

## Commentary on the Book of James

### James 1

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

James takes the familiar identity of a bond-servant in his greeting, evidencing his humility and obedience to His Lord Jesus Christ. This James is the brother of Jude and the half-brother of Christ. He is not James the son of Zebedee because he was martyred too early to have written this letter (see Acts 12:1-2). This James is the James who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He writes specifically to the Jews who have been dispersed, perhaps due to Herod's (Herod Agrippa I) ongoing persecution.

**2Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,  
3knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.  
4And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

Similar to Peter in his first epistle, James writes to those who have been dispersed and encourages them as they face trials of many kinds. He tells them to have all joy in trials. Trials are not joyous in themselves, but we are to consider them as all joy. This is because when we encounter them we can know that as our faith is tested it is also refined. Testing of our faith produces endurance so that we are able to persevere in our faith. When we see that our faith sustains us during difficult times, it becomes more and more precious to us, something that we hold more firmly to. The more we hold firm to our faith and endure difficulties for Christ's sake we become more and more like Him. In fact, suffering has a way of working sin out of our lives. We realize that this life is not our home and the be all end all. We choose to focus on the life to come in light of our present pain. As 1 Peter 4:1 says, "He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." God uses trials to test our faith, not so much so that He can know if we have faith, for He knows all. Rather, God seeks to give us the chance to bring Him glory by standing firm, thus filling our joy and increasing our faith.

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

**6But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.**

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

God gives us a great promise here through James. There are multitudes of times in life when we lack wisdom. What we must understand is that the Bible is not merely a code of ethics where we can look up a certain letter and number and find an answer. We need to know the Scriptures and we need the Holy Spirit to illumine our minds so that we can apply the Scriptures. We need to be able to determine how God is leading in a

circumstance, and we must ask him for wisdom. It is a simple prayer to ask for wisdom, but it must be done in faith. Only the person who is convinced that they cannot do ministry or life on their own apart from Christ is the one who will admit that they lack wisdom. Upon this admission they must ask for it in faith, a step requiring a humility and willingness to pray and call upon God for help. This calling must be in faith and with no doubting. We must believe that we have received what we have asked. If we don't believe, we should not expect to have our prayers answered. We must have absolute confidence in the fact that God delights in giving His children wisdom if only they would come to Him with open hearts and ask in faith. Those who doubt are unstable and double-minded. They are unsteady in their walk with God, one day standing strong and another day giving into sin or doubt. They doubt God's character or His promises. Such a man cannot experience the fullness of God's promise and the filling of the Spirit. Faith is essential in living the abundant Christian life. The doubter is like the surf of the sea. However the wind blows and with whatever force and direction, so too is the man who doubts blown about. God calls us to be anchored upon the truth of His Word no matter what the circumstances. We need to have faith, especially when being tried and tested.

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

Because of our standing in Christ being seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6), we can glory in our high position even if we are the last on the earth. After all, the last shall be first and the first shall be last (Mark 10:31). If a rich man boasts and flaunts his riches, trying to find his joy in them, he will be disappointed. As the grass flowers and fades, so he too will pass away. He can't take his riches with him, and if he hasn't honored God in this life God will not honor him in the next. This is why we must understand this life to be temporary, a mere vapor that is here and then gone. We must live in light of the life to come. Thus if we are poor and someone else is rich, it doesn't matter so much as long as we know we are rich in the life to come because we have been wise stewards of the kingdom of Christ and of the resources with which He has entrusted us. If we are rich, we are to glory in our humiliation. That means that we must rejoice not in what we have, for we will be "humiliated" when we have to leave it all behind. The rich man must glory in what is to come, and thus he ought to live with kingdom values and purposes, not making an idol of his wealth. One day Christ will come to judge and like the sun scorch all who boast in their possessions. They will be judged for unfaithfulness and will fade away into judgment and hell.

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

The man is blessed who does not give into doubt or sin despite difficulty and trial. He understands that trials are part of life, and that Christ will see Him through each and

every one. That Christ will go through trials with us does not mean that they will not hurt or even bring us to our physical death. It simply means that He will sustain our faith and testimony throughout them so that our joy can be full despite the suffering. This will prove our faith similarly to how presenting our bodies as living sacrifices proves what the will of God is. We will formally be approved in the sense that we will be formally adopted as sons into the kingdom upon our endurance under the trials of this life. Then we will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who receive His Son in faith (see also Revelation 2:10). Notice that saving faith produces obedience, though not all do well. Sometimes even a firm believer will choose to sin or be deceived. Yet we can be confident that God will keep such a person for no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand.

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

**14But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.**

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

God does not tempt us as if He is leading us into sin. He allows trials because suffering is not that which tempts us to sin. It is when we are enticed by the devil who must appeal to our flesh that we may get carried away by lust into sin. It is never God's fault that we sin. God is not tempted himself by evil, and He does not tempt anyone. God has no stake in evil, only in good. He doesn't do evil, nor does He cause someone to do evil. The Scriptures say that God hardens a person, but we can take that to mean that the person has made a choice to give into temptation by the devil and has let the lusts of his flesh carry him away. Pharaoh was responsible for hardening his heart even though God was sovereignly hardening it for him. Somehow the two co-exist. What we must understand is that we cannot pass our sin off on God, for God gives us a responsibility to obey and not choose to sin. It is our fault for giving into the lusts of the flesh, for we are not compelled to do so. We must indulge it and let it carry us away into sin. Once we have sinned and sin has done its work, we will experience the consequences of sin in some way. The unbeliever who sins will face the wages of death in hell. The believer who sins will (as well as the unbeliever) experience a death of the ability to bear fruit, enjoy God, experience close fellowship with God, love others properly, and have freedom from the bonds of sin. When we sin, we willingly subject ourselves to sin and Satan. We, in a sense, make ourselves bond-servants of the devil rather than of God. Sin always has harmful affects that lead to death. Some bring us closer to death than others because some sin does more harm than others. But all sin erodes our sensitivity to God and our ability to hear His voice and do His will. There is a sort of soul death involved as the mind is compromised and the heart's affections jeopardized. Yet the spirit will never die for it has been made alive in Christ.

