

# JAMES

## INTRODUCTION

There is no similar portion of the Sacred Scriptures so surcharged with the mind of Christ as is the Epistle of James.

Christ began the Sermon on the Mount with the special blessing of the poor, the meek and mournful (Matthew 5:3-9); likewise, James began, with “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.” (Chapter 1, verse 2)

Christ made “perfection” the theme of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:48), and the same theme is in James. (Chapter 1:4 and Chapter 3:2)

Christ said, “Blessed are you who are poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God.” (Luke 6:20) James wrote, “God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom.” (Chapter 2:5)

Christ said, “Every one that asks receives.” (Matthew 7:8) James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it shall be given him.” (Chapter 1:5)

Christ said, “In your patience you shall win your souls” (Luke 21:19); James admonished, “Let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing.” (Chapter 1:4; 5:7-8; 11)

Christ said, “If you have faith and doubt not . . . it shall be done;” and “Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” (Matthew 21:21- 22) James stressed the same promise, “But let him ask in faith, without any doubting.” (Chapter 1:6-8)

Christ said, “How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask of Him. (Matthew 7:11) In the same vein of thought, James declared that, “Every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of Lights. (Chapter 1:17)

Christ said, "If God so arrays the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more do so for you?" (Matthew 6:30) James also spoke of the grass, thus, "The sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass, and its flower falls off." (Chapter 1:11)

Christ said, "But if you do not forgive men for their transgressions, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions . . ." (Matthew 6:15) James put the same principle in these words, "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy." (Chapter 2:13)

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the Savior's teachings which are stated by James in this epistle; but they are enough to show that in some ways, this is the most Christian of the New Testament epistles. There is hardly a line of the whole letter that does not portray the mind of Christ, with the utmost loyalty and faithful adherence to His very words.

R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit., p. 510, wrote, "Nowhere in the New Testament is there a trace of conflict between James and any of the apostles, including in particular Paul . . . James and Paul, like the Twelve, are in fullest agreement on the doctrine of justification."

All that both writers said on the subject may be summed up in Paul's words, "For in Christ Jesus neither, circumcision or uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6)

The epistle of James flatly contradicts and destroys the great heresy of "justification by faith alone."

Authorship: James was a common name in the New Testament times, there being no less than five mentioned in the New Testament, these being:

- (1) James the father of Judas (not Iscariot), one of the Twelve (Luke 6:16);
- (2) James the son of Alphaeus, one of the Twelve (Matthew 10:3; Acts 1:13);

- (3) the James mentioned in Mark 15:40, of whom nothing is known;
- (4) James, one of the Twelve, a brother of the apostle John and one of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:17); and
- (5) James the brother of Jesus. (Matthew 13:55) It is to this James that the authorship of this epistle is usually ascribed.

Amazingly, James, along with the Lord's other brothers, was very slow to believe in Him. John declared that, "For not even His brothers were believing in Him" (John 7:5), and that was as late as the last feast of the tabernacles prior to the crucifixion.

To Whom Written? Many scholars seem to think James was written to members of the Jewish race, which following the Babylonian captivity had literally been scattered throughout the civilized earth, "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5), with the elimination that only converted Jews were addressed.

However, many of the "twelve tribes scattered abroad" were in no sense Christians, and a great many of them were determined never to be followers of Christ; and no such limitation appears in James's use of "twelve tribes," all of those addressed being referred to as "my brethren." (Chapter 1:2) It is therefore fully in keeping with New Testament phraseology to construe "twelve tribes" here in exactly the same sense as in the following words of Jesus, "In the regeneration when the Son of Man will set on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matthew 19:28)

Above, no less than twenty-four references in James were traced directly to the words of Jesus Christ; and in all probability here is one more. We therefore construe the salutation as directed to the Christians "scattered abroad," the same having been a fact following the persecution that arose around the martyrdom of Stephen. The device of making this letter to "Jews only" facilitates the downgrading of the epistle, making it exclusively a Jewish exhortation more

concerned with the Law of Moses than with Christianity, a downgrading which is rejected here.

Authenticity and Canonicity: The consent of the vast majority of all Christians in all generations for its inclusion in the sacred canon has triumphed over opposition, some of which came in ancient times, but was overcome.

Date: The traditional date for the martyrdom of James in 62 A. D. may be accepted as the *terminus ad quem*, or limit, and the approximate date of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in 37 A.D. as the *terminus a quo*, or starting point for determining the date.

E. C. S. Gibson, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21, James, p. ix wrote, "If James is writing, as many think, with direct reference to a perversion of St. Paul's teaching, this epistle will be subsequent to those of Galatians and Romans, and thus belong to the last years of his life, 62-63 A. D." This later date is the favored date of the writing of James.

Objections: William Barclay, op. cit., p. 24, stated that, "Only twice in the whole epistle is the name of Jesus Christ mentioned." The term "Lord," which was the predominant name of Jesus Christ in the primitive church, is mentioned no less than twelve times. That James made a distinction in the use of this term is seen in the very first verse where he spoke of being a "servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ," going on to use the term God some twenty times. It is simply inaccurate to say that there are only two mentions of the Lord Jesus Christ in this epistle. When James meant "God the Father" he usually used the word "God." In addition, there are a number of indirect references that unmistakably mean Jesus Christ, as in, "Behold the Judge is standing right at the door." (5:9)

James has the fullest teaching in the New Testament relative to the law of Christ which he called the perfect . . . royal . . . law of liberty," (1:15; 2: 8, 12) His teaching on justification is as clear as that in any other part of the New Testament. (James 2:14-26) He recognized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. (4:5)

He designated our Lord Jesus Christ as the “One who is lawgiver and judge” (4:12) The doctrine of salvation from sin appears in 5:19-20. Such elementary Christian teaching as the source of temptation in men’s lust (1:12-15), the salvation of the soul through obedience to the gospel (1:21), and the sublime objective of holy religion in all ages, namely that of enabling men to “draw near to God” (4:8), are also present vividly in this precious epistle. People who have been misled into believing that the great Christian doctrines are absent from the epistle of James should read it again.

## **CHAPTER 1**

W. E. Oesterley, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Vol. IV, p. 408, thought that, “For the most part this epistle is a collection of independent sayings.” The viewpoint advocated here is that every portion of it fits beautifully and appropriately into one theme of “Perfection.”

This theme was stated at the outset (verse 4), thus, “That you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

In this chapter, the following requirements for those who would be perfect are advocated:

- (1) be joyful in trials (verses 2-4),
- (2) in ignorance and uncertainties, let Christians pray in faith without doubting (verses 5-8),
- (3) in economic disparities, the rich and the poor alike are to rejoice at their new status in Christ (verses 9-11),
- (4) God is not to be blamed for temptations, but the source of temptation must be recognized as laying within Christians themselves,
- (5) anger and wrath are to be suppressed (verses 19-20), and

- (6) it is not hearing God's word but the hearing and doing of it that lead to perfection. (verses 21-27)

### Verse 1

The manner in which James here bracketed the names of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ carries the affirmation of the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord taught that "no man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24); and, in James' affirmation here, he did not mean that he had two masters, but that the two are one. The very use of the title "Lord" in the New Testament denotes this, the same being the "title given to the early Roman emperors to denote their deity." (Ibid., p. 410)

"A servant of God . . ." Paul, Timothy, Peter, Jude and Epaphras were also designated, the New Testament word for such being *doulos*, meaning "one born into slavery;" thus every such usage of it indicates that such a servant was a "born again" Christian. The Old Testament Hebrew word for "servant" (*eded*) was the title by which, William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 35, wrote, "The greatest ones of the Old Testament were known." Moses, Caleb, Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah were all called "servants of God."

"To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad. . ." This epistle is not written to the Jews, in the sense of racial Jews. The address of those to receive this letter as "brethren" in the very next verse proves this. The "twelve tribes" is here a reference to the spiritual Israel of God, that is, the Christians of all ages. In this very verse, James followed the same pattern that occurs repeatedly throughout the letter, in which the words of Jesus Christ dominate every line of it. It was Christ who promised the apostles that they would "sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28); and James here used exactly the same terminology to describe the church of Jesus Christ.

This epistle should be understood as inspired instructions to Christians, and the efforts of some to write it off as a mere appeal to racial Jews should be resolutely resisted. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, p.

382, wrote, "There are more references to the Sermon on the Mount in James than in all other New Testament letters put together."

### **Verse 2**

"Consider it all joy . . ." Christ said, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you . . . rejoice and be glad . . ." (Matthew 5:11-12) This is exactly the thought of James here.

"Encounter various trials . . ." It is the inner propensity toward evil that is meant here, outward trials and hardships being the thing in focus here. Walter W. Wessell, *op. cit.*, p. 946, wrote, "The word *pietrasmos* (trials) has two meanings: external adversities here, and inner impulse to evil in verses 12-14."

James could not have meant here that Christians are "to pretend that they get joy out of things which are disagreeable, for that would have an act of insincerity." (E. M. Zerr, *Bible Commentary, James*, p. 241)

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James William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 571, wrote, "The true view of temptation or trial is that it is an opportunity to gain new strength through overcoming."

"My brethren. . ." Walter W. Wessell, *op. cit.*, p. 945, wrote that this expression occurs "sixteen times" in the book of James, absolutely demanding that the letter be accepted as Christian.

### **Verse 3**

Verses 3 and 4 give the theme of the whole letter, which may be variously expressed as "The Testing of Faith," or "Christian Perfection."

“The testing of your faith . . .” begins with the Lord’s commandment for believers to be baptized (Mark 16:15-16), and some never even pass that test. However, the testing never ends with the baptism. Throughout life with its trials and hardships the testing goes on and on.

“Produces endurance (patience) . . .” James continues to reflect perfectly the words of Jesus Christ who said, “By your perseverance (patience) you will win your souls. (Luke 21:19) The meaning of “patience” here is that of courageous endurance, and not merely docile submission.

#### **Verse 4**

“That you may be perfect . . . “ It is a gross error to read “perfect” as used in the New Testament as if it meant “maturity.” Nothing short of absolute perfection shall ever inherit eternal life; and, while it is freely admitted that no man may achieve such perfection, it is never the less available to all men who will receive the gospel, be baptized into Christ, and thus become partakers of the heavenly perfection of the Savior Himself. The meaning here is “perfection,” which is exactly what the text says.

James’ entire letter is directed to the admonition that the Christian should not presume that Christ’s perfection would be bestowed upon Christians who trusted a subjective trust/faith alone to produce such a status, or who might fail in any manner of doing everything within their power to honor “the perfection in Christ” through their constant imitation of it. The testing of the Christian’s faith by various external trials, as in this verse and the preceding verse, carries the inherent message that the Christian must pass such tests. If in his sincerely trying to do so, the Christian should nevertheless fail, Christ in that extremity will surely provide what is lacking.

#### **Verse 5**

The theme of the epistle is “Perfection.” One of the most common impediments to perfection is ignorance. It is the word of God only which is able



to make one “wise unto salvation;” and without doubt, James’ reference to persons “lacking wisdom” meant a lack of knowledge of Divine truth.

There is no promise here to the effect that God will supernaturally endow the man praying for wisdom even with the knowledge of the word of God. All Christians are commanded to, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman.” (2 Timothy 2:15) What is promised here is that for the true seeker of Divine truth as it regards human salvation, if he shall indeed seek it in that word which lives and abides forever, God will surely give him liberally of all that is necessary for him to know.

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 529, wrote, “God has His means for giving additional wisdom. This is His word. Wisdom does not come down out of the sky. God’s Spirit instructs, enlightens, makes wise by means of the word. This angle of the matter James will take up again in verse 21.”

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 45, also discerned that the wisdom promised here is not wisdom of any secular subject, but, “The supreme and Divine quality of the soul whereby man knows and practices righteousness.”

James’ teaching regards with the most fidelity that of Christ Himself, who said, “How much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?” (Matthew 7:22)

## **Verse 6**

James gives the teaching of Christ, who said, “All things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you.” (Mark 11:24)

It is not merely faith in God, which James had in view here, but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He was writing Christians who, like himself, were servants of God and of Jesus Christ; and he had already mentioned their common faith earlier in verse 3.

