



EPISTLE OF JAMES: A GENERAL COMMENTARY

By Rev. Dr. Willis C. Newman

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INTRODUCTION

This work is a, introduction, survey and commentary on the Letter by James. My goal is to do an accurate exegesis of the Epistle, but also to relate it to our Christian living. Although there is practical and theoretical information woven throughout the Epistle, The letter is primarily focused on practical Christian living.

The primary motivation for this commentary comes from my Liberian pastor friend, Eric Sumo, and my wife Esmeralda (Esmie for short). It is written as a text for a Bible School course for Newman Bible Academy. I appreciate the student's encouragement.

With this introduction, let me tell you a little about Esmie and Me, give a short segment on how to be saved, and then we will jump into the Epistle itself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Willis C. Newman had eight years' experience in pastoral ministry in Portland, Oregon, USA before going into teaching at the Bible College and Seminary Level. At the pastoral level, over 900 people prayed to receive Christ as their personal Savior. He is a graduate of the University of Portland, Multnomah School of the Bible, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, California Graduate School of Theology and Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary. He has taken post graduate courses in psychology from American Military University.

He is Associate Professor at Faith Evangelical College & Seminary, Adjunct Assistant Professor at a community college, formerly Principal of the Bible College of Tonga and Director of Polynesian Missions, a missions agency focused on the South Pacific. He served several years as the South Pacific Director of Faith Evangelical College & Seminary (formerly Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, WA.). He also served as Professor at International College and Graduate School of Theology in Hawaii. While ministering in the Kingdom of Tonga, in 1991 Newman started a teaching site in that country for Faith Evangelical College & Seminary.

Newman returned to America in 1998, after serving seven years in Tonga (South Pacific). Since that time, he has been teaching in a community college, where subjects included psychology, sociology, and communication. He still teaches Bible and the social sciences at now Faith Evangelical College and Seminary in Tacoma WA, USA.

With his wife, Esmeralda (Esmie), they have started a website featuring free Bible studies, and an online Bible Academy. At this writing, over 30,000 individuals visit the website monthly, and over 1,000 have taken the free online Bible courses. Esmie, who holds a B.A. from the University of Washington, and M.A. from both Faith Seminary and Liberty University, also teaches at Faith Evangelical College and Seminary. She conducts international women's empowerment workshops. Newman has devoted over 30 years in tertiary education.

The Newman's have an extensive ministry in Liberia, Nigeria, Kenya in Africa. The Liberian ministry was founded along with Rev. Eric Sumo of Village Ministries. Newman Bible Academy has teaching sites in the above African countries. They hold regular pastor's conferences and women's conferences with hundreds attending.

HOW TO BE SAVED

The Bible gives us the message (gospel) of how to be saved. By this we mean how to gain forgiveness for our sin and how to gain eternal life. Summarized below are the steps of salvation as presented in the Bible. We invite you to receive Christ as Savior.

1. Agree in your heart with God that you are a sinner in need of His salvation:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

2. Know in your heart that there is a penalty to your sin:

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).

3. Believe in your heart that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for your sins and to give you eternal life:

"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)... "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

4. By faith pray to God: tell Him you believe the above in your heart and ask Him to save you through Jesus Christ. Remember that God is more concerned with the attitude of your heart rather than your exact words.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one would boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

"if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation" (Romans 10:9,10).

"Behold, I (Jesus) stand at the door (of your heart) and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20).

"But as many as received Him (Jesus), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12,13).

The following is a suggested prayer:

Heavenly Father, I admit to you that I am a sinner in need of your salvation. I believe that Christ died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay for my sins and to give me eternal life. I believe that only through Christ can I be saved. I ask for and accept by faith your free gift of salvation. Please come into my heart and be my Savior and Lord. Thank you for doing so. In Jesus' name, amen.

Dr. Willis Newman, 2014.

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INTRODUCTION

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. THE GENERAL EPISTLES.

The early church called several books the "General," "Catholic," or "Universal" epistles. The reason is that with the exception of 2 and 3 John they were not addressed or confined to a single locality. James is one of those General Epistles.

B. THE BACKGROUND OF JAMES.

James, the author of this epistle was the half-brother of the Lord, the head (Bishop) of the church in Jerusalem in the apostolic age. At first unbelieving, he was led to faith in Christ probably by an appearance of the risen Lord. From the first organization of the church at Jerusalem James appears as its head. Paul, for example, reported to James and Peter at Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18, 19). James was not an Apostle. He took the leading part in the council at Jerusalem, and was highly respected by the whole Church (Acts 15:13).

The NT mentions three men by the name of James. Two of them were disciples of Christ: James the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matthew 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17; Luke 5:10; Acts 1:13). The second James was James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13). The third James was the half-brother of Jesus, and the writer of this epistle bearing his name.

Jesus came from a large, close knit family consisting of several brothers and sisters. They were born after the birth of Jesus, and were His half siblings. Joseph, Mary's husband, was a carpenter – and passed his trade on to Jesus. His mother was named Mary, and his brothers as we know them were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (i.e. Jude, who wrote the NT epistle). Jesus also had several sisters.

After Jesus started His ministry, his brothers doubted that He was the Messiah. It was somewhat shocking to be confronted with one's brother's miracles – and also to witness the hostility of the rulers against Jesus.

After Christ's resurrection, his brothers and mother were with the little gathering in Jerusalem praying in the upper room (Acts 1:14). They were convinced of Jesus being the Christ. Jesus also made a special appearance to James, which probably cemented his absolute loyalty to Christ (Cf. Matthew 1:18; 2:11ff.; 13:55-57; Mark 6:3, 4; John 2:1-12; 7:3, 5, 10; Acts 1:14; 12:17; 1 Corinthians 9:5; 15:7; Galatians 1:19).

Gradually, James assumed leadership at the Jerusalem Church (Cf. Acts 15:13). He considered his ministry to the Jews (Galatians 2:9). He was loyal to Jewish tradition, but was unwilling to make the Mosaic Law normative for all responding by faith to Christ (Cf. Acts 15:14-29; 12:17; 21:18-26).

James, traditions holds, was known as old, “camel knees” as he spent so much time praying on his knees. They were thick with callouses. Eventually, James, along with some other Christian companions, was murdered by the Jewish leaders as ordered by the high priest, Ananus. There are two views of the actual death: Josephus claims he was stoned to death. A Christian historian, Hegesippus, is quoted by Eusebius as claiming that James was cast down from the temple tower, and then stoned, and finally had his skull crushed by a club. The two views can be combined into the one event with each account giving more details.

According to Josephus, Ananus was a Sadducee who had a severe temper and displayed an insolent character. He took it upon himself to exert his authority and murdered James along with some other Christians. However, James had such a good reputation, that king Agrippa took the high priesthood from Ananus after only three months in office. The Jews were also greatly offended at the murder of James.

Some put the date of James’ death at A.D. 63, but others at A.D. 69. The Jews believed that the murder of James initiated the siege to Jerusalem by the Romans and eventuated in the destruction of the city in A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem, Josephus writes, “These miseries befell the Jews by way of revenge for James the Just, who was the brother of Jesus that was called Christ, on account that they had slain him was a most righteous person.”

By the tone of his epistle, James appears as very pious and devoted to Christ. He pulls no punches when calling sin for what it is. He is very direct. However, James was also compassionate and humble, calling himself the servant of Jesus Christ, his half-brother. It was also likely that James had a wife (Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:5).

C. THE CONTEXT OF THE EPISTLE.

The Epistle is addressed to "the twelve tribes which are in the dispersion." These were Jewish Christians that lived within and outside of Palestine. It deals with conditions that were generally prevailing at that time, a time of persecution, poverty, discouragement, temptation and conditions resulting from them. Those persecuted were impatient and doubting and envious of the rich. Philip Schaff, in his history of the Christian Church (Vol. 1, p. 270), writes in a footnote, “most Christians were poor and oppressed by rich Jews.”

The believer’s faith was barren. They were discouraged. Hence James writes to them to comfort, encourage, warn, and exhort them. The Epistle is ethical and practical rather than doctrinal. Practical Christian ethics is the theme.

D. THE THEME OF THE EPISTLE.

James emphasizes that good works are necessary to show or demonstrate one’s faith. There is a conflict among scholars that James’ emphasis on works is contradictory to Paul’s emphasis on salvation by faith alone. Martin Luther, for example, called the epistle an, “epistle of straw.” The two ideas, however, are not contradictory, but complementary. James does not teach that good works are necessary to earn salvation – only that if a person is born again, there will naturally be some good works as a consequence. For example, an apple tree produces apples. An orange tree produces oranges, not prunes. Likewise, if a person is a born again Christian, there will be evidence somewhere in the person’s life.

E. THE DATE OF WRITING.

The book was written by James A.D. 45-50. Since the Jerusalem council is not mentioned (cf. Acts 15:1-35), which was held in A.D. 49, then that suggests the date before A.D. 49. Josephus said that James was murdered in A.D. 62 – but others suggest A.D. 69. The destruction of Jerusalem was in A.D.

70, and it is not mentioned in the epistle. Consequently, we end up with a date of around A.D. 45-50. Some suggest his death was about five years before the murder of Paul.

F. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK.

