

James

Introduction

James' letter is supremely practical. By "practical," we mean that the letter is not a theological essay. James reads more like a sermon and presents faith as something doable, something that that works, a faith that makes a difference, unlike the "faith" that refuses to work or that ends with "trembling" (2:19). James has been called "Proverbs for the Christian" and likened to the Sermon on the Mount. James talks straight and challenges us to examine ourselves in some of the most important areas of our everyday lives.

Author & Date

The author identifies himself simply as "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ..." (1:1). Who was this James? There are four possibilities, assuming the author is one of the James' mentioned in the New Testament:

1. *James the son of Zebedee, brother of John (cf. Mk. 1:19; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35; 14:33). He was one of the twelve but it is unlikely that he wrote James since he died in AD 44 at the hands of Herod (Acts 12:2).*
2. *James the son of Alphaeus. Also one of the twelve, he is mentioned only in the lists of the apostles (unless he is James the Less, mentioned in Mk. 15:40).*
3. *James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot). See Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13. He is otherwise unknown.*
4. *James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19).*

James the Lord's brother is the most likely author of the book since, though he didn't believe in Jesus earlier (Jn. 7:5), he later became prominent in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9). The Jewish character of the book, among other factors, has led most scholars to believe that this James is the author.

Ancient authors Eusebius and Josephus both confirm that James was stoned in AD 62 by the scribes and Pharisees for refusing to renounce his commitment to Jesus. That, and the lack of any mention of the Jerusalem Council (AD 48-49), has led a number of commentators to pinpoint the dating of the book at around AD 45-46.

Recipients

The letter is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (or "of the dispersion") (1:1). This term can mean the letter is intended for Jewish Christians or to the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16) the church (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3) that had been scattered abroad after the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7 (see Acts 11:19). Another possibility is that the

term “dispersion” (Gk., *diaspora*) is a metaphor which characterizes all Christians living here on earth as “strangers and pilgrims” (cf. I Pet. 1:1).

Occasion & Purpose

If the people to whom James is writing are of the literal *diaspora*, then the purpose of writing is somewhat apparent. As those who had been scattered due to Stephen’s martyrdom, they would be suffering various trials because of their commitment to Christ. James wrote, then, to address problems such as oppression by the rich and ungodly (5:1-6), discrimination (2:1-13), claims of faith without action (1:22-27; 2:14-26) and bitterness in speech (3:1-12).

Presumably, reports of these problems throughout the churches in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19) reached James and he wrote from Jerusalem to help correct them. His tone is authoritative and firm as he “preaches” through his letter to his audience. In doing so, he touches on a number of important themes, such as: suffering/ testing, eschatology (the doctrine of “last things”), poverty vs. wealth, the relation of law, grace and faith, wisdom and prayer.

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Salutation (1:1)

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.¹

James describes himself as a “bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” and he is the only writer in the New Testament who thus describes himself. The Greek word for “bondservant” is *doulos*, which can also be translated “slave.” He does not claim to be an apostle although Paul may have called him such in Gal. 1:19 (another view of that passage is that Paul said “I saw none of the apostles, but I did see James, the Lord’s brother”). In any case, the term apostle sometimes is used in a general sense as “one sent” (cf. Acts 14:14 re: Barnabas). Gal. 1:19 also describes James as the [half-] brother of Jesus.

We have already discussed the recipients in the *Introduction*. They are probably “Jewish Christians” who have been dispersed due to persecution of the church and are undergoing various trials because of their faith, but which will serve to test their faith.

1. Consider the things that would challenge a person’s faith if he was forced to move to another place because of his convictions?
2. What is the difference between a “servant” and a “slave”? See the article on page 30 to read a compelling argument for why the Greek word, *doulos*, should be rendered “slave,” not “servant.”
3. If James is addressing Christians, why refer to them as “twelve tribes”?
4. What does “dispersion” mean? Does it suggest that this letter written to a specific, local church?
5. Compare this opening with Romans 1:1-7 – what is different?

¹ All Scripture citations from English Standard Version unless otherwise noted

Trials and Temptations (1:2-12)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. **4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, **10** and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. **11** For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James is concerned with his readers' faith because they are facing trials "of various kinds" (*pierasmos*). But James assures them that these trials will accomplish a purpose in them that will bring joy which will far outstrip the temporary difficulties they are facing (see Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:16-18 for similar thoughts by the apostle Paul).

James employs a number of word-plays in his letter. For example, "greetings" (V. 1, *charein*) is followed by "joy" (*chara*); "patience" in v. 3 with "patience" in v. 4; "perfect" with "perfect and complete," in v. 4; the word "lack" connects with "lacking" in v. 4 and "lacks wisdom" in v. 5).

James' point is that there is a proper way for Christians to face "various trials" (meaning "tests of faith," whether illness, financial loss or outright persecution). They are to "count it all joy." This doesn't mean they are *happy* that they have "stumbled into" (see Lk. 10:3)) "various" trials, but they can maintain their joy through because it is performing a work in them that will serve them well in the long term.

Usually, when trials or suffering are mentioned in the New Testament, it refers to suffering for Christ. Here, "various" seems to indicate that James is talking about any suffering, including those common to man, the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."

Joy and trials are not terms you expect to see together. So we learn something that we would not know except through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. Our trials give us an opportunity to perfect our faith. The worldly man doesn't care about faith; but the Christian knows that "the just lives by faith" (Rom. 1:17). I Peter 1:6-7 echoes James 1:2ff.: "In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials (Gk., *pierasmos*), that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." See Romans 5:2b-5.

Testing recruits patience (endurance) and patience, when it is completed (or full-grown; compare with v. 15, "sin, when it is full-grown...") has its perfect work, the completion of Christian character. This endurance is necessary because this work is a life-long process. Perfection (Gk., *telios*) is the goal, the ideal. *Telios* is often rendered "mature," but that lets us off the hook. James is pushing an idea; he uses the adjective "perfect" more than any other New Testament writer — to describe God's "gift" (1:17), the "law of liberty" (1:25) and the man who is able to bridle his tongue completely (3:2). Trials accelerate our efforts to strive for perfection, nothing less. Therefore, we "count it all joy" as we "let patience have its perfect work."

