a believer's treasures in Christ are permanent (see 1 Peter 1:4, 5:4).

11) Similar thoughts are found in Isaiah 40:6,7 and Job 14:2. Earthly possessions cannot last - they are fleeting. The wise man said, "Riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away" (Proverbs 23:5). A twentieth century faith hero (Jim Elliott) said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We may possess riches, but we must not let them possess us. If we are consumed with "things," we will fade as a plant before the scorching sun.

IV. REAP THE PROFIT (1:12)

TRIAL + TRUST = TRIUMPH

12) John tells of the martyr's crown in Rev 2:10. There is, James says here, a way to obtain this crown without dying for our faith. It is through living for our faith, even when we feel like quitting. This is a beatitude, a promised blessing for the obedient and faithful. We must rely on God's grace and exhibit spiritual stamina to stand the test and win.

V. RECOGNIZE THE PUZZLE (1:13-20)

ACCUSATION AND ANSWER - "GOD TEMPTS ME" - "NO! HE DOESN'T"

13) How wicked is man that he would shift blame for his actions to God! Yet we know it happens - Adam tried it on the 1st page of Scripture. The thrice holy God cannot be tempted to sin, nor would He seduce man to do that which He hates. God does test us, but never tempts us. His goal is to approve; temptation's is to pull down. The difference between testing and temptation is one is to prove and improve - the other is to seduce us to sin. Testing comes from God; temptation comes from Satan.

ANATOMY OF TEMPTATION

14) James then describes the process that leads to sin: temptation has a 2-fold power; there is an outward allurements and an inward attraction. Jesus could never sin because there was nothing in Him for sin to attract. But we have a sin nature, to which Satan appeals in temptation. Those two are powerful, but God is more powerful.

15) James calls that inward attraction "lust" or "desire." When that lust has done its work, it ends in

sin. Sin, when it finishes its job, produces death. Why will we die? Achan lusted for the stuff, sinned, and died. David lusted for Bathsheba, sinned, and the innocent child died. Let us fight against lust and trust God that we might live!

ALTERNATIVE "THE UNCHANGING GOD ONLY GIVES GOOD GIFTS"

16), 17) This could be translated several ways, including, "Make no mistake about what I am about to say." Or, "Don't kid yourself about this!" Satan will try to deceive us into thinking that what he offers us is good. He always tries to make sin look pleasurable, but in the end it always brings pain, death. On the other hand, everything God gives us is good, even perfect! And He will not, cannot change! He is immutable, and will always give us only things that are good for us. A pastor of mine often said, "God loves us too much to do us any harm, and He is too wise to ever make a mistake." Clouds of doubt may hide His face, but faith will help us see.

18) The greatest gift is the gift of life, which comes to us in the new birth. God chooses to impart life to us through the Word of truth. As new creations, we are also the firstfruits of Christ's redemptive work, and thereby we belong to Him. As new creations, we have His power to overcome temptation and prove ourselves in testing.

19), 20) James makes now an impassioned appeal to his family members. The plea goes against our nature, but it blesses the life. He charges us to be ready listeners, with ears anointed by the Spirit to hear. Two ears and one mouth suggest more listening than talking; James commands it. Holding our tongue will help us hold our spirits and be less likely to become angry. Unwarranted and uncontrolled anger are improper and destructive. God desires for us righteousness of life, not the wickedness that can come from loose lips and hair-trigger tempers. Anger at sin is a Christlike and proper thing, but anger at persons is wrong, and can and should be controlled. God will help.

VI. REST ON THE PLATFORM (1:21-25)

IMPLANTED WORD, DOERS OF THE WORD

21) The Christian life is like a garden; things are to grow there. One important aspect of gardening is pulling weeds, getting rid of things that sap the moisture and nourishment from the earth and stifle the growth of the fruit-yielding plants. So we remove and we receive; remove the weeds of wickedness and receive the soul-saving Word of God. When such happens, the Spirit is better able to produce His fruit in the garden of our lives.

22) We humans tragically deceive ourselves when we drink in God's Word in lessons, sermons, Bible studies, and then don't put into practice that which we learn. Proper reception of the Word changes and activates the life. How goes it with you?

23), 24) James illustrates the hearer-only as being like a man (in this case a male person) who looks in the mirror, sees what of his appearance needs adjustment, and then goes away without doing anything about it. The Word is a mirror to the life and the soul, but if all we do is peer into the mirror, our lives do not change so as to please God and bless man. Generally the ladies use a mirror more properly than such a man. They recognize the need and address it. When we hear the Word, we must follow that by doing the Word.

