

JAMES

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

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PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of James. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of James.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

I wish to thank Hunter Wood for his help and Teresa Rogers for proofreading this material.
May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

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INTRODUCTION

James has been called “the first book of the New Testament to be written” (McGee), “an intensely practical manual,” and “the Proverbs of the New Testament” (Boa). Luther called it “a right strawy epistle,” presumably referring to the stubble of 1 Corinthians 3:12. He accused it of “having no true evangelical character” (Luther was wrong; see Jas. 2:23).

Author

Although the book of James does not follow the format of a letter throughout, it begins with a salutation, a standard part of an ancient letter. The salutation of a letter in the first century consisted of identifying the author and recipients and giving a greeting. James does that in his salutation. He says, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings” (1:1). The salutation should answer the questions of who wrote the letter and who received it. In the first century, the salutation of James adequately served that purpose, but in the twenty-first century, the salutation of James has produced more questions than answers. Which James is the author of this book? Who are the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad?

The epistle’s author, “James,” only refers to himself twice. In James 1:1, he calls himself a servant; in James 3:1, he calls himself a teacher. Beyond that, the book says nothing concerning its author, but that alone says something. The author must have been well-known at the time. In the New Testament, three prominent men had the name of James. James, the son of Zebedee, was the elder brother of the apostle John (Mt. 10:2). He was not only an apostle, but he was also in the inner circle (Mt. 17:1). However, his martyrdom by AD 44 makes it unlikely that he wrote this epistle (Acts 12:2).

James, the son of Alphaeus, was the brother of Matthew (Mt. 10:3). He was an apostle with the nickname “James the Less” (Mk. 15:40). Apart from being listed with the other disciples, this James is entirely obscure. Thus, it is doubtful that he is the authoritative figure behind the epistle.

James, the son of Joseph and Mary, was the half-brother of Jesus Christ (Mt. 13:55). At first, he did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (Jn. 7:5). After the Lord appeared to him, he became not only a believer but one of the pillars in the church at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14; 12:7; 15:3; 21:18; Gal. 2:12-19). This James best fits the evidence as the author of this epistle.

The author does not attach a title to his name in the salutation, indicating that he was well known. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was head of the Jerusalem church. While it is true that the other two men named James were apostles, they were not as well-known as James, the half-brother of Christ. When the name James was mentioned without a title, the most prominent James would be the first to come to mind. Besides, James, the son of Zebedee, the only other likely author, is usually eliminated because of his early death. Furthermore, the salutation of James indicates the book was written to scattered Jewish Christians (see Recipients below). James, the half-brother of Jesus, was *the* leader of the Jerusalem church. Thus, he was the most likely person to write to the scattered Jewish Christians.

There are other indications that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the author. The vocabulary of this book resembles the vocabulary of James’ speech in Acts 15. For example, in Acts 15, James uses the word “greeting,” and so does the author of this epistle, but that term as a greeting occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. There are other similarities. Compare “men

and brethren, listen to me” (Acts 15:13) and “Listen, my beloved brethren” (2:5), etc. Tradition says that James, the half-brother of Jesus, was the author. That tradition was not doubted until the Reformation when Luther questioned the epistle, but Luther’s problem wasn’t authorship; it was the entire letter!

If James, the half-brother of Christ, was the author of the epistle of James, the way he identifies himself in the salutation becomes deeply significant, for all he says about himself is that he is “a servant [Greek: slave] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.” He could have said, “I am the half-brother, or just the brother, or a close family member of Jesus Christ.” James did not do that; he was not a name-dropper (2 Cor. 5:15-16). Or, he could have said, “I am the head of the Jerusalem church,” which would also have been an accurate statement. He didn’t even do that.

Instead, he said, “I’m a slave of God and of Jesus Christ.” Only here, and in the book of Jude, does a New Testament author identify himself simply as a slave and both authors were half-brothers of Jesus Christ! That statement indicates the author’s humility and high view of Jesus Christ. James knew that physical birth gives no advantage before God. At any rate, he clearly understood his position in his relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Years ago, a small girl was wandering around the courtyard of a royal palace. A new guard, who didn’t recognize her, ran over to her and, in an official tone, asked, “Who are you?” She simply replied, “I’m nobody, but my daddy’s the king.” James exhibited a similar attitude concerning his relationship with the King of Kings.

Recipients

Who received this helpful epistle from the humble hand of James? James 1:1 says, “To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.” The phrase “the twelve tribes” is either literal and, thus, refers to the Jews, or it is figurative and refers to the church. Acts 26:7 indicates that it was used of the Jews and nowhere in the New Testament is this phrase used to refer to the church. So here, it must be a reference to the Jews. Yet, the book is written to Christians. The author identifies himself as “a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1). He views the readers as having been born again (1:18), as persons holding to “the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2:1), and he reminds them of “that noble name by which you are called” (2:7). He repeatedly addresses them as “brethren” (1:2, 1:19; 2:1; 5:7, etc.). The conclusion, then, is that James was written to Jewish Christians.

These Jewish Christians were “scattered abroad” (1:1). This is probably a reference to the dispersion because of persecution recorded in Acts 8:4 (see also Acts 9:2; 11:19). If so, these Jewish Christians were in Syria and even beyond (Acts 11:19). If this identification is correct, and many scholars believe that it is, the date of James is about AD 45, making it one of the first, if not the first book in the New Testament to be written. The fact that they were still meeting in synagogues supports this conclusion (the Greek word “synagogue” is translated “assembly” in 2:2).

From the book itself, other factors concerning these Jewish Christians can be gleaned. They were still meeting in synagogues (2:2) and had elders (5:14). Strangers sometimes attended their meetings (2:2-4). While some were rich (1:10), most were probably poor (1:9; 2:6; 5:1-6). Some were traveling traders (4:13 ff.).

What provoked James to write was that these Jewish Christians scattered outside of Palestine were experiencing various trials (1:2), both from outside their group and from within their group. Rich landowners were oppressing the poor farm hands among them by hauling them before the

courts (2:6-7) and wrongfully withholding their wages (5:4). Nothing indicates that this was a religious persecution (except possibly 2:7); instead, this was a form of social injustice. Moreover, these believers were having trouble among themselves. There were disagreements, self-seeking, and strife (3:13-18; 4:2, 4:11). Some were weak from sickness (5:13), probably due to God's chastening.

To make matters worse, they were not enduring these trials with joy and submission. They were being partial (2:1-13). Many were trying to give advice, assuming the role of a teacher (3:1). They had bitter jealousy and strife in their hearts (3:14), causing them to misuse the tongue to abuse one another (3:9-10), arguing with one another (4:1), speaking against one another (4:11), and groaning against one another (5:9). They were lusting after things (4:2) and were not praying properly (4:4). Acting as if they were self-sufficient, they did not consider the will of God (4:13, 16). Since they needed to take oaths (5:12), they were not completely honest with each other either.

Thus, these Jewish Christians were experiencing trials: tension inside the church and trouble outside the church. It is difficult enough to have trouble outside the Christian community, but when believers have trouble within the Christian community, it is almost more than they can bear. Outside the assembly, a believer wages war with the world, but woe to the believer who has to engage in battle on the field and return to the assembly and find another war. The church is to be a hospital. It rescues the dying from death. It gives remedy, rest, and recuperation to the sick but woe to the people who come to the hospital and find strife and struggle instead of rest and renewal. That hospital is sick and needs a physician. How does one cope under such circumstances?

When did James pen this epistle? According to Josephus, James was martyred in AD 62. Most who accept him as the author have proposed the date of writing from AD 45 to the end of his life. It has been placed as early as AD 34 (Hodges). Many, if not most, believe it was written early. One of the main reasons for this is that James uses the word "synagogue" (see "assembly" in 2:2), indicating that these believers were still meeting in a synagogue. If James was written in AD 45 or before, it was likely the first book to be written in the New Testament collection.

Message

Some say that James has no unifying theme. They claim this book is a collection of miscellaneous exhortations devoid of intentional unity. Goodspeed describes the epistle as just a handful of pearls dropped into the hearer's mind one by one. Recalling that the epistle had been called "an ethical scrapbook," Hunter concludes that it is so disconnected that it defies analysis. Scroggie asserts that this epistle has no one subject, as do most epistles. He even says that over a dozen themes have been treated almost disconnectedly (Hiebert, vol. 135, p. 222).

Most commentators would not agree with that conclusion. Perhaps the most common suggestion for a single subject is faith. MacNeil identifies the unifying thread of the epistle as "the obvious but important truth that a man's faith, his attitude toward God, is unreal and worthless if it is not *effective*, if it does not *work* practically in his life." Lenski asserts, "The entire epistle deals with the Christian faith and shows how this faith should be genuine, true, active, living, and fruitful. The noun 'faith' occurs sixteen times, and the word 'believe' three" (Hiebert, vol. 135, p. 222). Faith is a major subject in the book. Granted, "faith" or "believe" occurs nineteen times, but sixteen are in chapter 2. Other suggestions for the subject of James include works and maturity.

In the final analysis, trials may be the best suggestion for James's subject. He begins with that subject (1:2) and proceeds to discuss in varying degrees one type of trial after another. When he comes to the final paragraph of his volume, he concludes by saying, "Is any among you suffering?"

(5:13). Thus, James begins and ends with the subject of trials. In the process of discussing the topic of trials, James instructs his readers on how to learn from them. The message is the proper way to respond to trials is to trust God and learn from these trials by being swift to hear, that is, heed the Word, be slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Structure

Some say there is no structure in James. For example, Mitton says, “There is in fact no discernible plan in the epistle” (Mitton, p. 235). Barclay concurs, “It is difficult, if not impossible, to extract from James a continuous and coherent plan or scheme” (Barclay, p. 35). Tidwell has gone so far as to say, “The chief characteristic of the style is abruptness. Change is made from one subject to another with no effort to connect them. There is, therefore, no general subject and a lack of close connection between the points of analysis” (Tidwell, p. 219).

Hiebert, who wrote an article, “The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James,” began by saying, “The Epistle of James is notoriously difficult to outline. This is confirmed by the great diversity of the outlines which have been proposed. They range all the way from two to twenty-five major divisions. The epistle itself does not herald any clear structural plan concerning the organization of its contents. Hendriksen well remarks, ‘A superficial glance at this epistle may easily leave the impression that every attempt to outline it must fail’” (Hiebert, vol. 135, p. 222).

Those who say the subject is faith outline the book around that theme. For example, Pentecost says:

Faith endures trials	1:2-12
Faith withstands temptations	1:13-18
Faith obeys the word	1:19-27
Faith has no respect of persons	2:1-13
Faith manifests itself in works	2:14-26
Faith controls the tongue	3:1-12
Faith produces selflessness	3:13-18
Faith produces submission to God	4:1-12
Faith produces dependence	4:13-5:6
Faith in the Lord’s return	5:7-20

James has been called a “literary letter.” It begins with a salutation like an ancient letter, but it lacks other characteristics of a letter. Moo suggests it was like a modern “open letter” from a bishop to his parish (Moo, p. 36). Whatever the literary form, the structure seems to be summarized in James 1:19. Using that verse as the key to the outline of the body of the book, the following outline is suggested:

Salutation	1:1
Prologue	1:2-18
Theme	1:19-20
I. Be Swift to Hear	1:21-2:26
A. Hearing is doing the Word	1:21-25
B. Hearing is practicing mercy	1:26-2:13
C. Hearing is producing works	2:14-26
II. Be Slow to Speak	3:1-18

A. Teaching and the tongue	3:1-12
B. Wisdom and the tongue	3:13-18
III. Be Slow to Anger	4:1-5:12
A. Conflicts	4:1-10
B. Judging	4:11-12
C. Planning	4:13-17
D. Being treated unjustly	5:1-12
Epilogue	5:13-20

Purpose

The purpose of the book of James is to instruct and exhort believers concerning trials. That purpose has a negative and positive side. As stated positively, the purpose is to exhort Christians to respond properly to trials. These Jewish believers were in the midst of several external and internal trials. From without, the rich were oppressing them by taking them to court (2:6, 7) and their landlords were wrongfully withholding their wages (5:4). From within the church, there were fights (4:2) and some people were sick (5:14). James writes to exhort them to trust God and endure (1:3-4). God uses them to develop believers. Trials are for our training. Thus, believers are to learn from them. If they are to do that, they need to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath. James also warns them about the dangers in the midst of trials. Besides the obvious one of not trusting the Lord and, thus, not enduring, he speaks of temptation (1:13-18), a lack of works (1:21-2:28), prejudice (2:1-12), misusing the tongue (3:1-12), judging one another (4:11-12), leaving God out of your plans (4:13-17), and even bitterness (5:6-12).

Summary: James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, wrote to Jewish Christians outside Palestine who were going through various trials to exhort them to respond properly and warn them about several dangers they faced in the process.

In the midst of a trial, if you trust God and are swift to obey, slow to speak, and slow to get angry, you will obtain the maximum spiritual maturity from it. Before looking at the letter's contents, notice the practical lesson to be learned from the salutation. James, who identifies himself as a servant, is coming to minister to hurting people. Think of it. James, the half-brother of Jesus and the head of the Jerusalem Church, calls himself God's slave and ministers to people who are hurting. God's servants serve people.

Big shots boss people around. Servants serve. If one considers himself a big shot, he'll boss people. If he thinks of himself as a servant, he'll serve people. Little people who think they are big stuff try to get people to serve them. Big men who realize who they really are before God serve others. The world measures a man's greatness by the number who serve him. Heaven's yardstick measures a man by the number who he serves. John Wesley made a practice of telling those who served the cause of early Methodism, "Do all you can by all means you can in all ways you can in all the places you can at all the times you can to all the people you can as long as you can."

John Wesley is an illustration of a big man who preached and practiced servanthood. Peter Martin of Kelston told us about driving Wesley to St. Ives. When they reached Hayle, they encountered the rising tide of a river that made fording it difficult and dangerous. They were advised not even to attempt it, but Wesley insisted. Soon the horses were swimming and the poor driver expected at any moment to be drowned. "What is your name, Sir?" Wesley asked. "Peter," said the man. "Peter," Wesley said, "fear not. You shall not sink." They made it across the river

and finally to their destination. Wesley's first care, Martin said, was to "see me comfortably lodged at the tavern." He secured warm clothing, good fire, and refreshments for Martin. Then, totally unmindful of himself, he proceeded to the chapel where he preached. At the time, he was eighty-three years old.

JIMMY WHO?

When I was in high school, I had teachers who would give us something called a “pop quiz.” Pop quizzes were tests that were not scheduled. They just popped up at the whim of the teacher. I want to begin today with “a pop quiz.”

Here is the first question. If five birds were on a barbed wire fence, and I shot and killed one of them, how many would be left? Question number two: if a plane crashed on the Mason-Dixon line, where would they bury the survivors? Question number three: who is buried in Grant’s tomb? Question number four: who wrote the New Testament book called James?

Now, I’m after that fourth question, but I want to answer the first three before I answer it. If five birds were on a barbed wire fence, and I shot and killed one of them, how many would be left? The answer is none. The other four would fly away. If a plane crashed on the Mason-Dixon line, where would you bury the survivors? No place. You don’t bury survivors. Who is buried in Grant’s tomb? Answer: Grant.

Is the answer to question four tricky, like the first two, or is it straightforward, like number three? The answer is both. It is straightforward in that it tells us James wrote the book, but that can be tricky because there is more than one man named James in the New Testament. So, who was the James who wrote the book of James?

I am reminded of the 1976 presidential campaign. Everybody knew that somebody named Jimmy Carter was running for president, but they started scratching their heads and saying, Jimmy, who? At first, people didn’t realize who Jimmy Carter was because Jimmy was such a common name.

This chapter is an introduction to a study of the book of James. Understanding who the author is and who the recipients are will give you insight into the book and highlight several significant spiritual truths.

Author

“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greeting” (1:1). James was the author of the book of James, but beyond that, he does not identify himself specifically. The only other thing he tells us about himself is that he was a teacher. In chapter 3, he says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). As a teacher, he was no doubt well-known to them, but not to us. So, who wrote this book? We need to look into this because there is one great spiritual lesson here.

Son of Zebedee To complicate matters, three prominent men in the New Testament are called James. The first is James, the son of Zebedee. Matthew says, “And when He had called His twelve disciples to *Him*, He gave them power *over* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother” (Mt. 10:1-2). First, we know this James had a father named Zebedee, a brother named John, and he was an apostle. Elsewhere, Matthew says, “Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves and He was transfigured before them” (Mt. 17:1-2a). This James was in the inner circle, one of the chief apostles. Mark says, “James, the *son*

of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, ‘Sons of Thunder’” (Mk. 3:17). The expression “Sons of Thunder ” they were bold, energetic, powerful individuals. Luke says that when people in a Samaritan village did not receive the Lord and His apostles, James and John said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” (Lk. 9:54). The book of Acts says, “Now, about that time, Herod the king stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church, Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:1-2). James was the first martyr.

This James strikes me as a big, bold fellow. I don’t know this, but I imagine him being big, like a football player. He was undoubtedly bold and outspoken. I’m going to call him “James, the big.”

Son of Alpheus The second James is the son of Alpheus. Matthew says, “Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the *son* of Alphaeus” (Mt. 10:3). From this verse, we know that he had a father named Alpheus. Mark says Matthew was the son of Alpheus (Mk. 2:14), so we know that the second James had a brother named Matthew. This James was also an apostle. Mark says that he was called “the Less” (Mk. 15:40). “The Less” means “little;” he was small of stature.

By the way, there were two sets of brothers among the twelve apostles. Actually, there were three. Peter and Andrew were brothers (Jn. 1:40).

Half Brother of Jesus There is a third James in the New Testament. Matthew says, “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?” (Mt. 13:55). This verse says Jesus had brothers. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had children. They had a son named James, making him the half-brother of Jesus. We know several things about this man. We know his mother was Mary, his father was Joseph, and his half-brother was Jesus of Nazareth.

We also know that, at first, neither he nor his other brothers believed Jesus was the Messiah. John says, “For even His brothers did not believe in Him” (Jn. 7:5). That is a great proof of the humanity of Jesus. He was the Son of Man. He was a man, tempted in all points, like as we. Later, this half-brother of Jesus became a believer in Jesus as the Messiah.

After He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared individually and in groups to various people. On one occasion, He appeared to James (1 Cor. 15:7). “There is no way of knowing which **James** is referred to here, although most commentators assume him to be the Lord’s half-brother” (MacDonald). This might’ve been when he was converted. In Acts 1:13, he is numbered among the disciples. So, this half-brother of Jesus Christ, who started out as a brother, became a believer. The one who started as a skeptic became a saint. But he was much more than just a saint and a disciple. He became the leader of the church in Jerusalem.

Three well-known men in the New Testament were called James. James the Big, James the Little, and James the Half. Now, which one wrote James? Which one do you think wrote James?

I believe the James who wrote the book of James was the half-brother of Jesus Christ. For one thing, he doesn’t have a title, which means he is well-known. The only other James that qualifies would be the one I’m calling James the Big, but he was martyred. His martyrdom is generally dated around A.D. 44, and most conservative scholars have taken the book of James at A.D. 45 or later. James 1:1 says James wrote to the 12 tribes who were scattered abroad. When the early Christians were scattered, if the pastor of the home church was James, the half-brother of Christ, which we can prove, then it stands to reason that the most likely man to write to those people who were no longer there in the city of Jerusalem would have been James, the half-brother of Christ. So, the people who received this letter are an indication of who wrote the letter. Also, there is the

vocabulary. In James 1:1, his salutation is simply “greeting.” In Acts 15, James gives a speech and the vocabulary of that speech matches the vocabulary of the book of James. For example, in James 1:1, he addresses the people with the word greeting. He does the same thing in Acts 15:23. Those are the only two places in the New Testament where anyone used that salutation. Tradition from the first century to the Reformation says that James, the half-brother of Christ, wrote the epistle. Not until the Reformation did anyone question that.

Why did I go through all of that? I want you to look at the man who wrote this book. It was James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. He was the head, the very leader of the Jerusalem church. This was an important man. With all of that in mind, read James 1:1. James identifies himself as a slave of God and a slave of Jesus Christ. Here is a man who could have picked up his pen and scratched on the pad: James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ. Or he could have said, James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. Instead, he picks up his pen and says, I am a slave of Jesus Christ. Wow.

Some people are name-droppers. If they know the mayor or the governor, they will let you know that, usually in short order. James was not a name-dropper. Rather, his view of himself was that he was a servant. He was a slave of Jesus Christ.

Jesus had other half-brothers. One is Jude. He’s the man who wrote the epistle that appears before the book of Revelation in the New Testament. He identifies himself the same way that James does in his epistle. Rather interesting. that both men, who were brothers and half-brothers of Jesus Christ, end up identifying themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer” (2 Cor. 5:15-16). Paul says, “ I once knew Jesus Christ after the flesh. In Paul’s case, he thought that Jesus Christ was a blasphemer. But he said now that I understand that Jesus Christ died and rose from the dead, I have come to Christ. I’ve been saved from my sins. I know Christ after the flesh no more Because he died that I should not live unto myself. Christ died for all that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him. When you really understand that Jesus Christ died and rose and trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you no longer live for yourself, but you live unto Him.

So James could say, I knew Jesus after the flesh as well as anybody, perhaps except for his mother and father. He pushed that relation aside and said, I am his slave. How did that happen? The answer is that he realized that Jesus was the Son of God, who had died and rose from the dead.

A little girl was playing in a royal palace courtyard some years ago. One of the royal guards saw her, rushed over to her in a very official tone, and said, “Who are you?” And she said, “I’m nobody, but my daddy is the king.” That’s what James is saying. I’m nobody, but let me tell you about my brother. Let me tell you about my Savior. I’m his slave.

Recipients

Jews Who received the book originally? It was written to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. What does the phrase “the 12 tribes” mean? There are two possibilities. One is that it is literal, and therefore, it refers to the Jews. The second is that it is figurative and refers to the church as the Israel of God. This phrase occurs elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in Acts 26, it is used literally. For that reason, I believe that this is literal here. James wrote to Jews. In chapter 2,

he talks about where they are meeting; in the Greek text, he refers to their place of meeting as the synagogue.

Christian At the same time, they were Christians. They were born again (1:18). They are called brethren (2:1). They were called by the name of Jesus (2:7). They were waiting for the coming of the Lord (5:7). James wrote to Jewish Christians.

Scattered Luke says, “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen *to his burial*, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison” (Acts 8:1-3). Notice the phrase, throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria except the apostles. In chapter 8, they are persecuted in Jerusalem, so they are scattered out into the countryside, Judea and Samaria.

“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2). By the time you get to chapter 9, they’re all the way up to Damascus, which is in Syria. By the time you get to chapter 11, they are even beyond Damascus. “Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). They go as far as Cyprus. So, these Jewish Christians were scattered abroad, at least as far as Syria and perhaps as far as Cyprus.

James indicates that there are both rich and poor people in these congregations. James 1:9 speaks about a brother of low degree, a brother of low financial status, and verse 10 talks about the rich. So, both the poor and the rich were among them. Evidently, the poor were suffering at the hands of unsaved rich people (2:6; 5:1-6).

They also had trials inside the church. They were not responding properly to their outside trials. That is, they were not responding with patience. They were independent, materialistic, worldly. As a result of all of that, there were conflicts among them. Chapter 4 opens with, “Where do wars and conflicts come from among you?” There were complaints because they were being treated unjustly (5:7-12). Woe to the person having trouble outside the Christian fold and inside the Christian community.

A common proverb says a man’s home is his castle. A man can go out into the world and he can wage war. He can even be wounded in battle and return to his home, where he can find a retreat, a release, and rest. But woe to the man who has to march out into the world, wage war, and come home only to find another battle. Woe is that man, indeed. The church is a hospital. It is to rescue from death the dying. It is to give remedy, res, and recuperation to those who are battle-worn and weary. But woe to the man or woman who goes out into the world, does battle, gets wounded, and comes to a church only to find strife and struggle and not rest and recharge. Miserable indeed is that person. Well, that’s the kind of thing these folks were going through. They were having one conflict after another and they would come to the church and there was conflict there too. There was no rest for their weary bones.

In Shakespeare’s play Julius Caesar, people plot against Julius Caesar. It all comes to a climax when they stab him to death. The bitterest knife of all is thrust in by his friend, Brutus. That famous line from Shakespeare says, “Et tu, Brute? You too? You too?” That’s the way these people felt. They were being knifed in the back out in the world. They were coming to church and finding more daggers. So, James writes to these folk about how to face trials from without and trials from within. And it’s some of the most helpful instruction in all of the New Testament on Christianity.

Summary: James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, wrote to the twelve tribes scattered abroad.

Note two great lessons here. James identifies himself as a slave, God's slave. What do God's servants do? They minister to people. James identifies himself as a slave and he immediately ministers to people who are hurting. God's servants serve people. They serve God by serving people. Some people think they are big shots. Big shots boss. And it oozes out in their very attitude toward life and people. Servants serve. Now, which are you? Who are you? What is your view of you? Is your view of yourself that you are important, that you are a big shot? Or is your view of you that you're a servant? Think about that for a minute. Does the world revolve around you? Or are you here to serve the Lord?

I've known some big men who knew who they were, and their attitude was sweet and gracious. If you realize that you are nothing more than a servant of God, you'll serve. But if you think you're a big shot, you try to push other people around. Someone has said the world measures a man's greatness by the number who serves him. Heaven's yardstick measures a man by the number of people he serves. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, used to tell those who served in early Methodism, "Do all that you can, by all means you can, in all ways you can, in all places you can, at all times you can, to all people you can, as long as you can. Now, there's a man with a servant's heart.

There's a story told by a man named Peter Martin, who lived years and years ago in England. And he tells of the day when it was his job to take John Wesley to St. Ives to preach. On the way, they encountered a problem. There came to a place in the road that was covered with water. It did not look like their carriage could make it across. They were warned not to try. John Wesley said to Peter, "Do it." With a great deal of fear, Peter said, he started across that water, and pretty soon, it was so deep the horses began to swim. When he didn't know whether they were going to make it, John Wesley turned to him and said, "What's your name, sir?" He said, "Peter." Wesley said, "Peter, you'll make it." They made it.

The first thing John Wesley did was to take the driver of the carriage to the local inn. He saw to it that the driver was warm and had fresh clothes. He was sitting by the fire and had some refreshments. And John Wesley, the founder of this huge, massive movement in England, with almost no thought to himself, took off to preach. At the time that happened, John Wesley was 83 years old. He understood who he was. His concern was for the driver and for the people he was to speak to, and not for himself because John Wesley understood that he was a slave of God.

HOW TO HANDLE TRIALS

The famous football coach George Allen once told a reporter, “We were not put here to enjoy life, but to be tested.” Perhaps that statement could be debated theologically, but practically, that is precisely how many people often feel. Life sometimes seems like one trial and test after another: a tough teacher, a late date, or a fickle friend. For a wife, a husband forgets her birthday or, worse yet, their anniversary. For a husband, it is the washing machine breaking down, the car not starting, and his mother-in-law visiting—all on the same day. It can and does get more serious, like failing health, terminal illness, financial reverse, divorce, the death of a dear friend or a close loved one.

When trials come, most people immediately ask, “Why? Why me?” A thoughtful person will also ask, “How do I handle this?” How does one handle irritation, disappointments, and the griefs of life? In other words, asking, “How does one handle trials?” is like asking, “How does one handle life?”

James answers those questions in the opening verses of his epistle. The subject of James 1:2-12 is trials, various trials (1:2). The Greek word translated “various” means “many-colored.” Trials come in multiple colors and shades. Some are a light gray, such as an irritation or a disappointment. Others are dark black, such as a divorce or a death. This passage applies to all kinds of trials, from little annoyances, which are part of everyday experience, to severe suffering, which is unsought, unexpected, and unwelcome. The book of James refers to financial pressure (1:9, 27), oppression (2:6), disputes (4:1), injustice (5:1-6), illness (5:14), and death (1:27).

The opening verses of this paragraph consist of four commands instructing the reader on how to handle these various kinds of trials (see “count” in 1:2, “let” in 1:4, “let” in 1:5, and “let” in 1:6). Actually, the first three of these commands tell believers how to handle trials, whereas the fourth develops the thought of the third and beyond that of what happens to believers who don’t follow the instructions of the first three commands.

James adds two illustrations (1:9-11) and finishes the paragraph with a concluding statement in verse 12. This chapter will discuss the first three commands of this paragraph, which instruct the believer on how to handle trials and answer the question as to why they come into a person’s life.

Rejoice

Count It All Joy James begins, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials” (1:2). He says “when,” not “if.” Trials will come. When trials arrive, believers are to “count it all joy.” He must be kidding! Imagine. The car breaks down on the way home from work. The owner bursts into the house and blurts out, “Sweetheart, guess what? The car broke down. Isn’t that great? Let’s rejoice! Let’s throw a party!”

How can James say, “Rejoice”? It should be pointed out that James does not say, “It is a joy; therefore, rejoice.” The trial itself may be grievous. Instead, he says, “Count it all joy.” The Greek word translated “count” means “consider” and occurs here in the aorist tense, implying decisiveness. “All” does not mean “nothing but joy,” as if there is no other emotion. There may be grief (1 Pet. 1:6). “All” emphasizes the quality of the joy. Peter, while recognizing there may be pain, speaks of “greatly rejoicing” (1 Pet. 1:6). In other words, James is saying, “Make up your

mind to consider this trial as something about which you will be glad, greatly glad,” but the question remains, “how?” James must know something that others don’t.

