

Studies in James

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Introduction to James

The book of James is one of the strongest pleas for vital Christianity of the New Testament. With the possible exception of Mark it was the first New Testament book written.

The date of writing falls somewhere between A.D. 45 and A.D. 50, approximately 15 to 20 years after the ascension of Jesus.

It is generally agreed that James the Lord's brother wrote the letter.

Being written so early in the Christian era, there is no mention of the great fundamentals of the faith, or developed by Paul in later years.

The incarnation and resurrections are not mentioned.

The name of Christ is only mentioned twice Ch1:1, Ch 2:1.

To explore or confirm the fundamentals was not the purpose of James. His theme rather is the trial of our faith.

Within the five chapters of his book James put our faith to the test. He wants to know whether it is genuine or a cheap imitation.

James draws heavily on the teachings of the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount. 34 references.

In some ways this letter of James is the most authoritarian in the New Testament.

James issues instructions more profusely than any other N.T. writer. In the short space of 108 years there are 54 directives.

In v. 1 we are introduced to the writer. He describes himself as “James, the bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

James, the Lord’s brother, did not believe in Him.

John 7:5 “For neither did His brethren believe in Him.”

He probably shared the view that Jesus was out of His mind.

His friends said, “He is beside Himself.” Mark 3:21

The death and resurrection of Jesus had convinced James that Christ, his brother, was indeed the Savior.

After the ascension of Jesus, a group of believers are found “continuing with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.” Acts 1:14.

James in all probability would be in this group. He was a transformed, remarkable man.

In the space of a few years (15 or 20) he became the leader of the first church. He was a man of great authority in the early church. Acts 12:17; 15:13-29.

Notice how quickly he grew spiritually in v. 1 he puts God and the Lord Jesus Christ on the same level. It is important to recognize the divine truth that God the Father and God the Son are co-equal.

He wrote to “the twelve tribes scattered abroad.”

The original dispersion took place in 721 B.C. The ten northern tribes were taken into captivity by the

Assyrians. In 586 B.C. the remaining two tribes were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. The third dispersion took place because of the persecution of Saul. Acts 8. The Jewish Christians were scattered abroad. To these dispersed Christian Jews, James addressed this letter.

The first problem James discusses is that of the Christian facing temptations. There are two meanings of this word. In v. 2 through 12 the temptations are really trials and testings which are sent by God to test the reality of our faith and in the end produces Christ likeness in us if we are exercised by the trials. Hebrews 12:11.

In verses 13-15 the subject is temptation which comes from within and is an allurement to commit sin:

The Christian life is filled with problems. They come uninvited and unexpected.

These tests come in the form of ill health - of disappointed friendships - of sorrow due to the loss of loved ones - of financial reverses - and of failure on the part of family members.

James makes the amazing assertion that Christians are to "count it all joy" when faced with these various testings. Don't rebel - Don't faint - Rejoice These trials are not sent to destroy us - they are sent to develop our Christian character. God is trying to produce Christ in us - this process suffering - frustration - perplexity.

Trials as such are never pleasant but we should consider the end - the afterward of Heb 12:11 - the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Examples: The Savior endured the Cross for the joy that was set before Him. Heb 12:2 -

Consider Job, "The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before." Job 42:10.

v. 3 In this verse James talks about "the testing of one faith."

He depicts our faith as a precious metal being tested by God in the fire of persecution - sickness - suffering and sorrow. Cp 1 Pt 1:7

James says that this testing of our faith produces patience, steadfastness, fortitude.

Each test and each victory will help us to meet problems still to come.

v. 4 In this verse James urges his persecuted and scattered brethren to allow their suffering and sorrow to mature them spiritually. That they may be able to worship, work and witness for God.

Those who are exercised and submissive, and put themselves as clay in the hands of the divine potter, will be made a new, made complete. Those who stand the testing of the fires will receive.

1. A crown of life - This signified Joy-Victory-Honor

2. As soon as the Great Refiner sees His reflection in the molten metal, He will turn off the heat.

v. 5 This verse introduces us to the subject of wisdom. This is a most desirable attribute It is rare and scarce - precious and priceless - inestimable and invaluable.

Wisdom is the quality of being wise.

There is a vast difference between knowledge and wisdom.

There are many knowledgeable persons ... but few wise who are able to rightly use their knowledge.

There is a great need for wisdom today.

James says, "If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask God for it."

There is only one place where wisdom can be found.

The source of wisdom is Almighty God - the true and living God.

The patriarch Job cries out, "But where can wisdom be found?"

His answers is that wisdom is not found among the living of earth, it is not found in the depth of the sea.

It cannot be purchased with gold, and it cannot be bought with precious stones.

Finally, he declares that true wisdom is found in the presence of God.

v. 6

To obtain this wisdom there are certain conditions to be met.

We must approach God in faith, with no doubts.

We must believe He loves and cares and that nothing is impossible with Him.

If we doubt His goodness and power, we will have no steadfastness in the hour of trial.

One minute we will be resting calmly on His promises.

The next we will feel that God has forgotten us, and despair of hope.

If we act like this, James says we are like the waves of the sea missing to great heights, then falling back into the trough of despondency, troubled and tossed.

v. 7

Those who act like this cannot expect anything from God.

v. 8

In this verse James uses an interesting word to describe believers with the aforementioned characteristics. He says they say they are “double-minded”, which literally means a man with two souls. One soul believes, the other disbelieves. Such a one is unstable in all his ways.

The summary of verses 5 through 8

The source of wisdom is God. It is obtained by prayer. It is available to all men. He gives it willingly and generously. The crucial condition is that we ask in faith, without doubting.

In verses 9-11 James continues with the subject of holy testings by giving specific illustrations.

v. 9

The poor brothers may become discouraged by his poverty.

But he should always rejoice in the Lord. He is “an heir of God, and a joint heir of Jesus Christ.”

He is blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus.

v. 10

Next James turns to the rich man.

The poor man is to rejoice that he is exaltation.

The rich man is to rejoice on his humiliation.

Should a rich man suffers reverses he should take the spoiling of his goods joyfully, knowing he was in heaven a better and more enduring substance. Heb 10:34.

Riches, like many other things are transient, sometimes they fade overnight. Just like the grass which appears for a little time then vanishes away.

v. 12

In concluding his discussion on holy trials or testings James pronounces that “happy is the man who stands up under the testings.”

Because when he is tried or approved” he will receive the crown of life.

This is God’s standard for us. How do we react when testings and trials come?

In verses 13-17 the subject shifts to unholy temptations. Testings from God are designed to bring out the best in us.

Temptation from Satan are designed to bring out evil in us.

v. 13

Temptation to sin comes from Satan, not God.

God does not tempt man to sin. James says that: “He himself is incapable of being tempted by evil, but He tempts no man.”

v. 14

Man is tempted in two spheres.

He is tempted from within by his own evil desires.

He is enticed and dragged away from without. David and Bathsheba - 2 Sam 11 v. 15

When evil desire has conceived it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death.

To be out of fellowship with God is for the Christian a form of living death.

Verses 13-14 is the cause, v. 15 is the consequences.

v. 16

Sometimes those who fall into sin blame God.

James says, "Do not err, in this fashion", this is a form of self-deception.

v. 17

Only good gifts come from God. He is the source of every good and perfect gift.

He is pure light - He is perfect - therefore only good and perfect gifts come from Him.

In verse 17 James has been describing the character of our Father God.

In verse 18 he reminds us that we are sons of God, we are in His family and as His children we must be an example and representation of His purity.

