

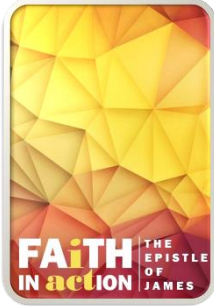
Adult Workbook

Woodlands Church of Christ
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Don Hooton

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

Lesson	Date	Lesson Title	Scripture
1.	9/7	Introduction to James and his Epistle	1:1
2.	9/21	Faith and trials	1:2-11
3.	10/5	Faith and its rewards	1:12-18
4.	10/12	Faith and the Word	1:19-28
5.	10/19	Faith and the royal law	2:1-13
6.	10/26	Faith and works	2:14-26
7.	11/2	Faith and the tongue	3:1-12
8.	11/9	Faith and conduct	3:13-18
9.	11/16	Faith against worldliness	4:1-12
10.	11/30	Faith and the future	4:13-17
11.	12/7	Faith and wealth	5:1-6
12.	12/14	Faith, patience and prayer	5:7-20



Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION

The Epistle of James is the first in a group of epistles customarily called General Epistles, which includes James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. They are designated as general or “catholic” epistles in the sense that they are universal, not being addressed to any particular individual or church, but to the church as a whole.

| 3

The Setting. It is clear from the letter by James that the early church was experiencing significant problems: divisiveness (1:19-20,26; 4:1), intolerance and favoritism (2:1-7), a uncharitable heart (2:15-16), a complaining and criticizing spirit (4:11; 5:9-11), and the worldly pursuit of wealth and status (5:1-6). He will ultimately tell everyone who wants this world and the kingdom too are nothing more than doubleminded people (4:4; 1:8).

Authorship: There is no question that James wrote the Epistle of James, but which James was the author? Some find at least six men by the name of James in the New Testament. I believe that you can find three who are clearly identified:

1. **James, the brother of Jude** (Jude 1).
2. **James, the father of Judas, not Iscariot** (Acts 1:12)
3. **James, the son of Alphaeus, called “James the less”** (see Mark 3:18, 15:40). He is mentioned in the list of apostles, but very little is known concerning him.
4. **James, the brother of John and one of the sons of Zebedee.** These two men were called “sons of thunder” by our Lord (see Mark 3:17). That he was slain by Herod who at the same time put Simon Peter into prison (see Acts 12:1-2) likely excludes him.
5. **James, the Lord’s brother.** He was a son of Mary and of Joseph, which made him a half brother of the Lord Jesus. In Matthew 13:55 we read: “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?” In the beginning, the Lord’s brethren did not believe in Him at all, but the time came when James became head of the church at Jerusalem. This is equally affirmed in the many references to an influential James in Jerusalem in the writings of Paul (1Cor 9:5, 14; Gal 1:15-2:12).

In Acts 15, this latter James is one of the leaders who has presided over that gathering in Jerusalem. He made the summation and brought the council to a decision under the leading of the Holy Spirit. I believe it was this James whom Paul referred to in Galatians 2:9, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.” This James, the Lord’s brother, is the man whom we believe to be the author of this epistle.

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 45–50. There have been those who have said that James wrote his epistle to combat the teachings of Paul; they argue that James emphasizes works while Paul emphasizes faith. However, the earliest of Paul’s epistles, 1 Thessalonians, was written about A.D. 52–56. Therefore, *even Paul’s first epistle was not written until after the Epistle of James*, which was the first book of the New Testament to be written.

The Key Theme: The following are what I consider to be the two key verses of this epistle. “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). And “is not faith without works is dead?” (James 2:20). It is not that James is trying to establish a doctrine – or a

teaching. It is the fulfillment of such an idea of living for Christ that he affirms. And from that, James shows that justification by **faith is demonstrated by works**; it must be poured into the test tube of works (ch. 1–2), of words (ch. 3), of worldliness (ch. 4), with his start a warning to the rich (ch. 5). In other words, faith in action is the way a Christian lives – and ultimately like Abraham – will be justified. But he builds those ideas around the themes of:

