

A
Doctrinal and Devotional
Commentary
of the book of
James

By
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A Doctrinal and Devotional Commentary of the book of James
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THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

01 - Introduction to the Epistle of James

TITLE: The book of James is named after its author.

AUTHOR: There are four James' that are found in the New Testament, the first being James the son of Zebedee who is also the brother of John the apostle (Mat. 4:21). It seems that he had been martyred too early (Acts 12:2) to have written this book. The second is James called 'the less' the son of Alpheus (Mat. 10:3). No one has ever considered this James to have authored the epistle bearing this name. Then there is also James the father of Judas (not Iscariot) (Luke 6:16). He is also not considered to have written this book. This leaves us with James called 'the oldest' who was the half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and also the brother of Jude (Mat. 13:55) who wrote the epistle that bears his name. The relationship is easily understood when you read the first verse of his epistle: 'Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ' (NKJV).

DATE: This letter had to be written before A.D 62 the year that he was reportedly martyred by the Jewish historian Josephus. It is believed that James wrote his letter anywhere between A.D. 44-49.

BACKGROUND: This letter was written to Jewish believers who had been dispersed because of the persecution under Herod Agrippa (To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad 1:1). The language used would be typically understood by a Jewish audience. There are more than 40 references to the Old Testament and also more than 20 to the Sermon on the Mount!

THEOLOGICAL ASPECT: Contrary to Paul, James offers little theological insight but mainly emphasizes on the outward living and the importance of living in the 'straight and narrow'. One should read James as one would read a sermon from his favorite preacher. He is preaching more than systematically teaching! He brings forth subjects such as: God, the coming judgment, faith and works, the Law, Christian living in general, godly wisdom, poverty and wealth. As John Dummelow wrote in his commentary on James: *'The question may therefore be asked, "What is the special value to us Christians of today of this brief Judaic Epistle with its somewhat narrow range and limited outlook?'*

If we approach the study of it from the right point of view, not regarding it as a treatise on Christian theology, but rather as a practical letter on Christian ethics treated from the standpoint of a devout Jew, we shall find it both interesting and deeply instructive.'

OUTLINE: James can be analysed through several outlines. We will be looking at the epistle of James through the eyes of 'Various tests in a Christian life'.

PURPOSE OF THE LETTER: It seems that this letter written for believing Jews was meant to give a balanced view in relationship with following their Messiah Jesus of Nazareth. Some were going too far in their ascetic view while others seemed to be too liberal. James reminds them that following Christ is of the heart but also of an outward manifestation of this truth. The book of James is very contemporary in the sense that a good number of Christians still find themselves either in a 'performance' or 'intellectual' spiritual trap.

JAMES
02 - Greetings
1:1

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

This epistle begins with the author naming himself – James. Actually it is IAKOBOS and we are given the Greek version of this Jewish name. As for ‘which James are we talking about’ you can find out in my short introduction. He names himself right from the beginning so that the readers would know who sent the letter is sent. In a North American setting we write our name totally at the end of the letter. I personally believe that it is more logical to write our name at the beginning rather than at the end. Have you ever found yourself turning to the last page to see who a letter was from? I have!

James describes himself as ‘*a bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*’. James is not the only one who introduces himself as a ‘*bondservant*’ (DOULOS) which means: a slave. Paul does it (Rom. 1:1), Peter (2 Peter 1:1) and so does Jude (Jude 1:1). The way we see ourselves in relations with God and the Lord Jesus Christ will directly affect how we live our Christian life. Yes, true believers in Christ have become children of God by adoption (Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5), heirs (James 2:5), also a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) and we are glad to be reminded of this. We have a tendency however to forget that we have been called to be a servant in God’s kingdom (Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 9:19, Col. 4:7). Even the angels are called servants (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). Let’s not forget that Jesus said:

Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

(NKJV)

Jesus is called the servant of God in Acts 3:23. We can not deny the fact that if angels and even Christ Jesus saw themselves as servants of the Almighty – we should also see ourselves as having the same calling. There are twenty-six verses that speak concerning God’s people serving Him. We are even told how to serve Him!

- With joy and gladness (Deut 28:47)
- Sincerity and truth (Joshua 24:14)
- All your heart (1 Sam. 12:20)
- Fear, rejoicing and trembling (Ps. 2:11)

- Gladness (Ps. 100:2)
- Without distraction (1 Cor. 7:35)

The verse found in 1 Cor. 7:35 really strikes me:

1 Corinthians 7:35

**And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.
(NKJV)**

How often we can be distracted by the things of this world! How often they rob us of precious time that should be given towards our Lord and Savior instead of ourselves. When we think of it, believers are actually robbing what they owe to their Lord – themselves! Time is to be given to family and work. How much time is actually given towards God’s kingdom, serving him with church ministries, outreach and evangelism, serving Him by serving others in His name serving in prayer and intercession.

Mark 12:17

**And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
(NKJV)**

Do you see yourself as a *'bondservant'*? Do you see yourself as no longer belonging to yourself? We are told to no longer live for ourselves but for Christ (2 Cor. 5:15) is that the deepest wish of your heart and are you striving towards that goal?

Notice that James is a *'bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'*. By telling the people that he is a slave of both God and Jesus Christ, James is placing both of them on the same level. As a Jew it would be unthinkable to place a man on the same level as God! Either James has lost his sense or he is describing the Messiah Jesus as God himself, come in flesh to live with mankind. We know that he is of a good mind so that leaves us with only one conclusion – Jesus is God incarnate the long awaited Messiah! We know that we are called to serve one another (Gal. 5:13) but we must not substitute serving one another as thought it was serving God! Some churches are so fixed on serving people with all different kinds of outreaches that there is little time, money or energy to serve the Lord himself. We need to keep a balance and remember what is first asked of us:

Matthew 22:37-40

(37)Jesus said to him," 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

- (38)"This is the first and great commandment.**
(39)"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'
(40)"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."
(NKJV)

After identifying himself and who he is, a bondservant, James now declares who his letter is written for:

(1)... To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

This epistle was written *'to the twelve tribes'*. There is no doubt that can come into our mind this letter is written for Jewish believers. The term *'twelve tribes'* is used five times in the Old Testament and also five times in the New Testament as a synonym for the children of Israel. It is never used as a means of identifying any other ethnic group but the Jewish people. God himself called the Jewish people *'the twelve tribes'* in Ezekiel 47:13! Knowing this is very important. Always keep in mind when you read that those written to are of Jewish descent who have converted from Judaism to being followers of Christ. They are ingrained and have been bathed in the Jewish Law and traditions. They have been reared in Israel and its culture. They are now facing a change that all true believers face – a spiritual birth that makes all things new. And sometimes this new way of walking 'rubbed against' all that they had been taught by the Jewish religious authorities. A battle would rage in themselves – 'what am I to do' or 'how am I to act'?

These Jewish believers were *'dispersed abroad'*. The term used is DIASPORA meaning: a dispersion, mainly of the Jewish people in Gentile countries. There are different views concerning this. The one I am inclined to accept is that James is writing more specifically to the Jews who had come to Jerusalem at Pentecost from different nations and about 3000 received salvation on that day (Acts 2:41). Although he might also have written to any Jew who was living outside the Holy Land.

Acts 2:5-12

- (5)And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.**
(6)And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.
(7)Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans?"
(8)"And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"

- (9)"Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,**
(10)"Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,
(11)"Cretans and Arabs--we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God."
(12)So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?"
(NKJV)

We also see in Acts 4:4 their numbers were up to about five thousand! When Pentecost was over most of them went back home and naturally spoke of their new faith in Christ Jesus the long awaited Messiah. It was these converts that James was writing to; men and women of Jewish descent who had given their hearts to Jesus by repenting of their sins. Why are these *'twelve tribes'* called as being *'abroad'*? Simply because they lived in places that were over the borders of Israel – different countries if you prefer.

James begins with one word – *'Greetings'* (CHAIRO) meaning: to be cheerful. This was a common word of salutation within the Jewish nation. But it also reminds us that we should all be cheerful, happy and joyful in life, even when the circumstances are against us! Why be happy? We should be happy because we have been favored by the Father to receive forgiveness of our sins and adoption as his children. This is the greatest grace and honor that can be given to a fallen child of Adam's race! If you are born-again what makes you happy - what you have or who you have become in Christ Jesus?

JAMES
03 - The test of faith
1:2-8

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
(NASB)

When I began to analyse this epistle and to consider the different tests described by James I gave the first trial the title 'The test of suffering'. Later when I began to actually write about this section (1:2-8) I realized that I should change my title to 'The test of faith', simply because that's what James calls it (v.3). I find it befitting that it is placed first on his list since ALL trials are there to, first of all, test our faith. So let's see what James has to say.

1. The joy of trials. (1:2)

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

He first of all wants us to *consider* what is happening to us. The word *consider* (HEGEOMAI) means: to judge, suppose or think. Unfortunately too many react instead of taking time to first of all think about what is happening. What James wants the believer to really consider is something that is out of the realm of the natural. When things do go wrong and cause us trouble or hardships, when life takes a turn for the worst we think of it just as it seems – a worsening. But James says NO don't think of it like that – think of it as joyful! The word translated for *joy* is CHARA which means a calm delight, cheerfulness or gladness. As I said this is out of the realm of the natural for anyone. Yet this is not so with the Disciple of Christ. We can look at trials with a different eye and have a different attitude, simply because we now have a new mind.

Romans 12:2

**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
(NKJV)**

The apostle Paul reminds the believers in Corinth that their minds have been transformed. God does not leave his children with the twisted minds that made them sin. He gives them a new mind – the mind of Christ!

1 Cor. 2:16

**For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.
(NKJV)**

It is with this ‘mind of Christ’ that we must analyse, examine and evaluate the different situations that confront us. When we do this it is with calm delight and cheerfulness! There is quite the difference between the outlook of the old man and the new one! We are commanded to be joyful when we are confronted with trials. So we need to stop, reflect on the situation and have a good attitude (the mind of Christ) about it.

James continues on and calls his readers *brethren*. We know that they were not his brothers or sisters in the flesh – so who were they? The word *brethren* (ADELPHOS) means: a brother literally or figuratively. James uses this word figuratively but is it only used in this sense? What does Jesus say about lineage?

Matthew 12:47-50

(47)Then one said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You."

(48)But He answered and said to the one who told Him, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?"

(49)And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers!

(50)"For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother."

(NKJV)

The key answer is found in verse 50. Everyone who ‘*does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother*’. So all of those who are of true faith in Christ belong to the same family. They are of the same blood but of the same Spirit. This is because when we honestly repent unto Jesus we all receive his Spirit (Rom. 8:9).

So NO, we are not all brothers and sisters (in the flesh) but YES, believers are all brothers and sisters (in the Spirit). So James writes to his brothers and sisters in the faith. However let's not exclude the possibility that his letter was also intended for any Jewish person who would read it.

The word *encounter* (PERIPITO) means: to fall into something or fall among something. In our context this is very interesting. Not all Christians wilfully sin in the sense that he or she plans to sin and has strategies to attain his goal. It happens very often that we *encounter* (fall into or among) various trials. Sometimes trials just 'pop-up', they simply appear. All was fine, all went well. Then, as a trap snaps over the mouse – we *encounter* difficulties. Such as family crises, predicaments at work, a natural disaster, a car accident or maybe some type of financial ruin. So many things can happen that you never saw coming and it's as though the floor opens up under you and you fall without being able to do anything. This is what James is speaking about. Various *trials* (PEIRASMOS) means: putting to proof, adversity or temptation. When these situations happen one needs to look at them as a time of proving ourselves to have the mind of Christ and honoring the Lord God by passing through them honorably.

2. Knowledge and completion. (1:3,4)

³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

When trials occur most people wonder 'WHY' this is happening to them. This question can often haunt a person and even years after they are still searching for some answer. They don't see how sickness, loss or heartache has any 'good' in them. In verse three we see that James attacks this problem right away so that once and for all we can settle the issue and move forward in life. He begins with the word *knowing* (GINOSKO) which means to be aware of, to perceive or to be certain. He wants his readers to firmly understand and believe what is going to be written. Since this letter was not only meant for those in his day but also for all who would later believe let's open our ears and hearts, understand and believe what is going to be explained.

It's all about the '*testing of your faith*'. What is presented to you (the various situations that confront you) is a '*test*' (DOKIMION) which means a test, a trial. The aim of this test is to manifest your trustworthiness. Am I a trustworthy child of God? Can the Lord entrust me with certain spiritual gifts or ministries and so forth? This reminds me of the parable of the talents (Mat. 25:13-30) where the Master gives monies to his servants and 'tests' what they did with it. When the last one came and presented himself he had done nothing but hid the money in the ground.

What he did had brought no benefit for the Master and he failed to be trustworthy. James tells us that the circumstances of life will test us and prove us worthy or not. The *'testing of your faith'* is actually the testing of your fundamental belief in what the Lord God says and promises. Life will reveal where you stand in relationship with your actual faith. Jesus spoke of those who gave 'lip service' but did not really believe.

Matthew 7:21-23

(21)"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

(22)"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

(23)"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

(NKJV)

It seems that many will have done unbelievable things such as: prophesying, casting out demons and done many wonders – all in the name of Christ but really had no true faith in him. What story does your faith convey about you? Are you what is called a nominal Christian or are you a Disciple of Christ? Will Jesus say the same to you as he did in this parable – I never knew you!

The *'testing of your faith'* is there to *produce* something. That is one of the reasons why there is testing. The word *'produces'* (KATERGAZOMAI) means to work fully, to bring to accomplishment. You see, God is working in his children to make them become more and more Christ-like. And he uses circumstances (which he brings) to mold you as he desires. God says it very openly in Jeremiah 18 that he is the potter and Israel is the clay and that he can mold them as he wishes.

Jer. 18:6

"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the LORD. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!"

(NKJV)

The Lord does the same thing with his children of the New Covenant. He is actually molding us into a new image – that of his beloved Son (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). The verse I really like concerning this truth is:

2Cor. 3:18

**But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.
(NKJV)**

So what is the '*testing of your faith*' supposed to produce? The answer is *endurance*. This word in Greek (HUPOMONE) means: constancy, continuance. The testing of my faith will bring constancy. Spiritual life is not supposed to be like a roller-coaster with ups and downs that never cease. A solid faith is more like a beaten path that has been walked upon so often that you know every step of the way. God works in the believer so that his or her life will stop being filled with havoc, disorder and chaos.

⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The aim of having *endurance* is to have '*its perfect result*'. The word *perfect* (TELEIOS) means: complete in growth and mental character. God intends to make mature Christians out of his children. Paul wrote it this way:

1 Corinthians 13:11

**When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
(NKJV)**

He compares being a Disciple of Christ with a child who grows. When he is older (mature) he puts away the childish things – that is the '*perfect result*' that James is speaking about! He speaks of being *perfect and complete*. We have seen what the word *perfect* means now let's take a look at what *complete* means. It is the word (HOLOKLEROS) meaning to be complete in every part, perfectly sound. Some Christians are very good at teaching while they are terrible with their patience. Others may serve well but have a tongue that they cannot master. One can say that these Disciples are NOT *complete*. What God desires for you is that every part of your being, body, mind and soul reflect the person of his Son. As the Son mirrors the Father (Heb. 1:1-3) so the Disciple should mirror his Master. As I write these lines I asked myself what is lacking in my life. What part of me is not Christ-like? Where do I still need to be 'tested'? Do I even accept being tested? How do I react when I am put to the test? All of these questions need to be answered if we desire to be Christ-like.

3. The need of wisdom. (1:5-8)

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

To be able to pass through trials and grow because of them the believer needs two main ingredients. We already spoke of one of them – faith but a second one is also needed and this is what James speaks of in verse five – *wisdom*. James fears that some will lack this second ingredient and he is right! The word *lacks* (LEIPO) means to leave, destitute, absent. He says that there might be something that is necessary in Christian growth but is absent from the believer. The Bible speaks of different types of people some are fools and others are wise. This is like the parable of Jesus and the ten virgins (Mat. 25:1-13), five of them were foolish while the other five were wise. Only the wise ones were able to enter the kingdom along with the bridegroom. James is naturally speaking of spiritual wisdom and not the ‘wisdom’ that comes from this world. So what is the believer to do when confronted by a trial where he does not know what to do?

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

It’s quite simple – ask God! The word *ask* (AITEO) means to ask, beg, require. James is saying ‘talk to God about it’. We need to express ourselves, come close to God and tell him what is happening. We call this praying to God. We need not to fear to do this, because we are invited to do so.

Hebrews 4:16

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

(NKJV)

God is our heavenly Father and he knows what we need even before we ask him (Mat. 6:8). Many are tempted to ask others what they should or should not do but it is far better to ask God what is to be done. Now how will God react when you ask him to give you wisdom? Will he scold, reprimand or rebuke you? Will he send you away crying and feeling ashamed? James teaches us NO! Go and ask the Father and he will give *generously* (HAPLOS) meaning: bountifully, liberally. It seems that God will answer with gladness and also with the measure of his character.

More than that it will be without *reproach* (ONEIDIZO) rail, revile, taunting. This is not like parents with their 'I told you so' or 'If you would have listened to me you wouldn't be in this mess' type of attitude. There will be no reproach from the Father only wise councils! So let's not be afraid and come close to receive the wisdom that we need. God will simply give to the one who asks. This reminds me of what Christ said:

Mat. 7:7

**"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.
(NKJV)**

Is there a special way that the believer needs to ask? James says that there is one attitude that you need to have when you do ask. Asking has nothing to do with where you ask or a special ceremony that involves your asking. You do need one thing and verse six explains it.

⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

We need to ask '*in faith without any doubting*'. Now I've had problems with this until I learned what is meant by '*without any doubting*'. I always thought that I needed never to doubt so that I will have a response from God, that I would get a sure answer. Thought if I doubted I wouldn't get anything from God. Actually my '*not doubting*' (DIAKEINO) meaning: to withdraw from, hesitate or waver has to do with the person I am approaching to receive wisdom. I must not doubt the existence of God, I must not doubt that God hear my prayers. That is what is meant by '*without any doubting*'. As for receiving a specific answer God does give them but sometimes he just wants us to walk in faith and hold on to his hand. Abram did not know where God would lead him and how he was going to get there (Gen. 12). We see that Abram did not doubt because this is what he did after God told him to leave everything and to follow him.