Verses 19-21 gives us some specifics on how we can do this:

1. We should be swift to hear. The Word of God ... the Holy Spirit ... counsel and admonitions from others.

2. We should be slow to speak. James says a lot about our speech. He cautions us to be guarded in our conversation. Nature teaches us these valuable lessons

in that we have one tongue, but two ears, we should hear twice as much as we speak.

3. We should be slow to anger. To be quick tempered or to loose one's temper is not a good example of the God of all patience. See Proverbs 16:32

4. To be a good representative of God we should rid ourselves of all moral filth and all evil that is foreign to the holy character of God. Every form of impurity must go. To receive the truth of God in all its fullness we must be morally clean.

5. We must receive the Word of God in meekness. We must receive it in humility ... we must bow to its authority. Only those who are submissive and humble can expect to receive the maximum benefit from the Scriptures.

6. It is not enough to receive the engrafted Word, we must obey it. We must translate the Bible into action. It must change our lives.

v. 22-25

The person who reads this Word but does not allow it to change his life is like a man who looks in the mirror which tells him to wash-shave-brush-or comb, but does nothing about it.

On the other hand, those who read, study, meditate and obey the Word will be set free from sin and experiences incalculable blessing to his soul.

In verses 26-27, vain religion and true religion are contrasted. If anyone prefers to be a Christian, but cannot control his tongue, he impresses nobody, and deceives himself.

On the other hand, the expression of our faith, which God our Father accepts, is in love to look after orphans and widows.

And also to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Chapter 2

The first 13 verses of this chapters deal with one of the most prevalent and obnoxious sins in the church today, “showing respect of persons.” Favoritism is utterly foreign to the example of the Lord or to the teachings of the New Testament.

There is no place in Christianity for snobbishness or discrimination.

v. 1

“My brethren as believes in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ don’t show favoritism.” Jesus is addressing believers and admonishing them that under no circumstances must they show favor because of birth, race, sex or poverty.

In verses 2 through 4 James gives a vivid example of what he is teaching here. The scene is a local assembly of Christians. A distinguished looking gentleman, with fashionable clothes and expensive rings has just arrived. The impressed usher leads this notable visitor to a prominent seat in the front.

On returning to the door he finds that another visitor has arrived. This time it is a poor man, he is dressed accordingly, in keeping with his humble circumstances. To save the congregation embarrassment, he offers this visitor standing room at the rear, or a place on the floor, in front of his own seat.

This glaring sin has been perpetuated despite this strong admonition. Black believers have been made to feel unwelcome. Jews have not been accepted cordially. Oriental Christians have tasted discrimination in varying degrees. James strongly declares that such a practice is wrong.

In verses 5-18 James gives four strong reasons why such a practice is wrong.

1. v. 5 and 6a. We dishonor a man when God honors. God has chosen the poor of this world. He has called the foolish the weak, the base the despised – the insignificant poor in this world, but rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Therefore it is wrong to discriminate against these brethren or sisters.

2. The second reason is found in v. 6b. The rich have oppressed the people of God. The rich here are not doubt unbelievers (See v. 7). James is saying: Why show favoritism to people just because they are rich. If you do, you are honoring those who are usually the first to exploit you and drag you into court. Calvin captured the argument tensely when he said, “Why honor your executioners.”

Furthermore, the same people blaspheme the worthy name of Jesus, the name by which you are called into abundant blessings. v.7

James’ final argument (v. 8) is that showing deference to the rich violates the law of love. The law of love is, “thou shalt love thy neighbors as thyself.” Therefore as Christians we must not show preference or contempt.

v. 9 In this verse those who continue to show partiality, despite this warning, are branded as sinners. “ye commit sin”

But more serious still the law convicts vs being transgressors. Sin is a failure to meet God’s standards. Transgression is the breaking of a known law, and is much more serious.

v. 10-11

One of the most common practices today is that of cataloging sin. The scale is set up that the worst possible sin is murder and next to it is adultery followed by stealing and lying. James says that God does not view sin in this way. Sin in God’s eyes is sin. The individual who breaks one of God’s laws is guilty of breaking the whole law. He stands before God as a lawbreaker.

v. 12

“So speak ye and so do”, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

“Speak and act as those who are going to be judged.”

The Christians speech has to be savored with salt. His words must be commensurate with his actions.

The believer’s speech and activities must be backed up with love.

v. 13

One day every believer will give an account of both his words and works when he appears before the judgment seat of Christ. If he has been harsh and critical in his dealings with others ignoring the royal law of love by showing no mercy then he can expect Christ to judge him on the same basis. Note also present judgment

aspect. Those who ignore the royal law must face the judgment with apprehension.

On the other hand there are those who live by the “royal law” can look forward with joyful anticipation to the judgment seat of Christ.

From v.14 to the end of the chapter the subject is Faith and Works. These verses are perhaps the most controversial in the epistle. Luther saw in these verses an irreconcilable conflict between James’ teaching on justification by works and Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. These verses are used to support the heresy that we are saved by faith plus works.

The Biblical concept of justification is that:

1. We are justified by grace – Rom 3:24
2. We are justified by faith – Rom 5:1
3. We are justified by blood – Rom 5:9
4. We are justified by God – Rom 8:33
5. We are justified by works – James 2:24

These statements present different aspects of the same truth.

Grace is the principle upon which God justifies. Faith is the means by which man receives it. Blood is the price which the Savior had to pay.

God is the active Agent in justification. Works are the result of justification.

v. 14

In this verse James brings before us a man who says he has faith, but has no works to substantiate his claim. He

says, "What good is this kind of faith." This man is a professor. Then asks, "Can this faith save him?"

James insists that a faith that does not result in good works cannot save. In this verse James is describing a professing Christian who says he has faith, but there is nothing about his life that indicates it. This kind of faith cannot save – it is worthless – it is all words.

v. 15-16

This verse contains an illustration of how such a one would act in a given situation. He is visited by one who has neither adequate food nor clothing and is almost destitute.

Although he has both in abundance he is not willing to share them. Professing great generosity he exudes empty platitudes and says to his poor brother, "Go and put on some clothing and eat a good meal."

Having said this he makes no effort to make this possible. James asks what good does that do? Words and attitudes like this are positively worthless.

v. 17

Then comes the classic statement in James, "Faith without works is dead." Faith that does not have actions of obedience to back it up is destitute of power ... dead.

There is a widespread movement within Protestantism today that advocates that all that is necessary for salvation is a verbal commitment to Jesus Christ.

This is foreign to the Word of God, but fills the church with professors who say they have faith but live selfish, carnal lives.

v. 18

True faith and good works are inseparable. James shows this by giving us part of a discussion between two men.

The first man who is genuinely saved is the speaker. The second, professes to have faith, but does not back it up with good works. In essence the first man says, “that it is impossible for anyone to have genuine faith in Christ and not demonstrate appropriate works. The true believer in Christ should demonstrate his faith by his good works.

v. 19-20

Many who claim to be Christian today give as their reason for this claim a belief in God.

James says that it takes more than a belief in God for salvation. For instance, he says that demons believe in the existence of God and they shudder in terror and horror. Demons believe but they are not saved.

When a person really believes on the Lord, it involves a complete commitment – spirit, soul, and body.

This commitment in turn brings about a changed life. This kind of faith produces good works.

In verses 21 thru 25 we have two examples of the faith that works. Abraham was a Jew and Rahab was a Gentile.

James says that Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son. To see the truth in its proper perspective read Gen 15:6. “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” At this point in life Abraham was justified by faith. But it is not until we come to Gen 22 where Abraham offered up Isaac, that he was justified by his works. Abraham’s faith was tested and it was proved genuine by his works. For this

demonstrating of faith and works Abraham was made righteous and he was called the friend of God.