1. One of the errors dealt with by James was that of an interest in the mere intellectual perception of truth and not the practical application of the truth to life and conduct. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone was properly defined and understood by the readers, but it was not vitally applied to personal life experience. Some have called this little epistle the, "Christian book of Proverbs."

2. This principle of true faith producing good works is touched upon in other portions of Scripture (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14), but in James it is emphasized. This theme weaves itself through the book under the following subjects:

- The ministry of trials.
- Wisdom through prayer.
- Nature of pure religion.
- Faith justified by works.
- The life of peace.
- The control of passions.
- The grace and value of patience.
- The power of prayer.

3. The principle and value of patience and endurance also runs through the epistle. Endurance comes from two words spliced together: "*meno*," which means to stay in a given place, state, relation endure, dwell, or remain. The second word is, "*hupo*," or under. *Hupomeno*, then, means to abide under, or to bear up courageously under suffering.

Patience comes from "*makrothumia*". "*Makro*" is long, and "*thumos*" is temper; consequently, it is also translated "longsuffering," or "long tempered." Long tempered is to be able to hang on to our temper for a long time in the face of provocation. It is that ability of self-restraint when confronted with a provocation, aggravation, or the hassles of life, and that does not quickly retaliate, punish, seek revenge, or try to get even.

James teaches us to develop the qualities of patience and endurance in the following situations.

- Be patience in the face of the various trials of life (1:3).
- Be patience and persevere in good works by the law of liberty (1:22-25).
- Be patience and under control under provocation by others (3:1-7).
- Be patience under oppression and injustice (5:7).
- Be patience under the suffering of persecution (5:10).
- Be patience because Christ will make right all the wrongs at His coming (5:8).

II. BRIEF OUTLINE OF JAMES

A. The Nature of Trials (1:1-18).

- Major teachings
- Reality of trials
- Encouragement in trials
- Pitfalls of trials

B. The Nature of the Word (1:19-27).

- Hindrances to the Word
- Application of the Word

C. The Condemnation of Partiality (2:1-13).

- The charge of personal favoritism
- The costs of favoritism

D. The Relationship between Works and Faith (2:14-26).

- The controversy
- The illustrations

E. The Importance of the Tongue (3:1-12).

- Control of the tongue
- Power of the tongue illustrated

F. The Nature of True Wisdom (3:13-18).

- True wisdom.
- False wisdom

G. The Danger of Worldliness (4:1-17).

- The source of worldliness
- The result of worldliness
- The removal of worldliness
- The features of godliness

H. The Need for Patience (5:1-12).

- The oppression by the rich
- The patience of the persecuted

I. The Power of Prayer (5:13-20).

- Prayer defined
- Issue of sickness
- Meaning of anointing of oil
- Confession of sins
- Example of Prayer
- Concluding encouragement

COMMENTARY OF JAMES

I. THE NATURE OF TRIALS (1:1-18).

A. MAJOR TEACHINGS.

In a nutshell, James addresses four issues in this section.

- How to view trials and the benefits of trials (verses 2-4).
- We can secure wisdom through prayer (verses 5-8).
- The riches of this world are very slippery and uncertain (verses 9-11).
- God is not the source of temptation, nor does he solicit us to evil (verses 12-18).

B. THE REALITY OF TRIALS (1:1-8).

1. Who wants trials? They are hard, troublesome, messy, and worrisome – and sometimes deadly. One mistaken view in Christianity is that once we become a Christian, then life will be happy with no

problems. Then reality sets in. Trouble, turmoil, disease and terrorism bring sadness, suffering, sorrow – and even death and tragedy.

Maybe we even think that God is mad at us, and visiting us with punishment. Our faith may sag. We don't like trials. We do everything we can to avoid problems, and even pray that they will go away. In some quarters suffering is viewed as proof that we are unspiritual, or maybe are harboring secret sin.

But, James teaches us a biblical truth that is completely foreign to our thinking. He says we should rejoice in trials! Come with me and let's explore the nature, purpose, and reward of trials.

I should first point out that sometimes suffering does come as a form of discipline and correction (e.g. Hebrews 12:4-11; 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; 1 Timothy 6:9-10). Another issue is that we should not deliberately plunge ourselves into careless activities that bring suffering and trials. Neither should we turn our back and energies on helping to resolve suffering in the world.

Trials are unpleasant, but when we have gone through them, they make us stronger. The writer of Hebrews explains it this way, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

However, once we find ourselves in a trial, we are to respond with the attitude of joy. James states, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (James 1:2). Look for God in the trial, knowing that in the end He will be glorified, and it will be to our benefit (Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:11). When we look for God in our problems, and believe He is there, it gives meaning to the immediate trial, which brings encouragement (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Several places in the Bible speak of how to view suffering. Probably the most famous place is in the book of Job. How we view trials, our perspective, and the meaning we place on trials is the key to handling the fire of trials. Here are some examples.

1. Trials are a testing of our faith (James 1:3ff.). The testing does not mean that God permits trials to see how much faith we have, but it is a mechanism to strengthen our faith. When we come through a trial, we come out stronger. A good example is Hebrews, chapter 11. The heroes of the faith strengthened their faith through trials. Paul realized the Thessalonians were under persecution and affliction for their faith. He also indicated that their faith was being "enlarged" in light of their suffering.

2. As believers, we should expect trials to come our way (1 Peter 1:6). Life is simply a series of one problem after another. Don't become discouraged when they come. Suffering is part of living, and even more so for being a Christian. Jesus said that He was hated by the world, and Christians would also be hated (John 15:18, 19; cf. 1 Peter:4:12-19).

3. Trials bring endurance, or perseverance (James 1:3, 4; Romans 5:3). We gain staying power. We don't give up, but keep on going as we trust God.

4. Trials produce strong character, and improvement on the skills God has given us (Romans 5:4). Think of it as an athlete training for competition. They agonize with pain in preparing their body and mind to win the prize.

5. We have the example of the people of God suffering in the Bible. Look at the suffering Paul endured (2 Corinthians 4:8-18). As I look at the events of this world, I wonder why there is so much suffering. As I write this, the radicals of the Islamic Nation in Iraq murder people with abandon. The Christians are

killed, raped, and driven from their homes. In West Africa the deadly virus, Ebola, is taking this lives of hundreds. Since the fall of humanity, there has always been suffering.

6. We can know that any form of suffering or temptation we may encounter, others have gone through the same thing. God will not let us be destroyed by the temptation, but will see us through the experience (1 Corinthians 10:13). He will not give us more than we can handle. Sometimes we may stumble and fall, and be buffeted by failure. However, in the end, God will bring us through the storm.

7. Satan will bring suffering against us, and God may permit it for a while. However, God has a purpose for it, and will in the end, “perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10; cf. verses 6-11). In this case, we are to humble ourselves before God, know that many others are under the same pressure, and that its purpose is to strengthen our faith. Faith offsets the anxiety we experience.

I once knew a couple who were leaders in a large church. He was a professional man, and she was a pillar in the woman’s group and missionary endeavors. She suffered a stroke, and became a prisoner to a wheel chair – cut off in the prime of her life. Everywhere they went, the husband had to push her in a wheel chair. Why does God let things like that happen? Frankly, I do not know. I cannot know.

I think of another illustration. I had a Liberian student once. He was a converted Muslim, became a pastor, his church was growing, and he had a marvelous ministry to Muslims. He was in the prime of life. One day he died and left a young wife and several children. Why would a loving God let that pastor die? Again, I have no idea. This we can know, however, God has a purpose for every situation. His purposes always turn out for good in the end.

Paul wrote, “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). God always has a purpose for everything that happens. We can rest our faith and confidence on that fact.

8. Suffering for Christ also affirms our identification with Him. Paul wrote that as being children of God, “and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if (since) indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:17).

9. Suffering nudges us toward a more correct attitude toward our life experience. Paul wrote, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16-18).

10. Facing and enduring trials with increased faith brings reward. Peter writes, “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of you faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6, 7).

This attitude is based on our salvation experience through Christ, as indicated in the preceding verses. Some think that persecution is in mind here rather than the normal trials of life. In either case, both apply. The purpose of trials, according to Peter, is to purify our faith, and to prove or demonstrate the reality of our faith – and eventual reward.

The word for “proof” (*dokimon*) means to test for the purpose of approving or judgment. The word means reliable, esteemed, valuable, or genuine. Only authentic believers can meet the testing, and the judgment is the giving of reward.

This kind of “proof” teaches us to learn the will of God (cf. Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:9-10; Philippians 1:10). Further, we use it to test ourselves, or check out our own faith in response to stress and trials (2 Corinthians 13:5). Finally, we are to “test” the times (Luke 12:56). That is, we learn to interpret and see the movement of God’s hand and plan throughout history, current events, and especially our own life experience we live out in this world.

In other words, when we encounter trials, stress, temptation, tragedy, or suffering in the world or our own life, our faith directs us to look for the plan and purpose of God in the situation. We look beyond the present pain, and look at the eternal plan and purpose of God, and how we are to fit into the mix of events. It is similar to the old proverb, “Look for the silver lining in every dark cloud.” The silver lining is God.

James caps off this idea of reward, “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” (James 1:12).

11. Suffering produces hope (Romans 5:4). Hope is precious. It has great value. Without it, we give way to discouragement, sink into despair, wrap ourselves in depression, and sometimes surrender to suicide. The hope we have is the certainty that we possess something, or that God and His promises are real, genuine, valid and true. Hope does not disappoint, but brings encouragement, “because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5). This priceless chain reaction leading to hope starts with tribulation (Roman 5:3).