“The one who doubts is like the surf of the sea . . .” not only does the doubter forfeit all legitimate expectation that his prayers may be answered, but something else appears in this verse, namely, that one who is a wavering Christian, or unfaithful in the area of his highest responsibility, will also prove to be unstable and undependable in all other areas likewise. Many a man’s forsaking the church has been the forerunner of his deserting his family, embezzling company funds, or plunging into a life of licentiousness.

### **Verse 7**

A firm and unwavering faith in God and in Christ Jesus underlies every Christian hope, every gospel promise.

“The Lord. . .” Many current commentators make the mistake of applying these words to the Father. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is meant.

### **Verse 8**

Two things of very great importance are evidenced by this short verse. In the first place, J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p.1034, suggested, “It refers to the teaching of Christ in Matthew 6:24;” thus being in perfect consonance with practically everything else in the book of James.

Secondly, “double-minded” is a word evidently coined by the author of this epistle, because it is not found in any other work prior to this. Clement of Rome, 95 A. D., quoting from this passage in his first Letter to the Corinthians wrote, “Wretched are they who are of a double mind, and of a doubting heart.”

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 532, said, this word caught on, and writers afterward frequently used it. “It is used often after the time of James as if it caught men’s fancy.”

### **Verse 9**

“Brother of humble circumstances. . .” This refers to the poor, the slave, the bottom of the social ladder; and the perfection which may be attained by

any such disadvantaged person is achieved in his realization of his exalted status as a Christian. William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 47, wrote, “Christianity brings to everyman what he needs . . . the despised poor learn self-respect . . . the proud rich learn self-abasement.” The perfection in Christ Jesus exalts the brother of low degree and brings a healing humility to the mighty and the proud. The gospel if given free course in the lives of men will lead to perfection.

### **Verse 10**

How could it be supposed that James was addressing rich unbelievers? It seems mandatory then to accept the rich of this passage as rich Christians. What James did here with reference to the rich and poor is exactly the same thing that Paul did with regard to slaves and masters. (1 Corinthians 7:22)

“Like lowering grass he will pass away . . .” Christ also used the metaphor of the grass to describe the ephemeral quality of life on earth (Matthew 6:20); and there can be little doubt that James had in mind the very words of Jesus in the comparison written here. Whatever riches may be acquired, whatever power may be grasped, whatever glory may come to life, whatever eminence, popularity and fame may shine upon anyone, it is all over in a moment of time. The sentiment of this passage echoes the words of Jesus. (Matthew 5:3)

### **Verse 11**

This verse is a simple statement of truth regarding all of the rich and mighty of this world. All that is said here of the rich man is likewise true of the poor man; but it is especially the rich and powerful who need this admonition, the same being noted here as further persuasion for the rich brethren to become “poor in spirit.”

### **Verse 12**

“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial . . .” “Trial” has a double meaning, that of external trials, and the inward tendency to evil.

“Once he has been approved . . .” “Even when he has been tested” is included in the meaning here, and with the additional thought of “when he has stood the test.”

“The crown of life . . .” mentioned by James here cannot be anything other than the “crown of righteousness” mentioned by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:8, and which in no sense is awarded in the present existence, but which will be bestowed “at that day” by the Lord Jesus Christ upon all them that have loved His appearing. The clauses which tie the two passages together are: “The Lord promised to them that love Him,” and “to them that have loved His appearing.”

“The Lord . . .” These words were supplied by the translators; but that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who promised eternal life is a truth already known to every Christian . R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p.538, wrote, “James does not need to name the Lord as being the one who promised the crown to those who love Him; His readers know that it is the Lord.”

It is clear enough that the one giving the crown is the Lord Jesus Christ, that it is a crown to be awarded at the final day, and that it is not awarded in the present earthly life.

### **Verse 13**

The purpose of this verse is to take away from men any excuse for their yielding to sin. The book of Genesis records the fact of Adam’s blaming Eve for his sin, with the implied element of blaming God also, “the woman You gave me;” and from that day till now, man has loved to blame the Creator for all of his troubles.

E. G. Punchard, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, James*, p. 359, has this regarding God’s use of temptation, “Trials and temptations are permitted to strengthen us, if we will, for God’s mightier service. Compulsory homage would be worthless to the loving Lord of all; so voluntary must be found instead, and proved, and perfected. Herein is the Christian’s conflict, and the secret of God’s ways with men.”

There are all kinds of ways of shifting the blame to God. After all, did not God create those fleshly appetites which we seek to control; are we not surrounded from the very beginning of life with all kinds of temptations; and did not God make all of these things which tempt me? James' words here were given for the purpose of destroying such fallacious reasoning. Surely, of all the evil doctrines ever advanced by Satan, was that of blaming God for human transgressions, must be one of the worst.

#### **Verse 14**

The seat of all wrong doing lies in human selfishness. As long as men seek only what pleases them, what they desire, what they crave, what gratifies them, that lust, which seeks the fulfillment of such desires, motivates all the sin on earth.

Herein lies the basic conflict involved in spiritual living. Man's ego must be suppressed, denied, and brought under subjection to the will of God. In instances where this is never done, sin reigns in men's lives.

“Carried away . . . and enticed . . .” It was the beauty of the forbidden fruit that acted as a lure for Eve, the bait, which caused her to be caught upon the hook of sin. Christians should learn to exercise skill in rejecting the alluring “bait” with which Satan baits his trap of enslavement to sin.

#### **Verse 15**

This is one of the boldest and most dramatic metaphors in the Bible. Restated, it means lust has a child named sin; and sin, as soon as it grows up, has a baby named death! William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 53, wrote, “The word here translated ‘brings forth’ is an animal word for birth; and it means that sin spawns death.”

When man permits his natural desires to dominate his life, he becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of the brute creation.

When man permits his natural desires to dominate his life, he becomes less than a man and sinks to the level of the brute creation. The teaching of this verse is identical with that of Paul who wrote, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23)

### **Verses 16-17**

“Do not be deceived . . .” Inherent in this is the fact that it is just as possible now for men to be deceived through the allurements of sin as it was when Eve was tempted in Eden. The great temptation in all sin is to be deceived into thinking that, after all it will not prove to be as bad as God declared it to be.

“The Father of Lights . . .” What are the lights here? It might be thought that the light of intelligence, the light of truth, the light of the world who is Christ, or the physical lights of the heavens, such as the sun, moon, and stars. William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 54, used the words *parallage* and *trope*, “Both these words have to do with the variation which the heavenly bodies show.”

Such things as the apparent movement of the sun around the earth, giving day and night, or its moving southward or northward, giving the seasons, and many other variations are suggested by these words. By contrast, “There is no variation with God.” In Him, “there is no shadow cast by turning.” “For I the Lord do not change.” (Malachi 3:6)

### **Verse 18**

It is the holy gospel of Christ that shines in this passage. A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 203, wrote, “The word of truth’ is understood to be that word of the gospel,” and it is absolutely certain that the new birth is the subject of this passage.

“That we might be as it were the first fruits . . .” Paul wrote, “God chose you as first fruits.” (See marginal reading—2 Thessalonians 2:13) Walter W. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p. 948, wrote, “These early Christians were called ‘first fruits’ because they were a guarantee of many more to come.”

### **Verse 19**

The Christian who would strive for perfection has a real problem with his tongue, a subject James would give fuller treatment later in the epistle.

The admonition to be “slow to anger,” was given by Paul, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” (Ephesians 4:26), the same being also condemned by him in a number of other passages: 2 Corinthians 12:20, Galatians 5:20, Colossians 3:8, Ephesians 4:31, etc. A. W. Momerie, *Biblical Illustrator*, p. 147, wrote, “If we treat men according to the first promptings of anger, we shall almost always do them wrong.”

### **Verse 20**

A. Whyte, *Biblical Illustrator*, p. 148, wrote, “It is the proud man, the conceited man, who is easily made angry, so cultivate a low opinion of yourself.” All men should be like that person, who when told of some very derogatory remarks an acquaintance had spoken against him replied, “Why that is nothing new; all that, and more, I said to God this morning on my knees.” (Whyte, *Ibid.* p. 148)

Albert Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 30, wrote, “The particular meaning of this passage is that wrath in the mind of man will not have any tendency to make him righteous.”

### **Verse 21**

“Putting aside . . .” Paul also used this word in such passages as, “putting away lying.” (Ephesians 4:25) “When I became a man, I put away childish things.” (1 Corinthians 13:11)

“Remains of wickedness . . .” A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 205, wrote, “This is not to be understood as “more than necessary” because wickedness in the smallest measure is already excess.”

“The word implanted . . . able to save your souls . . .” E. C. S. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 5, observed, “James teaching here is almost like a reminiscence of the parable of the sower.” “The seed is the word of God.” (Luke 8:11) Inherent in

this teaching is the fact of men being saved through hearing and the obeying of the word of God.

Before the implanted word can bring salvation to the soul, wickedness must be laid aside; and as E. M. Zerr, op. cit., p.243, wrote, "Laying aside wickedness" means that the man must himself do it and not wait for God to work some special influence on him."

"The word implanted" in this place suggests the indwelling Spirit, the indwelling Christ, etc. Paul also commanded that the "word of Christ" should dwell in Christians. (Colossians 3:16)

### **Verse 22**

Taken together with what James would write in the second chapter, it is clear enough that this epistle was written for the purpose of correcting the abuse of Paul's teaching regarding justification by faith. By this reference, James almost says, "My teaching is exactly what the apostle Paul really taught." "Not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law shall be justified." (Romans 2:13)

The passage in Romans has a primary application to doing the law of Moses, but by his declaration here, James showed that the same principle is applicable to Christians with respect to the law of Jesus Christ, a law which James would mention in the next line.

### **Verse 23**

"A hearer of the word. . ." The expression "the word," as used in New Testament times, is always a designation of the Christian gospel.

The hearers who do not do are here compared to a man who glances at himself in a mirror and then goes away without making any move to cleanse his face.

He just forgets all about what he might have seen, going on exactly as he was before.



## **Verse 24**

R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 556, said, “This is the same picture that is drawn by Jesus in a different way in Matthew 13:4, 19. The little birds just carried away the good seed.” Those who hear God’s word and then simply forget to do anything about it are the persons meant.

## **Verse 25**

Contrasted with the man who merely “glances” in a mirror the person looking into the perfect law of liberty is represented as “continuing to do so.” A mere glance at the word was insufficient.

E. C. S. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 5, said that, “The conception of the gospel as a law is characteristic of James;” but that conception was also that of the apostle Paul who wrote, “Do we nullify the law through faith? May it never be, on the contrary, we establish the law” (Romans 3:31); also, “And thus fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

“The law of liberty. . .” The Mosaic Law was slavery; the law of Christ is a perfect law of liberty. Whereas the Mosaic Law could not make its adherents perfect (Hebrews 7:19), the law of Christ leads to the absolute perfection of the redeemed in Christ. (Colossians 1:28)

Regarding the perfect law of liberty presented in this remarkable passage, it should ever be remembered that this is the same as the law established by faith (Romans 3:31), the same as the “the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), and the same as “the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”. (Romans 8:2)

And what is this wonderful law? R. Wardlaw *Biblical Illustrator*, *op. cit.*, p. 186, wrote, “I have no hesitation in answering; it is the gospel . . . the gospel is a law; let none be alarmed.”

## **Verse 26**

It is clear from this that James was addressing this letter to self-deceived people who in some manner had accepted the proposition that they were saved without reference to the practice of true Christianity. What was their fallacy? It could well have been that of imagining that they were saved through “faith

only.” That they were indeed believers is perfectly clear from the fact that they thought they were religious and were deceived into thinking that their conduct was unrelated to their salvation.

A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 207, quoted an interesting paraphrase of this verse from *Living Letters* thus, “If anyone says he is a Christian, but doesn’t control his sharp tongue, he is just fooling himself, and his religion isn’t worth much.”