The second illustration is that of Rahab, v. 25

Rahab was not saved by good character because she was a harlot. But James says that she was justified by works because she received the spies, then sent them out another way.

Rahab was a Canaanite living in the city of Jericho. She heard reports of the advancing Israelite army. She concluded that the God of the Hebrews was the true God and decided to identify herself with this God, whatever the cost might be.

When the spies entered the city she befriended them. In doing so she proved the genuineness of her faith in the true and living God. She was not saved by hiding the spies, but this act proved that she was a genuine believer.

v. 26

The passage ends with the statement, "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

James sums up his argument briefly. He compares faith to the human body. He likens works to the spirit. The body without the spirit is lifeless, useless, valueless. So faith without works is dead, ineffective, worthless.

In these verses James tests our faith. As true believers are we willing to share our clothing and food with those in want? Am I willing like Abraham to offer the dearest things in life to God? Am I willing, like Rahab, to turn traitor to the world in order to be loyal to Christ?

Chapter 3

In the previous chapter James has unmercifully castigated those who profess faith with their lips, but deny it in their lives. In the first 12 verses of this chapter he summarizes the biblical teaching concerning the use of the tongue. The old fashioned doctor examined a patient's tongue to assist in diagnosis. James tests a person's spiritual health by what use he makes of his tongue.

Many people today would not think of committing the more heinous sins of murder, stealing, adultery or drunkenness. But the same people would not hesitate to assassinate with their tongues the character of their follow-believers.

Many problems would disappear in many assemblies if believers practiced the teachings of James 3:1-12. "Be not many of you teachers, my brothers" ASB; "My brothers, not many of you should become teachers" NEB.

The subject of the tongue is introduced by a warning against hasty desire to become a teacher of the Word of God.

James says that a teacher has a great responsibility toward his audience and will be held accountable by God in a greater degree than non-teachers. The ministry of the Word of God should not be taken lightly.

The teacher must be prepared to obey and practice what he learns in the Word. He can never hope to lead others beyond what he himself has practiced and experienced.

v. 2

James now moves from the specific ministry of teaching to the general area of “conversation”. All people have a problem of keeping the tongue under control. The best among us stumble at one time or another. The true sign of Christian maturity is the ability to control one’s tongue. James also says that the one who can control his tongue, can control his body.

v. 3b

James now proceeds to give us five pictures of the tongue.

1. It is compared to the bit in a horse’s mouth. (v.3) The bit is very small – yet the behavior of the horse is controlled by it. So the tongue can direct the life for good or evil.

2. The second picture is that of a rudder. (v. 4) Compared with the ship the rudder is very small. Example: Queen Elizabeth weighed 83,673 gross tons. The rudder weighed 140 tons, less than 3/10 of one percent. Yet this small rudder could direct and control this huge vessel. The warning here is that we should not underestimate the power of the tongue.

3. The third picture is that of a fire. (v. 5) A lighted match carelessly thrown down can start a brush fire and leave huge areas of forests charred masses of ruins. What possibilities a small match holds a destruction and devastation. The great fire of Chicago was started when you O’Leary’s cow kicked over the lantern. This fire killed 250 people made 100,000 homeless and destroyed property valued at \$750,000. The tongue is like a moth or a turned over lantern. The potentialities for wickedness are almost infinite stains. James of it as a vastness of immorality. (v.6) It pollutes – contaminates.

An evil tongue can pollute a man's personal life and contaminates his other activities as well: slander - abuse - lie - blaspheme - and swear. A wicked tongue is set on fire by hell. All evil speech has its source there. The word used here for Hell is gehenna - the place where all wickedness will be confined - apart from the Lord, this is the only place where it is mentioned.

1. The fourth picture to which the tongue is likened to is a wild untamable creature. (v. 7-8a) All kinds of beasts, birds, serpents and marine life can be tamed. Describe some of the animals that have been tamed.

2. Man's success in taming wild animals does not extend to the area of his own tongue. It is a small piece of flesh, untamable, only God can bring it under control.

3. James next characterizes the tongue as an unruly evil. (v. 8) It is full of deadly poison. The writer has in mind here the deadly serpent or snake with exceedingly poisonous venom. A drop or two is sometimes fatal.

The tongue can poison minds and assassinate character. The tongue, uncontrolled can belittle and downgrade others, the extent of the harm done can be measured by the tears that have flowed. The hearts that have been broken. The reputations that have been ruined.

Verses 9-12

The tongue can be the most hypocritical thing in the world. It can be the most inconsistent member of our body. The things it can do are completely unnatural. There is nothing like it in nature.

One minute a man blesses God with his tongue, the next he curses those who are made in His image. (v.9)

It is unbelievable that the same source can produce such opposite results.

v. 10 James says that such a thing should not exist.

In vs 11-12 James sets before us three impossibilities in nature.

1. It is impossible for a fountain to produce salt and fresh water, at the same time.

2. It is impossible for a fig tree to bear olives.

3. It is impossible for a grapevine to bear figs.

These lessons from nature are intended to teach us that our tongue should be under control and our speech should be consistently good.

Psalm 141:3 "Set a watch before one's lips."

Psalm 19:14 "Let the words of my mouth ... be acceptable unto thee."

v. 13-18

In these verses James discusses the difference between true wisdom and false. We have outlined here the character of the truly wise man. We are also given a picture of the worldly wise man.

v. 13

If a man is wise and understanding, he will demonstrate it by his good works in a spirit of meekness.

He will emulate His Lord who is the embodiment of wisdom, in meekness and lowliness of heart. Matt 11:29 vs. 14-16 give us a picture of the worldly wise man. This type of man is characterized by bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, one who is ruthless in dealing with all competitors.

Even in Christian service it is possible to act in a worldly-wise way. James says that this attitude is earthly - sensual - devilish. These three adjectives eloquently describe a downward course. "Earthly" means that this wisdom is not from heaven but from the earth. "Sensual" means that it is not the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but of man's lower nature. "Devilish" means that it stoops to actions that resemble the behavior of demons rather than men. Wherever you find jealousy and strife you will also find disorder, disharmony and kinds of evil practices.

1. Consider the unrest in the world today.
2. Consider the unrest in some assemblies of God's people today.

v. 17 and 18 give us the true characteristics of true wisdom (heavenly) There are seven of them:

1. Pure
2. Peaceable
3. Gentle
4. Easy to be entreated
5. Full of mercy and good works
6. Without partiality
7. It is without hypocrisy = sincere, genuine

James closes the chapter with the words, "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace."

This verse is a connecting link between what we have been discussing and what is to follow. We have just

learned that true wisdom is peace-loving. In the next chapter we find conflict among God's people.

Those who want to reap a harvest of righteousness must sow the seeds under peaceful conditions. It must be done by those of a peaceful disposition.

James 1

James is the first of seven “General” epistles.

The others 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, 3 John, and Jude.

They are “General” in that they are not addressed to any particular church or person.

Apart from John’s epistles they all were probably written before the fall of Jerusalem A.D. 70.

The writer: James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He could not have been James one of the original disciples. He was beheaded by Herod (Acts 12).

There were others known as James, but the logical choice seems to be “James, the Lord’s brother.” Gal 1:19

During Christ’s earthly ministry, James was an unbeliever (John 7:5).

However he is seen at the Jerusalem prayer meeting as a believer, Acts 1:16.

When Peter left Jerusalem, James assumed the leadership of the church there, Acts 12:17.

Acts 15:13-29 and Gal 2:9 would mark him as “a pillar of the church.”

His final appearance in the N. T. is Acts 21:18.

Traditions say that he was martyred by the Jews in Jerusalem in A.D. 62.