12. The killer to faith is doubt (James 6-8). This emphasizes the power of faith. Faith believes that Christ has the ability, motivation, awareness, power, information, and willingness to deliver on His promises, and to act on the principles He sets forth in Scripture. The belief is not necessarily on the promise, but on the Person delivering on His promise.

13. God is just. When wrongs are committed against us, He will sort things out and bring the perfect judgment as He sees fit, and in His timing (1 Thessalonians 1:3-5ff.).

14. Suffering also gives occasion for the grace of God to be on display. In chapter two of Ephesians, Paul teaches that we were guilty sinners before God. However, because of His great love, kindness, grace and mercy, He saved the Christian. One purpose was that, “in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).

Grace means to bestow favor upon those who are guilty of sin, and deserve and actually stand under the Judgment of God. If there were no suffering and affliction in this world, then there would be no backdrop for God to display His grace.

15. There is a catch to suffering. It is not good to suffer when we deserve it. The suffering that strengthens faith and brings blessing is when we stand up for Christ and are persecuted. Peter wrote, “By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God” (1 Peter 4:15, 16; cf. verses 12-19).

16. Suffering comes from many sources. Sometimes it is outward circumstances such as persecution from those who hate Christ. Sometimes it is visited upon us by Satan working through circumstances or his demons and his human followers. At other times, the suffering may come from by various sources: within by sickness or any number of external environmental difficulties and hardships (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; James 1:2).

17. Suffering, pain, tragedy, and injustice are only for a little while – that is, for the people of God. Comparing the 10-20 thousand years on this earth, eternity is forever. This time of evil will end. Even on an individual level, our life span is in the 70's (at least in America), then we will be gone from the suffering in this world and in the presence of God (Philippians 1:21-24).

C. ENCOURAGEMENT IN TRIALS (James 1:9-12).

James proceeds to encourage the poor believers who were persecuted by the wealthy people (James 1:9-12), or felt inferior to the upper classes because of their low status in life. This encouragement is brought by reminding the readers where true riches, status, and position come from. He tells the readers to change their priorities.

Many times in this life we get our priorities misplaced. We look to the wealthy with envy and jealousy. We have the saying, "They have it made," meaning we think they have so much money they are secure and have an easy life.

Some sociologists believe that people are all struggling for scarce resource in their culture. There are three dominate resources that are pursued: power, prestige, and property. Property means wealth. Consequently, the people who have the most power, fame, and wealth are the most successful in society. They are granted high status, and even are called the "higher or upper class," as opposed to the "lower classes."

James reverses the cultural system of status. He reminds the poor believer to revel in their high position they have in Christ. He says to not be ashamed if they are poor, but look beyond their present social or economic conditions to the eternal rewards. Our wealth, status, and rank in the universe comes from our relationship to Christ – not on how much money we have in the bank account, what academic degrees we have, how big our house is, how many or what kind of cars we drive, or any of the social economic status markers that society sets up.

This background brings us back to James 1:9, 10. James tells the poor man to glory and be joyous based upon his position, prestige, and wealth that he has in Christ. Don't be concerned with what society claims is important, look at what you have in Christ. The lavish riches we have in Christ are beyond our comprehension. The things considered of value in this world are but trash compared to what we have in Christ.

Verse 12 refers to part of the believer's riches as the "crown of life" (cf. Revelation 2:10). A crown indicates something of great value. It is an ornament placed on the head of royalty – the symbol of power, wealth, and prestige of kings and queens. A crown symbolizes kingship and rule of a domain – in other words, power.

It also symbols victory. The winning athletes of the Greek Olympic games were crowned with a victory wreath. Crowns are made of valuable stones, jewels, and precious gems. The Crown of Queen Elizabeth is made of Platinum, and contains the famous 105 carat Koh-i-Noor diamond worth some USD\$1.6 million. This refers to value.

The crown of life, in this context, is life itself. Life, contrasted to death, is of the greatest value. Eternal life speaks of permanence, durability, glory, and being undefiled. Other crowns in Scripture are 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 Corinthians 9:25; Revelation 2:10; 3:11.

We now come to a statement in verse 10 that is hard to understand. James writes, "and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away." What does this mean? First,

humiliation (*tapeinosis*) literally means, “lowly, humble, weak, low reputation.” The same word is used to describe the poor man’s, “humble circumstances” in verse nine.

If the rich man is a believer, then the instruction from James is for the rich person to count his earthly riches as nothing, and realize that his real value and status is from his position in Christ. The reason is because soon the rich man will die and leave his accumulated wealth to someone else. Someone else will take his power. People will soon forget about his fame and prestige.

This view places the rich believer and the poor believer on equal footing. Any worthwhile value, riches, or position they have is only in Christ – not earthly treasure. The poor person can have as much faith as the rich person, and display as much faithfulness and perseverance, and have as much hope.

Some people, conversely, view the rich person as being a wealthy unbeliever - an oppressor of the poor. However, James says to the rich man to glory in his, “humiliation.” The problem I see is that a high status and wealthy nonbeliever (as measured by this world system) would reap no benefit to shift his happiness, satisfaction and joy over to being poor. He would not give away his money, titles, gold ring, and Mercedes to live in poverty, and still not gain the riches in Christ. He would end up with nothing. He would be in a worse place, because he would sacrifice the pleasures of this world and still go to hell. The first view makes more sense to me.

D. PITFALLS OF TRIALS (1:12-18).

1. In verse 13, James speaks of temptation. Up to now, he has been speaking of external temptations as testing or purification of our faith and walk with God. In this verse, however, he speaks of internal temptations as enticement to sin. God does not and cannot solicit us to do evil. Any testing He permits is to make us better, not worse.

The cause of sin is within us. We all have our weaknesses. For example, if one has trouble with alcohol, and gains victory alcoholism, then when the pressures of life get too great, that person may succumb to their old habit of numbing their troubles with alcohol. Another person may have a weakness for greed, sex, or gossip. We must use caution, because when the pressures we encounter become severe, then we may give up and give way to sin. That is why endurance and perseverance under trial is so critical.

2. The process of sin’s corrupting influence is given. Sin starts in our mind or sinful nature. It produces lust (Gr. *epithumia*), which is a strong desire of any kind. In this context, lust gives the picture of a prostitute luring a potential customer to surrender to her charms. The man, who is weakened by the pressures of life, consummates the transaction. Then it becomes sin. Sin brings death. Death does not mean to cease to exist. It simply means separation. Death is the opposite of life. James is pointing out that death is a conscious existence apart from God. Spiritual life is a conscious existence in a good relationship with God. In this case, our close fellowship with God is broken as we gain the displeasure of God. We can be confident, however, that after the discipline, God will draw us back to Himself.

3. Another principle we can take from this section is this: don’t give up in the face of pressure. Sometimes when oppression, persecution, or the trials of life become too much for us, we become discouraged, and our faith sags. We want to give up. You must remember, James writes, that everything that comes from God is good. He does not entice us to give up and sin. The pressure upon us is intended for our good to build up our faith.

Consider the example of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-18. After a great spiritual victory over the priests of Baal, Jezebel, who had the power, put out a hit on Elijah. Elijah allowed fear to dissipate his faith and ran away. He thought that God had abandoned him, and became so discouraged and depressed that he

was suicidal. He surrendered to his weakness. However, God had a plan for Israel and Elijah, and part of the plan was to help Elijah grow in spiritual strength and faith. The threat of murder by Jezebel was in the end, a good thing. God permitted it for ultimate good.

4. We learn about the character of God. James tells us there is, “no variation, or shifting shadow” with God. This means God never changes in His essence, characteristics, consciousness and will. In theology this is known as God being immutable, or unchangeable. God is perfect in every way. He is not in any growth or development process of becoming better or worse. It is impossible for God to change. He can never be more or less wise, holy, just, or merciful. His promises, plans and purposes never change. His motives are perfect and pure. (Cf. Malachi 3:6; Psalm 33:11; 102:26-28; Romans 1:23; Hebrews 1:11, 12; Isaiah 42:4; 48:12; Exodus 3:14).

We find comfort that is the same yesterday, today and forever. He will not change His mind about our salvation, or whether to show us love or mercy. His promises are solid and we can count on them. His ideas, motives, plans and principles are the same. Sin is the same as in the days of the Bible, and so is His attitude toward sin. Homosexuality, lying, cheating, greed, immorality, etc., are still sin and condemned by God. However, so is His willingness to forgive to those who come to Him.

5. James writes, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth” (verse 18). We find, then, that our salvation is caused by God’s will, not by the will of the individual. The process is by the gospel message being preached to lost sinners, and then God regenerating the spirit, which then the human will responds by faith to the Gospel message being preached.

6. When James says that they were of the, “first fruits,” he is referring to those first Christians – primarily the Christian Jews he was writing to. First fruits are the guarantee of a large harvest to follow. This prophecy is coming true. Millions have placed their faith in the gospel of Christ since James wrote these words. Throngs of people will continue to be saved until Christ comes. Our part is to continue to preach the gospel of Christ to the world.