What is the secret to viewing our trials in this way? Wisdom! How do you get wisdom? Ask! Who do you ask? God! Why? Because He gives “liberally and without reproach” (cf. Prov. 2:6a). The word translated “liberally” (Gk., *haplos*) comes from a root word meaning “single” or “simple,” meaning God’s gift is undivided, unwavering, without reservation (cf. with the *double-minded* man of v. 8). He gives “without reproach”; He does not give a “lecture” with the gift; He gives without criticism and “without reminding us endlessly of the value of the gifts He gives” (Moo, *James*). Some parents could learn from this.

Notice that James attaches a condition to the gift. While gifts are always free — that is, they are never earned, otherwise they would not be “gifts” — there may be a prerequisite to the receiving of the gift. For example, if a supermarket decided to give away a shopping cart full of money, the money would be “free”; but they would have a right to expect the winner to come to the lot and take the cart away. Likewise, James says in v. 5 if you want wisdom (if indeed you recognize that you need it), you need to ask for it (cf. 4:2, “you do not have because you do not ask”). Not only must you ask, you must ask in faith (v. 6). He defines what he means by faith when he says to ask without doubting. The man who doubts is like (and here James uses the first of many word-pictures) the waves of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. In other words, such a man is unstable, trying to look both ways. His doubt about receiving the gift becomes the cause for not receiving the gift. God is a liberal giver, but we don’t believe it! And the man that won’t believe “shouldn’t suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (v. 7).

Here’s another word play (v. 9) and an irony: “the brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position” (NIV). Meanwhile, the one who is rich should glory in his humiliation (v. 10) because his riches are coming to nothing.” There is a difference of opinion among scholars about whether the rich in this passage are Christians or not. It is likely that “brother” (Gk., *adelphos*) of v. 9 refers both to the one in humble circumstances and the rich. Later on, in chapters 2 and 5, James will criticize the rich, probably non-Christian oppressors. But here, there is no criticism, just a warning: whether rich or poor, life is short; as grass withers and the flowers fail, so will we all perish from the earth. In other words, “you can’t take it with you.” The statement sounds like a maxim made up of a combination of warnings found in Isa. 40:6-8 and Psa. 49:16-17. The poor who is faithful is as rich, spiritually, as anyone else; the rich who is faithful will not glory in riches but in his humble obedience to God. In Christ, all are equal, regardless of their physical circumstances (cf. 2:1ff; Gal. 3:28).

In v. 12, James picks up the theme started in v. 2 when he pronounces a blessing upon those who endure temptation (i.e., a challenge to their holiness). The NIV says, “perseveres under trial; “test” in v. 3 and “temptation in v. 12 come from the same Greek root word, *dokim*. “Blessed” is not adequately translated by the English word “happy,” although it may fit occasionally. The Greek noun is *makarios* and, biblically, refers to the distinctive religious joy which is one of the benefits of salvation.” It is more verdict than description or admonition. If you “fall into” various trials (v. 2), then you are to consider yourself “blessed” because the testing will help you get to heaven (“receive the crown of life”). The crown is the Greek word *stephanos* which usually means a crown of victory (as compared to diadem, a crown of royalty). Life is a race — sometimes a rat-race! — which must be run with endurance (cf. Heb. 12:1-2). Steadfastness is sometimes difficult even when things are going well. If one is unable to endure during the good times, he will probably not handle adversity very well. The time to practice endurance is now, for it is only when we are “approved” (cf. Rom. 5:4, NASV - “approved character”) that we shall receive the crown of life.

1. Think for a moment about the last major "trial" that you faced. How did you deal with it? Can you describe your reaction as one of "joy"? What is "joy"?

2. Does a Christian ever arrive at "perfection"? What is the difference between "perfect" (coming to *completion*) and "mature," if any?

3. While the "wisdom" which we are to ask for probably relates specifically to trials, the command to ask for it has broader application. What is "wisdom" and why do we need it so badly?

4. How "faithful" are you? Do you really believe God will answer your prayer for wisdom? Do you really believe he will give to you "liberally and without reproach"?

5. Reflect for a moment on your physical circumstances. Are you rich? Are you poor? Should either state affect your Christianity?

6. Are you blessed? Do you feel less blessed when trouble comes? Why or why not?

The Source of Temptation (1:13-18)

13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. **18** Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Trials potentially produce one of two attitudes, either resignation and a feeling of helplessness, or a feeling of blessedness, knowing that the trial is for a purpose (1:2-4). One attitude which we must avoid is the tendency to blame God for the temptation to sin that trials sometimes provoke. James is emphatic: “let no one say... ” God has no desire to see His people sin and will not do anything to promote sin.

Of course, God tests people, as He did Abraham (Gen. 22:1). That is, He brings them into certain situations in order to test their willingness to obey Him. But though the words are similar, even in the Greek, there is an important difference between the outer trials and testing and the enticement to sin, which comes from inside us. James argues that God is not associated with any kind of impulse to evil, which is what “temptation” is. Therefore, He cannot desire in people what He Himself is not susceptible to. The main point of the argument, as James will show, is that we are responsible for our own sins — God doesn’t lead us into it; He’s not to blame.

To understand what is going on when we are tempted to sin, think of a fish: the fish is tempted when he sees the bait and then he is “drawn away” by that desire, follows the baited hook, takes a bite and is hooked (the problem with this analogy is twofold; [1] a fish can’t sin and [2] his desire for the bait is proper. Not all desire is wrong; James is talking about desire that becomes illicit here. James uses the analogy of childbirth and maturity. Illicit desire gives birth to sin and sin is what kills a person, spiritually. James appropriately adds: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (v. 16) — sin is a product of your own lust, not something God does.

Verse 16, then, serves as a transition statement between vv. 13-15 and 17-18. God does not tempt anyone — in fact, God’s gifts are good and perfect (v. 17). He is unchangeable and there is no shadow or variation in Him. He is the Father of lights, which probably has reference to the celestial bodies — the sun, moon and stars (is there a side glance to the worship of these bodies by the pagans among whom these Jewish Christians are living now?). In other words, among His good gifts is creation itself. But more than that (v. 18), He is responsible for the greatest gift of all, our creation in Christ. It was by His will (grace) that we have been brought forth by His word (cf. I Pet. 1:23). We are “firstfruits,” a term which is elsewhere used to describe Christians (see Rev. 14:4), brought forth by God Himself. In the Old Covenant, the Hebrew words translated “firstfruits” refer either to the first of the crops to be brought to God or to the best portion of the crops that are harvested and given to God (Num. 15:20; II Chronicles 31:5). In both cases, the fruit brought to God was *devoted* to Him and it should be the *best* of the fruit. This is great gift from God — that those who walk by faith are “the best”; we might say, in our time, “the cream of the crop.” Such a God as this would never tempt man to disobey Him to the man’s destruction. He is a giver of good and perfect gifts, not a tempter.