### **Verse 27**

Some commentators make a big point of saying that James was here contrasting Christian behavior with external acts of religion, such as taking the Lord’s Supper; but this is not the case at all. Christianity also includes doing that, and everything else that Christ commanded. As Jesus put it in the Great Commission, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18-20) The true Christian does not attempt to avoid this requirement imposed by the Son of God Himself.

Again in this verse, there is evident the influence of the teachings of Jesus Christ. As R. C. H. Lenski, *Ibid.*, p. 561, noted, “It seems as though James has in mind Matthew 23:14, Luke 20:47, where is mentioned the hypocritical Pharisees who devoured widow’s houses and for a pretense made long prayers.”

Lenski also pointed out that certain rationalists point to this passage as teaching their kind of religion: “Just do good and lead a clean moral life; the rest doesn’t matter.”

“And to keep oneself unstained by the world . . . “ The meaning of this was accurately presented by E. M. Zerr, *op. cit.*, p. 244, who wrote, “Unspotted from the world’ means to be free from the vices commonly practiced by mankind.”

## **CHAPTER 2**

The first section of this chapter 1-13 carries a warning against courting the favor of middle-upper income people or the wealthy, against showing special

courtesies and solicitude. There is no doubt many congregations are tempted to do this very thing. After all, there are budgets to be subscribed, programs to be financed and all kinds of good works which require constant scrambling on the part of the church elders and deacons in their efforts to finance such things. Therefore the tendency is to do a little bowing and scraping when some well-to-do person condescends to visit the assembly of the church. It was no different in that generation to which James addressed these remarkable words. The warning is clear enough: "Don't do it!"

The second section will be introduced separately at the end of verse 13.

It will be remembered that "Perfection" is the overall theme of this epistle, and this first portion of chapter 2 relates to the general subject by guarding against partiality and false judgments of men upon the basis of external conditions.

### **Verse 1**

"My brethren . . ." Significantly, this entire epistle is addressed to Christians, true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; for only such persons could truthfully be addressed as "brethren." To read James as if it were addressed to Jews is to miss the meaning altogether.

"Your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ . . ." As usual, the scholars cannot agree on whether "faith" is here subjective or objective. The word is used both ways, and is impossible to exclude either meaning.

"Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ . . ." This exact title of the Master is found in that letter addressed by James and the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to the Syrian churches (Acts 15:26), and this is considered by some to support the proposition that this epistle was written by the same James.

"Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ . . ." The first two words of this verse is italicized, showing that they are not in the Greek. R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, p. 56, favored this construction, as also did Walter W. Wessel,

Wycliffe New Testament Commentary p. 950, who wrote, “Jesus is here called simply, the glory.”

“An attitude of personal favoritism . . .” What is condemned here is not the valid and proper respect which belongs to the noble and the great of this world, but the condemnation is against “the preference for vulgar wealth, the adulation of success, the worship, in short, of some new golden calf.” (E. G. Punchard, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VIII, p. 363)

## Verse 2

What a marvelous insight this gives into the early Christian assemblies. They were open meetings, in which men of all classes and conditions might enter.

“Assembly . . .” It appears from the usage of the word here that in Jerusalem, from which James presumably wrote, the Jewish name of the meeting house was currently used by Christians of their own meeting houses, a usage which, at that time, had no doubt already disappeared in most other places.

“Gold ring . . . fine clothes . . .” R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 564, paraphrased James’ thought here thus, “Are you Christians still impressed by a gold ring and a bright rag?”

William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 64, wrote, “The more ostentatious of the ancients wore rings on every finger except the middle one, and wore far more than one on each finger. They even hired rings to wear when they wished to give an impression of special wealth.”

Clement of Alexandria justified the wearing of one ring by Christians that it might be used as a seal, but said that it ought to have a religious emblem on it, such as a dove, fish or anchor.

It is a very vivid picture which James brings to our minds in this passage. The Christians have assembled for worship; and suddenly there walks in this distinguished looking man with a gold ring and obviously expensive clothes. He

creates a stir. Someone, one of the ushers perhaps, bows him into a good place; and then, when a working man, still wearing his work-clothes, comes in, he is told to set on the floor or stand! Such conduct, either then or now, is disgraceful. But does it still happen? Who can deny that it does?

### **Verse 3**

A number of totally false assumptions on the part of Christians acting in such a manner are discernible in this situation condemned by James. By such conduct, the perpetrations of this injustice revealed that they considered fine clothing a mark of good character and shabby clothes a mark of bad character. It showed that they considered wealth to be a guide of the worth of persons, that financial ability should procure a more favorable acceptance in the church, and that social and economic caste systems are allowed in the religion of Christ. James came down very hard against such false values.

### **Verse 4**

“Judges with evil motives . . .” The person guilty of the type of behavior in view here betrayed, by their conduct, the essential worldliness within them, and this proved that they were still acting in the evil spirit of the unregenerate world.

### **Verse 5**

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God . . .” (Luke 6:20, thus said Jesus; and there can hardly be any doubt that James had such words in view here. Christ did not teach that the poor are saved because of their poverty, nor that the rich are condemned because of their wealth; and yet the singular fact may not be denied that in the journey required of all that they leave everything for the Master, the poor having less distance to go, in greater numbers find the Lord of Glory. It is true in every age, as in that of Paul, that not many mighty, nor many noble are called. R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 568, wrote, “You acted as if this were what your Christian faith had taught you,

whereas it taught you the very opposite. Look at your numbers! How many of you would be heirs of the kingdom if God would act as you do?"

The poor visitor at church is a hundred times more likely to become a Christian than the wealthy visitor; and it is a sin against the growth of the church to exhibit the mind of partiality that would tend to discourage the poor.

John William Russel, Compact Commentary on the New Testament, p. 573, pointed out, God's choice of the poor is not based upon their poverty alone saying, "The phrase means more than the mere accident of temporal poverty. It relates rather to indifference to worldly possessions and is qualified by the final words of the verse, "to them that love Him."

### **Verse 6**

It simply does not make sense for the church to dishonor the poor and to fawn upon the wealthy and powerful. As quoted by A. F. Harper, Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. X p. 211, from Calvin's work put it, "Why should a man honor his executioners and at the same time injure his friends?"

"Is it not the rich who oppress you . . .?" There had been countless examples of this right there in Jerusalem, where the Sadducees, the rich party of their day, were notorious oppressors of the poor.

"Drag you into court . . ." "Drag . . ." implies force and is actually mentioned in cases of arrest in Acts 9:1, 16:19, etc. Christians were widely hated, and this would have made it easier for prosecutors to seek them out and harass them. Note: If your version of the Bible adds the phrase "Judgment seats . . ." these were both Jewish and Roman courts.

"Josephus speaks of the cruelty of the rich Sadducees to the poor in Jerusalem;" and besides this, both Isaiah 3:15 and Amos 4:1 speak of the same thing.

### **Verse 7**

The obvious reference here is to the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of whom all Christians were baptized (Acts 2:38), and upon whom the name was formally declared as in the baptismal formula given in Matthew 28:18-20. Some

have marveled that Jesus did not spell out the name of Christ in this passage; but as W. E. Oesterley, *Expositor's Greek New Testament*, Vol. IX, p. 440, wrote, "This was due to the Jewish heritage of James." He went on to say, "A feeling of reverence led the Jews as far as possible to avoid mentioning the name of God."

A. Plummer, *Biblical Illustrator*, James, p. 227, commented that, "The last clause literally means 'which was called upon you,' and we need not doubt that the reference is to the name of Christ, which was invoked upon them at their baptism."

"By which you have been called . . ." The fact of the epistle's being addressed to baptized believers in Christ is evident in this.

### **Verse 8**

"The royal law . . ." It is impossible to view "royal law" as a reference to the Law of Moses, because Moses was never a king. Throughout James, there are dozens of references to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and it is illogical to consider this as referring to anything else.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself . . ." To be sure this was in the Law of Moses (Leviticus 19:18); but it is the reaffirmation of it by Christ (Mark 12:31) of which James spoke here. As A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 212, wrote, "God has chosen the poor to be heirs of the kingdom (verse 5), therefore, the royal law is for those of God's kingdom." Christ the King in His kingdom sanctioned and made binding this law upon all who would follow Him; therefore, it is the royal law.

### **Verse 9**

Even Christians who willfully violate the commandments of Christ are transgressors, being breakers of His law. People like those showing partiality to the rich and powerful, through their value-judgments based upon external conditions, were violating the law of love, as taught by Jesus and His apostles.

As Walter W. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p. 952, wrote, “The law re is not the Old Testament as such, but the whole spirit (of Christ) which is contrary to partiality.”

### **Verse 10**

J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 1035, wrote, It might be said that even if a man transgressed the Law of Christ in the matter or respect of persons, he was only breaking a small part of that Law.” Not so! The Law, like the Lawgiver, is one.”

All of this is part and parcel of the “perfection’ theme which dominates the epistle, having the great value of showing that even Christians who earnestly strive to do the will of Christ are nevertheless not able to attain any acceptable degree of perfection in their own right.

Regarding the principle that breaking Christ’s commandments in one particular is the same as breaking all of them, commentators have given many illustrations. If one strikes a great mirror in only one place, the whole is broken; if one breaks over a fence at only one place, he has violated all of it; if a chain of a thousand links is broken by only one, the chain is broken, etc., etc. The thing in view here, of course, is the law of love; but there are many other commandments of Christ which are today violated by men with impunity; and not the least of these regard baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the command to assemble in worship, etc.

### **Verse 11**

In this verse, James was clearly rebuking those who were dishonoring the poor man, equating their conduct with murder, based upon Jesus’ elaboration of that command in Matthew 5:21-22. It is still the Law of Christ which James is holding before his readers. A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 213, agreed that James here reflects Jesus’ “expansion of the commandment on killing.” Thus, it was no small breach which those who showed partiality were guilty of. Their unfeeling snobbery toward the poor was exactly the same kind of personality destruction which James equated with murder.



## **Verse 12**

Very few deny that “law of liberty” is here a further reference to the teaching and doctrine of Jesus Christ; and why is it called a law of liberty? As contrasted with the Law of Moses, called by the apostles “a yoke of bondage,” the teachings of the Son of God are characterized by marvelous freedom. For example, there are only two great ceremonial ordinances in Christianity, baptism and the Lord’s Supper; and one of those (baptism) needs to be observed only once in a lifetime, and the other may be observed anywhere on earth.

Another contrast is in the countless sacrifices of Moses’ law and the one true and only atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of the whole world. Then again, the Law of Christ is the law of liberty because men assume its obligations of their own free will. All are invited, but none are compelled. James’ admonition here is that Christians who have voluntarily taken upon themselves to live as Christ directed should not revert to the unholy value-judgments of the unregenerated. It is true of every Christian that he is received by Christ, even though his life is flawed by many sins; he is received despite his lowliness in the world. Therefore, how incongruous it is that he should ignore these graces he has received by denying them to others.

## **Verse 13**

This is not a harsh judgment, for the sterner side of the judgment of God was enunciated by our Lord Himself (Matthew 6:15), where it is stated, “But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

The most wonderful truth received in all of the word of God is that mercy stands higher than the law as the guiding principle of God’s relationship with men. This was symbolized in the Old Testament by the Mercy Seat which was placed above and on top of the Ark of the Covenant.

However, it is in the New Testament that the full impact of God’s mercy comes to its glorious climax in the crucifixion of the Son of God that men through Him might have eternal life.

On verses 14-26: This paragraph is perhaps the most misunderstood passage in the New Testament; but the interpretation presented here flows out of deep convictions

- (1) that here indeed we have the inspired word of God,
- (2) that this portion of the New Testament is as easily understood as any other,
- (3) that the simple answers are the true ones,
- (4) that there is not the slightest contradiction between Paul and James,
- (5) that Paul's affirmation that we are justified "by faith" and James' declaration that we are justified by works means simply that we are indeed justified "by both," and that it is a sin to assert that men are justified either (a) "by faith alone" or (b) "by works alone,"
- (6) that all of the alleged contradictions between the sacred writers James and Paul derives not from what either of them said, but from the false allegations of theologians concerning what they mean;
- (7) and that Luther did not misunderstand James, but that he misunderstood Paul.