II. THE NATURE OF THE WORD (1:19-27).

A. HINDERANCES TO THE WORD (1:19-21)

James warns us that anger will keep us from effective Christian service. It will not, “achieve the righteousness of God.” The Christian must be quick to hear and receive the Word of God, and carefully consider the temptations or other matters of life in light of the word. It is to our advantage to be careful when we speak and make decisions in the face of trials.

He does not say to never get angry, but be slow in allowing its expression. Anger is a natural emotion that comes when we think someone deliberately offended us, or did something wrong and we need to retaliate to correct the person. The problem is that the other person probably does not think the issue was the wrong thing to do. The argument then escalates. After all, God gave us two ears and only one tongue. The tongue is hidden behind our teeth, but our ears are in the open.

James instructs us to corral and put away those habits and tendencies that keep the Word of God from penetrating our minds and being worked out in our actions. He specifically mentions filthiness and wickedness. These are umbrella terms that cover a host of evils and destructive habits. In their place, we are to embrace humility. The idea is to override the ungodly tendencies we have, and humbly and quickly receive the Word of God as the truth. Then we are ready to put the truth into action.

B. APPLICATION OF THE WORD (1:19-27).

1. James teaches us what an appropriate response to the Word of God is. The first thing is to actually respond to the Bible. Some people go to church faithfully, give their tithe and don’t hang out with

sinner. They believe they are fine Christians. Those activities are fine; however, if we don't "do" the principles in the Bible, we have deceived ourselves. If we have faith, then it must be turned into action – not setting on the sidelines just studying the Bible, or constantly reaching for a "breakthrough" experience in our lives.

Verse 25 begins to reveal how to "do" the Bible. He refers to the, "perfect law, the law of liberty." He did not say the Mosaic Law. The perfect law, however, summarizes what is contained in that law. Jesus quoted from Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5. There we are told the guiding principles of how to live. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

Another way of saying the second part is to treat others as we would want to be treated in a similar situation. Shifting this to evangelism, would we hope that someone loved us enough to bring us the gospel message on how to be saved? I would. So also if we love others, we will take them the gospel.

2. James specifically tells us something that goes back to the perfect law, "bridle our tongue." What we say, and how we say it, has a big impact upon people. We should not use coarse or offensive language, but season our speech with grace that it may be encouraging, positive, and build up the other person (cf. Ephesians 4:29-32). God has given us the gift of language, and we need to use it to glorify Him and help others.

3. In verse 27 we are taught another practical application of our faith. We should help others in physical need. Genuine acts of mercy to the helpless are pleasing to God, and reflect true religion. It is treating the person in distress the same way we would want to be treated if we are in distress. Here he mentions widows and orphans. They are distressed. These are actions that help, and are not just ceremonial activities.

Another principle is to keep ourselves unstained by the world. Unstained refers to our moral character. It is to live our life by faith in God and His power to care for us, and use us to His glory. We ought not become lax in attitudes and character, or let our minds become polluted or deceived by the onslaught of pressures and anti-God propaganda from the world. If we do, then we are not walking by faith and trust upon the God who loves us, and stepping out in the direction He wants us to God. We must keep ourselves usable for His service.

III. THE CONDEMNATION OF PARTIALITY (2:1-13).

A. THE CHARGE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM (2:1-3).

There is a saying, "It doesn't matter what you know, but whom you know." That is the power of leaders. Those who have access to their ear seek favor, and many times receive it. It is tragically common in the world system. Some politicians reward those who contribute to their campaign to get elected. They show favoritism, but it is by the motive of greed. Greed for power by the politician; greed for money by the donor who has advantages he would not otherwise have.

Sometimes we want our children to marry someone of better status in society than we have. We treat with special favor those who have power, prestige, and wealth. Sometimes people boast of the fine universities their children went to, and scorn those who started out in community college – or who were unable to attend any college.

We all are equal in the eyes of God, and that should be our perspective also. Of course, we need to treat those with advantage respectfully and with Christian courtesy, but it is wrong to fawn over them. God has placed people in places of power and leadership. We honor the position God has given them.

The rich men, the powerful men, the famous men all have one thing in common with the poor men. Death. Neither will take a dollar into the next life. Death is the ultimate equalizer. The one who has faith in Christ has the advantage. To be rich in faith is the best.

B. THE COSTS OF FAVORITISM (2:4-13).

1. We learn that at the heart of favoritism is pride: we give ourselves the power to decide who is worthwhile, and who is not. That is in contrast to God. He thinks all are worthwhile. There is a powerful psychological principle here. When we begin to compare ourselves to others, or others to others, we make false distinctions. It means that we believe some people are better or worse than ourselves.

We begin to feel inferior, and our self-image plunges when we compare ourselves to a famous movie star, or a billionaire somewhere. We begin to value ourselves based on our bank account, status in society, the car we drive, education, gold rings, or some other symbol of high status. However, value only comes from being created in the image of God. He is the only one who can dispense true value. When we make distinctions of value between people, we dishonor the lower classes – the poor men and women of this world.

2. In fact, James points out rather somber failures when we fall into the trap of favoritism. First, it reveals that our value system is faulty, because it differs from God. We have removed God from His rightful place. We dishonor those poor men that God honors. At the same time, we honor the rich person who does evil in oppression to the poor – and those kinds of people God has a real problem with.

Second, we demonstrate our lack of faith, because we have adopted the world's value system. The world's value system is contrary to God's. In fact, John says if we are a friend of the world's value system, it makes us an enemy of God (1 John 2:15-17).

Third, James says in verse nine, that it is sin to show favoritism and partiality. Let me develop that theme.

3. James continues to develop the sin issue (verses 10, 11). His point is that just one sin makes us guilty. Guilt carries penalty. We might say it is not fair to place favoritism in the same category as murder or adultery. It is true that some sins are worse than others (Cf. John 19:11). However, the committing of any sin – small or great – still makes one a sinner. One sin is all it takes to end up in hell. As to which sins are greater, we must leave that decision up to God.

To illustrate this principle, let's consider a thief. If someone robs a bank of \$1,000, and another person robs a bank of \$10,000, which one is a thief? Both are thieves. Both are lawbreakers.

4. James has been very blunt up to this point, but he (thankfully) inserts some mercy. He says we are to act like we are to be judged by the law of liberty (Cf. 1:25; 2:8). Within that law is mercy. Mercy is greater than judgment.

We are all guilty sinners. Even after we believe on Christ for our salvation and are born again, we still sin. We have to live in this corrupt world that hates our Christ – and us. We have to make a living, and work in jobs we don't like. We have dealings with sinners – and corrupt people. We have our weaknesses, and sometimes give way to those temptations. We sin out of our weaknesses, ignorance, and deliberate acts.

We desperately need the mercy and grace of God. He still abundantly gives us grace. His mercy trumps judgment (Cf. Romans 5:20, 21). The application to us is twofold. First, we must show mercy to others. Second, God shows mercy to us.

IV. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORKS AND FAITH (2:14-26).

A. THE CONTROVERSY (2:14-20).

1. This is a most controversial section of James' epistle. What is the relationship between faith and works? James does not mean we are saved by good works. That would go contrary to the rest of the Bible, which teaches we are saved by faith alone. Works, however, are important. They are the fulfillment, natural result, or outworking of our faith. The Christian has been born again by the Spirit of God (1 Peter 1:3; John 3:3-6ff.). Christians possess the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-11), and have become, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). We were saved to produce good works – this is God's design and purpose for us (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14).

With all that has happened to us, the natural outworking of our faith is good works. It is like an apple tree. Its design and purpose is to produce apples – not oranges or pears. If a farmer says, "Look at my apple tree, and it has pears hanging from the branches," we would think something is drastically wrong with the farmer.

It is the same with true faith: it automatically produces good works. However, it is critical to keep the sequence correct. Good works do not save us, nor do they produce faith. We must keep first things first – and that is what James does.

2. Another theological issue is illustrated by James. He largely has been teaching about sins of commission – that is, things we actively do outwardly. In his illustration of verses 15-17, he introduces another kind of sin – sins of omission. These are things we don't do, but are actually sins. His illustration is that if we have it in our means to help someone in desperate need, and don't, then that is a sin of omission.

Let me illustrate it in a more dramatic way. Let's say there is a river flooding. There is a man and children floating on the churning rapids headed toward a waterfall. If they plunge over, it will mean certain death. To complete the scene, let's say you have a rope in your hands to toss to them. They would be able to grab the rope and you could pull them to safety on the bank. If you did not toss them the rope, but just let them drift to their death that would be a sin of omission.

3. Keep things in perspective. I consider two issues. Our Christian walk has its ups and downs. We cannot all the time be fully dedicated Christians. Sometimes our faith is powerful and strong; other times it is dry and weak. Sometimes God puts us in the midst of revival with tremendous workings of the Holy Spirit using us. Other times God puts us into the wilderness to prepare us for something else. Even Jesus spent time in the wilderness where He was tested by Satan. Elijah who fled from Jezebel was left in the wilderness. Consider Job who lost all his family and friends, his money, and his marriage was filled with bitterness (Cf. Job 2:8-10; 19:17; 31:9-11).

The second issue is when to help people. For those who have plenty, they must be wise in helping people. In some poor developing countries, people are lulled into a "dependency attitude." They look at the wealthy nations, and believe the wealthy should support the poor – without any effort on their part. They won't work. They just sit wait for the aid money or remittances to come from overseas.