1. Who is responsible for sin? Trace the process of sin.
2. What "causes" it and to what does it lead? How does James describe the things that come from the Father?
3. How is the Father described? What is the significance of the description?
4. By what are we "brought forth"? To what end?

The Practice of the Word (1:19-27)

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **25** But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Verse 22 emphasizes one of James' main concerns in his letter. Hearing the word without practicing it avails nothing. This point is stressed over and over again in this and the following sections of James. "Be doers of the word, not just hearers." This is the fruit of being brought forth by God (v. 18). We must continue to live by the word even after we've been saved by it. As the "firstfruits" of God (Paul calls us a "new creation" [II Corinthians 5:17]) we must bear fruit (cf. John 15:1ff.). In the simplest terms, that means we must *do* the word; otherwise, our faith is vain (that point is covered in chapter 2).

However, James begins (v. 19) with a supremely practical imperative: *be quick to hear and slow to speak and slow to get angry*. "God gave us two ears and one mouth"; use them proportionally! Speak half as much as we listen? What a challenge for most of us! Few are good listeners. And fewer still are those who have the "long fuse" which James is commanding here. We love to make a point and get our way and grind our axes. It's especially dangerous when we do it "in the name of Jesus" as if we are defending His truth. Too often, we are far from it; we're just, as the Proverb writer says, spouting our opinions. Later on, James will say "Not many of you should become teachers... they will incur a stricter judgment" (3:1). Yet so many fancy themselves as "lights" to the brethren, while pressing their views. And just try disagreeing with them! James says: *quick... slow... slow*. We need to make sure we've got the right actions after those commands. The only thing we are to be "quick" about is in hearing.

Those who are "quick to speak" are often those who are quick to criticize or judge or just assert their opinions without proper thought. Proverbs 18:2 convicts many of us: "A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion." Often, being "quick to speak" leads directly to "anger." But James tells us that the anger of man is sin, it "does not produce the righteousness of God" (v. 20). There is proper, righteous indignation; James is not talking about that. He is talking about anger which proceeds from a "quickness" to speak. We call it a "quick temper." Paul said, "love is patient...not irritable" (I Corinthians 13:4, 5).

Not only are we to be "quick" and "slow," but we must do some "laying aside" (note how many action words James employs in this chapter). We are to lay aside or "put off," as a pair of muddy jeans, "all filthiness" and "overflow of wickedness." In other words, we need to recognize the variety of challenges which face us. Temptations come often and in a variety of forms. It is not possible to passively endure them or ignore them and still please God; we have to deal with every temptation. In 4:7, he tells us to resist the devil and he will

flee from us. We are to be active in getting away from sin, which is the only obstacle to heaven.

Only when we do that will we be ready to receive “with meekness” (the antithesis of anger) “the implanted word” which saves our souls. We are to do the paradoxical thing of receiving what has already been implanted (the word). The word not only saves us but it continues to save us; we are never “free” from the word. We must always be aware of the need to do the word, and not just hear it (v. 22). One cannot read James and fail to understand that Christianity involves some *doing*. It is supremely practical; it is not a philosophy or a “better way of life” or a “feeling better felt than told.” It is action, through and through. It requires a life devoted to God. We give attention to details and do not rely on unbiblical concepts and platitudes like, “grace will cover me” or “God wouldn’t send me to hell for that.” No, all sincere (“true”) Christians are *idealists* and strive for the best out of a heart that demands the best of themselves. We’ll deal later with the question of why we do what we do (it’s not to earn salvation, as if we could!). For now, we just accept the fact

Everyone else is deceived. They may be *hearers* — they have ears — but they don’t *hear*. In the Old Testament, to hear implied obedience or to “heed.” Perhaps they don’t hear because they are too quick to speak. Whatever the problem, they will not do what they hear. There are people who have been in the church for years and have never changed anything in their life based on what they’ve heard in the preaching and teaching of God’s word. They are satisfied with themselves. But, says James, they are deceived.

Christianity is about change. It is about *personal* change. James describes the man who refuses to change as a man who looks in the mirror (i.e., “hears the word” and knows it applies) and then walks away. You’ve heard all the illustrations. A man has mud on his face or spinach in his teeth; he sees it in the mirror, but then walks away and does nothing about it. How ridiculous, we say! Yes, and how much more ridiculous for us to face God’s word and see that change is needed and then “walk away,” as if we never saw ourselves that way. We immediately—just after the invitation song, perhaps?—forget what kind of people we are.

But the *blessed* person is the one who “looks into the perfect law of liberty” (v. 25) and *does* it! He has received the implanted word and he is living it out in his life. He continues in it, treating it as his most important possession. He wouldn’t think of ignoring it or forgetting it, not even for a moment. It is with him at all times; he reads it, studies it, talks about, meditates on it and lives it. He even sees trials in light of how he can improve (see Psalm 119:71, 107; cf. vv. 147-148). The word is truly implanted in such a person and he is blessed.

Some people think they are religious just because they “belong” and yet they do not do the basic things. James describes true religion in vv. 26-27. If a man cannot bridle his tongue, his religion is vain (v. 26). Furthermore, he must be one who “visits” orphans and widows, that is, he cares for them in their affliction. When they are in trouble, the true Christian is quick to come to their aid. He pays attention to their needs and addresses them with whatever resources he has. And, the truly “religious” before God are those who keep themselves unspotted from the world. They do not dabble in worldliness. Instead, they remain aloof, not from sinners, necessarily, but from sin, definitely (cf. I Cor. 5:1-13 and 2 Cor. 6:14ff.).