Knowing What Faith Will Do James continues, “Knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (1:3). Grammatically, verses 2 and 3 are one sentence, but chronologically, the “knowing” of verse 3 comes before the “count it all joy” of verse 2. Without the knowledge of verse 3, one might curse instead of count it all joy, but with the knowledge of verse 3, a trial can become an occasion of sheer joy. What is that knowledge that makes joy in trials possible?

What James knew and what believers under pressure need to know today is that testing one’s faith produces patience. The Greek word rendered “testing of your faith” only occurs twice in the New Testament: here and in 1 Peter 1:7, where it is translated “the genuineness of your faith.” It means “tested, approved.” James is talking about tested, approved faith, that is, genuine faith. Trials, then, are not to determine whether or not a person has faith but to develop the already present faith (Moo).

Believers who are trusting are believers who are rejoicing. Although it is not stated in this passage, the object of one’s faith is the Lord.

There is more. This approved, genuine faith produces patience. There are two words translated “patience” in the New Testament. One means patience proper, while the other means “endurance” (Trench, pp. 195-198). The one used in James 1:3 means “endurance.” Thus, James 1:3 says that *genuine faith produces endurance*. The purpose of the trial is to produce endurance in you. *Trials are for your training*.

Let me illustrate. Suppose two fellows went out for football. On the first day of practice, the coach instructed all aspiring players to run around the field thirty times and do thirty minutes of strenuous calisthenics. At the next practice, he did something similar, only he increased the amount of exercise. He did that again and again. Finally, one fellow said, “This coach doesn’t know what he’s doing. I came to play football, not go out for track.” The other fellow said, “I believe the coach knows what he’s doing,” so he stayed, ran, and exercised. In the process, he developed endurance.

Faith produces endurance. The bedrock question in a trial is, “Will you believe God?” Do you believe that God knows what He is doing? If you are trusting Him, you will be rejoicing (Rom. 5:1-4 and 1 Pet. 1:6-7).

Two traveling angels stopped to spend the night in the home of a wealthy family. The family was rude and refused to let the angels stay in the mansion’s guest room. Instead, the angels were given a small space in the cold basement. As they made their bed on the hard floor, the older angel saw a hole in the wall and repaired it. When the younger angel asked why, the older angel replied, “Things aren’t always what they seem.”

The next night, the pair came to rest at the house of a very poor but very hospitable farmer and his wife. After sharing what little food they had, the couple let the angels sleep in their beds where they could have a good night’s rest. The angels found the farmer and his wife in tears when the sun rose the following day. Their only cow, whose milk had been their sole income, lay dead in the field.

The younger angel was infuriated and asked the older angel, “How could you have let this happen? The first man had everything, yet you helped him,” she accused. “The second family had little but was willing to share everything, and you let the cow die.”

“Things aren’t always what they seem,” the older angel replied. “When we stayed in the mansion’s basement, I noticed gold stored in that hole in the wall. Since the owner was so obsessed with greed and unwilling to share his good fortune, I sealed the wall so he wouldn’t find it. Then,

last night, as we slept in the farmer's bed, the angel of death came for his wife. I gave him the cow instead. Things aren't always what they seem."

Sometimes, that is exactly what happens when things don't turn out how they should. If you have faith, you need to trust that every outcome is always to your advantage. You might not know it until some time later.

Remain Steadfast

Remind Steadfast The second thing James says to do is remain steadfast. James says, "But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (1:4). Again, the Greek word translated "patience" means "endurance." So, James is saying endure, and as you do, the trial will have its perfect work, which is to produce perfection in you. When problems pile up, we want to run, not remain. A teenager with problems at home chooses to run away. A man with pressure at work contemplates changing jobs. A wife with complexities in her marriage considers divorce. We want to run. But God says, remain.

To Become Mature The believer must remain steadfast in the midst of the trial so that the trial can have its perfect work and the believer may end up "perfect and complete, lacking nothing." *Trials are for your training.*

It has been argued that "perfect" here means "perfect." The goal toward which Christians strive constantly is perfection, but they will not reach it until they are with the Lord (Moo). The Greek word "perfect" means "reaching its end, finished, complete, mature." Remain steadfast, James exhorts, so the trial will have its full effect—attain its end. James is talking about something the believer can experience now (1:5). So, endurance will make you *mature*, that is, fully developed and *complete*, that is, with all your parts.

Let me illustrate. A ten-year-old boy has two eyes, ears, arms, and legs. He has all of his parts. He is complete but only ten years old; he is not mature. On the other hand, a thirty-year-old man may have two eyes, two ears, two arms, and only one leg. He is mature but not complete. The parts that he has are fully developed, but he doesn't have all of his parts.

God wants all of His children to be complete (have all of their parts) and mature (have all of those parts fully developed). To accomplish that end, He allows trials to come into their lives to either add something to them or develop something already in them.

I once had to work with someone with whom I did not get along. To relate to that person was a trial. While trying to respond biblically to a trying situation, God taught me a great lesson: to love someone who was not lovely. It's easy to love the lovely. It's much more difficult to love the unlovely. I got the message, at least to a degree. I was no sooner learning how to respond to that difficult person when someone just like that person, only worse, came along. My first reaction was, "Why must I go through this again?" I concluded that in the first instance, God was trying to add an element of love to my life that was not there, and in the second instance, He was trying to develop that which He had already added. Paul told the Thessalonians that they knew how to love. Then he exhorted them to love more and more (1 Thess. 4:9-10).

God allows trials to come into believers' lives either to add something to them or to bring to maturity some quality they already have. Trust Him! Endure! Don't run. Remain steadfast.

Request Wisdom

Request Wisdom Believers are to trust God and endure that they may “lack nothing” (1:4). The problem is believers lack and don’t even know what they lack or that they lack. So, James adds, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (1:5). In the Greek text, “if” in verse 5 is a first-class condition, indicating James is assuming this statement to be true. Assuming the person will lack wisdom, James advises the person to request wisdom from God. The wisdom to be requested is the wisdom needed to cope with trials (Hodges). This statement has been misunderstood by many. The wisdom here is not the “smarts” on getting *out of* or *away from* the mess. Instead, the wisdom is to be gained from going through this experience. Amidst trials, people realize just how much they need wisdom to know what to do, how to react, what decisions to make, and what they are to learn. James’s counsel is to request wisdom from God.

God’s Generosity God delights in giving wisdom to His children. He gives it “liberally,” a Greek word that means “generously” or “unconditionally.” He is not a miser with His wisdom; He does not hoard it (Hodges). God gives wisdom without reproach, which includes doing so “without chiding a man for his previous sins” (Adamson) or for our ignorance and stupidity (Hodges).

God does not reproach His children as human fathers so often do. The human father of a teenager often responds to a request for money by saying something like, “Do you think I’m made out of money?” Or, “Do you believe that money grows on trees in the backyard?” God does not do that. He gives graciously and generously.

James warns his readers to be sure to ask in faith (1:6). Faith is one of the requirements for receiving an answer to prayer (Mk. 11:22-24).

Warren Wiersbe tells of a lady in his church who was having trials. Her husband went blind and had to be put in the hospital. Then, she had a slight stroke. One Sunday morning, as she was leaving the service, Wiersbe said, “I’m praying for you.” She responded by saying, “For what are you praying?” He said, “I’m praying God will give you grace and strength during your trial.” She responded, “Well, also pray that He will give me wisdom and that I will not waste this trial.” That’s what James is saying. Pray for wisdom. Don’t waste the trial.

To sum up the imperatives in this passage, rejoice, remain steadfast, and request wisdom from the Lord when in a trial. While these three commands form the grammatical structure of the passage, there is more here than these three imperatives. For example, rejoicing (1:2) presupposes trusting God (1:3). There are four steps in responding to a trial: resting in the Lord, rejoicing, remaining steadfast, and requesting wisdom. The first and foremost response to a trial is to trust God.

There is more here than injunctions on how to handle trials. In the process of exhorting believers, James gives the purpose of trials. When believers respond appropriately to trials by trusting God, endurance (1:3), maturity and completeness (1:4), and wisdom (1:5) are produced in their lives. The divine intent in allowing you to experience trials is to develop, mature, and teach you.

TRIALS ARE FOR YOUR TRAINING! In the midst of a trial, we experience struggle and pain. God sees the end product, which is strength and perfection.

Summary: Since trials are for your training, the way to handle them is to trust God, remain steadfast (don’t run away), and learn from them. In short, in a trial, rejoice in your opportunity to

trust God and develop. Problems need not impair us. They can improve us, provided we respond properly to them. If we trust God, we end up mature.

A boy was born with a deformed foot. Two surgeons tried to straighten it but failed. The father studied the foot for months. Then he made a strange-looking box with rods that screwed into the side. Then, the surgeons operated again, cutting the muscles and the tendons in different places. The foot was placed in the box. A rod was screwed until the felt tip on the end pressed against the foot in one place, almost breaking the bone. Another rod was brought to bear on another part of the foot, again almost breaking the bone. Then the rod was used to straighten another part. For months, the boy's foot was kept in the box. The suffering was indescribable. The child wept.

For the most part, he tried to obey his father without complaint, but there were times when the pain was so bad he begged his father to take the box off and let him be crippled. The father mingled his tears with those of his son as he turned the screws tighter. The child was in agony. Sometimes, he felt his father was harsh, cruel, and without love, but the father kept the box on his son's foot. Finally, the father loosened the rod and said to his son, "Stand up." For the first time, the boy's foot stood erect.

Years later, the son, now a gray-haired man, stood over his father's grave. With tears trickling down his cheeks, he thanked God he had a father who cared enough to continue the suffering until the deformity was straightened.

Had the boy removed the box, he would have had a deformed foot all of his life, but by trusting his father, even though there were times of struggle and doubt, he ended up with a straight foot. That's the way all believers should handle all trials. Realizing that trials are for their training, they should trust God so they can mature.

Author and radio commentator Paul Harvey wrote a letter to his grandchildren called "These Things I Wish For You:"

"We tried so hard to make things better for our kids that we made them worse. For my grandchildren, I'd like better. I'd really like for them to know about hand-me-down clothes and homemade ice cream and leftover meatloaf sandwiches. I really would. My cherished grandson, I hope you learn humility by being humiliated and that you learn honesty by being cheated. I hope you learn to make your bed and mow the lawn and wash the car. And I really hope nobody gives you a brand new car when you are sixteen. I hope you have a job by then. It will be good if at least one time you can see a baby calf born and your old dog put to sleep. I hope you get a black eye fighting for something you believe in. I hope you have to share a bedroom with your younger brother. And it's all right if you have to draw a line down the middle of the room, but when he wants to crawl under the covers with you because he's scared, I hope you let him. When you want to see a Disney movie and your little brother wants to tag along, I hope you'll let him. I hope you have to walk uphill to school with your friends and that you live in a town where you can do it safely.

"On rainy days when you have to catch a ride, I hope your driver doesn't have to drop you two blocks away, so you won't be seen riding with someone as uncool as your mom. If you want a slingshot, I hope your dad teaches you how to make one instead of buying one. I hope you learn to dig in the dirt and read books. When you learn to use those newfangled computers, I hope you also learn to add and subtract in your head. I hope you get razzed by your friends when you have your first crush on a girl, and when you talk back to your mother that you learn what Ivory soap tastes like. May you skin your knee climbing a mountain, burn your hand on a stove and stick your tongue on a frozen flagpole. I hope you get sick when someone blows cigar smoke in your face. I don't care if you try beer once, but I hope you don't like it. And if a friend offers you dope or a

joint, I hope you realize he is not your friend. I sure hope you make time to sit on a porch with your grandpa and go fishing with your uncle. May you feel sorrow at a funeral and the joy of holidays. I hope your mother punishes you when you throw a baseball through a neighbor's window and that she hugs you and kisses you at Christmas time when you give her a plaster of Paris mold of your hand.

“These things I wish for you—tough times and disappointment, hard work, and happiness.

With more love than you can ever know,

Grandpa Harvey”

SUPPOSE I DON'T

At the beginning of a school term, the teacher tells the class, "If you do the daily assignments, read and report on two books, and do well on the final exam, you will have no trouble making an A in this class." It sounds simple, but many teachers know that most students don't do their best. There are always more B's and C's than A's. So, some smart instructors inform their pupils what will happen if they don't do the assignments: "If you don't do well on the final, but you do well on all the other work, you will get a B. If you don't do both reports, you will get a C. If you don't do the daily assignments, don't bother to take the final. You failed already."

In the opening verses of James, the church is the classroom, the Christians are the students, and James is the teacher. James is telling the pupils how to take the test of life. Trials are for their training, so the way to handle trials is to trust God. If you trust Him, you will rejoice, remain steadfast, and request wisdom. The result will be maturity, but like a good teacher, James also informs the students what will happen if they do not follow the instructions. Although not stated, the apparent implication of those opening verses is that you will not develop spiritual maturity if you do not respond appropriately to trials.

One day, a man strolling through the woods spied a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Fascinated, he stopped, stared, and scrutinized the butterfly's struggle. It struggled for hours to free itself. The man's fascination soon turned to pity, and he became determined to help the poor butterfly. He clipped off the end of the cocoon and the butterfly emerged easily. As the man stepped back, he watched the creature perch on the limb, fully expecting it to spread its wings and fly away. To his horror, however, the butterfly never moved. He watched as it died on the limb. Mystified, he later explained the events to a biologist friend, who informed him that the butterfly needed exercise to emerge from the cocoon and strengthen its muscles.

Likewise, God allows His children to struggle with trials to develop their spiritual muscles, but like the butterfly that was let out of the cocoon without the struggle, if we do not go through the struggle, we will not be able to fly. We will be spiritually immature. What does that look like?

Unsettled

Trust God "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting" (1:6). At first glance, it may appear that the exhortation "let him ask in faith" applies to the request for wisdom in verse 5, but the phrase "in faith" means "in the state of faith." The person trusts God for an answer to the prayer for wisdom because he or she is in the state of trusting God. Although James gives several instructions in James 1:2-5 on how to handle trials, the most basic and important thing he says is that you must trust God. That is the key to all the other instructions. Believers are to count a trial all joy, knowing that the genuine part of their faith produces endurance (1:2-3). Faith produces endurance (1:3), which ultimately leads to completeness and maturity (1:4). Requesting wisdom is done in faith (1:5-6). Faith is a critical concept.

Without Debate James says the opposite of faith is doubt and urges believers not to doubt (Mt.21:21; Mk. 11:23). The Greek word translated "doubt" means "to decide, to judge, to be divided in one's mind, to debate." It is translated "contended" in Acts 11:2 and in Jude 9. In other words, these types of people are debating within themselves. This does not mean that they have doubts about Christianity. They may have a few doubts and questions. That is not the point. The

point is that they are hesitating. They are at odds with themselves. Ropes says this is “a man whose allegiances waver, not one tormented by speculative intellectual questionings, which do not fall within James’ horizon.” Moo says this man has a “basic conflict in loyalties” between God and money or God and the world. Such a person is gripped with “uncertainty and perplexity” (Hodges).

People can be in the midst of a trial and ask for wisdom yet struggle. When struggling surfaces, they can constantly choose to believe in God no matter what happens. On the other hand, people can be in a trial and pray and start debating, hesitating, and vacillating. One minute, they pray and believe God. In the next minute, they think, “What will I do?” They begin to wring their hands. The whole situation begins to wring their heart. The debate begins to control them instead of them controlling the debate. It is one thing to ask, “Does God care? Is He going to do something?” It is another thing to be so dominated by those debating thoughts that they control you.

I’ve counseled people under pressure who were struggling. After we talked, they decided to trust God and, with some struggle, settled the issue. I’ve also known people under pressure who decided to trust God on Sunday and debated the issue on Monday. On Tuesday, they decided to trust God and struggled intensely on Wednesday. On Thursday, they decided again to trust God, but on Friday, they were once again cast into a pit of depression and even despair. That’s the kind of person James is describing in verse 6. If you follow instructions, you will trust God. You will debate if you don’t follow James’ advice to trust God.

Believers who do not trust the Lord go through a period of struggle, such as a college student struggling with staying in school, a wife struggling with staying in a marriage, a man struggling with staying at his job.

Driven James says, “For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind” (1:6). The word “for” indicates that James is giving a reason for why believers should ask in faith. It is because those who debate within themselves will be unsettled. They are like a wave of the sea driven and tossed. The image is of a sea during a storm. The sea is not calm and settled; it is wind-driven. The wind drives the waves against the rocks and the sea wall. Driven people are out of control. As the wave no longer controls itself, the wind does. Likewise, when people are under pressure, they debate rather than trust the Lord; they lose control. Their emotions, like the wind on the sea, drive them.

A mother once told me of her son who couldn’t decide which Bible College to attend. He enrolled in one in the northern part of the United States, attended for one semester, and transferred to another in the southern part of the country. In the second year, he did the same thing: first, he went to the northern school, then the southern. The third year was a repeat of the first two. He could not make up his mind. He was driven.

Some are driven from one counselor to another. Like a bee or a butterfly that flitters from flower to flower, they fly from pastor to pastor.

Tossed Debaters are not only driven; they are tossed. If “driven” indicates a loss of control, the word “tossed” illustrates totally out-of-control people. Picture waves in a storm-tossed sea. They rise and fall. To change James’s image just a bit, imagine a cork floating on a wave during a storm. It is carried toward the shore, then out to sea. It bounces up and down. Likewise, those debating are as unsettled as the cork on a wave in a storm-tossed sea.

People at this stage will say they went to bed, tossed, and turned. Interesting, isn’t it? James says, driven and tossed. We say, tossed and turned. You will not rest in bed if you’re not in the Lord. Paul uses the same analogy to describe spiritual maturity. He describes spiritual immaturity as being “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14).

The Lord wants us to trust Him. Job said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). When we trust Him, we have peace (Phil. 4:6-7). When we trust Him, we are content (Heb. 13:15). When we don’t trust Him, we are anxious (Phil. 4:6-7) and Solomon said, “Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad” (Prov. 12:25).

Unanswered

Debate There is a second result of debating instead of trusting the Lord. James continues, “for let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord” (1:7). Like the first consequence in verse 6, the second in verse 7 begins with “for” indicating another explanation of what happens when we do not ask in faith but debate within ourselves.

Unanswered In the Greek text, the word “that” is emphatic. “That man” is the one debating and being driven. That one will receive nothing from the Lord. He or she will not only be unsettled, but they will also be unanswered.

There are many reasons given in the Bible for unanswered prayer. Psalm 66:18 says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” Peter warns husbands that if they do not dwell with their wives according to knowledge and honor them, their prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). James 4:3 informs us that if we ask amiss, we will not receive an answer to our prayers. All of these things, of course, are sins. The sin can be disobeying God, dishonoring your wife, or just allowing the desires of your own heart to consume you with lust.

The reason given in James 1:7 for unanswered prayer is a divided heart. God wants singleness of heart (Col. 3:22). He wants wholeheartedness and commitment. People who are debating are not single-hearted or wholehearted. They will not get anything from the Lord.

The devotional booklet, *Our Daily Bread*, relates the story of a converted orphan girl in India who had the right heart attitude when she prayed. Kara, fearing she would become a slave and be physically abused, appealed to a missionary who taught in another village to take her into her home. The sympathetic woman replied, “I’m sorry, but we have no vacant rooms and no money to build any.” Kara tried to hold back the tears as she said, “Please pray that God will let you take me, and I’ll pray, too.” When the missionary reached her home that night, she found a letter from America with a large sum of money in it. She decided to add on to her house to take in the orphan girl. The next morning, she sent a helper to fetch Kara. Knowing it was a day’s journey there and back, she didn’t expect them to return until late that night. To her surprise, the messenger came back with the young girl at noon. “When I prayed,” the child said, “God assured me that He would provide, so I thought I would just get started.” “She was almost here when I met her,” the messenger reported. Kara had asked in faith without any wavering.

Unstable

Double-Minded There is a third result of not trusting God. James says, “He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (1:8). Those debating will end up unstable in all their ways. The Greek word translated “double-minded” means “two souls, two lives.” Double-minded is probably the best translation. This is not a reference to hypocrites. Hypocrites have two lives, but in one, they pretend to be something they aren’t and try to hide it. They appear to be something they are not. On the other hand, double-minded people have two lives and are not necessarily trying to hide

that fact; indeed, they can't. They have two hearts and two minds. They have a kind of "split personality." One part wants to trust God, while another part feels, "I can solve this myself" (Hodges). One part wants to trust God and the other doesn't.

One of John Bunyan's characters in *Pilgrim's Progress* is called "Mr. Facing-both-ways." Augustine once prayed, "Oh Lord, grant me purity, but not yet" (Augustine, cited by Adamson).

Unstable Such a person is unstable. The Greek word rendered "unstable" was used of a political disturbance. Just as there is unrest in a country where people start rioting, so there is unrest in those who are divided. They are unsettled, unsteady, and unstable. They are fickle, faltering, staggering, and reeling like drunk men.

They are unstable in all of their ways. Their instability affects all that they do. It must be remembered that the context of this concept is trials. Instead of trusting God, rejoicing, remaining steadfast, and requesting wisdom so they can be mature, they begin to debate and be divided within themselves. Consequently, they are unsettled, unanswered, and ultimately unstable in every area of their life.

Years ago, I was preaching in a rural church when a pastor asked me to talk to a farmer. He said he had counseled the man for many months and didn't know anything else to tell him. I met with the farmer and listened. He had every kind of problem imaginable. He had financial and physical problems. He had conflicts with his wife and with his children. He had difficulties at work and at church.

When he finished, I asked, "When did all of this start?" He knew the exact time; it was two years before our conversation. I then asked, "What started it?" He described in detail a trial, a big trial, and his response. It was then that I showed him James 1:6-8. I outlined the route downward, beginning with debate and moving through unsettledness, unanswered prayer, and instability in every area of his life. He told me it was as if I had read his diary. He fit the pattern perfectly. He had a trial, but instead of trusting God, he worried. Then, he doubted and after that, he debated. He was driven and divided. He prayed and got nothing. Ultimately, there was instability in every area of his life.

A trial in one area can affect a person's whole life. Pressure at work can cause problems at home. Trouble at home can cause tension at work. A wayward son can cause worry, which, in turn, will affect you at work, at home, and at church.

Summary: Amid a trial, if you do not trust the Lord, but doubt and debate, you will be unsettled, unanswered, and unstable in all of your ways. You will be spiritually immature. If you don't trust God, it will affect you in every area of your life and maybe for the rest of your life.

James 1:2-5 teaches that if believers respond correctly, that is, if they trust God in a trial, they will mature. I would expect that James 1:6-8 would teach that if believers do not respond properly, they will become immature. While that's true, it's worse. You will not just end up immature, you will also end up unstable in all of your ways. The improper response to trials affects the individual (unsettled), their relationship with the Lord (unanswered prayer), as well as other people in their life ("in all of your ways").

In other words, if you fail the test, it's more than just a case of getting one poor grade. It could be that to fail the test is to fail the class, to fail the class is to fail to graduate, to fail to graduate is to fail to get the job, to fail to get the job is to fail to get the higher salary and to fail to get _____. Let's face it. Failing one test could affect everything.

It sounds unusual, but it can and does happen. I know of one man who failed one exam and because of that one exam, he failed the course. Because of that one course, he did not graduate. Who knows how it has affected him since then?

When I was a student at Dallas Seminary, the curriculum was such that if you did not take Hebrew until the second year, you had to take it every year for the last three years of the Th.M. course. Furthermore, if you failed any of those last three years, it meant that you would not graduate. (At the time, there was no summer school. Since then, they have started a summer school program.)

To complicate matters for my class and me, we had to face a Hebrew teacher who was so intelligent that he had no comprehension of what it was like to have above-average intelligence! It took us six hours to do one assignment, and we had three assignments a week. You had to pass the final in his class, or you couldn't pass the course.

As I left my apartment the morning of the final exam, I felt like I was going to my own execution. Strolling slowly down the sidewalk, dreading every step, I passed an old two-story frame house. Next to the house was a short driveway, and at the end of it was a garage with a tin roof. Between the house and the garage was a huge oak tree. That morning a squirrel crawled out on a dead limb. At the moment I passed the garage, the limb broke. When the limb and the squirrel hit the tin roof with a thud, I turned in time to see the squirrel rolling down the roof, land on its feet, and scamper away.

It was as if God said to me, "Did you see that? Do you think I saw that?" I immediately remembered the story in Matthew about the Lord seeing every sparrow that falls. It was as if God said to me, "Son, surely I see you're going into this exam, so don't worry." As I continued walking toward what I felt was my death chamber, I decided I was going to trust God no matter what, that I was going to trust Him to help me pass the exam, that even if He didn't, I would trust Him anyway. By the grace of God, I passed the exam. Although I just barely passed it, I passed it.

A friend of mine was not so fortunate. He failed the exam. Later, he told me that he did not fail the exam on the Monday we all took it. He failed it on the Saturday before that Monday. He described the scene to me of going to the mailbox to mail a letter, dropping it in the slot, and standing there thinking, "I can't do it," and giving up. He chose not to believe and consequently, he failed the exam. As a result, he failed the class and as a result of failing that one class, he didn't graduate.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

A young mother was sitting in her den watching a soap opera on TV and sewing. Her small freckle-faced son was sitting in the middle of the floor, quietly playing. The mother, needing scissors, reached into her sewing basket only to discover they weren't there. Remembering that she had left them on the dresser in her bedroom, she said to her son, "Go into my bedroom and get the scissors off the dresser for Mommy." The little shaver playing in the middle of the floor looked up, sighed deeply, and replied, "What will you give me if I do?" The mother quickly and sharply reacted, "I'll tell you what I will give you if you don't!" He got the scissors.

When you hear a story like that, you probably respond, "That's the trouble with kids today. They're more interested in themselves than in their duty and obedience." Or "The mother's response was excellent." After those kinds of things are said, the truth is we all think like that and sometimes talk like that little freckle-faced boy. When a task gets tiresome and tedious, we ask ourselves, "Why bother? Why finish? What do I get out of this?" That's particularly true during a time of trouble.

In James 1, the half-brother of Jesus Christ urges believers experiencing trials to trust God and endure. That is easier said than done, mainly when the pressure mounts and the temptation is to quit or run. Then, you begin to ask, "What's in it for me?" While exhorting believers to respond correctly to trials in James 1:2-5, James answers that question to some degree. In James 1:9-12, he gives two illustrations and a concluding statement on the subject of trials. In so doing, he reviews two things believers will gain from trials and adds a third.

Rejoicing

Glory James gives two illustrations of what he has been teaching (1:9-11). He begins by saying, "Let the lowly brother glory" (1:9a). Although the word "glory" does not occur in verse 10, it is clearly implied that the rich man is also to glory. Whether lowly or rich, if you are responding properly, you are not griping or in a state of gloom. You are glorying in what the Lord is doing. In other words, these two are to do what James said in verse 2: count it all joy.

Blessed James returns to this thought in his concluding statement when he says, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation" (1:12). Blessed is the person who *endures* trials, not the one who *experiences* them. This statement assumes that the person is responding properly. The Greek word translated "blessed" means "happy." The ancient Greeks called the island of Cyprus the "happy isle" because they believed that Cyprus was so lovely, rich, and fertile an island that a man would never need to go beyond its coast to find a perfectly happy life. It had such a climate, such fruit and flowers, such minerals and materials, that it contained within itself all that was needed for perfect happiness. Blessedness, then, describes that joy within itself, that joy that is self-contained and entirely independent of all chances and life changes. Likewise, the man who has adequately endured trials has an inward self-contained joy and happiness independent of outward circumstances. He is blessed, indeed!

The English word "happiness" comes from the word "happenings." The modern idea is that if a man's happenings are in his favor, he is happy. Of course, if a man's happenings are contrary to his desires and expectations, he is unhappy. That is in stark contrast to the biblical idea of joy, which comes from within. How do believers get such happiness? The answer is they choose it.

Remember, verse 2 says, “Count it all joy,” indicating the individual’s choice. Verse 9 exhorts, “Let him glory.” Abraham Lincoln once said, “Most people are about as happy as they choose to be.” Happiness is a choice. You can choose to wallow in self-pity and be despondent and depressed, or you can choose to walk in God’s plan and be happy and blessed. You can choose a pit of pity or a hill of happiness. Whichever it is, it will be your choice.

Refinement

The Poor Believer The two illustrations James gives are of the kinds of things that believers learn through trials. They are illustrations of the refinement when believers respond correctly to trials.

For example, James exhorts: When James says, “Let the lowly brother glory,” he adds, “in his exaltation” (1:9b). This believer (notice he is called brother) is lowly, not in inner spirit, but in outward circumstances. In other words, he is poor (Adamson). It’s no fun to be poor. How can James say that a poor Christian is to glory? The answer is “in that he is exalted.” What does that mean? If you are poor, no one pays any attention to you. The kings of the earth usually ignore the poverty-stricken. Oh, when some politicians want publicity and votes, they talk about what they will do for the poor, but once in office, they rarely, if ever, consult with the have-nots.

If you are poor and a believer, the God of the universe is interested enough in your life that He is sending trials to mold, shape, and form. That’s exaltation! So, rejoice, boast, glory! Your trial is a sign that God is developing you. There is a way of looking at a trial as an honor. That’s the kind of wisdom a saint gains from suffering. Thus, the proper attitude is joy because God uses trials to produce spiritual maturity (Hodges).

During John Wesley’s time, one of England’s most degraded and poverty-stricken sections was the mining area of Kingswood near Bristol. Many of the miners became believers. When they entered into spiritual riches, they sang a hymn that one of them wrote. It included the line, “On all the kings of the earth with pity I look down.” Poor believers can boast because God has exalted them.

In other words, you are refined spiritually when you see things from God’s perspective. God’s purpose is to bring you to spiritual maturity. You understand things about Him, yourself, and life.