The Date:

This is probably one of the earliest of N.T. writings. The time of writing is placed at between 44-50 A.D. by the best of commentaries.

This explains much of the teaching in the epistles.

1. There is a very slight line of difference between Judaism and Christianity.
2. There is an absence of definite Christian phraseology.
3. The mention of Christian doctrine is rare.
4. The non-reference to Gentile Christianity.

All these suggestions indicate the epistle's early date.

Many depict James being at variance with Paul, especially regarding faith and works. (Ch 2)

When James wrote his epistle Paul's epistles were not yet written.

The Readers:

"The twelve tribes scattered abroad." v. 1

These people in becoming Christians had not ceased to be Jews.

Those representatives of the fifteen nations present at Pentecost must have carried home little more than the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and the barest rudiments of Christianity.

The Gospel preached by those "who were scattered abroad upon the persecutions which arose about Stephen" would be a little fuller, but very incomplete. Whatever they preached was preached, "to the Jews only."

So Christian communities were founded in the Jewish quarters of the cities. But it was a long time before they ceased to be “Jews” and to become disengaged from the synagogue.

See Heb 13:13 “Let us go forth to Him without the camp.” These were the people whom James had in mind when he wrote to “the twelve tribes scattered abroad.”

The Theme: Faith Producing Works

James’ argument is that true Christian faith most expresses itself in practical goodness. That is why he has so much to say about “good works.” The epistle is more ethical than doctrinal. Note the absence of reference to the birth-crucifixion-resurrection or ascension of the Lord. Notice now the emphasis on patience, love, peacefulness, humility, prayer.

The proofs of faith

1. Endurance of temptation
2. The right reaction to temptation
3. The origin of temptation
4. The Best antidote to temptation

James is writing to those Jews who were suffering for the faith, both from fellow Jews and also Gentiles. He says “Considering yourselves happy or honored to be tried in this way.”

v. 3 The testing of one’s faith, if accepted and used, produces stability and Christian fortitude. Rom 5:3-4 v. 4 This God sent disciples – makes us strong – it increases our endurances – it helps us towards Christian maturity lacking in nothing.

v. 5 “lack wisdom” the great deficiency of the average Christian.

Keeping this in context it would read “If any of you want wisdom – the wisdom where by we may count it all joy when we fall into severe testings.” v. 3

“Ask” see Ch 6:2

God gives “liberally” graciously – generously and does not keep reminding us of our past failings.

v. 6 “Ask in faith” with confidence, never doubting.

Wavereth between belief and unbelief.

The Israelites – Abraham “staggered not there unbelief”
Christians wavering are likened to the waver.

Driven by the wind – of adversity – from without and tossed about from within because of the lack of stability.

v. 7 This “wavered” – double-minded person. v. 8 should not expect to get anything from God.

How have we to react in trial?

1. The brothers in humble, circumstances has to rejoice in his exalted position in Christ.

2. The rich brother or sister is to rejoice in his reduced circumstances. Acts 4:32-37.

v. 13 “Happy is the man that remains (perseveres) steadfast under trial.”

For when he has been proved or shown to have stood the test he shall receive the “crown of life.”

1 Cor 9:25 Incorruptible crown.

2 Timothy 4:8 Cr. of righteousness

1 Pt 5:6 Crown of glory

Temptation

The origin of temptation v. 13 Temptation to do evil is near from God – Satan. God cannot be tempted to do wrong and does not tempt anyone to do wrong.

v. 14 Temptation comes when we allow inward desire or lust to draw us away.

v. 15 is the end result of such a course. “Spiritual death.”

v. 17 only “good and perfect” things come from God. Described as “The Father of light” no variableness, i.e. “The unchanging and unswerving God.”

The antidote for temptation.

v. 18 We have been born of God – brought forth by the word of truth.

v. 19 Therefore, every man should be: (1) Swift to hear, (2) Slow to speak, (3) Slow to wrath.

v. 21 Lay aside ... Receive ... the engrafted word which is able to save your souls.

v. 22 Be ye doers of the word not hearers only.

v. 25 But he who looketh in the Word and continueth therein this man shall be blessed in his obedience.

James 2

These verses warn against “respect of persons” Ch 2

Commentaries divided: believers – unbelievers

James in the role of a “prophet of social justice:

v. 1 Quote – The miseries were to come upon them when they met God They were guilty of various sins.

Regarding Riches – garments – gold –silver:

Riches = grain & oil – wormy, rancid

Garments = too many – moth eaten

Gold-silver = becoming tarnished

James says you have accumulated all this wealth at the expense of your workmen.

Characteristics displayed – injustice – greed –dishonesty – lack of love.

v. 4 The protests of the workers, relative to withheld wages, had fallen on deaf ears, but says James; their cries have been heard by the “lord of hosts.”

v. 5-6 James continues his tirade against the rich accusing them of luxurious living – immorality. Finally he accuses them of being inhuman. Running roughshod over the innocent and helpless. Killing them with overwork and underpaying them. The righteous man does not mean Christ.

Leaving the rich to their folly, James now turns to the believers who were being appeased. V. 7

“Be patient brethren until”, etc. “Tribulation worketh patience”

Example of patience – the farmer. Once the seed is planted he has no control – but waits patiently for the ripening and harvest. Early – later rains.

v. 8 “be patient” says James, all the wrongs of the earth will be put right at Lord’s coming.

v. 10-11 James now cites some examples of those who were patient. See Heb 11

They endured as seeing Him who was invisible. Heb 11-27

Job is specifically mentioned as an example of endurance (patience), fortitude.

“Curse God and die” “Though he slay me”, etc. Ended up with twice as much.

v. 12 “Do not swear”. Sermon on the Mount – Matt 5:24

This does not seem to be a question of profanity or cursing.

Neither a matter of taking an oath in a court of law.

It refers to the thoughtless use of the Lord’s name, in any shape or form, to authenticate the truthfulness of our statements. Yes, yes! No, no!

Expressions to avoid, “For heaven’s sake”; “As God is my judge”; “By Jove”; “Gee” (contraction of Jesus); “I swear before God”.

Proverbs 25:11 “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”

v. 3 Easy to understand.

v. 14, 15 Probably one of the most disputed portions of the N. T. – healing – sickness – from Adam – from personal sin – Satan activity.

God can and does heal today. Through doctors/medicine - miraculously - yet Traphinius and Paul were never healed.

This is a special kind of sickness - brought about by sin.

“And if he was committed sins they shall be forgiven him”

What we can claim here is healing of body after the confessing and forsaking of sin.

The oil may only be part of a ritual from the ceremonies of the O.T.

v. 15 says, “The prayer of faith will save the sick”

The wind is “restore” this would be of body and spiritual restoration.

V. 16-18 These verses do not teach that we have to go around confessing our secret sins to everyone. If we have sinned against someone we should confess to that person. Physical healing and spiritual restoration is linked again in this verse.

The power of prayer. Effectual -fervent; earnest-effective.

Elijah was a normal man - his prayers brought drought for 3 ½ years.

He prayed again. The rain came. We too can pray like Elijah.

V. 19 The picture is of one that has strayed away in some form.

Now says James, if one can turn this one to Christ he will save him from premature death - and his sin will be forgiven.

1 John 5:16 – Quote regarding prayer.

James 2:1-13

The title of our subject tonight is, “The practice of respect of persons”.

The teaching of the lesson is “Do not practice partiality”

V. 4-13 denounces the practice of showing respect of persons.

Showing favoritism in any form is utterly foreign to the example of the Lord or to the teaching of the N.T. There is no place in true Christianity for snobbishness or discrimination.

v. 1 The practices of partiality is distinctly forbidden. “My brethren” James is addressing believers in Christ.