**16Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**

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

**18**In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

James has already explained that God does not do the work of Satan in tempting us. Now he is warning us to not be deceived into thinking that good things come from any other source than God. Satan does not bless us, though he may work to keep us feeling satiated in our sin. He will not, however, give us what we really need, which sometimes is suffering to draw us to Christ. He will bring us pain, but it is never for our good. God, on the other hand causes all things to work for our good (Romans 8:28). We can rejoice in the character of our God, for He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. God does not change. There are no variables with the character and nature of God. He is always good. As the sun moves across the sky, the shadows move and change. God, however, is not like that. He made the light of the sun, and though the sun moves and the moon revolves around the earth, He doesn't change. He is always good. Whenever something good happens, whenever a prayer is answered, and whenever we see spiritual fruit and growth, we can be confident that God is at work. Satan never gives good things. This is helpful in determining the will of God. If something is bearing spiritual fruit and is edifying, it is not the work of Satan. If prayers are being answered for the kingdom to advance, this is God's work and not the devil's. If God gives just the blessing and intervention that we need in His perfect way and timing, we can know that the gift is perfect and from Him. God's sovereign plan was to send Christ and to cause sinners to be born again to salvation by the word of truth of the gospel. Man is the firstfruits of those who will be redeemed. The creation too, which presently groans for its redemption (Romans 8:22), will also be changed.

**19**This you know, my beloved brethren But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

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

**21**Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

James tells us that we must know about what he is going to say (better translated in the ESV). It is imperative that all believers are quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. When man is angry and wrathful, seeking his purposes and acting as if he must take matters into his own hand, he does not accomplish the will of God. God's work is to avenge, not man's. Man does no good when he loses his temper and lets his emotions rage. There is no righteousness in ungodly anger, especially when it is out of control. Being quick to hear means that we are quick to humble ourselves under the admonition and instruction of the Lord. We are quick to listen and respond to God's Word. It also means that we are more interested in what others have to say than in our own personal agendas. Rather than talking somebody's ear off about our own life, we make a point of it to ask them about theirs, being careful to remember things that have been going on in their life. Too many are quick to open their mouth and they stick their foot in their mouth by saying foolish things or things that they will later regret. We must choose our words carefully, being slow to speak. We must ask ourselves before we say something if what we are going to say will build others up and if it is wholesome before the Lord. Also,

there is a matter of self-control when it comes to talking. Some people need to learn when to stop talking and making captive audiences. We need to respect others time.

Becoming slow to anger is something that comes easier to some than it does others. Some react by ignoring and are not quick to hear. Some react by speaking and are not careful with their word selection. Others are quick to lose their temper and act out with physical force or words. None of these things are spiritual. We are to be slow to anger and slow to speak but quick to listen. We are to make a choice which we can do by the power of Christ in us to lay aside all that remains of wickedness and filthiness. We are Christ's and the Holy Spirit indwells us. Why do we grieve Him by making Him live in the presence of unconfessed sin? I can't imagine how much that hurts Him. There is no excuse for hanging on to fleshly lusts and sin patterns. There is no place for saying that "I just have a temper and that is how I deal with things" or "I just can't help myself" or "I just tend to be a blabbermouth so if I start blabbering just put up with it" or "I'm just not a good listener." God says we don't have reason to make excuses. Such reasoning blasphemes the work that Christ accomplished on the cross in enabling us to become slaves of righteousness, to reign in life, and to present our members as members of righteousness. We have already received the Word of God in our souls through which we were born again. Romans 10:17 reminds us that we served saved by faith which came from hearing the Word of Christ. James 1:18 explained that we have already been born from the word of truth. As such, we are saved, and we do not need to receive the Word over and over again in the sense of repentance unto salvation. What we are to do is heed the Word of God, which is where James is about to go. Receiving the Word of truth involves not just listening to a sermon but acting upon the Word of God. This is how we receive it. This is what the Scripture means when it says that we are to "let the word of God dwell in us richly" (Colossians 3:16). We are to obey it and let it affect our behavior.

**22But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.**

**23For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;**

**24for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.**

A mere hearer of the word who does not act upon it does not really receive the Word of God. Yet it is easy for such a person to deceive themselves into thinking they are living for Christ and bearing fruit when they are not. They hear God's Word in the Bible study and on Sunday morning, so they think they must be growing. Yet if they never live out the commands of Christ, no change has really happened. They may have more Bible knowledge but they are no more of a pleasing, living sacrifice to Christ. The purpose of our hearing the Word of God is growth, change, and a revelation of any unconfessed sin. It makes no sense to look into a mirror, see a frazzled mess, and not do anything about it. We are very careful to get our outer person looking just right before going out in public or when going to church. Yet are we this careful with the inner person? God is more concerned with the state of our heart when we assemble ourselves together than He is

about whether or not we have brushed our teeth (though that may be important to others). We need to deal with the spiritual mars, wrinkles, spots, and stains. This is the issue. The Word is a mirror to our soul, and we must use it to cleanse ourselves through confession and an appropriation of the blood of Christ.