The use of the word “religion” (Gk - *threskeia*) is rare, used only in this passage and in Acts 26:5 and Col 2:18 (translated “worship”). It often means “outward acts of worship,” that which is “seen.” James is saying that doing is a product of who you are and that “doing” may be seen. That makes “religion” worthwhile. But religion which ignores God’s instructions is vain. God’s religion (“pure and undefiled”) is one characterized by obedience from the heart. The other kind deceives the heart.

1. Who is commanded to be "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger"?
2. What are the possible interpretations of the phrase, "the righteousness of God"?
3. What is the prerequisite to growth in Christ (cf. Heb. 12:1-2, for a hint)?
4. How does one who only "hears" delude himself?
5. How are we to look at the "perfect law of liberty"? What law is that?
6. Is there a difference in being "religious" and "blessed"? What kind of religion is acceptable to God?
7. Summarize Chapter 1 in your own words, with a note to yourself about how you need to change:

Condemnation of Partiality (2:1-13)

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," **4** have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? **5** Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? **6** But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? **7** Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. **9** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. **11** For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. **13** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Partiality, or rather the *sin* of partiality, is the theme of this entire section of James. "Holding the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" means conducting oneself in a certain way. As he discussed before, it is being a doer of the word, not merely a hearer. As he will discuss later, it means faith is dead without works. Faith is not really faith unless accompanied by action. Partiality or favoritism is a prohibited action. If you are truly a doer of the word, you won't be guilty of it.

James illustrates his admonition by pointing his readers to two men. One is a rich man who wears the gold ring common to those in the Roman upper-crust; he also wears the finest apparel. In contrast, another man comes into the assembly in shabby clothes. The rich is given the best seat; the poor is told to "stand over there" (note the poor man must stand; the rich can sit). James says when we show this kind of favoritism, we are becoming judges with evil motives.

The word "partiality" comes from a Greek word which means "to regard the face." It has to do with making distinctions based upon outward appearances. It covers all those conclusions we jump to simply by looking at someone, and God totally condemns the attitude (cf. Eph. 6:9; Gal. 2:6; Col. 3:25; John 7:24).

Specifically, James is concerned with his readers' treatment of the poor for many of the poor have become the citizens of the kingdom. This is the way God planned it — cf. Isa. 6:1; Mt. 5:3; Luke 4:18; 11:5. The poor can be rich in faith (v. 5) but only rarely do the rich respond. Furthermore, it is the rich who do the oppressing; the poor have no power to do so even if they wanted to. Yet, the rich are honored and the poor dishonored simply because they are "rich" and "poor." The rich, as a class, even blaspheme the name "Christian" (v. 7). In other words, James says, it makes no logical sense, in the kingdom of the Lord, to despise the poor.

James proceeds to relate this problem directly to keeping the "law." He calls love the "royal law" and says if you fulfill it, "you do well." But if you show partiality, you sin and are convicted by that same law. It won't do to say, "Well, I've kept all the rest of the commandments but this one." No, James says, if you (willfully) break one commandment you break them all. That is, the law is an indivisible whole; if you violate one of its parts,

7. By what will Christians be judged?

8. How does "mercy triumph over judgment"?

The Relation of Faith and Action (2:14-26)

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

There are some difficult textual issues. For example, Philip Schaff comments on v. 18:

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith and I have works. There is a considerable diversity of opinion in the interpretation of these words. They appear to be the language of an objector, being the usual form by which an objection is introduced (Romans 9:19; 1 Corinthians 15:35); but when examined, they express the sentiments of James, and not those of an opponent; if an objection, we would have expected the opposite: ‘Thou hast works and I have faith.’ Some, considering the words as those of an objector, give the following interpretation: ‘One, defending thee, may say: Thou, who hast not works, hast faith, and I, who declare that faith without works is dead, have works; there is no reason to lay more stress upon the one than upon the other.’ But such a meaning is complicated and awkward; it reverses the language of the apostle. Others suppose that the objector is a Pharisaical Jew who, opposing James, maintains justification to be entirely by works without faith; but such a meaning is not borne out by the context. *It is best to suppose that the words are not those of an objector, but of a person who agrees with the apostle, and who is here introduced to impart liveliness to the discussion.* Nay, one may interpose, Thou hast faith and I have works. Others connect the words with James 2:14, and consider the intervening words as parenthetical, but we do not see how this removes the difficulty.

“Schaff’s Popular Commentary on the New Testament

These issues aside, the meaning of the passage is clear: faith includes works; if you claim to have faith, but do not work, your faith is dead, worthless. Words are cheap; saying “I believe” is nothing more than the demons can say. True faith produces value; our faith is proven by our works. No works? No faith.

Verse 24, more than any other, caused Luther to call James “a strawy epistle.” Luther felt it contradicted his new-found theology of “faith only.” But there is more to this passage than meets the eye, both for Luther and for us. Both Paul and James are teaching about faith and they are discussing two sides of the same coin. Even John Calvin saw no disagreement between Paul and James:

This verse (18) is a key to the meaning of James: faith is to be *proved* by works; then faith properly justifies and saves, and works prove its genuineness. When he says that a man is justified by works, the meaning according to this verse is, that a man is proved by his works to be justified, his faith thereby being shewn to be a living and not a dead faith. We may well be surprised, as *Doddridge* was, that any, taking a view of this whole passage,

should ever think that there is any contrariety in what is here said to be the teaching of Paul. The doctrine of Paul, that man is justified by faith and not by works, that is, by a living faith, which works by love, is perfectly consistent with what James says, that is, that a man is not justified by a dead faith but by that faith which proves its living power by producing good works, or by rendering obedience to God. The sum of what James says is, that a dead faith cannot save, but a living faith, and that a living faith is a working faith — a doctrine taught by Paul as well as by James.

John Calvin, Commentary on James

Luther apparently misunderstood Paul's view of faith and thus rejected James; but James is simply developing the concept. Paul never understood faith to be something apart from works. He taught just the opposite, that faith includes works, not only as the outcome of faith, but intrinsic to it. Like James, Paul did not conceive of a "faith" that did not include works (read Romans 6, for example).