25) James describes God's law as perfect - complete, not needing to be added to; also as liberating, almost an oxymoron, "liberating law." While Moses' law brought a certain bondage, Christ's law brings freedom for those who seriously consider it and obey it. As this obedience continues, so does the blessing of the Lord.

VII. RENDER THE PROOF (1:26, 27)

CONTROL OF THE TONGUE, CARING FOR THE NEEDY, CLEAN LIVING

26) Now James addresses the character of real (not empty, vain) religion. He first says that genuine religion enables a man to control his tongue. A man who reckons himself religious and has

an unbridled tongue is self-deceived. O how you and I daily need to ask God to set a watch over our mouths and keep the door of our lips.

27) James adds characteristics of proper religion, now called clean and faultless. There are in this world people in far worse circumstances than ourselves. Looking in on them in their time of need is required of believers. Also, we are called upon to keep our lives untainted by this world-system. How is it with your religion? Is it real, clean, faultless? Hypocrisy abounds all around us. Let us not be part of it. Let us live up to our profession in Christ.

**We live in a society of "Victims." So many people feel they have suffered wrongly.*

**Testing comes to all of us. Whether we come out "Victims" or "Victors" depends on our faith.*

**A maturing Christian lives every day trusting God to handle his life's circumstances.*

**When trials come, those who trust God WIN!*

JAMES, CHAPTER TWO

James is an insightful, inspired writer; God used his pen to teach us important truths of the Christian life. He begins by addressing the matter of partiality within the church - favoritism showed to people of means. He transitions to thoughts about the law - which forbade favoritism in just personal dealings. Mention of the law, then, which required works, led James to move to the relation between works and faith. What a great literary logician he was! What truth he shared! What a reflection of us we see!

I. WEALTH AND FAVORITISM (2:1-13)

PARTIALITY MAKES US POOR JUDGES

1) Our Lord's brother indicates he is talking to others in the family, the spiritual family, that is. When Christ is the object of our faith, and His alone is the glory, we must not glorify certain men by giving them preferential treatment based on non-spiritual criteria. "Show favoritism" translates a word that literally means, "seize the face," discerning based on external things. Paul several times challenged us to impartiality in our dealings with people; check Rom 2:11.

2), 3), 4) James gets very personal here, using an illustration that involves his readers. His Jewish roots show in using a form of the word "synagogue" for their meeting. Here's the scene: the assembly has gathered; into the meeting come two men - one dressed in finery with expensive jewelry (obviously a man of means), the other appears in shabby clothes, doubtless a man of poverty. How will these men be treated relative to their obvious circumstances? How differently would we treat a significant donor and a man seeking shelter at the Rescue Mission? In James' illustration, both men are stared at, and one is quickly given a seat of honor ("YOU! sit here, in the best seat"), while the other is also quickly dispatched to a lower seat where he will not be noticed. Today seating placement means little if anything, but honor, influence in decision-making, the frequent dropping of a name, and other methods are used to show partiality. James warns us, saying that such favoritism in God's family is unacceptable, discriminatory, and represents judgment of persons made on bases that are evil! Unjust estimations of persons is displeasing to our Lord. The ground at the foot of the cross is level ground, no high places for wealth and no low places for poverty. God loved the world, and our Lord Jesus Christ died for all.

POSSESSIONS DON'T INFLUENCE GOD

5) We perceive that very often people of wealth tend to trust more in their riches and less in their God, though such is certainly not always the case - God has many in His army to whom He has entrusted great wealth, and many of them use their resources for great good in God's work. A poor man is not honored of God for his poverty, but for his faith, which then makes him rich. The heart is

clearly more important than the contents of the purse.

POOR ARE MISTREATED BY THE RICH

6), 7) James tells us we have given an insult to the poor by esteeming them on the basis of earthly possessions. It is not uncommon for people of wealth to use their means to take advantage of the common man. Exploitation led to labor unions and labor laws. To get what was most important to them, the ungodly rich would drag men into court, where believers are told to settle matters privately and as a family, taking loss if necessary to protect God's name. Not only do such wicked wealthy abuse the poor, but they dishonor the name of God as well. How wrong are we to honor those who dishonor the noble name of our Lord Jesus! And yet when we show favoritism based on material possessions or social position, we do exactly that. God forgive us, and help us!