The meaning of v. 1

“My brethren, in your practice of the Christian faith, do not show respect of persons.”

Snobbery and race distinctions are inconsistent with true Christianity.

The shunning of some because of birth, race, sex or poverty is a practical denial of “the faith”.

In this context James says – if you practice partiality “you commit sin.” V. 9

Having said this, may I remind you of the other portions of the N.T. which teach that we ought to pay proper respect to rulers, masters, elders and parents. There are divinely ordained relationships which must be recognized.

Romans 13:7

“Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due: custom to whom custom: fear (respect) to whom fear: honor to whom honor.”

In our present passage the teaching is that no favoritism should practiced because of worldly prestige or expensive clothing.

The practice illustrated – vs 2-4

Describe the rich man and his entrance.

Describe the poor man and his treatment (vile/shabby clothes)

Stand here – or sit on the floor.

It seems incredible that this could happen in a Christian gathering.

How could such a sin be perpetrated today?

Discriminating against black brethren – hippies – long hair – different dress.

Brethren, we are dealing here with a divine principle, we must obey the written Word. God looks at the heart, heart condition more important than outward appearance.

The evils of partiality exposed – v. 5-11

In these verses James gives four reasons why we should not favor the rich and despise (neglect) the poor.

1. We dishonor a man whom God has chosen to honor – See v.5-6a. God has a special place in His heart for the poor. If we treat them wrongly we sin against God’s law.

2. v. 6—It is foolish to show deference to the rich, because they are the ones who oppress you and drag you into court. These referred to here are unbelievers.

Calvin says about this verse, “Why honor your persecutors/executioners?”

3. v. 7—Why be partial toward the rich – they blaspheme the name of Christ. T his sin, unfortunately, is not limited to the upper class.

4. v 8—James’ fourth argument is that showing favoritism to the rich violates the law of love. “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is probably one of the most revolutionary teachings in the Scriptures. Think on the implications of this. Who is my neighbor? Luke 10:29.

The Story of the Good Samaritan.

Our neighbor is any person who has a need which we can help to meet. Dangers – do not allow the pendulum to swing the other way.

“The royal law” = the law of love. The law of the King.

If we fulfill this law, James says, that, “We do well”

Mark 12:37 “The common people heard Him gladly” – not the wealthy or aristocratic.

1 Cor 26:29 Not many noble are called, but the poor – weak – base – the despised – the insignificant.

He has chosen the weak of this world to confound the mighty.

He has chosen the foolish of this world to confound the wise.

Most of our Lord’s followers were from the poorer classes.

God has chosen these dear ones, should we for any reason be disrespectful of them, while at the same time, showing undue respect to some prestigious person we disobey God's Word.

v. 9 If we show respect of persons we violate the "royal law"

This is both sin and transgression.

Sin is a lack of conformity to the will of God, a failure to meet His standards.

Transgression is the breaking of a known law.

So then, failure on our part to keep the divine principle of not showing respect of persons makes us transgressors in His sight.

v. 10 According to this verse, if we break the law in one place we are guilty of all. The law is like a chain of 10 links. Break one link and the chain is broken.

God does not allow us to keep the laws we like, and break others. The same God who forbade adultery also forbade murder. V. 11.

So, in the context, murder and adultery is breaking the law, but so is snobbishness and discrimination. Failing to love one's neighbor.

There is a basic problem that arises at this point in James' argument.

The question is:

Are Christians under the law or are they not?

James has been enforcing the law upon Christians, or so it seems.

There has caused many theologians to question the right of the epistle to be included in the canon of Scripture. (Luther). This argument, that it belongs to the Jewish era, becomes more convincing when you read the words written by the great proponent of the doctrine of the grace of God, Paul himself.

Rom 6:14 "You are not under law, but under grace."

Rom 7:6 "We are delivered from the law."

First of all it should be realized that Christians are not under the law as a rule of life. Christ, not the law, is the believer's pattern.

But certain principles of the law are of abiding value. In the Epistles nine commandments are repeated, not given as law but as instruction in righteousness for the child of God.

What James is saying here is, As believers you are not under the law - you have liberty in Christ to do what is right.

Therefore, love your neighbor as yourself, not as a matter of life or death, but that you will be rewarded for it at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

v. 12-13

"So speak ye, and so do" refers to words and deeds. Our whole life should be in our words - not partiality - favoritism - should be shown by us.

Such violations will be judged by the Word at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

v. 13

There is no question of eternal punishment here.

This penalty was paid once for all at Calvary's cross. In this verse it is a question of God dealing with an erring child in this world.

If we do not show mercy in our dealings with others, we are not walking in fellowship with God, and can expect to suffer the consequences of a backslidden condition.

1 Cor 11 - Some weak - sickly - some fallen asleep.

The expression "and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" may mean that if we show mercy to others, the judgment which might otherwise fall on us will be replaced by mercy.

To sum up the lesson: We should test ourselves on the subject of "respect of persons".

1. Are we more kindly to the young than the old?
2. Do we befriend prominent people rather than the comparatively unknown? Do we neglect the more prominent for the sake of befriending the inconspicuous?
3. Do we favor the rich over the poor?
4. Would we receive a person of a different race as much as we would receive one of our own race?

James 2:14-26

Real faith - spurious faith

Faith and works

These verses are the most controversial in James.

Luther could not reconcile James' teaching on justification by works and Paul's insistence on justification by faith.

These verses are also used to support the heresy that we are saved by faith, plus works.

This section could be titled “Justification by Works”, because there is a sense in which we are justified by works.

Explain the doctrine of Justification.

To grasp the full truth of justification we should understand that:

1. We are justified by grace – Rom 3:24. This means that we did not deserve to be justified.

2. Justified by faith – Romans 5:1. Faith appropriates what God has done for us.

3. Justified by blood – Rom 5:9. This is the price of our justification.

4. Justified by God – Rom 8:33. God is the person who justifies.

5. Justified by works – James 2:24. This is the outward reality and proof of our faith.

v. 14 James insists here that a faith that does not result in good works cannot save.

There are two keys that will help us to understand this verse.

1. ... though a man say he has faith. This man is not a real child of God – he is a professor – he only says he has faith.

2. The second key is brought out in some of the more recent translations. The last question in the verse should read, Can that kind of faith save him? No!

A false faith does not produce good works.

A true faith does. We know a tree by its fruit. "By their fruit you shall know them."

v. 15-16 Faith without works illustrated

We are introduced to two people here.

One man has neither adequate food nor clothing. The other (the man who says he has faith) has both – but he is not willing to share them. He says, "Go and put on some clothing, and eat a good meal." But he doesn't raise a finger to make this possible. What good is that? This action does not provide good or warmth for the body.

v. 17 Faith without works is dead

A faith without works is not real faith at all. It is dead – it does not exist.

We are not saved by faith plus good works. We are saved by faith and genuine faith produces "good works".

Works is the fruit of salvation not the root.

If this should apply to a Christian – obviously a backslider – John 15:2 – should be remembered. "Every branch which beareth not fruit He taketh away."

v. 18 True faith and works are inseparable.

Visualize this verse as a conversation between two men.

The speaker who is saved and possesses real faith, says to the other who professes says he has to have faith, but does not demonstrate it by good works.

"You say you have faith, but you do not have works to demonstrate/prove it. This is an impossible situation, for faith is invisible, the only way that others can know you have faith is by a life that demonstrates it."

“On the other hand, I will show you my faith by my works.”

Col 1:6 – faith-hope-love brings forth fruit.