1. Suffering (1:12-15). In this is the matter of personal character development to make us complete. While the wicked do suffer (Prov 10:1-6) and his friends do affirm the same (Job 4:7-8), Job has shown that life is not simple and neat and that the righteous do suffer. Even Daniel and his friends did (Daniel 2-5). James will show that in suffering, we are purified and proved (1:12).
2. Christ (5:9; 2:8). Fill in the blank:
 - a. Declares himself a “_____ of God and the _____ Jesus _____” (1:1).
 - b. Says that the _____ gives (1:7).
 - c. Described “our” _____ as _____ (2:1).
 - d. We praise our _____ and Father (3:9).
 - e. Humble ourselves before the _____ (4:10).
 - f. Be concerned about the _____ will (4:11).
 - g. Serve the “_____” (5:4).
 - h. Says that the _____ will return (5:7) and that His coming is _____ (5:9).
 - i. Prophets spoke in the _____ of the _____ (5:10).
 - j. The _____ is full of _____ and _____ (5:11).
 - k. We should pray in the name of the _____ (5:14).

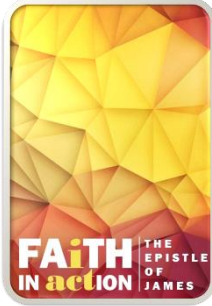
The Message of the Book: The Epistle of James deals with the very practical, but he will not get away from the subject of faith. James was evidently a very practical individual. Tradition says that he was given the name “Old Camel Knees” because he spent so much time in prayer.

Because the book deals with the most practical expression of the ethics of Christianity, the epistle has often been called the Christian’s “Book of Proverbs.” Of course, it does not replace the wisdom of the book in the Old Testament since such divine wisdom is timeless. Yet, it is still true that both emphasize the practical.

In addition to the book of Proverbs, the book has been compared to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Just as the book of Proverbs focuses almost entirely on the life and lifestyle of the one who would follow Yahweh, the Sermon on the Mount focuses on the life and lifestyle (not so much the collective assignments of a church). Notice the parallels:

1. Rejoice in Trials (1:2; Matt 5:12)
2. Be Perfect or Complete (1:4; Matt 5:48)
3. Ask God the perfect Giver (1:5; Matt 7:7)
4. Testing and its Reward for Believers (1:12; Matt 24:13)
5. Don’t be Angry (1:20; Matt 5:22)
6. Faith Works (2:14; Matt 7:16-19)
7. Blessed are the Poor (2:5; Luke 6:20)
8. Warning to the Rich (2:6-7; Matt 19:23-24)
9. Don’t Slander (4:11; Matt 5:22)
10. Don’t Judge (4:12; Matt 7:1)

The book also uses Old Testament heroes and heroines of faith: Abraham, Rahab and Job. He also refers to Old Testament Scripture. He stated that it “says” (4:5), quotes it (4:6), and finds in it the fulfillment of Christian living (2:8, 11, 23).



Lesson 2

Faith and trials

After his brief introduction, James wastes no time to get to the practical living applications he will make. He begins with two sweeping statements that show a rich, Jewish understanding of life under the sun with God. First, he will address the question of trials and difficulties (1:2-8) and how with prayer and wisdom, people of faith can endure. And in the second (1:9-11), he will address the question of wealth and want and the hardships it creates.

While the tempter is not mentioned by name in these paragraphs, James would have agreed with Jesus that Satan was the source of hardships. The accuser or opposer as he is called (c.f. Jb 1-2, Ze 3) will become openly hostile in the age of Jesus who will be the “strong man” who has gained control of the house without legal rights (c.f. Mk 3:22-30, esp 27). Jesus says he came to bind the strong man (that is, Satan) in order that he himself, as the stronger man (cf. Mk 1:7), might plunder Satan’s house. This is Jesus’s own explanation of the events we encounter in Mark 1-3. And it is the background of James’ words here. While Satan is the inciter to our sin and the father of lies, he masquerades as the good (c.f. 2Co 11:14) and aims to bring disorder and every evil thing – in contrast to the Father of lights (Jm 1:17).

The point James will develop in the balance of things is that while God loves and forgives us, he also allows us to mature and to grow. Whether the road seem easy – or very hard – it is the path that faith will journey. If we maintain a single-hearted devotion, James assures, we will find our way.