Perhaps this principle will help. Help people help themselves. For example, if you give a hungry man a fish a day, then you will have to continue giving him fish. If, however, you teach the man to fish, he can catch his own fish.

If people are taking advantage of you, then it is not a wise thing to keep letting them fleece you. We should not teach people to be lazy. It will keep you from helping people who really need help – and for those individuals, we need to help.

Paul wrote, “if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-13).

4. A final thought on this section is belief in God (verse 19). Many believe there is a God – maybe they believe the God of the Bible truly exists. However, that does not save them. It is belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves. People will normally talk about God, but when the conversation shifts to sin and salvation only through Jesus Christ – the conversation ends.

James also tells us that demons exist. They are real. They also tremble in fear of the judgment that awaits them. They also believe the truth of salvation through faith in Christ alone, but salvation is not available to them. That salvation must be personally appropriated by the individual. How privileged that we people are granted salvation. That is our ultimate hope and delight, that our name is written down in heaven, and we are saved.

B. THE ILLUSTRATIONS (2:21-26)

James illustrates his case that true faith will produce good works. Good works are evidence of, or completes true faith. Abraham is one illustration. Abraham believed God for his salvation (verse 23). However, without the faith he would not have been willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. With true faith, he was willing to do what God had commanded.

The other illustration was of Rahab the prostitute. She believed God, and risked her very life to send the Israeli spies on a safe route. Her faith put her in the famous “faith hall of fame” in Hebrews chapter 11. Her faith was demonstrated by action.

V. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TONGUE (3:1-12).

A. CONTROL OF THE TONGUE (3:1-4).

1. James issues another caution. Many times Christians want to become teachers. It is easy to understand, because teachers gain much attention and respect from their students. However, when handling the Word of God, one must be very careful. If the teacher teaches the wrong doctrine, then both he and his students will go astray.

That is why preachers and teachers must put in the study time to clearly understand what they are teaching or preaching. At the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), when we all will be evaluated, teachers will undergo a stricter scrutiny because they have a great responsibility.

Teachers must make sure they have the gift of teaching, then develop the skills, and get the knowledge to successfully communicate to the students.

2. In spite of James rather hard tone, he also includes himself in saying no one is perfect. We all have a sin nature, and are capable of sin. We all meet failure sometime in our life. That is the human condition. We all make mistakes, but remember that mistakes are things we learn and grow from.

3. James indicates that by watching what we say, we can be the “perfect” man. He does not mean we can become perfect and sinless. The word (*teleios*) literally means having reached the end, or completion of a process or task. For example, it refers to physical development, as a child develops into an adolescent, then a young person, and eventually becomes a mature adult. Our brains, for another example, are not fully developed until the early 20’s. That is why teenagers are sometimes impulsive and forget to consider the consequences of their actions as do mature adults.

In this case, perfect has an ethical and wisdom meaning. It refers to the person who over time with practice has gained knowledge, experience, and is mature in their thinking, working, teaching, and relating to others.

B. THE POWER OF THE TONGUE ILLUSTRATED (3:5-12).

1. We are cautioned to control our speech, because of the great influence of what we say. Our words can encourage others, teach other, but it can also split churches, discourage people – and gossip in a church is very dangerous and destructive thing.

Two Illustrations show the influence of our words. The small bit that fits in the mouth of a horse guides the huge, powerful animal. Without the bit, the horse can go where they want; there is no control over them. The second example concerns huge ships. The mammoth container ships plow through the sea from one continent to another, carrying tons of freight worth millions of dollars. The pilot steers the giant vessels with a small steering wheel that turns the rudder. In turn, the great ships respond and steam to the harbor of destination.

Words have power, authority, and clout. That is why in a coup, the first things rebels wish to capture is the media. If they can control the flow of words to the population, they have a better chance of overthrowing the government. Propaganda is simply the communication thorough words what those in power want the people to believe. Truth, however, is what the Christian has, and the words of truth guide an individual, church, or nation. The words of truth are the Bible.

2. James turns the direction of his teaching toward the heart. Words have a way of revealing the contents of our heart and intentions. What a person talks about reflects their motives, commitment, and indicates the love of their hearts.

Verse 10, to illustrate, says, “from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing.” In other words, what is in our hearts is not completely hidden, because it gushes out our mouth in the form of words. He is talking about Christians (v. 9). We are so complex.

The intents of our heart (revealed by our words) can cause great damage, like a spark can set a whole forest on fire. What we say determines the course of our life, or the nation or world (v. 6). This destructive power comes from hell, which gives us an idea of how Satan works. When we unleash the words of our sin nature, out comes, “restless evil and...deadly poison.”

The word hell is translated from “*gehenna*.” This refers to the final lake of fire that Satan, his demons, and the unsaved will have their eternal abode (cf. Revelation 20:10, 14, 14; Matthew 25:46). Hades is the other word used for hell, but that refers to the temporary holding prison for the unsaved awaiting the final judgment at the Great White Throne. Satan and his demons may roam over the earth to do their destruction (Cf. Job 1:7; 2:7).

3. There is a profound contradiction we Christian have. We have the love of Christ within us (Romans 5:5). We are told that the distinctive characteristic of Christians is that we are to love one another, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Jesus

even commands us to love one another (John 15:12, 17). This is the kind of love that seeks the best for the other person.

Then we come to that contradiction, “With it (our words) we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing” (3:9, 10).

This is astonishing behavior. We sing praises and worship to Jesus, and shout out our love and devotion to Him, but then turn around and curse our fellow Christians. How can that be? We proclaim our obedience to Him, yet we curse the very people we are to love! Here is a staggering contradiction: when we curse other Christians, remember they are created in the image of God. We are cursing the image of God and at the same time proclaim our dedication toward Him.

4. Let’s talk some theology at this place. The matter is what the image of God is. I repeat here what is found in my work entitled Christian Foundations.

“We are created in the “image of God” (Genesis 1:26; Colossians 3:10; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9; Ephesians 4:24). We actually correspond to the divine original. To illustrate, the government in each country has “official” rubber stamps with which clerks stamp approved documents. They put ink on the stamp and press it on the paper, leaving an imprint, or image, of the stamp on the paper. In the same way, mankind is the imprint, or image of God. We are made in His likeness; we are the image of God.

Like God we have the dimension of the soul: emotion, intellect, will, personality, and conscience. We have a moral dimension: true knowledge and righteousness (Colossians 3:9, 10). Like God we have a spiritual dimension (John 4:24; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). We have an immortal dimension: our existence extends to eternity (Revelation 20:10; 21:8; 22:5). Finally, we have a body that will someday be glorified after the manner of Christ (Colossians 1:15; 2:9; Philippians 2:6; 3:21; Genesis 1:26).”

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they did not lose the image of God; it is that our image became scarred or marred. We were infected by the disease called sin. For example, when we get sick, say from malaria or the flu virus, it does not change who we are. It just debilitates us in such a way that we cannot operate as when we are well.

VI. THE NATURE OF TRUE WISDOM (3:13-18).

A. TRUE WISDOM (3:13, 17, 18).

James contrasts true wisdom with false wisdom, or knowledge that benefits no one but Satan’s ends. Those wise ones have behavior in conformance with the intents of God, and are gentle when making decisions or instructing. He skips down to verse 17 to pick up the theme of godly wisdom. It is wisdom that comes from above, that is, heaven and the counsels of God. Peace is a repeated theme. Wisdom is marked by purity, reasonable, merciful, and genuine without hypocrisy. The result is right living.

B. FALSE WISDOM (3:14, 15, 16).

The list that describes wrong wisdom includes bitterness, arrogance, selfish ambition, jealousy, disorder and evilness. Selfish ambition is repeated twice. This is common in churches, or in everyday life. People want to advance in their career, and that is fine. However, when one adds selfishness to the mix, ambition becomes mired in jealousy, bitterness, arrogance, and actions that disturb the piece.

Too often a young youth pastor, or assistant pastor, wants the job of pastor. The motive is not to better the church, but selfish arrogance. Trouble then comes to the church as the youth pastor (or deacon or teacher or administrator) wants the attention and authority for himself – and not for the cause of Christ or the welfare of God’s people in the congregation. They will talk evil of the pastor, try to convince

people how bad the pastor is, and how they would do things better. Soon they have convinced enough people to follow them, and they try to take over the pastor's job. Conflict, not peace, is the result.

Another factor is the contrast of sources of the different kinds of wisdom. The false wisdom is earthly, natural, and get this: demonic! Satan, his eventual home, and his players are mentioned twice in this chapter. What comes from Satan and hell is evil. Many people today do not believe there is any such thing as evil. Clearly, there is.

VII. THE DANGER OF WORLDLINESS (4:1-17).

A. THE SOURCE OF WORLDLINESS (4:1, 2).

1. Worldliness means living according to the value system of those living life on earth. It is to live life as though God did not exist, or if He does, He is not paying attention to or cares about what happens on earth. By the world, I mean that organized and energized arrangement of this earth that is directed and controlled by Satan. It is contrary to the will of God, and fact is an enemy of God.

By this earthly system, I mean things like the news and entertainment media, the governments, commerce, secular education, the world of science, and the barons of wealth live by a different set of standards, values, beliefs, and ethics than God. Their world view does not include God. I must qualify this statement by saying there are many godly people who live and work in these institutions, but as a whole, the world ignores or even hates the God of the Bible – Jesus Christ.