1 Thess 1:3 – work of faith; the mark of true genuine faith in Christ is good works.

v. 19-20 If this man was seen (?) works have testified that he belongs to God.

Saving faith is not a mere mental assent to a well known fact. Believing on God, for instance. James says, that the demons believe in the existence of God, and they shudder at the thought of their eventual punishment by Him.

Mental assent – intellectual agreement is not rooted in true faith and does not produce good works.

On the other hand, when a person really believes on the Lord it involves a complete commitment of spirit-soul-body and results in a life of good works. A transformed life.

In v. 20 James appeals to the professor – “foolish fellow” to recognize that faith as head belief which does not produce good works is useless.

v. 21-25 Two examples to illustrate that faith produces works.

Abraham, a Jew

Rahab, a Gentile

1. Abraham – Quote v 21-26

To see this truth in proper perspective See Gen 15:6. Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness”. V 23

Abraham was considered righteous by God by believing
- in other words by faith.

40 years later he offered his son Isaac to God and was justified by this action or his work. He gave proof of his faith. This proved the genuineness of his faith. His good works identified him as a friend of God. Man said, "show me the reality of your faith". The only way this can be done is by good works.

2. Rahab was justified by works also.

v. 25 tells us what she did.

Joshua 2:8-11 - Rahab's conversion

She concluded that the God of the Hebrews was the true God and decided to identify herself with this God whatever the cost.

When the spies came into the city, she befriended them, in doing so she showed the genuineness of her faith in the living God.

She was not saved by hiding the spies, but this action or work proved that she was a genuine believer.

v. 26 Faith is inanimate without works.

Quote - "The body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead."

James compares faith to the human body.

James compares works to the spirit.

The body without the spirit is lifeless.

So faith without works is dead.

This kind of faith is spurious - not genuine, saving faith.

True faith produces good works

Faith is towards God – Works is toward man.

Summation:

Do I share my possession with those in need?

Do I live sacrificially in order to be able to send the Gospel to those starving for the Bread of life?

Am I willing to offer the dearest things in my life to God?

Am I willing to turn traitor to the world in order to be loyal to Christ?

Good works

1 Tim 6:8 – that they be rich in good works.

Titus 2:7 – show yourself a pattern of good works

Titus 2:14 – a peculiar people, zealous of good works

Titus 3:8 – be careful to maintain good works

Matt 5:16 – “Let your light so shine before man, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, who is in heaven.”

James 3

v. 17-18 of Ch 3. James shows here that the man ended with heavenly wisdom is a peace loving man.

In Ch 4 he mentions that strife often exists among God's people.

Why so many unhappy homes! – Assemblies torn by division – better finds among home workers and missionaries abroad.

Reasons v. 1 – lust = strong desires to accumulate material possessions – prestige – pleasure. The gratification of fleshly appetites.

These powerful forces are continually at work. 1 John 3:15.

Sometimes these four break loose and James says “you kill” – figuratively “Desire” here means to covet – we covet things and in our desire to obtain them we fight and quarrel with each other.

v. 3 To obtain what God wants you to have you must pray.

James says, “You have not because you ask not.”

If you ask for it and the prayer is unanswered, it means that God has judged that your motives were not pure.

“You have asked amiss”

Our prayer standard should always be, Is my prayer for selfish pleasure or for God's glory?

v. 4 James condemns the love of the world on “spiritual adultery”. Demas adulteresses, the unfaithful wife.

“The world” this is the system which man has built up around him to satisfy the lust of the eyes-flesh-pride of life.

In this system there is no room for Christ or God.

To be a friend of this system is to be an enemy of God.

“He who loves the world the love of the Father is not in him.”

This is the world that crucified Christ.

v. 5 Difficult to translate. “Do you think the Scripture speaks in vain? The Spirit who dwells in us yearns enviously.

v. 6 Thank God for the super abundance of God’s grace for each occasion. Heb 4 – Come boldly, etc. Prayer – prayerlessness of behavior today.

To rectify this unspiritual condition, James now presents the remedy.

It is in six steps. (1) Submit to God (surrender); (2) Resist the devil; (3) draw near to God (prayer); (4) Cleanse your hands (actions); (5) purify your hearts nature – desires. Confession. This should be accompanied by deep sorrow. V. 9; (6) Humble yourselves in the sight of God.

If we do these things “God will exalt us in due time.”

v. 11-17 The sin of evil speaking.

The royal law of love says that we should “love our neighbors as ourselves.”

To speak evil against a brother is to judge his nature – it is also speaking evil and condemning the royal law as worthless.

v. 13-17 The sin of self-confidence. Boasting-planning without God. The sin is that he never took God into his plans. I will—we will. (Lucifer) The rich farmer, Luke, “I will”. “Boast not thyself of tomorrow”

It is a sin to plan for the future without God. What wilt Thou have me to do.

v. 16 “We don’t know what tomorrow holds.” Dea Volente Our life is steam, appeareth – gone. V. 15 D.V. Lord willing.

v. 16 The Christians were priding themselves in their boastful plans for the future. This is evil says James because it leaves God out.

v. 17 Quote

Him that knows to do good = to take God into our lives in every aspect – a moment by moment dependence upon Him.

If we know this is right and don’t do it – it is sin.

In Ch. 4 James puts us on trial with regard to covetousness – conflict – evil speaking – planning without God.

James 4

In the last verse of Ch 3 James points out that the wise man is a peace-loving man. Quote.

In chapter 4 he reminds us of the tragic strife that sometimes exists among God's people.

The reason for this is that some are ceaselessly striving to satisfy their lust for pleasure ... possessions ... and position. The danger of worldliness.

v. 1-20 The source of all strife.

From whence come wars and fightings among you?

The reason ... strong, fleshly desires striving to be satisfied.

Some of these desires are: to accumulate material possessions ... the drive for prestige ... the craving for pleasure ... the gratification of fleshly appetites.

These power forces work within each of us in some they become unharnessed and break loose.

v. 2 James says "Ye kill" ... this is not literal murders ... it means that some brethren in order to obtain their fleshly desires will trample roughshod over anyone who obstructs their progress. 1 John 3:15 "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer."

In essence of course, anger-wrath-jealousy-cruelty are murders in embryo form.

v. 2b-3

Ye fight and war, yet ye have not ... because ye ask not.

The bickering and strife among believers comes from the desire for more things and from jealousy.

v. 2

Many believers do not have what God wants them to have because they do not ask God in prayer.

Don't argue ... don't fight ... "pray". This is the right approach to this problem. Put your life in God's hands.

v. 3

One of the reasons for unanswered prayer. Asking with the wrong motives ... to gratify the flesh.

The psychology of these three verses is to be content with what we have and to rejoice in what God has given to us and to wait with anticipation on the good things He will give us.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

v. 4

James in v. 4 condemns the excessive love of material things as spiritual adultery.

An adulteress is one who is unfaithful.

God wants us to love Him first and foremost with everything we have. Thessalonian believers "turned to God".

If we set up material idols and value them above God we are spiritually unfaithful, and in Biblical language we are adulteress. The same of being an adulterer physically.

Not also the admonition that friendships with the world's systems makes us at variance with God, in fact says James it makes us the enemy of God.

Never let us forget that it was the world's systems – political and religious that crucified the Lord of Life and Glory ... our Lord.

How can a believer walk hand in hand with the world that murdered their Savior.

v. 5

This verse would draw our attention to the spirit that worketh in us. This would refer to our old nature – the old man – the Adamic nature.

v. 16 “But He giveth more grace.” Not the change in thought here.

In the first five verses we saw how wicked the old nature in a believer can be. Now we learn that we are not left to deal with the lusts of the flesh in our own strength. Grace for every need.