About trials (1:1-8). The first thing James says is that testing should be received with joy because it results with steadfastness (1-2). And with it, wisdom will be needed.

The people he addresses is “My brothers.” With reference to the audience of the letter (lesson 1), it will be shown that while he speaks of Jewish things (i.e. the *synagogues* of chapter 2), he is seeing a multi-racial presence of believers in the churches he would have addressed (c.f. Ga 3:28ff, Ro 9:3), even as Jesus did (c.f. Mt 23:8; Mk 3:35; Lk 22:32).

“All” joy is translated elsewhere as “pure” joy. Just as Paul prayed that Colossae would be filled with “all” spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col 1:9-11), James wants the same complete and pure joy for Christians. Trials can bring that. Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials in that journey which suggests they are unwelcome or unsought. So, James would not encourage us to throw ourselves head long into trials what are *various*, but he encouraged them to remain steadfast.

Christians “meet” or “encounter” trials or testing just as the man helped by the Good Samaritan “fell into the hands of” robbers (Lk 10:30). Although the KJV translates this as temptations, the word is typically neutral as to its moral quality. Instead, it is a “trying of your faith” (KJV) that proves more often the resolve of the subject upon which it is being exercised. While Satan is likened to an

JAMES 1:2-11

2 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.

attacker (or pirate, c.f. Mt 4:3; 1Cor 10:13; 1Ti 6:9) and the one tempting one in a trial, trials are the generic reality of experience for all humans, even Jesus (c.f. Hb 4:14-16; c.f. Lk 6:22).

As James notes, there is a purpose that will bring its “full effect” (ESV) in these trials. First, they “produce” Steadfastness” or “endurance.” This highly prized trait that manifests itself in different situations likewise should compel us on, James says, to the full effect of maturity that shows the believer to be both “perfect and complete.” This “perfection” is a word that suggests no deficiencies in character. The second word means “whole” or even “single-minded.” And it should be noted that the reason for the tests will reveal our connection to the character of God and that it is not some unachievable high standard but rather, a stable relationship of a complete God with a person who loyalty and devotion to Him is equally complete.

| 6

Then, comes wisdom that God will give – even Jesus affirms that (Mt 7:7). With wisdom, we can see what the word calls misfortune as opportunities to glorify God and accomplish His purpose in us. In Luke’s gospel (11:11-13), it is the Holy Spirit Jesus said the Father would send. In Proverbs, Wisdom is a lady who seeks to reveal herself to seekers and in the New, the Holy Spirit is God who seeks to reveal Himself to seekers. He was promised to those who would reveal His truth in time (John 14:26; 16:13). God gives this wisdom generously – and without judgment. God gives with finding fault in us – and gives more than enough.

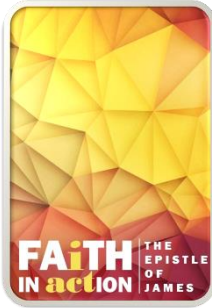
So, ask in faith without doubting. Since God gives abundantly, James says we should not expect God to answer us if we will not believe in His ability. God will not hesitate even though we will hesitate – waffle around like a rudderless boat in the sea. He calls this “double-minded-ness” in verse 8. Israel was warned not worship Yahweh with two hearts (De 26:16, c.f. Ps 12:2). And James has already shown the single-mindedness of God for believers. So, such two-minded people will remain unstable in all he does, not just his spiritual life. This instability is defined as disorder elsewhere (c.f. 1Co 14:33; 2Co 12:20).

About poverty (1:9-11). The “lowly” brother is contrasted with the “rich” brother in verse 10. In the Law, there was consistent law to be concerned for the poor. And in Solomon’s day, when his wealth came from God’s gift, the prophets began to castigate the rich because of their selfish indulgence to the harm of their fellow brother. He will return to this theme in 2:15-16 and say that such compassion is the result of faith – not the regulation of law. But the promise James brings is that the rich man “in his humiliation” will “fade away” through the trials he has just considered.