Genesis 12:4

**So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
(NKJV)**

When we doubt we are described as being '*the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind*'. This gives a picture of things floating in the windy sea that are tossed here and there never attaining any stability. It also speaks of being agitated by external elements. In other words – totally lost and unable to anchor ourselves in the midst of trials and tribulations. So let's not doubt God nor his attitude towards his children. He does listen and he does care. He wants your best and sometimes it means that trials will be needed to mold and shape us into the image of Christ.

⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

We are given a warning in verse seven. The word *expect* (OIOMAI) means to imagine, suppose or think. James is saying the following: By the way don't think you'll get anything from God if you're double minded about him. Double minded (DIPSUCHOS) means to be two-spirited, vacillating, not sure of God, he will, he might, it depends – I don't know for sure. If that's what you think of God well let me tell you that you are not going to get wisdom from him. By the way the context of these verses is for *wisdom*. It had nothing to do about getting something from God and believing that God will give it to you – as some teach. It's not 'name it and claim it' or believe that you have it and you will receive it. The subject is the need of wisdom and not of a new car, money, job, health or anything else for that matter. By doing so you dishonor the Lord by claiming something that he has never promised you!

When we are *double minded* we are *unstable* (AKATASTATOS) meaning: inconstant, unstable in faith and our approach to God. The Lord God wants his children to approach him with a simple faith. He wants us to believe that he is all that he says he is and all that he says about you is true also.

So do you pass the test of faith? How do you react when the winds of adversity strike you? Are you filled with joy or ingratitude? Do you understand that these afflictions are there to prove (mostly to yourself because God already knows) what sort of Christian you are? Are you double minded when you talk to God? Are you certain that he is there and that he is listening? How is your faith when strife, trouble and discord knock at your door?

JAMES
04 - The test of contentment
1:9-11

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

(NASB)

Contentment is probably one of the most difficult character attributes that a person can possess and for those that have it they are surely blessed. Contentment has little to do with where you live, your background, intellectual or physical capacities, philosophy of life or if you are a man or a woman. There are people who are not content with their life in Europe as well as in Africa. You can lack contentment if you are of Royalty or a simple worker. People of Academia as well as those who suffer from mental disorders can both lack contentment. Men and women alike are afflicted with this sin. Before we look at our text let's first of all understand what contentment is.

Contentment is a state of mind that rejoices in what one has instead of hoping of attaining what one has not. In other words contentment is being happy with what you have. The apostle Paul teaches us to be content in life with what you have.

1 Timothy 6:6
Now godliness with contentment is great gain.
(NKJV)

This '*great gain*' will safeguard you from certain common sins that plagues every continent of this world. First of all contentment will protect you from envy (James 3:16). Second, from greed (Heb. 13:5). Third, from certain ambitions (Prov. 13:10). Fourth, from anxiety that our supposed lack might bring in life (Mat. 6:25-34). Fifth, from complaining (1 Cor. 10:8-11). As you can see the lack of contentment (which fruits are: envy, greed, worldly ambitions, anxiety, complaints, etc.) are all sins against the person of God. When we lack contentment we declare that what the Lord has granted us is NOT SUFFICIENT while he promises to provide for our needs (Mat. 6:8; Heb. 13:5). The problem with many of us is that we do not differentiate between our NEEDS and our DESIRES. God will take care of our NEEDS not necessarily our desires simply because they often mostly originate from our flesh (James 4:3,4).

Contentment springs forth from a heart that understands certain spiritual truths. Mostly that in God's grace he provides for his children. This understanding will manifest humility and bring the child of God to worship and glorify his heavenly father. God is filled with kindness and compassion (Ps. 145), he has unimaginable promises for his children (2 P. 1:1-5). In other words it is in God that we should find our contentment. Paul teaches us that God (in various ways) is our '*all in all*' (1 Cor. 12:6; 15:28; Eph. 1:23). So let's look at what God (through James) has to say concerning contentment.

1. Contentment and humility. (1:9)

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

James continues to speak to his *brothers*. We have seen (v.2) that he is mostly writing to those who have a common faith with him, those who have passed from death unto life, those who are born again by the Holy Spirit. We also have seen that these brethren have been *dispersed abroad* (v.1). As we have seen there are reasons why these Jewish believers had been dispersed. I would like to add that the Jews had been dispersed in the known world of that day when they had been taken captive to Assyria and Babylonia and later allowed to return to their home land by Cyrus (mid sixth century b.c.). By the time this epistle was written the Jewish people lived everywhere in the Roman Empire.

So what about '*the brother*'? He first of all speaks to those who were of '*humble circumstances*' (TAPEINOS) meaning: base, cast down humble. For most people (Jews included) it was not an easy time to be living. The poor were very poor and the slaves had even less. All of this was while the rich were very rich. What we call the 'middle class' hardly existed in the Roman Empire. It is believed that about 97% of the Roman Empire's population suffered one way or another from poverty! So poverty was very common and the desire to have more was greater. I would say that times have not changed much. When we look at the world's population we see that there is a very small percentage of the very rich who possess or control the vast majority of the world's economics and wealth. The poor are the massive portion of the world's population, while the small middle class is slowly and steadily declining. Still today the desire to have more or to be greater is very much alive. This section is pertinent for all believers for we all have a place in the world's economic system – and most of us are poor if we compare ourselves to the rich.

So again what is the *brother* to do? James says that he is to *glory* (KAUCHAOMAI): to vaunt, boast or glory (in a good or bad sense). Something seems to be wrong here. If we are poor, if we lack in resources, if we are in need then we should *glory*! In what are we to boast and to brag about – I'm poor! James say that we need to change our vision of life. We need to see with our spiritual eyes and not through our flesh.

We are called to boast (in the good sense) about our *high position* (HUPSOS): elevation, altitude, dignity. What James is speaking about is our great spiritual wealth, position and inheritance. Yes, we may be poor to the eyes and standards of this world BUT we are quite the opposite in the eyes of the Lord God! We are no longer poor but have become exceedingly rich. Believers have become children of God (John 1:12), heirs of God through Christ (Gal. 4:7), we possess all things (2 Cor. 6:10), we have an inheritance that no one can steal and is reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). This is what the apostle Peter wrote concerning the people true believers have become.

1 Peter 2:9,10

(9)But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

(10)who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

(NKJV)

That is why it is so important for the believer to recognize who he has become in Christ Jesus. There is nothing in this world that we should envy or be jealous about. Just think how long this life is compared to eternity. Think of Esau and how he thought little of spiritual matters and his inheritance. He gladly forfeited his spiritual heritage for a bowl of soup (Gen. 25:34). May we never, ever chose the riches of this world by turning our back on our Celestial Father. Remember what Jesus said:

Luke 16:13

"No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

(NKJV)

Even if we are the poorest of the poor, we are the wealthiest people on earth. Jesus said that the lilies of the fields are better clothed than Solomon in all his glory and that we are worth much more than they (Mat. 6:28-30). So keep this truth in your heart – you are extremely rich in Jesus.

2. The contentment of the rich. (1:10,11)

¹⁰ and the rich man *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

James now turns to those who were wealthy. The word *rich* (PLOUSIOS) means: abounding with, wealthy, rich. There were some who had much more of this world's measure than others, whether by being born into such a family or by his own means. Like today there are those who are believers and are rich. Now what are they to do? James says that they also must *glory*. It is the same Greek word that is used. So they should also boast about something – but what is it? In *humiliation*. The idea behind this word (TAPEINOSIS) is almost the same as the word *humble* in verse nine. It is a different twist for it means: to be made low, or vile. What I see is that the rich must glory in the fact that he is being made low. I believe that this is in the sense that he is learning that greatness and magnitude is not all it seems to be. Imagine becoming a believer and suddenly realizing that all your life was based on a lie! Imagine seizing all that you have has no measure of importance before the Lord, that you are not a better or more important person because of your possessions. This surely brings a sense of humiliation. You thought you were important but understood that you are just like any other person – a sinner and doomed to hell! This person is told to glory in his *humiliation* because this is what brought him to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He understood what Jesus said:

Matthew 19:23-26

(23)Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

(24)"And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

(25)When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"

(26)But Jesus looked at them and said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

(NKJV)

James compares a flower to a rich person. Both have something in common - they will *pass away* (v.10). This word (PARERCHOMAI) means figuratively to perish, avert or pass. He is reminding the rich that they too will one day die and have to stand before God and give an account of their lives. This was a correct and common belief within the Jewish community. How were the rich to explain away their love of money, their haughtiness and selfishness? How were they to explain that they were right in living a self-centered life while not lifting a finger to help their fellow man?

There would be NO EXCUSE before the Lord. Remember the parable Jesus told concerning the rich man and poor Lazarus (Luke 16:20-31). So if you are wealthy in this world's standards and have become a child of God – be grateful and glory yourself that you were brought low to understand your neediness before God.

¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

In verse eleven James explains how this is done (the humiliating). For the blade of grass it is the '*working of the sun and the scorching winds*' that do the work. The effect is that the flower falls and so does its beauty. Everything that the grass had (its appearance) is *destroyed* (APOLLUMI) meaning: to destroy fully. Nothing is left, no beauty and no worth. The rich man who '*pursuits*' (POREIA): career, travel, ways the riches of this world will also simply lose all he had.

The key word in the above verse is *pursuits*. It gives the picture of someone who is driven by the desire to become rich. It is his lifetime dream and he works towards it. All is done in relation to attaining his goal. So he has no time for what has true worth – the Lord God. It is this person who will *fade away*, not the godly rich person, not the man or woman who uses the monies that they have to do good in the name of Jesus. Not the one that knows that all they have is from God and belongs to God and is a wise servant.

May I ask if the riches of this world are blocking you from entering the kingdom of Heaven? Are your hopes and dreams depending on your wealth? Is your self-worth based on what you have or your status? If so you will just perish.

Matthew 13:44-46

(44)"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

(45)"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

(46) "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

(NKJV)

On the other hand, have you given all, set aside all because you have found the hidden treasure or the pearl of great price – Jesus! Are you ready to empty yourself so that the Holy Spirit will be able to fill you? Have you also decided to be occupied with your Father's business like young Jesus was?

Luke 2:48,49

(48)So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously."

(49)And He said to them, "Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?"

(NKJV)

James
05 - The test of temptation
1:12-18

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* 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 by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
(NASB)

Temptation is the curse that comes with every fallen heart. Temptation is the illegitimate desire to have or to do something that the Lord God does not want. Temptation, when acted upon, is an open rebellion against our Maker. Even with a sinless heart, as with Adam and Eve, temptation sometimes has the overwhelming power to seduce. Temptation did not begin with the creation of mankind in the Garden of Eden for temptation existed before man ever was! Temptation filled the heart of the great cherubim Lucifer. His downfall was the illegitimate desire to be like God (Isaiah 14:12-15).

1. Temptation and its reward. (1:12)

¹² Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

We often believe that a blessing will bring about wonderful and delightful events in our life. If this is our belief we need to re-think the way that the Lord works! Here we see that a blessing is brought by other means. First of all the word '*Blessed*' (MAKARIOS) means to be supremely blessed, fortunate or happy. The blessing of which James will be writing about is more than an 'ordinary' blessing it is a 'supreme blessing'! Contrary to other blessings by the Lord this particular one needs our cooperation to be realized for it is written: '*Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial*'.

It is understood by the text that the trial is not because of one's own sin, foolishness or stupidity. It is a trial, (PEIRASMOS) meaning: putting to proof, experience or adversity that we are placed in by someone outside of one's self.

An example of this would be the trial that Job faced when the Lord allowed Satan to attack him. Having victory in this trial we notice that he was '*supremely blessed*' by the Lord when he received the double of all he had lost. Another example would be trial Jesus went through when he was confronted by Satan (Mat. 4 & Luke 4) and he came out victorious.

James teaches that the believer needs to '*persevere*'. The word '*perseveres*' (HUPOMENO) means: to stay under, remain or endure. One will be '*supremely blessed*' only if one willingly endures the trial he has been placed under. We often desire to be relieved of the trial we are under forgetting that one needs to persevere IN THE TRIAL and throughout the trial for it is there for a reason. When we get out of the trial before its works is completed we forfeit the blessing that the Lord has for us.

It is only when '*he has been approved*' (DOKIMOS) meaning: acceptable or approved that he will be supreme blessed. So one needs to pass through the trial to be acceptable before the Lord. This might sound harsh but when you think of it the Lord provides everything to enable his child to be victorious and when the child refuses to be victorious he must not believe he will be 'applauded' by God!

(v.12)... he will receive the crown of life which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him.

Here we see the '*supreme blessing*' that is mentioned above for '*he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised*'. The word '*crown*' (STEPHANOS) means: a wreath (sometimes of golden leaves). This must not be confused with a crown (DIADEMA) meaning: something about the head. The STEPHANOS is more of a symbol of honor (as with the Olympic or Spartan games) and DIADEMA is more of a symbol of power and authority (as with the dragon (Rev. 12:3), the beast (Rev. 13:1) and the rider on the white horse (Rev. 19:12). So the crown that the Lord will give is actually some special honor. This reminds me of different medals (honors) that are awarded to soldiers who have done some outstanding feat. This honor (crown of life) will be given to '*those who love him*'. This is the foundation that gives the believer the power to go through the trial – his love for the Lord God.

2. Temptation and God. (1:13)

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

Normally a person will believe that he is either tempted by his own flesh or by Satan another might think that *'I am being tempted by God'*. Here the word *'tempted'* (PIEZO) means: to pack or press down, as though we are 'squeezed' into an unpleasant situation. Here James teaches us that the Lord God does not tempt us and the reason is the following *'for God cannot be tempted by evil'*. God, because of who he is, is beyond the reach of temptation. We see this clearly through the life of Emmanuel – God with us. Jesus did not fall into temptation (although the enemy tried) nor do we see Jesus tempting anyone – ever! Because God is HOLY he is unable (by his character) to tempt anyone to sin. That is why James says that God does not tempt anyone.

3. Temptation and lust. (1:14,15)

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

Here we see one of the reasons why we are tempted. If the temptation is not induced by God – where does it come from? Here James says that a person *'is carried away and enticed by his own lust'*. This is very important to understand. Too often a person says that Satan tempted him to act in such a way – and this may be true. But the truth is that most of the time temptation lies within us because of our fallen nature AND the body (flesh) in which we live.

James talks about being *'carried away'* (EXELKO) meaning: To drag forth, draw away. The goal of temptation is to drag the believer away from God while the goal of sanctification is to bring us closer to the Lord. This carrying away is done when we are *'enticed by his own lust'*. The word *'enticed'* (DELEAZO) means: to entrap, allure. One can say that lust is like a fisherman who has different lures at the end of his line. His lures look good for the fish but they are a trap to catch them! So what is the enticement – *'his own lust'*. The word *'lust'* (EPITHUMIA) means: a longing especially for what is forbidden. The flesh in which we live is enticed by things that are forbidden by the Lord. We all know that there is a battle between the flesh and the Spirit in us. Paul explains this warfare in Romans chapter seven.

¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

When this illicit longing *'has conceived'* (SULIAMBANO) meaning: to seize, to arrest. When the believer is seized by his lust (whatever it may be) there is a natural outcome that we can not get away from: *'it gives birth to sin'*.

Sin is the fruit of lust that is carried out in one's life. In other words we miss the mark that the Lord has given us to live by. It also means that we are rebelling against the will of God. However it does not end there for *'when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death'*. The word *'accomplished'* (APOTELEO) means: to complete entirely. So the final consequence of yielding to lust is *'death'*, both physical and spiritual death. We see this clearly with the consequence that Adam and Eve received for allowing lust to enter their lives.

4. Temptation and deception. (1:16-18)

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. ¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. ¹⁸ In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

Here James gives us a warning *'Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren'*. The warning deals with deception *'do not be deceived'*. The word *'deceived'* (PLANAO) means: to roam, to go astray. He wants us to be anchored to what will be said and not to 'float around' like we see Jude speak of certain people:

Jude 1:12,13

**(12) These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots;
(13) raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.
(NKJV)**

He calls his fellow believers *'beloved brethren'*. Here we see his attachment to the other Disciples of Christ. We are of one body and we all share the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:4-6). The word *'beloved'* (AGAPETOS) means dearly or well beloved. They were deeply loved by James. May this be every believer's attitude – to really love one another!

¹⁷ Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.

This is the deception that James warns about. He was worried that Christians might have the wrong notion concerning the Lord God. The first misconception they might have, has to do with: *'Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above'*. Some people thought that gifts came from their own strength, this world or other gods.

Where do 'gifts' come from? James tells them that a 'good' (AGATHOS) meaning: benefit, well, good and a 'perfect' (TELEIOS) meaning: completeness gift is from 'above' (ANOTHEN) meaning: from the first, from above, from the top. So these 'gifts' are from above – celestial in contrast with from 'down here', earthly or human. These 'gifts' are given 'by the Father of lights'. Here James is speaking of the Lord God who is the creator of all light and celestial bodies that shine in the dark (Gen.1:3).

The second misconception again deals with the person of God: '*with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*'. People may have thought that God could change his attitude, or his decrees or even his plans for them. James reassures them that God is not like that because '*with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow*'. In God there is no 'variation' (PARALLAGE) meaning: fickleness, variableness, nor any 'shifting' (TROPE) meaning: revolution or turning. God is stable, he does not change. He is who he is and will ever be who he is. Actually God is the only perfectly stable, non-changing being in the entire universe. Let us understand these things and keep them secure in our hearts.

Mal. 3:6

**"For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.
(NKJV)**

06 - James
The test of response
1:19-25

¹⁹ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

(NASB)

The epistle of James is not a theological theses like you would find with the writings of Paul. James writes on several general topics that faced his audience daily. Here he speaks of anger and how to deal with it. Anger goes all the way back with the second generation of humanity when Cain was angry and jealous towards his brother Abel. He was incapable of dealing with his emotions and this brought forth the first killing recorded in the Bible. May we be very attentive to the fact that anger may also reside in us and if left unchallenged it may also destroy our lives and the lives of others.

1. Anger management. (1:19,20)

¹⁹ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

This is the second time that James calls his readers '*beloved brethren*' the first being in verse sixteen. The tenderness of James is once more manifested. It is so important for all Disciples of Christ to manifest love, kindness and tenderness towards others. True believers should be the reflection of Jesus. People should see in them what Christ looked like. So let others around know that you love them and manifest this truth towards them.