PARTIALITY IS FORBIDDEN IN THE LAW

8), 9) These two verses set the law of love and the practice of favoritism at odds. Earthly relations are to be governed by the law left us by the King, the "royal law." It reads, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Loving our neighbors keeps us from wronging them in the ways prohibited in the ten commandments. When one keeps that law, he is doing the right thing. When one plays favorites based on possessions, position, appearances, he is sinning. God in heaven is an impartial Judge, and we should endeavor to follow His example. James reminds us that this law is scriptural; and it is found in both testaments. We are hereby warned by God against distributing the favors or the censures of the church according to outward appearance. Lev 19:15 says: "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly."

10), 11) We are prone to tolerate some deviation from the law in ourselves, considering that we do pretty well overall. We are also capable of noticing and magnifying even the smallest law-violations in others. How inconsistent! We seem to think that if we obey in major matters, we are excused when committing minor infractions. Doing right never can balance out doing wrong. There is always the matter of repentance and forgiveness. James here condemns such tolerance of "minor infractions" of the law by making it clear that transgression of any part of the law is a challenge to the authority of the Giver of the law - God Himself. We conclude here that no one can keep the whole law, so there must be another way of salvation - and there is, through faith in Christ.

12), 13) God's law for us is not one of bondage, but of freedom. His guidelines for life free us from slavery to sin in our lives. They also set us free from bowing and scraping to those who possess great wealth, while encouraging us to show mercy to the less fortunate when it is in our occasion and ability to do so. Therefore, our talk and our walk should reflect knowledge of these two things - 1) the law itself, and 2) that we are going to be judged according to the law. Judgment looms as an ogre over us, waiting the day of taking his pound of flesh, but mercy in life will soften judgment in death. That is, if we show mercy to those who need it now (the poor and needy, the one who offends us), mercy will be shown us when we need it, that is, in the time of judgment.

II. WORKS AND FAITH (2:14-26)

DESCRIPTION OF DEAD AND USELESS FAITH

14) It is an easy thing to make the claim of having faith; it is more difficult, and far better, to back up such a claim with deeds. James, ever the very practical theologian, puts doctrine in shoe leather. His rhetorical question demands by its construction a negative answer: "A workless faith is not a saving faith, is it?" Such faith brings no profit.

15), 16) As the excellent teacher, James often uses illustrations to color his points. Here he sets up a hypothetical scene - a brother or sister is without basic necessities of life - food and clothes. They come to you for help and get only sentimental words and wishes. James repeats his paragraph

opening question, "What good is it?" A person who sees a need and does not pursue meeting it is like Nabal in the Hebrew Scriptures (1 Samuel 25). He resembles the priest and the Levite in Christ's "Good Samaritan" parable. The claim to faith in such a person will be challenged, and absent works will prove absent faith.

17) As in the illustration, a spoken sentiment without any effort to help is meaningless. So in life faith that is not backed up, substantiated by a life of works, is also without meaning. It is dead faith, a professed faith only, but not possessed. Faith moves outside the place of worship to the place of work, ministering to the needs of others, physical and spiritual.

18) Now comes an important aspect of James' argument, that of the outward proof of the inward reality. One claims to have faith, while asserting that another may have works. James challenges the "faith-only" speaker to demonstrate his faith w/o works, while he promises to prove his faith's reality **by** good works. Sound logic, is it not?

19) The value of workless faith is disputed, being compared to demonic assent to fact that God exists, an assent that causes them to tremble, but not to repent. Saving faith rises above such and does good works, trusting God!

20) James takes a hard swing at the man who decries works as part of the Christian experience; he calls him a fool! These are strong words; James isn't playing around. You want proof of the emptiness of faith aside from works? I'll give you proof! I'll take you back to our first father Abraham; he'll show you the importance of works!

DEMONSTRATION OF LIVING AND SAVING FAITH

21), 22), 23), 24) Martin Luther here wrongly sees James at odds with Paul; Paul had spoken of Abraham's justification by faith, James speaks of his works. Neither contradicts the other, as the writer to the Hebrews points out in 11:17 *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice*. These two elements worked in harmony; the faith saved, and the works proved the validity of the faith. None would have been able to observe the Patriarch's faith had it not been for the confirming, completing works. In this context is a great definition and understanding of **Justification** - the crediting to our account the righteousness of Christ when we believe. In other words, we are "**DECLARED RIGHTEOUS**." Again, bear in mind that James is here talking about justification **displayed** - "Show me." "You see." Before God, justification is seen in a person's heart; before men it can only be seen in the life of works that demonstrate the obedience of faith. Faith and works together complete the picture for God and man. The claim for faith in Abraham has no "empty" ring to it; it is backed up in the life of the revered Patriarch.