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

When we use the Word of God as a mirror, looking intently at it and then making the appropriate corrections, we are an effectual doer and will be blessed in what we do. This is because this allows us to live consistently in a matter that is consecrated to Christ. We should look in the mirror of God's Word as frequently as we do in real life. I bet we look in the mirror a couple dozen times in one day. If we did this with our meditation upon the Word of God, we would be able to purify ourselves by confessing any sin that is present. Living free from sin and in obedience to Christ allows us to be filled with His Spirit, experience His favor and blessing, and bear fruit in abundance for the kingdom. The perfect law is the law of Christ, the law of liberty. This is living according to the will of God as the Spirit leads us. He will never lead us against the law of God and the commands of Christ, though we are not under the Old Testament Law.

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

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

Many people consider themselves to be religious. Often implied by that statement is that they think that they are holy and righteous. What James is saying is that such an assertion is false if a person doesn't control his tongue (slow to speak and slow to anger). If he is not careful to look into the mirror of God's Word, he will be deceived by the state of his own heart. We are not even able to do adequate self-examination without the Word of God because of how we can be deceived. A person's religion is worthless if they are not able to live in obedience to Christ. The true evidence of saving faith is whether or not a person is able to live in victory over sin. Obedience is not conditional for salvation but a clear evidence of it. It is not perfect obedience, but it can be consistent and persistent obedience if we are faithful to look repeatedly into the mirror of God's Word. James message to us is that we need to live out our faith. It is not good to just hear the Bible and know its content if it has no impact upon how we live our lives, particularly in respect to sin. So if a person was trying to be religious, they would have to be perfectly without stain from the things of the world. They would need to be servants of all, giving care to orphans and widows. No man would ever be able to do this perfectly on their own, for they are born with a propensity to sin. Fortunately, we are made righteous through the blood of Christ through faith. That faith is to lead to righteousness so that we can more and more and better and better live in a way that is undefiling and full of acts of service. As we learn to appropriate faith and as Christ deals with leftover sin from our

life apart from Christ (and some from our life with Christ), we will be able to better live out this pure and undefiled "religion."

## **James 2**

**1My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.**

**2For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,**

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

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

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

**6But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?**

**7Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?**

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

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

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

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

**12So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.**

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

God calls us to not judge others based upon status, wealth, influence, power, prestige, appearance, or any other manmade dividing factor or means of classification. God doesn't make distinctions based upon the color of a person's skin or whether or not they can afford name brand clothing or a top of the line car. He doesn't bless the rich and ignore the poor. He doesn't treat Asians more kindly than he does Africans or Americans. God is the same to all. The exhortation from James is that we, like God, do not demonstrate partiality by showing personal favoritism. Making distinctions shows that we have evil motives. It may be that we want to have more rich people in our church to boost the budget. It may be that we are protecting our appearance among an elitist group so that we avoid being seen with those of lower classes or vice versa. It is ironic how there is a natural bias toward being kinder to the wealthy, powerful, and those with status. The reality is that it is often times the rich of this world who take advantage of the weak and oppress them. It is the poor who are more likely to inherit the kingdom (1 Corinthians 1:26). There must be a selfish motive that is thinking of self and ignoring the

purposes of God. Showing partiality is a transgression of the law of God. A person could keep the whole of the law of God, but if he misses one point (say by being judgmental and showing favoritism), he is guilty of all. Thus all men are sinners and fall short of the glory of God. No man can be perfect. When we witness, we merely need to show people that they are sinners because they are not perfect. If they protest, we can show them how specifically they have broken the law to help aid them in understanding their imperfection. There is no righteousness in not murdering but committing adultery or in not committing adultery but murdering. If a person is guilty in one point, he is guilty of all. Once a person realizes that he is a lawbreaker himself, he is more likely to show mercy to others. A person who has received mercy from Christ is then to give demonstrate that mercy to others. If he does not, he can expect to be judged with the same measure with which he judges others. Mercy is the means of overcoming the wages of sin, and it is better than judgment because it can lead a person to repentance (Romans 2:4). We must all remember that we are free men under the law of liberty in Christ, not under the Law that brings condemnation and judgment. As such, we are to treat others as if they are also under the perfect law of liberty because they are. Rather than making distinctions, finger-pointing, and trying to find any little flaw in another person, we ought to show mercy to all and be indiscriminate in how we treat our neighbors as ourselves. That is evidence that we have fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law because of our faith in Christ. We are to live by the royal law which was instituted by Christ that we love one another even as He loved us (John 13:34-35). The summation of the intention of the Law is to teach us to love one another as ourselves and to love God with all of our being. Being reborn as believers through Christ allows us to do this. So partiality is in no way in line with love, and in no way is it conducive of Christian behavior.

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

**15If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,**

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

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

That faith has works has been a theme so far in James' epistle in that he consistently emphasized doing over hearing and issues of Christian behavior. James is not trying to say that we work to get saving faith. He is not even trying to say that faith is a work of man. The work of man is that we believe (John 6:29), though we believe because the Holy Spirit has drawn us. Salvation is a work of God and a gift of God, though man is responsible for receiving Christ. The only work of man is to respond to God's call in faith. God does not overrule or negate human responsibility in the matter of choosing or rejecting the Spirit of God. James' issue is not with the dynamics regarding the moment of salvation, however. His issue is with what happens after a person is saved. This has been the consistent emphasis of his epistle. Writing to professing believers who are Jews, James is emphasizing that they do they Word and not just hear it. Here he is saying in a similar way that true saving faith has works which bear evidence of that faith. His question is, "If someone doesn't have works after professing Christ, are they really saved?" This is an interesting question. He gives an example of a person who is in need

and asks a professing Christian for help. The Christian merely tells the man that he wishes him well (a technique that the world is excellent at employing) and hopes he gets what he needs, but he doesn't do anything for him. James is saying that this is not right. If a person professes faith in Christ but never acts in line with the royal law of Christ, how can they truly have the righteousness of Christ? Now Christians do fail to do what they should at times. That doesn't mean that they need to question their salvation immediately. However, the Holy Spirit should draw attention to the hardness of heart and convict them. If a person shows no repentance or no sensitivity to the things of God as a rule, then they had better test themselves to see if they are of the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5).