Another important distinction to be made between Paul and James is that Paul, especially in Romans and Galatians, uses the term "works" in a technical way. Paul is talking about performing "perfect works of righteousness" in order to be saved. That would be "justification by works" and no man other than Jesus has been able to live the law in a perfect way. Paul's argument is that one would have to never sin in order for God to "owe" him salvation; but it takes just one sin to ring the bell and it can't be un-rung; from that point forward, the only hope a man has is to put his faith and trust in the work of Christ.

Paul never argues that faith is passive. Implicit in everything he says is the idea that when you fully trust in God, you act in a certain way. He would argue right alongside James that if a man ever simply sat back and said, "God save me," without ever expecting to do anything, that his "faith" would be vain — it wouldn't accomplish anything and it certainly wouldn't save him. It would not be "faith," at least as far as Paul's vocabulary is concerned. While Paul never contends for salvation by works (any works), neither does he contend for salvation by "passive acceptance of Christ." Faith is active.

James often uses the word "faith" in a more restrictive sense than Paul, as a synonym for "belief" (John, in his gospel, generally uses "belief" in a broader sense). So James can talk about faith and works as two different ideas showing how the one depends on the other. He is also talking to those who have already been baptized. Their relationship to God and to each other means they will display their faith in God, not through empty words but through action (cf. I Jn 3:16-18 for a similar argument).

1. How does this section compare with 1:21-27?
2. How about 2:10?
3. Is faith passive or active?
4. How can faith be "by itself" (v. 17)?
5. What is faith "by itself"?
6. What is the relationship of faith and works - are they really two separate things? What does James say?
7. If we just acknowledge God ("believe"), in whose company are we?
8. What example does James use to illustrate his point?

9. Compare James 2:21ff. with Romans 4. What are the distinctions and similarities in the arguments?

10. How is faith perfected ("brought to its intended goal")?

11. Define "works."

12. How can we be justified by works?

13. What other illustration does James use?

14. What is faith without works?

The Control of the Tongue (3:1-12)

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2** For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. **4** Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. **7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

James takes up a discussion he began in chapter 1 (v.19f.) and picks up again in chapter 4 about pure speech. There are few things more destructive to the community than the problems which proceed from verbal anger, backbiting and sniping. James begins his discussion with a reference to teachers since the main implement of his role as a teacher is that which is most difficult to control - the tongue. Therefore, only those who have some degree of ability to control the tongue should be teachers.

Note the context of the statement in v. 1 does not support the idea of a general prohibition or limitation on who should be doing the teaching except as it relates to the use of the tongue. And the argument James uses should make all “teachers” stop and think — they shall receive a stricter judgment. This does not mean that there are different degrees of punishment but that “to whom much has been given from him much will be required” (Lk. 12:48). Teachers will be held responsible for the way they use their tongue in discharging their teaching responsibility.

James makes the point that controlling the tongue is a difficult task, not to be taken lightly. In fact, he says, if a person can bridle the tongue he can probably do anything! “We all stumble in many ways (i.e., we all have our own burdens to bear, different temptations to face). But everyone stumbles when it comes to the tongue, whether you are a teacher or not.

James illustrates his point with various illustrations popular among the Greeks and Hellenistic-Jews: the bit in the horse’s mouth controls the whole beast; the little rudder on a ship turns the whole vessel. Likewise, the way we use our little tongues tells a great deal about our character. So often, it “boasts great things” and kindles a great fire (v. 5). The tongue itself is a great fire, capable of great damage - set on fire by hell itself! Jesus said that what comes out of a man defiles him and warns of idle words (Mt 12:34ff.). The tongue is the power of Satan himself and he uses it in willing participants at every opportunity. While men have been able to tame virtually every wild beast, no one has found a remedy for the sins of the tongue — it remains unruly, full of deadly poison.

The tongue is responsible for duplicity, a characteristic James abhors (1:6-8). Men — with the same tongue — will both bless God and curse men. It’s as if a spring can produce both salt water and fresh at the same time. It doesn’t make sense. But a man speaks out of the abundance of his heart and too often his heart is full of hate, envy and jealousy. So thus the man speaks.

1. What part does the tongue play in the life of a person?
2. How many people have ever lived without sinning in what they have said?
3. What kind of damage can the tongue cause?
4. Who is the source of impure speech?
5. What is basically inconsistent about "cursing man" while "blessing God"?
6. Think of some modern day examples of "cursing men."
7. What is the remedy for impure speech?
8. Give some examples of constructive and destructive uses of the tongue with which you are familiar:

Two Kinds of Wisdom (3:13-18)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. **15** This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. **17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Some commentators assume that James is talking about teachers in this section, but that assumes James is continuing his thought from v. 1. However, the audience is more likely all who think they are “wise.” If you one is truly wise, then a certain kind of behavior will follow, which James then describes. Note that the outstanding characteristic of the wise person is “gentleness.” Against that is “bitter jealousy” (NASV) and selfish ambition. Where these two exist, there is no wisdom but confusion and “every evil thing” (v. 16).

There are two kinds of wisdom: earthly, sensual, demonic - the kind that does not descend from above, but is found right here on earth. And, the kind that “comes down from above” (cf. 1:17). The first kind is wisdom that is transitory and weak (“earthly”), unspiritual and authored by devils. It is a wisdom, all right, but we want no part of it!

The kind of wisdom that comes from above is described by James with seven adjectives. It is first pure, which may mean moral blamelessness or it may have to do with motive and intention (as in “pure in heart” - Mt. 5:8). It is peaceable, gentle, willing to yield (or “reasonable” - NASV), full of mercy and good fruits. These traits all have to do with the way we deal with people. True, practical, godly wisdom is far from the self-seeking, grasping, striving sort of thing which we see in so many people today who see the world as “dog-eat-dog.” Unfortunately, there is evidence of this in some churches, where the practice of earthly, demonic “wisdom” is not uncommon.

Furthermore, James says, this heavenly wisdom is without partiality (cf. 2:1-12) and without hypocrisy (genuine, without show or pretense). James words are badly needed today by all of us. It is apparent (and perhaps inevitable) that people, especially those in leadership roles, use the church as a means to make a name for themselves. Involved in that self-seeking pursuit is all kinds of prejudice, bitter wrangling and pressing of rights. James says that true wisdom produces just the opposite: gentleness and peace (v. 18).

1. What, in this context, is “good behavior”?
2. Is “jealousy” and “ambition” inherently wrong?
3. If we are bitterly jealous and selfishly ambitious, where do we stand in relation to the truth?