The Rich Believer James gives another illustration. He says, “But the rich in his humiliation” (1:10a). That is, wealthy believers (Ropes; Moo) are to glory because they are made low. As in verse 9, this does not mean low in spirit but made low in outward circumstances: a loss of wealth. What?! Rich believers are to glory over their loss of wealth! Perhaps a sudden loss of wealth is an even greater trial than poverty is for the poor. The poor have grown up lacking means and often adjust to it. A sudden plunge into poverty is perhaps worse.

How can James then say that a rich Christian is to glory in being made low? James explains, “Because as a flower of the field he will pass away” (1:10b). This is an apparent reference to Psalm 40:6. As the flowers and grass of the open field fade away, so do people. Rich people tend to depend on their money and get a sense of security from it. They may conclude that they are indestructible. They can easily forget that as a flower of the field, they will pass away. In financial reverses, they are to learn that and they are transitory and temporary (Lk. 12:16-21).

James amplifies this point by referring to something that happened in Palestine. He says, “For no sooner has the sun risen with the burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits” (1:11). In the spring, after a refreshing shower of rain, green shoots of grass sprout, but in Palestine, there was a

phenomenon known as the “simoom,” when a scorching southeast wind heightened the normal heat of the sun. It came from the desert and on Palestine like a blast of hot air from an open oven. When that happened, new blades of green grass wilted, withered, faded, fell, and ultimately died.

James is saying that’s how it is with people (1:10) and their money (1:11). Neither people nor their money are permanent; both are passing. In an instant, it can be taken away from them, or they can be taken away from it. So, even though the rich lose their money, they can glory. They can learn a vital lesson of life: money and people are not permanent; they are part of the passing.

You say, “But I’d rather have the loot than the lesson.” Oh, no! If having money makes you think you can trust it, the Lord does you a favor by teaching you that it is not part of the permanent. If the result is that you built your life on Him instead of it, you can glory over the experience. Sweet is the lesson learned from bitter experience.

From the two illustrations of people from opposite ends of the social spectrum, James demonstrates the kind of refinement that God makes in believers through trials. The poor who are ignored by the world gain the rich spiritual insight that they are being exalted by God, who is paying close attention to their development. On the other hand, the rich Christian who probably has too much recognition, honor, and esteem realizes by a sudden loss of wealth the vanity of life and of riches. Although radically different economically, both are gaining spiritual insights through their experiences with money. No doubt their trial was tough. Remember, when things get tough, the rubbing brings out the shine.

A pastor and his wife were describing the pressure on them because the church was not able to pay their salary. Rather than giving them a full check, they gave them partial checks, which were only a fraction of what their full salary would have been. It produced a great deal of hardship and struggle for them, but in describing the situation to me, the pastor’s wife said, “I do not think I will ever again, as long as I live, ever receive a paycheck without being grateful that God provided it.” Her trial involving money taught her a valuable spiritual lesson.

In other words, you are refined spiritually when you begin to see things from God’s point of view. You understand things about Him, yourself, and life. Job experienced severe trials. He lost his wealth and health, his ten children and the support of his wife, and received accusations from his friends that it was all because he was a sinner. Throughout all, Job claimed he was innocent and wanted to have his day in court before God. Finally, in chapter 38, God speaks, but instead of answering Job’s question, He asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” God asked 72 questions without giving Job an answer. It is then that Job says, “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor *myself*, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). He understood things about the Lord (He is sovereign) and things about himself (he needs refinement).

Rewarded

The Trial James concludes his extended discussion of trials: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those that love Him” (1:12). The Greek word translated “temptation” means either “trial” or “temptation.” Some commentators have rendered it “temptation” and related it to verses 13-18, where James discusses temptation in depth (Hodges), but it is better to understand verse 12 as a conclusion to the discussion of trials rather than the beginning of a discussion of temptation, mainly because temptation is to be resisted, not endured. Furthermore, the only other place in the New Testament a crown of life is mentioned in Revelation 2:10, and there it is granted for enduring

a trial, not resisting temptation. Therefore, the point of James 1:12 is that when believers endure a trial, they have demonstrated that they genuinely love Jesus Christ and, thus, they will receive a crown of life at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Reward What is a crown of life? In the ancient world, there were three kinds of crowns: a crown of leaves, a crown of flowers, and a crown of gold. The crown of leaves was given to the victor in an athletic game. The crown of flowers was worn at a time of joy, like a wedding. The crown of gold rested on the head of a king. There was a crown of victory, a crown of gaiety, and a crown of royalty. James says the one who endures trials will receive a crown of life. The Greek phrase means “a crown which consists of life,” not leaves, flowers, gold, or life.

What does that mean? No one knows for sure. Perhaps it includes everything an ancient crown stood for, like victory, joy, and royalty. Maybe their levels of life in heaven. There is life and abundant life here. While all will be happy, so to speak, perhaps some will have an abundance of happiness. Whatever it means, this much is clear: when believers endure trials, God rewards them. He will give them a crown of life.

Summary: If believers respond correctly to trials, they will rejoice, be refined, and be rewarded.

The trusting, enduring believer will gain completeness, maturity, and wisdom in this life and will receive a crown of life in the next life.

In the midst of a trial, people tend to fret about what they are losing: time, property, etc. As a result, they can get impatient and gripe. James advises those in the midst of trouble to look at what is being gained. Don't think about the loss; think about what can be learned. Don't focus on the physical; remember the spiritual. Don't concentrate on the temporal; consider the eternal.

D. L. Moody tells of a pastor who was calling on a Christian family that had just suffered the loss of all their possessions in a tragic fire. As he approached the lady of the house, the pastor said, “I give you joy, Madam.” Surprised and ready to be offended, she exclaimed, “What! Joy that my property is consumed?” “Oh, no,” he answered, “Joy, you have property that fire cannot touch.”

“IT’S ALL GOD’S FAULT”

The man concluded, “It’s all God’s fault.” His story went like this: “It all started when I lost my job. I didn’t lose it because of anything I did; I got laid off. Then, as hard as I tried, I couldn’t get another job. That put pressure on my marriage. My wife and I quarreled over what little money we had left. Then, I started sharing my problems with a lady I knew. I met her at the bowling alley. She seemed to understand. One thing led to another and I ended up having an affair and divorcing my wife, but it’s all God’s fault.” Now, he didn’t say it exactly like that, but when confronted by a Christian friend, what he did say was, “If God had not allowed me to lose my job....” In other words, it’s all God’s fault.

A young lady wanted to marry a man who was not a Christian. When told by her pastor that God said Christians should not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), she responded, “Well, if it wasn’t right for us to come together, God wouldn’t have let it happen.”

Sounds strange? Surely anyone would know God didn’t cause a person to commit adultery, or God would not work in a person’s life to directly contradict what He said in His Word, yet blaming God is as old as the human race. When Adam sinned, he blamed God. Remember? He said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me.” (Gen. 3:12). When Lazarus died, Martha blamed God. She said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died” (Jn. 11:21).

Why not blame God? Isn’t He in control of everything? Doesn’t even James teach that trials come from God? That’s proof that it’s all God’s fault, isn’t it? In James 1:2-12, James discusses outward trials—subjection to suffering. In James 1:13-18, he discusses inward temptation—solicitation to sin. By juxtaposing these two subjects, James is telling us that there is a temptation within every trial.

The Nature of God

Don’t Blame God It’s more serious than just being tempted. The real danger is that one might conclude that since God allowed the trial, He also sent the temptation. In other words, it’s all God’s fault. James warns, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’” (1:13a). Blaming God for *temptation* is going too far. James 1:13-18 gives three reasons why we should not blame God for our temptation.

God’s Nature The first reason James gives for not blaming God for temptation is the nature of God. He says, “For God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (1:13b). The two halves of this statement are related. If God could be tempted, He has the capacity for sin and could, in turn, tempt us. If God cannot be tempted, He has no capacity for sin and, therefore, cannot tempt us. Mayor states, “God is incapable of tempting others to evil because He is Himself absolutely insusceptible to evil.” When James says that God does not tempt anyone, he means God is not the personal agent of temptation. God allows others to tempt believers. Job is an example. God did not personally tempt Job, but He did allow Satan to tempt Job (Hodges).

The ultimate question, then, is what is God like? The Bible says God is holy, indicating He is set apart from sin. God is light, and in Him, there is no darkness at all, meaning that in Him, there is no sin at all. Since that is the nature of God, He cannot be tempted. There is nothing within Him to which sin can appeal.

This passage brings up the question of the temptation of Christ. If He is God incarnate, how could He be tempted? The answer is that temptation is both objective and subjective. Christ was objectively tempted and solicited to sin, but subjectively, He was not tempted because there was nothing in Him to desire sin (Hodges).

Let me illustrate. Suppose a man got up one morning to discover fog on his front lawn. Wanting it moved, he looked around for something to do the job and found an old ice hook. If he thought he could drag the fog off his property with an ice hook, someone would say to him, “You can’t do that. Fog is a vapor. There is nothing in it to which you can attach the hook.” Likewise, God’s nature is such that there is nothing sin can “get a hold of” in Him.

God can no more sin than a bachelor can beat his wife!

The Nature of Temptation

If God is not the source of temptation, who is? In James 1:14-15, James describes the nature of temptation, sin, and death. He gives the origin of the species on the subject of sin.

Temptation James says, “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (1:14). This verse defines temptation. This common but complex process deserves careful analysis. The phrase “drawn away” implies that individuals begin this process in an original repose of restraint. Then, they are drawn away by their own desires. These desires are not necessarily evil; they may be natural and innocent, such as a desire for food, sex, security, or significance. These natural and normal human longings become sinful when they violate God’s Law. These desires lead to the next phase of temptation, which James calls being “enticed.” The Greek word translated “enticed” means “to allure by bait.” Something outside of the Law of God appeals to the desire within people to lure them away from the will of God. Thus, temptation comes to individuals when their natural desires draw them away to something outside the will of God. In short, temptation consists of two things: a) being drawn away by desires and b) bait, that is, something that draws your desires away from the will of God.

Let me illustrate. Suppose a kid wanted something costing \$20 but didn’t have the money to purchase it. Needless to say, there would be an intense longing within him for \$20. Then, imagine that a friend invited him over to his house for a visit and while his friend was out of the living room getting refreshments, he noticed a \$20 bill on the coffee table. A desire wells up within him to take it. In this case, the temptation is the bait of a \$20 bill on a coffee table and the desire within a man drawing him away from the will of God to steal another man’s money.

Notice carefully that what has been defined is temptation, not sin. A person can be tempted without sinning. Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The problem with temptation is that behind the bait is a hook. When believers are tempted, they see the bait and not the hook.

Sin James continues, “Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (1:15a). This verse describes the process of sin. To convey the concept of sin, James uses the metaphor of conception and birth, but what are the component parts in terms of sin? The difficulty is the clause “when desire has conceived.” For conception to occur, two elements must unite: the sperm and the egg. What two spiritual elements unite to produce the conception of sin? James only gives us one, that is, desire. What is the other? Most expositors have concluded that the missing element is the will. For example, some say, “It is only when a person, by an act of the will, assents to its (that is, desire’s) enticement that sin results” (Moo; Hodges). Thus, James is saying when desire is united with choice, there is sin. Sin, then, consists of two things: desire plus choice.

Let's go back to the illustration mentioned earlier. When the kid who desired \$20 saw a \$20 bill on his friend's coffee table, he was tempted. Perhaps (hopefully) there was a debate and maybe even a struggle about whether he should take it. Then there was a decision. He decided that he would. That is sin. Notice carefully. He did not have to *take* the money to sin; he just *decided* to take it. Sin is not an external act; it is an internal decision.

Death James concludes, "And sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (1:15b). Sin leads to death. For anything to be full-grown or mature takes time. A mature sin is a fixed habit in a person's character (Adamson). When that happens, James says it brings forth (notice that James again uses the imagery of birth) death. So, death consists of sin plus maturity, that is, sin plus time. In this verse, desire is pictured as a mother who gave birth to a child—sin—and that child grew up and gave birth to another child—death. If the kid who stole the \$20 bill from the coffee table of his friend did it again, again, and again, continuing to steal bigger and bigger things, he could end up involved in a violent crime, resulting in his death. Remember, it takes years to produce maturity.

The question is, what does James mean by death? This passage is addressed to believers (1:2, 9, 16; "us" in verses 18, 19). Believers have passed from spiritual death into spiritual life and will never be judged concerning eternal destiny (Jn. 5:24). Those given eternal life *never* eternally perish (Jn. 10:28). The New Testament, however, does teach that a believer may sin to the point of physical death (1 Jn. 5:13; Rom. 8:13; 1 Cor. 11:30; Acts 5:1-11). Therefore, James is talking about the *physical* death of a believer. The book of Proverbs teaches that physical death is the ultimate end of sin (Prov. 10:27; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14; 19:16). Of course, if believers turn from the error of their ways, they will abort the process (5:20).

The point of all of this is that the nature of temptation is such that it does not come from God. Instead, it comes from us. We want to blame everybody and everything but ourselves. We want to blame society, Satan, and the sovereign God of the universe.

It's like the little boy who wanted to go swimming. His mother told him, "No," but permitted him to walk. When he returned dripping wet, his mother said, "I thought I told you not to go swimming." He responded, "All the other kids went in." He could tell from his mother's expression that she was unimpressed, so he said, "Well, God made swimming holes for swimming, didn't He?" She was still not convinced, so he threw in, "The Devil made me do it." We're willing to blame our sidekick, the swimming hole, and Satan. James says the problem is us. As the old hymn writer says, "It's not my sister, it's not my brother, it's *me*, O Lord."

Shakespeare wrote, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings" (*Julius Caesar*, Act I, ii 134). The source of temptation is not God; it is us. So, don't blame God for temptation. Imagine a man taking money from a friend and then blaming his friend.

The Nature of God's Gifts

Don't Be Deceived In James 1:16-18, James gives the third reason why God is not the source of temptation. He says, "Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (1:16). The Greek word translated "deceived" means "to cause to wander or lead astray." The individual who assigns God as the source of solicitation to evil is a person who has gone astray. Don't be like a ship going off course.

God's Gifts God does not give people temptation because of the nature of His gifts. James says, "Every good and every perfect gift is from above" (1:17a). The Greek word translated "good" implies that which is useful and functional and the one rendered "perfect" refers to that which is complete and is in no way defective. A gift could be good but not perfect. A tie is a good gift for

a pastor, but it may not match anything he owns and, therefore, would not be perfect. God's gifts are not like that. All His gifts are good and perfect; therefore, He does not give temptation.

Furthermore, James adds, "And comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is not variation or shadow of turning" (1:17b). The lights of which God is the Father are the sun, moon, and stars (Moo; Hodges). The heavenly lights, sun, moon, and stars appear to change. God is not like that. God never changes. God gives good and perfect gifts and He never changes. He always gives good and perfect gifts. Fickle friends may give you a good Christmas present this year and an imperfect one next year. God is not like that. He always gives good gifts and He never varies.

James now gives an illustration of one of God's perfect gifts. He says, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of His creatures" (1:18). When James says, "Of His own will," he is telling us that God chose to give this gift. He didn't *have* to make us His children, but He brought us forth (note again that James is using the analogy of physical birth). Sin gives birth to death; God gives birth to us (Hodges).

He brought us into His family through the Word of truth. The expression "the word of truth" occurs five times in the New Testament (1:18; 2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). Elsewhere, it is identified as the gospel of salvation (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:3). According to Paul, the gospel is Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-8). When people hear that Christ died for their sins and rose from the dead, and they trust Christ for the gift of eternal life, God gives them the gift of eternal life and makes them part of His eternal family. Furthermore, we are the first fruits of His creatures. This gift is so good that He would like to do this throughout all of His creations.

Again, the point of the passage is that the nature of God's gifts is such that they are good. Beyond that, the point is that God only gives good gifts. He would not give us anything like temptation. Temptation is not from God; He does not give those kinds of gifts.

Summary: When you are tempted, don't blame God. Temptation does not come from God. The nature of God Himself, the nature of temptation, and the nature of God's gifts all prove that.

People blame God. I have heard them say, "God made me this way." "God has not convicted me." One pastor who divorced his wife so he could marry his girlfriend said, "She's so perfect for me. God must've sent her to me."

James 1:2-18 forms the introduction to the whole book. In James 1:2-12, James said, in essence, that trials come from God and lead to life (see esp. 1:12). Now, in James 1:13-18, he is saying that temptation is from us and leads to death. Believers are to learn from their trials and make sure that they do not blame God for their temptations.

Thus, in the introduction to his book, James teaches that since trials are for our training, we should trust God and learn from them (1:2-12), but with every trial, there is a temptation and the ultimate temptation is to blame God. However, we shouldn't do that for the simple reason that temptation comes from us, not Him (1:13-18).

Life has a way of getting complicated very quickly. When something happens, we react, and another person responds to our reaction, and we react to their response! Now, what started out as a simple situation has become complex. At this point, one of the most helpful things people can do is figure out what a trial (that is, what is not their fault) and what is temptation and sin (that is, what is their fault) and deal with each biblically. To say the same thing another way, after identifying what a trial and a temptation are, a believer should ask, "What is my biblical responsibility?"

HOW TO LEARN FROM TRIALS

As I arrived at the gate to board the plane, I discovered to my delight, that Mr. White was traveling on the same flight. We made arrangements to sit together and as we settled into our seats, I thought, “What an opportunity to learn something from someone who has spent a lifetime walking with Jesus Christ.” I had met Mr. White years before and knew him to be a spiritual leader and senior citizen in the kingdom of God. So, I began to ask questions. Along the way, I asked, “What would you say are the most valuable spiritual lessons that you’ve learned in life?” To my surprise, he said, “My troubles have been my greatest teachers.”

James would concur. According to him, one of your greatest assets is not your personality, potential, or possessions but your problems. God allows tests and trials to enter your life to teach you and train you. How are you to learn from your trials? The answer to that is in James 1:19-20.

The Response

James writes, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (1:19). The Greek word translated “then” is the word “therefore.” This word is absent in many modern English translations because it does not occur in a few Greek manuscripts. This word, however, is in the majority of Greek manuscripts and belongs in the text (Hodges, p. 37, fn. 1). It indicates that these verses are related to what has been said.

Some relate verse 19 to verse 18. For example, Adamson, who argues for retaining “therefore,” says, “He has already spoken of the new birth, and now proposes to show that this experience should evidence itself in conduct.” Since we have been begotten through the Word of God, we should be swift to hear it. It is probably best to relate James 1:19 to the introduction in James 1:2-18 (Hodges; *NKJV Study Bible*). Because we are to learn from our trials, this is what James says we ought to do. This should be our response to trials.

Be Swift to Hear First, James exhorts, “Let every man be swift to hear.” This does not refer to social interaction, such as hearing your family and friends. James goes on to talk about the fact that the Word is planted within us (1:21) and that we are to be doers of that Word and not just *hearers* only (1:22). The context, then, especially the word “hearers” in verse 22, makes it clear that this is a spiritual injunction, not a reference to social intercourse. In the midst of a trial, one needs to be swift to hear the Word of God and the “counsel of others based on that Word” (Hodges). Does that mean that believers should listen to all the lectures on the Bible that they can? That is not the point. The Greek word translated “hear” here means “heed.” James is saying we need to be quick to hear and heed the Word of God. In short, obey Him.

When a mother tells a child to do something and the child does not do it, she says, “Did you hear me?” Literally translated, she means, “Did you heed me?” A person can hear the Scripture, read the Scripture, and be taught Scripture but not heed it. That is particularly true of people who are familiar with what the Scripture says. We hear what we expect to hear, not what is being said.

An army general inspecting a military base asked to see the bugler privately. “Can you play Fire Call?” he inquired. When the bugler assured him he could, the general requested that he meet him at 5:00 the following day. The post commander, nervous about the general’s visit, quizzed the bugler. When the commander found out that the bugler had a rendezvous with the general the next morning, he immediately ordered that the fire station be put in top-notch shape. That night, the fire

station was a beehive of activity as equipment was washed and polished; even the door hinges were oiled. The following day, when the bugler reported to the general, he was ordered to play Church Call.

“But sir,” he objected, “yesterday you wanted to know if I could play Fire Call.”

“Yes, son,” replied the general, “but now please play Church Call.”

As the first notes of Church Call pierced the early morning stillness, the fire station doors flew open and out roared the truck with bells clanging and sirens screaming. They didn’t listen. They heard what they thought they would hear, not what was being played.

Be Slow to Speak Next, James says, “Be slow to speak.” When people have problems and get under pressure, what do they do? They “spout off” at the mouth. Show me a man who is undergoing a heavy trial, and I’ll show you a man who is talking.

Is there anything wrong with that? What’s wrong with talking about your troubles? James does not say, “Don’t talk about it at all;” he says, “Be slow to speak.” When people are under pressure, they can become so preoccupied with their preconceived ideas that they don’t hear any new ideas or, worse yet, God’s ideas. It’s impossible to talk and listen at the same time. So, James instructs those in the midst of a trial to be slow to speak so they can be swift to hear. You cannot learn while talking (Hodges). An old proverb says, “When going through deep water, it’s necessary to keep your mouth closed.” Or, as someone has pointed out, God gave man two ears and one mouth. That means He wants him to listen twice as much as he talks. Think twice before you speak.

A talkative young man once came to Socrates to study oratory. When the philosopher told him that the price was double what he usually charged, the youth objected, but Socrates said that he had to be taught two sciences: first, how to hold his tongue and, secondly, how to speak.

Slow to Anger Then James says, “Be slow to wrath.” The Greek text says, “Slow to anger.” In English, there is not much difference between wrath and anger. Those two words are used interchangeably, but there is a difference in Greek. Wrath is an explosion of anger, whereas anger is an inner settled feeling of hatred. So, technically, James is not talking about a passing display of temper but a persistent dislike, hostility, and resentment.

James is not saying, “Do not be angry at all.” He says, “Be *slow* to anger.” Paul says, “Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph. 4:26). The biblical view is to be slow to get angry and swift to deal with it. Unfortunately, most people do the exact opposite. They are quick to get angry and slow to deal with it.

One of the most common reactions to difficulties is anger (Hodges). James is saying that in the middle of a trial, you should be slow to get angry. Thomas Jefferson said, “When angry, count to 100.” That’s excellent advice because you’ll make the best speech you’ll ever regret when you’re angry. “Temper is a weapon we hold by the blade” (James M. Barrie). For example, It has been said that frequent episodes of anger can bring about diseases in the body such as migraine headaches, digestive disorders (ulcers), hardening of arteries (high blood pressure), diabetes, rheumatism arthritis, muscular tightness (backache), etc.

The three commands of James 1:19 are related to each other and ultimately to the subject of trials. When a trial comes, an individual usually 1) gets angry, 2) “spouts off” at the mouth, and 3) doesn’t learn from the trial. With keen insight into life, James points out that when a trial comes, one should be slow to get angry, slow to speak, and swift to hear what the Word of God has to say. To say the same thing another way, in the midst of difficulty, don’t be controlled by anger, but by the Word of God.

The Result

James 1:20 further explains James 1:19: “For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (1:20). “For” indicates the reason for the commands of verse 19. In a sense, verse 20 is connected to just the last clause in verse 19, “Be slow to wrath,” and yet, in that wrath is the key to verse 19, verse 20 is related to all of what is said.

Negative The Greek word rendered “wrath” is the Greek word for anger. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. There are three possible interpretations of the phrase “the righteousness of God”: 1) subjective genitive, that is, the righteousness God confers on us; 2) possessive genitive, that is, justice; and 3) objective genitive, that is, the righteous activity that meets God’s approval. The word “produce” is decisive for view three (Moo; Hodges). People are justified by faith. Paul taught that (Rom. 5:1) and James understood it (2:23). At justification, a person is declared righteous before God; that is, positional righteousness, which every believer possesses. Here, James is not speaking of that kind of righteousness; he is referring to practical righteousness. Paul says, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death or of obedience to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16). Obedience produces practical righteousness. For the practical righteousness of God to be produced in the lives of believers, they must go beyond the faith at justification. They must follow the instructions of James 1:19.

In these two verses, then, James is saying that the reason a *beloved brother* should be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger is that if he gets angry, God’s purpose for his life, which is to produce God’s righteousness in his life, will not be produced. In short, anger prevents learning (righteousness).

No matter how bad the situation, you can always get angry and make it worse. That’s easy to see, isn’t it? If God designed a trial whereby a rich man loses some money to gain some spiritual riches and gets bitter and angry over the loss, he will never gain spiritual insight. According to the Rabbis, “Thrice was Moses angry, and thrice he failed to produce the mind of God” (Adamson).

Positive James 1:20 is stated negatively, but there is an opposite and positive point. If anger prevents righteousness, not getting angry and hearing and heeding God’s Word produces righteousness. When believers experience trials, the “ultimate goal” is to realize God’s righteousness in their lives, that is, “God-likeness,” the maturity spoken of in James 1:2-4 (Hodges; see 3:2). Obviously, if believers do get angry and if they do obey God, they gain the practical, righteous lesson that God has for them. They will gain endurance, completeness, maturity, wisdom, and joy (1:3, 4, 5, 12; 3:2).

Summary: The way to respond to trials to learn from them is to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

Since “swift to hear” refers to being swift to heed, these three commands deal with a person’s actions, words, and attitudes. If believers deal with these three areas in a trial, they will learn from it. If, on the other hand, they get angry, they will short-circuit the process and the practical righteousness of God will not be worked out in their words and works.

James 1:19 outlines the remainder of the book (Hodges). “Swift to hear,” that is, to do what God says, is developed in James 1:21-2:26. “Slow to speak” is the topic of James 3:1-18. “Slow to wrath” is covered in James 4:1-5:12.

As a professor, I quickly discovered that not all students learned from my lectures. The student who learned the most was the one who came to class with an eager attitude to learn, asked good

questions, and took good notes. His attitude, words, and actions were all they should have been. If a student came to class with the wrong attitude, he usually learned nothing.

A wise old bird sat on an oak.
The more he saw, the less he spoke.
The less he spoke, the more he learned.
Lord, make me like that wise old bird.

HOW TO HEAR GOD SPEAK

A man I knew named Paul was having problems with his wife and work. He was not getting along with his wife, and his wife was not getting along with him. On top of that, he was having financial and spiritual problems. So, he and his wife invited me to their home to discuss their difficulties. I listened as he reviewed his woes and frankly raked his wife over the coals. When he finished, I said, “Paul, some of what you are telling me the Bible calls trials and some of what you are telling me the Bible calls temptation and sin. James teaches that trials are for your training. What you need to do is learn from these trials.” He responded, “What if you do not know what God is trying to teach you? How do you find out?” I referred him to James 1:5, “Ask for wisdom.” Having given him that bit of biblical information, I was sure it would answer his question, but it did not. This time, he said, “But how does God answer a prayer for wisdom? How do we hear God speak?” Paul had asked the logical question. If God wishes to teach us in the midst of our trials and desires that we gain wisdom, how does He communicate to us? James answers that question in the latter part of the first chapter of his book.

Remove Sin

James instructed those experiencing trials to request wisdom from God (1:5). Later, he exhorted them to be swift to hear (1:19). Now he says, “Therefore, lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness” (1:21a). “Therefore” relates James 1:21-22 to James 1:19-20. Because believers in a trial are to be swift to hear God’s Word so that the righteousness of God can be produced in their lives, they must put away sin and receive that Word. In other words, God communicates through His Word, but several things must be done before believers hear and learn, especially God’s wisdom. First, James says, “Lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.” The Greek word translated “lay aside” means “put off.” It was used for putting off a garment, such as a coat. Thus, James says, “Put off sin like you would take off your coat.” In other words, “Stop it.”

Filthiness James uses two words to refer to sin: 1) filthiness and 2) overflow of wickedness. The Greek word translated “filthiness” means just that, “dirty, filthy.” It was used of a dirty, filthy, badly soiled, shabby coat. Here, it is used of moral defilement. When modern Christians think of some sins as filthy, they immediately imagine sins like robbery, riot, and rape. In this passage, the sins that are mentioned are things like wrath, wrong words, and willful actions without listening. These sins are filthy too.

Malice James also exhorts believers to put away the “overflow of wickedness.” The Greek word rendered “wickedness” can mean either evil (Moo; Hodges) or malice (Hort; Mayor). In the New Testament, it seems to mean malice—badness toward someone—spite or an attitude of getting even. That is probably the meaning here. What is to be laid aside is the abundance, the overflow, of sin, which is malice.

The sins in this passage very often occur together, especially in a trial. We get angry. Then, we “spout off” at the mouth and strike out at someone with malice. A friend in Minnesota told me about an experience that illustrates this well. He and his wife were headed home one cold winter night when their car broke down. It was 2:00 am and 30 degrees below zero. Fortunately, they were only a few blocks from a filling station. My friend told his wife to stay in the car and he

would go to the station for help. When he arrived at the station, he discovered that only one man on duty couldn't leave. So, he asked if he could use the phone. The attendant said, "No." Company policy was that no one could use the phone. By that time, my friend had had it. It was 2:00 in the morning, 30 degrees below zero, no other service stations were open, and he could not use the phone. He exploded at the attendant: "What would you do in a *real* emergency!" He stormed out the door, thinking, "In the morning, I'm going to write a letter and get that man fired!" Fortunately, by the following day, he had cooled off and didn't write the letter, but notice what happened in the middle of the night. There was a trial, anger, words, and malice.

This instruction to put away sin is in the context talking about hearing. James 1:19 says to be swift to hear. What follows is an exhortation to hear the Word (1:21). Therefore, James says, "If you want to hear God speak, you must put away sin first."