Christians also have the temptation to become wrapped up in the world's system, so that in practical life we live as though there is no God. We are in the world, but not of the world. Our citizenship is in Heaven, and we are ambassadors for Christ to this world (Philippians 3:20; 2 Corinthians 5:20). We belong to a different order of reality. We have been delivered from the, "domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

2. James explains the source of problems and conflict. They come, in part, from the trying to satisfy the lust of pleasure that is in conflict with God. Pleasure is a major value of the world. Pleasure is fine when it comes from God, but in the world system, pleasure does not come from God. We hear so often that the chief end of man is to seek pleasure with drugs, sex, money, fame, power, etc. It comes in the statements like, "If it makes you happy, then it is fine. Go ahead and do it." If this were true, then a serial murderer is doing right, because killing makes him happy.

It may be surprising to know that God wants to give us pleasure. The Westminster Shorter Catechism explains it in the first two instructions. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever... The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him."

Unfortunately, people look for happiness in all the wrong places. We can enjoy the good gifts and graces God bestows upon us. The greatest source of our happiness, however, is to know that our name is written down in heaven (Luke 10:20).

James mentions the result of seeking pleasure apart from God: quarrels, conflicts, murder, envy, fighting. Someone has said that the three major motives for murder are sex, revenge, and money. God says that we are not content with the toys of the world, because we turn our back on God, and don't ask Him.

B. THE RESULT OF WORLDLINESS (4:3-6).

1. The world is given greater emphasis by James. He says that when worldly people pray, God does not grant them what they ask, because their motives are wrong. They ask so as to promote themselves by

the standards and values of the world. However, in reality, they are asking God to promote His enemies agenda. We cannot align ourselves as friends of the world, and please God. They are antagonists against each other. In fact, we line up ourselves in the battle lines against God. Friendship with the world makes us an enemy of God.

He uses the analogy of an adulterous person. The main idea is faithfulness. We cannot be faithful to God if we faithfully advance the agenda of the world – which is against God.

2. The dominate values of the world are to become rich, gain power, or become famous – and at any cost. These goals stir up the negative drives mentioned, such as murder, envy, wrongful pleasure seeking, selfishness, arrogance, jealousy, and evil.

At this point, I must make a qualification. If God grants us money, high status, power, and/or fame, then we need to use it correctly. We can enjoy the benefits it brings in this world. However, whatever niche in society God gives us, Paul teaches of the rich to, “do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” (1 Timothy 6:17-19; cf. Luke 16:13).

Our main job is to glorify God by advancing the agenda of Jesus Christ using all the resources applied to all the opportunities He has placed in our hands. God’s agenda is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Peter states, “And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:42, 43).

The other two great commands which govern our life in this world are what James calls the “perfect, royal law of liberty” (James 1:25; 2:8; cf. Luke 10:27, 28). God is the main priority in life, and seeking the welfare of humanity is the second priority. It is not to selfishly seek and jealously strive and ardently grasp for the temporary and illusive rewards this world offers (cf. 1 Timothy 6:6-12). The best is to set our mind on the eternal places and things of Christ.

I would submit that this teaching by James calls into question the so called doctrine of “prosperity teaching” proposed by some sectors of Christianity.

3. Another great teaching James brings is that the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in us. The text is difficult to translate. One way to explain this idea (4:5) is that God has made or placed the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Furthermore, He “jealously desires, yearns, or longs” for us as do the worldly people jealousy desires, yearns, or longs for the pleasures, status, money, and rewards offered by this world system.

The Expositor’s Greek Testament accepts the Revised Version translation the difficult phrase this way, “The (Holy) Spirit which he (God) made to dwell in us yearneth for us even unto jealousy envy.” It goes on to explain, “The words witness to the truth that the third Person of the Holy Trinity abides in our hearts striving to acquire the same love for Him on our part which He bears for us. It is a most striking passage which tells of the love of the Holy Spirit. It is a most striking passage which tells of the love of the Holy Spirit, as (in one sense) distinct from that of the Father or the Son” (cf. Romans 8:26-28; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

4. Verse six begins the transition to the next cluster of verses, and indicates what God likes and dislikes in His creatures. God opposes the proud people. Pride is the foul garden from which envy and jealousy sprouts and grows. It is the sin that brought down Satan (cf. Isaiah 14:13, 14ff.; Ezekiel 28:11-19). Prides breeds envy, jealousy, deceit and wickedness.

The picture of verse six is that of a military engagement. God opposes the proud one. Opposes comes from *antitassetai*, which is a military term referring to an army lined up in position to battle against the enemy. Conversely, God gives grace, or increasing unmerited favor toward the humble. Humility, then, is an effective weapon against the war Satan wages against us.

As a theological note on the Trinity, Verse five refers to the Holy Spirit who dwells within the believer, and verse six states that God opposes the proud. Two members of the Trinity, then, are linked together in these two verses. The divinity of the Holy Spirit is identified.

If being humble is how we defend ourselves against the devil's onslaught against us, then we need to explore what humility is.

The word group in question is, "*tapeinos*." Its basic sense, or core meaning, is simply "low." The word is used in both a negative and positive way. The negative is what is normally thought of as a lowly person, self-belittling, insignificant, poor, weak, inferior, servile, or petty. It can picture a person as a flatterer, submissive, or as an oppressed person. This is normally how the world looks at humility. It is the attitude that hinders one from rising to a high and free disposition.

The word can be used to describe depression of the mind. Depressed people do become weak and defeated. They feel deserted, helpless, deprived, and lack confidence and hope.

On the other hand, humble is used in a positive sense. It can refer to modest or obedient as applied to a soldier. Humility was considered good when related to the gods of Greece. It carries the meaning that people should adjust themselves to the gods.

In secular Greece, the idea of humility was negative. The Greeks exalted freedom and despised subjection. In the extreme, it would be the narcissistic person who is full of themselves, and act as they are the center of the universe. In the Bible, in contrast, humility sets itself under God and exalts obedient service to Him. The secular mind is opposed to what the Bible means by humility.

Christ does not require outward acts of self-abasement, but a heart attitude of total trust in God that expects everything from the grace of God and nothing from self. It is the opposite of selfishness. It is to put Christ on the throne of our life, and not our own ego and selfish interests. Humility is at the center of Christian life as we live for and trust in God, and gladly ready ourselves for service to others.

Jesus is our model. He described Himself as meek and lowly, which meant He freely, from the heart, sincerely dedicated Himself to obedience toward God, and service to others (Cf. Matthew 11:20; 20:28; Luke 22:27). Humility is to have genuine concern for the welfare of others. Further, humility is the opposite of self-assertion, and forms the base for unity (cf. Philippians 2:1-8). The result of His humble obedience meant that God, "highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

C. THE REMOVAL OF WORLDLINESS (4:7-10).

Pride, jealousy, envy, conflict are not the advantage of the Christian. James now tells us how gain humility. The ten action verbs in these few verses point to an urgent need to abandon worldliness and embrace godliness. Remember, godliness is to live like there is a God; worldliness is to live like there is no God.

In this section there are three players involved: God, the believer, and Satan. The struggle is Satan appealing to our fleshly desires to ignore God, and the believer submitting in obedience to God. When

we do, God will exalt us. Satan's lie is to get us to believe that we should exalt ourselves. Our choice is to surrender to self-will, or God's will.

1. Submit and resist are the first moves. Submit is two words put together: *hupo* (under), and *tasso* (to arrange). It has a military meaning. Just as soldiers arrange themselves under their captain in battle formation, Christians are to arrange themselves under God in battle formation.

Resist also is two words joined together: *anti* (against) and *histemi* (to cause to stand). This adds to the battlefield picture. We are to dig in and stand against Satan. The promise is that Satan will flee from us. Two other sets of Scripture add to the correct way to resist Satan (1 Peter 5:6-10; Ephesians 6:10-20).

The weapons that Satan uses are those temptations of pride and envy, and the other issues James has listed. The weapons of resistance for the believer are faith, prayers, humility, and submission to God, plus the heavenly wisdom we gain from the Bible.

It is important to know that we have in our ability to resist Satan that he may flee. Our power, however, comes from having the Holy Spirit indwelling us, and the fact that God will put an end to Satan's maneuvers against the believer.

2. We are to draw near to God, and then He will draw near to us. James is now giving us more detail as how to put Satan to flight. Drawing near involves to purify our faith (4:8). The next phrase refers to the double minded he warned about in chapter one. Miserable, mourn, weep and gloom refers to contriteness of spirit as we confess to God our sins, and seek His forgiveness and cleanliness (1 John 1:9).

3. Humbleness is yet again mentioned in verse (10). We meet Satan's arrow of pride with humility. James teaches an amazing truth in this section. We learn that God knows what is going on in our lives. The Christian life is not following a stale list of rules and religious ceremonies. We live our lives in the presence of God, who will draw near to us in a very personal way. Further, we have the Holy Spirit who lives within us.

We have the picture of an active, personal God who is fully aware of our problems, troubles, temptations, and the opposition of Satan and his world system. Our job is not to chase after and resist Satan. Our strategy is to, by faith, humbly bow in submission and service before the presence of a living, caring God. He desires our welfare, friendship, service, and worship.

D. THE FEATURES OF GODLINESS (4:11-17).

James explains several features of what a godly life looks like in practical life.