25) And now we look to the redeemed prostitute, Rahab, to see more proof of the premise that works verify faith. Joshua relates to us the courage of this once notorious lady, who risked her life to save the Jewish spies. Her act of faith did no less for her than Abraham's did for him; it saved her soul and brought her into the family line of Christ in faith and in the flesh (His ancestress).

26) James concludes his point with a homely illustration. A corpse is no different from a living person, except that it physically lacks breath and spiritually lacks soul - both having departed. Such a one is dead, and so is a professed faith that is not backed up by a life of good works. James has made his point well.

Concerning partiality, Jesus is our pattern: He was balanced and impartial in matters of wealth and position. He won Matthew, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, three rich men - did not snub them for their riches. He had time for the leper, the blind beggar, and the woman living as a harlot - didn't snub them for their lowliness. He was completely impartial, and so should we be!

JAMES, CHAPTER THREE (1-12)

As early as 1:26, James mentions the vital relationship between true religion and one's speech. Few sins in a believer's life are more prevalent, destructive, and accepted than sins related to speech. Lehman Strauss, "The control of the tongue is the barometer of Christian maturity. The speech of any Christian will soon reveal whether or not he is spiritual."

THE MATURE MAN, THE MAN OF FAITH, EXERCISES POWER OVER HIS TONGUE.

WE MUST LEARN TO CONTROL OUR TONGUES BY THE HOLY SPIRIT. WHY? Because...

I. IT DETERMINES GREAT MATTERS (3:1-5)

EXPLANATION

- 1) Some of James' readers desired to be teachers. He commands them to stop seeking that office because teachers face more severe scrutiny by the Judge. Teaching spiritual truth is a great privilege that carries with it an equally great responsibility.
- 2) An old wartime slogan was, "Loose lips sink ships," that is, talk can betray secrets, leading to the loss of lives. James says, "Loose lips cause trips." Control of the tongue evidences spiritual maturity. If we can keep our tongues in check, all else should be ok.

ILLUSTRATION

- 3) The first of five illustrations James uses concerns horses. A small child can pull on reins attached to a small bit and control a horse weighing hundreds of pounds. So the small tongue is very powerful. And it must be guarded by the Spirit.
- 4), 5a) James' 2nd illustration is that of a ship, moved by powerful winds across the seas, and guided by a relatively small rudder. It was the loss of its rudder that made the WWII German warship *Bismarck* a sitting duck, causing her to be sunk by fire from smaller, less powerful British warships. This terror of the high seas was reduced to rusty scrap iron at the bottom of the sea off the coast of France. So great was the influence of that little rudder - and equally great is the influence of the human organ of speech, the tongue. We must pray with the Psalmist, "Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips" (141:3). Again, we must be swift to hear and slow to speak.

II. IT DEFILES AND DESTROYS (3:6)

SYMBOL OF FIRE AND SCOPE OF INJURY

- 5b), 6) James next employs the figure of fire, which can be so devastating in nature, as is often experienced in great raging forest fires, especially in California. A little fire can become a great calamity; a little bad speech, which James says has its source in hell, can become a great disaster for many people.

III. IT DEFIES CONTROL (3:7,8)

COMPARISON OF BEASTS AND CHARACTER OF THE TONGUE

- 7), 8) The fourth illustration Pastor James uses returns us to the animal world. It is amazing how people can train such a wide variety of animals to do so many things, yet mankind struggles almost without success to tame the tongue. It resists every effort to bring it under subjection, and it contains verbal poison that can be deadly to relationships, lives, careers, and more.

IV. IT DEMONSTRATES CHARACTER (3:9-12)

INCONSISTENCY AND INDICATION

- 9), 10) Next James points out the error of ***blessing God*** and ***blasting men*** from the same mouth. He calls on his brothers to be consistent in their speech. How about us, today? Do our tongues speak out of both sides of our mouths? Or, do we who name the name of Christ speak well of others even as we praise and glorify our Lord? Is our speech spiritually consistent?
- 11), 12) The final illustrations James employs are to set forth that need for consistency of speech in a believer's life. He mentions sources of water and fruit; a fountain cannot spring forth with two

differing types of water. Vines must bear grapes, and fig trees can only bear figs. If the heart-fountain is clean, no foul speech should emit from it. The grammar in the questions demands a negative answer to each!

Proverbs 6 lists 7 things that are an abomination to the Lord, 3 of them relate to the tongue!

We should talk better: Prov 15:1, Prov 25:11. We should talk less: Prov 10:19, 17:27,28.

A RESOLVE TO MAKE: PS 17:3, 39:1

A WARNING TO HEED: MT 12:36, 37

A PRAYER TO PRAY: PS 19:14, 141:3

MAKE CHRIST THE LORD OF YOUR

LIPS!