An old corny joke vividly portrays the problem. Someone said to a fellow, "You have a carrot in your ear!" The man with the carrot said, "I can't hear you." Raising his voice a little, the message was repeated. Again, the man with the problem said he couldn't hear. Again, the message was delivered still louder. The man with the carrot in his ear reached up, pulled the carrot out of his ear, and said, "I can't hear you; I have a carrot in my ear." Likewise, if you have sin in your ear, you'll not be able to hear God speak.

Receive the Word

Receive The Word James says, "And receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (1:21b). After laying aside sin, one is to receive the implanted Word of God. The Greek word translated "receive" means "to welcome." The "word of truth" (1:18) is the gospel (Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5). The "implanted word" (1:21) is the Word planted in a believer's life *after* the new birth. Adamson argues that there is a Greek word that means "innate," that is, "implanted at birth." It does not appear in this verse. Therefore, the word rendered "implanted" must refer not to birth but to a time "later in life." James says that believers are to welcome the Word. Peter says that they are to desire it (1 Pet. 2:1).

The Word is to be received with meekness. Instead of an attitude of anger (1:20), believers are to have an attitude of meekness (1:21). Meekness is not weakness. In fact, this Greek word was used of a wild horse that had been tamed and was now under the control of a bit and bridle. It's not that he is weak; it is that he is meek, that is, his strength is under control. So meekness means "strength under control." Imagine a horse with all of his muscle and might, yet under the control of a bit and bridle, waiting for instructions from the rider. That is the picture of meekness. It is the picture of someone with the strength of steel but a teachable spirit.

To hear God speak through the Word, one must receive the Word with a teachable spirit. Some receive the Word but with an argumentative spirit. When they hear what God says, they want to argue with it. They come up with all sorts of reasons why they can't do what God says or why it won't work (maybe the reasons should be called excuses). Some receive the Word with an analytical spirit. When they hear what God says, they respond, "That's interesting," and begin to analyze and study it. When they have finished, they *know* what God said but have not done it. Then there are those blessed saints who receive the Word with an agreeable spirit. The minute they hear the Word, they say, "I agree," and do it. James says that is the way to receive the Word, meekly with a teachable spirit.

The Salvation of the Soul James teaches that one is to welcome with meekness the implanted Word. The Word of God is to be planted in the soil of the soul, allowed to take root, grow, and

produce fruit. James insists that such a process is able to save a person's soul. What does that mean? The saving of a soul is a cliché used among Christians to refer to someone being saved from damnation, but that is not what James has in mind in this passage. He uses the word "save" five times (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20). In none of them is he speaking of being saved from damnation. For example, he speaks about the prayer of faith saving the sick (5:15). In this passage, James does not discuss *sinners* getting saved and going to heaven. He is talking about *saints* and their sins. Sin is filthy; it gets believers dirty, does damage, and causes death (1:15).

The Greek word translated "soul" means "soul, life." Most commentators interpret "soul" in James 1:21 as the inner life or immaterial part of a person and "saves" as ultimate salvation, but some have argued, I believe correctly, that "soul" here, as in Mark 8:35-36 and 1 Peter 1:9, means "life" and that James 1:21 is talking about saving one's physical life from the damage done by sin (Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege*, pp. 23-25; see also Hartog). James says the Word can save a believer's *life* from dirt, damage, and the death that sin causes if they receive the Word with a teachable spirit. Earlier in the passage, James warned that sin could lead to death (1:15). Now, he teaches that the Word, properly received, can "preserve physical life" (Hodges).

A missionary friend told me of getting angry and praying, "Lord, save my soul." He meant, "Lord, save my life from the destructive effects of anger." That's what James is saying.

Do the Word

To hear God speak through the Word, believers must not only put away sin and welcome the Word with a teachable spirit but also *do* what the Word says. James makes that explicitly clear by adding, "But be doers of Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (1:22). Hearing the Word is probably a reference to hearing the Word read and taught in an assembly of believers (Hodges). Believers are to hear and heed the Word of God. What follows in the remainder of this paragraph are two reasons why believers should do the Word.

Deception In the first place, if they hear the Word and do *not* do what it says, they will end up deceived. James puts it like this: "For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror where he observes himself, goes away and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (1:23-24). This passage is usually taken to mean that a man looks in a mirror and sees his "flaw" (Blue), "shortcomings and defects" (Barnes), "blemishes, imperfections, deformities, and impurities" (Clarke). If that is the case, notice carefully that James says he is like a "man;" he does not say like a "woman." The Greek word rendered "man" means "male." A female would never do what James says males do. If a woman looks into a mirror and sees anything wrong, she immediately corrects it, but men do not necessarily do that. A male of the species may look in a mirror, see a problem, not correct it, walk away, and soon even forget that he had not shaved or that his hair was not combed. Likewise, when believers hear the Word of God and do not do what it says, they run the risk of being deceived. The Greek word translated "deceived" means "to miscalculate, to reason falsely, to mislead."

A man who lived in the mountains had never seen a mirror. One day, he found one that a hiker had lost. He picked it up, looked at it, and said, "Well, if it ain't dear old dad. I never knew he had his picture taken." He took it home and put it in the closet. His curious wife saw him do it and when he left, she dug it out of the closet, looked at it and murmured, "So that is the old bag he's been chasin'." We look in the mirror, but we don't see ourselves.

The occupational hazard of attending a Bible-teaching church is that believers could conclude that they are okay just because they hear the Word. They could take pride in hearing the Word, but

those who do not do what it says are as bad off or worse off than those who do not even hear it. They end up deceived.

Blessing James gives a second reason why a believer should obey the Word. He says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one is blessed in what he does” (1:25). This verse outlines the process to obedience. It begins with looking into the perfect law of liberty. The Greek word translated “look” is not talking about a mere glance; it means “to stoop and look.” The idea is to bend over something to get a closer look at it. This refers to the close observation of the text of Scripture. The Bible is like Shakespeare; it is not sufficient to read it; it must be studied. The perfect law of liberty is the law of love (Mayor; Mitton). The law of love liberates! It is the complete, perfect law.

The next step to obedience is to “continue” in the Word. This is not the usual Greek word for “continue” in the New Testament. This particular word means “to continue beside.” Alford refers to Wiesinger’s remarks that the idea is not so much about continuing to observe it in action as it is about observing it in attention. In other words, this is a reference to meditation. After observing carefully what the Word says, a believer needs to linger *beside* it, thinking through what it means and how to apply it.

The third and final step in obedience is to do the work. The Bible was written not just for meditation and contemplation but for action. Aristotle wrote in the front of one of his books, “This book was written for action, not discussion.” Believers who do what the Word of God says will be blessed. They will hear God speak. They will be blessed with endurance, completeness, maturity, insight, wisdom, happiness, and righteousness (1:3, 4, 5, 12, 19). They will be blessed, indeed.

Summary: To hear God speak, one must put away sin, receive the Word of God with a teachable spirit, and do what the Word says.

That may involve other things like carefully observing the text and thinking through its implications, but the bottom line is that one hears God speak through the Word of God. When in a trial, believers need to make sure that they are in the Word and under the Word. It is not sufficient to hear or even know what the Scripture says. One must hear and heed; hear and adhere to the instruction of God.

Lord Bacon said, “It is not what men eat, but what they digest that makes them strong; not what we gain, but what we save that makes us rich; not what men read, but what they remember that makes them learn; and not what we preach, but what we practice that makes us good Christians. These are great and common truths often forgotten by the glutton, the spend-thrift, the bookworm, and the hypocrite.”

PURE RELIGION

Imagine a mother telling her teenage son, “Go to the store and get me a quart of whole milk. The recipe calls for whole milk, not fat-free milk. So make sure you get whole milk.” The son goes to the store. As he is talking on his phone to his girlfriend, he approaches the dairy section and, not paying attention, picks up a carton of fat-free milk, pays for it, and returns home. He is surprised to hear his mother say, “You brought me fat-free milk!” He thought he had picked up whole milk.

That is a parable of things spiritual. Some people *think* that they have whole milk, but they are deceived. What is a pure spiritual life and what is the watered-down version that deceived people have? To avoid deception on the one hand and help develop a pure spiritual life on the other, James makes several powerful observations in James 1:26-27.

A Deceived Spiritual Life

Deception James indicates that it is possible to be self-deceived about one’s spiritual life. He says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless” (1:26). The man *thinks* that he is religious but is deceived. How could such a thing happen? What was in his head to make him *think* he was on the right track?

Religious The clue to this man’s deception is in the word “religious.” That Greek word has particular reference to the external aspects of worship (Ropes). It describes scrupulous attention to the details of formal worship. This man thinks he is religious because of the rituals of religion. This religious man *hears* the Word (1:23). That means he attends the assembly of the saints (Hodges). His modern counterpart is a faithful member of the church. He attends all of its services and does more. He is religious, that is, he is careful about the details of worship. He sings when others yawn. He plunges money into the plate when others pass it down the row. He listens intently while others sleep or let their minds wander. He can even tell you about the service and sermon afterward. Now, what’s wrong with that? Nothing. In his case, he thinks he is really spiritual *because* he goes through these rituals of religion. He has heard the Word but has not yet done the Word.

Another modern-day application of this principle is what some Christians do with the practice of “devotions.” Many believers spend a few minutes every day reading the Bible and praying. Then they think they are “spiritual” *because* they had their daily devotions. “Less dedicated Christians don’t have daily devotions,” they think.

Neither church attendance, even where the Word of God is powerfully preached, nor daily devotions makes one spiritual. Don’t think because you’ve gone through the rituals of religion, you are religious. If you do, you are deceived.

Not Bridling the Tongue The problem is not that the man heard the Word. He heard the Word, but had no practical effect in his life. He looked into the perfect law of liberty (1:25), that is, the law of love, but did not act in a loving way. This man went through the rituals of religion; he heard the Word, but in the words of James, he did not “bridle his tongue” (1:26). After he left church, the deceived man should have been able to figure out that something was wrong with his spiritual life. All he had to do was listen to himself talk. He spoke unloving words.

Earlier, James had urged, “Let every man be ... slow to speak” (1:19). This deceived man heard the Word but did not heed it. Instead of being slow to speak, he was swift to speak. The words came out of his mouth as rapidly as bullets out of a machine gun and did about as much damage. Or perhaps he said things he should not have said. At any rate, his tongue was a dead giveaway that there was death in his spiritual life.

This brother thinks he is spiritually healthy, but Dr. James says, “Stick out your tongue and let’s see how healthy you really are!” Justin said, “By examining the tongue of a patient, physicians find out the disease of the body and philosophers the disease of the mind.” James would add, “And preachers the disease of the heart.” What you say about someone else may reveal more about you than about them. As a wise old man once said, “You can generally tell the metal of the bell by the sound of the clapper.”

Useless Religion Thus, James concludes that one who goes through the rituals of religion, including hearing the Word, but does not bridle his tongue not only deceives himself but “this one’s religion is useless.” The ritual of religion without the reality of the spiritual truth involved is useless to control one’s tongue or produce personal sanctification. It is like a sick person visiting a physician and listening to his lecture but not taking his prescription. The whole routine was useless in producing physical health.

Likewise, the spiritually sick and immature visit an assembly where the Word is preached. They even listen to the lesson from the Word of God, but it is all useless if they do not practice the principles they heard from the Word. What is even more tragic is that people think that they have the real thing because they went through the ritual. On top of being useless, they are deceived. How sad.

A Pure Spiritual Life

Pure Religion In contrast to the self-deceived religionist, James says, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (1:27). The Greek word translated “pure” means “free from soil or stain” and the one rendered “undefiled” means “free from contamination.” It is important to notice that James is not talking about *true* religion versus false religion. He is talking about *pure* religion versus impure religion. This is not a matter of true milk versus false milk (such as white paint in water); it is more like pure milk versus diluted milk. Spirituality is like milk. Whole milk has 4% butterfat, low-fat milk contains 2% fat, and skim milk contains no fat (butterfat) at all. James is talking about whole milk versus low-fat milk, not milk versus whitewash.

Service What is pure religion? When all of the impurities have been filtered out, what is left? James answers that question by saying, “To visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (1:27). Pure religion consists of service and sanctification.

The Greek word translated “visit” means “to visit with care.” This word does not describe the visit of a mailman, a census taker, or a salesman. It describes someone who has come because he or she is personally concerned and cares deeply about the people in the house. “Orphans and widows” was a proverbial phrase in the Old Testament for those in need of help (Mitton). In ancient times, orphans and widows were more likely than others to be poor and financially insecure. In the first century, there was no public relief. Women did not work as easily then as now, so being a widow very often meant being in affliction. In this passage, these two groups represent all who suffer distress and need, which is evident from James saying, “in their trouble.” The Greek word rendered “trouble” means “affliction, pressure, tribulation, distress.” The point is that *pure* religion

is personally helping those in need. This is not just checkbook charity. It is not sufficient to make some allocation of available funds and feel the responsibility is done. This demands personal concern and personal involvement with people.

Our problem is that this kind of service takes time, and we are selfish. We want to know what we will get out of it. Even in our religious life, we come to church asking, “What can I get out of this?” not, “What can I give?” Spirituality is interested in giving, not getting.

Permit me a personal illustration. I know a little of the wisdom of God. Many know much more than I, but I know a little of the Word and wisdom of God. Let me tell you how I got it. I went to one of the finest seminaries in the world for teaching people the Scripture. I heard the Word taught from some of the best teachers anywhere in the world at the time, but that is not how I learned the Word of God. In college and seminary, I was taught Greek. After graduation, I used it diligently. I’m not a scholar; I am a student. I have used Greek to closely observe the minute details of the Scripture. That has given me some knowledge, but that is not how I learned the wisdom of God. I have an excellent theological library. I have made it my business to know what the best books on the Scripture are and over the years, I have collected them. I have spent hundreds and thousands of hours poring over these books to see what they can teach me about the Scriptures and I have learned a lot. Frankly, that gave me a lot of book learning, but I’m not sure how much of the wisdom of God I gained that way.

In the final analysis, I gained what wisdom of God I possess from His Word from practicing what I found in the Word and ministering it to others. I have learned some of the greatest truths by being deeply and intimately involved with people. When you get involved with people, you really begin to understand the wisdom of God.

Sanctification Pure religion consists of service and sanctification. James speaks of keeping “oneself unspotted from the world.” The Greek word translated “world” means “orderly system.” In the New Testament, the world is that system headed by Satan, whose intent is to leave God out. Thus, to be spotted by the world is to leave God out of some phase of one’s life. Some leave God out of their checkbook, decisions, vacations, etc.

James is saying the believers with pure religion guard themselves from leaving God out of any aspect of their lives. In other words, the real thing consists of personal sanctification. Technically, the word “and” is not in the Greek text. These two spiritual activities, service and sanctification, are connected. Is it possible that James is telling us that if believers are helping people, they will be unspotted from the world? One Greek professor suggests that translating this “in order to keep oneself unspotted” is preferable (Hodges). If you are involved in helping people as unto the Lord, you will not be leaving Him out of your life. “No amount of prayer and church attendance can compensate for the lost compassion and involvement with the poor” (Hodges).

I read a lot (it is my hobby) and use a highlighter when I do. On more than one occasion, I have read while sitting in my recliner with a highlighter in my hand and have had the highlighter fall on to my shirt, leaving a spot. I have learned that if I leave the cap to the highlighter out of the process, I get spotted shirts.

Summary: Some people are deceived by the ritual of religion, not having pure religion, which consists of service and sanctification.

Although James 1 covers several subjects and contains several paragraphs, in the final analysis, it is a unit. The overall subject of this chapter, as well as the theme of the book, is trials. In this chapter, James says that God allows trials to come into our lives to teach us His wisdom and develop His *practical righteousness* in us. If that is to happen, we must hear and heed His Word.

The one specific activity James mentions in this whole process is visiting people in need in their trials. Thus, James is teaching that the wisdom of God and the righteousness of God are produced in the life of children of God as they obey the Word of God in general and minister to people in particular.

It is also interesting to note that James 1 begins with *your* trials. It ends up with you visiting others in *their* affliction. When you are having trouble, help someone else. Some use their trouble as an excuse for not helping others. In the helping of others, we not only obey God but also learn firsthand about His Word and His wisdom. As someone has said, “When you dig a man out of trouble, the hole which is left is the grave where you can bury your own trouble.”

Jean Thompson stood before her fifth-grade class on the first day of school in the fall and told the children a lie. Like most teachers, she looked at her pupils and said that she loved them all the same and would treat them all alike. And that was impossible because there was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard in the front row. Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed he didn't play with the other children, that his clothes were unkempt, and that he constantly needed a bath; as well, Teddy was unpleasant. It got to the point during the first few months that she would take delight in marking his papers with a bright red pen, marking bold X's and then marking the F at the top of the paper, the biggest of all.

Because Teddy was a sullen little boy, no one else seemed to enjoy him either. At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's records. She put Teddy's off until last. When she opened his file, she was in for a surprise. His first-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is a bright, inquisitive child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners ... he is a joy to be around.” His second-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is an excellent student, well-liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness, and life at home must be a struggle.” His third-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy continues to work hard, but his mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest, and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken.” Teddy's fourth-grade teacher wrote, “Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and sometimes sleeps in class. He is tardy and could become a problem.”

Mrs. Thompson realized the problem by now, but Christmas was coming fast. It was all she could do, with the school play and all, until the day before the holidays began, and she was suddenly forced to focus on Teddy Stoddard. Her children brought her presents in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's, which was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper of a grocery bag. Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of other presents. Some children started to laugh when she found a rhinestone bracelet with some of the missing stones and a bottle that was one-quarter full of cologne. She stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on and dabbing some of the perfume behind the other wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed behind just long enough to say, “Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my mom used to.” After the children left, she cried for at least an hour. That very day, she quit teaching reading, writing, and speaking. Instead, she began to teach children. Jean Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. On days of an important test, Mrs. Thompson would remember that cologne.

By the end of the year, he had become one of the smartest children in the class, and ... well, he had also become the “pet” of the teacher who had once vowed to love all of her children exactly

the same way. A year later, she found a note under her door from Teddy, telling her that she was his favorite of all the teachers he'd had in elementary school.

Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he finished high school, was third in his class, and that she was still his favorite teacher of all time. Four years later, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he stayed in school, stuck with it, and would graduate from college with the highest honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still his favorite teacher. Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time, he explained that after getting his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter explained that she was still his favorite teacher but now his name was a little longer. The letter was signed Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story doesn't end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he'd met this girl and was to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and wondered if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit in the pew usually reserved for the mother of the groom. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. And I bet on that special day, Jean Thompson smelled just like ... well, just the way Teddy remembered his mom smelling on their last Christmas together.

PREJUDICE

Have you ever heard stereotypes like these?

Jews are rich, clannish, and pushy.
Asians are passive and unemotional.
Chicanos are illiterate, sloppy, and lazy.
Blacks are emotional and rhythmic.
Anglos are snobs.

Prejudice is worldwide. Theodore Freeman once said, “Anyone who says he is totally free from prejudice is lying” (Freeman, quoted in Simi Horwitz, “Are You A Secret Bigot?” *Seventeen Magazine*, 2/1977, p. 110). It’s not surprising, then, to find that prejudice seeps into the church. Let’s face it; it is here. What does God say about it?

James discusses the problem of prejudice in James 2:1-13. There is a connection between the discussion of prejudice and what was said in chapter 1. Previously, James said that we are to do what the Scripture says. More specifically, we are to be involved in ministering to people. Prejudice would prevent our involvement with people. Furthermore, James concluded his lengthy discussion in chapter 1 by saying that believers are to keep themselves unspotted from the world. Favoritism is a spot that should not be on any saint.

Believers can Practice Prejudice

The Point James begins the discussion of favoritism by saying, “My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality” (2:1). The word “Lord” in the phrase “the Lord of glory” is not in the Greek text (in the NKJV, it is in italics, indicating that it is not in the Greek text). Most translate this “difficult expression” with the words “our glorious Lord Jesus Christ” (Ropes). The presence of the article (“the”), however, does not “easily fit this view” (Hodges). Bengel suggests, “our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory” (Adamson). Another suggestion is “our Lord Jesus Christ of (from) glory” (Hodges). The Lord Jesus came from glory to have mercy on the whole world. He died for everyone. Before Him, the Lord of Glory, we all are sinners who need mercy. Before Him, all race, rank, and reputation vanish.

James insists that believers (“brethren”) should not have the faith of Jesus Christ and yet show partiality. The word “partiality” comes from a Greek word that means “to receive by face.” Partiality is judging a person by outward standards (Moo). It is judging a book by its cover. James says, “Don’t do that.” Partiality is one form of prejudice. The word “prejudice” means “prejudge.” It is to form an opinion without due examination of the facts or arguments necessary for a just and impartial decision.

Faith in someone who belongs to “glory” and at the same time shows deference to the rich and disdain for the poor is “shabby and cheap” (Hodges). On the other hand, if the faith here is “the faith” as in doctrine, the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ is the belief that Christ, the Lord of Glory, moved by mercy, died for every human in the world. James says, “Don’t hold to that, and at the same time, practice partiality.”

Behind the lines during World War I, a group of Christians opened a house for Christian fellowship called Talbot House. All soldiers, irrespective of rank, were welcome. It came to be known as “Toc H.” Over the entrance was the sign, “Abandon all rank ye who enter here.” In Christ, there are no generals, no lieutenants, and no privates, just sinners saved by grace. So, James says, “Don’t have the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ on the one hand and partiality on the other.” The two, like oil and water, don’t mix.

The Illustration James says, “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place’” (2:2-3a). This is the case of the near-sighted usher. James imagines a man coming to church wearing gold rings, a sign of wealth. In the ancient world, the wealthy sometimes wore a ring on every finger (except the middle finger). They wore rings (plural) on every finger. If they had to, they would even rent jewelry to have several rings for each finger (Barclay). The man with many rings was also attired in “fine apparel.” The modern equivalent would be like a man coming to church in a \$2000 tailor-made suit with a \$500 pair of shoes and a multi-carat diamond ring on his finger.

In James’ imaginary illustration, two visitors came to church that day. The second was a poor man dressed in filthy clothes. The usher who received these two visitors demonstrated prejudice. He did not judge these men based on his faith. Instead, he measured them by the superficial outward standard of their appearance. He paid particular attention to the man dressed in expensive clothes and gave him the best seat in the house.

On the other hand, “and say to the poor man, ‘You stand there,’ or, ‘Sit here at my footstool,’ have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?” (2:3b-4). It is not that there were no more seats left—the usher had one! Nevertheless, the usher said, “Sit on the floor close to my footstool” (Mayor). The least he could have done was give the second visitor his seat. Perhaps this is an exaggeration, indicating that the usher demeaned the poor visitor by suggesting he sit underneath the footstool on which the speaker rests his feet (Hodges).

The usher favored the rich man based on his outward appearance, namely, a gold ring and costly clothes. He demonstrated partiality toward the rich and prejudice against the poor. James accuses him of partiality and evil thoughts. The usher made distinctions based on the wrong standard, on the standard of outward appearance. James says that’s poor thinking. To do that is to set yourself up as a judge and to have wicked thoughts.

A newspaper reporter in Dallas, Texas, hired a chauffeur-driven limousine and had it drive up to a toll booth. Then, she and the driver told the attendant, “We’re sorry, but neither of us has any money.” The attendant chuckled, reached into his pocket, pulled out a quarter, and threw it into the basket, explaining, “It’s not every day you get to treat a lady in a limo. Go ahead.” A few days later, the same reporter pulled up to the same booth in a Volkswagen. This time, the same attendant she had encountered before said, “Look, lady, if you don’t pay the toll, I have to. So just pull over and write me a check for twenty-five cents.”

The reporter took the limousine and chauffeur to a self-service filling station. They pulled up to the pump and sat there. After a while, the management came out, filled up the tank, washed the windows, checked the oil, and told the lady passenger, “People think these big cars will not run well on cheap gas. I appreciate the fact that you stopped. If you come here once a week, I’ll give you the gas.” A few days later, the same reporter drove up in the Volkswagen and waited to see what would happen. After a few minutes, an attendant hung his head out the window and screamed, “Look, lady, this is self-service. Pump it yourself! At these prices, we can’t pump it for you.”

Unfortunately, that prejudiced attitude that permeates the world has also infiltrated the church. In his well-known book *The Religious Factor*, Dr. Gerhard Lenski tells of a survey done in churches in an American city. The conclusion was that Protestant churches of all kinds prefer people “like themselves” in taste and income. We don’t mind a few folks a bit above us, but we ignore those a bit below us.

One Sunday morning, an old cowboy entered a church just before services began. Although the old man and his clothes were spotlessly clean, he wore jeans, a denim shirt, and very worn and ragged boots. He carried a worn-out old hat and an equally worn-out Bible in his hand. The church he entered was in a very upscale and exclusive part of the city. It was the largest and most beautiful church the old cowboy had ever seen. The people of the congregation were all dressed in expensive clothes and accessories. As the cowboy took a seat, the others moved away from him. No one greeted, spoke to, or welcomed him. They were all appalled at his appearance and did not attempt to hide it. The preacher gave a long sermon about hellfire and brimstone and a stern lecture on how much money the church needed to do God’s work. As the old cowboy was leaving the church, the preacher approached him and asked the cowboy to do him a favor. “Before you return here again, talk with God and ask Him what He thinks would be appropriate attire for worship.”

The old cowboy assured the preacher he would. The next Sunday, he returned to the services wearing the same ragged jeans, shirt, boots, and hat. Once again, he was completely shunned and ignored. The preacher approached the man and said, “I thought I asked you to speak to God about what you should wear before you came back to our church.” “I did,” replied the old cowboy. “If you spoke to God, what did He tell you the proper attire should be for worshiping in here?” asked the preacher. “Well, sir, God told me that He didn’t have a clue what I should wear. He said He’s never been here before.”

Prejudice is Contrary to the Faith

Choice of God At this point, James gives three reasons why partiality is wrong. The first is that it is contrary to the choice of God. James puts it like this: “Listen, my beloved brethren: has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promise to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man” (2:5-6a). God makes His choices not based on outward appearance but on an inner attitude. First, Samuel 16:7 says that man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. More specifically, James 2:5 does not say that God chose people with faith so they go to heaven. Instead, James says God has chosen those materially poor to be *rich in* faith. These individuals don’t just have faith, they are *rich* in faith. Not everyone who has faith is rich in faith (Hodges).

Furthermore, these poor people don’t just know the Lord; they love the Lord. Scripture makes a distinction between trusting Christ and loving Him. Jesus Himself said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15). The poor person of James 2:5 has done more than trust Christ. He has loved and obeyed Him; he is rich in faith (Hodges).

Consequently, he will inherit the Kingdom. There is a sense in which all who have trusted Christ are heirs (Gal. 3:29). Yet, there is another sense in which only those who faithfully follow the Lord and suffer with Him in the process will be joint-heirs with Christ in ruling over the Kingdom (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). Apparently, James 2:5 is referring to those who are rich in faith, become joint-heirs with Christ and rule and reign with Him in the Kingdom. Nevertheless, the primary point that James is making is that God chooses based on an inner attitude and not an outward appearance.

When we are partial, that is, when we choose based on outward appearance, we are making choices contrary to the method of God. We tend to prefer the tall, dark, and handsome. God very often chooses the short, shot, and shapeless.

Suppose two families join your church next Sunday. One was obviously on your social and economic level, and the other was not as good off as you. Which family would you give the warmest welcome? Which family would you invite for dinner? If we're honest with ourselves, we would admit we're partial and prejudiced. We judge people based on outward appearances, like the color of their skin, the length of their hair, the cost of their clothes, their nationality, or their educational degrees.

I once spoke at a church that put me in the home of one of its wealthiest members. It was a beautiful home with comfortable appointments, and I enjoyed my stay there. I did not know until years afterward that two families in the church wanted to keep me for that week. One was wealthy and the other wasn't. Whoever made the choice decided that I should stay with the rich man. The rich man was spiritually poor. The financially poorer man was spiritually rich. If God had chosen, I would have stayed with the poorer man.

Common Sense James gives a second reason why partiality is wrong when he says, "Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?" (2:6b-7). Our choices are not only contrary to the choices of God; our choices are contrary to common sense. The wealthy men James' readers had chosen turned on them and oppressed them. He does not mention the kind of oppression, but the letter's recipients would have immediately known of whom he spoke. From what James says, we know that the rich were hauling them into court. Perhaps this is connected with something James mentions later in chapter 5 (5:4, 6). The name by which they were called was probably "Christian" (Acts 11:26; Adamson). These oppressors were blaspheming the name of Christ! Thus, there was financial oppression, legal pressure, and persecution. To be partial to such oppressors doesn't make good sense.

When I was in college, I had two friends. One was well-built and well-liked, but he was spiritually carnal. The other wasn't much to look at, but he had memorized whole books of the New Testament. I chose the good-looking fellow to be my roommate. That was dumb. His spiritual level was so low he began to drag me down. I was partial to him and he was the one hurting me spiritually. I switched roommates when I woke up and applied some simple common sense to the situation. I made a choice like God would have made.

Command of Scripture The usher could have objected, pleading, "I was not slighting the poor man; I was just loving the rich man." James speaks to that and, in doing so, gives a third reason why partiality is wrong.

He says, "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law" (2:8-11). In this portion of the paragraph, James is saying that partiality is contrary to the command of Scripture. In verse 8, he quotes Leviticus 19:18, calling it the "royal law," the one that reigns over all others. In other words, if you show kindness to the rich because of love, "you do well," that is, you are doing the right thing (Hodges). He goes on in verse 9, however, to say if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the Law as a transgressor. In fact, Leviticus 19:15 says, "You shall not be partial to the poor nor honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness,

you shall judge your neighbor.” So, James says, “If you kept verse 18 of Leviticus 19, you did well, but if you broke verse 15 of Leviticus 19, you have sinned.” Then he adds, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet stumble at one point is guilty of all” (2:10). You only have to break one law to be a law-breaker. How many links in a chain must one break before he breaks the chain?