1. The godly life does not condemn or judge others. It is common among Christians to point out the faults of other people. We want them to act, believe, and do what we think is right. We have our idea of how to act, feel, and act. Our list of rules, however, is very different than other people. This is true of siblings who grew up in the same house, went to the same school and church, and lived in the same community. We all have our unique way of looking at things.

When we set ourselves up and the judges of other people's thinking, feeling, and lifestyle, we become the Judge. James says we take over God's role. He is the Judge. We do not know how God is working in the other person's life. We are to grow in spiritual maturity, but God has a personal plan for every believer, and He will accomplish His plan in our lives in His own way and timing. We don't know the troubles, aspirations, weaknesses, and temptations in other people's life. God does.

2. The godly views this life from the perspective of eternity, and with God's values. The godly realizes that their life is short, and may be over today. We do not know what tomorrow holds. It is good to have goals and dreams in mind, but we are reminded that they must be God's goals for our life. It is God who gives success or failure. It is His choice to determine who should have wealth, power, influence and status. He also decides who is to be poor and of low status in this world. He always has our welfare in mind.

James again condemns boasting and arrogance. He calls it evil. Some of the readers were engaged in making money. They bragged about how they could make a great profit. But those are the goals of this world, not God's world. James was targeting the traveling traders who carried out a lucrative trade throughout the world.

James did not condemn the making of money, but of living life as if God did not exist or was not involved in the lives of people here on this earth. They were not taking God and eternal things seriously. They needed to place God in the midst of their trade. They were self-centered rather than God centered.

3. The final issue James tackles is the sins of omission (verse 17). When we know the right thing to do, and refuse to do it, then that is a sin of omission. When we live to advance the agenda of the world system that Satan manages, then it is sin. Remember, we are to humbly live for God in trust and obedience to Him. We are to live godly lives, not worldly lives. Those who live godly and those who live worldly embrace two different worldviews, value systems, and agendas. The godly live with eternal delights in sight as declared by God. The worldly live only for the advantages they can gain in this life and world. We cannot serve both at the same time.

VIII. THE NEED FOR PATIENCE (5:1-12).

A. THE OPPRESSION BY THE RICH (5:1-6).

This section of James can be broken down into two subsets. The first six verses are very Jewish in nature, and verses 7-12 have more of a Christian focus or flavor. The first section imports the Messianic views of the Jews, and it was the Jewish people who James was addressing.

1. Two phrases point to the Messianic belief: the "last days" of verse 3, and the "day of slaughter" of verse five. The teachings of the Old Testament spoke of a coming Messiah who would rule the world through the nation of Israel. They conceived of the Messiah as more of a political leader. This time and era in this world's history is referred to as the "Messianic Kingdom or era." James refers to this time in verse three.

The Messiah, identified as Jesus Christ, will destroy the world powers ruled over by Satan. Messiah will bring judgment to the wicked. In the program, Messiah will deliver the nation of Israel, establish her in righteousness, and restore her as a nation. The Messiah will then rule the world in righteousness, and the nations of the world will yield and submit to His authority.

There are four major events that will happen at this time, as pictured by the Old Testament prophets. 1. The signs of the approaching Messianic era. 2. The actual appearance and rule of the Messiah. 3. The judgment of the wicked. 4. The blessedness of the righteous.

The Apostle, John, speaks of this person, "He found first his own brother, Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Christ)" (John 1:41; cf. 4:25; Luke 1:31-33; Jeremiah 23:3-8; 33:15, 16; Zechariah 3:8; 6:12, 13; Isaiah 4:2; 42:1; 52:13; Ezekiel 34:23, 24).

James uses abundant Old Testament imagery and language pointing to this world crisis.

2. The application to us today regards the issues of greed, gaining riches at the expense of the poor, the fraud of withholding wages from the poor workers in order to hoard more wealth. This particular practice placed the workers in a very difficult place. The workers were paid by the day. If they did not get their wage, they and their families had nothing to support themselves. It was fraud on the part of the wealthy.

The wealthy needed to give generously to the poor. Their hoarded luxury was at the expense of the defrauded poor. Another pointed remark by James is the fallacy in the thinking of the wealthy. They believed that the poor had no defender since they had not money to pay for a lawyer. James reminds them that God is the protector of the poor. Furthermore, it was brought to their attention that their wealth would not be of benefit at the judgment of Christ. There is a special place in God's heart for the poor.

3. The idea of wealth is not condemned by James. What is wrong is the greedy, fraudulently accumulation and hoarding of wealth and using their status and resources for the persecution of the poor to take their money to be selfishly used. They were placing their trust in money, and ignoring God. In a word, corruption is the sin.

4. There are two basic faulty attitudes these selfish wealthy people had. First, they did not include the eternal or God into their lifestyle. They were myopic. They thought this world was all that mattered. They ignored the fact that life is just a vapor, but eternity is forever.

The second fallacy they held was that they thought their chief end for existence was in this world. They would go to any end to accumulate more of the luxuries of this world. They thought their value as human beings was measured by the things they could grasp and accumulate. Their goal was to impress others around them with their wealth, homes, gold, and all the status symbols of their culture. Pride was mixed with greed, and disdain of the poor.

They failed to realize that everything they accumulated in this life would be of no advantage in the next life. All their prestige, high status, and impressive wealth would evaporate when they died. Their persecution of the poor, however, would follow them into the next life.

Generosity is a character quality that God rewards and highly values. Paul spoke to this when collecting funds to help the poor in Jerusalem. In speaking, for example, of the poverty stricken churches in Macedonia he wrote, "that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:2). Chapters eight and nine of 2 Corinthians teach much about our attitude of wealth and generosity.

Even Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). In another incident Paul told how Peter, James and John had given him and Barnabas the commission to evangelize the gentiles. Paul adds this, "They only asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I also was eager to do" (Galatians 2:10).

Unfortunately, the wealthy Jews James was addressing did not heed the Old Testament admonitions or Christian teaching. If God has given us wealth, then we must use it to help those less fortunate around us.

B. THE PATIENCE OF THE PERSECUTED (5:7-12).

James now switches to the more Christian orientation regarding persecution.

1. The declaration to be patient is found in verses seven and eight. The motivation is that Christ will be here soon, and He will take care of the oppressors (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10). It is our tendency to want to throw off the yoke of those corrupt people who oppress the poor. We want to get even.

However, sometimes (maybe most of the time) the oppressed are helpless against the power and influence of the oppressors. God is a just God. He will not let injustice go unpunished.

2. A blessed fact revealed by James is the imminent return of Jesus Christ to this earth. He references the, “coming of the Lord...the coming of the Lord is at hand...the Judge is standing right at the door” (5:7-9). Christ is coming as the Judge. His first coming was in the role of Savior, to assume the penalty of sin for all those who believe upon Him as their Savior. James probably thought Christ might come in his lifetime. Christ, however, has not come for some 2,000 years.

Nevertheless, based on James words, there nothing yet that needs to happen in prophetic history before His return to this earth to set up His Messianic Kingdom. Christ could come before I finish this sentence. He didn't, but He could have.

We must be aware of Christ's imminent return. Our lives must reflect this truth. As we look at this troubled world, we feel helpless. We can, however align our mental perspective with Scripture. This world cannot fix itself. No human institution can fix or solve the problems we face. The United States or the United Nations cannot fix the world. We are confronted with economic woes, the horror of terrorist threats, proliferation of wars, abuses of humanity, disease, famine, and plagues, corrupt governments, increasing crime, the intensification of wickedness and evil, and the list expands on.

It is not surprising that this world is violent. The violent one, Satan, rules it, and he hates people. We humans are also inflicted with the disease called sin. The human race cannot fix itself. However, the promise is that Christ will come and fix the world. He will rule in righteousness and peace. The uproar of the wicked will cease. We must be patient. God is right on schedule. He has a perfect plan for history – including your history. He will come and fix things when He is ready. Complaining will not help.

3. James fleshes out his declaration to be patient with several illustrations. He uses the farmer waiting for his crops to come up. He also references the Old Testament prophets and Job. He tells us to, “strengthen your hearts” (v. 8). One way to accomplish this is to look at the examples of the Old Testament people, and see how God dealt with them in compassion and mercy while they endured under suffering.

In Job's case, James did not extol his patience (*makrothymia*), because Job was very impatient. The quality James stressed was steadfastness, endurance, or perseverance (*hypomonen*) in his faith.

4. The last teaching of this section deals with oaths. This verse seems not to be connected in context with what goes before or after it. A parallel portion of Scripture is in Matthew 5:33-37). An oath (*horkos*) literally means a fence, boundary, border or an enclosure that restrains a person. An oath, then, is a fervent petition to some deity or esteemed person or thing as a witness to a person's resolve to speak the truth or keep a promise. It would be catastrophic to lie in the presence of a superior person or thing. Perjury is very serious.

Some believe that we are not to give an oath to God. Courts in the United States require witnesses to place their hands on the Bible and swear under oath to tell the truth – so help me God. To give false testimony while under oath is a serious crime. To those who object giving an oath may simple state, “I affirm” that the testimony is true.