**18But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."**

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

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

Someone might say that they have faith because they have works to show evidence of their faith. Another person might say that they have faith apart from works. The challenge is, "Let's see what kind of faith that really is. Let's put it under the microscope and see how valuable a mere assertion of faith apart from works is." Well, says James, even the demons believe in God and tremble in fear. They know that there is one God and only One to fear. So sarcastically, James complements the person who boasts in faith apart from works, saying that they do well for their belief. Yet what he is really saying is that they are doing no better than the demons. The demons believe in God and tremble. The person who professes faith but doesn't live like one freed from sin (and likely is proud of the fact that grace covers sin), is worse off than the demons because they undervalue the serious nature of sin. Such a person is foolish, not being willing to recognize that saving faith leads to a change of values, desires, and affections. As 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." The believer is controlled by love. If this is the case, then his behavior will have to have at least some indication of a change of heart.

**21Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?**

Romans 4 makes it clear that Abraham was justified by faith in simply believing the Word of God. James' point is that Abraham's faith proved genuine in that its outworking was obedience in doing what God said.

**22You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;**

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

The works of Abraham were a result of the faith that was alive and well in him. He had been declared righteous by God prior to offering up Isaac in obedience to God's command. Faith is something that is ongoing in a believer's life. Faith is perfected in obedience to God's commands. James is trying to show us that there is an interweaving of the value of faith and works. Many people object to a gospel which says that Jesus died for sins so now we can do whatever we want. What they don't understand is that true saving faith produces with it an ability and desire to obey the commands of God. This is why we are told to acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord. Works are not necessary to grant saving faith. Works are merely the natural outgrowth of faith.

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

Martin Luther disdained this book and particularly this verse because it seemed to indicate that man is saved not by grace alone through faith alone and in Christ alone but by works. But in context it is not saying that. All it is saying is that works of obedience are evidence of justification. In other words, if no works of obedience are present, there is reason to doubt a person's justification in the first place. This is not just a mere haphazard of a guess that there is no justification, but there is Scriptural reason to encourage somebody to really examine themselves to see if they are of the faith. This does not mean that we as humans have the ability to decide whether a person is saved or not. We have evidence to question and doubt, but not to decide conclusively and thereby judge and condemn. Only God knows the true state of a person's heart. We are justified by faith alone through the work of Christ. Salvation is a gift of God implying grace apart from works. However, salvation is unto good works. It is not through good works but for good works. There is a great difference. As Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." The clear Biblical teaching is that we are not saved by works. There ought to be no confusion about that. Man's effort does not get him saved. What we do see from this Ephesians passage is that saving faith is for the purpose of walking in the good works for which God has called us and of which God has prepared for us. Why are we created as new creations in Christ? We are created for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. The issue is not whether or not faith is based upon works. The truth that James is so emphatic about is that works follow saving faith. James denounces cheap grace which uses Jesus to escape hell but has no fear of God and manifests no evidence of a change of heart. True faith is manifested by good works.

**25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?**

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

Rahab was justified by faith in God. She feared God and chose to serve Him rather than the gods of Jericho. Her faith was manifested in her obedience to conceal the spies and do good works for the people of God. Thus, in the same way as Abraham, her works

were through faith and because of faith. She was not saved by her works but her works demonstrated evidence of her salvation and faith in God. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead. In other words, a person who claims to have faith but doesn't have works is like a corpse. We would do well to picture what a loved one looks like while preserved in a casket before burial. This is a person who professes Christ and has no works. He looks like he might be alive but just sleeping. Yet there is no one there. He is just matter that will decay. The real person is gone. In the same way, a person who doesn't live out the commands of Christ is really not there on the inside. This is a message for our generation of Christianity. Where are the works? May we test ourselves to see if we are indeed of the faith. Did we repent? Have we been reborn? Is Jesus our Lord? Have we put our lives totally under His control and Lordship? If not, we have reason to doubt our salvation.

### **Chapter 3**

**1Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.**

Teaching is an extremely influential ministry. Those who become teachers of the Word will incur a stricter judgment because of the immense responsibility and capacity to lead others into truth or to lead them astray. It is not a careless ministry that one should undertake haphazardly. This is why those who teach had better study to show themselves approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). We don't want to be ashamed at Christ's coming because we learn that we have taught incorrectly or been lazy in our teaching and study. If teaching is the good work to which we are called, we had better take it very seriously. Furthermore, we had better guard our hearts in purity before Christ because, if we do not, we will be prone to not teaching the Word accurately (see 1 Timothy 1:5-7).

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

Another reason that those who teach need to be careful is because believers have a tendency to get off course and stumble into error and sin. We are weak and imperfect beings, still with flesh and a body corrupted by sin. Our minds, too, are in the process of being renewed. Our sanctification requires time. Thus we can see how James, despite his emphasis on works following faith, does not teach sinless perfection of the believer. Believers will struggle and stumble. They may "fall away" and suffer shipwreck of their faith (like Alexander and Hymanaeus in 1 Timothy 1:19-20), but they will never escape God's reach. We are secure eternally in Christ since we are already seated with Him in the heavenly places.

James makes it plain that all believers stumble in many ways. The most ready testimony of our fallibility is our mouths. We very easily say things that are not true, hence his emphasis on teaching correctly. If a person could say everything right and never say something hurtful or wrong, he would be a perfect man, having full control over the other

bodily members. If a person can control what they say, they will have no problem controlling what they do. Yet the obvious truth is that we struggle with what we say. As such, we will struggle with what we do as well.