James gives an illustration. Imagine that someone committed murder. Then, suppose he was caught and brought to court. When the judge asks, “What do you say for yourself?” The defendant replies, “Your Honor, I did not commit adultery.” James concludes that if you do not commit adultery, but you do commit murder, you have broken the law (2:11). Innocence in one area does not excuse you in another (Hodges).

Likewise, to keep the law of love toward the rich and break the law of partiality toward the poor is to sin. Partiality is contrary to the Scripture.

The Practice of Mercy is Consistent with the Faith

One might conclude that the point of James’ discussion is “Don’t be partial.” That’s only partially true. That’s the negative side. The positive side is given in the last two verses of this paragraph, which, in essence, is “Practice mercy.”

The Exhortation James concludes, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty” (2:12). When you speak and act, remember, you will be judged. You will be judged for practicing partiality but will also be held accountable for practicing mercy. Remember, both of these are in the law called, in verse 12, the law of liberty. The law of liberty is the law of love. Laws usually limit. The law of love liberates. In chapter 1, James says we are to look in the perfect law of liberty and do it (1:25). Now, he says that we will be judged by it.

The Explanation James explains the judgment of verse 12 in verse 13 (“for”). “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (2:13). Those who have shown no mercy will be judged without mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment. So, those who have exercised mercy will be judged with mercy. It has been suggested that the Greek word translated “triumphs” could be rendered “exults over,” as if “mercy could celebrate with words its victory over judgment” (Hodges).

The context indicates that these verses are directed toward believers (see “brethren” in 2:1, 2:5, 2:14). Therefore, the judgment spoken of in James 2:12, 13 must be the Judgment Seat of Christ (see Hodges for a discussion). If believers are the type of people who have dispensed mercy during their lifetime, they will be judged mercifully at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If they have been harsh, unmerciful, and played favorites with people, they will not receive mercy at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The way believers treat others is the way God will treat them.

Summary: Those who believe that Christ died for the sin of the world should not practice partiality; they should practice mercy and if they do, they will be rewarded.

This passage begins by talking about the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:1) and concludes by discussing mercy. Is there not a connection between the two? The faith of Christ is that He had mercy on us in dying for the sins of the world. So, we who have had faith in Christ should make some simple, reasonable deductions. Christ has had mercy on us. We ought to practice mercy on others. We need to see not that the man is a thief, but that the thief is a man, a man for whom Christ died, one on whom we should have mercy. Jesus is willing to have mercy on all, including drunks and divorcees, pimps, prostitutes, and pill poppers. Dare we do any differently?

If we do what Christ did, we will be rewarded by Him. A friend of mine, David Henderson, was once the pastor of a Baptist church in Soddy, Tennessee. Like other Tennessee towns in the hills, Soddy had a bootlegger. No one paid much attention to him, but David did. He tried to win him to Christ. As far as I know, David never succeeded. One day, the bootlegger died. David was the only preacher the family knew. So, they invited him to preach at the funeral. Only a few people showed up. Some David knew and some David did not know.

A few months later, an elderly woman came to see David. She said, "My husband knew what you tried to do for the old bootlegger. He also heard you preach at his funeral. He was very impressed. Well, last week, he died too and he wanted you to have his books." David promised her that he would stop by and pick them up.

A few days later, he dropped by her house. It was an old frame house. The old man and his wife lived on meager means. Once inside, the elderly lady showed David a small back room. There was no door on it, just a cloth curtain. When she pulled it back, David got the shock of his life. There were 3,000 of the finest theological books money could buy. Her husband had been a bishop in a small denomination. He had collected books all of his life, and publishers sent him books for free because of his position. He left them all to David in his will.

David had shown mercy, not partiality, and received a great reward.

JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS

Salvation is by faith. If the New Testament teaches anything, it teaches that. Jesus taught that Peter taught that. James taught that and Paul taught that. Salvation is by faith and not by works. No one has to work to get to heaven. In fact, no one *can* work to get to heaven. When Jesus was crucified, two thieves were crucified with Him. One of them said to Him, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom” (Lk. 23:42). That indicates that he had faith, so Jesus said, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43). The thief on the cross did not do any good works; he didn’t have time! Yet, he went to heaven. Salvation is by faith apart from any works.

If so, why not just trust Christ and do nothing? Why not just sit in a comfortable pew, soak up the spiritual blessings, and do nothing? Why work? A number of answers from the New Testament could be given to that question. James gives one answer in James 2:14-26. His answer has provoked confusion and controversy.

The Principle

The Faith James asks, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?” (2:14). James asks if faith without works can profit and save. In the Greek text, the second question indicates a negative answer is expected.

Some commentators claim that the faith spoken of in verse 14 is not genuine faith that produces eternal life. They point out that the person “says” he has faith. They contend he is only a professor and not a possessor. Thus, according to them, when James asks, “Can faith save him?” he means, can *that* kind of faith, later revealed as one without works, save him? For example, Moo argues that the presence of the definite article (“the”) in the Greek text means James is asking, “Can *that* faith save?” Hodges, a Greek professor for twenty-seven years, says that the Greek does not support that type of translation; it is an “evasion of the text.” He points out that the definite article appears in James 2:17, 18, 20, 22, 26 and “in none of these places are the words ‘such’ or ‘that’ proposed as natural translations.”

Granted, James says, “Someone *says* he has faith” (2:14), but James does not mean to imply that this person’s faith is not genuine. James addresses this passage to “my brethren” (2:14, see also 2:1, 15), that is, people who have exercised saving faith. The issue in this passage is not true faith versus false faith. It is faith that is alone, meaning without works (2:17), versus faith with works. Faith without works is dead, indicating it was once alive! (Hodges, who also quotes Nicol, Plummer, and Dibelius, who come to the same conclusion).

The Salvation If the faith in James 2:14 is genuine faith that produces eternal life, what does James mean when he says, “Can faith save him?” The word “saved” occurs five times in the book of James (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15; 5:20). Each time, it refers to the saving of temporal life, not the saving of the eternal soul. For example, “soul” in James 1:21 means “life.” James 5:15 says, “The prayer of faith will save the sick.” Thus, James is not talking about going to heaven. He is simply asking, “Can faith without works save a person’s *life* from something?” The question is, “From what?” The answer is, “Save your life from being wasted and possibly save it from death.” James 2:14 must be kept in context. James 1:15 mentioned physical death. James 1:21 spoke of saving one’s life from the defilement, destruction, and death of sin. The Word is able to save your life (Hodges).

James 2:13 discusses the Judgment Seat of Christ. In James 2:14, James asks, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith and does not have works?” In other words, what *profit* will believers have, now and at the Judgment Seat of Christ, if they do not produce works? James further asks, “Can faith save him?” That is, “Can faith without works save believers from wasting their lives now, possibly even dying, and being judged without mercy at the Judgment Seat of Christ?” Without works, life is wasted and not rewarded. The issue is profit. Will a believer’s life be profitable now to be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ, or will it be unprofitable? A believer’s life is unprofitable without love (1 Cor. 13:1-3) and without works (2:14).

The Works James illustrates the kind of works he has in mind. He says, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (2:15-16). A believer (see “my brethren” in 2:14) comes upon a “brother or sister” (2:15), that is, a fellow believer, who is naked and destitute of daily food. This person lacks the very necessities of life, sufficient clothes and food. The Greek word rendered “naked” means “without an outer garment.”

Instead of providing for these physical needs, the believer says, “Depart in peace,” which was the normal Jewish greeting of the day. It would be something like a believer today saying, “God bless you,” or “Have a good day.” The believer says, “Be warmed and be filled,” but does nothing to help. In other words, the works James has in mind are labors of love (1:27, 2:12) and acts of mercy (2:13).

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown and Linus are looking at Snoopy, who is shivering in a snowstorm. Charlie Brown told Linus, “Snoopy looks kind of cold, doesn’t he?” Charlie replied, “I’d say he does. Maybe we’d better go over and comfort him.” So they went over and said, “Be of good cheer, Snoopy.” That’s all they did. They did nothing to warm and feed him. Words are not much comfort when you are cold. The tragedy is that cartoon is a slice of real life.

James concludes his illustration with a question, “What does it profit?” (2:16). This is not a reference to the profit to the needy. James asks, “What profit is there for the *believer* who saw the need?” He began (2:14) with that question. Moo observes, “Not only do the empty words of the ‘believer’ do no good for these others; they bring no spiritual ‘profit’ to himself either.” If *believers* feed and clothe the needy and have good works, *they* would profit now and at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The Conclusion James concludes, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (2:17). Faith without works is dead. Dead faith is still faith. A dead battery is still a battery. If it is dead, it was once alive. Dead faith is faith without works. It is a faith that is not working; it is “ineffectual, unproductive” (Hodges). Dead faith is a faith that has no life, that is, no ability to profit, no ability to save from a wasted life and no ability to be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Something can be alive and yet described as dead (Lk. 15:24, 32; Rom. 4:19; Rom. 7:8 and 5:13; Rev. 3:1). In English, to say that an idea is “dead” simply means that it is not working (Hodges).

The great theological question posed by this passage is, can a dead faith (a genuine faith without works) get one to heaven? The emphatic answer of the New Testament is yes! Paul says, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:5). In 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, Paul teaches that it is possible for all of a person’s works to be burned at the Judgment Seat of Christ. He will suffer a loss of reward, but, in the words of the apostle Paul, “He himself will be saved yet so as through fire” (1

Cor. 3:15). James would call that man's faith a dead faith; it was faith without works. So faith without works is able to get you to heaven—Romans 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 prove that—faith without works is dead; it is not able to get you rewarded. The point is, faith without works is unprofitable.

The Protester

The Objector At this point in the passage, James introduces an objector. “But someone will say” (2:18). This person has been called an ally (Moo), but it is clear that he is no ally of James because James calls him a foolish man (2:20). Furthermore, the formula “someone will say” was used in classical Greek and in the New Testament to introduce an opposing opinion (1 Cor. 15:35; see Mayor for examples in classical Greek). Apparently, this was a standard literary format for an author who wished to present and refute an opponent's point of view (Rom. 9:19-20).

The Objection What is the objection of the objector? He says, “You have faith, and I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (2:18). There is a manuscript problem in this verse. Although a few manuscripts do contain the word “without,” the vast majority of Greek manuscripts contain a Greek word (*ek*) which is translated “out of.” That change, however, produces a problem because it makes the objector sound like he is saying the same thing twice instead of two different things (“Show me your faith *out of* your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”). What is his objection?

Granted, following the correction mentioned above, there is no apparent difference between the two statements in English, but in the Greek text, there is. In Greek, the objector changes the order of words. In one, he starts with faith. In the other, he starts with works. In other words, the objector seems to be saying, “You start with faith and show me works. I'll start with works and show you faith.” He is saying, “I don't believe either of us can do it because I don't think there is any relationship between faith and works.”

Hodges explains it like this, “The underlying assumption is, of course, that neither of these things can be done. The argument is virtually a *reductio ad absurdum* [reduction to absurdity], in the eyes of James' interlocutor. After all, who could ever take a set of deeds, however noble they might be, and show from them his creed? One must *say* he has faith (compared with 2:14) even when his works are lacking. Yet, impossible though it would seem to be, to ‘act out’ one's faith by any conceivable set of deeds, the objector (in irony) offers to do it provided James, starting with some statement of his faith, can show how such faith is reflected in works. But though it is the easier of the two tasks, James cannot even do this much. His opponent is quite sure” (Hodges, “Light on James Two from Textual Criticism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 348). According to this interpretation, the objector says there is no connection between faith and works (Hodges). That explanation fits James' answer to the objector in verse 20, where he contends that faith was “working together” with Abraham's works.

The Objector's Proof The objector continues in verse 19 (Mayor; Hodges). That is obvious from the fact that James does not begin his response until verse 20. The objector says, “You believe there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (2:19). “Do well” does not mean, “I congratulate you.” It means you do good works (see 3 Jn. 6, where this exact phrase occurs, except in the future tense instead of the present). In other words, the protester is saying, “You [James] believe that there is one God and you do that which is good.” He continues, “Let me show you that there is not necessarily any relationship between faith and works. The devils also believe but don't do good works; they just tremble. So, you see, there is no relationship between

faith and works.” What the objector is saying would be like someone saying today, “Two people joined our church. Both of them had faith, yet one really went to work and the other did nothing except get emotional now and then. Therefore, I don’t think there is any relationship between faith and works.”

The Proof

The Objector James answers the objector in James 2:20-23. He begins his answer by saying, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” (2:20). Note that the word “man” is in the singular, as is the word “you” in verse 22 (Moo), but the word “you” in verse 24 is in the plural, indicating that James has turned his attention again to his readers and is addressing them (Hodges). James calls the objector a foolish man. The Greek word translated “foolish” means “empty, vain, fruitless.” This has been paraphrased as “What a senseless argument!” (Hodges). Epictetus uses the word of a guest at dinner, who is somewhat ignorant but makes a great effort to impress his fellow guests with his supposed knowledge (Mitton). So it may be that James suggests that the opponent addressed here is not so much a genuine seeker after truth but one who is seeking to impress others with his subtle cleverness. At any rate, James reminds this empty-headed objector that faith without works is dead (2:20). His proof of that follows.

The Proof The next verse contains the phrase “justified by works,” which has caused a great deal of confusion. Did James believe in justification by works? And if not, why did he talk about a justification by works? This thorny problem caused Luther to call the book of James “a right strawy epistle.” Unfortunately, Luther did not realize what a friend he had in James.

There is no question that James believed in justification *by faith*, just as did his friend, the apostle Paul. James clearly says, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (2:23). That is a quote from Genesis 15:6, the same verse, incidentally, which Paul uses to prove that justification is by faith (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3).

With that in mind, consider what James says to the objector: “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?” (2:21). That is a reference to Genesis 22:9, 12. The offering of Isaac on the altar took place years after Abraham was justified by faith. In Genesis 15, Abraham was justified by faith. In Genesis 22, he offered Isaac on the altar. The question is, “Why did he call the offering of Isaac justification by works?” The answer is that justification by works is *before people*. Paul says, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, *but not before God*” (Rom. 4:2, italics added). Justification by faith is before God. Justification by works is before people (Hodges). So, James is saying there is a relationship between faith and works. When you add works to faith, people can see you have faith.

I once went to a church to conduct an evangelistic meeting. During the week, I led a man named Tom to Christ. Sometime later, I returned to the church and asked the pastor, “Did Tom really get saved?” In response to my question, the pastor immediately told me about Tom’s works. Why? A person is saved by faith, not by works. True, but the pastor knew that the man’s works for the Lord demonstrated that he knew the Lord.

The Point Now James insists, “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” (2:22). James says faith was *working together* with works. That is his point to the objector. There is a relationship between faith and works. The two work together (Hodges). James not only claims a relationship between faith and works but also spells out the relationship: “And by works, faith was made perfect.” The Greek word translated “perfect” does

not mean “without fault or flawless.” It means “full-grown, mature.” As Abraham worked, in his case, his faith grew and matured as he offered Isaac on the altar. It was “nourished and strengthened” (Hodges).

Thus, by obeying God and offering his son Isaac on the altar, Abraham demonstrated that he really believed God and was a friend of God. James adds, “And he was called the friend of God” (2:23). Abraham is not called the friend of God in the book of Genesis, but he is called that in Isaiah 41:8 and 2 Chronicles 20:7. There is a difference between being a believer in God and a friend of God. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (Jn. 15:14). So by the offering of Isaac, Abraham demonstrated he was not only a believer but a friend.

James has finished his reply to the objector. He has demonstrated that there is a relationship between faith and works. Works mature faith and, thus, they are profitable to the believer. Having established that with the objector, James now turns his attention to the readers (see the plural “you” in verse 24; see Moo).

The Principle

The Principle Turning his attention to his readers, James says, “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (2:24). As has been explained, he means that faith is demonstrated before people by works and not just by saying, “I have faith.” Notice he says, “You see,” that is, *you* the readers, you people see, not God. To say the same thing another way, there are two kinds of justification. Justification before God is by faith, and justification before people is by works (Calvin, who calls it the “the double meaning” of justification; Darby; Hodges).

The Illustrations James gives his readers two illustrations. The first is Rahab, the harlot. He says, “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (2:25). Rahab (2:25) and Abraham (2:21) are used as illustrations and are in contrast to each other in several ways. Abraham was a man; Rahab was a woman. Abraham was a Jew; Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was a patriarch; Rahab was a prostitute. Although Abraham and Rahab are in stark contrast to each other, the point James makes in each of their lives is the same. How does anyone know that Rahab had faith? The answer is by what she did. When she had faith, she was justified before God, but when she received the messengers and sent them out another way, she was justified before people (see Josh. 6 for the story of Rahab). Note also that her physical life was saved by her works (Hodges).

The second illustration that James uses is, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (2:26). To think of the body as an illustration of works and the breath inside as faith is to get this illustration backward. Instead, the way James is using this illustration, the body represents faith. How does anyone know that a body is alive? The answer is that it has spirit. It breathes. Its breathing demonstrates that the body is alive. Likewise, works demonstrate that faith is alive.

The Conclusion James concludes with the statement that he started with and has repeated throughout the passage: faith without works is dead. As Romans 4:5 and 1 Corinthians 3:15 so vividly demonstrate, a dead faith, that is, a faith that has no works, is able to get one to heaven, but as James contends, that kind of faith is not able to *profit* now or at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Nor does that kind of faith mature or allow others to perceive its presence.

Summary: Faith needs works to be profitable, perfected, and perceived by others. God sees faith and says, “He is righteous.” People see works and say, “He is righteous.”

Suppose a man and a woman got married. After several years, they developed problems and came to see me for counseling. He says, "She does not love me anymore. Before we were married, we agreed we would share the housework and would always tell each other when we were going to be late coming home from work. Now, she doesn't do any of the housework, stays late at work, and never calls to tell me." In that situation, I might ask her, "Do you love him?" And let's suppose, for the sake of an illustration, that she says, "Yes, I love my husband very much." If so, I might say to her, "Love without works is dead. It has no life, no ability to be profitable to him or to be mature, but most importantly, it has no ability to demonstrate to him that you love him. Ma'am, love with labor has life. You need justification by labor, that is, your husband needs to see your labor so he can know your love. Get to work. Do your share of the housework and call him when you are late. That will be profitable. It will develop and mature your love and it will enable him to see that you love him."

WHAT EVERY TONGUE OWNER SHOULD KNOW

Before you are given a license to drive, you must have some instructions and be given a test. If you were to join the Army, before issuing you a rifle, they would give you instructions on how to use it. You and I have a weapon more lethal than either a car or a gun and we're never given any instructions for its use. It's the piece of flesh between our teeth called the tongue. We need instructions on its use, and James will give them to us.

Why does James discuss the tongue in James 3? The answer is in James 1:19. In that verse, James said, "Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." He then commenced to discuss swiftness in hearing, which he interprets as swiftness to hear and heed the Word of God. Now, having concluded his discussion of obedience and works, he turns his attention to the tongue. This, then, is the beginning of the second major division of the book.

James says, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (3:1). The Greek text indicates that James is saying, "Don't be eager to be teachers" (Mayor). The use of "we" indicates James included himself as a teacher. It has been suggested that the backdrop of this passage is the open assembly type of church service practiced in the first century (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Any male could give instructions to the assembly (Hodges). Thus, this is something like us saying, "Don't be eager to be a pastor or a Sunday School teacher." On the other hand, the rest of the passage seems to be referring to the general use of the tongue or, at least, it can be applied to the everyday use of the tongue. So, in another sense, he simply says, "Don't be eager to teach people with your tongue." The reason for this exhortation is that teachers receive a stricter judgment. The teacher and the speaker (the user of the tongue) have more to give an account of at the judgment than the learner and the listener.

What followed may be viewed as a discussion of three uses of the tongue. This has been called "the most famous passage on the tongue in all of literature" (Hodges).

A Controlled Tongue

The Controlled Tongue James begins by describing a controlled tongue. He says, "For we all stumble in many things" (3:2a). James acknowledges that all Christians stumble in many ways. By using the word "we," he includes himself. Even the half-brother of Jesus Christ,⁷⁷ the head of the Jerusalem church, admits that he sinned. If anyone says he has no sin, he is deceived (1 Jn. 1:8). The New Testament certainly does not support the contention of sinless perfection.

Nevertheless, "If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man" (3:2b). Even though all sin in many ways, it is possible for believers to control their tongues.

Indicates Maturity Believers who control their tongues are described as "perfect," that is, mature. An uncontrolled tongue indicates immaturity. A child can't keep quiet. Some years ago, when my children were small, my wife's sister baked a cake for my wife's birthday. It was for a surprise party that night. That afternoon, my children and I were at my sister-in-law's house and we saw the cake. So, I said to them emphatically, "Do not, under any circumstances, say anything about this cake!" At the dinner table that night, as soon as the meal was finished, my youngest daughter said, "Where's the cake?" Children can't control their tongues. A controlled tongue can indicate maturity. I remember seeing a Christian leader under a lot of pressure. He could have said

plenty and probably had the right to do so, but he didn't. His control demonstrated to me his spiritual depth.

Indicates Self-Control James goes on to say that a controlled tongue can not only indicate maturity but also self-control in other areas. He says the one who does not stumble in word is “able also to bridle his whole body” (3:2c). In other words, the tongue is so difficult to tame that if you have enough self-control to handle it, you can control the other members of your body.

Illustrations James illustrates the controlled use of the tongue by saying, “Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body” (3:3). A four-ounce piece of stainless steel in a horse's mouth can control a half-ton of horsepower. A rider in control of the bridle is in control of the horse. While horseback riding with three of his friends, a friend of mine spotted a deer. Although they knew better, they decided just for kicks, they would surround the deer and move in on him. As soon as the buck saw them coming, he became frightened and took flight. He ran right past one of the riders, which frightened the horse, which took off in a flight of his own straight for the barn. The rider tried everything he could to get the horse to stop, but he couldn't. His friends followed at a fast gallop behind him and his uncontrolled horse. They raced back to the barn. When they arrived, they discovered that the rider could not control the runaway horse because the bit in the horse's mouth had slipped down and the horse bit it with his teeth. Thus, the rider was unable to control the bit and consequently, he failed to control the beast. The rider in control of the bridle is in control of the horse. Likewise, believers in control of their tongues are in control of their whole body and personality.

James gives another illustration of the same concept. He says, “Look also at the ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires” (3:4). An ancient ship was much bigger than a horse. It could weigh 300 to 1000 tons and carry a cargo and crew of 300 to 6000 men. In a storm, the ship could be driven by a fierce and violent wind, yet the relatively small rudder could control all of that weight under the pilot's control.

The conclusion to the discussion of the controlled tongue is in the first part of verse 5, where James says, “Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things” (3:5a). The tongue is a small member of the body, but it can do great things. The great things are not just big; they are also good. James is saying the controlled tongue can do great, good things. It can indicate maturity and self-control. A controlled tongue can edify, encourage, educate, comfort, praise, give thanks, and pray.

The Uncontrolled Tongue

Beginning in the middle of verse 5 and extending through verse 8, James describes a second kind of tongue (see esp. 3:3, 7, 8). According to James, an uncontrolled tongue can do great harm. He describes the harm before he describes the uncontrolled nature of the tongue.

The Harm For example, he says, “See how great a forest a little fire kindles!” (3:5b). All the illustrations thus far have indicated something good. It is good to control a horse or a ship, but the destruction caused by fire illustrates that the uncontrolled tongue can do great damage.

James amplifies this illustration by saying, “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (3:6). By “world of iniquity,” James means that the tongue is capable of every kind of sin. There is no law it cannot break. The tongue can blaspheme God, dishonor parents, lie, steal a reputation, and bear false witness. The tongue can also defile the

whole body, that is, the entire person. A house fire does damage in two ways. The flames destroy and the smoke defiles. The tongue can damage a person, and like smoke, it damages a house. It can affect all of us: our minds, our moods, our conscience, and our conduct.

I put a tea kettle full of water on a stove and turned up the flame. Walking away to do something else, I forgot about the tea kettle. In fact, I left the house without realizing that the tea kettle was still boiling on the stove. When I returned, the water in the tea kettle had boiled away and the heat on the kettle itself was so hot that it melted the handle on top of it. Fortunately, nothing else caught on fire except for the handle on the tea kettle melting. The burning of the handle filled several rooms with the smell of smoke that took months to disappear.

The tongue sets on fire the course of nature. The phrase “course of nature” (Greek: “wheel of life”) means the whole course of life. The picture is of a moving wheel of fire that touches every area of life. The tongue affects not only a person but also all of his or her life. It can affect people at home, work, church, and play.

Thus far in James 3:6, James has said the tongue can be a whole world of wickedness in the whole of a person in the whole of his or her life, but there is more. The tongue can be set on fire by hell. The ultimate source of this sin is Satan (Milton; Hodges). He can put words in a believer’s mouth. When Jesus told Peter that he was going to die and rise again, Peter rebuked Him. The Lord then told him, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Mk. 8:33). In other words, Satan had put those words in the mind and mouth of Peter.

The Uncontrolled Tongue Don’t blame it all on Satan. He can put thoughts in your mind and words in your mouth, but James does not develop that idea. Instead, he goes on to say the problem is we do not control our tongue. Keep in mind that earlier in the passage, he insisted that mature believers could control their tongues (3:2). James puts it like this: “For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue” (3:7-8a). It’s true. Even today, every kind of creature has been trained. Many households have trained dogs. The circus has trained lions and elephants. We train birds, including parrots and pigeons. We train snakes. In India, they play a flute and a snake’s head rises in the air. We tame animals in the sea, such as porpoises and even whales. We have trained birds, beasts, serpents, and sea creatures, but James says we cannot tame the tongue.

James summarizes this section of the paragraph in the last words of verse 8. “It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (3:8b). The uncontrolled tongue does great harm. James has described in detail the damage the tongue can do using the imagery of fire. Now, he adds deadly poison. In verse 6, using the illustration of fire, he indicated that the tongue could defile. Now, using the illustration of poison, he is saying it can destroy. It is deadly!

The body of a woman was pulled out of a river in Los Angeles. Pinned to her coat was a piece of paper on which she had scribbled two words: “They said.” No one knows what was said and who said it. These words did as much damage as a smoking revolver or a switchblade knife.

Remember the poem you recited as a child: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me”? James says, “Don’t believe it.” Words can kill. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21).

An Inconsistent Tongue

The Inconsistent Tongue The third use or kind of tongue James describes could be called an inconsistent tongue. He says, “With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who

have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so” (3:9-10). With the same tongue, we bless God and we curse men. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. That is inconsistent. James insists that ought never to be. Adamson says the Greek construction rendered “ought not so to be” is only used here in the New Testament and is “the strongest possible Greek.”

When an ancient king ordered a royal chef to serve him the choicest piece of meat he could find, the cook served him a tongue prepared with delicious spices. The king was delighted. The next day, he ordered the worst piece of meat from the same animal. The chef again served the tongue. The king summoned the cook and asked, “Can a cut of meat be the best and the worst?” The cook said, “Yes, when it’s the tongue.”

Unnatural James argues that for a believer (note “My brethren” in 3:10), the inconsistent use of the tongue is unnatural. He does that by asking a series of questions: “Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh” (3:11-12). The answer to all of James’ questions is “No.” The reason is that it is unnatural. It is not natural for a fig tree to bear olives or for a grapevine to bear figs. Likewise, it is unnatural for believers to be inconsistent with their tongues.

Believers have been saved by grace (Eph. 2:8). So when they speak, they ought to minister grace (Eph. 4:29). That’s natural. For believers to be inconsistent and use their words to minister grace and use words that do not also minister grace is unnatural for them, the recipients of grace.

Summary: Don’t be eager to be a teacher with your tongue because a controlled tongue can do great things, even great good, but an uncontrolled tongue can do great harm and an inconsistent tongue is unnatural for one who knows the Lord. The conclusion is clear: be slow to speak. When you do speak, don’t be inconsistent. Don’t do harm. Do good. Bless God and benefit people.

The subject of James is trials. James 1:19 summarizes the way James develops that subject. One of the ways we learn from trials is by being slow to speak. Could some of our trials be designed to teach us to control our tongue?

An extension of this truth is that the test of the tongue is not just the truth. The test is whether it edifies (Eph. 4:29). It is possible to say something that is true, but it is also unnecessary and does harm. The test of the tongue for the believer is whether it builds up. On a ship crossing the ocean, the captain and the first mate took turns being in charge on the deck. One day, when the captain was on duty and the first mate was off duty, the first mate did something that was rare for him—he got drunk. The captain entered into the logbook, “The first mate got drunk today.” The next day, he was furious when the first mate was sober and on duty and saw the logbook. He later told the captain, “That makes it sound like I get drunk all the time. I don’t want the ship owners to think that. Take that out of the log.” The captain said, “It’s true. It stays.” Sometime later, when the first mate was again on duty, he entered into the logbook, “The captain was sober tonight.” When the captain saw it, he became angry and said, “Hey, it sounds like I always get drunk. Take that out of the logbook!” The first mate replied, “It’s true. It stays.” The test of the tongue is not “Is it true?” The issue is: “Is it controlled and consistent, and does it edify?”

WISE OR OTHERWISE?

If I were to ask, “What are your greatest headaches?” you would probably reply, “Financial problems!” or “Car trouble!” or “Medical issues!” After reflection, you might say that spiritually, your greatest problem is your mouth. What is the solution to our problem with the tongue? James exhorts his readers to be slow to speak (1:19). He elaborates, “Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment” (3:1). He then explains that since the tongue can do great harm and great good, one should be slow to speak. Aren’t there times when one should be *quick* to speak? Suppose you were in a conversation and the people needed your wisdom? Surely, you should speak up. Right?