James refuted the perversion that men are justified "by faith only." The modern outcropping of that delusive error has its roots in the teachings of Martin Luther; and it aids understanding of it to remember that Luther clearly understood James as a contradiction of his false theory, which he mistakenly attributed to the apostle Paul, incorrectly believing that he had discovered it in Paul's writings.

Walter W. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p. 952, wrote, "James was not attacking Paul's doctrine of justification by faith but rather a perversion of it." The perversion is justification "by faith only."

## **Verse 14**

“If a man says he has faith . . .” Here, at last, is that subjective trust/faith which is so frequently imported into New Testament passages. The word for “faith” here is exactly the one used in Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8 and the allegation that here is a pretended faith, or some inferior brand of faith is absolutely illogical, there being no word in the apostolic writings regarding “kinds” of faith.

The only possible way of identifying the existence of “faith only” is from what “they say” who profess to have it. Thus, this is exactly the type of identification of “faith only” that should have been expected; in fact the only one possible.

“Can that faith save him . . .?” So stated as to require a negative answer, this is a refutation of the heresy that men are saved by “faith only.” It is clear enough that James did not here teach that the man was not justified “by faith.” But that he could not be justified by “faith only.”

## **Verses 15-16**

“If a brother or sister is without clothing . . . and one of you . . .” These words tied in with “my beloved brethren” in verse 14, make it impossible to suppose that James was addressing some external theory. The problem addressed was exactly the one that exists today, namely, Christians supposing that “faith only” saves them and that there is no need for works.

Since that ultimate justification surely depends upon works, as almost universally admitted, why should it be thought unreasonable that the initial justification (in conversion) also depended upon the convert’s repenting of his sins, confessing Christ, and being baptized? Did not Christ Himself deny salvation to those who would not confess Him, even though they “believed on” Him? (John 12:42) Did he not also teach that those who will not repent cannot be saved? (Luke 13:3, 5) Did He not also declare that unless one is baptized

(born of the water and the spirit) he cannot enter the kingdom of God? (John 3:5)

It should be noted that such things as confession, repentance and baptism are a “work of faith” only in the sense that “the faith” commands them. Subjective faith does not baptize sinners; they must themselves have this done. Subjective faith does not repent; the sinner must himself do the repenting.

### **Verse 17**

Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 1228, wrote, “Faith alone in verse 24 and faith without works in verse 26 correspond with what is said here.”

“Faith if it has no works is dead . . .” The dead do not do anything, the same being analogous with trust/faith without works. But is this not equivalent to the proposition that faith without works is “not real faith”? Indeed no. Is a dead body no longer a body? Is a dead body not real? Is a dead body different in nature from a living body? Is a single characteristic of a body lost by the mere fact of death? Thus, a faith that is genuine enough in itself, when dead, is not essentially different. Thus, there is no reason to make this place an excuse for affirming that those “without works” had the wrong kind of faith. The most marvelous body that ever lived may be compared with the most marvelous faith that ever existed; but if that marvelous faith is without works, it then has the same status as a dead corpse.

### **Verse 18**

“You have faith . . . and I have works . . .” R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 66, wrote, “The pronouns do not refer to James and the objector, but are the equivalent of ‘one’ and ‘another,’ and are merely a more picturesque way of indicating two imaginary persons.” What James is really saying is that some people do in fact claim to be saved “by faith only,” while others are diligent to maintain good works which alone are the proof of faith.

“Show me your faith without the works. . .” This is an impossibility of course; and here is the reason why James introduced this entire discussion by the remark, “But someone may well say . . .” A faith without works, unproved by any act of obedience, cannot ever be known certainly to exist by anyone supposing that he has such faith.

No one ever accused Jesus of teaching that salvation is by “faith only,” or of contradicting Himself when He said one shall be justified by “His words.”

Ronald A. Ward, op. cit., p. 1228, turned to the thief on the cross for confirmation of the “faith only” concept, thus, “The penitent thief had no time left for works; and faith had no time in which to die.” Note: Ward overlooked the most remarkable “works” of the thief in that he confessed Jesus Christ as Lord under the most unfavorable circumstances and prayed for his remembrance in the kingdom. Certainly, this was something more than faith only.

### **Verse 19**

An examination of the demonic faith to which James referred here reveals it is nothing different in any particular whatever from the faith of all Christians, except in that one fatal flaw of being “faith only.” The allegation commonly made upon the basis of what is written in this verse, to the effect that those James sought to correct were possessors of monotheistic faith in God but that they were not believers in Jesus Christ our Lord, is wrong for two reasons.

- (1) The ones being corrected were Christians. (Verses 15-16)
- (2) The demons referred to fully believed Jesus Christ to be the Son of God Most High, the promised Messiah, and the ultimate Judge who would torment the wicked. (Mark 1:34 and Luke 8:28)

Thus the point of James here is that a person having “faith only” is not better than a demon, nor has he any better hope of salvation. In all fairness, it should be pointed out that the great majority of those preaching “faith only” are

not practitioners of it, indicating that they themselves do not dare trust it. In the matter of baptism, for example, preachers of salvation by “faith only” are more diligent to baptize people than some who hold the ordinance to be a Divinely imposed precondition of primary justification.

“The demons also believe . . .” In this series of commentaries there have been included many essays on the subject of demons and demonic possession; but it is appropriate here to include the vital comment by J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.* p. 91, who wrote, “It is no more difficult to believe in demons than to believe in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, in angels, or in the devil. The Bible hints (though it does not state plainly) that demons were to be consigned to the abyss.”

It has been noted that the demonic faith in view here had all the elements of the distinctive faith of Christians. As R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 585, noted, “James is not listing all that such a faith accepts, for quantity is not the point.” The point is that “all faith,” even the faith strong enough to move mountains, if “alone” is worthless; and who said that? Paul! (1 Corinthians 13:2)

### **Verse 20**

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 73, wrote, “The fact that Christianity must be ethically demonstrated is an essential part of the Christian faith throughout the New Testament.” Barclay’s affirmation, however, does not go far enough. The importance of the great Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, along with the absolute necessity of the church and a consistent fellowship in “the body of Christ” are also most certainly included.

“You foolish fellow . . .” R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 67, wrote, “The foolish man addressed is anyone who is so devoid of spiritual understanding that he does not see that faith which never results in works is merely a sham.”

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 91, wrote, The language of verse 20 calls upon the believer in “faith only” to be willing to recognize or acknowledge the truth.

James is so confident of the truth of his position and the force of his reasoning that he calls upon the person who errs to concede.”

The man who will still uphold “faith only” in James’ mind is shallow in his mind; nevertheless he will proceed to present arguments from the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament.

### **Verse 21**

The essential error in the usual interpretations of this verse was succinctly stated by R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 589, who wrote, “James is not speaking of the first verdict which God pronounced upon Abraham when Abraham was first brought to faith.” By such a device as this, the “faith only” attempt to make that first occasion the true salvation of Abraham (by faith only) thus making James’ statement that Abraham was “justified by works” refer to a confirmation only of that first justification. However, as J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 93, clearly stated, “This hardly does justice to James argument. James is talking about faith saving a man (verse 14). It is not contemplated merely that one already just or acquitted is proved or declared righteous; but the action of God in declaring him righteous is referred to.”

But did not Paul say that “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:3), the same being verbatim quotation from Genesis 15:6? Let it be noted, however, that neither The Genesis record nor Paul’s use of it carries any hint whatever to the effect that Abraham’s faith only was the basis of God’s reckoning to him righteousness.

James in this passage gives the occasion when Abraham was justified, and it was not that of his first believing, but that of his meeting the Divine test of his faith. If God had already justified Abraham on the basis of his “faith only” there could have been no reason whatever for God’s testing his faith.

Never did any man pass a sterner test of faith than did Abraham; and, if Abraham was not justified till he passed it, how could it be supposed that any man could be saved merely upon an alleged trust/faith, and that without his

meeting any test whatever? What is the test? “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works . . .?” The device of making the word “justified” here to be something other than the meaning in Paul’s use of the word should be noted. As J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 94, declared, “It must be admitted that Paul and James used the word ‘justify’ in the same sense.” The one word from both James and Paul’s writings which is positively used in two different senses is “works,” Paul using the term as a reference to the works of the Law of Moses and James using it of works of obedience to the commands of God, as in the case of Abraham here given. An understanding of this is vital to understanding what either James or Paul taught.

#### **Verse 22**

R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 68, wrote, “The literal meaning here is, “faith cooperated with his works;” and here is the key to understanding all that both Paul and James wrote on this subject. One may only marvel at a view which asserts that, “We are not to suppose, however, that it was Abraham’s faith plus his works which now brought about his justification.” (Tasker, *Ibid*) Of course, that is exactly what we must not merely suppose, but receive as gospel truth.

“As a result of the works, faith was perfected . . .” Here is the clinching argument that faith “without works” is imperfect, utterly unable to save. Inherent in this is also the truth that works are not merely something that genuine faith “does” but something in addition, something needed for the perfection of faith.

We must receive and accept the words as they stand in our versions. Why it should be considered an incongruous thing that Abraham’s faith should have been “made perfect” by his works of obedience, when the New Testament flatly declares that even the Son of God Himself was “made perfect through obedience.” (Hebrews 5:8-9)



### Verse 23

James here quoted exactly the same passage that Paul quoted in Romans 4:3, proving that his teaching concerned exactly the same kind of justification as that in view by Paul; it does, however, explode any possibility of “faith only” having been the grounds of that justification, even in the teachings of Paul.

“And he was called the friend of God . . .” References to Abraham as the “friend of God” are found in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 70, explained why God called Abraham his friend, “God did not hide from Abraham what he proposed to do (Genesis 18:17); Abraham rejoiced to see the day of the Messiah (John 8:56). Similarly . . . Jesus called the apostles His “friends.” “No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing but I have called you friends, for all things I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15)

Even the designation of Abraham as “the friend of God” did not derive from “faith alone” on Abraham’s part, being founded partially also upon his life of obedient service.

### Verse 24

James’ efforts in the whole paragraph are directed against supposing that salvation is, “by faith only.” E. G. PUNCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 367, wrote, In the Greek, the adverb ‘only’ comes last, emphatically.”

“A man is justified by works and not by faith alone . . .” What screams of outrage would arise if one dared to amend James statement here to read, “By works only is a man justified!” And yet, that is exactly what men have done to the teachings of Paul in their false allegations that he taught “justification by faith only.”

There is another grave error which should also be refuted, namely, that the acceptance of what James here said makes an acceptance tantamount to a man’s thinking he can “earn salvation,” or that humble recipients of God’s word in this

passage are guilty of making themselves “their own savior,” or that faithful working Christians think they are placing God in debt to them. How ridiculous is such nonsense! Even when Abraham met the test of offering his son Isaac upon the altar, he was still a sinner, the unworthy recipient of the grace of Almighty God; and so it is with all who ever were or ever shall be saved. J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 97, summed up this verse as follows, “It was because Abraham had done this that the blessings followed. So works justify, not in themselves alone, but still they justify.”

### **Verse 25**

“In the same way . . .” One must look for some correspondence between the cases of Abraham and Rahab, which appears to be this, that both alike performed works which in themselves would have been illegal or sinful, unless they were undertaken in direct consequences of being understood as the will of God. In the instance of Rahab, it is likewise clear that in her case also, she was justified as a consequence of what she did, and not upon the basis of “faith alone.”

“When she received . . .” Rahab was justified “when she received the messengers, etc.” If it was not “when she received the messengers” in Rahab’s case, when was it?

### **Verse 26**

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 100, wrote, “Thus the doctrine of salvation at the moment of faith—without obedience—is not a Biblical teaching. It is rooted in the conversion experience theology of early revivalism. It sets aside the plain teaching of the Bible on the doctrine of obedience and the works of faith.”