The Worldly Attitude (4:1-10)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. **4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." **7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

What James says here follows closely with what he discussed in the last paragraph. There, he described true wisdom or "wisdom from above." He referred to "peace" in his last statement, implying that those who are "wise and understanding" (3:13) are those who make peace. Apparently, there was strife and division among the people to whom he was writing. He begins this paragraph with a question (as he did the last paragraph), "Where do wars and fights come from among you?" (4:1). If everyone was acting with wisdom, there would be none. But instead, some are envious and self-seeking and that, in answer to James' question, is the source of their disputes. "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil things are there" (3:16). Thus, the "confusion" is defined as their wars and their fights and their wars and fights come from envy and self-seeking as frustrated desire leads to violence (v. 2).

This desire "to have" is frustrated because of a failure to pray ("you do not ask" - v. 2b). They do ask, but a failure to ask properly is like not asking at all; in other words, self-seeking prayers go "no higher than the ceiling." This is the problem with their prayers - they asked only for themselves, "to spend it on your pleasures" (v. 3). Our focus when we pray must be on the things of God (see Mt. 6:9-10).

This attitude — desire for pleasure — is worldly to the core and worldliness is enmity with God. Those who desire friendship with the world cannot be friends with God. When one turns back to the world, he or she commits spiritual adultery (v. 4a; see 1:27, "keep oneself unstained from the world"). Remember that he is talking to the baptized. Being filled with envy and self-seeking, even while a "member" of the church, makes you a worldling. V. 5 is difficult, but a reference to the Lord's jealousy seems to be obviously implied (cf. Ex. 20:5). He demands total, unreserved allegiance to Him and therefore is "jealous" when we flirt with the world through our envy and self-seeking. What "Scripture" is James referring to? There is none which exactly reproduces his words, but if our interpretation is correct, then he could be thinking of a number of Old Testament passages which refer to the jealousy of God (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Zech. 8:2).

"Grace" (v. 6) tempers the jealousy of God. That is, God enables us to meet the requirements of His jealousy — He gives us all we need to please Him. The condition is humility. If we are humble, God's grace will see us through. If we are proud, God's jealousy will turn to wrath.

What follows (vv. 7-10) is a call for repentance. "Therefore," James says (v. 7), submit to God (be humble), and God's grace will be effective for us. If we resist the devil, the devil will flee (through God's gracious deliverance). If we draw near to God (note the condition,

again), He will do the same to us (v. 8). In any case, we must come to God with “clean hands.”

In law school, the study of “Equity” is required. One of the outstanding characteristics of this branch of the law is the necessity for what it calls “clean hands.” That means that if one party is going to sue another he cannot expect to be successful unless he comes to the court free of guilt for the same crime. For example, if I gypped a man out of his pig and then you do the same to me, “Equity” would intervene and prevent me from suing you for gypping me out of the pig I had obtained unethically; I wouldn’t have “clean hands.” In like manner, James encourages his readers to put away such double standards and double-mindedness.

If the rebuke applies, James is demanding true repentance, involving lamenting, mourning and weeping (v. 9). When a man truly repents, he knows it, God knows it and everyone else knows it. True repentance involves godly sorrow and true humility (cf. 2 Cor. 7:8-11). In the kingdom of God, the first step is down.

1. What war takes place before “wars and fights” break out among people in the church?
2. Is all “desire” bad? What makes it bad?
3. Why does James call these people “adulterers and adulteresses”?
4. Do you think they were literally murdering each other?
5. What is the key to peace?
6. What is involved in “humbling” yourself?

Faultfinding (4:11-12)

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. **12** There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

The discussion of humility leads naturally to another “mini-sermon” on speech. This time, the emphasis is on judgmental speech. When we speak evil of a brother and judge a brother, we speak evil of the law and judge the law. Why? All speaking about others is not “evil speaking” and all judgment is not evil judgment. It is when we put ourselves in the place of the law and speak and judge as if we are the standard instead of the Lawgiver, that we become “judges with evil thoughts” (Jas. 2:4; cf. Jn 7:24; I Cor. 5:13).

The concept of “judging” is sorely misunderstood. Nobody who is doing evil wants to be “judged,” and thereby confronted with the evil. The most common appeal is to passages like this one or Matthew 7:1ff. But the word “judge” is capable of a number of meanings and is not prohibited in every case (see the passages above). We are to make accurate discernments (judgments) about our own conduct and the conduct of those who claim to be our brethren. Failure to do so exposes the church to the potential for all kinds of evil, including false teaching.

The prohibition of both James and Jesus is against a judgmental attitude. We should not be anxious to rush to judgment and find a fault in a brother or sister upon which we can pounce. Such an attitude is clearly prohibited. So often, when we engage in such judgment we are not doing so with the bible in our hands. The basis for our judgment is that the person has violated our standards, whether or not he has violated any biblical standard.

Furthermore, when we judge with unrighteous judgment, we “judge the law.” Since the law prohibits evil speaking, when we engage in it we judge the law unworthy to be kept - we place ourselves “above the law.” We must be very careful in our speech and must continually examine our motives when we feel it necessary to speak about a brother or sister in Christ.

1. Describe some types of “evil speech.” What forms does it take?
2. Where does Jesus talk about this problem? What does He say?
3. How many ways is the word “judge” used in the Bible?
4. Why is it not possible for a “judge” of the Law to be a “doer” of the law?
5. How many Lawgivers are there?
6. What is the significance of the terms “save and destroy” in v. 12?

Arrogant Self-Sufficiency (4:13-17)

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— **14** yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. **15** Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. **17** So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

The connection of this paragraph with the previous section on humility is somewhat obvious, but there is probably more of a link to what follows in 5:1-6, where James addresses the rich. Here, his comments are directed toward (wealthy?) businessmen who “make plans” to go to the city and do this or that piece of business. He is criticizing those who go about making plans but leave God out of the picture, as if they direct their own lives. The fact of the matter is that we don’t know what will happen “tomorrow,” if indeed it even comes.