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

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

**5So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!**

The tongue, though a very small body part, has great power, like the rudder of a ship, a bit in a horse's mouth, and a spark that sets ablaze an entire forest. A tongue can speak a few words that can totally turn a person's life around. Out of potentially the same mouth, words could come which could destroy or slander a person's reputation forever. A few words, positive or negative, true or false, Biblical or unbiblical, can make a great difference either for the kingdom or against it. Thus, the person who has control of his tongue is a mighty force for the kingdom while a person who does not have control is a serious liability.

**6And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.**

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

**8But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.**

The tongue is a fire in that it can do such great damage or bring so much blessing. Fire hurts because of its power. It has many uses, some good and some bad. It can cause great destruction and burn out of control. Yet it can be used as purification in a loving word of confrontation. The tongue must be sanctified or it can defile a man through and through. As Jesus said in Matthew 15:11, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Our tongue can talk our way right into condemnation and hell as it breeds an entire world of iniquity. It doesn't (or at least shouldn't) usually take a long time to identify whether or not a person is a Christian by their speech. If profanity, vulgarity, or degrading speech comes from the person's mouth, it is reasonable to assume that he is not saved. If he speaks wholesome things and even goes out of his way to say kind things, perhaps he might be saved. If he uses his tongue to confess Christ and share the gospel, now that is a miracle testifying to a changed life in Christ. Every animal, no matter how wild and vicious, can be tamed and has been tamed by man. Yet man cannot tame his own tongue except by the grace of God through Christ. The words that proceed out of the unbeliever's mouth are a deadly poison, causing others to sin more and leading their own souls into hell. It is wild and untamable, a restless evil. Thus, believers must take heed lest they stumble and fall through the work and wiles of their tongues.

**9With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;**

**10from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.**

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

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

Rebuking the Jews to whom he writes, James challenges them in their use of words. The same tongue can be used to bless God and curse men. Out of the same mouth can come both honor toward Christ and dishonor. This ought to not be so. Our speech is a work that demonstrates our faith. As such, the tongue needs to be presented to God as a member of righteousness. Evidently, James' readership has a problem with insulting and cursing others. They were using their mouths for an ungodly purpose. Just as a spring cannot produce both pure and bitter water and as fig trees produce figs and not both figs and olives, so too must the mouth of believers bring forth speech honoring to God. It is no surprise that some of the easiest sins to fall into surround the mouth. It is no surprise that Satan uses slander, gossip, demeaning criticism, and judgment as major means of causing division in the body of Christ. The tongue should and does play a major role in the church: preaching, teaching, confrontation, speaking the truth in love, praising God, praying, and so on. These are the uses to which it must be confined.

**13Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.**

A lot of people profess wisdom. Some believers think that if they are old that they are wise or if they have a theological degree that they have understanding. James is saying that by a person's conduct one can know if he has wisdom. If a person is gentle and maintains a good testimony, then they have wisdom. True wisdom impacts the choices, speech, and behavior of a person. It is not mere head knowledge or a high IQ. Wisdom translates into living.

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

If a person claims to have wisdom but keeps bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in his heart, he had better repent. To claim to be wise and yet have not surrendered one's life to the leading and Lordship of Christ is arrogant. To profess understanding and yet envy the gifts and talents of others is conceit. Wisdom will lead a person to deny himself, to serve others, and to do it all by faith in Christ, not leaning on his own strength, ability, or understanding (Proverbs 3:5, Zechariah 4:6). Such arrogance is to deny the truth of Scripture and the work of the Spirit testifying in one's heart about its true condition. The truth is that wisdom produces humility and an understanding that strength is perfected in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Wisdom reveals weakness and makes a person rejoice in it all the while causing them to purify their hearts from outstanding and ongoing sin. Wisdom is not found necessarily in age, intellect, or experience, but in obedience to the

Word of God. Again, we see the theme of not just merely hearing and knowing the Word of God but living it out in practice.

**15This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.**

The wisdom that is based and derived in self rather than in Christ is earthly, natural, and demonic. It is not of Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). Such wisdom is worldly and is thus foolishness. Any professed wisdom that is not from Christ and according to the Word of God is not just lesser but evil and demonic. Satan is behind the “wisdom” of any person who professes to have understanding but who lives in sin.

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

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

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

James again emphasizes that worldly counterfeit wisdom is bound up in jealousy and selfish ambition. This breeds chaos, division, disorder, destruction, and every evil thing. This is why those who become teachers will get the stricter judgment. This is why James cautions us about teaching and using our tongue. If what comes out of our mouths is not sanctified or given by the leading and empowering of the Spirit but is rather fleshly and driven by self, we will not be bearing fruit for the Lord but for the devil. We don't want to sow seeds for the devil, but this we will do if we are living with unconfessed sin, and especially if we then try to teach others. We desperately need the Spirit to give us what to say and to take control of our tongues. We can't manage our tongues with our own fleshly powers. If we have any outstanding sin, we will not lead others to the truth unless by mere accident because of the Word of God accomplishing its purposes. The result of a person harboring jealousy and selfish ambition is every evil thing, not just some things but all things. The wisdom from above is given to those who yield themselves to the Spirit and are free from sin. They will be able to speak what is pure. Their speech will have no selfish motive or agenda, but it spoken freely as it has been received from God freely. It is then peaceable, seeking reconciliation and avoiding needless offenses. It is calm and collected, not spiraling off into angry discourses or judgments. It is reasonable, meaning that it is equitable, fair, just, and gentle. It is not seeking to gain any advantage, but it is seeking and loving only the truth. It is full of mercy and good fruits, leading to evil of no kinds but only to Christ and the cross. It is consistent and steadfast, not double-minded and changeable. Finally, it is without hypocrisy in that what is spoken is lived out by the one doing the speaking. Thus, the speaker has credibility before men and authority and power from God. This person is trying only to make peace, and thus his speech is full of peace. The end result of the words that are sown with wisdom is the fruit of righteousness in his own life and more importantly in the life of the one to whom he speaks. Not taming the tongue results in destruction and demonic words. Living purely

and speaking God's wisdom by the power of Christ within a person leads to fruit that lasts and leads to holiness. This is the desire and hope of any teacher of the Word who instructs with integrity and without selfish motives. He is not trying to depend upon his own ability, he is not attempting to draw attention to himself, and he is hoping only to say what the Word says, glorifying God in the process.