James is a very practical book; and, from the very nature of its purpose, James deals with what men must do to be saved.

In the ultimate and final sense of being the grounds upon which God’s justification is given to men, there is not anything that sinful men can either

believe or do which finally justifies them. God indeed reckoned righteousness unto Abraham, but that did not make Abraham righteous, nor was he ever so in the absolute sense; so it is with Christians. Neither faith nor works, of whatever degree or quality, can make them righteous. The perfect faith and obedience of Jesus Christ our Lord are the unique ground of human redemption, which is achieved for them by Jesus Christ, received by men when they believe (have faith) and obey the gospel, being baptized into Christ, identified with Christ, being actually Christ as members of the spiritual body (the church) of which Christ is the head, and remaining “in Christ” throughout life; THEN they are truly justified eternally, their faith and righteousness being not theirs, but His, no longer merely reckoned unto them, but their true possession “as Christ.” Both the faith and the works which justify sinful men, therefore, are related to that higher consideration of their relationship with the Lord of Glory.

Certainly, men must have faith and obedience before they can be incorporated “into Christ;” and in Him, having been baptized into Him, they become partakers of the true righteousness (perfect faith and perfect obedience) which saves and justifies them is not theirs but Christ’s. It is no mere reckoned or imputed thing, but an eternal, perfect and beautiful status of the absolute and genuine righteousness of Christ. That is what Paul referred to when he spoke of presenting every man, “perfect in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28)

Justification “by faith alone” profoundly misses the point on two vital counts:

- (1) Nothing that a sinner either believes or does can save him “out of Christ” (although, of course, he must both believe and obey the gospel in order to enter Christ.
- (2) Even in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is the true ground of all human redemption, even in His case, it was not “faith only,” but a perfect faith and a perfect obedience.

How regrettable are the weary disputes of men regarding the part sinners have in their redemption; how preposterous is the notion that what a sinner “believes” could endow him with eternal life! To receive that as God’s free gift,

he must qualify for entry into Christ's spiritual body, through faith and obedience of the gospel, or as Jesus stated it, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." The function of baptism in this is that it is entering "into Christ," where all righteousness and redemption are found.

Note: HOW DARK IS THAT TRAGEDY OF HUMAN ARROGANCE WHICH WOULD MAKE A SINNER HIS OWN SAVIOR THROUGH CLAIMING ETERNAL LIFE AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HIS "FAITH ONLY."

### **CHAPTER 3**

This entire chapter is a "self-contained section dealing with the bridling of the tongue, and fitting exactly into James' overall theme of "perfection."

In this chapter, as throughout the epistle, the remarkable consonance with the teachings of Christ should be noted. Had not Christ Himself said, "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (Matthew 12:37); and did He not also caution His followers against seeking the adulation accorded teachers? (Matthew 23:1-12)

#### **Verse 1**

"Let not many of you become teachers . . ." James is not seeking to discourage any who might have been qualified for such work. A. F. Harper, Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. X, p. 220, wrote, "His words were meant to remind us of our responsibilities, rather than to deter us from our duties."

The need for such caution grew out of a number of circumstances:

- (1) The Christian meetings were open, uninstructed and informal; and anyone wishing to be heard could rise and speak (1 Corinthians 14:16-20.
- (2) The great honor attached to the work of teaching, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 12:28, where teachers ranked second only to apostles and prophets, naturally led self-seekers to attempt to teach, whether or not they were qualified.

- (3) Some of James' readers, perhaps many of them, had come out of Judaism; and the characteristic of many of those was described by Paul in Romans 2:17-24, to the effect that their lack of any true qualification did not deter their conceited and arrogant assumption of the office of "teacher" for all mankind!
- (4) The Judaizers who attempted to graft the forms and ceremonies of Mosaic Law upon the church were a particularly troublesome element of the church which sorely needed the caution here expressed by James.

As James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles and Commentary*, Vol.; V, p. 372, wrote, "These teachers of the Law in the Christian church were the great corruptors of Christianity." Paul likewise addressed stern words to this group when he wrote, "Some . . . have turned aside to fruitless discussion . . . wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they did not understand either what they were saying . . . make confident assumptions." (1 Timothy 1:6-7)

"Stricter judgment . . ." Jesus declared that hypocrites make long prayers for show, and at the same time devour widows' houses, would receive "the greater condemnation." (Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47)

False teachers being unqualified, must be reckoned among the most vicious and destructive influences in the whole history of Christianity. As R. C. H. Lenski, "The Interpretation of . . . the Epistle of James," p. 600, wrote, "The damage that wrong teaching may cause is indicated by what James later says of the tongue. Untold damage may result. We see it everywhere to this day. This text about the judgment that teachers shall receive cannot be impressed too deeply upon all who teach today, whether professionally or as volunteers."

#### **Verse 2**

"We all stumble in many ways . . ." James was not here making some great confession of his own sins, but rather pointing out the universality of sin and error in all men, not excluding himself of course, nor meaning it as his "confession."

"If any man does not stumble in what he says . . ." James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 373, wrote, "In Scripture, walking denotes the course of a man's conduct; stumbling denotes a lesser failing than falling (Romans 11:11)."

“He is a perfect man . . .” W. E. Vine, Expository Greek Dictionary, Vol. III, p. 174, wrote, “Perfect” means complete goodness, without necessary reference to maturity.” James’ words here should be referred to the New Testament theology of “perfection,” unattainable by men, but receivable by them “in Christ,” whose absolute and total perfection is available through sinner’s believing and obeying the gospel, thus being united with Christ, in Christ, and as Christ, therefore accounted perfect. (Colossians 1:28-29)

“Able to bridle the whole body as well . . . “ The thought is that if one attains mastery over the tongue, which is the most unruly and rebellious member of the body, he should also be able to control all of the others as well.

Note: The “whole body” may well be a reference to the “church.”

The use of bridle at this point prompted the employment of the horse metaphor in the next verse.

### **Verse 3**

“If we put the bits into the horses’ mouths . . .” This is a small point, the passage meaning the same either way; but what is denounced here is the fact of modern translators, through their adherence to an unscientific and improvable methodology, presuming to “correct” the sacred text.

There are three comparisons introduced by James with this verse with reference to the tongue. These are:

- (1) the bit, verse 3,
- (2) the rudder, verse 4, and
- (3) the small fire, verse 6.

The first two of these stress the importance and power of such a small instrument as the tongue, and the third stresses the astounding damage resulting from such a small beginning.

### **Verse 4**

Just as the tongue is a very small member, the rudder of a great ship is likewise a very small instrument in comparison with the whole ship; but the

guidance of the entire vessel is accomplished by means of that tiny rudder. E. G. Punchard, *op. cit.*, p. 369, wrote, “The earliest English translators understood the ships here as an image of ourselves, and the winds as impulses of our own minds, by which we are driven hither and thither.”

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, 105, wrote, “The word “pilot” is a substantive participle, “the one guiding straight,” and not the technical word for a “pilot” or “governor of a ship. The one who holds the rudder (the steersman) can turn the ship about and thus control it.”

The point James was making here is that a little rudder controls a great ship, there being no reference in this illustration to the damage caused by the tongue, that being outlined in the following illustration of the little fire out of control.

### **Verse 5**

The first sentence in this verse is the application of the two illustrations of the bit and the rudder, its power being out of all proportion to its size. James here referred to the nearly incredible power of human speech to move men to either noble or destructive purposes.

W. E. Oesterley, *op. cit.*, 451, wrote, “There is no idea of vain boasting; the whole argument turns upon the reality of the power which the tongue possesses.”

“Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire . . .” In this illustration, James will show how fantastically overwhelming is the evil that can ensue upon a Christian’s (or anyone’s) failure to control his tongue. The essential difference in this third illustration is seen in the fact of the horse and ship being under control; where here, the tiny fire that kindles a whole forest is out of control.

### **Verse 6**

“The very world of iniquity . . .” J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 106, noted, the general meaning of this is “a world of unrighteousness.”

An uncontrolled tongue is closely allied with the inherent wickedness of unregenerate human carnality. Every conceivable form of lust, greed, deception, hatred, malignity and every evil, is aided, encouraged and propagated by means of the tongue.

“Which defiles the entire body . . .” Jesus Himself mentioned “railing,” one of the sins of the tongue, as being among those things which proceed from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:23), and thus James is still inspired, as throughout the epistle, by the exact teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Significantly, the thought here is not that of damage which the tongue does to the body of Christ, or to the whole world of the social order, but the staining and defiling effect upon the uncontrolled tongue’s possessor.

“And sets on fire the course of our life . . .” “Course” here means the whole round of human life and activity. The obvious meaning here being “man’s whole animalistic nature, which can be, and often is, inflamed and kindled into the most outrageous wickedness by the tongue.

“And is set on fire by hell . . .” The word used here is *Gehenna*, (hell) this being the only usage of it in the New Testament, aside from the use of it by Jesus Himself in the gospels; thus James continues to be strictly loyal to the teachings of the Master.

“*Gehenna* . . .” is the Greek form of a Hebrew word meaning “the valley of Hinnom,” where the worship of Molech was conducted. King Josiah defiled it, and it, became a place of refuse and abomination. Due to the Hebrew detestation of the place, the name came to stand for the idea of eternal punishment (hell) for the wicked as taught in Deuteronomy 32:22; Leviticus 10:2; Isaiah 30:27-33 and 66:24; Daniel 7:10; Psalm 18:8.

## **Verse 7**

“Is tamed . . .” It is a literal fact that mankind, in response to the original directive of the Creator for man “to tame “ the earth and the sea and everything in them (Genesis 1:28), has indeed done that very thing. How strange it is, and how tragic, that he has had no such success in the matter of “taming“ the tongue.



## Verse 8

T. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 577, observed that, “Fortunately James did not say that God cannot control the tongue (or tame it),” while true enough, fails to touch the problem, namely, that the tongue is indeed out of control because of man’s failure to exercise dominion over it that God commanded. It was true in James’ day, as it is in this that, “It is a restless evil . . .”

It is like a caged beast, even under the best circumstances, ever seeking an opportunity to break forth and set the whole world on fire. James does not mean here that a Christian cannot tame his tongue. E. G. Puchard, *op. cit.*, p. 370, wrote, “If he could not, he would hardly be responsible for its vagaries; but in verse 10, he said, ‘My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.’”

“It is a restless evil and full of deadly poison . . .” This is similar to “full of adultery” (2 Peter 2:14), and “full of envy” (Romans 1:29). Paul also made use of the same metaphor: “The venom of asps is under their lips.” (Romans 3:13)

## Verse 9

“We bless . . . we curse . . .” The use of “we” as in verse 2; does not indicate any guilt on the part of James in this particular. “Bless we the Lord . . .” Scholars have busied themselves to find out where James got this expression, but as R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 611, said, “He coined it!” The two titles have only one article, showing that James intended for us to read both titles as pertaining to Jesus Christ our Savior, attesting His Divinity and Godhead.

“Made in the likeness of God . . .” is a reference to Genesis 1:26, the sin and inconsistency of the same tongue blessing God and cursing men lying in the fact of man’s likeness to God, any curse of men, therefore, being actually a curse against God in the likeness of men, therefore being actually a curse against God in the likeness of His creation.

## Verse 10

In the admonition here and in preceding verse 9, James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 378 thought that James might have had reference to a widespread custom of early Christian times, in which Christians were “cursed bitterly in Jewish

synagogues.” It would appear, however, that it is not particularly the sins of Jews in cursing Christians that James dealt with, but the habit of some “brethren” engaged in the awful business of cursing men! All such unchristian conduct is vigorously denounced.

### **Verse 11**

It is said that along the Dead Sea there were both salt-water and fresh-water fountains; so James made his meaning clear by adding, “From the same opening.” The illustration shows that man’s behavior in blessing God and cursing men with the same tongue was a monstrous perversion of nature, in fact an altogether impossibility in nature.

### **Verse 12**

“Neither can salt water produce fresh . . .” Here the tremendous thrust of James’ teaching is made. Just as, in nature, it is impossible for a fountain to be both salt and sweet, so it is with men. The “cursing” shows the real character of them that do it. Their character denies any goodness that might otherwise have appeared in their pious talk.