JAMES, CHAPTER THREE (13-18)

The subject of this paragraph is wisdom, particularly as it relates to its source.

The character of wisdom is dictated by its source, and it demonstrates that source.

The wise man wrote, "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom" (Prov 4:7).

We need wisdom, and can ask God for it (James 1:5), or it can come from the other fellow.

Which wisdom will you seek to guide your life - divine, or devilish?

I. DEMONSTRATED WISDOM (3:13)

13) Those who presumed to teach must have thought themselves pretty bright. Now Pastor James asks those who feel they have wisdom and understanding to show it, not by ascending the Rabbi's platform, but by the behavior they exhibit and the humility their wisdom produces in their lives. Of "show" and "tell" it seems James and God put the greater stock in the "show." It is easier to talk a good life than it is to walk one, but walking it is the true test.

II. DEVILISH WISDOM (3:14-16)

14),15),16) James now takes off the gloves; these are bare-knuckle punches he begins to throw. This wise pastor does not spare the feelings of his readers, but he would spare them grief and judgment by setting their feet on the right path. James has described a humble, tongue-controlling, unassuming character. Those who live contrary to that have a boasting that is empty and a wisdom that is emptier. The sins of envying a God-sent teacher and the ambition of taking his place are a stench in God's nostrils. Such are pretenders to wisdom, and their so-called wisdom didn't come from God, but from the wicked heart of man and from the demons. James hits hard, but he does so like a parent chastening in love. When God directs things in the church, they are orderly. When the envious pursuits and selfish ambition of carnal men drive our actions, the result is disorder. This is accompanied, not by spiritual fruits in the church, but by what in the original language sounds like "foul" deeds.

III. DIVINE WISDOM (3:17, 18)

17) True heavenly wisdom is described by James with eight adjectives. They are sublime. (1) It is holy; we get the name "Agnes" here. (2) Its also peaceable, not striving; here find the source of the name "Irene." (3) It is fair and reasonable. (4) Then it's approachable, willing to listen. (5) Next it shows pity and (6) performs good deeds. (7) It doesn't play favorites, and (8) it doesn't play games. It is sincere. May God give to us such wisdom for our lives.

18) When you look out into the gardens around you, you see plants coming up that will bear fruit. The fruit will resemble the seed that was planted. Seek to sow the seeds of peace in your home and church, and God will bless you with righteousness which begets peace. Your home and other environments will become a little bit of heaven.

Knowledge is available from many sources - knowledge is a treasure to be cherished.

Wisdom enables us to make the best use of knowledge, makes it practical, profitable.

Again, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God..." (James 1:5).

*Many follow after pleasure, few pursue knowledge, fewer still seek wisdom.
"Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom."*

JAMES, CHAPTER FOUR

Our culture is one that is centered around "US;" license plate - "It's All About Me"

The decalogue as principles for life are about 1) God, 2) Others. It's not all about me!

One of America's (and no doubt the world's) greatest sins is selfishness - the opposite of Love.

Like Cain, when we put ourselves ahead of God and others, we are making trouble for everyone.

FOLLOWING OUR THEME, THE MATURE MAN, THE MAN OF FAITH, IS A PEACEMAKER, NOT A TROUBLEMAKER.

I. SOURCE OF CONFLICT (4:1-6)

SELF-SEEKING PRODUCES STRIFE

1) James begins by asking another question, one that demands a positive answer, "What is the source of the conflicts and skirmishes (we get our word "polemic" from the 1st of these) among you (us)?" His answer is simple and accurate - they come from our striving to satisfy our own desires for pleasure, often at the expense of another, who may be seeking the same evil end. The philosophy known as "hedonism," the pursuit of pleasure as the highest good, gets its name from the word used here and in verse three. James marks us as being selfish.

SELF-SEEKING HINDERS PRAYER LIFE

2) Now comes a series of short, terse statements, all related to wanting, getting or not getting, and how to receive what we really want. You strongly desire something, passionately want it, but it doesn't come. Our greed is rarely gratified. Like Cain with Abel, you kill in your jealousy, but even that doesn't bring satisfaction. So you keep on fighting one another. Wars and other smaller conflicts arise out of someone's greed - men wanting something that other men have. Part of the reason why you do not have what you want is that you don't ask God!

3) But there is more; sometimes you do ask God for something and still do not receive it. In such cases, James says, you have asked with hedonistic motives. Selfishness defeats us again. The text is literally, "Spending for pleasure." That really describes our day, doesn't it? What happened to "Jesus first, others second, self last?" The word "spend" is the one Jesus used of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, spending his father's bequest to him.