“He giveth more grace”, i.e. strength whenever it is needed. “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

To prove that God gives strength as it is needed, James quotes Proverbs 3:24. God resisteth the proud ... but gives His all-sufficient grace to the humble – the needy.

Verse 7-10 True Repentance

In these verses there are “six steps” to be followed where there is true repentance.

1. We must submit to God. Submission – subjection – surrender. We must be subject to Him ... we must be ready to listen and obey Him ... We must not be proud ... we must be tender and contrite.

2. Resist the devil. We do this by closing our hearts and ears to his suggestions and temptations. We do this by

using the Sword of the Spirit – and putting on the armour of God. If we resist him by these means then he will flee from us.

3. Draw near to God. We draw near to God in prayer ... on occasions we must come in desperate believing prayer ... pouring out our hearts at all times. When we do this He draws near to us ... even when we have sinned and we come to Him confessing, He restores our soul.

4. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners and purify your hearts ye double minded. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. Ch 1-8. The hands, speaking of outward actions and the heart speaks of inward motives.

We cleanse our hands and purify our hearts through confessing and forsaking our sin, both inward and outward. See Psalm 24.

1. Confession should be accompanied by deep sorrow for sin. Verse 9. “Be afflicted and mourn and weep,” let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to heaviness. When God visits us in conviction ... it is time to prostrate ourselves, and mourn over our sinfulness ... powerlessness ... coldness ... and barrenness. We should humble ourselves and sorrow over our materialism – secularism – and formalism. We should show the signs of godly repentance. We should mourn and weep.

2. Finally we should humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. If we honestly take our place in true repentance at His feet ... then says James, He will lift you up ... he will restore you and exalt you. Job 22-29 “When men are cast down then thou shalt say there is lifting up and He shall save the humble person.”

v. 11-12 The sin of evil speaking.

The next sin James deals with is speaking evil of our brother.

The royal law (Ch 2-8) says that we should “love our neighbor as ourselves.” To criticize a brother unjustly is breaking this law and will be held accountable.

We are not under the Law; we are doers of the Law. James says in v. 12 that God is the only Judge ... he alone has the power to save or destroy. See E ph 4:31, “Let all evil speaking be put away from you.”

v. 13-17 The sin of self-confidence

The next sin James condemns is that of boastful planning in independence of God.

He pictures an aggressive business man laying plans for the future.

Notice the details of this plan.

This business man was meticulous in his planning.

He thought about the time – today or tomorrow

He thought about the personnel – we

He thought about the place – this city

He thought about the duration – spend a year there

He thought about the activity – trade

He thought about the anticipated result – get gain ... make money.

These are detailed and well-laid plans ... one thing is missing God was never one taken into the plans. The rich farmer This is a dangerous procedure ... we are provoking God when we act in this way.

James says that self-will is sinful. To say “we will” or “I will” is sin.

Note the “I wills of Lucifer” in Isa 14:13, 14. There are five of them.

v. 14

It is wrong to take your life into your own hands.

We do not know what a day may bring forth.

God should be consulted in all our plans ... and they should be made in His will.

There is no certainty in life ... our life is frail ... and unpredictable ... it is like a vapor which appeareth for a little, then vanishes away. “It is like a puff of smoke.”

v. 15

We should live and speak knowing that our destinies are in His control. We should say in all our arrangements. “If the Lord will we shall both live and do this or that.”

Paul believed in this principle.

Acts 18-21 I will return to you “if the Lord will”.

1 Cor 4-19 I will come to you shortly “if the Lord wills”.

Sometimes Christians use the letters “D. V.” to express their dependence on God. These letters are the initials of two Latin words, “Deo volente” meaning God willing.

v. 16

“But now you glory in your boastings” This verse is a strong admonition. These believers were boasting of their plans for the future. They were arrogant and lived as though nothing could interrupt their time schedule.

They were acting as if they were masters of their own life.

v. 17

Therefore to him that knoweth what is right to do good, and doeth it not (fails to do it), to him it is sin (he is guilty of sin)."

The doing good here in context would be the taking of God into every area of our life.

Living in a moment by moment dependence upon Him.

If we know that this is God's will, that this is the right way, to fail to do it, is sin.

Chapter 4 has put us on trial with regard to covetousness ... conflict ... evil-speaking ... planning without consulting God.

Some questions to ask ourselves: Do I covet to get more, or am I content with what I have?; Am I envious of what others have?; Do I pray before buying?; When God speaks do I submit or resist?; Do I speak evil against my brethren?; Do I make plans without consulting God?

James 5

James 5:1-6

Introduction

This is probably one of the most searching and piercing sections of the letter.

The denunciation of the first six verses fall unsparingly on the rich.

James takes on the role of a prophet of social justice.

1. He cries out against those who fail to use their wealth for the alleviation of human need.
2. Against those who become rich by exploiting their workers.
3. James also rebukes them for using their wealth for self-indulgence and luxurious living.
4. Then finally he pictures the rich as arrogant oppressors of the righteous.

The Study

v. 1 James reminds the rich that harvest-time is coming. "That which we sow we shall reap." Gal 6:11-12

Those who live in wealthy profligacy and who exploit their employees, James says, they should begin now to weep and howl, for God's judgment upon them will bring untold misery. Luke 16.

James mentions four cardinal sins of the rich in the next five verses.

v. 2-3 The sin of laying up treasure on earth.

The Bible never says that it is a sin to be rich.

James speaks of wealth as it was recognized in Bible times.

Riches - Garments - Gold - Silver

The hoarding of these things until they were spoiled is what James calls sin.

“Your richest goods are ruined” probably meant that their grains had become wormy and their oil rancid.

The point here is they had been hoarded to the point where they were spoiled.

They could have been used a one time to feed the hungry.

Apply the same principle to:

Garments - Silver - Gold

Garments hanging in the closet for so long were moth eaten.

Gold and silver were discolored because of not being used.

The sin was, that before the goods-garments were spoiled - gold - silver tarnished, they would have been used to feed the hungry - clothe the destitute - provide medicine for the sick - spread the Gospel.

The expression in v. 3 is interesting.

“And shall eat your flesh as it were fire.”

It means that their failures to use their riches for the good of others would cause them the keenest suffering and remorse.

The second sin was failure to pay proper wages. See v. 4

This is shocking; it was prevalent in James' day, it is still with us.

Though the workers had worked well they evidently had been deprived of their wages.

Their masters turned a deaf ear to their cries for justice. James reminds those rich cheats that though they refuse to listen to the cries of desperation, they were heard by the Lord of Sabbaths, that is, the Lord of hosts.

The day of reckoning was coming.

The third sin was that of luxurious living. V. 5

James next denounces the sin of luxurious living. It is a sin to use affluence to indulge in selfish extravagance. This not only touches the rich but touches us too.

The fourth sin is inhumanity towards the righteous. V. 6

Some take this verse to mean that the Just or Righteous one is the Lord Jesus.

This interpretation does not fit the context.

The just or righteous one is the innocent man (Poor man)

James says He cannot resist you, so you have killed him ... not directly perhaps, but by overworking and underpaying them.

Exhortation to patience. V. 7-12

In these verses James now turns to the believers, who were being oppressed, and encourages them to be patient. The motive for patience is the coming of the Lord.

It is used in the N. T. several times as an incentive to patient endurance.