#### **James 4**

**1What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?**

**2You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.**

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

The Jews evidently struggled getting along with one another, a very bad thing to do if one is hoping to be used to evangelize others. They quarreled, argued, and were full of conflicts. James reminds them that the reason for their conflict is the work of their flesh to which they are yielding. They are letting their flesh be enticed and are thus indulging every lust according to their own selfish pleasures. As each seeks his own way (which our culture preaches), conflict is the inevitable result. Rather than asking God to meet their needs, they lust and get angry when they do not have what they want to satisfy their pleasures. As a result they hate and some even murder another. As a result of their unmet evil desires and envy, they quarrel and fight with one another. All they would have to do is ask God if they needed something, for He has promised to meet all of their needs in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). Yet any asking of God that they did do was misdirected because they were asking out of fleshly motives, seeking to fulfill selfish desires. God would gladly give them what they asked if they asked from a heart that wanted to please Him. But they only wanted to use God to further their own lusts. In their frustration from not having their selfish prayers answered, they then took matters into their own hands and tried to get their own way by harming others. These were supposed to be Christians and yet they were living like pagans. Thus, it is no wonder that James is emphasizing over and over again that righteous conduct is the outcome of faith. It is an ugly and repulsive thing when professing Christians sin like the world or even worse than the world.

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

The Jews in James' audience are adulteresses at least in the sense that they are making alliances with the devil and are thus "cheating" on God. Likely, they were also committing adultery in real life. Rather than resist the devil, they established a friendship with him. Friendship with the devil and the ways of the world makes one at odds with God. One is either for God or against Him. There is no middle ground. When we serve

our flesh, we make friends with the devil and advance his cause and purposes. When we submit to God, we advance His will and desires.

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

The ESV translates this better saying, "Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?'" In other words, God greatly desires to have our spirits honoring Him and desiring Him, for He is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5). The quote appears to be a paraphrase of the idea that is in Genesis 6:5 which says, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." The point is that James is saying that God has created us because He loved us and wanted our worship. When He doesn't get our worship, it grieves Him greatly. When we live in sin as the Jews were doing here, God is hurt and becomes a person's enemy, practically speaking. We are not at enmity with God in terms of our justification but in terms of our sanctification. God must move to discipline us so that we can repent. Like a parent to a child who says, "No, and you can't make me," God must break our hearts with His loving discipline so that we become obedient children and give Him the honor that He is due as our rightful Father and authority.

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

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

God gives us a grace in sanctification which enables us to resist sin and the devil. He enables us through Christ within us to submit to Him. When we do this, the devil runs away because he fears Christ, though he is not intimidated at all by our self-effort to resist him. We resist through Christ's power by the grace of God. This humility in submitting to the will of God and resisting the urges of the flesh brings honor and more grace from God. However, those who harden their hearts and sin are opposed by God, and God will work on them like He did Jonah to get them to repent.

**8Draw near to God and He will draw near to you Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.**

Though we may make an enemy out of God by turning our back on Him like stubborn children, we need His grace. Fortunately, He loves His children and is ready to pour out His grace. The only thing is that we must first draw near to Him. He doesn't force our love, though He does draw us with His kindness. When a person says that they just don't feel close to God or are not where they should be spiritually, they are to blame. If we wonder why there is no sign of revival anywhere to be found, it is we who are to blame. God is a God of grace, ready to pour it out upon us. Yet we refuse to draw near to Him. Some think they are drawing near, but unless they obey and keep themselves from sin, they are just having some spiritual experience or doing some religious exercises. God wants a heart that by faith obeys Him. This is why He says for the Jews to wash their

hands from sin. They need to repent and confess their sin that they are currently in. They are double-minded, trying to enjoy the pleasures of the world even though they are children of God. They pray but they doubt. God calls them to change so that He can draw near to them. They must make the first move.

**9Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.**

Godly sorrow produces repentance. This is what James is after. He wants them to loathe their sin and mourn over how they have hurt the heart of God. Like Peter, they need to go out and weep bitterly over sinning against their Lord whom they love. They need to stop laughing and acting as if all is well, and they need to be broken in humility, trembling before the presence of Almighty God.

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

This is a Biblical theme restated in many places. God will bring the haughty down low while He promises to listen and honor the humble in due time. Whenever a person humbles himself before God, God promises unconditionally to exalt them in His way and in His time. It may not be an earthly exaltation, but we can rest assured that we will be honored in the kingdom that is coming. We do this in the presence of God by calling out to Him and renewing our commitment to Him. We must ask for His forgiveness and let Him purify our hearts. The move is ours.

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

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

We are not to speak evil of one another, judging them and trying to play the role that only Christ can and will play. We don't know the motives of men. Only God can judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. We can make decisions based upon what we know, but we cannot read a person's mind or understand exactly what is going on in their heart. We break the law when we make ourselves judges. James tells us to stop judging and rather keep the law ourselves. We must first pay attention to sin in our own hearts before we concern ourselves with outstanding sin of others. Even then, we are not to act as those who stand with the power to read minds and condemn. We must deal with facts and behaviors, not the hidden thoughts of the heart. We must trust the Spirit to do the work that only He can do as we rest in ministering the Word of God. Only God has the power to save or to cast into hell, and we must not try to usurp His role. We will be judged if we try to do so.