James begins his subject with this introduction: '*But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger*'. The two key words are '*quick*' and '*slow*'. Now the word '*quick*' (THACHUS) means: fleet, prompt, ready or swift. This gives the idea that we must be prompt and not delay '*to hear*'. James is speaking about listening to others.

We often speak before we know all the facts and this has a disastrous effect on relationships. So hearing comes first in all communications. Then there is the aspect of being 'slow' in the following two aspects. We are first asked to be 'slow to speak'. The word 'slow' (BRADUS) means: dull or slow. What normally happens when we are 'slow to speak' – we take time to think about what we are hearing! How many times have you heard someone say: 'I didn't mean that'? What the person is saying is that he didn't take time to think things through before speaking. We need to slow our speech down and think. The second slow thing that we are asked to do is to be 'slow to anger'. Now the word 'anger' (ORGE) has different meanings some are: violent passion, wrath and great indignation. These three things that we are told to do, go hand in hand. First we must listen to what is said, then we should be slow to speak (respond) and finally slow to anger (get irritated). If mankind could simply follow these words of wisdom the earth would be a much happier place to live in.

²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

We often desire to take things in our hands. We get angry, explode in someone's face, scream and voice our opinion, degrade and abase our antagonist. Then we feel good because we said what was on our mind. But has that really achieved anything? James says – NO! You see '*the anger of man*', again it is the same word in Greek for anger, '*does not achieve the righteousness of God*'. In other words the anger that you manifest and feel so good about will not bring holy righteousness. It will not solve the situation, it will actually only continue the warfare. Believers need to learn to let God take care of the situation and to leave him to bring out truth and righteousness. That is why we are told the following by the writer of Hebrews:

Hebrews 10:30,31

(30)For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

(31)It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(NKJV)

In a difficult situation allow the Lord to take leadership and bring you justice. Lean on him and believe that one way or another his righteousness will prevail.

2. How to deal with anger. (1:21,22)

²¹ Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. ²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

Anger is the subject James is writing about and in the following two verses he will tell us how to deal with anger. Now not everyone has the same 'anger level' in his heart. Some are almost 'anger proof' while others are often exploding bombs. They are very touchy and can detonate at the slightest irritation.

The first step is *'putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness'*. There are things that we need to get rid of. The words *'putting aside'* (APOTITHEMI) means to cast off or lay apart. What is needed to be understood is that the believer IS ABLE to do this. I have often heard Christians say: 'I can't stop' or 'it's too difficult'. But this is their flesh speaking and not the Holy Spirit in the believer. We are told by Paul that:

Phil. 4:13
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
(NKJV)

This is good and exciting news. I can get rid of my anger because of what Christ is able to do in my life. It is not the Lord who limits our capacity to change (sanctification). It is our misunderstanding of the power of God or our unwillingness to do what we ought to do.

There are two things that believers are called to put aside. The first is *'all filthiness'*. Now *'filthiness'* (RHUPARIA) means: dirtiness. Here James is speaking of moral filthiness. Our mind may be filled with filth which pushes the believer to outbursts of anger. When we don't see things as the Lord sees them we are filled with moral and spiritual darkness. Jesus says the following about moral filthiness:

Matthew 15:18,19

(18)"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man.

(19)"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. (NKJV)

One needs to search his heart and see what is in it. Once this is done, the person needs to put aside what displeases the Lord.

Now the second thing we are called to put aside is *'all that remains of wickedness'*. The word *'wickedness'* (KAKIA) means: badness, depravity and malignity. This seems to give the idea of things that are even more immoral than *'filthiness'*! There are different levels of darkness. When someone is wicked there is something profoundly wrong with him. There is a moral difference between telling a 'white lie' and voluntarily hurting someone physically. James is asking his readers to reflect on their anger and to take a deep look at their hearts.

They are not only to deal with the easy things to set aside but to dig deeply and deal with the more awful things that are hidden in us. Once this is done what am I to do?

(v.21)... in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

The person is to get rid of certain things but the Lord does not want him to be left with an inner void. Here we are told what the believer is to do next: *'in humility receive the word implanted'*. We are told to *'receive'* (DECHOMAI) which means: to accept, take or receive. We need to accept what the Lord desires to give his children. Many have difficulty in accepting the full forgiveness of their sins or the love God has for them and so forth. For some reason the mind sometimes limits what it is willing to receive from God. James tells us that we need to receive all that the Lord has for us. In this particular case we need to receive *'the word implanted'*. The word is naturally the Word of God. The Lord God desires to take his word and let it be *'implanted'* (EMPHUTOS) meaning: engrafted. His word is not naturally grafted in us for we are his enemies (Rom. 5:10). Only when we are born again, born by the Spirit are we capable of receiving not only the Living Word in us but also the Written Word to guide us by the Holy Spirit. We desperately need to take God's word and let it grow in us. Why you might say? The word grafted in you *'is able to save your souls'*. This has nothing to do with eternal salvation for only the Son is able to make us righteous before the Father (Act 4:12). This deals with the deliverance from the anger that is in us. The word *'save'* (SOZO) means: deliver, protect, heal or make whole. The word of God in the believer will not only protect him but it will bring healing and make him whole. In other words, it will deliver him from the consequences of the anger burning in him.

3. The hearer and the doer. (1:23-25)

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

There are two things that you can do after hearing the teachings of James. Either you hear them and lay them aside or you hear them and you act upon them. This last section is all about this. The success of a life of righteousness and the inner healing of our soul depends on these three verses. Here James speaks of two people who have a different reaction towards God's word.

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

This is the first person, let's take a look at him. We first notice the following: *'For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer'*. This is a person who listens to what is said but that's all he does – listen. He may be quiet and polite and even agree with the word of God. However it goes in one ear and comes out the other. There is no spiritual response in him. A great many Christians are like this man. They come to church services or activities and their lives are not really transformed simply because the word does not take root in their hearts. Jesus speaks about some of these people in his parable of the seeds (Mat. 13).

We also notice that this first person is *'like a man who looks at his natural face'*. Here we have another example and this time it is a person who looks at himself. One looks at himself in the mirror and examines what he sees. He looks closely at every feature of his face. So then what? What does the person do? Well we see that *'he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was'*. Once this person has finished looking in the mirror he turns away and he has *'forgotten'* (EPILANTHANOMAI) meaning: to lose out of mind, neglect. In other words the person finds himself acceptable. His search in the mirror did not disclose any faults so he neglects to bring any real deep rooted changes. He is happy with the way he is. He should have seen his sins, his anger and other faults – but he doesn't. He seems to be blinded. That is why James wrote that the believer needs to allow the word of God to be alive in him so that changes will occur.

²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the *law* of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

The second person in this story also looks but he looks *'intently'* (PARAKUPTO) meaning: to bend beside, lean over, stoop down. This gives the idea that the second person stops and actually profoundly looks at the *'perfect law, the law of liberty'*. This is not the law that condemns but the law (in Christ) that liberates the soul from death and the power of sin. Paul writes about the different aspects of the law from chapter two through every chapter until and including chapter ten ending with this verse:

Rom. 10:4

**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
(NKJV)**

This man not only *'looks intently'* but *'abides by it'*. This is the difference between both men. One looks and forgets, the other also looks but he looks deeply in the law and *'abides'* (PARAMENO) meaning: to stay near, persevere or continue. He makes a decision to act upon what he has read and he becomes *'an effectual doer'* (POIETES) meaning: a performer. He becomes someone who sets his heart and mind to do what is right in the sight of God. This and only this man *'will be blessed'* (MAKARIOS) meaning: supremely blessed.

Power, change and blessings are when we look at ourselves, see our sins, then deeply look in the word of God and abide in it. There is power over anger and all other sins, we have this assurance from the Lord.

07 – James
'The test of your religion'
1:26,27

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.
(NASB)

As the apostles walked with Christ they were able to see first-hand what true religion was all about. Looking at Christ was looking at the Father Himself (Heb. 1:1-3). The writers of the New Testament wrote down for us what they saw of Christ and what the Holy Spirit inspired them to remind us of. The gospels and the epistles manifest the multi-faceted aspects of religious life that the Father approves. In this section, James places one of these aspects before us. This is written for us so let us open our hearts so we can understand and apply it to our lives.

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless.

It all has to do with the way a person '*thinks himself to be religious*', the way we perceive ourselves. In our last section, James spoke of a man who looks at his reflection and is quite satisfied with it, forgetting all the faults he sees. We can say that we have the same pattern of thinking in this section also. So how do we perceive ourselves religiously? The Bible speaks of the importance of our self-perception:

Proverbs 23:7a
For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.
(NKJV)

The rich young ruler thought that he was 'good' yet he had great sins (Luke 18:18-27). The scribes, Pharisees and the other teachers of the Law also thought they were in good standing before God but Jesus calls them hypocrites (Mat. 16:3). People standing on the street corners and praying publicly thought they were worshipping God but the Lord also calls them hypocrites (Mat. 6:5). Others openly gave alms and did charitable deeds and thought that this was 'good religion' (Mat. 6:1) but Christ also calls them hypocrites. The way we see ourselves is often misleading for we have a defiant and rebellious heart (Jer. 5:23).

As it is written *'as a man thinks himself'* here the word *'thinks'* (DOKEO) means: to think, to seem and the subject of his thinking is *'religious'* (THRESKOS) meaning: pious, religious, ceremonious.

As with the rich young ruler who thought himself to be religious but had a great idol in his life, many Christians also believe that they are *'religious'* but fail miserably. He fails because he *'does not bridle his tongue'*. This will not be the last time that James speaks on the subject of our communication with others. The problem with some Christians is that they cannot control *'bridle'* (CHALINAGOGUO) meaning: to curb, fig. to bridle. Some people just can't control their tongues. Many verses speak about our tongue for it can be an asset or cut like a sword.

Our tongue can be:

- Flattering (Pr. 6:24)
- Choice silver (Pr. 10:20)
- Promoting health (Pr.12:18)
- Foolish (Pr. 15:2)
- A tree of life (Pr. 15:4)
- Spiteful (Pr. 17:4)
- Evil (17:20)
- An instrument to save ourselves from trouble (Pr. 21:23)
- And so much more

So do we govern our tongue? Are we its master or its slave? Do we gossip? Are we unable to keep silent about something someone has confided to us? A person like this *'deceives his own heart'*. The word *'deceives'* (APATAO) means: delude, deceive, to cheat. How bad is it when we cheat ourselves or when we lie to ourselves thinking that we are religious but can't contain our tongue! Blindness concerning our spiritual state can only bring spiritual misery and death. One needs to be honest with himself and take a good look at the way he uses his tongue.

(v.26)... this man's religion is worthless.

It's not that an untamed tongue lessens our spirituality or diminishes our walk with the Lord God. What it does is that it makes our religion *'worthless'* (MATAIOS) meaning: to be empty, profitless and vain. In other words it is *'worthless'*! Do you remember what the apostle Paul had to say about our lack of love?

1 Corinthians 13:1-3

(1) Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

(2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

(3) And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

(NKJV)

Here is another example of a self-deceiving Christian. He can speak the language of men and angels, he has the gift of prophecy, he understands all mysteries and has all knowledge and can even move mountains with his faith YET he is nothing! He gives all his possessions to the poor and willingly goes to the stake to be burned – even if he does that but has no true love for others – IT PROFITS ME NOTHING.

So both James and Paul are saying that even though you have outstanding outward religion if you miss either the control of your tongue or lack true love – you are deceiving yourselves! Like so many pagans you think you please God but you do not. So this very small section in the book of James is extremely important.

²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

In this verse we are told what one aspect of true religion is. This true religion is first '*pure*'. This word in Greek (KATHAROS) means: clean, clear or pure. It is unpolluted by falsehood. Think of a pure mountain stream compared to a river filled with industrial waste. Which one would you like to drink from? Secondly this religion is also '*undefiled*' (AMIANTOS) meaning: unsoiled. It does not have a speck of any counter active ingredient – it is perfect. This is the type of religion that James is writing about.

This type of religion is pure and undefiled '*in the sight of our God and Father*'. There is only one person to which our religion must be pure and undefiled and that is '*our God and Father*'. Religion is not meant to be accepted by our family, friends and even the church leaders and members. It is meant to be accepted by God” He is the only one who we should seek to please. It is understood that when our religion is pure and undefiled it should automatically please others because we are to manifest true kindness, care and grace to others around us.

(v.27)... to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

So here it is. This is what James calls a pure and undefiled religion. It is made up of two main aspects. One deals with our relationship with people, the other deals with our relationship with God. As for our relationship with others, James writes: *'to visit orphans and widows in their distress'*. The word *'distress'* (THLIPSIS) means: affliction, anguish, burdened. True religion thinks of others, especially when they are suffering. Orphans and widows are often all alone and terribly need the presence of others. Men and women should step-in and care and protect them. Disciples of Christ need to remember that we are one big family and that we are all part of the body of Christ. Remember also what Jesus said concerning this:

Mark 9:41

**"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.
(NKJV)**

So what are you doing to help those in real need? Are you, one way or another, involved in the lives of others? Do you open your home to others? Do you actually plan to visit or receive those who need encouragement? Taking care of those who need help, now that's true religion.

But there is also another side that James speaks of and that is our relationship with the Father. James writes *'and to keep oneself unstained by the world.'* If we are to care for others we are to keep ourselves *'unstained'* before the Lord. The word *'unstained'* (ASPILOS) means: unblemished, without spot, in other words to keep ourselves pure. You see we have more than one enemy. The one spoken of here is *'the world'* (KOSMOS) meaning: orderly arrangement, fig: our world. We need to keep from being stained by the *'world system'* or the philosophy of the world. Here Paul writes it perfectly:

Colossians 2:8

**Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.
(NKJV)**

As children of God we are called to be different, to be Christ-like in every aspect of our lives. Paul gives four different aspects of this in his letter to the Ephesians.

The first is the manner of our walk:

Ephesians 4:1

**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,
(NKJV)**

The second deals with the walk of our mind:

Ephesians 4:17

**This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,
(NKJV)**

The third is our walk in charity:

Ephesians 5:2

**And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.
(NKJV)**

The fourth is our walk in the light:

Ephesians 5:8

**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.
(NKJV)**

May our religion not be worthless before the Lord and let us be honest enough to take a good look at the way our tongue manifests itself.

James
08 - The test of fairness
2:1-7

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

(NASB)

1. An example of favoritism (2:1-4)

Fairness and favoritism are on opposite sides of the spectrum. As a result of our sinful nature we battle constantly to be fair with everyone and not to show favoritism. Favoritism when pushed to its limit can manifest racism and give birth to segregation. Favoritism is a sin and when we favor one race over another it can develop into genocides. Even on a much smaller scale (as with this section) favoritism always brings shame to the holy name that Christians bear.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,”⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

The Christians that James wrote to, were living in a cosmopolitan society. The Roman road system went from one end of the Empire to the other, from Spain across Europe to northern Africa. This included all the countries that touched the Mediterranean Sea and even more. These were people of different languages and culture; with a vast array of different religions embedded in each of these nations. Sometimes one could disdain certain people and treat them with contempt.

There was also another type of favoritism that treated the rich differently than the poor. Often one can regard the rich or the noble with a different eye. This is what James is mentioning in this section.

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of personal favoritism*.

He calls the Christians '*brethren*'. We have seen in the past that he does this. There is a sentiment of brotherhood, of being in the same family. Each Disciple of Christ is now a brother or sister for we all have the same Father in heaven and the same brother – Christ Jesus! May we remind ourselves of this fact that we are part of a universal family and must treat others with great regard!

Here James teaches that it is very possible to '*hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism*'. A believer can truly and honestly have saving faith in Christ. He can believe that his Lord is surrounded in glories, that he is LORD not only of his life but also over all things since his name is above all names (Eph. 1:20,21; 4:9,10). He can be an earnest follower of Christ and yet have '*an attitude of personal favoritism*'! The word '*attitude*' (EN) means: fixed position and gives the idea of someone who does not change, in this case, of certain thoughts concerning others. He is narrow-minded and has prejudices. We can see that James speaks of people who will not change their minds even though the evidence is against them.

An example of this would be Simon Peter. After the death and resurrection of Christ he stayed away from Gentiles and did not bring the 'Good News' to them. It took a dream from God (Acts 10) to show him that all men were to be accepted and evangelized. An even better example of favoritism also deals with Peter and what happened in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-16). Peter met Paul and believing gentiles and all went well but when certain men from James also came, Peter stopped being with the Gentiles to be only with Jews. Seeing this, Paul stood up against Peter's favoritism and openly rebuked him! I wonder if we have any personal favoritism. Are we open to everyone, do we eat with everyone and have fellowship with everyone? Or are we part of a select few – a clan if you prefer within the congregation and outside its walls.

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

Here is the example that James gives us. It is the story of two men who arrive at a meeting of the Body of Christ. The first is rich for he has *'a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes'*. By the description given we can tell that the first person is wealthy. Not everyone had gold rings and wore *'fine clothes'*. Just as in our present world, the rich or the famous are often given special treatment wherever they go. Now a second person arrives at the meeting but this one is different he is *'a poor man in dirty clothes'*. He is totally on the other end of the spectrum! The first is rich and the second is poor. The first has fine clothes and the second has dirty clothes. The contrast is remarkable.

³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

So what does the Christian who has an *'attitude of personal favoritism'* do? Well he pays *'special attention'* (EPIBLEPO) meaning: to gaze at, regard, have respect to. You see a rich visitor – 'WOW'! We don't get them very often and you go all out for this man. You greet him and say: *'You sit here in a good place'*. You find him the best place to sit in. The word *'good'* (KALOS) means: good, valuable, distinguished from. It is the place of honor that this rich stranger receives and you are so glad to give it to him. As for the other man it's a different story and you also show this person a *'personal favoritism'*. To the poor visitor you say: *'You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool'*. The first is sitting in the best spot in the congregation and the other either has to *'stand over there'* or *'sit down by my footstool'*. You give him two choices either stand back there or sit on the floor by my feet. If you found a place for the first you could have certainly found a place for the second. Why does the rich get the best treatment while the second is treated with contempt? It is because you manifest favoritism and this is a sin.

⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

Here James asks a question *'Have you not made distinctions among yourselves'*. The word *'distinctions'* (DIAKRINO) means: to separate, distinguished from. This gives the idea that before doing this, the people thought about what they were to do and came to a conclusion. By doing this, they became *'judges'* (KRITES) meaning: a judge. So they sat in a judge's seat and made a judgment. The rich man will be greeted differently than the poor man. James says that this reasoning is bathed in *'evil thoughts'*. So he is not pleased with this type of attitude of looking up to the rich and down to the poor. This has *'evil thoughts'*. In Greek this means to have hurtful internal considerations.

2. God's desire (2:5)

⁵ Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world *to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?*

Remember that they placed themselves as judges in this situation. However who is the only real judge in any situation if not the Lord God! James tells them that God sees things differently. You see, these Christians looked down upon the poor that came to their services and they needed to be reminded of the thoughts of God. With the poor, God gave them to *'be rich in faith'* and not only that but also to be *'heirs of the kingdom'*. What a contrast with what we have seen in the story that James provides. God has made them rich by their faith and also by their celestial heritage. James tells them to *'listen, my beloved brethren'*. They needed to wake up and take heed to the Lord's teaching and so should all of us. Bigotry, segregation, racism, intolerance and prejudice is not to be found in the heart of any follower of Christ!

3. Something to think about (2:6,7)

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

In this section, James gives his readers something to think about. He first tells them that they *'have dishonored the poor man'*. Their action brought a reaction. They favored the rich which in turn brought *'dishonor'* (ATIMAZO) meaning: to render infamous, to entreat shamefully. By doing this they treated shamefully their fellow believer. God had made them his children and they were treated disgracefully by his other children! Do you believe that this will go unnoticed? Do you believe that the Lord will bless the congregation that allows this to be carried on? May this be a warning for all who practice such disgraceful acts!

James continues, but this time with general arguments. *'Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?'* A very down to earth argument is the fact that it is the rich who *'oppress you'* (KATADUNASTENO) meaning: to exercise dominion against. The rich (in general) are people who think of themselves first and will do anything to get even richer, to the point of bringing you (who are judging the poor and disfavoring them to the rich) into court. The rich use every means they have against you, even the court system. They want to take advantage of you and deprive you of what is legally yours. And they are the ones that you prefer!

Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

The last argument against any favoritism is that the rich '*blaspheme*' (BLASPHEMEO) meaning to speak impiously or defame. They blaspheme the sacred name of God, the very one who has forgiven you and has blessed you with his compassion and kindness. You acknowledge the rich and you disavow the poor – what's wrong with you? Why the special treatment for those who curse and revile the '*fair name by which you have been called?*'.

There was something terribly wrong with some of the Christians back then and this has not changed today. Many churches are not open to people other than what they themselves represent. Even those who feel segregated in society segregate themselves by not openly welcoming all in their churches! How far are we from the pure heart of God!

James
09 - The test of the Royal Law
2:8-13

⁸ If, however, you are fulfilling 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 and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.
(NASV)

In this section James will be speaking about three different spiritual laws that affects the believer one way or another.

- the Royal law (v.8)
- the law (v.9,10,11)
- the Law of Liberty (12)

This unit is still colored with the theme of the preceding one, which was having ‘partiality’ and how sinful that was. James adds to what had been said and states in verse nine that partiality is not only sinful but that the person who is partial is actually a TRANSGRESSOR.

James 2:9

But if you show *partiality*, you are committing a SIN and are CONVICTED by the law as a TRANSGRESSOR.

(NKJV)

James is using pretty strong words in regards to being partial to certain brothers or sisters. We might call it *PREFERENCE*, as in ‘I prefer being with her’ (or them). But the bible calls it *partiality*. The Greek word that is used here (PROSOPOLEPTEO) means: To *favor* an individual. One is compared to the other. One is chosen *over* the other.

The Bible has a different view and calls our *preferences* between the brethren a sin. For God this attitude is SINFUL and we should do all we can to change our attitude of preferring one in relationship to the other.

Another strong word James uses in regard to partiality is '*convicted*'. This Greek word (ELEGCHO) means: to reprove, rebuke or convict. Even when our hearts abound with joy, when we have a great time being with people we prefer the Bible says that we are convicted. This is a word linked with CONVICT – which gives the idea of a criminal. We must never allow our feelings to dictate what is right or what is wrong. It is the Word of God that is our standard in all things. In the sight of God, partiality is not a pretty thing or an innocent thing.

The third strong word James uses is '*transgressor*'. This Greek word (PARABATES) means: violator, breaker and transgressor. Transgressors are not honest, law abiding citizens, they rather go against what has been legally established. They break human rules or go against what has been divinely ordained. When I prefer this brother or that sister and put away God's Holy Law concerning my relationships – I become a sinner, a convict and a transgressor. So let's embrace and manifest this reality of "Oneness", between all who confess Christ as their Lord and Savior, by not having favorites.

As I said before, James will be speaking concerning the three different laws that are found in this text.

- the Royal law (v.8)
- the law (v.9,10,11)
- the Law of Liberty (12)

Let's take time to look at each of them.

1. The Royal law (2:8)

The first is the Royal law found in verse eight.

⁸If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well.

The first thing that comes to mind when we hear this, is when Jesus spoke these words in his Sermon on the Mount.

Matthew 5:43-45

(43)"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

(44)"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

(45)"that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

(NKJV)

On another occasion Jesus spoke these same thoughts.

Matthew 22:37-40

(37)Jesus said to him," 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

(38)"This is the first and great commandment.

(39)"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

(40)"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

(NKJV)

One might think that Jesus was giving his disciples a whole new set of laws to live by. But this is not so, *loving our neighbor* or the “Royal Law” as James calls it, was given to mankind, by God – the Father in the times of Moses. In a series of laws that the Father gives Moses for the children of Israel the “Royal Law” comes forth!

Leviticus 19:18

'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

(NKJV)

So we see that the “Royal law” of loving our neighbor as ourselves had been well established. Jesus reminded his followers to love their neighbors and James reminds the disciples to do the same. In the same way we are reminded today that the “Royal law” is still in full effect. Loving one’s neighbor as one’s self is a definitive proof that we are true Disciples of Christ. When we do this, James says that *‘you are doing well’*. We are doing what our heavenly Father desires for us to do – so let’s practice the Royal law all the time. Remember what Jesus said:

John 13:35

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

(NKJV)

Again please notice that James writes that if we do follow the Royal Law ‘love our neighbors as ourselves’ then *‘you do well’* (v.8)The idea behind this Greek word (KALOCE) means: to be in a good place. It also gives the idea of being good or goodness. What God is saying to us is that when we are good to each other it’s a ‘good thing to do’ and a ‘good place to be in’.

There is a very special sense that envelops us when we do good things to other people. This results in a sense of happiness that is different than all other ‘happy moments’. It’s almost indescribable. It brings a smile to our face and a tear to our eye. It warms our hearts and joy fills our soul. Yes, doing ‘good’ to others is a wonderful thing.

2. The law (2:9-11)

The second law that James speaks of is simply called: the law.

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 and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, “DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,” also said, “DO NOT COMMIT MURDER.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

The Law is actually one of the Biblical terms given to the ensemble or to the whole set of laws (613 of them), that the Jewish people were instructed to live by. Three things are related to “the Law” in verses 9 - 11.

First of all disciples are *convicted by the law* (v.9)

⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors.

When we break the Royal law we are *convicted* by it. The word ‘*convicted*’ (ELEGCHO) means: to confute or to admonish, to rebuke. So God rebukes the breaker of the Royal Law for his attitude of favoritism. It goes to show how serious God takes his “Royal law”. I don’t believe that any true believer desire to be rebuked by God, do we?

Secondly, not only does the law convict us but also we become 'guilty' of all the law when we break just one section of it!

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all.

God declares us guilty of breaking ALL his law when we break just PART of it! Most people do not realize that breaking one aspect is technically breaking all of the law. There is no place for self-righteousness – for keeping 99.9% of the law has no more worth than keeping 18% of the Law. God says: 'it's all or nothing, it's being perfect or not, being holy or not'. There is no "middle ground" before the Lord. This verse teaches us the gravity of sin and it should destroy all of our thoughts concerning "how good we are"! None of us are good – all have failed.

Romans 3:10-12

(10)As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

(11)There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

(12)They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

(NKJV)

Never believe that you are righteous – even if you could (and you can't) live out 99.9% of God's Law.

The third mention of the Law is in relationship with being a *transgressor* of the law.

¹¹ For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Again the Greek word is (PARABATES) which means a violator, a breaker of the law. Failing, by having favorites, makes us become breakers of the law. So we become OUTLAWS, just like in the days of the American ‘wild west’ where bank robbers, cattle hustlers and murderers – were declared outlaws. These outlaws would have posters with their faces on them with a big “WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE” inscription on them. If transgressing human laws makes us “WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE” how much more is this true when we become transgressors of divine law!

3. The law of liberty (2:12,13)

The last law that is spoken about by James is “*The law of liberty*” which is found in verses twelve and thirteen.

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

After speaking of the “Royal Law” and how we are convicted by it, and of “the law” and how we transgress it, James ends with the “Law of liberty” found in verse twelve. This is where the grace of God is manifested to all of us because we are all transgressors of His laws.

The Law of Liberty is spoken of by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans.

Romans 8:1,2

(1) There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

(2) For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.

(NKJV)

Here we see that the *law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*(Rom. 8:2) **set's us free** from the *law of sin and of death* (v.2).James calls this the Law of liberty (because it sets us free), Paul calls this the law of the Spirit of life and it also sets us free. This law, found with both James and Paul sets us free. It liberates us from the condemnation to come. What James tells us is that we should live by the standards of this liberating law that has been placed in our hearts. James also reminds us that we have a responsibility towards this liberating law that we are now under. Our responsibility is to *speak* and to *act* by its principles. So love your neighbor as yourself!

This section ends with a stern warning that we all need to listen to.

¹³ For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

After being told of the necessity of living by the Royal Law we are told that there is a consequence for those who do not live by it. If one does not live a life of mercy there is a judgment waiting for him. This is for both believers and non- believers alike . Some believe that when we are in Christ, the Father lets them do whatever they please and that there are no consequences. Paul says that believers can not mock God and that they shall reap what they have sown (Gal. 6:7). Peter also tells us of the judgment of God and that it will begin in God's house (1 Peter 4:17). The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the following:

Hebrews 10:30,31

(30)For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

(31)It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

(NKJV)

May these warnings run deep in our souls! The grace of God is given but the severity of the Lord is there for those who mock Him.

Rom. 11:22

Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

(NKJV)

James
10 – The test of good works *1
2:14-19

¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that? ¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. ¹⁸ But someone may *well* say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.
(NASB)

This is the eight test that James places before his readers. These were the first seven:

- The test of faith
- The test of contentment
- The test of temptation
- The test of response
- The test of your religion
- The test of fairness
- The test of the Royal Law

Today’s test will concern the “good works” that we do.

1. The first two questions. (2:14)

In our present section, there are two questions that are asked. Still today they bring many heated arguments. Some denominations teach that one needs faith AND ‘good works’ to obtain salvation. These believe that somehow your good works have merit in the eyes of the Lord God. On the other hand you have those who say that salvation is solely based on your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your savior. These believe that only the merits of the sacrifice of Christ can suffice to bring salvation. The second group also believe in ‘good works’ and that they do not earn any merits but are rather a sign that you are following Jesus and desire to glorify God for the salvation that Christ has already obtained for you. This is not a futile argument, but rather the difference between being saved or not!

**¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?
Can that faith save him?**

1. What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works?
2. Can that faith save him?

In other words if someone says “I am a Christian”, but does not manifest it through a life of ‘good works’ (walking in the light) – is that person saved? Does claiming to have faith without any ‘good works’ have any weight in the eyes of the Lord? Is it sufficient to receive redemption?

Before we continue, remember that the Lord does expect his disciple to manifest much fruit and good works in his life.

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

(NKJV)

Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for *good works*, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

(NKJV)

Does the blood of the Lamb of God cleanse the person who only says: ‘I have faith, sure I’m a Christian’? Countless millions go to church every Sunday, will they all go to heaven? Is saying, “Jesus is Lord” a magic phrase that open up the pearly gates? Is it a ‘secret password’ that lets you in? Is being a Christian a simple intellectual acceptance (Yes, Jesus did exist) or is it something much deeper than that? James will tell his readers that being truly saved is much more than just “lip service”.

2. James gives an example of what he means. (2:15,16)

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

In verse fifteen James gives an example of a person ‘*a brother or a sister*’ who is in need. This person was without clothes and daily food. Don’t forget that in those days the Jews were persecuted by the Roman Empire and the Christian Jews were persecuted not only by Rome but also by the other Jews! So, many could be without the necessities of life. Now seeing the pressing needs of your brothers and sisters what do you do? How do you respond?

What does your heart tell you? Are you inclined to rush and do what you can to provide for them or do you have a tendency to turn your face away? Are you like the two religious people who did not help the poor man that had been robbed and left to die (Luke 10:29-37)?

¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for *their* body, what use is that?

If the only thing you do is say “*Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed*”, does that reflect that you are saved? Are you reproducing the mind of Christ? Are you being the salt and light of the world? The phrase: ‘Go, I wish you well’ gives the idea that you are withdrawing or departing and wanting peace to be upon the person. It is as if you see a beggar on the street and as you walk by him you say: ‘Hey, have a great day’!

So if you don’t help the person in need James asks – ‘*what use is that*’? The word ‘good’ (OPHELOS) means: to heap up, accumulate, benefit. Is there any benefit that you do or bring towards the needy person by giving a big smile and saying ‘have a great day’ when you could actually help him? Many would be surprised by what James says. Notice that he does not answer his own question – because it does not need to be answered it is understood, NO - you don’t do any good to that person.

3. James answers his own question (2:17)

What James does is that he answers the second question found in verse fourteen (Can such a faith save him?)

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

The person who says he has faith but does not accompany his life by works of faith – simply does not have saving faith! He can intellectually say that Christ was a real person, that he was a prophet or a great man of God. He can say that his teachings are relevant to all of mankind and that we should be a ‘good person’ like he was.

But his lack of care, love and compassion for his fellow man manifests that his heart has not been transformed by the Holy Spirit and that his mind has not been renewed. Faith without any works is dead. It’s not that faith and works equal salvation but rather that faith without any outward works is actually dead – non-existing. The word ‘*dead*’ (NEKROS) means: a corpse, dead. You are a body without any true spiritual life in it. That is why Paul reminds the true believers the importance of always being spiritually alive for the Lord.

Romans 12:1,2

(1) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

(2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(NKJV)

This is what Jesus says:

Matthew 7:17,18

(17) "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

(18) "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

(NKJV)

Jesus says that the fruits people bear are important, because they reveal the true nature of their hearts.

- A good tree bears good fruit
- A bad tree bears bad fruit

The man James is speaking about bears bad fruits because he is a 'bad tree' – not at all saved.

4. A common argument. (2:18,19)

Now James will give another example starting in v.18, this time it is a challenge between two persons.

¹⁸ But someone may *well* say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." ¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

The challenge concerns the faith that a person says he has and the manifestation of it. It seems that the first person says he has faith BUT does not have the works that should characterise it. The second person manifests faith by his life, through his good deeds.

The basic argument is the following: '*Show me your faith without the works*'. Is this possible? How can people see your faith if you do not do any 'good works'? The answer is that they can't, it is impossible! Why? This is simply because it is not there.

No one can see the works because there are none to be seen. This is what James means by a faith that is dead.

In verse eighteen the second person says that '*I will show you my faith by my works*'. Which one would you believe? The one that does nothing and says he is a true believer or the one that has an active caring life and says he is a believer? Do you remember what Jesus said to those who thought they were his disciples but were not?

Matthew 7:20-23

(20)"Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

(21)"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

(22)"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

(23)"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

(NKJV)

These people prophesied, cast demons out and did many wonders – all in the name of Christ YET Christ says: 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness'. They really thought they were saved but they were not!

Notice that James includes an unusual example in verse nineteen.

¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

Demons believe in God, more than Christians probably do. Here are some examples:

Mark 3:11

And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."

(NKJV)

Luke 4:41

And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ.

(NKJV)

The demons believe who Christ is – that he is God incarnate, but they don't have saving faith. We can tell this because their deeds are of darkness. So how is your faith? Are you born again and living for the Lord? Can people see your 'good works' because your heart has been renewed?

James
11 – The test of good works *2
2:20-26

²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.
(NASV)

In his writings concerning the importance of having a living faith that produces fruits, James continues his arguments. This time, he will use two well-known people of the Old Testament. The first being the father of all Jews and the second a gentile woman.

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

²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? ²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Another example is given, James will now speak of Abraham – the father of all Jews!

Verse twenty is a piercing question that James asks his readers:

²⁰ But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

Were they ‘willing’ (THELO) meaning: to wish, be inclined or desire. Did they really want to know the truth about the subject of faith and works? Or did they simply want to continue their lives while shutting their eyes on the subject? Still today, many desire to turn away not only from this question but from many other spiritual aspects.

James wanted them to desire to *'recognize'* (GINOSKO) meaning: to know, be aware of and recognize. One needs to be able to distinguish the truth from falsehood. Paul reminds Timothy of this fact when he wrote:

Colossians 2:8

**Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.
(NKJV)**

It is the truth that will set you free, as Jesus taught his disciples (John 8:32). Unfortunately not everyone is willing to receive it. James calls his readers *'you foolish fellow'*. This is certainly not a compliment, for the word *'foolish'* (KENOS) means: empty, vain. He is telling them that it is totally vain to believe that faith is true faith if there is no life (good works) manifested. Actually the word *'works'* (ERGON) means: toil, an act, deed or labor. Faith is not a philosophy, a viewpoint or a simple idea. Faith is something that is alive and manifests itself through an active life. Finally, James tells them that *'faith without works is useless'*. The word *'useless'* (NEKROS) means: a corpse, dead.

How did Abraham become righteous? Was it by his faith alone or by his faith that is accompanied by deeds?

This is what verses 21 and 22 says:

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James sets out to prove that faith and actions (which is the manifestation of faith) are needed to testify that our faith is true. Abraham had faith that God would resurrect his son even if he had to kill him – that is faith. Do you remember what Abraham said to his servants when he left with Isaac for the mountain top?

Genesis 22:5

**And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."
(NKJV)**

Abraham had complete faith in the Lord God and that is why he said that they will BOTH come back to them. His faith was *manifested* when he acted upon his belief that God would resurrect his son Isaac. His faith was demonstrated when he actually raised his knife to sacrifice his son. When God saw this (his active faith) this is what happened.