SELF-SEEKING OPPOSES GOD

4) These next three verses deal with two great evils of this or any day - worldliness and pride. Matthew Henry calls it "*criminal friendship with the world.*" As Hosea's wife Gomer committed adultery, leaving him for another lover, so the believer who loves this world is unfaithful to God and becomes an enemy of God. This a serious charge! We must not set our hearts on this world system; such puts us at odds with the God of heaven and earth. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world*" (1 John 2:15). **Father-love** and **world-love** are mutually exclusive.

5) Here is perhaps the most difficult verse in the book to understand. In the context of a relationship with God being cheated on by flirtation with the world, it seems best to interpret this way, "The sense of Scripture is not vain when it tells us that God is jealous over us, and expresses His desire for us in the indwelling Spirit He gave us." God is a jealous God, and the Spirit certainly would convict us of the sin of spiritual adultery. Ps 42:1,2 describe man yearning for God. It seems here that God also yearns for man - what an honor to us sinners!

6) Is it not wonderful that the Holy God gives increasing grace to stumbling saints?! Greed in verses 1-3, worldliness in verses 4,5, and pride here in verse 6, are all kindred evil spirits. Greed says, "*I want.*" Worldliness says, "*I want the wrong things.*" Pride says, "*I deserve.*" Such

declarations cause God to place Himself in battle array ("resist") against us, and they are a real disgrace. To the humble, who says, "I'll give," and "You're more important," God gives grace, unmerited favor. Let us be careful to resist pride, lest God be forced to resist us!

II. SERIES OF COMMANDS (4:7-12)

COMING UNDER AUTHORITY AND COMBATING SATAN

7) Verses 7-10 contain 10 imperative verbs (commands). The practical nature of James' book comes full into view here. To use a variation of a popular store's slogan, "*Don't just know stuff, do stuff.*" Instead of satisfying greed and pride, we should submit ourselves to the Lord, to come under His authority. This will naturally lead us to set ourselves against the devil, that is, to resist him. This roaring lion, seeking to devour whom he can, is unable to stand before the believer who is properly linked with God. He will turn and run! Don't confuse these first 2 commands - "**submit to God,**" and "**resist the devil.**" Some resist God and submit to the devil - wrong! Let's get it right!

COMING NEAR GOD AND CLEANSING OURSELVES

8) We who were formerly estranged from God are now bidden come nigh Him; attached to that call is the promise that He will reciprocate, drawing near to us. The Psalmist had told us that the person standing in the hill of the Lord must have clean hands and a pure heart (24:3,4). James now bids us to prepare for God's presence with a cleansing of our hands and hearts. It is "double-minded" to try to give God **and** the world our hands and heart. Give them to God. Remember, James is here speaking to Christians, believers, us who are saved! He is not speaking to lost people!

CONTRITION

9) It seems that his readers were glad-hearted in the impurity of their hands and heart. James exhorts them to follow Christ's beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn" (Matthew 5:4). The redeemed heart cannot live with joy in sin. The convicting presence of the Holy Spirit will turn improper gladness into proper sadness at sin's presence. The fix is to repent and turn **to God from** sin.

10) As selfish pride brought warring strife, so selfless humility brings peace and honor from the Lord. With God, the way up is down. To exalt ourselves is to defeat God's design; to humble ourselves is to complete His plan, allowing Him to exalt us. Jesus patterned this for us as is fully described in Philippians 2. To kneel before Him is to rise.

CEASING TO SLANDER

11), 12) Using the imagery of judgment and a courtroom, James discusses how we speak of people. Each conversation is a trial; each person talked about is a defendant. When we speak ill of someone, even though it be truth, we are judging them (and we are judging the law of liberty that bids us protect them). The judging of our neighbor is the work of the Lawgiver-Judge, Who is our God. Ours is to treat all people alike with kindness, whether they are rich or poor.

III. SOVEREIGNTY CONSIDERED (4:13-17)

SENSELESS PRESUMPTION

13) James does not here forbid us to make plans, or chide us for having done so. He does, however, challenge the making of plans without consideration for the will of God. Presumption is a great sin, and many practice it unawares. We do well to consult the Word and pray as we make our plans, even for business.

14) The sins of pride and selfishness fit right in with presumption about the future. Humility recognizes that God is in control, and that life at best is a fleeting thing, like the vapor from a boiling pot. Our times are not in our hands, but in God's. Tomorrow is uncertain, and it is in the Providence of God as to what we shall do; we must recognize that.