### **Verse 13**

The application this has for teachers was thus presented by R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 80, who wrote, “Any contentiousness or arrogance, any tendency to self-assertion, any desire to glory over others, is an infallible sign that the essential qualifications are in fact lacking.”

There is a moral foundation in all true wisdom, there being an utterly impossibility of any wicked person being, in any sense, wise. The true wisdom is found alone in those of moral and upright character.

### **Verse 14**

A pretended wisdom in one whose life and character are out of harmony with the Lord can never be the truth, even in areas where it might seem to coincide with it, the sum total of such a person’s life being a lie against the truth.

“Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition . . .” W. E. Oesterley, *op. cit.*, p. 455, and many others deduce from this that, “The personal abuse heaped upon one

another by partisans of rival schools of thought” represents the type of sins condemned in this passage. Of course, such are included, but it is doubtful if the meaning may be thus restricted.

E. G. PUNCHARD, *op. cit.*, p. 371, wrote, “Falsehood is not merely the hurt of some abstract virtue, or bare rule of right and wrong, but a direct blow at the Living Truth (John 14:6) . . . All faintest shades of falsehood tend to the dark one of a fresh betrayal of the Son of man.”

No class of persons is any more in constant danger of falling short in this category than is the group of teachers and preachers of religious truth. Such persons are accustomed to speaking and having their words accepted; and their attitudes to become like that mentioned by Shakespeare, “I am Sir Oracle, and when I open my lips, let no dog bark!”

Thus is stressed the greater need for all who “contend earnestly for the faith” to do so in a manner becoming the meekness and modesty of truly Christian teachers.

### **Verse 15**

No better comment on this verse was found than that of James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 381, who paraphrased this verse, “This outrageous method of spreading religion is not the wisdom that comes from God, but is earthly policy, suggested by your animal passions, and belongs to demons who inspire you with it.”

“Demonic . . .” is better understood rather than “devilish,” which appears in some versions of the Bible. Vine notes that the word here does not mean satanic, but demonic.

### **Verse 16**

Walter W. Wessel, *Wycliffe New Testament Commentary*, p. 957, wrote, “In the preceding verse, James described such so-called “wisdom” in an advancing series as, “Pertaining to earth, not to the world above; to mere nature, not to the spirit; and to hostile spirits of evil, and not to the living God. Verse 16 follows as proof of what has just been said.”

In the inherent wickedness of factions and partisan defenders of human systems of religion, it appears here that honesty, fairness and truth will be conspicuously missing from their presentations.

### **Verse 17**

“The wisdom from above . . .” This does not mean that mortals are directly inspired by such wisdom, but that God is the ultimate source from which their wisdom is actually received; and the means of their receiving it, while not in view in this text, must surely be allowed as the gospels and apostolic writings themselves, there being no other possible source of it. J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 1036, observed, “The wisdom described here is moral rather than intellectual.”

“Pure . . .” The word of God is not to be alloyed with human speculations, philosophy and opinions, the word itself taking precedence over everything else.

“Peaceable . . .” The tendency of the true wisdom is not that of producing faction and strife, but that of healing divisions, and pouring oil upon the troubled waters of human relationships.

“Gentle . . .” E. C. S. Gibson, *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, James, p. 45, says this means, “Forbearance, even under provocation.” All who teach others should ever be conscious of the fact that a rude or thoughtless word may wound to death an immortal soul.

“Reasonable . . .” has the meaning of being “persuaded to forgiveness.” (James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 381) This is the very opposite of the cold, haughty and unyielding hardness of some religious teachers.

“Full of mercy and good fruits . . .” Again, the Savior’s own requirement that those who would be forgiven must themselves be willing to forgive others inspires James’ comment in his epistle. (Matthew 7: 9 and 6:14-15)

“Unwavering . . .” E. C. S. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 45, tells us that scholars are not altogether sure of the meaning of the word thus rendered, “unwavering, without doubtfulness or without partially.” All these definitions are possible

denotations of “unwavering,” meaning without consistency, vacillation or erratic changes.”

“Without hypocrisy . . .” Hypocrisy was a vice which James exposed and denounced with all the vehemence of his being. The entire 23<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Matthew being given over to such a purpose, the conduct of those ancient Pharisees being the perfect example of what Christian teachers today ought not to be and ought not to do.

### **Verse 18**

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God,” (Matthew 5:9) is the beatitude James certainly had in mind here. As J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.* p. 1036, expressed the thought, “The wise man is the peacemaker who sows good seed that in God’s time will bear precious fruit.”

William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 95, wrote that the behavior in view here, “Is the result of true wisdom.” Barclay’s discussion of that “wisdom” is very appropriate in this connection and he wrote, “True wisdom” is from *epiekes*, of all Greek words in the New Testament, the most untranslatable. Aristotle defined it as that “which is just beyond the law.” It means, “justice and better than justice.” It is that which steps in to correct things when the law itself becomes unjust. It is impossible to find an English word to translate this quality . . . (it is) “the sweet reasonableness we would wish to receive ourselves.”

The most outstanding thing in this chapter is the profusion of the Spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ which dominates every line of it. In the introduction, it was noted that James is the most Christian of all the New Testament writings, in the sense of being based absolutely upon the declarations of the Master Himself; and this chapter affords the most remarkable demonstration of that fact.

## CHAPTER 4

The sermonical nature of this epistle is quite pronounced in this chapter, as in the third. There is first a section directed against worldliness in the church, (verses 1-12), with a somewhat parenthetical appeal to alien sinners, (verses 7-10), to obey the gospel, the appropriateness of this inclusion deriving from the fact that every Christian congregation contains within the periphery of its influence a number, sometimes quite large, of the unconverted. The admonition against worldliness continues with a directive against making plans without reference to the will of God. (verses 13-17)

### Verse 1

It is rather startling that James would refer to the disputes and the wrangling of church members in such terms as “war and wrangling;” but is this not actually the nature of them?

It is safe to view James’ words here as directed toward the solution of “a spiritual problem within the circle of believers.” The invasion of Christian personality by evil influences contrary to it is a recurring problem in every generation; every Christian must fight and win in the war spoken of in these verses.

The words of this section are applicable today, being sorely needed in countless situations all over the world.

“Pleasures that wage war in your members . . .” As in practically every line of this letter, the teachings of Jesus are in focus. Our Lord taught that the “riches and pleasures of this life choke out the word of God” (Luke 8:14); and James dealt with both, pleasures here, and riches at the beginning of the next chapter. The inherent selfishness of human nature in the pathetic struggle to satisfy the desire for pleasure must inevitably be thrust into conflict both inwardly within the personality itself and outwardly in all human relationships.

The kind of wars and fighting just mentioned is precisely that of pleasures warring against the soul’s true interests “in your members,” meaning not

“between the members of the church” exclusively (though this is included), but within men themselves, individually.

The pursuit of pleasure must be regarded by every Christian as a fruitless and dangerous course, loaded with all kinds of disastrous consequences.

William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter, Revised*, p. 100, wrote.

- (1) It sets men at each other’s throats; the basic desires for money, power, prestige, and worldly possessions, for gratification of bodily lusts (lead men to) trample each other down in the rush to grasp them.
- (2) It drives men to wickedness, envy, hatred, even murder.
- (3) In the end, it shuts the door of prayer.

In addition, it may be pointed out regarding the pursuit of pleasure that:

- (4) It chokes out the word of God. (Luke 8:14)
- (5) It cannot lead to satisfaction, requiring continually both that the amount and the intensity be increased, until finally the pleasure-mad soul is utterly miserable.
- (6) It produces soul-hunger, disquietude and unhappiness, actually the death of the soul. (1Timothy 5:6)

## **Verse 2**

James’ reference, “you murder,” is not to be taken as an indictment of the Christian communities addressed by him as murderers. John William Russell, *Compact Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 575, wrote, “The word “murder” is to be taken in the sense of hatred proceeding from envy, as in 1 John 3:15: ‘Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.’”

The blunt, powerful charges made in this verse are difficult to punctuate; but R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, p. 86, arranged them in a parallel which seems to be commendable,

“You desire and do not have; so you kill.  
And you covet and cannot obtain; so you kill and wage war.”

The frustration and misery of the selfish, pleasure-craving soul are eloquently portrayed in this verse.

“Obtain . . .” J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 126, wrote, “Obtain” means “to attain one’s goal or purpose.” (c.f. Romans 11:7)

“You do not have because you do not ask . . .” There is no hint here that if they had prayed for the ability to gratify their lustful pleasures God would have given it; rather, that their willful selfishness had dried up the springs of prayer within them.

### **Verse 3**

J. W. Roberts, *Ibid*, wrote, “God answers prayer, but not all prayer, especially not in giving the ungodly the ingredients for selfish gratification.”

The Bible reveals exactly whose prayers are answered. He hears the cry of the righteous (Psalm 34:15); He hears those who call upon Him in truth (Psalm 145:18); He hears the penitent (Luke 18:14); those who ask “in His name” (John 14:13); those who ask “believing” (Mark 11:24); and those who ask according to God’s will; (1 John 5:14).

### **Verse 4**

“You adulteresses . . .” Like “kill” in the preceding verses, this word too must be understood in the spiritual sense of unfaithfulness to God. “Spiritual adultery” is the unfaithfulness of the church, which is the bride of Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2; Romans 7:1-6; Revelation 21:2 and 22:17)

This verse represents the bride of Christ, the church, falling in love with the world also being used here in the metaphorical sense of meaning “society, as it organizes itself apart from God.” (T. Carson. *A New American Commentary*, p. 579)



“Friendship with the world . . .” refers to a Christian’s loving the pleasures, enticements and lusts of society in general, a friendship that tends inevitably to forsaking the Lord.

“Hostility toward God . . .” Demas, it will be recalled, “loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10), the result being that he forsook Paul and the gospel of Christ.

### **Verse 5**

It is the conviction here the spirit should be read Spirit, since the only spirit ever made to dwell in Christian hearts is the Holy Spirit.

This verse is a disputed text, so we shall be content with giving what would appear to be the best rendition of it. Emphatic Diaglott, p. 769, reads, “Or do you suppose that the Scripture speaks falsely? Does the Spirit that dwells in us strongly incline to envy?”

This rendition is not out of harmony with our text above, also fits in beautifully with verse 6, given by the same translation thus, “Indeed, it bestows superior favor; therefore, it is said, “God sets Himself in opposition to the haughty, but gives favor to the lowly.”

“Do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose . . . ?” The inherent truth in this is that Christians were familiar with the New Testament teaching regarding the indwelling Spirit, and the fruits of it, which never included envy! W. E. Oesterley, op. cit., p. 459, agreed here that the reference “must be to the New Testament;” and this shows that James, with all Christians, held the Pauline writings to be authentic Scripture.

### **Verse 6**

“He gives a greater grace . . .” The unity of the triune godhead makes it futile to inquire whether God or the Holy Spirit is the subject here. Anything that the Spirit of God does to bless men may be also appropriately said, to be what God does.

“The Scripture speaks . . .” E. G. PUNCHARD, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible Vol. VIII*, p. 373, noted, “Peter used the same quotation (1 Peter 5:5), and it seems to have been a common saying, a maxim of the wise that had become, as it were, a law of life.”

“God is opposed to the proud . . .” There is no grater deterrent to righteousness than pride. Through pride, Satan fell; pride leads the list of the seven deadly sins; pride cankers and destroys human personality; pride incurs the enmity of God Himself. As William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 105, wrote, “Pride does not know its own need, cherishes its own independence, and does not recognize its own sin. It shuts itself off from God; its real terror is that it is a thing of the heart.”

“Gives grace to the humble . . .” New Testament teaching on humility is all-pervasive. The parable Jesus spoke regarding the publican and the Pharisee at prayer (Luke 18:9-14) is a good example.