Genesis 22:10-12

(10)And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

(11)But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" So he said, "Here I am."

(12)And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

(NKJV)

Notice what the Angel of the Lord said to Abraham in verse twelve: *'For I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'* The faith of Abraham was tested and it prevailed. Not because Abraham simply said *'I fear you'* but rather *'since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me'*. Had God actually approved the active faith of Abraham? Was the Lord God totally satisfied with what Abraham had manifested? The proof of this is found in our next verse.

²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

Only when Abraham's faith became active (manifested that it was real) was he *reckoned* to be *righteous*. The word *'reckoned'*(LOGIZOMAI) means: to take inventory, imputed. In other words God noticed and then it became Abraham's God-given *'righteousness'* (DIKAIOSUNE) meaning: equity, justification, righteousness. God seeing the truth of Abraham's faith, made him just before his face. Do you remember the story that Jesus told of two brothers who were called by the father to work in the vineyard and the lesson told?

Matthew 21:28-31

(28)"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.'

(29)"He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went.

(30)"Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.

**(31)"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first."
Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the
kingdom of God before you.
(NKJV)**

Not only did Abraham become righteous because of his true active faith but something unbelievable happened between God and his relationship with Abraham. It is written that:

(v.23)... he was called the friend of God.

This is the first time that anyone was called '*the friend of God*'! The bond between them was now different. Abraham went from being a creature of God to a friend of God. This is what true faith does, it changes everything between God and the believing person. Abraham was a true believer because he *walked* by faith – his faith in God was real and not just something he said he had. In our next verse James tells it like it is:

²⁴You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

This was a basic problem in the apostolic time and it has not changed at all. Still today people SAY they are Christians but it is false because they don't LIVE like Christians. Their faith is either cultural or intellectual. It is not a faith that transforms the basic nature of a person. There is no new birth, the Holy Spirit has not quickened their soul. This is exactly what John the Baptist said to the crowds coming to listen and be baptized by him.

Luke 3:7,8

(7)Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

(8)"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. (NKJV)

Producing fruit is the basic proof that you have saving faith in you. Bearing fruits is taught all over the N-T. As we have seen, James speaks about it and John the Baptist also spoke about it so does Jesus. Paul speaks about the "fruits of holiness" in Rom. 6:22, then the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, then abounding in fruits in Phil. 4:17.

The writer of Hebrews also speaks of bearing fruits: the fruits of righteousness (12:11) and the fruits of your lips (13:15). Paul even spoke about the fruits that were in his own life.

1 Cor. 15:10

**But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without fruit. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was in me.
(NKJV)**

The fruits in Paul's life were EVIDENT for all to see and the active ingredient in bearing fruit was '*the grace of God that was in me*'.

2. The example of Rahab (2:25,26)

²⁵ In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? ²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

A final example, given by James is the story of a prostitute called Rahab. Notice that James goes from one side of the spectrum (Abraham the father of the faith) to the other side (Rahab a gentile prostitute). Abraham had received a calling from God to follow him (Gen. 12) and in a way we can understand that God was pleased with him. But what about a prostitute, a woman who lived in sin and debauchery? How does she fit in? The answer is simple, Rahab became *righteous* by having active faith. There was a moment in her life when she made a decision to place her life in God's hands and believed and manifested this by helping the spies who were sent to Jericho.

Jos. 6:17

**"Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent.
(NKJV)**

Not only that, but Rahab became a very important person because it was through her lineage that Christ was born. In Mat. 1:5 we learn that Boaz the husband of Ruth was the son of Rahab. We also see in Heb. 11:31 that Rahab was saved by her faith.

One might wonder if one can get away without having godly deeds and still have hope that his (dead) faith will save him? James ends with the answer:

²⁶ For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

May we all be warned that faith, if it is not accompanied by righteous deeds, is DEAD! If your faith is not accompanied by righteous deeds (because of your new birth) it is not saving faith. James compares this type of 'faith' to a body without any life. May we remember the prayer of Paul to the Philippian believers:

Philippians 1:9-11

**(9)And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge
and all discernment,**

**(10)that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and
without offense till the day of Christ,**

**(11)being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the
glory and praise of God.**

(NKJV)

James
12 – The test of the tongue *1
3:1-5a

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ² For we all stumble in many *ways*. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. ³ Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. ⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

(NASB)

How many broken marriages, broken noses and broken lives have found their origins by what comes out of our mouth? How many tears, heartbreaks and depressions have their source in what has been said? How many dreams, aspirations and self-esteems have been destroyed by what people have said to us? I believe that the tongue is responsible for causing more trouble than almost anything else in the world. We all have in us the most lethal weapon that exists and if we do not use it wisely, it will *shoot to kill*.

1. A warning to those who teach (3:1)

A warning about the tongue is first given to those who teach.

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

With the usage of the tongue comes responsibilities that will be monitored by God. All people and especially teachers are ACCOUNTABLE to God. Jesus said:

Mat. 12:32

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit *will not be forgiven*, either in this age or in the age to come.

(NKJV)

He also said the following about all the careless words that are spoken. This emphasises the importance of what James is teaching us about our tongue

Matthew 12:36,37

(36)"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

(37)"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

(NKJV)

Jesus says that *every careless word* will be accounted for – every one of them! The word ‘careless’ (ARGOS) means: lazy, useless, barren, idle. To have ‘stupid speech’, or speaking out of terms is inappropriate for the believer. How much more wrong it’s to teach others with a false tongue! Our words will either protect us or ‘hand us over’ for eternal judgement. One needs to stop and think before he speaks. Will the Lord appreciate what I want to say and the way that I want to express myself? This is what believers need to ponder. Knowing this, Paul reminds all the brethren of the following:

Col 4:6

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

(NKJV)

The apostle Peter speaks of the coming condemnation of those who speak falsely in God’s name.

2 Peter 2:1-3

(1)But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

(2)And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed.

(3)By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

(NKJV)

Destruction and condemnation lurk over the heads of those who SPEAK falsely in the name of God. Do the words that come out of our mouth matter? – Absolutely! Should the words that we say be pure and holy? – Absolutely!

2. Becoming a perfect man. (3:2)

²For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

On the other hand James says that if we are careful with our words and do not stumble because of them – then we are mature Christians. The word ‘*stumble*’ (PTAIO) means: to trip, to err, fig. to sin or fail. Notice that James says: ‘*we all stumble in many ways*’. No one is perfect, no one is faultless and no one is impeccable before the Lord. In all of us there are areas where we miss the goal that the Lord has given to all his children. In some people’s it is more prevalent or evident than in others – but we all fail God. The subject is failing in the way we speak.

... If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

Many great men and women of the Bible have stumbled in their speech, like James writes ‘*we all stumble in many ways*’. Think of Adam when he lied in the Garden of Eden. Abraham who said that his wife was his sister. Samson constantly lied to Delilah. Jacob lied to his father. The Jewish mid-wives lied to Pharaoh. Stumbling in speech is everywhere in the Old and New Testament.

There’s an aspect of our life that needs more attention than others and that is what we say! James speaks of ‘*a perfect man*’ the word PERFECT (TELEIOS) means: to be complete. No matter what else I do I will never be complete if I do not control my tongue. I will never be a mature Christian if my tongue is out of control! How many people wound others by what they say? The tongue is like a sharp sword that pierces our hearts and bring tears to our eyes. Yet when the tongue is used wisely it comforts, edifies, encourages and heals. It communicates the gospel of reconciliation and brings salvation to those who have ears to listen.

Why is it so important to master my tongue? This is simply because keeping my tongue in check, is a sign that I am able to keep my whole body under control.

Let’s read the second part of verse two again:

... If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

If a person is capable of keeping his tongue under control it seems that he can also master the other aspects of himself. This shows me that the tongue is the most difficult part to normally control. The tongue should be one of the first “body parts” that bows down to the authority of God. In other words we should all be seriously working on managing our tongues.

3. Examples of how to master the tongue. (3:4-5a)

James will continue and give seven (7) examples that deal with the tongue.

The first is a horse:

³ Now if we put the bits into the horses’ mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

By the image of a horse, James figuratively taught that we can control all of our life by having control over our tongue. A wild horse becomes tamed, because his mouth is under our control. His mouth needs a bit which is an instrument for the rider to control his horse. We too will become tamed when our mouth is under control. Our “bit” is the Holy Spirit.

The second is a ship:

⁴ Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

Here the idea is that the rudder *steers* the boat where it should be going. The rudder of a ship is steered by the captain or the one he chooses to do so. Our tongue should also be *steered* to where we want to go, and not let us be steered into all types of trouble. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to steer the way our tongue is used.

- For blessing and not cursing
- For edification and not putting down
- For the glory of the Lord and not the ways of the world

Let us allow the Holy Spirit to be the rudder of our tongue even when there are *strong winds* that blow against us!

⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things.

This small and almost uncontrollable part of our body '*boasts of great things*'. The word '*boasts*' (MEGALAUCEO) means: to talk loud, to boast, megalomania. Boasting is never a good thing. Remember what happened when Aaron and Myriam boasted that they were just as important as Moses? What about Korah and those who rebelled against Moses also stating that they were important and how the ground 'swallowed' all of them. Remember Nabal the husband of Abigail and how he boasted that he did not need to help David and his men and how he died a short while later. As I said boasting is never a good thing. It only brings destruction.

The third example will be explained in our next section.

James
13 – The test of the tongue *2
3:5b – 12

5b See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.
(NASB)

In this section we are continuing the different pictures James gives us of the power of the tongue.

4. The fire of hell (3:5b, 6)

5b See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

Here we have the image of a destructive force that is unleashed by one small spark! Our tongue can unleash devastating forces with unimaginable consequences also. Just one match can start a fire that will burn hundreds and even thousands of acres of land. One spark of our tongue can begin a feud that will turn into an open war! In verse six James says that the tongue:

- Is a fire
- Is the very world of iniquity
- Is a member that defiles
- Is a fire that sets fire to our life
- Is fueled by hell

The warnings of James are surprisingly powerful and filled with imagery. We can almost smell the fire burning and feel its heat! The tongue is like a fire because it can destroy everything in its path and it can get stronger and stronger with time, becoming more and more death threatening. The tongue can be all *'iniquity'* (ADIKIA) meaning: injustice, wrongfulness. It sometimes cares little for justice for it just wants to spit out its anger. The tongue *'defiles'* (SPILOS) meaning: stain, blemish, disgrace. The tongue brings us disgrace. Its vile use brings shame and embarrassment onto us. The tongue *'sets on fire the course of our life'*. Our life is difficult even when we have no conflicts with others. Part or even our entire life can be set aflame for sometimes there is no coming back to before we said a word and the consequences are forever with us. Finally the tongue can be so sinful that James says that it *'is set on fire by hell'*. This is the word used by the Lord when he describes eternal destruction, the place where un-repentant souls will be tormented for all eternity. This is where the tongue (when not guided by the Holy Spirit) gets its energy from!

5. All sorts of animals: (3:7)

⁷ For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race.

Beasts, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are named. Here we see the capacity, intelligence, wisdom and perseverance of man in regards to animals. He is able to tame them and control them and even have them serve him. Man can *'tame'* (DAMAZO) meaning: to tame, to train all of these animals but man seems to be at a TOTAL LOSS before his tongue.

5a. Words of wisdom (3:8-10)

⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; *it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.* ⁹ With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

This is a comment concerning the tongue in relationship with taming animals. James says that *'no one can tame the tongue'*. There is not a single person who is able to keep his tongue under perfect control all the time. There will come a time when one will speak in a way, or speak of someone, or hurt feelings by the misuse of his tongue. The tongue is described as *'a restless evil'*. The word *'evil'* (KAKOS) means to be worthless, depraved, wicked. This depraved member is restless it is always agitated ready to attack and infect others. It is also described as being *'full of deadly poison'*.

Rare are the things that are always filled to its brim but the tongue is an exception. It seems that it never dries out of its capacity to hurt others and blaspheme the Lord. The tongue is filled with *'deadly poison'*. Although the tongue can sing praises to the Lord and bring an encouraging word of edification, here James is troubled by the 'other side' of the tongue. The word *'deadly'* (THANATEPHOROS) means: death-bearing. This is what an untamed tongue gives birth to – death in all its forms and fashions. It is a deadly *'poison'* (IOS) meaning: rust, venom, poison. It is like a snake that strikes and implants its deadly venom leaving only suffering behind.

⁹ With it we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰ from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

Within the section concerning the example of animals James slips in a few words of wisdom and warning. He is trying to appeal to the minds of his readers. Here he contrasts blessing and cursing. In relationship to the Lord God 'we *bless*' with our tongue. The word *'bless'* (EULOGEO) means: to speak well of. We honor, praise, glorify, acclaim the holy person of God. At the same time in relationship with men, we *'curse'* them. The word *'curse'* (KATARAOMAI) meaning: to execrate, to doom, to curse. We dishonor, lie, humiliate, demean and degrade people around us. Our tongue is truly like a vipers which is split in two at the tip! James adds that we should never curse men because they *'have been made in the likeness of God'*. Sin has degraded and darkened this image yet all mankind reflect the person of God and does not compare with the rest of creation. This type of speech *'ought not to be this way'*. Under no circumstances should a believer use his tongue in such a way!

6. The sixth is water. (3:11)

¹¹ Does a fountain send out from the same opening *both* fresh and bitter water?

Even nature can not copy what the tongue does – salt and fresh water never comes out of the same source. An ocean will always be salty just as a lake will always have 'fresh water'. One is safe to drink while the other will slowly kill you. Yet our tongue can become an evil mixture of good and bad. As we have said, this should not be, there is no place for praising God on one hand and cursing those made in the image of God on the other hand. There is no place for speaking in favor of the Lord and then against people.

7. The seventh and last example is that of vegetation. (3:12)

¹² Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor *can* salt water produce fresh.

To ask the question is to answer it – of course not. Each tree bears its own particular fruit. This is so even in spiritual life. Remember what Jesus said concerning trees and bearing separate fruits.

Matthew 7:15-18

(15)"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

(16)"You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

(17)"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

(18)"A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

(NKJV)

It is undeniable that the Lord Jesus Christ expects that his disciples will bear good fruits by following in his footsteps. The Holy Spirit has been given unto the born-again believers so that they will be empowered and transformed to be able to do this. Keep in mind what Jesus said to his followers:

John 15:5-8

(5)"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

(6)"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

(7)"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

(8)"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

(NKJV)

If our tongue is a “Christian tongue”, it too must bear its own specific fruit. Our tongue is either good or bad – you choose what it will be used for!

The writer of Hebrews wrote:

Hebrews 13:15

Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

(NKJV)

The tongue is to be mastered, if not it will poison our life and that of others and dishonor God. Some men are 'lion tamers', but all men need to be 'tongue tamers'!

James
14 – The test of wisdom
3:13-18

¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
(NASB)

This section deals with people who actually think too much of themselves. We see them everywhere from school yards to universities benches, from the pulpit to politicians. Pride affects all types of men from all creeds and countries. Men and women both seem to find in themselves all the wisdom they think they need. They are the ones telling others what they should do and how to live. They are the ones who always have something to add to what is being said. Some become arrogant, egoistical and overly-confident. There often very little that can be done for these people simply because they think they are wiser than the person(s) speaking to them.

Proverbs 12:15

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise.

(NKJV)

I have rarely seen a person openly testify that he is a fool or ignorant or stupid! Quite the opposite, we all see ourselves as pretty stable and balanced individuals. We're not perfect but we're O.K. in general. Most of us don't think that we lack wisdom in life – we naturally all know what is best is for us! So if you think you're this well-balanced individual, who is smart and has enough wisdom to get along pretty well– then this section is tailor made for you!

1. Wise in your own eyes. (3:13,14)

¹³ Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

The words wise and understanding in verse thirteen need to be explained. First of all the word *wise* (SOPHOS) means clear. It came to mean: “To see clearly” in life. A person who sees clearly is not easily fooled. He knows where he is going. He can see the snares of life and knows how to avoid them. That is why the word of God is so important to the believer because it brings clarity to his life and understanding to his soul. The Bible dissipates the spiritual fog that envelops the mind. Once we are born-again, the Holy Spirit is there to teach us (John 14:26) and to guide us (John 16:13) in God’s truth. The Holy Spirit implants wisdom in the child of God.

Now the word *understanding* (EPISTEMON) means “*To be endowed with knowledge*”. As we will see, there are two types of ‘knowledge’, an earthly and a heavenly one. James is speaking to those who believe that they are filled with earthly knowledge and believe that it suffices. In other words James is speaking to people who say that they can see things clearly in life and believe they know what they are talking about. This sounds like a lot of people I know – sounds like me sometimes! So what is the test of a person who says he is wise? Or how can we tell that a person is truly wise or not? James says that it starts off by being manifest in his conduct.

“Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.”

(v.13)

First of all wisdom has to be manifested (*let him show*). You can be the wisest person in the world and have the answers to all of mankind’s problems but if you do not manifest yourself – then your wisdom is totally useless. If a person believes that he is wise yet keeps silent when he can bring help – he actually is more of a fool than anything else! Normally, it is with our eyes that we can tell if someone is wise in the Biblical sense.

All we need to do is just watch how a person acts in life! His behavior will manifest his heart. Paul teaches that older women should be reverent in their behavior (Titus 2:3) and that those who desire to become elders should have a good behavior (1 Tim. 3:2). Good behavior needs to be witnessed by others – it is a test of spiritual integrity. James will tell us that wisdom is manifest in three different ways. Wisdom is concerned with our:

- good behavior
- good deeds
- gentleness of wisdom

Does my wisdom (good behavior, good deeds and gentleness of wisdom) pass this spiritual test? '*Good behavior*' (KAIOS ANASTROPHE) speaks of my virtuous or valuable conversation. James links our '*good behavior*' with the virtue found in our conversations. How true this is, for our speech (as we have seen) can edify, and encourage as easily as it can demean and be scandalous. Are my conversations virtuous, godly and holy in nature?

Does my wisdom manifest itself in good '*deeds*'? The word '*deeds*' (ERGON) means: toil, effort, labour. This speaks of the things that I place my efforts in. Are my projects foolish like the builder Jesus speaks of?