But who are these rich? The lowly man is a “brother” without question (v.9). One commentary argues “Grammatically, both the terms *brother* and *to take pride in* (verse 9) are linked to the rich man in verse 10” (Nystrom, 55). Ultimately, how would the words of exhortation from James for the rich (in this very context) mean anything if they were not in the community of Christ? It was the disparity between the brothers that itself presented the trial. And like the “cows of Bashan” in Amos 4:1-3 who were promised their judgment even as unauthentic sons of Abraham, so too these rich Christians, who are unauthentic and disingenuous with what their pride is really in, will face judgment for their sin. Even the Corinthians faced the same ungodly, class distinctions they had in Roman society, and faced the ire of Paul (c.f. 1Corinthians 11:17-22). These rich would need the wisdom of God to have a new perspective (they would have never learned in society) to see riches for what they are – transitory and often, an obstacle to begin to accept without reservation the standards of wealth that the world holds up and become dull to see the image of God in the poor around us.

The lowly will likewise rejoice in their testing (of poverty) because it provides them the opportunity to show their faithful endurance and to “inherit the earth” just as Jesus promised. If riches of this world are the treasure of our hearts, just as Jesus promised, for your treasure will be destroyed and stolen (Mt 6:19-20).

Choose what brings “real joy” (1:2).



Lesson 3

Faith and its rewards

The Epistle of James develops how faith should look in the life of a believer and the character of faith. One writer puts it this way, “His chief aim is plainly to impress his readers with a conviction that true Christianity is always a great moral power and will therefore reveal itself through growth in the energies and beauties of holiness,” (Robert Johnstone). And in this section in the first chapter, **the proof that faith exists in us is our endurance of trials** (It will continue that there is proof in deeds of kindness (chapter 2); proof in self-control (chapter 3); proof in a godly life with others (chapter 4-5:6) and final words to be faithful). While faith does have its rewards – it must come through trials. James already said joy should come through trials (1:2); that God can provide the wisdom to make it through (1:5) but that like everything, it must be done in faith (1:6).

The next section of Scripture (1:12) begins again with the theme, “steadfast under trial” written in a way that reminds of Jesus’ beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. And, his wording closely matches Jesus (Mt 24:13) where we are told that only those who endure to the end will be saved. James doesn’t say the blessing is in no trials – or in light trials – but in remaining faithful through them – and manifesting the “love for Him” in that way. This incentive to endure caused Spurgeon to write, “There is a crown for me... Then will I gird up my loins and quicken my pace, since the crown is so sure to those who run with patience.” But what is this crown?

In several places in the New Testament, crowns are mentioned: 1) Everlasting Crown* (1Co 9:25), the Crown who was the People Paul taught (Ph 4:1; 1Th 2:19), the Crown of Righteousness (2Ti 4:8), the unfading Crown of glory (1Pt 5:4), and the Crown of Life (Ja 1:12; Re 2:10; 3:11). Even crown of thorns that Jesus wore is the same word (Jn 19:2,5). To Romans and Greeks, this *stephanos* was a crown that symbolized victory or reward. In the Greek Olympics, winners were awarded the *stephanos*, a laurel crown. In the Isthmian games, crowns were shaped from pine (Easton’s Bible dictionary). Of course, our vision of crowns are shaped by Queen Elizabeth II’s crown of 2,868 diamonds, 273 pearls, 17 sapphires, 11 emeralds, 5 rubies, including the Cullian II diamond or, the Second Star of Africa, which is 317.4 carats. But this would be a *diadem* (Greek) in Scripture, which is used of royal dignity (c.f. Re 12:1; 13:1; 19:12)

But *the reward* is not the crown itself – but what these crowns *represent*; just as the crowns represented the accomplishment of the athletes or the authority of the Emperor or Queen. John said, “And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life” (1 John 2:25), that is why it is a crown of Life. Peter said it was a crown of glory because when we are crowned, we will be glorified. For the Christian, there are not different types of crowns – just different ways of picturing the blessedness we await.

JAMES 1:12-18

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.

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.

Temptation and Sin (1:13-15). James says succinctly, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God.” Temptation does not come from God. Though God allows it, He Himself does not entice us to evil. Human experience has shown us how prone we are to blame others when we find ourselves in trials. Yet by His very nature, God is unable to either be tempted (in the sense we are tempted, as James will explain), nor does He Himself tempt anyone. The great cause of sin, James says, is our desire – or lust.