**13Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."**

**14Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.**

**15**Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."  
**16**But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.  
**17**Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

Some evidently were making presumptions about the future, acting as if they were the sovereign over their own lives and as if they knew the future. There is nothing wrong with making plans, but it must be done in humility, knowing that ultimately we can only do what God allows and ordains by His will. Certain businessmen made presumptions on the upcoming year that they would go somewhere and make a profit. The reality is they may or they may not. They really don't even know what will happen to them the next day, let alone the next year. Furthermore, they need to understand that their lives are mere vapors, once here and then vanishing in mere moments. Thinking that they run their own lives, they need to rather live humbly before God knowing that any good thing that happens is from the Father of lights above. We don't have to literally say "If God wills" after every plan or prayer, but sometimes it is not a bad idea for reminding ourselves that He is in charge and we are not. What we must do always is have an attitude that says, "Lord, I will do whatever you lead me to do this day." And then tomorrow, we should pray the same thing. Each day we are to be seeking the Lord's will as He often unveils only that which we need to know for a given time period. Otherwise why would we need to ask God each day for daily bread?

The issue fundamentally is how our hearts think. The businessmen were arrogant, making presumptions about all that would happen. Yet God could require their very life the next day. It is arrogance to make decisions today based upon presumptions that won't be fulfilled until the future. We must live by faith in God, trusting in Him for strength and provision each day. These people didn't make God their boast, but their boasting was in their own arrogance and presumption. Such is evil as it doesn't submit to God. More generally then, when we know what we are supposed to do, and we do not do it, we sin. When God leads us in a direction and we refuse to follow, we sin. When the Holy Spirit tells us to forgive someone or repent and we do not do it, we sin. When God has revealed that we should not presume upon tomorrow and we do, we sin. We must do what we know is right, or we make ourselves at odds with God.

## **James 5**

**1**Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.  
**2**Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.  
**3**Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!  
**4**Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.  
**5**You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

**6You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.**

James sets about to rebuke the sins of the rich. There is nothing wrong with being rich. Their sin was in how they took advantage of the poor and in how they boasted in their riches. James tells them to reap and wail because they are about to lose all that they have worked so hard for. In one moment, it will all be lost as they meet Christ who will judge them not on how rich they were but on the state of their hearts. The clothes that they enjoyed and boasted in will rot and their currency will rust. All that is material will decay and come to nothing. How the material possessions were used will themselves be an indictment to these people. They had withheld pay to those to whom it was due, and God has seen and heard of the injustice. They lived a life of luxury and wanton pleasure, indulging their every fantasy, lust, and desire, thinking of no one but themselves. They are like sheep ready for the slaughter as God is coming to judge them. They condemned and even killed righteous men. They didn't provoke them or fight with them, but they killed them just because they could. These are evil people who were corrupted by wealth and power, and God will bring them into judgment for their evil ways and deeds.

**7Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.**

**8You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.**

We are to be patient until the Lord does come and render judgment and justice. The wicked will not get away with their wickedness so there is no reason for us to blame God for being unfair. God is patient in that He is giving us opportunity to witness to the wicked, but He will pour out His wrath upon those who do not receive His Son in repentance and in faith. Just as a farmer tills the soil, plants the seed, waits as the early and late rains water it, and then harvests it, so too we must continue laboring and being holy in our behavior, knowing that one day we will reap what we have sown. We must be patient and steadfast, for we do not know what seeds God will cause to sprout and grow. We must just be patient and faithful in doing the work of the Lord and sowing seeds of righteousness. Christ will come and render to each His due, and His coming will be soon. In light of that fact, we must be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might (Ephesians 6:10), being patient and continuing to labor for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).

**9Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.**

In light of Christ's imminent coming, we must not complain against one another but rather love one another and spur one another on to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25). If we complain, argue, and fight with one another, then we will be judged for our unfaithfulness and lose our reward before the judgment seat of Christ.

**10As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.**

**11 We count those blessed who endured You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.**

The prophets in the Old Testament provide a great illustration of patience. They spoke the Word of God faithfully their entire lives, despite the fact that God had told them up front that the people to whom they prophesy will not listen to them. In fact, they persecuted them, yet the prophets continued to say what God told them to say and follow Him in obedience. In light of their example, so we too ought to be patient in living faithfully before the Lord. Those who endured in the Old Testament like the prophets and like Job despite their suffering are counted blessed. We can be assured that whether or not we see the mercy of God on this side of the grave (as Job did) or on the other side (as many of the prophets did), that we will indeed receive it. God is gracious and compassionate, and He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). In light of this, we have incentive to persevere in righteousness and obedience.

**12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.**

James reminds us what Christ said by reiterating the truth that we are not to swear by anything but to let our yes be yes and our no be no. If we were to swear by anything, we would be judged for profaning it if we did not keep the oath. Besides, we shouldn't have to swear or make promises. People should be able to take us at our word. There are times for covenants and agreements, but they are no good whatsoever if the person making the agreement cannot be trusted. That we can take one another at our word regardless of whether or not we swear by something is what counts. There is no place for oaths in the Christian life.

**13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.**

When we suffer, we are to pray for strength and endurance. We need God's grace to see us through so that we are preserved from Satanic attack and temptation. We are extra vulnerable when we are weakened from suffering. We need to pray to ask God to see us through, not to give us answers as to why we are suffering. We must call to Him for sustenance. After all, He promises to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with us (Psalm 23:4). If God has blessed us with happy times, we are to give Him the thanks and credit that He is due. There is a time for laughter and a time for mourning. In the good times, we need to exalt the name of God especially so that we don't fall into pride. Even in suffering we should exalt God in praise.