God controls the earth’s fate. He will, at some point unknown to us, bring it all to an end, “all of a sudden” (II Peter 3:10). Not only that, but He is eternal but our lives in the flesh are but puffs of smoke — “here today, gone tomorrow.” Therefore, we are silly to “boast in our arrogance” about things over which we have no control. Proverbs 27:1 warns: “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” Christians ought to be the most adept at living “one day at a time.” To say we’re going to do this or that, as if we have total control over life, is a failure to acknowledge our finiteness and God’s control.

The saying in verse 17 strikes us as having little connection with what James is urging here. Probably, he is borrowing a maxim which was well-known at the time and making the point with it that we are to do what James is telling us to do. It is not enough for us to avoid doing wrong, we must be doing what we know to be the right thing to do; failure is sin. Sins of omission are just as serious as sins of commission.

1. Is James condemning foresight in this section? If not, what?
2. What kind of people are coming under fire from James?
3. What is “boasting”? What is “arrogance”?
4. How do we know what good to do? What happens if we don’t do it?

Denunciation of the Wicked Rich (5:1-6)

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. **2** Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. **4** Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. **5** You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

As in the last section, James begins with “Come now...” and his comments are directed to wealthy landowners who have abused people to get their riches. There is a division of opinion among scholars about whether James is talking to (or about) Christians or unbelievers. There are compelling arguments on either side, but I believe James is speaking about non-Christians who are oppressing the brethren. The main reason this view appeals to me is because of the sudden change in tone in v. 7 where James encourages the brethren to be patient, perhaps due to the trials inflicted upon them by the rich. It’s not, of course, that “Christians” are incapable of the sins mentioned by James; sadly, it’s been all too common in history (for example, there were many “Christians” who owned and mistreated slaves during the early years of our country’s history). But James is probably writing this in order to teach a couple of lessons to his readers. First, do not envy the rich, for their woes will come; and second, be patient under trial (5:7ff.). The scalding rebuke of James, in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, would serve both purposes very well.

1. Is there any note of hope for the rich in this section?
2. Describe the crimes of the rich that James mentions here:
3. What are the “last days” (v. 3)?
4. What does “Lord of Sabaoth” refer to?

Miscellaneous Exhortations (5:7-20)

Patience in Suffering (5:7-11)

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. **10** As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. **11** Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

James returns to a discussion of patience under trial, with particular reference to the mistreatment they were enduring from the rich. The reason they are to be patient instead of anxious is because the coming of the Lord (*parousia*) is “at hand.” First century believers lived in the constant expectation of the return of the Lord (as we should today). Since no one knows the day or hour (Mk. 13:32), we ought to live each day as if it is our last on earth. That would preclude, then, grumbling against those who give us trouble, let alone our brethren.

James encourages his readers to take a look at the Old Testament and learn from the examples of suffering they find there. We “count them blessed.” Why? Because they endured suffering in faith and patience. Job is an outstanding example. His story proves not only the perseverance of Job but the truth about God - that He is compassionate and merciful.

1. What is the point of the analogy with the farmer?
2. What is the “coming of the Lord” which James refers to?
3. How and why are we to “establish our hearts”?
4. Give a couple of examples of prophets who endured suffering.
5. What happened to Job at the end?

Concerning Oaths (5:12)

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

The "above all" presents something of a problem here, since the verse does not appear to have any clear connection with the previous passage. Perhaps this is James' way of showing that he is about to draw the letter to a conclusion. In any case, to understand this statement you must understand the almost identical statement of Jesus in Mt. 5:34-37. It appears that James is consciously reproducing Jesus' prohibition, with some slight changes. The point in both is the same. Christians are to be people who can be believed without having to "guarantee" it by an oath. Whether James and Jesus are prohibiting official oaths, such as in a court of law, is up to the individual to decide. The main exhortation, however, is to be honest in all our dealings and statements.

1. Read Mt. 5:34-37 and compare Jesus' words with James. Are there any differences?
2. How we let our "yes" be 'yes' and our 'no' be 'no'?"
3. What is the consequence for dishonesty?

Concerning Prayer (5:13-18)

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. **16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. **18** Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit

Again, James begins a discussion of a subject seemingly disconnected entirely with the preceding context. It is certainly not difficult to determine the subject of this section since it is mentioned in every verse. The point is that we need to be in constant communication with God, making our requests known to Him and thanking Him for every provision He makes for us.

There is difficulty in determining whether James is discussing physical illness or spiritual sickness — or both. I lean toward the latter for two reasons: (1) v. 15 sounds like a promise and there is no absolute promise that a sick person will get better if we pray for him; as we know, they often do not. (2) “The Lord will ‘raise him up’” are words that seem very much to speak of a spiritual raising, not physical recovery. (3) The promise to forgive sins is not a physical promise. When you connect it with v. 16, there’s seems to be little doubt that the emphasis is on spiritual healing, although vv. 13-14 seem to be talking about physical health.

In any case, prayer is the avenue to God’s help, whether we are suffering, sick or sinful. There is strong encouragement to be faithful and to place the emphasis on spiritual things (e.g., forgiveness). But we are to go to God in prayer in all things, including physical concerns. Fervent, frequent prayers from those who are righteous will have a great effect, James says. An example of effectual prayer is Elijah (I Kings 17-18). He prayed that certain things would happen (according to the Lord’s will) and those things happened. He was fervent and he was righteous and his prayers were answered. The comfort lies in the fact that he was a man “with a nature like ours.”

1. What were the elders of the church to do for the sick?
2. What is the significance of “anointing with oil”?
3. What connection is there between physical sickness and forgiveness (v. 15)?
4. What is involved in confessing our sins to one another?

Concerning the Wanderer from the Truth (5:19-20)

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James, as we noted at the outset, is full of imperatives (almost 50). Now, instead of closing his letter with various greetings and benedictions, he issues a call for action. Do not “leave well enough alone,” but turn the sinner from the error of his ways. If he has wandered from the truth as presented here and elsewhere in scripture, turn him back to God. Whose soul will be saved and whose sins will be covered? The Greek is ambiguous, but both probably refer to the soul and sins of the wanderer. It is unlikely that James is teaching us to take up the work of turning people back to God so that our own sins will be covered. We need to confess and repent of those. And we need to love our brethren enough to do all we can to see that their souls are saved from death and that their sins are covered.

1. Some people don't like the term “erring brethren.” Does James seem to believe that such exist?
2. What does it mean to “wander from the truth”?