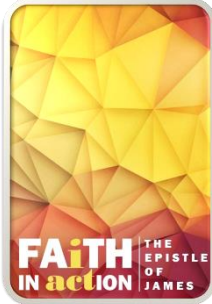
While God sometimes allows tests to come to His people, even some who might be thought of as His favorites (Job, Jo 1-2, or Abraham, Ge 12), or as a father does (He 12:9-11). Other times He may send tests as a form of judgment upon those who have rejected Him, such as sending a spirit to bring deception (1Ki 22:19-23) or departing from a man and refusing to answer him (1Sa 28:15-16). Yet in no case does God entice a person to evil. **Satan tempts: God tries.** But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial.

Each one is tempted when he is drawn away. The picture of being drawn away is either a metaphor taken from a fish enticed by a bait, and drawn after it, or rather from a harlot drawing a young man out of the right way and alluring him with the bait of pleasure to commit folly with her. In either case, the lure did not bring the fish to the hook, the fish followed his own impulse to the hook. Satan certainly tempts us and uses what is in us as the draw: the desire for flesh, the desire of the eye and the pride of life. It has been around since the Garden. Then, “When desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” Desires that corrupt will lead to sin and when there is sin, there is death – spiritual death. This inevitable result is what Satan always tries to hide from us, but we should never be deceived about.

In this section we well, Verse 13 should caution us against attributing tragedy to God in statements like, “I guess God needed another angel in Heaven,” or “Well, God has His reasons.” One may mean well, but the words do not correctly reflect the nature of God as presented by James. In verse 14, James is making the case that God cannot be tempted. God is not the cause of our fall. What is in the equation that he uses: desire + temptation = sin. Remove one, and Satan loses his power. He can’t tempt you with something you have lost a desire for, nor can your desires overwhelm you if you don’t invite the temptation in.

Because God is Good and Perfect (16-18). Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above because James knows we are in trials and surrounded by sin and death. Of course, the ultimate goodness of any gift is measured with both its origins and its effects. Something that may seem to be only good (such as winning money in a lottery) may in fact be turned to our destruction. The gifts are perfect because God is: “with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.” There is nothing secretive: He is the Father of lights. Some have noted that Greek is actually “the Father of the lights.” The specific lights are the celestial bodies that light up the sky, both day and night. The sun and stars never stop giving light, even when we can’t see them. Even so, there is never a shadow with God. When night comes, the darkness isn’t the fault of the sun; it shines as brightly as before. Instead, the earth has turned from the sun and darkness comes. This means that God is always light – and is always good – and never changes. In the modern theology called “process theology” which asserts that God is “maturing” and “growing” and “in process” Himself from the god of wrath in the OT to the god of love in the New. Yet the Bible says that there is no variation or shadow of turning with God.

He brought us forth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. We can see God’s goodness in our salvation. He planned it from eternity (Ep 1:3ff) and through the Word (John 1:1,14), He was explained and for those He would draw to Himself through His word revealed in the Word, they would be His glory. These “first” fruits could be a reference to the “Jews” who “first” believed, suggesting that James anticipated a swelling harvest from Gentiles but that the swell of Gentiles converts began very quickly and was already creating difficulty with Jews. So, it is my view that the first fruits is in connection to the final harvest of our eternal redemption: the final reward of our faith – as proven that we are first fruits among His creatures.



Lesson 4

Faith and the Word

In the Epistle of James, we have seen how he introduced the life of Christians as joyous in trial and sturdy through temptation. Now, we have come to this well-known passage where James expands of this oft repeated theme to put our faith into action. He admonishes us to be "doers of the word, not hearers only". Let's explore how he connects the life of the Christian to the Word.

The phrase: "**Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger,**" sounds like it was written in a modern era and great exhortation today. Yet, what it shows is the timeless wisdom of how a life lived in Divine wisdom will manifest itself.

When someone is quick to hear, it means they are willing to carefully listen and analyze what others are saying. To have biblical wisdom and keen insight, it's paramount to learn from mature Christians so that you don't make the same mistakes. This is why we should hear "quickly" so that we don't fall into a trap that can suddenly destroy us.