## **Verse 7**

James here included a series of blunt, power-packed exhortations, running through verse 10. The expression “you sinners” coming right in the middle of this (verse 8) forbids referring this particular paragraph to Christians, the unmodified designation “sinners” not being an appropriate address for members of the body of Christ to whom the whole letter is written. T. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 579, wrote, “The verbs in these exhortations are in the aorist tense, indicating that these things are to be done ‘once for all,’ as a settled thing for the soul.”

The unconverted, who make up a part of every Christian audience, are plainly intended as recipients of the exhortation here.

“Submit therefore to God . . .” That primary Christian obedience is inherent in this admonition is apparent from McNab, as quoted by A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 232, who wrote, “Herein are blended perfectly the true activities of faith and works. By faith we submit to God in a fuller, deeper surrender to His will . . . in our act of submission, we are prepared for conflict with the evil one.”

If men submit to God, they must resist Satan in order to do so initially, and recurrently ever afterward.

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you . . .” brings to mind the initial scene in our Lord’s ministry, that of His resisting Satan in the wilderness temptation (Matthew 4:8), which ended by Satan’s “leaving Him for a season.” This also suggests that it is initial Christian acceptance of the gospel that is in view here.

This admonition has its relevance to Christians in the fact of their original victory over Satan when they became children of God not having been due to their own strength, but to that of the Lord; and a reminder of this would steer them in the right direction for subsequent struggles against evil.

### **Verse 8**

“Draw near to God . . .” The exact equivalent of this expression, “Let us draw near,” as used in Hebrews 10:22ff has a marked application to conversion, faith, repentance and baptism, all three being specifically referred to. It is of special importance that Hebrews was also written to Christians and yet contains this very pronounced paragraph on the conversion of alien sinners; and there is no good reason for supposing that James did not do the same thing here.

### **DRAWING NEAR TO GOD**

Who is there among men who would not like to draw near to God? Even the privilege of drawing near to some great man, such as a president, a prince or a king excites and challenges men, and how much greater is the privilege of drawing near to the Almighty God Himself!

Only God has the right to prescribe the terms upon which men may approach Him, and these are outlined in Hebrews 10:22ff, where faith, repentance and baptism are laid out as preconditions of drawing near to God “in Christ.”

The wonderful benefits of drawing near to God are beyond all calculation:

1. It provides safety. The only true safety is in nearness to God. (Psalm 119:117)
2. It gives unspeakable joy. Joy is the keynote of the New Testament. For those who have been “have been brought near, by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13), there is joy unspeakable and full of glory.
3. It provides strength against temptation. When a great storm moves through a forest, the branches farthest from the trunks of the trees are the first to fall. If men would succeed against temptation, let them remain near the Lord, as did John, and not follow far off, as did Peter.
4. The most important blessing of all is that God “will draw near” to them who draw near to Him. God draws near to them who draw near to God. God magnifies the sacred influences that bless the souls that come to Him.

The last portion of this verse has a parallel in it, thus, “Cleanse your hearts, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” (1 Peter 1:22-23)

It is clear that Peter used “purify your hearts” in the sense of being obedient to the gospel, being born again, in short, being converted; and it would be strange indeed if James used this same expression in any other sense here.

“Cleanse your hands . . .” is parallel with “purify your hearts” and means exactly the same thing.

### **Verse 9**

This stern warning to the unregenerated is an appeal for them to consider the wretched and miserable state of the lost. Some unsaved persons may indeed laugh; but let them recognize their separation from God, and their laughter will be replaced with weeping and mourning.

The mourning mentioned both by Jesus (Matthew 5:4) and by James is that godly sorrow which produces repentance, and without which salvation is not promised. (Luke 13:3, 5)

### **Verse 10**

This is an appeal for the unconverted to forsake the human pride, which more than any other impediment restrains men from obeying the word of the Lord; like most of this passage, it also has its abiding relevance for Christians themselves.

Jesus said in Matthew 23:12, "Whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." What is this exaltation? As it relates to conversion, when one in penitence submits to the initiatory rite of Christian baptism, he is immediately "raised to walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4) Beyond this, however, there is the exaltation that shall come to all the redeemed at the last day. Having here concluded his abrupt, powerful exhortations to the unsaved, James returned to his admonishing the "brethren."

### **Verse 11**

"Speaks against the law . . ." R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 637, wrote, "James does not here use 'the law' as a reference to Mosaic Law, because he is writing to Christians, not to Jews."

The law spoken of here is the law of Jesus Christ, the law of the gospel, the law of the New Testament, the Christian law. E. C. S. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 56, wrote, "The teachings of Jesus Christ are the law James here referred to; but it should be particularly noted that such opinion does not consider the whole of Christ's teaching as 'the law.'" They restrict the law of Christ "to moral pronouncements of the Old testament as expanded by Jesus, or to "none other than" the law of love!

By such devices as these, modern theologians get rid of the great Christian ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the obligation of church

membership and attendance, and everything else except “the law of love,” rather nebulously interpreted to mean “merely being a nice guy!” Let the servant of the Lord beware of this.

The priesthood being changed, there is made a necessity, a change also of the law. (Hebrews 7:12) Inherent in this is the fact of there still being a law that men must obey, that is, the law of Christ.

Law was not done away with; it was “changed” to the law of Jesus Christ our Lord. Salvation “by grace” does not abolish law as a principle, though it did abolish salvation by “Moses’ law.” “Not under law but under grace” is not a denial that men must obey the law of Christ, but rather emphasizes the grace and liberty of Christ’s law contrasted with Judaism.

Therefore, James’ words in this verse refer to the law of Christ in its entirety, and to the specific instance of certain Christians having broken it by their speaking against and judging one another, the specific part of that great law of Christ which they had violated being Matthew 7:1ff.

### **Verse 12**

“Only one Lawgiver and Judge . . .” Jesus Christ the Holy One is the lawgiver and judge referred to here. Christ Himself made His teachings to be the “rock” upon which alone the builder could safely build. (Matthew 7:24-27). His word will judge men “at the last day.” (John 12:48) God has commissioned Jesus Christ to execute judgment.” (John 5:37) Christ is the One who will preside in the judgment of all nations. (Matthew 25:31ff) His words, “These sayings of mine,” “Whatsoever I have commanded you,” (Matthew 28:20), are the constitution and by-laws of the kingdom of God; and this student cannot accept any interpretation of this which would in any manner dissociate these verses from Jesus Christ, unto whom only has been given “all authority in heaven and upon earth.” (Matthew 28:18ff)

“Who is able to save and to destroy . . .” Jesus represented Himself as being the One who would save and destroy by His judicial, “Come you blessed,”

or “Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Matthew 25:31ff) The reason so many do not understand James, is that they do not see it as, almost totally, an extension of the teachings of Christ.

“Who are you who judge . . .?” There are certain types of judgments that Christians must make; but the kind of judging forbidden by the Lord is the uncharitable pronouncement of harsh and uncomplimentary allegations against fellow creatures. There are many reason why this is a sin. First, Christ forbids it (Matthew 7:1); also, it inevitably bears fruit in the proliferation of harsh judgments, it is negative, unhelpful and destructive; it contravenes the love principle that binds Christians together “in Christ.”

### **Verse 13**

Note: The presumption of men is a dreadful and arrogant conceit: “Tomorrow . . .” Of course, we shall be alive and in health tomorrow. No emergency will arise, no sickness lay us low, no sudden death overtakes us. Tomorrow is our apple, and we will cut in up like we please.

“Tomorrow we will go to such and such a city . . . “ The weather will be good; transportation will be available; we shall meet with no accident; no car will be wrecked, airplane fall, or train derail; we shall arrive exactly as planned.

“And spend a year there . . .” Lodging will be available to us, and at a price we can afford—no problems! No rioting shall break out; no epidemic shall occur; no war will break out; no disastrous fire will hinder; no earthquake will level the city; no flood will sweep it away. No thieves or robbers shall injure us!

“Engage in business . . .” Ah yes! Goods will be available, and of the kind, quality and price we want; financing the operation will be no impediment; there will be no shortages, no damaged freight, no ruined merchandise, no change in style or taste would hinder the trade; no city regulation, no competition, no shortage of labor—nothing will get in the way!

“And make a profit . . .” Of course, buyers for our products will be plentiful; they will have the money; they will wish to purchase our goods, at a price substantially higher than we paid; the profits will roll in!

What should be thought of such godless planning? As A. F. Harper said, “The sin of these men was not planning for the future, but in failing to consider God in their plans.”

It is not necessary to apply these verses (through 17) to the rich only. All people, regardless of wealth, social standing or any other condition, who make their life plans without respect to the will of God are the ones remonstrated.

#### **Verse 14**

The uncertainty of tomorrow was stressed by Jesus who said of the grass of the field, “Which is alive today and tomorrow thrown into the furnace.” (Matthew 6:30)

Both Peter and James discerned the spiritual overtones of the teaching of Peter saying, “All flesh is as grass, (1 Peter 1:24) an idea certainly inherent in what James declared here. How ephemeral and uncertain is life! James following the example of Jesus in drawing illustrations from nature illuminated his teaching with the metaphor of vapor, a fog or mist. How present, real and tangible is a heavy ground fog; yet three hours later the sky may be clear for a thousand miles in all directions. That’s the way life is.

Despite the propensity of men to discourse on this subject, however nothing ever written surpasses in beauty or power the noble words of the New Testament in this passage.

#### **Verse 15**

“If the Lord wills . . .” J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 141, wrote, “This, it seems, is not an Old Testament expression.” It is found, however, a number of times in the New Testament. (Acts 18:21, 21:14, 1 Corinthians 4:19, 16:7, and in Hebrews 6:3)



A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 226, wrote, “The thing that matters is for us to have the right attitude toward God, not the chattering of a formula!” This is contrary to what James said. He laid down the law that, “You ought to say, if the Lord will!” There is not a word in that to the effect that the right attitude is all that matters; that is not all that matters, and it is highly important that Christians witness to their faith Jesus Christ and to the sovereignty of God by saying, “If the Lord will,” not in a irreverent and flippant manner, of course, but sincerely and truly.

R. V. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 104, pointed out, “The Christian failure to honor James’ commandment is not due to a horror of hypocrisy, but to an unwillingness to honor the ‘supremacy of God.’”

### **Verse 16**

“All boasting . . . “ is not evil; but “all such boasting.” There is a type of boasting “in Christ” that is helpful and necessary in the Christian pilgrimage. Hebrews 3:6 has the instruction that Christians should, “Hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.”

Paul boasted in the churches (2 Thessalonians 1:4), in Christ, and in Christians, (2 Corinthians 7:4. He commanded, “But he that boasts, let him boast in the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 10:17)

The type of boasting James had just outlined, in which men flaunted all kinds of ambitions and godless plans without any reference whatever to Almighty God, is reprehensible and sinful.

“You boast in your arrogance . . .” The conduct James described was not that of mere thoughtfulness, but that of consciously leaving God out of consideration in the making of human plans.

### **Verse 17**

W. E. Oesterley, *op. cit.*, p. 465, perceptively attributed James teaching in this verse to the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 23:23), wherein Christ laid down the

law that, “Sins of omission are as sinful as those of commission.” It is truly amazing that hardly a line of this entire epistle may be found without this same connection.

Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 1233, identified the great sin of omission as: “The failure to receive and obey the word of God.” Phillips’ translation of this is, “Well remember that if a man knows what is right and fails to do it, his failure is a real sin. E. C. S. Gibson, *op. cit.*, p. 57, saw in this, “A remarkable correspondence with the words of Paul in Romans 14:23.”

## CHAPTER 5

This chapter has a dramatic denunciation of the wealthy class who had murdered the Messiah, that is, the rich Sadducean aristocracy in Jerusalem who had slain “the Just One.” (Verse 6)

This paragraph (1-6) is parallel to those passages in the gospels which Jesus Christ pronounced against Jerusalem, and the similar pronouncement of the apostle Paul in Acts 28:25-28. Calvin as quoted by E. G. Puchard, Elliott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 375, was probably correct in failing to find here any call to repentance. It was past time for that. The hour was approaching when the wrath of God would be poured out upon Israel for their final rejection of Christ.