SENSIBLE TRUST

15), 16) Having corrected us for presumption in planning, James now directs us in a better way. He bids us to always consider in our hearts and attitudes, and as often as appropriate in our words, the sovereign will of God. Do not let this become a trite formula, "If the Lord wills, " but make it a constant reality in our looking to the future and making plans. This is the attitude expressed in verse 13, "This is what we **will do** tomorrow, and the results are also certain." James calls this boasting, and says it is evil. We have all known people who made certain plans for an uncertain future, ending up in disappointment and despair. Let us not follow their mistake.

SINFUL OMISSIONS

17) James has set forth many good things for us to do, just in this chapter: Submit to God, resist the devil (7), come near, wash, purify (8), consider God's will (13-16). Knowing these things, we will sin if we do not do them. Sins of omission are as surely sins as are those of commission. We must shun the evil and cleave to the good.

It is a small package that is all wrapped up in itself. Selfishness, handmaiden of pride, cardinal sin of universe. "Lord, get me outside myself; help me to be concerned with Thee and with others, leave my welfare to Thee." I see Jesus on the Cross, concerned with executing the Father's will and providing salvation for others.

JAMES, CHAPTER 5

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen..." Certainly this is applicable to the Jews as a people. Over the 4,000 years of existence, they have seen more griefs and trials than any nation of Adam's race. James is writing primarily to Jewish Christians; he mentioned their trials right from the start (1:1ff). This Proverbs-like book addresses, among other things, how they are to react in their troubles. We should inquire of ourselves as to how we handle troubles in life, comparing ourselves with this text.

THE MATURE MAN, THE MAN OF FAITH, IS PRAYERFUL IN TROUBLES

I. HIS CONFIDENCE IS NOT BASED IN POSSESSIONS (5:1-6) Riches are ...

POWERLESS TO PREVENT MISERY

1) While it would appear in the present time that the wealthy are the better off among us, James speaks of that which is to come - a misery for the rich that will make them weep and wail. He is not condemning riches, only speaking of those who get their wealth wrongly, cling to it as a loved thing, and do not use it for blessing others. Compare 1:10 and 2:6.

PASSING AWAY

2), 3) He goes on to describe the passing nature of riches, using terms like rotting wealth, moth-eaten rags that were once fine clothes, and corroded precious metals. "Riches to rags" is not the story we would like to live. He even notes that the corrosion will spread from possessions to persons, eating away their very flesh! This may be more a sickness of the soul than of the skin, but greed is deadly!

POORLY GOTTEN, PLEASURE-SPENT, PERVERT JUSTICE

4), 5), 6) Here James addresses two of the three moral aspects of money (how we get it, how we feel about it, how we use it). God in heaven knows that men are struggling because they worked for the rich, but were not properly paid - a poor way for a man to get rich! Instead of using wealth to bless people, these men had consumed it on their own indulgent desires, living in luxury while their laborers lack basic necessities. As in 4:2, they are indicted for taking the lives (in murder) of others to enrich themselves! He cannot be speaking of believers, can he?

James here speaks of the "rich" and the "poor." Generally, the rich were unbelievers, but we rejoice that God has saved many a person of means. Many of them have given generously to the work of the Lord. Remember that these Jewish Christians were usually ostracized from their communities,

causing, among other things, loss of financial opportunities. This no doubt helped produce the disparity between “rich” and “poor.” There is no sin in having wealth, and there is no particular virtue in poverty. This was just the general character of circumstances in the day in which James lived and wrote.

II. HIS CALMNESS IS BASED ON PATIENCE (5:7-12)

STAND FIRM

7) The promise of blessing upon believers in Messiah, and the glories of the Messianic Kingdom had not (and have not) been realized yet. Some who were suffering in lack were perhaps growing impatient, waiting for the fulfillment of the things they anticipated. James commands them to have patience, looking for the return of Christ (the words “Messiah” and “Christ” are the same - one Hebrew, the other Greek). He illustrates with the farmer’s patience.

8) James repeats the command for long-suffering (the exact word used in verse 7), urging his struggling readers to imitate those who make their living from the soil - who can only wait and pray for rain. “So strengthen your hearts in the surety of the promise that Jesus is coming again.” In fact, His appearing is near; and if it was considered near then, how much nearer are we to it in this generation!! Don’t lose heart, even in the worst of circumstances.

STOP MURMURING

9) “Don’t grumble” is a present active imperative. The idea is that grumbling is going on and that it needs to stop! The word is better translated “groaning,” as it is elsewhere in the NT. It is not so much that they were in conflict, as that they were not handling the suffering well. Today we might call it “whining” more than groaning. Difficulties are common to men, and since we all bear them, let us bear them well. Nobody likes to listen to a whiner.