I wonder what James would say to that? In James 3:13-18, he discusses the subject of wisdom and its relationship to the tongue. In this passage, James describes two kinds of wisdom: worldly (3:14-16) and godly (3:17-18). He also tells the possessor of those two kinds of wisdom how to handle his or her wisdom, especially in relationship to the tongue.

Show Wisdom by Works, not Words

James begins by asking, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” (3:13a). He answers this later by discussing the wisdom that is from above (3:15).

By Works Before he describes godly wisdom in detail, he says up front, “Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom” (3:13b). In other words, even if you have godly wisdom, don’t be eager to speak. Be slow to speak. If you have wisdom, show it with your works meekly, not with your words. Meekness is strength under control. All these strengths are to be under control.

What works does James have in mind that a person with true wisdom is to show? The answer is in verses 17 and 18. Perhaps, works here also include labors of love and acts of mercy James described in the earlier part of his epistle (1:19-2:26; see esp. 1:25, 1:27; 2:12-13, 2:15-16; see also “mercy and good fruits” in 3:17).

Not by Words If a person with godly wisdom is to be slow to speak, it almost goes without saying that a person with worldly wisdom should also be slow to speak. So, James adds, “But if you have bitter envying and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth” (3:14). If all you want is your selfish interests and there is bitterness and envy in your heart, you’re probably going to want to speak first. People will probably not say, “All I really want is my way.” They will clothe their wickedness in wise-sounding words. They will say, “All I want is justice.” If, however, what you want is your way, those words are a lie against the truth of what you are. So, James says to the person possessing these kinds of attitudes, “Don’t boast. Don’t lie.” You should not only be slow to speak but also not speak at all.

Don’t open your mouth if the only wisdom in your mouth is your wisdom teeth. A woman once told John Wesley, “My talent is to speak my mind.” Wesley replied, “Woman, God wouldn’t care a bit if you buried that talent!”

In the remainder of this passage, James describes these two kinds of wisdom in detail.

Worldly Wisdom

Its Source Concerning worldly wisdom, James says, “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic” (3:15). This wisdom is not from above, that is, not from God. The Jews had such a deep reverence and respect for the name of God that they didn’t use it. Thus, in Jewish fashion, James does not use God’s name but says, “not from above,” meaning “not from God” (Mitton). This wisdom is earthly, that is, it is from the world. The world is that system that leaves God out. Worldly wisdom does not come from God, nor does it include God. Worldly wisdom is sensual. The Greek word translated “sensual” means “natural.” The natural individual is without God (Jude 19), so worldly wisdom is without God. It is not from heaven; it is from the heart of humans. Worldly wisdom is demonic. Ultimately, worldly wisdom is from the devil. There is a wisdom the devil plants in people and pours out through them on the earth. Notice that these three sources of worldly wisdom are commonly called the world, the flesh, and the devil. The point here is that this wisdom does not come from God; it comes from the enemies of God.

Its Nature What is this wisdom like? James describes it by saying, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there” (3:16). In James 3:14, he charged that worldly wisdom is characterized by bitter envying. In verse 16, he drops the bitter and simply says, “envying.” In both verses, he describes it as self-seeking, a word that describes ambition or rivalry. The basic idea of worldly wisdom is “I want my way. I am envious and jealous of you, and I want to be on top.”

When I was a kid, we played a game called “King of the Mount.” One fellow got on the top of a small pile of dirt or a hill. He was king. The object of the game was to knock him off the top and replace him as king. Anyone playing the game would do anything they could to accomplish that end. That’s what James is talking about: an attitude that says, “I want to be king of the mount and I’m jealous of anyone who is on the top.” That is worldly wisdom that comes, ultimately, from Satan.

Its Results Worldly wisdom results in “confusion and every evil thing” (3:16). The Greek word translated “confusion” means “instability, disorder, tumult.” The phrase “every evil thing” refers to what is worthless and bad. The result is disorder. When this kind of wisdom is applied to a situation, it does not bring people together; it drives them apart. Then there is every evil work. When the differences become division, there is disorder and devilishness. There is also every kind of evil work, such as sins of the attitude, including envy, jealousy, and bitterness; sins of the mouth, such as gossip, and sins of actions. You do things to get your way; the result is every kind of sin. Worldly wisdom starts with selfishness and ends with every kind of evil.

In the summer of 1986, two ships collided on the Black Sea, causing a tragic loss of life. An investigation revealed the cause of the tragedy was human stubbornness. The captain of each ship was aware of the other ship’s presence. Both could have taken evasive action to avert the collision, but according to news reports, neither wanted to give way to the other. Apparently, each was too proud to yield and make the first move. By the time they saw the error of their ways, it was too late (*Our Daily Bread*, 12/4/1987).

Godly Wisdom

Its Source Godly wisdom is the exact opposite of worldly wisdom. James says, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and

good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (3:17). To begin with, the source is the exact opposite. Godly wisdom is from above, that is, it is from God.

Its Nature Not only its source but also its very nature is the opposite of worldly wisdom. Verse 17 says it is, first of all, pure. Note the words “first ... then.” Through these words, James is saying that purity is wisdom’s first and foremost characteristic. This is the most important part of it. First, there is purity, then all other characteristics listed in verse 17 follow, but not necessarily in the order they are given.

Godly wisdom is pure. The Greek word translated pure means “pure, free from defilement.” In this passage it no doubt refers to motives. Worldly wisdom has wicked motives, that is, it is self-seeking, envious, and jealous, but godly wisdom is pure. It is not seeking its own best end but what is best for others. How would one know if another individual had pure motives? The answer is to consider what follows in this passage.

Godly wisdom is peaceable, that is, it seeks peace. God puts a premium on unity. Ephesians 4:3 exhorts believers in a church to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. When people differ, godly wisdom seeks peace.

I was once in a church where several men differed on an important doctrinal issue. The result was war. The reason was that one of the men kept saying, “All I want is justice.” He should have been seeking peace. If he had had pure motives and sought peace, there would not have been the war that resulted.

Godly wisdom is gentle. This particular Greek word is so rich that no English word can translate it. It means “fair, moderate, gentleness, and sweet reasonableness.” Aristotle used it of the forgiving man who does not stand on strict justice but who listens to merciful considerations (Barclay). Godly wisdom is a willingness to yield. This Greek phrase could be translated as “ready to obey, persuades well.” In other words, you can talk to this person. It is the opposite of being stubborn. When I worked with teenagers, I often heard them complain, “I can’t talk to my parent.” That’s not godly wisdom. Godly wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits. Men of the world are often cynical and sarcastic. Men of heaven are merciful and gracious.

Godly wisdom is without partiality and without hypocrisy. The Greek word translated “partiality” means “without uncertainty” or “indecision.” In other words, this type of person is firm. This is particularly interesting in light of all that has been said. Wise people are gentle, approachable, full of mercy, yet they are firm. To be without hypocrisy means to be genuine and sincere. Thus, people with godly wisdom are firm, but their firmness is not a defense mechanism. They are firm inside and it is genuine.

Its Results As he did with worldly wisdom, James gives us the results of godly wisdom. He says, “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (3:18). Using the imagery of sowing and reaping, James is saying that those who make peace sow peace and they reap righteousness. In short, the fruit or result of godly wisdom is righteousness. It is peace, not war, reconciliation, not rivalry. This is, of course, in stark contrast to worldly wisdom. The result of worldly wisdom is sin; the result of godly wisdom is righteousness.

The men on the board of the church were divided. Emotions were deep and strong. They discussed the problem and decided to vote. Just before they did, the leader of one of the factions said, “Before we vote, I’d like to say something. I feel as strongly about this as you do, but before we vote, I would like to say that I think our unity is more important than this issue. So, I want you to know that no matter how this vote goes, I will support the majority.” Then they voted. The leader, who spoke before the vote, won the vote, but because of what he said, the man on the other side of the issue, who felt as strongly about it as he did, said, “Okay, I lost, but I agree. Unity is

important, so I'll go along with the majority." The result was beautiful to behold. Instead of division and war, there was unity and righteousness. That's godly wisdom. The leaders sought peace and unity. The result was righteousness. To put it another way, a lot of sin was prevented.

Summary: While worldly wisdom is selfish and results in sin, godly wisdom is pure in motive and results in righteousness. The point is that if you have worldly wisdom, shut up. If you have godly wisdom, show it with works and not words. Worldly wisdom should be silent. Even godly wisdom should be slow to speak. That's the sum. Show godly wisdom with works, not words.

An apt description of a wise man is that he has long ears, big eyes, and a short tongue. There are two kinds of cleverness and both are priceless. One consists of thinking of a bright remark in time to say it; the other consists of thinking of it in time not to say it.

One of the best illustrations of godly wisdom I've ever seen was an older man who was a Christian high school principal. He had been the superintendent of a public school system all of his adult life. At age 65, when he retired, a small Christian high school prevailed upon him to become their principal. His job was not easy. There were differences among the faculty. It was a time in the history of our country when the slogan among the young people was, "Don't trust anyone over 30."

Soon after he took over, peace reigned. I was invited to the school to be the spiritual life speaker for a week and witnessed first-hand the campus's tranquility. Furthermore, the teens loved the principal, who was an old man. At the end of the week, I asked him what his secret was. He told me, "Three words sum up my approach: be fair, clear, firm." He explained, "When a problem arises, listen to both sides and make a fair, biblical decision." Once you have, be clear. Make sure everyone understands what the decision is and, then be firm. Stick by your decision." That's godly wisdom. Notice that it is fair yet firm, and James would say it's also slow to speak.

THE CAUSE AND CURE OF CONFLICT

The question is as old as Cain and Abel. Ever since the first murder, people have been asking, “What causes conflict?” Brothers have battles. Families have fights. Countries have conflicts. Why? What causes conflict and, more importantly, what is the cure? Political scientists point to national policies as the cause of war. Sociologists speak of social forces, like class struggle and intolerable living conditions. Economists emphasize poverty, economic imperialism, and the redistribution of wealth. Historians claim that there is a hint in critical events and key leaders. What is the cause of war?

The church is not immune to conflict. Controversy and struggle exist within Christian families and Christian churches. Why is there conflict among Christians? In James 4:1-10, James discusses the cause (4:1-5) and the cure (4:6-10) of conflict.

The Cause of Conflict

James asks, “Where do wars and fights come from among you?” (4:1a) and answers the question with another question and several statements. In the process, he talks about three wars: the war within us, among us, and above us.

The War Within His question is, “Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?” (4:1b). There is a war within us. On one side is our own “desires for pleasure.” The Greek word translated “pleasure” comes from a Greek word that was always used of sinful self-indulgence. It is the word from which we get the English word “hedonism.” In the war within us, if the desire for pleasure is on one side, who is on the other side of the battle line? The answer is in verse 5, where we are told, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously.” The battle within us is between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). Believers have been described as a walking civil war. They can have a difficult time living with themselves.

It is important to note that believers who operate out of a desire for pleasure are leaving God out of the picture.

The War Among There is not only a war within us, there is also a war among us. James says, “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war” (4:2). The way this verse is punctuated is misleading. It should read, “You lust and do not have; you murder. And you covet and cannot obtain; you fight and war” (Ropes). In other words, James is making two statements that parallel each other. The first is that believers have desires, but those desires get frustrated, so they commit murder. Murder, in this verse, should be taken figuratively, not literally (Hodges). The second statement says virtually the same thing. Believers covet but do not get what they want, so they fight and war. What is the difference between the two statements? From the Greek words used, it is apparent that the first statement has to do with things, while the second has to do with people (Mayor; Mitton). Disappointed desires for possessions and frustrated desires for positions cause people to fight.

A neighbor once spotted Abraham Lincoln separating his two sons from a bloody-nosed battle. “What’s the matter, Mr. Lincoln?” he inquired. “Just what’s the matter with the whole world,” he responded. “There are three walnuts and each boy wants two.”

Again, it is important to note that James begins with a desire for pleasure that does not consider God (4:1). The desires for pleasure that leave God out include such desires as desires for possessions and positions.

The War Above The third war James mentions is the war above us. He says, “Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (4:2). In the previous two wars, James has mentioned desire (4:1-2). Although it is not stated, it is implied that believers, in this case, have a desire, but they do not get what they want because they do not ask the Lord for it. Perhaps they do not ask God because it is an evil desire (4:1), or maybe they choose to leave God out of this issue. At any rate, not asking God indicates that believers are fighting God.

Yet, these believers do not stay prayerless indefinitely. James adds, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (4:3). Asking amiss is equivalent to asking “badly.” The requests are “bad” because they are selfish (Hodges). The problem is that when believers finally get around to asking, they are asking simply and solely so that they may spend it on their own pleasures. Notice that James is not saying this is a case of asking God to meet a need but to satisfy pleasure. In this instance, the believers are not coming as servants to a master to have a need met. They are coming as a master to ask God to serve their pleasure. James says that’s wrong. That’s amiss. Such is, in essence, fighting God.

Fred Brown, the evangelist, tells of a lady who asked him to pray for her unsaved husband to come to Christ. She told him it was tough living with her husband because he drank and when he got drunk, he mistreated her. After listening patiently, Brown asked her, “Do you want God to save your husband because that is His will, or do you want God to save your husband because it will make life easier for you?” Some people ask God for things not because they want His will but because they want release or relief. They’re really fighting God.

The kind of prayer James has in mind might sound like this: “Lord, help me this day. Keep me in good health because it’s so miserable to be sick and I have so much to do. Keep my family well, because I need their help. Protect my home and barn. Keep my cattle free from disease so I can make a good living. Protect my investments so that I will not suffer a financial loss and put it into the hearts of those who owe me money to pay me. Please don’t let it rain until I get the hay in, and then please send some showers, as my cornfield is getting dry. Watch over all that concerns me this day. Amen.”

Illustrations It’s almost as if James says, “Let me illustrate.” He says, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (4:4). The terms “adulterers” and “adulteresses” are not to be taken literally (Hodges). That is obvious from the fact that James here talks about friendship with the world, not sexual immorality. Throughout the Scripture, adultery is used figuratively to refer to spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Israel was called an adulteress when she was unfaithful to Jehovah. Jesus called His generation an adulterous generation.

Those seeking their own pleasure, even though they were praying (4:3), were deserting the lover of their souls and befriending another lover James calls “the world.” The Greek word translated “world” means “system” and refers to the system headed by Satan. He intended to leave God out and run the universe on his own. Thus, the concept of the world in the New Testament is that system headed by Satan, which leaves God out (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Friendship with the world is to engage in leaving God out of one’s life and, thus, is spiritual adultery! To leave God out of one’s life is to become His enemy (4:4).

James adds, “Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, ‘The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?’” (4:5). The Holy Spirit, who dwells within every believer (“us”), “yearns jealously” (Gen. 6:3-7; Ex. 20:5; Zech. 1:14) after believers who are fighting against God and leaving God out of their lives. Imagine how a husband would feel whose wife, when she needed to buy clothes, goes to the man next door to get money. That’s how the Holy Spirit feels when believers go to the world to get their needs met.

To put it all very simply, the cause of conflict begins with selfishness and sinful self-indulgence that leaves God out. During a labor dispute in England, when labor and management were fighting, one lady observed, “Everyone is out for himself—the employees, the management, the politician. The whole world is one big selfish mess!”

Ultimately, the cause of conflict is leaving God out, an attitude that James calls pride (4:6). Pride is the root of the problem: within you, among you and others, as well as above you. It leads to unfaithfulness to God and worldliness. As the comic strip character Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

Moo observes, “With penetrating insight, then, James provides us with a powerful analysis of human conflict. Verbal argument, private violence, or national conflict—the cause of them all can be traced back to the frustrated desire to want more than we have, to be envious of and covet what others have, whether it be their position or their possessions.” And beyond that is pride.

The Cure for Conflict

Humility What is the solution to all of this? The answer is in James 4:6-10. James begins this section by saying, “But He gives more grace. Therefore He says, ‘God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (4:6) and he concludes with, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (4:10). In other words, this section begins and ends with an exhortation to humility. When believers humble themselves before God, they receive grace from God (4:6) and God lifts them up. God designed people with needs and desires so that He could meet them and He delights in doing so. God meets our needs by His grace. Mitton defines grace as “God’s generous, active, effective help to man, far beyond anything the man deserves or can rightly expect.”

Moreover, God gives and gives and gives and gives. He never runs out of grace (Hodges). That’s the idea of the phrase “more grace” (4:6). God gives abundantly. Of all the water that comes over Niagara Falls, very little runs the great generators. That’s the way God gives—abundantly—more and more. Of all the sun that shines, most is not needed. That’s the way God gives, more abundantly than the need.

How does the believer receive this grace? Verse 6 says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. This is a quotation from Proverbs 3:34.

If believers are proud, that is, they say within themselves, “I’ll do it my way without God,” God resists them. On the other hand, if they humble themselves before God, God blesses them. The question is, “How do believers humble themselves before God? James 4:7-10 describes the process in three steps.

The first step in humbling oneself before God is to submit to God and resist the devil. “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (4:7). These two commands must be taken together. If you submit to God, you can resist the devil. If, however, you try to resist the devil before submitting to God, you will get yourself in a great deal of difficulty and fail.

Submitting to God is obeying His commands (Rom. 6:16). It says to the Lord, “I will do what You say. I want Your will. I want You to supply my needs, but if in Your wisdom You don’t think I need this particular thing at this particular moment, I will accept that.” Resisting the devil is resisting the temptation to leave God out and assert yourself to meet your needs. What the devil wants believers to do is leave God out, to try to meet their needs apart from God’s will in their lives.

Let me illustrate. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. Needless to say, after that, He was hungry. The devil tempted Him, saying, “If you be the Son of God, make these stones turn to bread.” Now, what’s wrong with that? Is the devil doubting that Jesus was the Son of God? The answer is “No.” The Greek text could be translated “since You are the Son of God.” Furthermore, Jesus was hungry and He could have made bread out of stones. What would have been wrong with that? The answer is that the devil was trying to get Him to assert Himself apart from God’s direction and concerning his directions. Jesus submitted to God and resisted the devil. He said, in essence, “I’d rather be hungry in the will of God than to be fat in the will of Satan.”

James encourages his reader to submit to God and resist the devil by adding, “And he will flee from you.” Although there is a struggle, a spiritual struggle, in resisting Satanic suggestions, the struggle is not permanent. Victory can come. The devil will depart the scene once he sees the believer is determined to submit to God and resist him.

The second step in humbling oneself before God is to “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinner; and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (4:8). Again, these two commands go together. When we draw near, we perceive the need for cleansing. When we cleanse ourselves, we prepare to draw near. For sinners, cleansing their hands means washing themselves of their dirty actions. Double-minded believers need to purify their hearts by dealing with their attitude (see 1:8 for the concept of double-mindedness). The latter part of James 4:8 is taken from Psalm 24:3-4 and is a Hebrew parallelism. The point of hand washing and heart washing is cleansing. Hand washing is symbolic of the cleansing of guilt. Pilate publicly washed his hands to cleanse himself of any guilt for the death of Jesus. Lady Macbeth tried to rub the guilt from her soul by rubbing the blood-stained spot off the skin of her hands.

When believers draw near to God, they not only see their sin, which they are able to be cleansed of, but God draws near to them. This is the encouragement to draw near to Him, even when there is sin. God is faithful and just to forgive the sin (1 Jn. 1:9) and to have fellowship with the cleansed believer (1 Jn. 1:7).

Step three in humbling oneself before God is to “Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom” (4:9). Was James a killjoy? Was he against laughter, humor, and fun? The answer is “No.” James is addressing their particular situation. Notice he says, “Let *your* laughter be turned to mourning.” As Ropes says, “James is not giving a complete directory for conduct at all times, but is trying, by the unexpected intensity of his language, to startle half-hearted Christians into a searching heart.” When dealing with sin in the presence of God, laughter and joy are out of place. To put the same thing another way, take your spiritual condition seriously.

Exultation James concludes: “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (4:10). When we humble ourselves, God exalts us; He supplies our needs.

Summary: The ultimate cause of conflict is selfish desires that leave God out (pride) and the cure is humility, which submits to God for His grace. Since the cause of conflict is leaving God out, humble yourself to Him for grace.

A single girl wants a husband, so she goes after one who is not spiritual and ends up in a conflict between serving the Lord and submitting to an unbelieving husband. Such a woman needs to humble herself before God and decide to marry only a believer. She needs to say, "I'd rather be single in the will of God than married out of the will of God."

A wife wants something from her husband, so she goes after it. She pressures, pleads, and pouts and ends up in a conflict with him. She must humble herself before God and say, "Lord, You give me what I need. I'd rather suffer the need in Your will than try to satisfy the need outside Your will."

A man wants a position at work or at church. He just wants his way. The result is often conflict. He needs to humble himself to God, deciding, "I'd rather not get what I want and be in God's will than to get my way and be out of God's will."

Two men lived on the frontier at a time when there were no fences. Both had large herds. A conflict developed between their employees and ultimately between them. One of the two men was godly, so he said to the other, "You choose whatever land you want and I'll take the rest." That man was Abraham. After that incident, God said to him, "As far as you can see in every direction is what I'm going to give you and your descendants" (Gen. 13). As missionary Jim Elliot said, "God always gives His best to those who leave the choice to Him."

WHY WE JUDGE OTHERS

All are guilty of judging others. The voice on the phone said, “I sent my son to your store for five pounds of apples and I found upon weighing them that you only sent four and a half pounds.” The grocer replied, “Madam, my scales are regularly inspected and are correct. Have you weighed your son?” We all do it. We jump to conclusions. About the only time some people ever get any exercise is when they jump to conclusions. That is part of what the Bible calls “judging.” Why do we do it? Maybe we should ask, “What is it?”

Stop Speaking Evil and Judging

Speaking Evil James says, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren” (4:11a). The Greek phrase “speak evil” means “to speak down.” Those who speak down to others perceive themselves to be above others, which is an attitude of pride. James has just said believers are to be humble (4:10). Humility affects our attitude toward others (Hodges). Tyndale translated “speaking evil” as “backbite.” The corresponding adjective in Romans 1:30 is rendered “backbiters.” This same word is used twice in 1 Peter of the slander and misrepresentation, which Christians often suffered at the hands of non-Christians (1 Pet. 2:12; 3:16). Actually, this word describes “Many kinds of harmful speech” (Moo), including questioning legitimate authority and slander. One commentator says that the Old Testament denounces speaking evil against God and man more often than any other offense (Adamson). James rebukes the love of fault-finding. We say, “He did a good job as Master of Ceremonies, but he sure does like the limelight, doesn’t he?”

A teacher once pinned an “8½ x 11” sheet of paper on the wall. In the center was one small black speck. When she asked the class what they saw, they replied, “A black dot.” None of them saw the white paper! We all tend to see black instead of white. A man named Johnny had a dog he named “Uncle Joe.” When asked why he gave his dog such an odd name, he replied, “Because he’s so much like my Uncle Joe. He growls at everything he eats and wants to fight everyone he meets.” Do people name their dog or their son after you?

Judging “He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother” (4:11b). James has more in mind than backbiting and fault-finding. As he says, “He who speaks evil of his brother and *judges his brother*” (4:11), James is talking about speaking evil and judging. The subject of judging in the New Testament can be confusing. Matthew 7:1 says, “Judge not.” Yet 1 Corinthians 6:2-5 says, “Judge.” How does one reconcile these two verses? There is a proper and an improper judgment. What is the difference?

The Greek word translated “judge” means “to separate, select, choose, to approve, esteem, to be of opinion, judge, to decide, determine, decree, to judge.” Those activities may be proper, or they may be improper. What is the distinction? There are three elements in all judging—proper or improper. The three elements are 1) a standard, 2) a case, and 3) a judge. The judge takes a case, measures it against a standard, and decides whether it meets it. Therefore, *proper* judgment is when there is an appropriate standard, a proper case, and a proper judge. A proper standard, of course, is the Word of God. A proper case is made up of facts and a proper judge is one who has been given the right to judge in that situation.

Let me illustrate. The Bible says Jesus Christ is God’s Son, who died for our sins, and that salvation is by faith. If someone says one of those things is not true, I, as a Christian father, have

the right, yea, the responsibility, to say to my children, “That is not true.” That is proper judgment because I am applying the proper standard, the Word of God, and have the right and responsibility to do so with my children.

Or take another illustration. The Bible says, “Do not steal.” If I have proof someone has stolen, I have the right to judge that sinful act. Christians have the right to judge wrong doctrine and wrong deportment. Paul criticizes the Corinthians because they did not judge a sinning brother (1 Cor. 5). Just make sure that 1) your biblical standard is correct, 2) you have all the facts, and 3) you have the right to judge in that case.

God commands Christians to judge certain things. Christians are responsible to judge doctrine and conduct (1 Thess. 5:19-22; 1 Jn. 4:1-6). Elders must determine what is biblical, what is godly, and what is best for the church. They have to make decisions concerning the plans and programs of the church and in areas like money, music, and missions, all of which involve judging.

It should be pointed out, however, that there are times when, even though you have exercised proper judgment, you must decide what you are responsible to do. For example, a wife may see clearly that she has a disobedient husband, but her responsibility may be to submit to him anyway (1 Pet. 3:1-6). Judging is one thing; carrying out the judgment is another.

What, then, is *improper* judging? The answer is any judgment in which there is an improper standard, an improper case, or an improper judge. Suppose a Christian were to say that So-and-So is not a spiritual person. When challenged as to how she could know such a thing, if her reply was because that individual violated some man-made mandate, she is misjudging that person because she has a wrong standard. She is not using the Word of God but rather the opinions of men. I once heard a Christian say in my presence that two individuals whom we both knew were having an affair. When I asked how she knew, she said, “It’s how he looks at her.” She had no facts. That’s improper judging!

A careful female driver was stopped by a police car. A cameraman pulled up in another car to snap a picture of the officer giving her a white box. “Congratulations, Madam,” the policeman said. “You are the first woman to receive an orchid for ‘Safe Driving Week.’ We have been following you for some time and want to commend you for observing the traffic laws.” The next day, her picture was in the paper with the caption, “She appeared quite nervous while receiving the orchid.” Nervous was hardly the word for it. Her driver’s license had expired and she was driving without a license! The policeman didn’t have all the facts and made an improper judgment.

A Japanese proverb says, “Search seven times before you suspect someone.”

It Puts You Above the Law

Speaking Evil of the Law James adds that if you judge improperly, that has something to say about your relationship to the Scripture. He says he who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother “speaks evil of the law and judges the law” (4:11c). To speak evil of a brother is to speak evil of the Scripture. “To speak evil” means “to speak down, to speak evil of, to disparage.”

Before this, James referred to the law. In James 1:25, he called the Scripture the “perfect law of liberty.” It is perfect because it comes from God and accomplishes its purpose. We generally think of the law as limiting, but James calls the law of the Lord, more specifically, the law of love, the “law of liberty” because love liberates. In James 2:8, he calls God’s law the “royal law,” which means “belonging to the king, or supreme,” that is, it rules all the other laws. James is here referring to the law of love mentioned in Leviticus 19:18 (2:8). Many commentators concur that this

reference to the law in James 4:11 is a reference to the law of love as given in Leviticus 19:18 (Mitton; Hodges).

To love one's neighbor as oneself rules out speaking evil of him or her because we would not want him or her to do that to us. So, to speak evil of a brother is to speak evil of God's law that says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." It is to say that the law is no good.

Judging the Law There is more. Believers who judge another are not just speaking evil against the law, they are judging the law (4:11). By violating the royal law of love, the backbiter is, in effect, passing judgment on it. It is one thing to break a law and another to judge a law. Suppose a policeman stopped someone for speeding. The speedster might say, "Sir, you are right. I am wrong. I was just not paying attention to what I was doing." That fellow is a lawbreaker. On the other hand, suppose a policeman stopped someone for speeding and the speedster said, "This speed law is ridiculous. I think it is nuts. I want to go faster than the posted limit. I ought to be able to do so." That fellow is a law judge. He not only broke the law, but he also judged the law. His actions and his attitude were wrong.

We are supposed to be under the Word, that is, obedient to it. You may not be under the Word, you may be beside the Word, that is, in neglect or disobedience. When you judge your brother, you put yourself above him and the Word of God. You judge him and the Word.

Becoming a Judge There is still more. Anyone who judges his brother not only speaks evil of the law and judges the law, but, in the words of James, "If you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge" (4:11d). That may sound like James is simply saying, "You break the law." While it is true that to judge a brother improperly is to break the law, that is not what James is talking about here. James is not just saying, "You broke the law" (that is, you judged); he is saying, "You did not do the law" (that is, love your neighbor). Thus, it is not enough to just stop backbiting. God wants you to love your neighbor; He wants you to obey the law.

To judge the law is to put yourself above the law, which is abandoning humble submission to the law (Hodges).

It Puts You Above God

The Lawgiver James moves from a discussion of the law to the Lawgiver. He says, "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (4:12a). The Lawgiver, of course, is God. Erdman says, "Only one is the Lawgiver and the Judge; He allows no one to cancel His laws or to debate His decisions." Mitton agrees, "He (God) alone has the right to modify or overrule it." God not only gives the law, He can save and destroy. This twofold power is constantly affirmed in the Old Testament. It means to kill and to make alive (Deut. 32:39; 1 Sam. 2:6,-7; 2 Kings 5:7; Ps. 68:20). God's right to judge is based upon His unique power to save and to destroy. He, who can determine the fate of immortal souls, is qualified to pronounce sentences upon them.