Also, if one is quick to hear, they will be slow to speak. In other words, by having active ears and practicing patience, our ability to control the tongue will also flow naturally due to self-discipline. Slow to speak doesn't mean to remain silent; it just means to listen more and talk less.

And when we are quick to hear and slow to speak, we will consequently be slow to anger. While anger is an emotion that can be out of control, it can be controlled by living and walking according to the Spirit in the fruit He brings (c.f. Galatians 5:13ff). As James clearly states, "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." While it is possible to be angry at sin, fight for justice, and seek honor in which this "anger" is "self-controlled" and channeled to the proper authorities.

This will accomplish righteousness. The anger of man will not. The likely meaning here is the *righteous (life) God calls us to live*. James returns to this theme in 3:8-12 where Christians are warned against cursing fellow believers. "Outbursts" rarely flow from righteousness within. Righteous action cannot spring from unrighteous anger.

In that connection, James says that **God calls us to put away all filthiness and wickedness** (the very thing that manifests itself in the "anger of man") and **receive the implanted word which is able to save our souls**. This "word" is the "word of truth" (1:18) It is also significant that we receive this word with "Meekness" (ESV) or "humility" (NASB). It is impossible for me not to see Moses here. The anger the Israelites escalated in his heart (Numbers 20) – that he allowed within him – was recorded after we are reminded that

JAMES 1:19-28

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.

Moses was the most humble of all men (Numbers 12:3). Humility is something you and I must work at – not “achieve.”

He says it will “**save your souls.**” Scripture says we “have been saved” (Rom 8:24-25); we are “being saved” (1Cor 1:18) and that we “will be saved” (Rom 8:21-23). The word implanted will grow to the final result of saving our souls. We must nurture what we have so that what we have will be what we always have.

In that connection, then, James says, “**But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deceiving yourselves.**” This is, according to James, how you see faith in yourself. Later in chapter 2 he will show how God sees faith and justifies us in it. Yet it was Jesus who said, “If you love me, obey my commands.” *There is no clearer statement than this.* In fact, Jesus will say in Luke 16:18 (as well as the sermon on the Mount) that our righteousness (‘doing’) must excel that of the Pharisees. If we say we have faith but do not obey, we are like a man who looks at his natural face in the mirror and then forgets what he looks like. Faith in God is clearly demanded and so is obedience. And each requires effort.

James says that we will be approved by the “law of liberty” (v. 12). But what is this “law of liberty”? Some have said that it is the Ten Commandments. Although Israel violated the law, the Mosaic Law was never a law to freedom – but instead a law that defined sin in order to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:19-29). It did not provide freedom from sin for us, nor could it produce righteousness in us because we were sinners. This “law of liberty” is the “royal law” (v. 9), or the law of God. God’s law remains our guide to holy living, and we must continue to obey all of its moral precepts lest we be revealed as lacking authentic faith. While we certainly stand in grace by faith, we live to be judged by faith in the deeds we have done in the body.

James then says that the one who looks into the perfect law of liberty and perseveres, **he will be blessed in what he does.**

Then, James shows another application: the control of our speech (even though anger usually manifests itself this way). *If anyone among you thinks himself to be religious while he doesn’t bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this man’s religion is worthless.* There really is no reason to debate what James is trying to express here. There is no worth to our religion if we will not manifest self-control in our speech. In their world, “free speech” was rarely protected by law. However, most people said what they thought – not matter the consequence. And this is the application James is making. It is not refusing to say bad or immoral things; it is restraining from saying useless things (c.f. Ephesians 4:29-32).

And then he makes an even more amazing statement: Religion that is pure and undefiled is to visit orphans and widows in distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world. I believe Paul mentions these two classes of people because they are vulnerable, needy, and were not able then (and today as well) to give anything else in return. When one devotes their time and energy to the most vulnerable, they are showing sacrificial love like God loves. As clearly noted, these are things that God calls individuals to live in their life.

Finally, believers are to keep themselves unspotted from the world. We are to be blameless and without blemish. God calls us to a life of obedience and devotion to His kingdom rather than the carnal kingdom of this world. We are sojourners, a peculiar people, distinct from others, and our lives should demonstrate this in front of the world. We are to be in the world, but not of the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15).