SEE THIS

10) There was a great illustration of patient endurance in the picture James set forth of the farmer in verse 7. He adds another example from the world of ministry - the prophet. Here he adds patience “in the face of suffering.” These men of God were “long-tempered” even when those to whom they ministered mistreated them harshly. The Jewish believers to whom James wrote could identify with this in their own present set of difficulties.

11) The word for “patience” in vs 10 differs from “perseverance” here in this way. The earlier one has to do with being long in suffering, and doing it well. This latter word suggests more bearing up under a load (of difficulty). Job had problems heaped upon him as few others ever have. He maintained his integrity, bore the load, and in the end God blessed Job, and Job honored God by his own repentance. God will help you bear your difficulties, too.

12) Matthew records in two passages that Jesus charged men not to swear to confirm the truth of their statements - Mt. 5:33-37 and 23:16-22. The reality that James shares here is that our spoken word should be true, “yes” meaning “yes” and “no” meaning “no.” If James’ readers don’t change their behavior, they are setting themselves up for judgment.

III. HIS CONSOLATION IS BASED ON PRAYER (5:13-18)

PROPER REACTIONS

13) The first four of these verses address how the believer in Christ is to handle the varied circumstances of life. Consider the 2nd one first. A merry heart should not be stifled; it should burst forth in praise to Him Who caused its joy. We sing unto the Lord, and our song of joy can be a source of encouragement to others. Now, consider the first. As our blessings lead us to praise, so should our hardships lead us to prayer. Praise and prayer suit us well in the good and bad.

POWERFUL PRAYING

14),15) These two verses speak to the handling of difficulty. The bottom line is that we should

PRAY. These are indeed difficult words to understand, their meaning more difficult to convey. James may be speaking of the physically sick, or he may refer to those who are discouraged and weak in spirit and heart. Both may be included - men despairing in spirit because of prolonged grief in body. We are not to bear such trials alone; he says we should call for the church leadership to come to our side. These can soothe our dry and parched skin by applying ointment, and they can pray with us over our needs. Oil is often a symbol of God's Holy Spirit, Who can surely aid the hurting saint. When we trust God in prayer, we can confidently expect God to answer.

16) It seems likely that part of the spiritual despair discussed here relates to sins against the brethren. Such sins should be confessed to the offended brother. There is also the matter of personal accountability within discipleship groups, where we have pledged to be honest and open. That confession, coupled with earnest prayer, should help bring us out of our need. This prayer and confession are practical works that help demonstrate real faith.

PRAYING PROPHET'S PATTERN

17), 18) We often think of great prayer warriors as spiritually superhuman. James reminds us that the prophet Elijah was just an ordinary man with an extraordinary God. Yet this ordinary man prayed, and God withheld rain from Israel for 42 months! This answer to prayer was also a judgment on the land for the sins of the people and their wicked King, Ahab. Once again, when Elijah prayed, God sent a frog-strangling, gully-washing torrent of rain on the land. And if we pray, we ordinary people with an extraordinary God, we can expect and experience great things from Him. In fact, He knows what things we have need of before we ask, yet He bids us ask. And He often holds back the blessings like He held back the rain, **until** we do ask. What is your need today? Ask God for it.

IV. HE CALLS MEN TO PENITENCE (5:19,20)

19), 20) Some of the above verses clearly apply to believers, while some could even speak of the lost. There is no doubt that here James deals with Christians - sadly, saints who have lost their way. He counsels the strong among us to help recover the weak from the wayward path they chose. There are several mentions by other writers (and speakers [Jesus]) of this principal (Matthew 18:15, Romans 11:14, 1 Peter 4:8). This is not reaching the lost, but rather reaching out to the believer who is not fully walking in the light. Jesus did this for Peter by the shores of Galilee in John 21. Paul called out to John Mark through Timothy. Thank God for those who have so blessed us in our "less-than-best" times. Who knows how many Christians have been spared the ultimate discipline of death because some caring brother or sister ministered to them in their backsliding? There is an open door for such ministry in this 21st century church. Let us go through the door to our hurting family.

The whole book has been about doing right! Persevering in trials, Practicing the truth, getting Power over the tongue, making Peace, not trouble, and when trouble comes, Praying! Such a Mature Man, a Man of Faith, will help many also do right. Two major things result from this: 1) that brother may not experience a premature death, and 2) much sin which could discredit the church and the gospel may be prevented.