Above the Lawgiver James concludes his discussion of judging by asking, "Who are you to judge another?" (4:12b). What superior virtue, power, holiness, or wisdom do you possess? As a teenager once said, "Who died and left you in charge?" Wesley answered James' question: "A poor, weak, dying worm." Adamson suggests, "For James, as for us, however, the best answer is scornful silence" (Adamson). The implication of the question is that if you judge, you are putting yourself *above* God. Show me someone who always criticizes others, and I'll show you someone who is not subject to God. Such a person displays "arrogant, self-exultation" (Hodges).

Summary: When believers speak evil or judge improperly, they are putting themselves above the Word of God and the God of the Word.

Why do people judge? Psychologists say one possibility is that people constantly judging have low self-images. They put others down to elevate themselves. There is no doubt some truth in that. It is also possible that people constantly judging are practicing what psychologists call “projection,” that is, they are guilty and project their guilt on other people. While there may be some truth to those psychological explanations, in some cases, James says that the root issue is that the backbiter is not subject to God. The human judge is, in reality, judging God instead of God judging him.

Judging another believer is not just an obedience problem, nor is it just a tongue problem. It is more basic than that. It is an attitude problem. If James 1:19 is the outline for the rest of the book, these verses fall within the section that deals with the *attitude* of being slow to wrath. If believers are submitted to God, they will be slow to wrath, slow to judge, and swift to love. If they are not submitted to God, they will be swift to anger, backbiting, and slow to obey.

The ultimate conclusion is not just to stop judging. It is to do the royal law, that is, love your neighbor, but it is easier for us to judge, isn't it?

Paul Harvey tells the story of Philippe I, the Duke of Orleans. He was indeed a strange man. Throughout most of his childhood, he wore petticoats. He loved jewelry, lace, and ribbons. Later in his life, he arrived at the battle lines painted and powdered, covered with ribbons and diamonds, his long eyelashes batting in the breeze. He never wore a hat to battle for fear of flattening his wig. Rather than death, he feared what the sun and dust might do to his complexion. Observers today would quickly conclude that he was a homosexual, but, as Paul Harvey says, “You need to hear the rest of the story.” His mother was named Anne. His oldest brother was Louis—Louis XIV, the king of France. In an era when the rivalry of brothers for a throne was not uncommon, Anne saw to it that her younger son was reared to the contrary of all such ambition. She reared her little boy as a little girl for what she believed was a good reason: to prevent the sibling rivalry for the throne that would cost him his life. She even called him “my little girl.”

Philippe, Duke of Orleans, actually had two wives, eleven legitimate children, and a mistress. No historian will dare speculate as to how many illegitimate children. He is remembered as the “grandfather of Europe.” Every subsequent Roman Catholic family in France listed him among its ancestors. All the kings of France after his brother Louis, as well as Marie Antoinette and the son of Napoleon, were descended from him.

To judge is not only a mistake; it is sinful.

WHEN PLANNING, DON'T FORGET

Just before I leave on a trip, I recheck everything. Like a pilot before takeoff, I go down my checklist. Do I have everything I need for this trip? I check the suitcase for suits and shirts, ties and a toothbrush. I check the briefcase for Bibles, books, paper, and pens. On this trip, I was off to preach in Houston, Texas. I checked and rechecked, double-checked, and took off. When I arrived, I had all that I needed: shoes, socks, even tapes, and a tape recorder. Then, I discovered that I'd left out one small detail in all of my planning. When it first dawned on me what I had done, I couldn't believe it. I checked everything again—everything in the briefcase—everything in the suitcase, but it was just not there. I had flown to Houston, Texas to preach and left my sermon notes in Los Angeles! (A few minutes on the phone saved the day.) That's the danger in planning, namely that you leave something out. More seriously, it is that you leave out the most important part of the program. The Bible warns us that we're all in danger of doing just that as we travel through life's journey.

Some Make Plans and Leave God Out

The Plan James warns: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'" (4:13). The phrase "come now, you who say," was a colloquial expression designed to get attention. A. T. Robertson suggests that there is also in it a tone of impatience. The person to whom James refers is one who is making plans for the future. The plans sound vague: "today or tomorrow ... to such and such a city ... spend a year there." Actually, the planning described in James 4:13 is specific. The person planning the journey has a definite time, "today or tomorrow," and a definite place in mind, "to such and such a city." In Greek, "there" means "this" and refers to what can be seen or pointed out. It is as if the person is planning and pointing out on a map where he or she is going (Mayor). Furthermore, the planner has a definite period, "a year," and a definite purpose, to "buy and sell and make a profit." In other words, this fellow has definite plans for a business trip.

I once did a study on planning. One of my conclusions is that in addition to a purpose, a plan consists of a goal (that is, a long-range goal), an objective (that is, a short-range goal), a program, a schedule, and a budget. James 4:13 includes a goal (to make a profit), an objective (to go to a specific city), a program (to buy and sell), a schedule (to leave soon and stay a year), and although not mentioned, a budget is involved. After all, this was a business trip to make money. We have all done this very thing. We make plans for next year's vacation, school year, investments, or business. So, what's wrong with that? Is James saying that planning is wrong? No! James is not saying that planning is wrong. The Bible does not support such a concept in this passage or any other passage. Paul planned trips (Rom. 15:23-25).

The Problem What is the problem? Several verses later, James explains, "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (4:15). What was missing in the plans of verse 13 is taking God into account. James' imaginary traveler made plans; there is nothing wrong with that, but he left God out; there is everything wrong with that. I suggested earlier that a plan consisted of a purpose, a goal, an objective, a program, a schedule, and a budget. James 4:13 includes all of those except a purpose. For believers, the purpose of everything that is done should be to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31). We do the same thing. We make plans for marriage and don't

make sure it's in the will of God. We lay out prospects for investment and leave God out. We leave on vacation and leave our Bible at home.

Hodges points out that James has discussed humility in our relationship to God and our speech to others. Now, he develops the theme of humility in our relationship to ourselves, especially in our tendency to brag about our material ambitions.

William Henley's *Invictus* says,

It matters not how straight the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

Leaving God Out of Plans is Stupid

Don't Know the Future James says leaving God out of your plans is not very smart: "Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow" (4:14a). See Proverbs 27:1. To say it is not smart is putting it mildly. A better word would be "stupid," an English word that means "lacking in understanding, sluggish in understanding or mental dullness, foolishness." Leaving God out of one's plans is foolish because no one knows the future.

During a fierce storm in November 1975, a huge freighter named *Edmund Fitzgerald* sank in the waters of Lake Michigan. A week before, the chief steward, Robert Rafferty, mailed a postcard to his wife in Toledo, Ohio. He wrote, "I may be home by November 8. However, nothing is ever sure."

No Assurance of Life Leaving God out of plans is not very smart, not only because no one has knowledge of the future but because no one has the assurance of a long life. James says, "For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (4:14b). The Greek text of this verse contains a play on words. In the Greek text, the verse reads, "appearing and then disappearing." Life is brief. Since you may not even be alive in the future, making plans and not considering God and His eternal truth is unwise.

The Bible repeatedly reminds us of the brevity of life. Life is like a shadow (Eccl. 8:13). One moment, a shadow dances upon the earth's grassy carpet. Then a cloud passes over and the elusive shade is swallowed up, never to return. Life is like a dream (Ps. 73:20). It lasts for a moment and vanishes when we awake. Life is like a puff of smoke (Ps. 102:3). Smoke lasts and lingers for seconds, maybe moments, and is gone.

George Bernard Shaw said, "Life's no brief candle—it's a splendid torch!" The Scripture would say, "Life is not a torch, it is a brief candle, not one that lasts all day; it is a brief candle, more like one on a birthday cake."

When Michelangelo was well past eighty, he wrote, "I've reached the 24th hour of my day and ... no project arises in my brain which has not the figure of death engraved upon it." If eighty years of life were like the sixteen waking hours we live every day from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m., then,

If you are ten years old, it is now 8:00 a.m. and breakfast is over.
If you are twenty, it is 10:00 a.m.
If you are thirty, it is noon.
If you are forty, it is 2:00 p.m. and lunch is past.
If you are fifty, it is 4:00 p.m.

If you are sixty, it is 6:00 p.m. and dinner is being served.
If you are seventy, it is 8:00 p.m. and the shadows have already fallen.
If you are eighty, it is 10:00 p.m. and time for the light to go out.

Life is brief. Life is uncertain. On the other hand, death is certain. An old Turkish proverb says, “Death is a black camel, which kneels at the gates of all.” An epitaph on one tombstone reads, “As you are, once I was; as I am, someday you will be.”

In light of the realities of life and death, it is foolhardy to leave God out of any plans.

Leaving God Out is Sinful

According to James, leaving God out of plans is not only stupid, it is sinful. He says, “But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (4:16-17). Notice he uses the words “evil” (4:16) and “sin” (4:17). There are two aspects to this sinfulness: what people do and what they do not do.

What They Do Believers who make plans and leave God out often boast in their arrogance. Confidence in one’s cleverness, luck, strength, or skill provokes individuals to boast and brag about what *they* will accomplish. If God is left out of those plans, such boasting about what a person will do is sinful. People who boast about tomorrow are claiming to be god. The true and living God said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” This is more than a lapse in awareness of God and His will. Such pretentious plans are a source of pride. Hence, all such boasting is evil (Hodges).

What They Don’t Do Believers who leave God out of their plans not only boast but also do not do that which is good. They know that doing that which is good, which in the context of James 4, is to rely upon God, but they do not do it (4:17). That is sinful behavior.

The switch from the second person (you) to the third person (he) has been discussed among commentators. Moo says, “Commentators are nearly unanimous in viewing this verse as a traditional saying that circulated independently of this context.” He suggests that switching to the third person and that the verse fits somewhat awkwardly in the paragraph supports that claim. Adamson, however, says such views are taken “without good reason.” The switch to the third person indicates that James generalizes this truth, which perfectly fits the context and is an appropriate climax to this discussion (see “therefore”).

A man fired from his job asked his boss, “Why did you fire me? I didn’t do anything.” His boss said, “That’s the problem. You didn’t do anything.”

During the Civil War, a soldier was court-martialed and shot by the army for picking a bouquet of violets for his girlfriend. He was supposed to be on guard duty, but he wasn’t and as a result, the enemy slipped through. He knew to do the right thing, but he didn’t. That was criminal behavior.

Hazel Felleman has rewritten William Henley’s *Invictus* in a poem she entitles “My Captain”:

I have no fear, though straight the gate,
He cleared from punishment the scroll.
Christ is the Master of my fate,
Christ is the Captain of my soul.

Summary: To make plans and leave God out is stupid and sinful.

What is the conclusion? Someone might hastily conclude that this passage teaches that no one should make plans. That is like the fellow who did not take lunch to work because he thought the place might burn down before noon.

James is in favor of planning. He did not say that the businessman planning a business trip should not have made plans; he simply added that he should have said, **“If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that” (4:15)**. Paul did just that (Acts 18:21). James is not pleading for no planning. He is pleading for godly planning. So, plan and include God in your plans. Put the Lord in your courses at school, in your career, in your wedding, in your work, in your family, and in your finances. Let me illustrate. Have you made out a will? If you have, that’s good. Next question: did you include the Lord in your will? If so, that’s godly.

There is a story about an ancient Persian prince who decided that to accomplish all that he wanted to do, he divided his life into four periods. He determined that the first period of his life would be given to travel. He designated the second period of his life for the affairs of the state. He decided the third period of his life would be given to his friends. He dedicated the fourth period of his life to God. As the story goes on, the prince dies unexpectedly at the end of the first period of his life. His life was cut short. His well-laid plans were never fulfilled. The most significant thing about the story is the most important part of his life was neglected entirely. That’s not smart. James would add that it’s sinful.

WHEN TREATED UNJUSTLY, REMEMBER

He wanted to be an accountant, so he went to college. For four years, he worked and studied. Finally, graduation came. This is what he had been looking forward to for so long. He could now get married, get a job, and go to work, which is exactly what he did. He got married, landed a good job, and went to work. Then, he hit an unexpected bump in life. At the company where he worked, another employee with the same education and experience was making \$200 per month more than he was. He felt betrayed and used. He felt like he had been treated unjustly.

He wanted to be a pastor. He had attended college and seminary to prepare for the ministry. Finally, he became the pastor of a small church in a rural town. At the time, the average income was approximately \$10,000 a year. The church paid him \$60 per week, just over \$3,000 a year. He did odd jobs on the side to provide for his family, including milking a cow. The pastor was dedicated and both he and his family were willing to sacrifice, but they felt that under the circumstances, they were being treated unjustly because the small church gave \$7,000 a year to missions. Furthermore, several men in the church owned successful businesses. In light of all the factors, what they were paying the pastor was financial oppression.

Have you ever been financially oppressed? Have you ever been treated unjustly? In James 5, a group of believers was treated unjustly; they were financially oppressed. For one thing, they were being cheated out of their just wages (5:4). They were also being condemned (5:6), which may indicate that they were being taken to court (2:6). It was not too much for James to say that they were being killed (5:6). That statement is probably figurative, but what is evident is that these believers were experiencing harsh treatment from unbelievers.

James does an interesting thing in this passage. In James 5:1-6, he addresses the rich oppressors of believers. It is possible that these wealthy employers were Christians, but it is much more likely that they were not believers at all. If that is the case, and most commentators say it is, James addresses unsaved people in this passage. For example, Moo says these verses “unmistakably addressing non-Christians.” That is certainly not done very often in the Scripture, but it does happen, especially in the Old Testament prophets. In the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, James pronounces judgment on unbelievers who unjustly treat Christian laborers. Yet the book is written to believers, so there is also a lesson for us.

Judgment is Coming

The Exhortation James begins by pronouncing judgment. “Come now, you rich, weep and howl” (5:1a). The phrase “come now” was a colloquial expression used to get attention. In James 4:13, this same expression was used to address believers who left God out of their plans. Here, it speaks to unbelievers who leave God out of their lives. The rich men were, no doubt, unsaved rich men (Hodges). The rich men of James 5:1-6 are contrasted with the brethren addressed in James 5:7-12. That doesn’t mean these unbelievers were in the assembly when this epistle was read. Nevertheless, James is addressing them as if they were. The prophets of the Old Testament employed that technique before James and authors have utilized it since his time. So, like the Old Testament prophets before him, he advises these unbelievers to “weep and howl” (Joel 1:5, 13; Isa. 13:6; 14:31; 15:3; Jer. 4:8).

The Reason James explains that they should mourn “for your miseries that are coming upon you” (5:1b). The Greek word translated “miseries” means “the hardships, the suffering of distress.” Here, it is a reference to the suffering of judgment. In other words, James is announcing that judgment is coming. As sure as the sun rises and the sun sets, as sure as spring follows winter and fall follows summer, judgment is coming.

You will be Judged

Wealth will be Worthless In James 5:1, James announces judgment. In James 5:2-3, he describes that judgment. In the English translation, the first three sentences in these two verses are in the present tense. In the Greek text, however, they are in the perfect tense. These are “prophetic perfects,” a prophet in the Old Testament spoke of the future as if it had already happened (Adamson). In his mind, it was so sure to happen it was as if it had already taken place. So, although the English translators rendered these statements using the present tense, James is looking at the future judgment as if it had already been accomplished. That is evident in his last statement in verse 3: “You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” Riches fell into three groups in the ancient world: foodstuffs, costly garments, and precious metals. James does not mention these three groups by name, but that is what he has in mind (see Mt. 6:19). The kind of destruction he mentions applies to those three categories.

For example, James says, “Your riches are corrupted” (5:2a). The Greek word rendered “corrupted” means “to perish, rot.” These riches are foodstuffs. When we think of riches, we think of money and maybe metals, like gold and silver, or stocks and bonds, but wealth can be stored crops, such as corn or wheat. James says it will rot and worthless on the Day of Judgment.

James also says, “Your garments are moth-eaten” (5:2b). Garments, here, are outer garments, like a mantle or cloak. We would say a mink or fur. In the East, garments were a form of wealth. Achan stole a garment. Samson promised a garment to anyone who could solve his riddle. Paul claimed to have coveted no man’s money or apparel. James says their garments will be moth-eaten—no good—worthless on the Day of Judgment.

James adds, “Your gold and your silver are corroded” (5:3a). The Greek word rendered “corroded” means “rusted.” Gold and silver do not rust, meaning James is speaking figuratively. He expresses strongly that gold and silver, like the rest of the wealth, will be worthless. God and silver at the judgment will be of no more value than an old rusty nail. The most precious and indestructible things are doomed to decay, dissolution, and destruction.

Imagine giving your life to gain gold and seeing it rust. Think of it. Spending your life to collect clothes and they are moth-eaten. Look at it. Working all of your life to fill barns with food and it’s rotten. On the Day of Judgment, wealth will be worthless. Today, wealth may be worth having. It can purchase protection and even obtain security, but it will be worthless on the Day of Judgment.

Wealth will be a Witness Wealth will not only be worthless but also a witness against those who hoard it. James says, “And their corrosion will be a witness against you” (5:3b). A. T. Robertson comments, “There will be no escape from the telltale rust which, like gray hairs, betrays age and the approach of death.” Valuable things will become valueless. The rust will be proof of the perishableness of all earthly things.

Money does talk. It will talk on the Day of Judgment. It will witness that these people lived for it instead of the Lord.

Wealth will Work Against Them Their wealth will not only be worthless and will witness against them, but it will also work against them. James says, “And will eat your flesh like fire”

(5:3c). There may be an implied reference here to the fire of Gehenna. At any rate, the picture is of a gold bracelet rusting and shrinking until it eats into the flesh, the point being that the rust that ruined the possession will also be the downfall of the possessor.

James concludes, “You have heaped up treasure in the last days” (5:3d). There is no period of human history when it would be more foolish to heap up wealth than in the last days. Paul says, “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds” (Rom. 2:5-6).

Because You Left God Out

Cheated Laborers These unsaved rich landowners cheated their farmhands out of their just wages, only in this case, the laborers were believers and they cried to the Lord. James says, “Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (5:4). The Greek text says, “the Lord of armies.” The Lord is the almighty, omnipotent Sovereign who is not oblivious to injustice. Some have suggested this verse refers to Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:15 (Ropes; Mitton; Barclay). Laborers were to be paid daily (Mt. 20:1 ff.). By delaying the payment, the employee could more easily be underpaid.

As the story goes, a hard-working Irishman asked his boss, widely known as the town skinflint, for a well-deserved raise. “Pat,” he said, “you really don’t work as hard as you think. There are 365 days in the year. You sleep eight hours every day, making 122 days. Subtract that from 365 days and you only have 243 left. You also have eight hours every day for recreation and taking care of your family, which is another 122 days. That leaves a balance of 121 days. Deducting the fifty-two Sundays leaves you with a total of sixty-nine days.

As you know, your office is closed every Saturday at noon, giving fifty-two half-holidays or twenty-six more days you don’t work. That leaves a balance of only forty-three days. However, we allow one hour for lunch, which, over the year, makes sixteen days, leaving twenty-seven. We give you two weeks’ vacation, which leaves only thirteen days. There are twelve legal holidays, leaving only one day. And if you add up all your coffee breaks, you will see that you probably owe me money.” Figures don’t lie, but liars do figure!

Lived for Themselves These wealthy landowners not only cheated the laborers but also lived for themselves and not the Lord. James goes on to say, “You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury” (5:5a). In verse 5, the Greek word translated “pleasure” means “luxuriously.” It implies extravagant comfort. The Greek word rendered “luxury” implies “wastefulness.” Both words connote excess and self-indulgence.

What exactly does this mean? Excess is relative. What is “essential” to one is “extravagant” to another. I listened to two men talk about their childhood. One said, “We didn’t have indoor facilities.” The other man, who didn’t have to walk as far to the facilities in his childhood, replied, “But we didn’t have electricity.” Necessity is all relative. I remember watching one of the few TV sets in our town as a little boy. It was in the display window of a furniture store! I thought to myself at the time, “Surely anyone who has one of these would have to be very rich.”

How much you have is not the issue. It is how much you spend on yourself versus how much you give away. The obvious point in this passage is that these non-Christian, rich landowners spent all their money on themselves. James tells them, “You have fattened your hearts as in a day of

slaughter” (5:5b). Thus, they had fattened themselves like they fattened the ox before they took him to the slaughterhouse.

Living for themselves would have been bad enough, but they crushed the innocent. James says, “You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you” (5:6). The rich controlled the courts and used them to crush the innocent. The word “murder” here is probably not to be understood literally. Nevertheless, even if it is figurative, it is describing damage to another person, which in this case was perhaps depriving him of the means of earning a livelihood. The innocent farmworkers did not resist the oppression of the rich. Instead, they cried to the Lord (5:4) and left their case in the hands of a righteous Judge (Rom. 12:17-21).

This subsection ends with the statement “he does not resist you,” which has been called anti-climatic (Ropes), but that misses the point. In the words of Adamson, “The (very effective) point of this climax plainly is that the helplessness of their victims increases the damnation of these rich: ‘You have condemned and killed the righteous: he is your defenseless prey.’” Tasker puts it like this: “It brings the section to an end on a note of majestic pathos.”

Not for the Lord Perhaps one of the most significant things about verses 4 and 5 is not what they say but what they do not say. These rich landlords lived for themselves, cheated, and crushed others. They should have lived for the Lord and helped others. Instead, they lived for themselves and hurt others (Lk. 12:21).

Summary: The ungodly rich, who financially oppress the poor, will be judged. The judgment will be on their riches and them because they leave God out of their lives, live for themselves, and hurt others. Because the rich have lived for themselves and oppressed others, they will be judged and are advised to weep. In short, ungodly oppressors will be judged.

Let me clarify several issues. There is nothing wrong with wealth. The sin is not in being rich; there is no particular virtue in being poor. The issue is how the wealth was obtained and how it was used. James condemns those who amass wealth by fraud and spend it on selfish luxury. If (or “when”) you are treated unjustly, remember there is judgment ahead. A just God will punish injustice. There will be justice. Although there is injustice now, justice is coming later. Judgment is coming, which means justice is coming. If you have left God out and have mistreated others, there is a judgment ahead for *you*. The God you try to live without now, you will stand before later. You may think you are getting away with injustice now, but you will face a just God later.

Because of a technicality, a judge was forced to let a criminal go free, whom he was convinced was guilty. Before he allowed him to leave, he ordered him to stand before the bench and said, “Sir, this trial has been highly unfortunate. I know in my heart that justice has not prevailed in this case. I know you are guilty of the crime for which you have been tried. The jury knows you are guilty. Your attorneys know you are guilty. What is even more important is that you know you’re guilty. But because of an unfortunate twist in the laws of evidence, I am forced to set you free. Now, as you walk out that door, I want you to know one thing—one day, you will stand before another Judge in a higher court than this. No clever lawyer will manipulate the law to cover your guilt in that court. No amount of money will be used to hire witnesses to cover your crime. No earthly judge, subject to the limitations of human law, will consider your case. On that day and before that Judge and in that court, you will hear the just verdict of your crime. And unless your heart is changed before that time, you will begin to pay under a sentence that will last forever.”

WHEN TREATED UNJUSTLY, DO

Her father didn't like her. He always yelled and screamed at her; he never just talked to her. She could never please him. Living with him was more like living at boot camp with a mad Marine sergeant than living with a loving father. She tried to please him. She really did, but as any objective outsider could see, even from a distance, that her father had problems. That was putting it mildly. He was filled with hate and hostility, anger and anxiety. Then, one day, he left. He left his work and his wife, his house, and his home. He deserted them all. Then, her mother, her brother, and her sister *blamed* her for his leaving! As she told me the story, my blood boiled. I thought to myself, "How unkind. How unjust." Her question to me was, "What do I do?"

Good question. What do you do when you are treated unjustly? James 5:1-6 reminds us that we should remember that a just God will punish injustice. That's great, but that's later. What about now? What does a person do in the meantime? James gives three commands (5:7-12).

Be Patient

The Exhortation The first thing James says is, "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (5:7a). This exhortation is connected to what has previously been said in James 5:1-6 (note "therefore"). In James 5:1-6, James teaches that justice will be done. Now, he says, "Therefore, be patient." That is, since God will punish the oppressors, patiently wait for Him to do it. Two different Greek words are translated "patience" in the New Testament. One means "endurance" and the other "patience." This one is translated correctly "patience." It means "long-tempered." It is the opposite of being short-tempered. It is self-restraint, which does not hastily retaliate. How long is this patience to last? The answer James gives is "until the coming of the Lord," the point being, just be patient until the Lord gets here. He will right the wrong.

The Illustration At this point, James says, in essence, "Let me illustrate." He says, "See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain" (5:7b). Be patient like the farmer who plants and patiently waits for the rain and the harvest. The early and latter rain refers to the two rainy seasons in Palestine. The "early rain" normally began in Palestine in late October or early November and was anxiously awaited because it was necessary for the germination of the seed. It was the signal for sowing (Ropes). In the spring, the maturing of the grain depended on the latter rain, light showers falling in April and May. Without these, even heavy winter rains would not prevent crop failure.

Phillips Brooke, the famous New England preacher, was noted for his poise. At times, however, he could become frustrated and even irritable. One day, a friend saw him feverishly pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Dr. Brooks?" asked the friend. "The trouble is that I am in a hurry, but God isn't." God is patient in heaven and wants His children to be patient on earth.

Fix Your Heart

The Exhortation Next, James says, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts" (5:8a). The patience that James commanded in verse 7 is not just an external endurance. It is an internal

inclination. Patience is not a grin-and-bear-it stance. The Greek word translated “establish” means “to fix, make fast.” Ropes suggests the translation, “Make your courage and purpose firm.” Solomon advised, “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). When you are treated unjustly, the temptation is to get bitter and resentful. James says, “Beware.”

When I first began traveling as an evangelist, someone told me that money was one of the traps of an itinerant ministry. So, I decided I would never say anything about money. For the thirteen years that I traveled, I never put a price or premium on going to any church. All I ever asked for was a plane ticket plus an honorarium. During those years, I received from nothing to something more than gracious. Most of the time, I was treated fairly and even generously. There were those times when a small church gave me a small sum. I took it as from the Lord and never said a word. A few times, however, I was treated unfairly. They never took an offering in one church, where the meetings were exceptionally well-attended and the Lord particularly blessed. The pastor himself was personally wealthy. He owned a great deal of real estate and gave his wife a new car every year. At the end of the week, the treasurer asked the pastor, “How much should I give Mike?” As the story was related to me later, the pastor said, “Ah, give him \$150.” That included expenses and an honorarium. If they had given me a check for just expenses, based on mileage, it would have been more than \$150. If they had taken just one offering and told the people it was for me, it would have been more than \$150. Pure and simple, I had been had. I was shocked and shaken. I even got bitter. Then someone told me, “It’s bad, but if you get bitter, it’ll be worse.” Realizing that was right, I cried out to the Lord and *fixed my heart*. I told the Lord I would trust Him and not be bitter.

The Reason The reason James gives for establishing your heart is, “For the coming of the Lord is at hand” (5:8b). According to James, the coming of the Lord was imminent, that is, He could come at any moment. Mitton, an English commentator, says, “James clearly believed, as others of his time did, that the coming of Christ was imminent.” As a Lutheran commentator, Lenski says, “Christians may expect it at any time.” Moo states, “The early Christians’ conviction that the *parousia* [return of Christ] was ‘near’ or ‘imminent’ meant that they fully believed that it *could* transpire within a very short period of time—not that it *had* to.”

James 5:8 is one of the proofs of the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Walvoord says, “If the Scripture presents the coming of the Lord for His church as imminent by so much, they also declare it as occurring before the predicted period of the tribulation” (Walvoord, *The Rapture Question*, p. 82). If this verse is not teaching Pre-tribulation rapture, it loses its punch. Then, believers could be bitter for a while and when they see that they are in the Tribulation, they could repent before the Lord returns.

James 5:8 also states that believers need to fix their hearts. First John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.” To abide in Him is to abide in love. If you do that, you will not be ashamed when He appears. To be in hate and hostility would be embarrassing.

Don’t Grumble

The Exhortation Some Christians don’t get bitter; they just let off a little steam by griping and grumbling. Thus, James adds, “Do not grumble against one another, brethren” (5:9a). The Greek word translated “grumble” means “to groan.” This verse has the idea of complaining, criticizing,

and fault-finding. We say, “That fellow gets to me. If he weren’t so pigheaded. These dumbbells running the show don’t know what they’re doing, etc.”

The Reason The reason James gives for not grumbling is “lest you be condemned” (5:9b). The majority of manuscripts read “judged” instead of condemned. In James 5:1-6, James reminded us that unbelievers who mistreat believers will be judged. Here, he informs us that believers who groan, gripe, and grumble at unbelievers will be judged.

Furthermore, “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (5:9c). The Lord is ready to come and when He comes, He will judge believers. Note the repeated reference to the coming of the Lord in this passage. R. A. Torrey says, “The second coming of Christ is said to be mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters of the New Testament and it occupies one in twenty-five verses from Matthew through Revelation” (Torrey; *What the Bible Teaches*, p. 195).

The imagery in this passage is particularly striking. It depicts the “sense of immanency” (Hodges). The judge stands at the door. Imagine a colossal hall of justice with high ceilings supported by giant pillars. In the courtroom, no one is sitting behind the bench. The people in the courtroom are standing around. Some just mutter to themselves, and others turn to their neighbors and complain about other people. Then, the bailiff comes in, raising his hand to silence the people in the room and begins to open his mouth. There is no doubt that the words about to proceed from his lips are to announce the entrance of the judge. That is the picture James paints of the Second Coming of Christ.