Appendix

John McArthur on *doulos* ("slave")

If you go to the New Testament, you will find the Greek word for "slave" about 150 times in all its forms. And you will find it actually translated "slave" only a few of those 150 times. The New Testament translators only translate the Greek word for slave "slave" when it's referring to an actual physical slave, or when it's referring to an inanimate object, like "slaves of sin" or "slaves of righteousness."

So there is this concept of slavery in the Scripture that has been completely hidden to the English reader. Now this was by design because the word "slave" is the most important, all-encompassing, and clarifying word to describe a Christian used in the New Testament, and yet whenever a Christian is in view, it's not translated "slave." The word is *doulos*. Have you heard that word? The word is *doulos*. In the Greek, that word means "slave"—never means anything but "slave." It doesn't mean "servant"; it doesn't mean "worker"; it doesn't mean "hired hand"; it doesn't mean "helper." There are six or seven Greek words that mean "servant" in some form. *Doulos* never means "servant." A servant is someone hired to do something. The slave is someone owned. Big difference — huge difference — and yet all through the New Testament the word "slave" is masked by the word "servant," or some form of the word "servant." Truly a remarkable thing.

When I started doing the research on this word, I found 22 English translations of the New Testament, 22. There was only one of them of all the translations of English New Testaments going back to the King James, of those 22, that translated *doulos* "slave" every single time, even though everyone knows it means slave and only slave. In fact, the most formidable of all Greek dictionaries, Kittel, says, "The word *doulos* means slave, the meaning is so unequivocal, no study of history is necessary." It always means slave, and yet it's not translated slave.

Recently there have been a few new translations. Only one of them translates the word *doulos* "slave" every time. It's called *The Holman Christian Standard Bible*. But up until that one a few years ago there was only one, and that's the Goodspeed translation. You ever heard of it? Edgar Goodspeed was a cutting-edge Greek scholar in the 1930s at the University of Chicago. But everybody knows what *doulos* means. Why don't they translate *doulos* "slave"?

For the answer to that question, you have to go back to the first English Bibles, back to the sixteenth century, back to Calvin and John Knox and other translators putting together the Geneva Bible, who made a decision not to translate *doulos* "slave." The reason? There's too much stigma with the concept of being a slave. It's too strong a downside. It's too humiliating, too belittling. So they opted to cover the word by replacing it with "servant," "bondservant," and eliminated the word "slave," except when the New Testament talks about an actual, physical slave, or an inanimate object, as I said, like slaves of sin or righteousness. They said it's just too negative.

They thought that was negative in the sixteenth century? Slavery for all intents and purposes was abolished in the fourteenth century. What were they afraid of? And if they think there was some stigma in the sixteenth century with the concept of a slave, how about in the first century when the writers of the New Testament used the word? There were as many as twelve million slaves in the Mediterranean world. One out of every five people in the Roman Empire was a slave. And if you study the history of the slavery, it was

everything that any kind of human relationship could be. There were places in relationships in which it worked very well, and there were others in which it was horrendous and abusive and demeaning. But nonetheless, the Holy Spirit inspired the word *doulos*, *doulos*. Since we don't see that word in our English Bible, we are missing a paradigm in which to understand our relationship to Christ. Frankly, I started doing research. I found one book from about ten years by Murray Harris. I found an article in the 1960s by Doug Yamauchi on this issue of slave. And they were saying exactly the same thing I'm saying. And I said, "Why didn't anybody pick this up? Why hasn't anybody responded to this?"

Just a couple of illustrations to show you how important it is. Jesus said, "No man can serve two" ...What?... "masters." Well, you could if you were a servant, right? You could serve two people, couldn't you? You could have a day job and a night job. A lot of people work for more than one person, but you can't be a slave to two masters because you can only be owned by one.

Jesus talked slave talk all the time. The writers of the New Testament talked slave talk all the time. But we don't see it because it's not there in our English text. The Russian Bible has it right. Other international translations have it right. We don't. This was how Christians referred to themselves in the early church. There's a story about a man named Epheneus who was imprisoned by the Romans for his commitment to Christ. And then he was brought into some inquisition, and they asked him to answer their questions and to recant his devotion to Christ and swear his allegiance to Caesar. Every question they asked him got the same answer. He said this, "I am a slave of Christ. I am a slave of Christ." And for that, he was executed.

When you think about terms used to describe Christians in the New Testament, we're called children of God, right? We're called heirs and joint-heirs. We're called members of the body of Christ. We're even designated as branches, sheep. And you don't want to mix all those metaphors because each of those gives you a facet of understanding and aspect of our relationship to Christ. But the dominating word inside of which our full understanding of salvation is best seen as this word "slave."

Now there's a corresponding word that I want to mention as well, and that is the word "master," right? If I were to ask you...let me ask you a fundamental question: "What is *the* foundational reality that defines what it means to be a Christian? What is the fundamental reality that distinguishes the believer's relationship to Christ? What is our great confession in three words?" Jesus is Lord.

In fact, if you want to be saved, Romans 10:9-10 says, "You confess Jesus as Lord." *Kurios* is the corresponding word to *doulos*. *Kurios* is "lord and master." *Doulos* is "slave." You can no more eliminate *doulos* from the believer's relationship to the Lord than you could eliminate *kurios*.

For years I have written books dealing with the issue of the Lordship of Christ to try to help people who think you can become a Christian without acknowledging Jesus as Lord, which is an impossible thing; but nonetheless it's advocated. And the simple answer to that is this. If He is Lord, which is to say He is Master, then I am His slave. There's no such thing as a master with no slaves or a slave with no master. And 1 Corinthians 12:3 says, "We call Jesus Lord by the Spirit of God." We like to talk about Jesus being a personal Savior. And I understand that. But that is so ambiguous. What do you mean "a personal Savior," like a personal butler? What are you talking about? People say, "You have Him as your personal Savior." Well, I understand that it's not a corporate thing, I understand what's being stated there. But the ambiguity of that phrase suits the contemporary vagueness of the gospel. Like Jesus is my own genie who jumps out of His little bottle when I rub it and ask Him for what I want.

See complete blog article, *Servant or Slave*, at <http://tinyurl.com/ov3sdr7>

Notes