Luke 14:28-30

- (28)"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it --**
(29)"lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,
(30)"saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'
(NKJV)

What do people see when they look at how I built my life, my relationship with others and where I am going? Do they perceive that my path is paved with wisdom from above or foolishness from below?

Does my wisdom manifest itself in '*gentleness of wisdom*'?

Doing something, even though it is the “right thing to do”, does not necessarily pass the test of God’s wisdom. It all depends on ‘how’ I do things. We all have seen people ‘do the right thing’ but they did it with a bad attitude (negative, grumpy, careless). My wisdom needs to be expressed in a godly way and James calls this by having ‘*gentleness of wisdom*’. The word ‘*gentleness*’ (PRAUTES) means: mildness, humility and meekness. I can give a word of wisdom and be exceedingly rude, impolite or insolent. When I do this, my words will simply be discarded.

In verse fourteen, James will explain what stops us from having the celestial wisdom that we should all have.

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth.

Four things are listed which work against wisdom:

- bitter jealousy
- selfish ambition
- arrogance
- lying against the truth

Celestial wisdom is barred from entering my heart when it is, first of all, filled with *bitter jealousy*. Jealousy will actually blind me, making it impossible to make honest judgments. Jealousy will “pull down the curtains” of my heart and stop the truth from coming in. When we are jealous of what others are doing or possess, this twists any wisdom coming from our hearts because it is tainted with this sin

Then there is *selfish ambition*, the key word here is selfish. Wisdom will be trampled when it is used in a selfish way. Wisdom is to be used for the good of others while selfishness only desires to better oneself! Having godly ambition is wonderful, that’s how Christians move forward and shed their old lives. Selfish ambition however destroys celestial wisdom because it is centered upon ourselves – it is self-centered.

Then there is *arrogance*, which also repulses wisdom. Actually arrogance is the opposite of wisdom. The word '*arrogance*' (KATAKAUCHAOMAI) means: to exult oneself against. Arrogance will make you believe that you are MORE than others. By believing yourself better than others you automatically lack wisdom and humility. Wisdom is filled with meekness, as Christ was – not arrogance. When you are arrogant you actually believe that you 'know it all' therefore the only 'wisdom' that you need is your own. And this becomes a deadly trap that so many have fallen into.

Finally *lying* is the last ingredient against wisdom or the final result of such an attitude. One can lie to himself, thinking that he's just fine and is God's gift to people! I've seen this quite often, even within the Christian community! Some people refuse to see themselves as they are and believing others are to blame for their own failings. If there's a problem – it's always the other person! Lying to oneself certainly does not favor wisdom.

2. Wrongful wisdom (3:15,16)

¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

The wisdom that is before us is not from God – far from it!

(v.15)... This wisdom is not that which comes down from above

This means that it is not godly wisdom. Why should the children of God be seeking a wisdom that is not from the Lord? What profit shall it give them? If man's wisdom has created the earthly chaos in which we live, why call it good and seek it? The prophet spoke the words of the Lord concerning this:

Isaiah 5:20,21

(20)Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

(21)Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!

(NKJV)

But if it does not come from above – from God, where does it come from?

But it is earthly, natural, and demonic.

(3:15)

James brings three contrasts between these two wisdoms.

- It is earthly in contrast with celestial
- It is natural instead of spiritual
- It is demonic instead of godly

We can often dismiss our lack of wisdom – and even have a good laugh over it! We can “explain it away” or sometimes even justify it. But we are just lying to ourselves. When we act outside of God’s wisdom it just manifests that we are: earthly, natural or even demonic – instead of being celestial, spiritual and godly! How foolish some Christians have become! They accept folly while rejecting the wisdom that God offers. No wonder our churches reflect the philosophy of the world rather than the wisdom of the Lord. By having the churches reflect the world system of growth instead of relying and acting upon the Holy Scriptures – we have become users of wisdom from the underworld! James will now attack the OUTCOME of our lack of true wisdom.

(v.16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

We already have seen that jealousy and selfish ambition is against godly wisdom and when we lack godly wisdom this is what happens.

(v.16)... “There is disorder and every evil thing”

The fruit that our natural and earthly wisdom bears is ‘*disorder*’ and ‘*every evil thing*’!

When I act without godly wisdom this brings disorder – the very opposite of what wisdom should bring! Look at the world around you and tell me what you see – is it not mostly disorder? Every single aspect of our civilization has been tainted with disorder because it is founded on false wisdom. The word *disorder* (AKATASTASIA) means: instability, commotion and confusion. The world is restless and it is so because it rests on either earthly, natural or demonic wisdom. It also bears every evil *thing*! The seeds of earthly wisdom reap all sorts of evil! Nothing good comes from this. If earthly wisdom was a garden then its fruits would be thorns, barbs and thistles – nothing good, nothing good at all would be in it!

3. Rightful wisdom (3:17)

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

On the other hand, James explains what the true fruits of wisdom are:

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

Does this depict the wisdom that I possess? Is it *pure* holy in Gods sight? Are my thoughts the thoughts of the Almighty? Does my vision of life concur with the Lord’s? Is it peaceable and not irritating?

1 Peter 1:15

**but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,
(NKJV)**

Do I search to bring *peace* about me? Do I strive to keep harmony in my household, work place and church?

Colossians 3:15

**And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.
(NKJV)**

Gentle (calm). Does this trait of character manifest my normal state of being? Do the circumstances of life change the way that I react?

1 Thessalonians 2:7

**But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.
(NKJV)**

Reasonable (fair). Am I just in my dealings with my fellow man? Do I take advantage of a situation or do I remain fair to others even if it disadvantages me? Am I reasonable in my desires and expectations of others?

Colossians 4:1

**Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.
(NKJV)**

Full of mercy (soft hearted). Am I filled with compassion and pity? Am I hard hearted when someone does me wrong? Do I forgive easily and am I clement in my decisions?

Proverbs 3:3

Let not mercy and truth forsake you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart, (NKJV)

Full of good fruits (not shameful ones). How are the fruits of my life? Do people look at me and are they pleased with the way that I behave as a Christian?

Matthew 3:8

**"Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,
(NKJV)**

Unwavering (not crooked). Are the paths of my life straight? Do I change my mind depending on the circumstances before me – depending if there is a profit for me in it? Do I stand for the truth even in the storms of life? Do I cave in or give up under pressure and walk on a different path than I should?

Romans 4:20

**He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God,
(NKJV)**

Without hypocrisy (honest). Am I frank and authentic? Do people see the ‘real me’ all the time? Do I wear different masks depending on the crowd I am with?

Matthew 23:28

"Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

(NKJV)

James ends saying that the “sower” of wisdom and the seeds of wisdom both have the same essence – peace.

¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

What we are told here is that wisdom must be sown in peace and our efforts must be to make peace – for that is true heavenly wisdom.

James
15 – The test of pleasures
4:1-6

**What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ² You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious 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 with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”
(NASB)**

The test of indulgence and pleasure is probably one of the tests we fail so easily. If there is one thing that we all love to do it's to “*take care of ourselves*”. Have you noticed that we do not have to be taught anything about taking care of ourselves? It just comes automatically. No one taught me:

- I needed to eat and eat the things I like best
- I needed to wear the clothing that makes me look good
- I needed to have the friends that I want to have
- I needed to look out first of all for “Number One” – me

We all have a ‘Built-in’ system that places us on the “Top of the Hill” of our “Important Peoples” list. This system is called our “Fallen Nature” – it is preoccupied first and foremost with the desires of our flesh. In this section James will deal with indulging ourselves. We all know that Jesus teaches us that we are to look out for others even before ourselves.

Matthew 22:37-40

(37)Jesus said to him," 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

(38)"This is the first and great commandment.

(39)"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

(40)"On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

(NKJV)

And also:

John 13:13-15

(13)"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am.

(14)"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

(15)"For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

(NKJV)

Matthew 7:12

"Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

(NKJV)

Jesus teaches us that all that we do to others must be exactly what we would desire people would do to us. Why then do we feast at a banquet table and leave the crumbs for others? Why do we keep the best for ourselves while neglecting the needs of others? Let's look at what James has to say.

1. Question and answer (4:1-3)

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? ²You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.

You are envious 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 with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

First of all James asks a question but does not tarry in giving the answer.

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?

You see, having difficulties among brothers & sisters in the church is not something new. It seems that fighting and quarreling has been deeply engrained in our nature. Why are there battles? Why are people arguing? Why are people dissatisfied with each other? Why has tension plagued personal lives, families and even churches throughout history? The word '*quarrels*' (POLEMOS) means: warfare, battle or fight. The word '*conflicts*' (MACHE) means: a battle, controversy, fighting. There is no doubt that James is speaking of serious inward fighting within the body of Christ. Have you ever thought about it yourself? Why so many 'battles' between churches and denominations? James gives the simple answer:

(v.1)... Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

These battles and quarrels, the fighting in our churches, our homes and in our hearts all have it roots in the same soil – our desire for pleasure (what pleases us). The word '*pleasures*' comes from the Greek (HEDONE) meaning: sensual delights, lust, pleasure. In other words HEDONE means “the gratification of the natural desire or sinful desires.” This gives the idea of sensual delight or lust. James teaches that we have a battle within us, this battle rages in our hearts. It is a battle for the gratification of our natural desire or sinful desires. We want to be first and not consider the others. We want things to be done our way and do not consider what is taught in the Bible. When we do not curb our desires, they are not automatically under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In other words fighting and quarreling has its source in the gratifying of our own desires – instead of the Lord's. These '*pleasures*' they '*wage war*' (STRATEUOMAI) means: to execute, go to war.

They actually fight against you (as a redeemed child of God) and even though they are ‘in you’ they do not want your best! This is quite strange actually that my flesh fights against the Holy Spirit in me. The apostle Paul extensively writes concerning this inward fighting in Romans chapter seven. Here is an example:

Romans 7:21-25

(21)I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

(22)For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

(23)But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

(24)O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

(25)I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

(NKJV)

Everyone has these fights, quarrels and battles raging inside him – everyone! Knowing this, we should all pay attention to what James wrote. Now, he will give an example of what he is talking about.

² You lust and do not have

The battlefield is having or not having. The battlefield is all about owning, having what we desire or power over something or someone. Some people will go to great extent to have or to get what they want. Some people will not look at the consequences of their actions, as long as they have their hearts desires. Some people will not look at the cost of trying to get what they want. This is how Jesus explained it:

Luke 14:31-33

(31)"Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

(32)"Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace.

(33)"So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

(NKJV)

The cost of being a disciple is to *give up* everything and not to be governed by desires, quarrels or fights over things. As I said, some people will go to great extent to get to the point that they desire. James says that:

(v.2)... so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

I thought this word was pretty strong: *'you commit murder'*

The word *'murder'* (PHONEUS) means: to be a murderer, to kill, to slay, to murder. Some Jews who had turned to Christ in the past, had been murderers – they were called the zealots. By and through violence they wanted to get rid of the Romans and establish the Kingdom of God by doing so. One of these zealots had even become an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Acts 1:13

And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

(NKJV)

Illegitimate desires have brought people to covet, to quarrel, to fight and even to kill. Desires have broken lives and families, taken away innocence, destroyed churches and have given birth to unimaginable amounts of tears and hardship. But why is it that you *'cannot obtain'* as it is mentioned in v.2?

There are a few answers given to us for our reflection. The first is:

(v.2,3)... You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

Before fighting and quarreling and coveting we should speak to God about it – ‘*you do not ask*’, James writes. I mean REALLY speak to God about it. Do I take time to really speak to God? Do I ‘throw-in’ a few prayers between two things that I do? Or do I set a time, or reserve a time to be in the presence of God. One would be surprised how some believers spend little time with God in prayer because they ‘have no time’ to do that! How foolish not to take time with the Lord God who governs everything in the universe INCLUDING every aspect of your life!

The second reason “I do not have” is found in verse three:

³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

James tells us to look at “The reasons WHY I want things”. Let’s be honest enough to search our hearts, to be brave enough to tell ourselves the truth that lies deep in our hearts. What is *motivating* my prayer? Why am I wanting this? Why am I doing this? Lord, am I doing this out of selfish ambition or vain conceit? Are my prayers bathed in the wrong motives? Am I considering others better than I am or is it the opposite? Is this for MY own interest or is it for the interest of OTHERS? Is this a selfish prayer? Is it for my glory or the Lord’s? Will I be the only beneficiary if this prayer is answered? If we would ask Paul about praying this might be one of his answers:

Philippians 2:3-5

(3)Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

(4)Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

**(5)Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
(NKJV)**

So, first of all, I do not have because I do not bring it to the Lord and allow Him to speak to me and tell me what to do. Second it depends on my motives for praying – why do I ask for this.

A third reason for not receiving from the Lord is the following:

(v.3)... so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.

The wrong motivation is that it is for you to '*spend it on your pleasures*'. The word '*pleasures*' (HEDONE) which we have seen before means: sensual delight, lust. You ask so that it will gratify your flesh. All of this is in detriment to the will of God and the benefit of your brothers & sisters.

2. The warning (4:4-6)

⁴ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”? ⁶ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

When our motives, our true motives are for ourselves (for whatever reason) we are called adulterers.

(4) You adulteresses..

A better rendering would be adulterers and adulteresses. We become spiritual adulterers, when we indulge ourselves in the flesh, when we do things our way instead of God's way. That's how God looks at us – as adulterers. No matter our reasoning process, no matter our motivation we ARE spiritual adulterers before God. It is of extreme importance that we make certain that our prayers are in line with the teachings found in the Holy Scriptures. When we have worldly attitudes and wrong motivations in our hearts we openly manifest our rebellious defiance towards God. And the consequences of having worldly attitudes and wrong motivations are DISASTEROUS!

⁴ You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

God doesn't stand for it. God doesn't joke about this! I become an ENEMY of God. I don't know if we understand what is being stated here? Even if I am a child of God – He looks at me as his enemy when my *desires* and *motives* are not parallel with his and when my desires are placed higher than God's. I am considered his enemy when I openly rebel against His plan for me. When I pray selfishly, I am not in a good relationship with Him. This is exactly what happened to Lucifer and brought his down fall. He wanted to have what was forbidden. He desired to do things his way and not the Lord's.

Isaiah 14:13-15

(13)For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north;

(14)I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

(15)Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

(NKJV)

James reminds his readers that the Lord God has given his Spirit unto them and that He is there to guide us.

⁵ Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

James calls upon his readers to think about all of this. He asks if the Scriptures were given for no reason. The answer is “of course not”. He then reminds them that the Lord is a jealous God. He loves and cares so much for us that he does not want to spiritually ‘share’ his child with anything or anyone else. That is why the Holy Spirit has been given to us. A good thing concerning the Spirit is that he will not leave the believer alone. The Holy Spirit will remind him constantly that the fights, quarrels and battles are a sign that he is living in the flesh.

If you are battling in your prayers desiring to satisfy the flesh, if your pride is causing you to pray inappropriately then there are two things that James ends this section with.

⁶ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, “GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.”

The first thing is that the grace of God is there for the receiving: ‘*But He gives a greater grace*’. When you find yourself sinning with a bad attitude in prayer and you know it and find yourself sometimes losing the sin-battle, remind yourself that the grace of God is there to help you carry on and with confession be forgiven.

So do not be distraught continue to battle for the victory is there for you. The second thing is for those who are insensitive to what has been said by James. The ones who continue to walk on the road paved with the desires of the flesh and just don't seem to mind, there is a warning for you: *'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*. If you are a proud person and it reflects in your life and prayers, be warned, God will oppose you and you will lose the battle!

James
16 – The test of humility
4:7-10

⁷ Submit 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 miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.
(NASB)

This portion of the epistle of James is short and simple yet so powerful and life changing if we apply it. It deals with a subject that is not well accepted in our modern times – submission and humility. We have been told and taught constantly since we are little children that we can do whatever we desire and that no one or nothing should stand in the way of our happiness. We have learned that we can make the choices WE want, go where WE want, act and live as WE want. We mistakenly think that no one has the right to curb our individuality and our freedom. What the world does not know and understand is that by doing whatever we want we become AUTOMATICALLY enslaved to Satan, our flesh and sin. And by doing so we technically lose all we think we have. Submission to God is the gateway to freedom – authentic freedom.

1. Submission – to God or the devil? (4:7)

In verse seven, James speaks of two beings in relation with our lives – God and the devil.

⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

All the children of God need to understand and accept the importance of submitting themselves to the will of God.

Can you find one instance in the Bible when a person resists or refuses to do the will of God and he is blessed by it? Does God ever reward people for turning their backs on him, or insulting him or openly rebelling against him? This lesson is one that we need to learn and apply very early in our new life. We should remember these two simple words that Jesus spoke – ‘Follow me’ (Mat. 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 16:24, 19:21)

Jesus asks his disciples to ‘follow him’ which involves submitting to his will. Because of this James, encourages believers to know how to relate to God through submission. So James begins to write concerning our relationship with God:

⁷ Submit therefore to God.

This speaks about what the desire and the aim of our soul should be – to freely bow down to the Lord God. Now the word ‘*submit*’ in Greek (**HUPOTASSO**) means: to subordinate, to be under obedience, to submit oneself unto. The idea is very clear, for all that have ears to hear. James calls all Christians to bow down before the authority of the Living God and to obey his very words, to voluntarily submit themselves to Him. This is how Jesus puts it:

Matthew 22:21

**They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
(NKJV)**

When James says to: “Submit yourselves, then, to God” it is in relations with v.6 when he writes:

James 4:6

**But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."
(NKJV)**

Since God will resist you when you rebel against Him, isn’t it wise to willingly submit to him? Now, I believe that in the rest of this section, James will give clear-cut examples of what he means by submitting to God.

2. Submission to God is resisting the devil (4:7)

(v.7) ...Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

The word ‘*resist*’ (**ANTHISTEMI**) means: to stand against, to oppose, to withstand. Both words “God *opposes* the proud” (v.6) and “*Resist* the devil” (v.7) are from the same word-family in Greek. One is simply more of a military term than the other. I don’t know if it’s a play on words but it seems to me that it is.

In a way, James is saying: God will RESIST you if you don’t RESIST the devil! Why - because we are manifesting pride and rebellion towards God when we align ourselves with the philosophy of the devil! Always remember that God resists those who manifest pride and you and I are no exceptions.