Examples James offers two examples that give further insight into what he means by “Don’t grumble.” The first is of the prophets, who were examples of patience, endurance, and suffering. He says, “My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed, we count them blessed who endure” (5:10-11a). These mighty prophets spoke in the name of the Lord. Surely, if they represented Him, they would be successful, but they suffered affliction instead of meeting with success. Instead of being treated like special ambassadors, they were treated like common criminals. Yet they were patient (5:10) and endured (5:11). The implication is that they did not grumble and hence we count them blessed, that is, happy (see also 1:2, 12).

Which prophets did James have in mind? He does not say. The truth of the matter is that almost all of the prophets are examples. Jesus could refer to this as almost a proverbial truth: “For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:12). Jesus also said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets” (Mt. 5:31). Stephen charged, “Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?” (Acts 7:52). If there is any one prophet James has in mind, most would nominate Jeremiah. He was particularly known as the suffering prophet.

The second example that James gives is Job. He says, “You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (5:11b). Job is an example of endurance. He was an outstanding example of fortitude and courage in adversity. He did cry out to God but did not take his wife’s advice and curse God. The example of Job teaches something else. When we endure, God extends compassion and mercy. The end of the story was vindication and blessing for Job (Job 42:12). The implication is that those who endure will be “compensated” for what they lose during trials. Their compensation will not necessarily be in material terms. It could be spiritual (1:1-12) or, as this context suggests, rewards when the Lord returns (Hodges). So, James says, “Don’t grumble. Be patient. Be blessed.” If you groan, grumble, or hold a grudge, you will only end up hurting yourself. Put those aside and be happy.

Don't Swear

Don't Swear James adds, "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath" (5:12a). What does James mean when he says, "Do not swear"? The Anabaptists interpreted this verse to mean that a Christian should take no oaths whatsoever, even in court. If all we had were these words and those like them in Matthew, this would be a possibility, but neither Jesus nor James had that in mind. The Old Testament did not prohibit the use of an oath in court. The only qualification was that the name of Jehovah must be used and not the name of some strange god. Others interpret this verse to mean that a Christian should take no oaths in everyday conversation, that is, do not use God's name or some sacred object to guarantee the truth of what is said (Adamson; Hodges). In ancient times, the most binding of all oaths was to call on God. To substitute a sacred thing, for example, heaven for God, was thought by some to be less binding, but the Bible does not forbid anyone to call on God as a witness in everyday conversation. No less than the apostle Paul himself did that (1 Thess. 2:5).

The best explanation of James 5:12 is to interpret it in light of the context of James 5:6-11. James is not talking about being in court, nor is he talking about everyday conversation. Instead, he discusses what happens when you're under pressure, particularly when treated unjustly. He says, "Beware of impatient discontent readily expressing itself in the criticism of others." Swearing often results from our impatience at the circumstances under which we labor. Mark Twain says, "When angry, count to four. When very angry, swear." Most of us don't have to have Mark Twain tell us that. That is what we naturally do. James says, "Don't."

Speak Simply "But let your yes, be yes, and your no, no" (5:12b). Jesus says this same thing (Mt. 5:37). "Our mere word should be as utterly trustworthy as a signed document, legally correct, and complete" (Mitton).

The Reason James adds, "Lest you fall into judgment" (5:12c). The majority of Greek manuscripts have a different Greek word than the *Textus Receptus*. The majority of manuscripts have the Greek word for "hypocrisy" rather than the Greek word for "judgment." Hodges, who takes the majority reading, says, "The oath-taker falls too easily into hypocrisy since it gives him the opportunity to tell lies under cover of a solemn claim to truthfulness (Peter himself had fallen into precisely this kind of hypocrisy in his denials of the Lord)."

Summary: When treated unjustly, be patient and don't be bitter, grumble or swear. In other words, "Be patient and let God take care of it." He will either do it now or later (Rom. 12:17, 19; 1 Pet. 2:21-25). Don't be resentful and don't retaliate. Be patient and endure (Prov. 20:22).

When financially oppressed or grossly and unjustly mistreated, be patient. Even those doing the will of God, like the prophets, were mistreated. If they can be patient in the midst of their being treated unjustly, so can you. When treated unjustly, there is a loss. The question becomes, "How do you respond to the loss?"

William Carey, the pioneer missionary to India and a printer who had come to assist him, were successfully producing portions of the Bible for distribution. Carey had spent years learning the language to produce the Scripture in the local dialect. He had also meticulously prepared grammars and dictionaries for his successors. One day, while he was away, a disastrous fire broke out and destroyed his work: the building, the printing presses, the many printed Bibles, and, worst of all, the manuscripts, grammars, and dictionaries on which he had spent so much time. His servant tearfully told him of the disastrous loss when he returned home. Without a word of despair, impatience, or anger, he knelt and thanked God that he still had the strength to do the work again.

He started immediately, not wasting a moment in idle self-pity. Before his death, by God's grace, he had duplicated his entire achievement and produced better work than he had the first time.

IS YOUR SICKNESS DUE TO SIN?

If you are like me, you regularly receive mail that tells me there is something I need to do. I usually ask three questions of each such letter: What do you want me to do? What if I do it? What if I don't? For example, I received a letter telling me I would win one of five prizes if I visited a real estate site. So I asked myself, "What do I do?" I know from experience that this means I am to listen to a high-pressured salesman give me a high-pressured sales pitch concerning a high-priced piece of recreational property. What if I do that? According to one piece of mail, I would get a radio, razor, radar range, or etc. And if I don't?—nothing. Good. That's what I want: no hassle, no hardware.

On the other hand, I sometimes get a letter telling me I ought to do something, and the situation is different. I get a tax bill. Simple enough, they want me to pay property taxes. If I do, they leave me alone for six months. If I don't? I get charged interest, maybe a fine, and conceivably even jail. I respond to the instructions in that letter because of what happens if I don't.

God has sent me several letters called "epistles." In His letters, He doesn't wait for me to ask. He tells me what to do, what happens if I do what He says, and even what will happen if I don't.

The epistle of James is like that. James asks, "Is anyone among you suffering?" (5:13a). James asks his readers if they are experiencing trials and troubles. When I get a letter, I want to know, "What do you want me to do?" In this case, James says, "Let him pray" (5:13b). When I read that, I am immediately reminded of what James said in chapter 1. He began this book by talking about falling into various kinds of trials. When that happens, James said believers are to rest in the Lord, remain steadfast, and rejoice because God allowed this trial to come into their lives for their training. He also said that believers should pray if they don't know what God is trying to teach them (1:2-5). In the last paragraph of his book, he returns to the subject with which he began as if to sum it up by saying, "If you are in a trial, make sure that you pray so that you can learn."

I also ask a second question: "What happens if I do what I am asked?" James answers that question by asking another question. He says, "Is anyone cheerful?" (5:13c). This is a return to where he began. His opening statement was, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials" (1:2). If you respond correctly to the trials in your life, you will be counting them as an opportunity for joy. What do you do then? James says, "Let him sing psalms" (5:13c). The reference to singing psalms in James 5:13 answers people who say there should be no stringed instruments in the church. The Greek word translated "sing psalms" means "to play to a stringed instrument, to sing to a harp." This Greek word describes singing with accompaniment. There is another Greek word that simply means "to sing." Thus, this passage instructs that the singing be done with a stringed instrument. The piano is a stringed instrument. James is making the point that when believers respond correctly to their trials, they will be singing. It is like a motor in a car. When it is not working correctly, there is straining and struggling. When it is running properly, it hums. Likewise, Christians make music when free from guilt and bitterness and responding correctly to their life's circumstances.

When I get a letter, I also ask a third question. "What happens if I don't do what I'm asked?" James answers that, too. He says, "Is anyone among you sick?" (5:14). The arrangement of these three questions in chapter 5, as compared to what James has to say in the opening verses of chapter 1, leads to the conclusion that James is saying, in essence, "If you are responding properly to trials, you'll sing. If you're not, you're sick, that is, physically ill." The New Testament teaches that sin can make a person physically ill (1 Cor. 11:30), which is the case here. The fact that the sick are

to call the elders suggests that this illness is due to sin (Hodges) and the sick are told to confess their sin (5:15-16). The people who received this epistle were experiencing trials, for example, unjust treatment from the rich (5:1-6). Some were responding well and some were not. They were angry (1:19), griping (3:1-12), having conflicts with each other (4:1-10) and judging one another (4:11-12). The pressure and stress, the conflict and fights, the worry and anxiety made them physically ill.

Physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists have repeatedly warned us that the way we respond emotionally can affect us physically. It's not what you eat; it's what eats you. You tell your doctor, "I've got a pain in my neck," and he asks, "*Who* is it?" Or, you tell him, "I've got a pain in my back," and he will ask, "Who is on it?"

James 5:14-20 does not discuss all sickness, regardless of its origin. It is only to be applied to physical illness due to spiritual sin. Mayor, who wrote a classic technical Greek commentary on the book of James, when commenting on James 5:15, said, "If he has committed sins which have given rise to his sickness." Mitton, another English commentator, said that the reference in James 5:15 was not meant to be a general statement, implying the possibility that man may be entirely free from sin, but is related to the precise context and means "if sin is the cause (or partial cause) of his illness."

So, the man in this passage is sick and unable to leave his house. The Greek word translated "sick" in verse 14 means "without strength." He can't leave this sickbed, which is indicated by the fact that he is to call the elders to come to him rather than go to them. The picture that emerges from this passage is this: a believer, experiencing trials, did not do what James said. Instead, he sinned. Because he sinned, he became physically ill. The question is, what is he to do in that case?

Call the Elders

The Procedure Since this sick saint is not able to go to the elders, he is to call for the elders to come to him. James says, "Let him call for the elders of the church" (5:14a). This passage does not discuss a healing meeting or a healing line; it describes a healing house call. The first step is to be taken by the sick person, not the elders. Furthermore, it is not one elder, singular, or one healer, but a group of men called elders all from one church. The sick saint is not to go outside his church for help but to call the elders of his church.

When the elders arrive, they are to do two things: "Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" (5:14b). The prayer is obviously for the healing of the sick person (5:15). The Greek text indicates that they are to stretch their hands over the person as they pray. The problem concerns the anointing with oil. Why do that? There are two views. The first is that the oil is medicine. Those who take that explanation point out that using oil to treat illness was very common in the ancient world. There were recorded incidences of Jewish rabbis visiting the sick and anointing them with oil to cure such ailments as headaches. The Old Testament (Isa. 1:6) and the New Testament (Lk. 10:34) mention the medicinal use of oil. The Good Samaritan poured oil and wine on the injured man's wound.

The second view is that the oil is symbolic (Moo). Those who take that interpretation point to the elders doing it. James said, "Call the elders," not the doctor. If the oil is medicinal, the passage encourages elders to practice medicine. Furthermore, the oil does not heal; the prayer does (5:15). Lehman Strauss says, "Actually, the oil in James 5:14 would be no different than the muddy water of the river Jordan into which Naaman was commanded to dip seven times." Thus, the oil is

symbolic (Hodges). James does not give the purpose of the anointing nor the explanation of it. Many have taken the oil to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The procedure is simple. Call the elders, have them symbolically anoint the sick person with oil and have them pray for his healing.

The Result The result, like the procedure, is also twofold: The Lord will raise him up and the Lord will forgive him. James puts it like this: “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (5:15). This does not necessarily mean that the Lord will completely heal him, at least now. This is a two-stage healing. At this stage, the sick man gets “raised up,” given enough strength to do the next step. That must be the interpretation of this verse because the next verse instructs others to pray that he may be *healed* (5:16). Evidently, he was not completely healed at this point. That comes later. He is, however, forgiven by the Lord, even before he goes to the next step.

Someone may argue, “Doesn’t verse 15 say, ‘if’ he has sinned, implying that he may not have?” The “if” of James 5:15 is a third-class condition in Greek, which is said to mean that maybe he has or has not. The third-class condition, however, does not *always* imply “maybe.” In John 14:3, Jesus said, “And if (a third-class condition in the Greek) I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again.” As there is no “maybe” in John 14:3, there is no “maybe” in James 5:15. This is the consensus of the commentators (Mayor; Ropes; Tasker).

When believers are sick due to sin, they are first to call the elders, not a doctor and not a faith healer.

In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is so guilt-ridden from having convinced her husband to kill the king that she is driven to walking in the night, rubbing her hands to remove the bloodstains. Her maid sees her and calls the physician. The physician waits in the shadows with the maid in the middle of the night. When he sees her, he says, “This disease is beyond my practice.... More needs she the Divine than the physician.”

Confess Your Faults Mutually

The Exhortation The second thing James says to do is “Confess your trespasses to one another” (5:16).

The Explanation To whom does he confess? It is not to the Lord because he says to confess to one another. Nor is it to the elders because the phrase “one another” in Greek is a reciprocal pronoun and means “to one another mutually.” If this confession is to the elders, the text demands that the sick person confess his sins to the elders and that the elders confess their sins to the sick person. Where in the Scripture does it teach mutual confession? The answer is where there has been a conflict between two Christians (Mt. 5:22-24; 18:15-17). This suggests that the sin that caused the sickness in the first place was a conflict with another brother (4:1-10). No doubt neither side was totally innocent. All parties needed cleansing and, thus, confession.

As a general rule, the confession of sin should be as public as the knowledge of the sin. If only the Lord knows about the sin, confess it to Him, and forget it (1 Jn. 1:9). If another has been offended, confess it to that one person and forget it (Mt. 5:22-24; 18:15-17). In those rare cases where the whole church knows, public confession is in order (perhaps 1 Cor. 5).

Confession of sin to another human being need not rehearse the gory details of the past failure. Confess the trespass, not the details. For example, simply say, “I mistreated you. I did not treat you in a loving way.” Make it general, not specific. Also, beware of blame. This is confession

time, not condemnation time. Do not say, “Do you remember when you ... and then I” Just admit your sin and ask for forgiveness.

Pray for Each Other

The Exhortation After the sick person has called the elders and received enough strength to be reconciled with his brother, they are to pray for each other. James says, “And pray for one another that you may be healed” (5:16). It is not enough to confess. You must pray for each other; pray for each other’s healing.

James moves from the command to the principle to encourage you to pray. He says, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (5:16). What is an “effective, fervent prayer?” Robinson calls this phrase “notoriously difficult” (J. Armitage Robinson, p. 247). In the Greek text, there is only one word, and it can either mean 1) when it is put into operation, 2) when it becomes operative, or 3) fervent or effective (Mitton). Wycliffe translated it “continual.” Tyndale and Luther rendered it “fervent.” The King James translators of 1611 combined the two in the somewhat redundant “effectual, fervent.” To simplify, the idea is either: 1) when prayer is put into operation, it does great things, or 2) when prayer is fervently entered into, it accomplishes great things. The following illustration seems to indicate that the second interpretation is correct (5:17). In other words, it refers to “a spiritually energetic prayer.” It is a prayer from the heart and soul (Hodges).

The prayer between the two newly reconciled believers is not to be a cold, formal recitation like that of the Pharisees but the earnest, fervent, heartfelt prayer of someone who wants something. Some people pray to hear themselves or to be heard by men; others pray to be heard by God.

The Illustration James gives an illustration: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit” (5:17-18). Elijah prayed and it ceased to rain; he prayed again and it started raining. Simple: pray and get an answer, but there is more to it than that. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. He was a member of our frail family. In 1 Kings 18, he withstood hundreds of men; in 1 Kings 19, he ran because of one woman. He knew courage and fear; he knew victory and defeat. The encouraging thing for us is that if Elijah could have our passions, we can have his prayers. Even though he was a man with our nature, he prayed earnestly, that is, intently. The Old Testament does not explicitly say that he prayed earnestly, but that is the natural deduction from the record (1 Kings 17:1). If an ordinary yet righteous man can pray and change the forces of nature, how much more can a prayer of faith from us restore health to a fellow believer?

Be Assured that This is the Thing to Do

The Exhortation James adds one other word. He says, “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (5:19-20). At this point, James moves beyond those who are sick. He begins with “brethren,” which he often uses at the beginning of a new subject (1:19; 2:1, 2:14; 3:1; 5:7) and he says “if anyone.” James instructs believers to turn to the truth, those who have wandered from the truth. Essentially, he says, “Be

assured that this is the thing to do.” We tend to draw back from confrontation. James says, “No, do it.”

The Reasons James gives two reasons why we should do this. First, if you get a believer turned around, you will save a soul from death. The death spoken of here is physical death (1:14-15; 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 Jn. 5:16; Rom. 8:13; Acts 5:1-11). Second, James says you will cover a multitude of sins, that is, you will be covering over the sins that he has done and the sins that might have been done will not appear nor occur. The covering of sins is an Old Testament image for forgiveness. The sins that are forgiven are “covered,” that is, they are “out of sight” (Hodges).

This is an appropriate conclusion to the book. James began by discussing trials (1:2-12) and temptations (1:13-18). Trials, correctly responded to, lead to a crown of life (1:12) and temptation improperly responded to leads to death (1:15). Obtaining the crown of life and avoiding death is a major concern of this book. Having “saved a soul from death,” the book is completed.

Summary: If you are experiencing trials, pray. If you respond correctly to those trials, you are counting it all joy, so sing. You could be sick if you have not appropriately responded to those trials. Then call the elders, confess to any offended brother, and pray for him. Above all, remember—do it!

The most challenging part is to do it. We draw back from following this procedure, but remember the good that can happen if you follow the instructions.

The first time I became involved in reconciling two offended Christians, I was the guest speaker in a small rural church. After the Sunday night service, the pastor invited me and a few others to his home for refreshments and fellowship. In the middle of the evening, a middle-aged lady said to me, “I don’t have any joy in my Christian life.” I thought she was either a new believer or an ignorant believer, so I would enlighten her and tell her that joy came from fellowship with the Lord. She responded by saying, “I know that.” I was taken aback, but I told her, “You mean you are trying to have fellowship, and you have no joy?” She responded, “Correct.” Then I said, “Well, I think I know your problem, but I would rather not discuss it here.”

We got together the next afternoon in the pastor’s study. I explained several possible reasons for her problem, not the least of which was an unresolved sin in her life. After listening to me expound on each of these possibilities, she told me that in the last two years, she had been in the hospital twice. Both times, the doctors ran extensive tests and said nothing was wrong with her. I asked her what had happened two years before. To make a long story short, she said she’d had a conflict with another lady in the church. She had become bitter and resentful. The two of them were not on speaking terms.

Several days later, I met with the two ladies together. They confessed to each other and became friends. If you could talk to them personally, each would tell you that, at first, they didn’t want to do it, but after they did, they were delighted because of what it solved and prevented.

WHEN LIFE DEALS YOU A LEMON, MAKE LEMONADE

(This chapter was published as chapter 11 in the book *Biblical Sermons* by Haddon W. Robinson. Here is a slightly revised version of what is in that book.)

In the summer of 1979, my family and I moved from Dallas, Texas, to Los Angeles, California, where I was to assume the Church of the Open Door pastorate. My wife capitalized on the opportunity to get me to buy a piece or two of furniture. We did want to replace the end tables in the living room. So, I said, “Okay.” We decided that instead of buying them in Texas and paying to have them shipped to California, we would wait until we got to Los Angeles to make the purchase. When we arrived, my wife started looking. She shopped at about half a dozen stores. She found just what she wanted. That particular furniture store was a member of a national chain and the furniture was on sale. She loved the pieces and I liked the price, so we bought them. When we paid for the three-piece set, we were told it would take delivery four to six weeks. That was no problem. It was just in time for a group from the church that was scheduled to come to our home.

Six weeks later—no furniture. We called. They said it was a popular sale and had been flooded with orders, but it would be along shortly.

Eight weeks later—no furniture. More explanations. Then, one piece came.

Six weeks after that—a second piece came.

Six more weeks—more excuses.

What was to take six weeks was now six months. The whole thing was a hassle. Whenever someone came to our house, we had to explain why the lamp was on the floor instead of on an end table. Whenever I went through the living room, I thought, “When will they deliver that last end table?” At that point, I felt like I had been dealt a lemon.

I’m sure you have felt the same way at some point in your life. Life has a way of dealing us deuces instead of aces. Your ordeal might not have been as long, a brief irritation like a fender-bender or traffic jam, or, “I’m sorry, sir, we’re out of that at the moment.” Or your ordeal may have been more serious, such as losing your boyfriend, your job, your money, or your wife. Whether you’re five, fifteen, or seventy-five, you’ve learned that life has lemons.

Now, how do you handle lemons? The answer to that question is what the book of James is all about. To use his word, the subject of James is trials. In the introduction, he informs us that trials come from God and lead to life (1:2-12), that is, trials are for our training. Then James immediately discusses temptation as if to say that, with every trial, there is a temptation, particularly to blame God. He reminds us that temptation comes from us and leads to death (1:13-18).

James draws a conclusion and states it in James 1:19, forming the outline of all that follows. Since God allows trials to come into our lives to mature us, and since there is a danger that we might sin and miss life and make a mess, we must make sure we respond properly, that is, if we follow this formula, we will get the most, the maximum maturity from our troubles. When life deals you a lemon, make lemonade. Here’s the recipe for the best lemonade ever tasted.

Be Swift to Hear

Not Generally To be swift to hear obviously means to listen, but to whom and when? There are several different answers. James could be saying to be swift to hear others generally. That, of

course, is true and needs to be done. So much of our conversation is centered on our frustrations and our interests, and we are deaf to what others are saying to us.

Once, a little boy shouted loudly at supper, "Pass the potatoes!" His mother insisted that he go to his room for behaving rudely. Later that evening, his father disclosed that he had bought a new tape recorder and had secretly taped the family chatter at supper time. As everyone listened eagerly, they heard loud laughter and excited talk. Then they detected a boyish voice saying, "May I please have some potatoes?" A little later, the same voice said the same thing. The chatter continued and then, after several repeated requests, the loud shout, "Pass the potatoes!" We definitely need to listen to each other.

During Trials, James is not exactly talking about being swift enough to hear others. The context of James 1:19 indicates that he is talking about being swift to hear when you are in the midst of a trial. When trouble elbows its way into our lives, we are slow to hear anyone but ourselves. When our plans are interrupted, we erupt. When we are inconvenienced, we are incensed. Then, when anyone tries to tell us anything, we are anything but swift to hear.

Do God's Word James goes on to explain that hearing here is hearing God's Word (1:21). He quickly adds that hearing God's Word means heeding God's Word (1:22). The Bible is God's recipe book for making lemonade out of lemons, but you have to do what it says, or you'll not have lemonade. You could have the most expensive and extensive recipe book in your home. It could tell you how to make Chicken Normandy, Trout Amandine, and Crab Bisque. You could have all the ingredients in the refrigerator, yet you would not enjoy these fine dishes if you just read the book and did not do what it said. You could read and get enlightened. You could understand how to make it. You could even read and get excited, but until you followed the directions, you did not enjoy the food. You would also have to follow the directions strictly and entirely to get the maximum results. Some just read the book. Some start and stop. Some finish and don't follow the recipes exactly. For guaranteed results, you must follow the instructions completely.

Helping People All of a sudden, James discusses pure religion, which he identifies as visiting the fatherless and widows. In other words, heeding the Word means helping other people. When the lawyer asked Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus responded, "Love God." Jesus added that the second greatest commandment is like it, "Love your neighbor." If you are not involved in people's lives and investing time in ministering to them, you are simply not where God wants you to be. Furthermore, you are not handling your problems and pressures the way God desires. We use personal problems as excuses for not visiting people to help them. James teaches that when you are in a trial, that is when you should visit people. So, when you have a problem, be swift to hear God's Word, heed God's Word, and help God's people.

Without Prejudice James next discusses the case of the near-sighted usher. He is telling us that prejudice will keep us from ministry. In this case, they shared with the rich and shunned the poor. James says sharing with the rich is okay, but shunning the poor is not (2:8-9). We gravitate toward those like us in class, age, and education. We do not naturally relate to those of a different economic or educational level, so we don't. If I understand James, he says to work at it, especially when you have trials. Allowing biases to keep you from being involved with people is robbing them of your ministry to them and robbing yourself of their ministry to you.

Works It is no accident that the next paragraph in the book of James deals with the concept of "faith without works is dead." James is saying, "Go to work; get busy."

The sum of James 1:19-2:26 is to be swift to hear, hear and heed God's Word, and help God's people. When hurting, help others.

In the middle of a battle, a man was shot. He could have used his wounds to lie there until rescued, and some have. Then, even though wounded, there are those brave ones who manage to rescue others. We call them heroes. All of us have hurts. Some of us use them to excuse ourselves. Some help others in spite of their hurts.

Be Slow to Speak

Teaching The second thing James says is to be slow to speak. He discusses this one in detail in chapter 3. In James 1-12, he says, “Don’t be eager to be a teacher.” The tongue can do great good and great harm but can also be inconsistent. So, be slow to speak.

Showing Wisdom In James 3:13-18, he talks about wisdom and concludes that even if you have wisdom from heaven, show it first in your actions. In short, be slow to speak.

When I was in seminary, several men from another seminary and I formed an evangelistic association. Five of us were charter members of the corporation. Most of these men were ahead of me in age and experience; I was the team’s junior member. We divided the United States into eight areas and made plans to put a regional evangelist in each region. We printed brochures, started a mailing list, and even raised funds. A few of these men graduated from the seminaries they attended before I did. They entered evangelism, still committed to the idea of eight regional evangelists, etc. Then, I graduated and commenced to travel.

When we had our next meeting, they asked me how it was going. Actually, it was going very well. Some of them, however, were having difficulties. As we talked, it dawned on me what they were doing. I remember saying, “Hey, gentlemen, beware. Don’t give people promises; give them performance.” These young evangelists were promising people the country and not performing in their church. That is something James is saying. Give me performance, not promises. Don’t tell me, show me.

James 3 should be seen in light of the subject of the whole book, which is trials. He is not just saying to be slow to speak normally; he is saying to be slow to speak during trials. If you are talking, you are not listening. If you are not listening, you are not learning. If you are not learning, you are not growing. If you are not growing, you are being overcome instead of being an overcomer. So, shut up and listen.

Be Slow to Wrath

Leaving God Out The third command in James 1:19 is to be slow to wrath. He discusses this in detail in James 4:1-5:12. He does not use the word “wrath” or “anger” directly, but he does talk about a wrong attitude and leaving God out. “You have not because you ask not” (4:2) sums it up. That is, you didn’t go to God.

In Conflicts One of the consequences of leaving God out is war (4:1-10). James describes a war within us with ourselves, among us with others, and above us with God. The ultimate source of these wars is leaving God out, which James calls pride.

Judging Another result of leaving God out of life is judging others (4:11-12). In inappropriately judging others, we put ourselves above God.

Planning Another area where believers leave God out is planning without considering God (4:13-17).

Unjust Treatment It is even possible to leave God out when we experience unjust treatment (5:1-12).

Underneath all this is anger at other believers, unbelievers, and God. The final result is physical illness (5:13-18).

As a man in the ministry, I am amazed at how often I counsel people who start with a conflict and physical ailments and end up talking about anger. As I entered the auditorium to speak at a Bible conference, I saw a lady at the door whom I had met before. I simply asked, "How are you?" It was only a greeting, not an invitation for a medical report, but she said, "Not too well." I asked her what seemed to be the problem and she said, "Headaches and pain in my neck." I inquired, "Were you in an accident?" She said, "No, but I've been to a doctor and he says there's nothing wrong with my neck." To edit the story, she, her husband, and I had a long talk. It became immediately apparent that she had conflicts with her husband and was very angry. When she dealt with the anger and her relationship with her husband, her headaches disappeared.

Summary: To make lemonade out of a lemon is to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.

These three imperatives deal with actions, words, and attitudes. When in a trial, some Christians make sure that their actions are right, but their words and attitudes aren't. As they grow, they discover that there are things they shouldn't say as well as things they shouldn't do. Underneath, their attitude is still not what it ought to be. Until all three of these areas are what God intended, there will not be spiritual growth like God wants.

I confess that I have not always followed the recipe, but I am learning and I have managed to follow the instructions a few times. For example, take the case of the undelivered but paid-for furniture. The first thing I did was occupy myself with the ministry. I often wanted to see the manager, but when I had to choose between that and helping someone else, I chose the latter, even on my day off. Secondly, I said nothing. Oh, my wife and I discussed it. She called and asked questions, but I said little else beyond that. Thirdly, I did not get angry. To be more exact, when I felt the anger coming on, I quickly controlled it and contained it. Then I wrote a letter. Not to the salesman, not to the local manager, but to the national president on the East Coast. It read as follows:

Dear _____:

I am writing to inquire about the tree you are growing for me. How is it doing? Would you say it has a normal growth rate? When do you anticipate it reaching maturity so that it can be used? I trust that it is being watered, fertilized, and cared for properly.

Let me explain. Last summer, my wife and I moved to Southern California. We needed tables for our living room. After visiting many stores, my wife found a set at _____ in Pasadena that she fell in love with. In August, we placed an order. We were told it would take four to six weeks for delivery. Several months later, the first of three pieces arrived. Then, after another month or so, the second piece arrived. The third piece has never arrived. It is now April. We have tried to be patient and kind. On several occasions, we have called and have been told repeatedly, simply that it is not in yet. We are certain you must be growing the tree

for our last piece of furniture, and we're just curious about how its growth is coming.

In the meantime, I think you should know that because of my position, many people visit my home. Of course, when they see a lamp sitting on the floor, we have to explain. So, dozens of times, we have told people about your tree-growing project. Now, I realize it takes a long time to grow a tree, but at least knowing when you think it might be ready would give us some kind of hope. So, could you tell us, sir, when our tree will be ready for its service?

Sincerely,
Mike Cocoris

The results were: 1) I did not get an ulcer. 2) I learned a little patience. 3) I taught my kids how to handle problems: don't get upset, be patient, and go to the president. 4) The furniture was delivered within seven days.

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