Giving oaths is a very serious exercise. Perjury was condemned in the Old Testament in the Mosaic Law (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12; Deuteronomy 19:16-19). The phraseology was like the example by King Saul, “For as the Lord Lives” (1 Samuel 14:39). In Matthew, Jesus seems to be teaching that we

should tell the truth and keep our word. It is a call for honesty and trustworthiness. If we promise something, then we should keep our word.

Other scholars take this verse as speaking out against careless and frivolous use of oaths. This was a common among the Pharisees who were infamous for this custom. They would swear by an oath on many things. To get out of the restriction or obligation of the oath, they would swear by anything other than God. They would release themselves from the oath by saying they had not sworn by God, but by heaven, earth, or some other supposedly superior force. In that case, their obligation was nullified in their mind.

Pagan religions also practiced swearing by various objects, such as an idol, that what the person was saying was truthful. This understanding of the oath is consistent with verse 12, because giving an oath with God as a witness is not mentioned.

This interpretation, then, could connect verse 12 back to the previous verses. The intent would be that while being under trials, we impatiently rashly swear against those who torment us. In is in contrast to patience and endurance.

In the final analysis, it is the general consensus among many scholars that the injunction by James does not refer to the formal act of swearing an oath before God in such things as a court of law, swearing allegiance to an official office, or in becoming a citizen of a country.

IV. THE POWER OF PRAYER (5:13-20).

A. PRAYER DEFINED (5:13-18).

1. The first step in understanding prayer is to define what the Bible means by prayer in this context. Three words are used in this section describing prayer: *proseuchomai*, *euche*, and *deesis*. I take the first one. *Proseuchomai* is made up of two words. *Pros* is a preposition of direction. It means to or toward a destination. It can mean to be beside something or someone.

The second part of the word is *euchomai*, which means to wish or want something. Putting the two together, they mean at the root, to express a wish toward something. In this context, the destination of the wish is God. It is to ask humbly and earnestly of, or to worship to God.

The second word is *euche*. It means a wish expressed as a petition to God. To petition means a respectful and humble request made to a superior for something desired.

The third word is *deesis*. It is defined as a petition, to plead or make a humble request to someone.

Consequently, prayer is to humbly, respectfully, and earnestly plead or request of God our sincere wishes and desires. We can add to this definition the words praise, faith, thanksgiving, and to ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Faith means to recognize and commit ourselves and requests to the faithfulness of God.

To ask in the name of Jesus Christ is to acknowledge that actual healing is accomplished by Jesus, and that humans are only the instruments used by God. This is implied in prayer. People humbly pray in faith (the instruments), but place their requests before God, knowing only He can heal.

B. ISSUE OF SICKNESS (5:13-15).

1. Now we need to break down the issue of sickness. What is James referring to? Again, we have three words in this context to define: *kakopatheo*, *astheneo*, and *kamno*.

The text reads beginning with verse 13, “Is anyone among you suffering? (*kakopattheo*)...Is anyone among you sick? (*astheneo*)...and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, (*kamno*).”

Kakopattheo comes from *Kakos* (bad, evil, harm), and *pathos* (i.e. suffering, passion). Put them together and we come up with the meaning to undergo hardship or suffering, be afflicted, endure afflictions, or suffer evil and trouble. James uses the word back in verse 10, “as an example, brethren, of suffering (*kakopattheo*).”

The next word is *astheneo*, which means to be weak, feeble, sick, or without strength. Literally, it means to be without strength. The third word of our investigation is *Kamno*, which means to be weary.

2. OK. We now have the spade work done, but what does it all mean? Verse 13 could read, “Is anyone among your suffering? (i.e. with mental worry, anxiety, depression, or distress, because of the harsh treatment of the oppressors).” Constant trouble wears on our mind. We become discouraged, and our hope sags and withers. When we lose hope, we give up in despair.

Verse 14 could read, “Is anyone among you sick? (with some bodily ailment).” There is a close connection between the mind and body. Sickness of the mind radiates out to sickness of the body. Depressed or anxious thoughts bring headaches, high blood pressure, and physical sickness.

The verb “Let him pray,” instruct us, “Let him keep on praying.” Don’t stop.

C. MEANING OF ANNOINTING OF OIL (5:14).

1. The anointing of oil poses another problem. Some take it to mean placing a dab of olive oil on the forehead as a symbol that the Holy Spirit is working in the life of the stricken person. Others take it to mean to take the medicine and treatment the doctors have prescribed in addition to the prayer of faith.

The Jews of that day were keen and accurate observers and practitioners in the art of healing and health. Medical science was well developed in Egypt where virtually every disease had a physician – a specialist we call them today. The Hebrews had many medicines, medical men and even could operate on cataracts.

Sometimes people trusted too much on the physicians as in the case of Asa, who was rebuked for misplaced trust (2 Chronicles 16:12). Oil and wine were used for both internal and external use (Luke 10:34; 1 Timothy 5:23). Among the regular Temple officials were medical men. The Rabbis ordained that every town have a physician and surgeon. The recommended treatments of the Rabbis were generally hygienic, medicinal, sympathetic, or even magical. They used cold-water compresses baths, and special diets. Goats milk and barley porridge were prescribed by all diseases whose symptoms were wasting, or being gradually reduced in the fullness and strength of the body.

The word “anoint” (*aleipho*) basically means to outwardly rub or pour over something or someone. It was used to describe a medical procedure, while the word “*chiro*” is more often used in a sacred, symbolic use. *Aleipho* is used in James 5:14. The rubbing of oil after a bath brings refreshment and comfort to the person, and was a common medical procedure (Matthew 6:17; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34). The context in James indicated the medicinal use of oil, because the point of the procedure was to help in the healing of the person as per common medical practice of the day.

2. The point of the section is that when one is sick, they should pray, take their medicine and trust God for the outcome He desires. Sin also causes stress and sickness. Consequently, the spiritual function of healing is helping the sick person deal with troubles in their life caused by sin. Mutual confession and restoration of relationships can cause healing of mind, soul, and body. Genuine, mutual concern for

each other assists in melting away discouragement and disappointment. The connection between sin and sickness can be found in Isaiah 33:24; Matthew 9:2-5; John 4:14.

D. CONFESSION OF SINS (5:16).

1. Sins against God need to be confessed to God only. Sins against others need to be resolved with those sinned against, reconciliation and forgiveness brings reprieve. The confession of sin brings relief to our body, psychology, and spiritual lives.

Confession is made when 1. Some wrong is done to fellow man or woman; 2. When we have a troubled conscience we request counsel of a godly minister or friend how to obtain God's forgiveness, direction, and strength to resolve a problem or turn from a sin or need prayer on our behalf; 3. When we commit a public sin and give a public confession before the church as an act of penitence.

One caution is that we should not confess wrongs done to another if the confession will bring greater harm to the person sinned against. An example, say a couple has gone through a very bitter divorce. Wrongs were committed on both sides. One person has remarried someone, however, and gone on with their life. It would be wrong for the other person to approach and confess old sins committed against the remarried party. It would simply stir up more trouble.

Some sins mentioned by James are lack of faith, strife, and bitterness, showing prejudice against the poor, not living out our faith by helping others, pride, selfishness, wrong motives in prayer and the like.

A final note is that it is not God's will that all people will always be healed in body. For example, Paul asked to be healed, but was denied (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

E. THE EXAMPLE OF PRAYER (5:17, 18).

Elijah is given as an example of prayer. James declares that a righteous man effectively praying can bring about great results. Elijah was not perfect, but his heart was turned toward God. At times his faith fainted in the fire of opposition. He was a man of similar feelings, discouragements, and sufferings just like the readers of James epistle – and that applies to us today.

An earnest, intense, heartfelt, faith filled, persistent petition placed before God is powerful. Halfhearted, faithless prayers asked with selfish motives lack power.

F. CONCLUDING ENCOURAGEMENT (5:20).

Finally, James exhorts us to ministry toward others. When Christians wander from the way of Christ, they can find themselves in deep trouble. The encouragement is to come alongside the wandering person and carefully nurse them back to Christ and healing.

However, though this might seem as though James is speaking of a backslidden Christian when he says, "if any among you strays from the truth" in verse 19, the intent is probably to a non-Christian. The reason is that a Christian cannot lose their soul to death (verse 20). God may take their physical life because of sin (1 John 5:16), but their soul will never die. Death means separation from God, not cessation of existence.

The reference could be to one who has verbally professed Christ as Savior, but it was not a genuine salvation experience. When the troubles of being a Christian confront that person, they wander away from the Christian Faith.

Evangelism, then, is the issue at stake. Surely, to bring a backslider back into right relationship with Christ is important. So is soul-winning. The encouragement is for the church and individuals to

persistently seek to proclaim the gospel of Christ even in the face of persecution. Of course, the Christian needs to be careful how they evangelize. For examples, evangelism among Muslims, Buddhists, communists, or Hindus can be very dangerous. Care and careful strategies need to be considered. A dead Christian cannot any longer preach the gospel.

The multitude of sins (verse 20) refers to the sins of the converted one – not to the sins of the evangelist who proclaims the gospel, or helps restore a backslidden Christian to Christ.

CONCLUSION.

This brings us to a close on our journey through the epistle of James. We have examined the holy teaching on the nature of trials; the nature of the Word; the condemnation of partiality; the relationship between works and faith; the importance of the tongue; the nature of true wisdom; the danger of worldliness; the need for patience, and the power of prayer. May God richly bless you, the reader, as you continue your faithful walk and service to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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