James uses the farmer as an example of patience. V. 7

He does not reap the same day as he sows. There is a long period of waiting. First must come the early rain, causing the seeds to germinate. Then there must come the latter rain, toward the end of the season to bring the crop to maturity.

v. 8 In this verse, James exhorts his readers to be patient like the farmer. Also to be courageous. Strengthens your hearts. Because the wrongs of earth will be made right when the Lord returns.

v. 9 Don't grumble

During times of distress it is not uncommon for the victims to turn against one another. Human nature is strange, sometimes under pressure we turn against those we love most. Hence the exhortation: "Murmur not one against another"; "lest you be judged". In trying circumstances we should not let resentment - expressed or unexpressed - build up.

James says, "The Judge is standing before your heart's door."

He knows what we think. Soon we all will stand before Him at the Judgment Seat to give an account.

v. 10-11 The O.T. prophets are brought forth as examples of suffering and patience.

Notice the order. Suffering affliction - Patience.

Romans 5:3 Tribulations worketh Patience.

Trouble produces endurance.

Patience is explained in other parts of the N.T. as fortitude or steadfastness.

These O.T. prophets were persecuted unmercifully, yet they endured as seeing Him who was invisible. Heb 11:27.

These men were blessed of God because they endured. Heb 11

If we want to be blessed by God then we too must endure.

v. 11 Job is taken as an outstanding example of endurance and fortitude.

Few men in the world ever suffered so much loss in so short a time as Job.

Yet Job never turned from God, and even under added pressure would not curse Him.

In the end his endurance was rewarded. God revealed Himself as merciful and full of pity. See Job 42.

Consider the phrase, "the end of the Lord". It means - the final issue or result which God brings to pass.

v. 12 This is an interesting verse

1. There are some who believe that the question here is that of cursing or profanity.

2. There are others who use this verse exclusively to forbid the practice of taking an oath in a court of law.

In the context neither of these conclusions fit, entirely.

The practice which is forbidden is the thoughtless use of the Lord's name - or some other name - to attest the truthfulness of our speech.

The believers should not have to swear by anything in heaven or earth.

Those who know Him should be able to depend on the fact that his yes means yes and his no, no.

Having established what we believe to be the interpretation let us look at a few applications of the truth.

1. The passage could be applied to forbid such needless expressions as “for heaven’s sake – by Jove – gee – gosh – golly.
2. Profanity or cursing by a believer is unthinkable and a sin.
3. In a court of law when a believer is not known and the law of the land demands that we make an oath on the Bible, then it would be better to conform, “Last you fall into condemnation.” James perhaps was thinking of the third commandment. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.”

James 5:13-20

The theme in the closing verses of this chapter is prayer (7 times).

Prayer is appropriate for every occasion.

James is encouraging his brethren in the use of prayer.

Is any among you afflicted? (suffering) Let him pray.

The context shows that many were in trouble, deep trouble.

The answers to this problem, says James, is to go to the Lord in prayer.

Conversely, he says, in times of rejoicing we should praise Him.

From this exhortation we learn that God wants to be brought into every changing mood of our lives.

Ideally, we should see God as the first course of all that comes to us in life.

In all of our circumstances we should see no hand but His.

v. 14-15 Sickness and prayer.

This is probably one of the most disputed portions of the N.T.

It brings us face to face with the place of healing in the life of the believers today.

Before looking at the verses in detail, let us review what the Bible teaches about sickness and healing. All sickness, in a general sense, is the result of sin in the world.

1. Also sickness can be as a direct of sin in a person's life. 1 Cor 11:30

2. Not all sickness is the result of sin in a person's life. Job is an example of this. Epaphroditos - Phil 2:30; Gaius - 3 John 2

3. Sometimes sickness is the result of satanic activity.

Job's body was covered in boils - Job 2:7

Satan crippled the woman in Luke 13:10-17

She was unable to straighten herself up - Satan had bound her for 18 years.

Paul had a physical problem caused by Satan. He called it a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me. 2 Cor 12:7

That God can and does heal is a foregone conclusion.

It is also clear that God uses different means of healing.

1. He heals through a natural bodily process.

2. Sometimes He heals through medicines. Paul to Timothy – take a little wine, etc. – 1 Tim 5:23

3. Sometimes He heals through physicians and surgeons.

Jesus said that “the sick need a physician” – Matt 9:12

Paul spoke of Luke as “the beloved physician” – Col 4:14

These references recognize the need for doctors among Christians.

Then God heals miraculously

The Gospels contain many examples of this.

It would be incorrect to say that God generally heals in this way.

Neither would it be correct to say that He never does. There is nothing in the Word that would discourage us from believing that God can heal miraculously today.

There are also instances where apparently it was not God’s will to heal.

Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletum – 2 Tim 4:20

The Lord did not heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh. 2 Cor 12:7-10

If it were always God will to heal, some would never grow old or die.

Healing is not something anyone can demand from God.

Faith-healers say that if a person is not healed it is a lack of faith.

Paul – Trophimus – Gaius were not healed, and yet their faith was virile and active.

Now turn to vs. 14-15 and see if we can fit them into what the rest of Bible teaches about healing. Quote.

If these were the only verses in the Bible on healing, we would assume that a believer could be assured of healing from every sickness that comes into his life.

However we have seen that it is not always God's will to heal.

Therefore we are forced to the conclusion that James is not talking of every kind of sickness – but rather a sickness which is the result of specific circumstances.

To me the key to understanding the passage is found in the words ... “and any sins he may have committed will be forgiven.”

This man had committed some sins, maybe involving the testimony of the local church. He realizes that his sickness is the result of his sin. He repents and confesses his sin to God. Since his sin involved the public testimony of the assembly, he calls the elders and makes a full confession to them also.

They pray over him – anoint him with oil in the Name of the Lord. Their prayer of faith saves the sick man, and the Lord raises him up.

To me the passage teaches that it is a definite promise of the Lord, that where sickness is the direct result of sin, and where sin is confessed and forsaken in the manner described, the Lord will heal.

The Oil

Some interpret the oil here as signifying the use of medicinal means, since oil was a form of medicine in James' day. See Luke 10:34

Another view is that the ritual use of oil was meant. This idea is strengthened by the words "in the name of the Lord." This means that the anointing was to be done by His authority and in obedience to His Word.

v. 16 "Confess your faults one to another"

At first glance this statement might give the impression that we are to tell other people about our secret sins.

This is not the thought. James is saying here, that if we have sinned against someone, we should confess our sin to that person as soon as possible.

Next we are urged to pray for each other's healing.

Oftimes than we care to admit our illnesses may be cause by sin. Overeating-worry-anger-intemperance-jealousy-selfishness-pride-unforgiving spirit.

All sin should be confessed and forsaken promptly.

This is vital for our spiritual health and good for our physical well-being.

v. 16b-18 These verses show how Elijah prayed. Quote.

The incident is recorded in 1 Kings 17:1-10

Ahab was king - Through his wife Jezebel he became a worshipper of Baal - then he led the people into idolatry.

Ch 16:33 says, "He did move to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that went before him."

The drought then that came upon them for 3 ½ years was the direct result of sin.

In Ch 18 Elijah had the notable contest with the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel.

Describe.

When the people saw the power of God they turned back to Him.

Then Elijah prayed again and the 3 ½ years of drought ended. Notice that the sin of Ahab and the prayer of Elijah brought 3 ½ years of drought.

The forsaking and confession of sin by the nation plus the prayer of Elijah brought an end to the drought.

Elijah was no supernatural man – he was like us. He should inspire us to pray.

v. 19-20 Quote.

This verse describes a brother who has wandered away from the truth, in doctrine or in practice.

Another brother makes this a matter of fervent; believing prayer – then wins him back to fellowship with God and with his brothers and sisters in Christ.

The repercussions are that this brother has saved the erring brother from either a premature death or spiritual tragedy. Secondly he covers a multitude of sins.

They are forgiven and forgotten by God.