**14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;**

**15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.**

**16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.**

These three verses must be taken as a package deal. The Greek word for sick means to be “without strength, feeble, powerless, sick.” Thus, based upon the definition of the word, it could mean that the person is physically ill or spiritually not where he needs to be. I tend to believe that this passage is relating to spiritual healing because of the unconditional promise of God in verse 15 to heal the sick person as long as the prayer is in faith. Yet God doesn’t always choose to heal physically. But we know His will is always to bring about spiritual growth and repentance. Nonetheless, God does heal physically, and we should approach him in faith. We will not do any harm by anointing the person’s head with oil, but we will do harm if we do not approach God in faith. We must actively and in faith pray for those who are sick, believing that God does raise the sick. We must also pray for those who are struggling spiritually, as God delights in giving them strength. In either case, it is the person who is “sick” who is to be the one initiating the prayer. Practically, the elders may not know about the sickness, so it requires the one who is sick to notify them. Such initiation also demonstrates faith on the part of the one who is sick. Many times we are down and out and do not want to inconvenience the elders to pray for us. Yet such is the call of an elder, and they must not act as if prayer is an inconvenience.

As far as the anointing, this at the very least means that spiritually they ask the Holy Spirit to minister to the person as they lay their hands upon him. However, there is no reason not to take this literally as a command of God to put oil on the person’s head as a symbol of the spiritual reality and as an act of faith. Just as Samuel anointed David in by pouring oil on his head, so too this signifies the work and ministry of the Spirit coming upon the person. It is an outward symbolic act of a spiritual reality that happens because of faith. Not just any prayer but the prayer offered in faith will restore the person who is sick. The Lord will raise him up. The word for “raise” could mean either to “awaken” as from a spiritual apathy or to cause to “rise up as from a seat or a bed.” The point is that when the prayer that is offered in faith is finished, God will restore the person and enable them to be strengthened either physically or spiritually or both. We know it is God’s will to spiritually get a person back on track who takes the step of faith to draw near to God. We also know that God can and does supernaturally heal physically. We need to come to Him asking His will but also praying boldly believing Him for healing. If the person has outstanding sin and the Spirit leads them to confess, God will forgive him.

In light of these truths we are to pray for one another and confess our sins to one another so that we may be healed. In other words, the implication is that some are sick either spiritually or physically or both because of unconfessed sin. They may have wronged a brother and not dealt with it. They may have sinned against God and not confessed it. They may have participated in the Lord’s Supper with outstanding sin (1 Corinthians 11:30). Thus, we must confess our sins if we wish to experience healing. Secondly, we must pray for one another. When a person asks us to pray for them, specifically in this case when the person asks for the elders to pray for him, we need to do it and do it in faith. We are not wasting time, for the effective (believing) prayer of a righteous (no

unconfessed sin) man accomplishes much. God works through the prayers of his saints. He delights in hearing our requests that are according to His will and made in faith. We ought to believe that our prayer does indeed accomplish much. We are to be aware however that if our prayers are not in faith or from a righteous heart that God may not answer.

**17Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.**

**18Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.**

James then gives the example of Elijah. We think of Elijah as being a sort of faith superhero. Yet James reminds us that he was but a man who had faith. He prayed earnestly (which may be what separated his prayer from much of ours) that it wouldn't rain (as God has led him to pray), and it didn't rain for three and a half years. Upon his praying again, it rained and the famine ended. In other words, God loved Elijah so much as to honor his prayers, even though they affected the course of an entire nation. God listened to one man because he prayed in faith, according to the will of God and from a righteous heart. We can be encouraged by Elijah's example to pray because God does listen and answer prayers.

**19My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.**

Some say that a believer will never fall away. The reality is that they will never lose their salvation, but they can make a willful decision to grieve the Spirit and indulge their flesh even if it kills them (1 Timothy 1:19-20). We are all vulnerable to this. If a person does indeed turn from God and gets misled either because they have been deceived or because of a willful rebellion and then they turn back to Christ, the one who encouraged him to repent will save the person's soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. This is not to say that their spirit is saved from hell, for if they were of the truth before, they are still of the truth even if they are living in error in the present time. James is using soul in the same way that he used it in 1:21. He used it there in terms of receiving the word implanted which can save the soul. The soul had already been saved, but it is being made into a shape that is characteristic of one which has been saved. It speaks of sanctification. Thus, I believe that upon bringing a Christian who has fallen away back to Christ that a person preserves their state of sanctification from being totally wrecked and thus losing their reward. Such a repentance will indeed allow God to forgive them of all their sins and allow them to press on into further sanctification and the earning of eternal rewards. The key word in this passage is the word "stray" which means that a person was led away from the truth to sin. Thus, they were originally of the truth. A stray animal is an animal that had a home but is now lost and wandering about. This is in contrast to 1 John 2:18-20 which says, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they

all are not of us.” For comparison purposes, the key phrase is “they went out.” This implies that they forsook the place where they were in the church and went to their home, which had never been in the church. They went out because they were never of us. This is different from James because those James is referring to go, like the prodigal son, away from their home to where they are not supposed to be. Those John is referring to don’t get tricked into sin; they merely go to where they have always been. They just make their sinfulness and pagan allegiances official, boldly denying Christ as the Son of God, something those who stray usually do not do. Thus, I believe James is referring to pulling a believer from their own destructive behavior. A believer can get so deceived that it does take another to go to them and bail them out of their own destructive thoughts and habits. They are destroying their soul, mind, heart, personality, and being. Their spirit will still go to heaven, but they are killing all that could be used to glorify God on this side of the grave. When such a person saves another from this course and they repent, they have been saved from vast unfaithfulness, leading others astray and suffering a serious loss of eternal rewards.

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