One might wonder how he can resist the devil, what must he do? I believe the best example is found when Jesus resisted the devil in the desert (Mat. 4 or Luke 4). If you read this account you will notice that at every attack from the enemy Jesus responded with the word of God. He humbled himself and acted upon his Father's words. This was Jesus' first attack and reaction:

Matthew 4:3,4

(3)Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

(4)But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

(NKJV)

In the devil's second attack, Jesus responded with these words in verse seven:

Matthew 4:6,7

(6)and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'"

(7)Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

(NKJV)

In the third and final bout with the enemy Jesus replied in verse ten:

Matthew 4:9,10

(9)And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

(10)Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

(NKJV)

In verse seven James is also saying that victory lies in doing what God says.

(v.7) ...Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

When we are tempted it is our duty as a child of God to react to our assault by the enemy. We are called to not give in but rather to stand against him. When we do this (not by our flesh but by the Spirit) the Lord says that the devil '*will flee from you*'.

Our English word *'flee'* (PHEUGO) means: to run away, to vanish. The promise of God is given – stand up against the devil when he comes around and he will go away. He does not promise that he will never come back and try to make you sin. The battle against sin will continue as long as we live in this body of flesh.

But what God does promise is that there is a way to have victory and this is done one battle at a time. The battleground is your mind and that is why we need to focus on the Lord and his teachings.

3. Submitting to God by drawing near (4:8a)

⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

God desires you to be close to him – not to wander off with the devil, anyone or anything else. You're his child and he is your Father and he wants you to be home and not wandering in the streets of the world. The Father wants to protect you and he will but the part of the believer is to stay close to Him. Jesus often spoke about coming closer to him, he even shouted this invitation to the crowd in Jerusalem:

John 7:37

On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

(NKJV)

He told the little children to come to him (Luke 18:16). He invites the heavy laden to come to him (Mat. 11:28). He also says that some do not want to come to him (John 5:40). The Son gives an invitation to come to him. He does this because the Father also calls people to draw close to him. There is a tremendous promise attached by God for those who draw close to him.

(v.8a) ...and He will draw near to you.

Draw close to the Father and he will come near you – what an assurance! We sometimes hear Christian people say: 'God seems to be so far away'. Actually it's not God that has abandoned them but they who have stopped being close to the Lord God.

4. Submitting yourself by being cleansed. (4:8b)

(v.8b) ...Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Yes, God invites us to draw near but I just can't come to God as I would to any person. I have to come with an honest heart. This has to do with having a repentant attitude before God. We must know that we need a good washing before entering into his presence. We must confess our sins and have a repentant attitude, a desire to abandon what dishonors the Lord. A surgeon washes his hands before he operates – a Christian washes his soul before he enters his Father's presence. Remember the story of Joshua the high priest when he was in the presence of the Lord and he was attacked by the enemy?

Zechariah 3:1-4

- (1)Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him.**
 - (2)And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?"**
 - (3)Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel.**
 - (4)Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."**
- (NKJV)**

In the presence of the Lord, Joshua, the high priest, had to be cleansed from his filthy garments (a symbol of his iniquity - v.4). Now clothed with '*rich robes*' he could stand before the Lord God. For all of us sinners the apostle John gives us a great assurance concerning drawing near to God.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(NKJV)

To approach God we need to be clean and Christ is the only one who can do this for us.

5. Submitting yourself by purifying your hearts (4:8b)

(v.8b) ... and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Washing your hands has to do with your evil deeds, your outward sins. Being double minded has to do with your thoughts – what goes on in your heart and mind. Not only your hands but also your heart and mind have to be clean.

Notice that the heart first needs to be purified. The word *'purify'* (HAGNIZO) means: to make clean. When we clean our home we search here and there to see where cleaning needs to be done. The same goes with our heart-cleaning. We must search here and there using the light of the Lord in every dark corner of our hearts and apply repentance and abandonment as cleaning agents. When our hearts are not pure, this automatically infects our minds. Our minds can become double-minded, like a snake that has a forked (double-edged) tongue. The words *'double-minded'* (DIPSUCHOS) means: two-spirited, vacillating. We could call it 'walking on the edge'.

Being double-minded is a bit like Ananias and Saphira in Acts 5. They gave for the work of God and wanted people to believe they gave all yet they kept part of it for themselves. Double-minded – is having one part for God and one part for me, but I won't tell one part is for me. Our hearts must stand upright before God – we must be single-minded. A perfect example of not being double-minded is expressed by what Joshua said to the Israelites:

Joshua 24:15

"And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

(NKJV)

Washing your hands and purifying your hearts both give the same picture – to get rid of impurities. So make sure that both the outside and the inside are clean when you draw close to God. If one of the two or both of them are not clean then sincerely apply 1 John 1:9 in your life.

6. Submitting to God means to take a deep look at whom we are. (4:9a)

⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep;

To submit to God we should feel miserable before him. James is speaking about a drastic change of being because of realizing how we stand before God. This is what we should be doing: We should be *'miserable'* (TALAIPOREO) meaning: to realize one's misery, be afflicted. We should feel miserable before our own sins and realize that they bring shame upon his name. To have victory we need to know who exactly we are and not play 'make believe' that I'm such a good person for we are not!

To submit to God we should "*mourn*" (PENTHEO) meaning: to mourn.

This gives the idea that we should have a deep sorrow towards the Lord with a repenting attitude concerning our iniquities. Once we have realized our natural state of being sinners and enemies of God (Rom. 5:8) we should not be satisfied with who we are and what we do. We should have a deep regret and not be like the vast majority of the Jews in the days of Jesus. Remember what he said:

Luke 13:34

**"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!
(NKJV)**

They were *'not willing'* to repent and come to Christ. They were not willing to change their hearts and follow their Messiah. May we always be willing to mourn over our sins.

Finally, to submit to God we should *wail* (KLAIO) meaning: to wail aloud, keeping nothing 'inside'. We should openly communicate our repentant heart towards the Lord. It is one thing to think these things over but quite another to openly cry out to the Lord in a deep sense of repentance. We should never abstain from this attitude. Remember the prodigal son and how he came back and talked with his father?

Luke 15

(21)"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

(22)"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

(23)'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

(24)'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

(NKJV)

When the son opened his heart to his father and openly expressed his sinful attitude the father reacted with great joy and he reinstated his son – as his son!

7. Submission to God means a true change in the believer. (4:9)

(v.9b) ...let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

The effect of your introspection or reflection upon yourself should bring this change.

From laughter to mourning / from joy to gloom. It seems that some Christians were living a life of carelessness, doing what seemed best, not really worrying about what God thought or the consequences their negligence would bring upon them. Laughter and joy were ever present when their lives should have produced mourning and gloom. True submission is being honest enough to realize what is upsetting to the Lord and to do what it takes to get rid of it. This is a question of attitude in the place of sin. Some Christians still found pleasure in it. Jesus said it in these terms:

Matthew 5:30

"And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

(NKJV)

8. Submitting to God is also a day to day thing. (4:10)

¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

When we get up in the morning we should humble our soul before God. This is how King David humbled himself before God.

Psalms 8:3,4

(3)When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained,

(4)What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (NKJV)

Every day we must humble ourselves and rejoice in the presence of the Lord with a clean heart and mind as the Psalmist says:

Psalms 105:2

Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works!

(NKJV)

One final thing, there is a promise attached to submitting to God with humility. Once you:

- Resist the devil
- Approach God with clean hands & pure heart
- Take a real look at who you are
- Humble yourself

God promises that:

(v.10)... He will exalt you.

The word '*exalt*' (HUPSOO) means: to elevate, to exalt. He will be by your side, he will be your shield and your strength. He will not be ashamed of you and He will glorify himself through you. You will be lifted high in His sight.

James
17 – The test of your mind
4:11-17

¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*. ¹² There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? ¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

(NASB)

1. Do not judge (4:11,12)

In this first section James speaks about those who have a sinful attitude against the brethren by slandering and judging them.

So first of all let's look at verses 11 & 12.

¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*. ¹² There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

James begins with the introductory word '*brethren*' and this is not a mistake on his part. This is the tenth time that James uses this term and he will use it another five times. In the mind of James if we are *brothers & sisters* that means that we are in the same family – the family of God. It also means that we have the same roots, same history and that we all have the same family name “Christian”. It means that we all have the same Father and that Jesus Christ is the brother of all of us – no one being excluded!

It means that we are of one body – but unfortunately in this case not all of one mind and heart. There was something definitely wrong with this family of Christians. It has something so awful and disgraceful that James could not keep silent about it.

¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren.

They were doing something that they shouldn't have – they slandered!

Now '*speaking against*' (KATALALEO) in Greek means: To speak against or evil of. It is evident that some Christians were doing things that others either did not like or did not understand and their reaction was to speak out against these brothers & sisters. Unfortunately Christians speak against others without really speaking to that person first as Jesus prescribed:

Matthew 18:15

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

(NKJV)

I am certain that if we would simply follow his directions and actually speak to the person, we would understand and probably change our minds concerning what we have heard. Now slandering someone means to speak against him.

¹¹ Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge *of it*.

So our text says that some Christians spoke to people about other people in a way that was not FOR (honoring) them but AGAINST (discrediting) them. These people were not in favor of them, or kind toward them but against them. They can't keep their thoughts for themselves – they share but it's a poison that slowly kills the best of relationships. Instead of bringing it to the Lord and waiting upon him – they speak to other people and often defame their name. To '*speak against*' or slandering, not only means to *speak against* it also means to '*speak evil of*'. This seems to be taking the “speaking against” one step further. Speaking evil of someone is attributing bad or evil intentions to what that person has said or done. Our Lord and Savior has taught us this must NEVER BE DONE!

Matthew 5:22

"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

(NKJV)

After stating that speaking either against or evil of someone is a terrible sin, James will tell why.

(v.11)...He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law;

In other words when I speak either against or evil of a brother or sister not only am I speaking against him or her but also against the one who made the Law and judging the one who made the Law. In other words, when I speak against YOU – I speak against God! When I judge YOU – I judge God! We forget that the brothers and sisters are part of the body of Christ and when we speak against them we speak against the body of Christ!

When I say...

I also say...

He's so stupid to have...

Christ is so stupid...

She's not so spiritual...

Christ is not so spiritual...

Shouldn't this verse pierce our hearts and seal our lips from verbally sinning against our brothers and sisters? Imagine we become judges of the Law when we do such a thing! We are never to put down a brother or sister, it dishonors the Father who loves and has given his Son for that person. It dishonors the Son who has suffered tremendously for the redemption of that person. It dishonors the Holy Spirit who has quickened, sealed and inhabits that person.

In verse twelve James tells us to “**watch out**”!

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

James is reminding his readers that there is only one in the entire universe who is capable of making infallible laws and that is God Almighty. At the same time he is also saying that not only is God the only one who can make laws but he is also the only one who is truly able to judge others.

Romans 2:1-5

(1) Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.

(2) But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

(3) And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

(4)Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

(5)But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

(NKJV)

So let's think before we speak and keep our lips sealed so we will not speak ill of our brothers and sisters. We really need to be careful because it is also written in verse twelve that:

(v.12)...the one who is able to *save and destroy*.

Christians really need to be very careful about speaking against others because God is the one who is able to *save* or *destroy*. This deals with the judgments of God towards people. He is able to '*save*' (SOZO) which means: to deliver or protect, to heal or to make whole. This gives the idea that the judgments of God can be favorable towards his child. He can intervene and make the circumstances of life beneficial. God did this when the two spies were hidden by Rahab the harlot (Joshua 2) and they were not found by the soldiers in Jericho. On the other hand, God can '*destroy*' (APOLLUMI) meaning: to perish, to lose, die, to destroy fully. God did this with Pharaoh's army when they pursued the Israelites through the Red Sea and perished (Ex. 14).

As you can see this word had different depth in its meaning. God can easily stand for you and your plans will prevail or he can just as easily stop your heart from beating. James is asking the believers to remember who they are dealing with – God.

2. Today or tomorrow (4:13-17)

¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Now let's look at the second part of this section which speaks about “*Planning ahead*”. James speaks of the foolishness of planning ahead without consulting God.

(13) Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”

James is talking about people who do not include the Lord God in their future plans. You can see that he is thinking not only of people not including God in their long-term vision (*spend a year there*) but he also includes people who daily forget about the desires of God (*today or tomorrow*). This can be seen in the lives of many Christians who unfortunately are so busy with their own plans and moving ahead in life it's as though God doesn't exist – except, naturally, when they need his help! To these people James writes: ‘*Now listen*’. He wants them to pay attention and if we are like the group he has just described we also need to listen!

¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow.

His first argument for including God in all that we do is that we are not in control of our future. More than that, we do not even know what the future has for us! Since we do not know what is in store for us should we not be concerned enough to include God who IS IN CONTROL of our future? Is it not pure foolishness to live our life APART from God?

This foolishness is forgetting that the future is not in our hands and that there is nothing we can do if God is not with us. Remember what Jesus said:

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing.*

(NKJV)

For us to succeed our God MUST be in our plans or rather our plans must be God's plans! God can resist us, as we have seen in our last section:

James 4:6

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

(NKJV)

And if he resists us we will be like the Israelites who went round and round for forty years in the desert – getting nowhere! James even tells us that we are nothing at all before the Lord.

(V.14)... You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

I believe that the more we understand that we are NOTHING before the Lord the more we will automatically call upon him for our future. Who we think we are will affect our relationship with the Lord. How many kings found in the Old Testament failed simply because they thought too much of themselves! They did what they wanted and how they wanted caring very little for the Lord God. Yet we also see the blessings on the kings who were attached to the God of Israel. We are here *'for a little while'* why not act wisely and always consult the Lord before we make important decisions. This is what Christians should have been saying:

¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

We should first of all make certain that the Lord would be pleased and approve our desires. Through the prophet Malachi the Lord God reminds his people about the importance of doing what pleases him.

Mal. 1:8

And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the LORD of hosts.

(NKJV)

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ also stated the great importance of daily seeking the will of our heavenly Father in all we do.

Matthew 6:32,33

(32)"For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

(33)"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

(NKJV)

Unfortunately these Christians didn't seem to do this. When we forget the Lord in our actions and we walk alone in our dreams James calls it like it truly is, plain old boasting.

¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

The word '*boast*' (KAUCHAOMAI) means: to vaunt, glory, rejoice. Not only are these Christians fools by not including God in their plans but they also are boasting or rejoicing about it!

One may be a fool but living in '*arrogance*' (ALAZONEIA) meaning: self-confidence, pride about it is pure insanity! One should be ashamed to exclude God from his future plans in life, not be happy about it!

Have you noticed the extreme opposites people do with others and with themselves? With others they: judge and they speak against (v.11) and with themselves they: boast and brag (v.16) Isn't this what we still see today? We put others down and lift ourselves up – don't we?

Should it not stop, once and for all? James says that boasting and bragging is EVIL!

(v.16) ...All such boasting is evil.

There's never anything right when we judge and speak against others or boast and brag about ourselves. You see, not including God in our daily lives or our future plans is simply boasting that we are able to take care of ourselves that we can do things ourselves and this is evil. Why, because it manifests our independence from God. Should we really be boasting that we don't need God? Isn't that pure foolishness?

James then ends with a solemn warning.

¹⁷ Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

What James is saying is that there is no excuse for judging or speaking against or bragging or boasting – or anything else! When we know the good we ought to do and we don't do it – we sin. This refers to this context but also to all that we do and know in our Christian walk. When we know we ought to do something, we should simply do it. So from now on, let's keep our lips sealed about the brothers or sisters unless it's for praising them. Let us also include God in all we do and always be looking for His will in our life!

James
18 – The test of power
5:1-6

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! ⁴Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you.
(NASV)

It seems that James is opening a parenthesis in his epistle to the Jewish believers. This section is directly linked with “The test of patience” which follows (5:7-12). The portion we are now studying appears to be a prelude to the test of patience. This section seems not to speak to believers but rather the rich who oppress the believers they hire for their fields. There are three reasons why I believe the rich people mentioned are not Christians.

There is no exhortation to repentance
They are not admonished to a better life
There is no promise of reconciliation to God

1. Woe to the rich unjust. (5:1-3)

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ²Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

These rich people are warned that they should *weep and wail* because of the judgment that is coming upon them.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. In contrast with his earlier writing the “YOU” mentioned here are not brethren but people with an awful future awaiting them. For James speaks of the ‘*miserias*’ (TALAIPIORIA)

meaning: wretchedness, calamity. Their future is filled with great condemnation from the Lord. The Bible, both in the Old and New Testament often condemns the rich who have this attitude.

Isaiah 5:8

**Woe to those who join house to house; They add field to field, Till there is no place
Where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!
(NKJV)**

Amos 3:10

**For they do not know to do right,' Says the LORD, 'Who store up violence and
robbery in their palaces.'
(NKJV)**

Luke 6:24

**"But woe to you who are rich, For you have received your consolation.
(NKJV)**

There is a coming misery, not because they are rich but because they gather their riches in an unrighteous way. We all know that some beloved children of God were extremely rich, men such as Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David & Solomon and they are but a few names in the Bible. James pictures their wealth as something that will just vanish away – disappear! He tells them to *'weep and howl'*.

(v.1) ...weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

These two words are very descriptive in the Greek. To *'weep'* (KLAIO) means to sob aloud and *'howl'* (OLOLUZO) means: to shriek, to howl. The judgment that James is speaking about can surely be compared to the one that Jesus spoke of.

Luke 13:28

**"There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and
Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.
(NKJV)**

The same theme is also taught by Christ in Mat.8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30. Hearing of this judgment to come can you picture what these rich people ought to be doing? They should be publicly manifesting their repentance and begging the Lord to forgive them. They should be wearing sack cloths and placing ashes upon themselves! They should be doing as rich Zacchaeus did when he met the Lord.

Luke 19:8,9

(8)Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."

**(9)And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham;
(NKJV)**

In verse two, James continues his ‘woe’ concerning the rich and gives two images of their ungodly wealth.

²Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

Wealth that has been unjustly acquired will simply rot away like vegetables and meat do. We also have the idea that even though one thinks that their riches are protected (like clothing in a chest) it too will lose its worth – like moth eating away at it! Do you remember the story of the rich man that Jesus told about and how foolish he was to trust in his riches?

Luke 12:16-20

(16)Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

(17)"And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

(18)"So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

(19)'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'"

**(20)"But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'
(NKJV)**

God will bring judgment upon this type of rich people.

In verse three, James gives another image of how God sees unrighteous money- making.

³Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

The word “rusted” (KATIOO) actually means: to rust through, corroded, canker. Gold and silver do not rust, but James uses this as an image of what it looks like before God – all the riches they amassed are rusted every bit of them. What use is it to be rich if our ‘treasure’ is worthless before the Lord. Let us take the advice of Jesus instead.

Matthew 6:19,20

(19)"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

(20)"but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

(NKJV)

More than that, their wealth will actually speak against them!

(v.3) ...and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire.

It seems that on the Day of Judgment, unrighteous wealth will bring guilt upon its owners. Their corrosion will testify of how you got to be rich. Nothing will be able to stop their witness against you and the condemnation coming to you. The image given is like the working of a fire, which devours all in its path. Paul speaks of a fire that will consume the works of all the children of God. Some works will stand through the fire, while others will be consumed by it leaving them without any reward.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15

(12)Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

(13)each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

(14)If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

(15)If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Then James gives the accusation that will be stated against them.

(v.3) ... It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

They did not share, help out, give, or offer their riches to the needy. They simply hoarded, like pirates hoarded their stolen treasures and hid them. Maybe someone would say: “What have I done wrong to get such a judgment?” James tells them the wrong they have done.

2. The accusation against the unjust rich. (5:4-6)

⁴Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. ⁵You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you.

In verse four, we see that they stole from their workers! They didn't pay their wages. They kept for themselves the salary that they should have given to their workers. The Law of Moses stated that the wages should be given every day.

Leviticus 19:13

**'You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.
(NKJV)**

This is exactly what the rich were doing: cheating, robbing, and holding back the wages. James writes that the Lord himself has heard the cries of the workers and he will intervene with a devastating judgment.

(v.4) ...and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

The name Lord of Sabaoth is written only twice in the New Testament. Once with Paul (Rom. 9:29) where he cites Isaiah and here in James. The Lord of Sabaoth means 'the Lord of hosts' or 'Lord of armies'. James is referring to the celestial armies that are at the Lord's command. This is stunning reminder of who the unjust rich have to deal with! Not only content with stealing from their workers these rich people have a four-fold accusation against them. All of these accusations have to do with greed.

1. 'You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure.'

We see in verse five, that they took care of themselves and only themselves. They were not aiding their fellow neighbors. Their eyes were shut to the needs of the poor. They had forgotten all the moral laws concerning the care they needed to give to the less fortunate. We also see that they lived for pleasure and luxury.

2. ‘You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.’

Again we see in verse five, the idea that they “nourished themselves”, like animal keepers nourish their herd! It also gives the idea that one “fattens a calf” for it to be eaten. Here it was their hearts that had been fattened and they will one day meet their Master and face judgment *‘in a day of slaughter.’*

3. ‘You have condemned and put to death the righteous man;’

In verse six, instead of being like Abraham and Boaz who were fair with all their workers, they actually condemned them! Unsatisfied with stealing from their workers they also brought them to justice. Their hearts were never satisfied and there was no limit to their shame. They oppressed and plagued their workers. Blood was on their hands, they even got some of their workers killed! Liars, thieves and murderers, that’s what they were. But God declares these workers *‘righteous’* and justice will be done for them.

4. ‘He does not resist you.’

The last accusation is that these poor people had done nothing against them – they did not even resist! Quite the contrary, they worked hard and diligently. They willingly labored under their authority and reaped nothing but hardship in return. As for us, let’s make sure that we are not like the rich who James is speaking about. Let us not oppress in any form or anyway our brothers and sisters, and all people because they are made in the image of God.

James
19 – The test of patience
5:7-12

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. ¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.
(NASV)

James is arriving at the end of his epistle and there are just two more recommendations that he wants to give to his readers. This test is the test of patience – a very difficult test for all of us. Patience is a rare commodity these days. We want everything and want it now.

- We're impatient with sickness - that can't stop us
- We're impatient in traffic - we have to move faster
- We're impatient with our children - they ought to know better
- We're impatient at work - everyone should be perfect

Patience is a lost art, and living gets more and more bitter, more and more tense, more and more irritable because of our lack of patience. The Bible teaches us the importance of being patient in all circumstances.

- Patience helps us to bear fruit (Luke 8:15)
- Patience brings security (Luke 21:19)
- Patience brings hope (Rom. 15:4)
- Patience is virtuous (2 Thes. 1:4)
- Patience is to be pursued (1 Tim. 6:11)

So let's open our ears to what the Lord wants to teach us about patience.

1. Be patient to the very end. (5:7,8)

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

In his first sentence James describes the length of our patience and the end point of our patience. Many of us may ask “how long will I have to be patient?” I’m so tired of waiting! How long will I endure this situation – it seems to be never ending! How long will she irritate me – I’m so tired! Have you ever asked yourself: “How long will this continue” or “How long before it all ends”? The answer is found in verse seven where James tell us “How Long” our patience must be.

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.

Our patience must endure until the return of Jesus Christ! That’s how long! This type of patience is called LONG-SUFFERING in the Bible. Our goal is to be patient with others as well as in difficult situations like the good Lord was patient! The following verses will manifest that believers have a wonderful God who is patient.

Romans 15:5

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,

(NKJV)

Psalms 86:15

But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

(NKJV)

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

(NKJV)

If God has endured us and is patient with us in our failings and sins, should we not also be very patient with others? James is now going to give an example of what patience is in the natural realm.

(v.7) ...The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

It's a picture of a farmer who (we can imagine) has planted seeds in his field. When he gets up the next day the farmer does not get irritated because the crops are not ready for harvest! He is not frustrated because he does not see his fields overflowing with produce! He is patient, because he knows that it takes TIME for these things to happen. He knows that the spring and autumn rain has to do its work for harvest to arrive. In life most things are not instantaneous they can only arrive in their due time. Notice that James speaks of a '*precious produce*' (TIMIOS) meaning: valuable, costly. The farmer waits patiently because he knows that there is a harvest that is coming. There will be a time when all of his toil will be rewarded – so he waits. As Christians we also need to be patient because a harvest of peace and plenitude awaits for us when the time arrives. But before this time is at hand we must also bear '*the early and late rains*'. There are things that we just can not do to hasten the harvest. What exactly is the Christians' harvest? What are the children of God waiting for?

⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

We need to be patient and endure the tempests of life until *'the coming of the Lord'*. We should patiently wait in all circumstances until the Lord Jesus returns. There is a promise of his return given to us by angels when Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father:

Acts 1:9-11

(9)Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

(10)And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

(11)who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

(NKJV)

So in addition to patience we are called to *'strengthen your hearts'* during the waiting period.

Strengthening our hearts gives the idea of not abandoning or not letting go! This is like a person, on whom the wind is blowing and blowing but it does not overpower him because his feet are firmly set upon the ground beneath him. We also have to stand firm because after a while of waiting we have a tendency to drop everything and abandon the fight .But James encourages us to be patient and long-suffering because the Lord's coming is near! This is the second time he speaks of the Lord's coming – ever wonder why? Because when the Lord will come back – everything will fall back in to its proper place – everything will be just fine. We won't need to be patient any longer – all will be perfect (and so will we).

2. A parentheses. (5:9)

After telling the disciples to *'strengthen your hearts'* while they wait James tells them to do something else.

⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

While we are patient we have to *stand firm* in opposition. This is not the first time that James speaks about our tongue and how devastating it can be. I believe he echoes this theme once more because he knows that when we wait and wait we can sometimes become impatient and lash out with our tongue. Our natural tendency would be to grumble against the person, group of persons or situation we are trying to be patient with. We can be disappointed, irritated, frustrated and at one point the lack of heavenly patience will make our mouths overflow with grumbling. We see this all the time – I do it and we all do it. We grumble not only against the people or situation that we are in but sometimes also against the one creating this state of having to be patient - God.

James tells us why we should not grumble:

(v.9)...so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

- You will be judged
- The judge is standing at the door.

James reminds his readers that the Judge does not allow *grumbling* between brothers and sisters or against him. One day all of our grumbling will surface when we will face Christ at his tribunal! Remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 7:1,2

(1)"Judge not, that you be not judged.

(2)"For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

(NKJV)

3. Examples of suffering (5:10,11)

James will now move on and give us an example of patience.

¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James reminds us that we can look at the lives of spiritual men and women and how they were patient especially in the face of suffering, because they spoke about the Lord. This suffering has nothing to do with a certain fault in ourselves but rather what we stand for. Suffering for our faults is one thing but suffering because we represent God is another. Remember what Peter wrote:

1Peter 2:20

**For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?
But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable
before God.
(NKJV)**

Suffering for God is difficult because there is nothing that we can do about it – while suffering because of ourselves is a situation that we can change. Jesus says that suffering for God is to be considered – a blessing!

Matthew 5:11,12

**(11)"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil
against you falsely for My sake.
(12)"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so
they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
(NKJV)**

Patience is a key trait of character that we all need to possess. This is what the Bible has to say about this subject.

Being patient and waiting upon the Lord has its great rewards like we see in Isaiah:

Isaiah 40:30,31

(30)Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,

(31)But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

(NKJV)

In Jeremiah, we see that the patience of God for his children is renewed every single day, because of his faithfulness. Having received such patience we also should manifest patience in all circumstances.

Lamentations 3:22-24

(22)Through the LORD'S mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not.

(23)They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.

(24)"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

(NKJV)

James first gave the example of prophets of old who were patient and now he will give another example, this time of a person well known to be patient – Job!

¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

What is James pointing out in this phrase? Is it not the final outcome of things – what the Lord finally brought about! The example is Job who lost absolutely everything he had, including his children. He was left with a sick body and a wife who cursed him and told him to die!

Job 2:9

Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

(NKJV)

But Job remained unwavering in his faith and was patient in the dreadful circumstances that he now was living. And that is what we should also do. We should not look at the present moment or affliction and become irritated or impatient but rather look towards what God will do with this situation. Always remember:

(v.11)...that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James reminds his readers why they should look forward to being patient. It is because the Lord is filled with compassion and mercy.

So let's place our confidence in this compassionate and merciful God and be PATIENT in life.

3. The last warning. (5:12)

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

James ends with a final warning about patience. Why would someone have the need to swear '*do not swear*'? Often it's either to get out of a situation or to confirm something. Impatience will make us say things or do things or promise things just so that the situation will change and end. Some will get so tired of a given situation that they will even recant their faith to be set free from the authorities. But James says not to do that, rather to be patient and allow God to work in your life situation.

So don't be nervous, anxious or in a hurry. Don't say things just to get out of a situation or to make it change. Just remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 10:19,20

(19)"But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak;

(20)"for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Be patient and just tell the truth and let God handle the situation. For the second time James speaks of being "condemned". The first was in v.9 and the second in v.12.

(v.12)... so that you may not fall under judgment.

Our impatience, one way or another, will bring a condemnation and it's not because we are children of God that the Lord will close his eyes to it. In all that we do and in all that we live we need to be very patient. Having patience will drastically change your life – blessed is he who has patience!

Lamentations 3:24,25

(24)"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

(25)The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him.

(NKJV)

James
20 – The test of life
5:13-20

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky ^lpoured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

(NASB)

This is the last section of the epistle of James and I hope that this commentary has enlightened and encouraged you. If there is ONE verse that stands out, ONE verse that you should remember, ONE verse that should be kept in your heart, it's the following one.

James 1:22

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

So let's listen and do what James brings to his readers.

1. Is there anyone? (5:13-15)

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

James begins with three questions and three answers to them. This is very simple and very effective. The first question is: Is anyone among you suffering? James writes: *'Then he must pray'*.

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray.

I found that it has become second nature for me to pray; not only when I'm in difficulties but also to prevent difficulties. If we are in trouble or we suffer, our 'spiritual instincts' should bring us to our knees as we look towards heaven and pour our hearts out to the Father. When I pray and it is because I got myself into trouble which causes me suffering, I also confess my sin and ask for God's forgiveness. Praying is part of the solution for our troubles.

The second question is: *'is anyone cheerful?'* James goes from one extreme to another, from being in trouble or suffering, to being happy.

(v.13) ...Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.

Now if we are happy what should we do? *'He is to sing praises'* is the answer. Are you in trouble – well let the Lord know. Are you happy – again let the Lord know. When songs of praise come forth from our mouths this manifests that we recognize the source of our happiness – God. From one end of the spectrum of emotions all the way to the other end – let the Lord know about it. It seems that James is telling us that the Lord is interested and has a listening ear when his children speak to him!

The last question that James asks is: *'Is anyone sick?'*

¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

Again James gives an answer to his own question. What is it that we should do when we are sick? I don't believe that James is referring to an everyday sickness, something that we know we will naturally get over. I believe James is speaking about a SERIOUS sickness, someone that is almost on his deathbed. The word *'sick'* (ASTHENEIO) means: to be feeble, to be diseased, weak.

In those days, you could not call a doctor, an ambulance, the hospital or any other medical specialists like we can today. Remember the story of the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years (Mark 5:25-34). This poor woman had gone to see many doctors but had never gotten any better because they were charlatans!

Mark 5:25,26

(25)Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years,

(26)and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.

(NKJV)

When someone is very sick James tells us that we should call the elders of the church.

(v.14)... *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

A person in such a situation needs spiritual help. He just might be knocking at the door of eternity. Men of God should be by his side to encourage and pray for him.

Now not only prayer would be given but also the anointing with oil. This has happened to me only once as a pastor. I was called to anoint a man that had been in a car accident and was now in a coma. The family was in the process of deciding if they should keep the person on life support or not. We gathered around the bed and prayed. I anointed the man and placed his life in God's hands. He was later 'un-plugged'. Not only did he survive but he was able to recover enough to talk and do other things.

¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

This is not a promise that each time a person is near death bounded by sickness he will be raised up from his sickness. This is what Albert Barnes wrote concerning this:

'This must be understood, as such promises are everywhere, with this restriction, that they will be restored to health if it shall be the will of God.' (Notes on the whole Bible)

John Calvin wrote:

As the gift of healing as yet continued, he directs the sick to have recourse to that remedy. It is, indeed, certain that they were not all healed; but the Lord granted this favor as often and as far as he knew it would be expedient. (John Calvin's commentary on the Bible)

Dr. Thomas Constable wrote:

It is interesting that James did not tell his readers to call for someone with the gift of healing. Evidently such people were rare even in the very early history of the church when James wrote.

The fact that the weary person was to summon the elders gives a clue that this person's sickness connects with some spiritual condition. This proves to be the case in [James 5:15](#). Today a skilled physician normally provides the medical attention. The elders need to deal with the spiritual factors affecting the sick person, if any, since they have a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the flock ([Hebrews 13:17](#)). In this context James had a sickness

with spiritual roots in view. Really all sickness is traceable to the Fall. (Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable)

If healing was guaranteed then a person could technically always call the elders, always receive the unction and always feel better afterwards. In other words a person could escape death by being anointed each time he felt sick! And we know all of us will die unless the Good Lord comes back first. Rather, if you are very sick call the elders, they will pray and anoint you with oil and if the Lord wills you will be healed. If not, it just might be the time you are to enter into his presence. I believe that as medical science increases, there is less and less obligation for the Lord to intervene in one's life like he did 2000 years ago. When the elders come to see the person it is not only for them to pray and to anoint.

(v.15) **...and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.**

It is also a time for confession. This shows that sometimes SIN can and will have an effect on your body. A person who is sick should take time to analyze his life to see if SIN might be the determining factor in his situation.

2. The example of Elijah and prayer. (5:16-18)

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Verse sixteen confirms the necessity of confession and prayer.

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

The 'one another' mentioned here is not telling every person the sins that you do. But rather telling the offended party that you have sinned against him.

Elders being called to pray, speaks about praying for the sick person who asks prayer from them. Praying for *'one another'* and *'confessing'* to the offended party is all linked to the context of being healed – *'that you may be healed'*.

Now James speaks of the power of prayer.

(v.16) ... The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

What makes a powerful prayer? James says it is its effectiveness. Big, long, beautiful prayers are not necessarily powerful prayers. Only when they are effective are they powerful! For the prayers to be powerful it depends on two things: the person saying the prayer and God hearing the prayer. As for the person, James says he must be righteous –

(v.16) The effective prayer of a righteous man...

A person who is not inclined to honor God by walking in the light, who keeps his sin close to his heart – is not a righteous person. That man's prayer will not be effective. As for the other end of the prayer – it depends on God, whether this man's prayer is within the plan of God or not. Some people say 'I know it is God's plan that no one should be sick – so he will recover'! Unless God has personally spoken to them – then they have no clue what they are saying they do not know God's plan!

Remember that we often see believers who are sick or weak in the Bible. Also don't forget that Christ did not cure everyone he saw! James gives the example of the prophet Elijah and his prayer life.

¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Just by reading these two verses, you might come to think that Elijah decided when it was going to stop raining and when it was going to start again, as though he had power over nature, as if he was divine! But this is not the case. It is God who manifested himself in both cases before he prayed.

Before the drought Elijah said:

1 Kings 17:1-5

(1)And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word."

(2)Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying,

(3)"Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

(4)"And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there."

(5)So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he went and stayed by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.

(NKJV)

It was at this point that the Lord God stopped the rain and protected his prophet from drought. When rain began again, this is what happened:

1 Kings 18:41

And Elijah said to Ahab, 'Go, eat and drink, *for there is a sound of a heavy rain*'.

(NKJV)

Here we see that God gave Elijah the ability to hear the rain coming. It was not Elijah who decided that it was time to rain. What happened, is that Elijah *knowing the will of God* - PRAYED for his will to be done. And it happened! It will happen with all of us – if we know the will of God and pray for it – God will act upon His own word. Jesus prayed: 'Thy kingdom come – Thy will be done' (Mat. 6:10)

3. James' last encouragements (5:19,20)

James then ends his epistle with one last word of divine encouragement. It's about caring for the brothers and sisters.

¹⁹My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, ²⁰let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

A person does not usually FALL INTO SIN – he usually just wanders off and slowly loses his way. Sin usually creeps in, slowly but surely, until it engulfs us and binds us; a little here and a little taste there, just one more time here and a 'last time there'. The first thing you know is that you're in big trouble and don't know how to handle the situation. That's why we need friends – good friends – to tell us the truth and help us out.

That's what a good friend does – he cares and does what it takes to help. This saves the person from death and a whole lot of sins! So let's be a good friend and a person who prays and intercedes for others.

I hope this commentary has encouraged you and equipped you to become a better Disciple of Christ.