E. C. S. Gibson, Pulpit Commentary, Vol. 21 James, p. 67, wrote, “This paragraph might almost be a leaf torn out of the Old Testament.” Despite the original application of these verses, however, there remains an eloquent warning for all men who may be tempted to amass their wealth through selfishness and exploitation. If Christians are in this ungodly call, the warning is for them also.

R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Epistle of James, p. 644, wrote, “Merely bearing the Christian name does not exempt them.” James more than any other New Testament writer, identified the true reason why “the Righteous

One” was slain. It resulted directly from the selfish hatred of the Jewish religious hierarchy in Jerusalem, a hatred which was inspired by Jesus’ twice cleansing the temple and challenging their godless robbing of the people. It was their conduct in the temple that figured prominently in the teachings of Jesus; but in this inspired paragraph, James gives a little more extensive view of their “operations” in the wicked defrauding of farm laborers, and their selfish lives of luxury.

The next paragraph (verses 7-12) has an admonition directed to the brethren with a plea for them to be patient and wait till the Lord Himself would avenge their wrongs and execute judgment upon their oppressors. “The rich” in focus here were also the persecutors of Christians. (chapter 2:6-7)

### Verse 1

“You rich . . .” A. F. Harper, Beacon Bible Commentary, p. 238, wrote, “Neither here nor elsewhere in the New Testament are, the rich denounced simply because they are rich.” Many God-fearing souls have been wealthy, from the days of Job and Abraham till the present day, and the frequent New Testament warnings to riches must have always been understood as reference to wealth held without regard for the kingdom of God.

“Weep and howl for your miseries . . .” William Barclay, The Letters of James and Peter, p. 115, wrote, “The verb *ololuzein* (used here) means more than to wail; it means to shriek . . . it depicts the frantic terror of those upon whom the judgment of God has come.” This supports the interpretation that what we are dealing with here is a judgment of God upon a self-hardened and rebellious people.

“Which are coming upon you . . .” God’s judgments are announced in the present tense, indicating that such prophecies are as certain to be fulfilled as if fulfillment had already come to pass.

## Verse 2

All the fabulous wealth of the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem would prove utterly worthless to prevent the “miseries” coming upon them. Their great stores of oil and wheat would be turned into famine by the siege against the city. Their fine garments would prove as worthless as a moth-eaten rag.

The best commentary upon what befell Jerusalem is found in the works of Josephus, who related in detail the unspeakable horror, disaster, slaughter, famine and total ruin, not merely of the city alone, but even of the temple and everything else.

The riches that would be “corrupted” were supplies like those of corn and oil; fine clothing was also a standard treasure of the rich. Gold and silver would be mentioned next.

## Verse 3a

“Gold . . . silver . . . rusted . . .” The precious metals themselves did not rust, of course, and James certainly knew that; but the base alloys evil men had mixed with them did rust. The gold and silver of the Sadducean enemies were in no sense “pure” but they had been mixed with fraud, deceit, oppression, falsehood and murder; and the metaphor of rusted gold and silver is eloquent. Even the most precious assets would be of no avail when the judgment fell.

“A witness against you . . .” As the blood of righteous Abel cried out unto God, just so the Sadducean wealth of Jerusalem would cry to heaven for vengeance. Long centuries of God’s forbearance and patient love, still spurned, still contemptuously rejected would at last reap their inevitable harvest.

“Will consume your flesh as fire . . .” The woes coming upon them were, in fact, caused by their inordinate love of that very wealth so avidly and fraudulently acquired; thus it was appropriate to say that the wicked riches unjustly extorted and wickedly abused would indeed eat their flesh as fire. E. G. Punchard, *op. cit.*, p. 375, declared that, “The wages of the traitor, the spoil of

the thief, and the wealth of the oppressor burn the hands that clasp them. Memories of the wrongs shiver through each guilty soul like fire.”

### **Verse 3b**

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p.1037, referred this to “The siege of Jerusalem.”

T. Carson, *A New Testament Commentary*, p. 580, wrote, “The last days were already upon them. The Christian is always in the last days. (Acts 2:17; 1 John 2:18) The reference is to the last days before the Second Advent, of which the destruction of Jerusalem was a type.”

In the destruction of Jerusalem, the wealthy Sadduceans lost all of their wealth, and more than a million were ruthlessly murdered, fulfilling perfectly the promise of Jesus that, “The king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire.” (Matthew 22:7) This was “the last days” of the Jewish commonwealth.

### **Verse 4**

It was not merely the rejection of Christ that provoked the judgment of God upon the Jewish state, although that was sufficient; but it was their gross rebellion against the very law they pretended so much to adore. Leviticus 13:13, and Deuteronomy 24:15, and countless other passages forbade the withholding of the laborer’s pay even for the space of a single day, but the evil men James denounced had withheld it altogether, defrauding them of it.

“The pay of the laborers . . .” This is an eloquent statement. It identifies the place of the offense cited as Jerusalem of Judaea, the rest of the civilized world of that period having all of the farm work done by slaves. A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p. 238, wrote, “Only in Palestine would field laborers have been hired; elsewhere in the Roman Empire the fields were worked by slaves.”

“Lord of Sabaoth . . .” The judgment about to fall upon Israel was due to their having rejected the teachings of the Lord of Sabaoth, as inculcated in the Law of

Moses; and it was most fitting that this lapse on their part should have been mentioned in connection with this prophetic announcement of their destruction. The expression means, “The Lord of Hosts,” “The God of the heavenly armies,” “God of the heavenly hosts (such as the sun, moon and stars),” “God of all the armies of angels arranged in an orderly host,” etc. It speaks of the omnipotence, glory and eternity of Almighty God. R. V. G. Tasker, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, James, p. 113, called this, “One of the most majestic of all the titles of God in the Old Testament.”

### Verse 5

“Fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter . . .” This is a reference:

- (a) to their delicate living and their pleasures, called here “nourishing to their hearts” and
- (b) to the forth coming of Jerusalem, called here “a day of slaughter,” the Old Testament expression meaning “a day of God’s judgment” (Isaiah 34:6; Ezekiel 21:15); and let it be noted that the day had already arrived. Their sins continued in a day of slaughter, that is, up till the very moment of the impending judgment.

As T. Carson, *op. cit.*, p. 580, put it, “They were like animals gorging themselves on the very day of destruction.” Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI, p. 824, said concerning, “the last days” of verse 3, and the “day of slaughter” here: “This is not to be understood as the judgment day, but as the last days of the Jewish commonwealth.”

### Verse 6

“The righteous man . . .” is an expression used of Christ in a number of New Testament references (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14), and this is clearly the meaning of it here. That James did not specify Christ by name is no problem, because New Testament writers generally were most reluctant to mention by name their

own family; and James adhered to this rule, making only enough exceptions to identify Jesus as the Christ and Savior.

The great sin of the heartless rich being thus condemned and judged was that of murdering the Messiah. “You have condemned . . .” indicates formal trial and passing sentence, details that were often absent from their unjust dealings with the poor. “You have killed . . .” This they did not generally do to the poor; but they effectively wrought the crucifixion of Christ.

“He does not resist you . . .” The true meaning of the clause then is, “You have killed the Christ, but will He not resist you?” “Do you really think you can escape judgment for such a crime as that?” Thus read, this verse is a powerful and dramatic conclusion of this terrible, yet magnificent, prophecy. The oppression of the poor, the persecution of the church, the cruel and heartless crucifixion of the Messiah—the inspired James in this sublime paragraph announced the forth coming judgment of God as about to fall upon the perpetrators of such wickedness.

This passage (1-6) deserves to rank alongside the greatest passages of the Bible for its tremendous social implications. Charles David Eldridge (source of this quotation unknown) identified the Bible as the source of all social justice in these words, “The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writers denounce the exclusive privileges of the rich, and the usurpation of the rights of the poor, and strenuously enforce their demands for righteous dealings among men. The Bible, like an unfailing arsenal, has supplied the ammunition for the age-long struggle for liberty.”

The connection with the foregoing in the following passage (7-12) is most intimate and instructive. With R. C. H. Lenski, *op. cit.*, p. 645, we deplore the blindness which has viewed these as isolated statements. “He is charged with patching heterogeneous pieces together. A redactor (!) is also mentioned.” It is simply incredible that men should not see how closely James followed the teachings of Jesus Christ, the writings of the New Testament authors, and the teachings of the Old Testament in this epistle.

The historical situation in which this epistle occurs is that of the expectancy permeating the whole church during those years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Christ had categorically predicted it in a prophecy that so inspired the church that when the city was finally destroyed, not a Christian perished in the disaster. They, having been forewarned, fled to Pella.

- (1) The first six verses are a prophecy of the certain and impending overthrow of the Sadducean overlords who were notorious oppressors of the poor and the terminal heirs of that generation which had murdered the Son of God; (2) the next six verses are concerned with the proper behavior and attitude of the Christians who were destined to witness the fulfillment of the prophecy.

### Verse 7

“Until the coming of the Lord . . .” Our Lord blended the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem with those of the coming of the end of the world; and, in all probability, not the apostles or other New Testament writers understood until long afterward that the two events would be separated by a vast distance in time. Only time would reveal that the destruction of Jerusalem, which was indeed the end of the Jewish dispensation, of the Jewish state, and of Judaistic persecution of Christianity, would be only a type of the destruction of the whole world at the Second Coming.

“Coming of the Lord,” therefore, in this place has primary reference to the destruction of Jerusalem; but in its wider reference to the Second Coming, the admonition of “patience” applies to all generations of Christians.

“Be patient, therefore . . .” “Patience” as used here, does not mean merely patience with respect to persons. E. C. S. Gibson *op. cit.*, p. 68, noted, “It includes endurance in respect of things (that is, of events).”



A. F. Harper, *op. cit.*, p.242, paraphrased the meaning as, “Patiently accept God’s delay in the timing of our Lord’s return.”

“The early and late rains . . .” The farmer who after planting his crops, does not expect a harvest at once, but patiently waits till the early and late rains have sprouted and matured the grain.

Walter W. Wessel, *Wycliffe New Testament Commentary*, p. 961, wrote, “In Palestine, the early rain in October and November came after the crop was planted, and the latter rain in April and May when they were maturing. Both were crucial for the success of the crop.”

Some have seen in this illustration an intimation that God in His harvest of the earth will also wait for the early rain (that prosperous era of Christianity before the destruction of the world prior to the final advent of Christ). Although interesting, it is precarious to make such an illustration the basis of any specific prophecy.

### **Verse 8**

The particular “coming of the Lord” mentioned by James here was indeed “at hand.” As James would declare a little later, “The Judge is standing right at the door.” (Verse 9)

### **Verse 9**

“The Judge is standing right at the door . . .” It is agreed by all that “the Judge” here is Christ, thus justifying the conclusion that “the Judge “ mentioned a moment earlier in 4:12 is also Christ.

“Do not complain . . .” The type of complaining which was likely to have existed in the churches which originally received this letter was that of complaining because so many years had passed and yet the old Sadducean hypocrites were still totally in charge in Jerusalem. During the interval between the governorships of Festus and Albinus, the wicked high priest Ananus seized the opportunity to murder James the author of this epistle.

Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, xx. 9. 1 (200), wrote, “He convened the judges and brought before them James a brother of Jesus who was called Christ. He accused him of having transgressed the law and delivered him up to be stoned.”

E. G. Punchard, *op. cit.*, p. 377 has this additional reference to it writing, “One of the mocking questions put to St. James by his enemies, as they hurried him to death was, “Which is the door of Jesus?” Failing to receive an answer they said, “Let us stone this James the Just.” So, they threw him from the pinnacle of the temple, after which he was beaten to death with a fuller’s club.”

J. R. Dummelow’s paraphrase, *op. cit.*, p. 1037, seems to be an accurate reflection of James’ admonition in this verse, “Do not let your irritation and soreness at outside oppression vent itself in impatience and grumbling towards one another.”

#### **Verse 10**

“The prophets” suggest that there were many of these whose lives were good examples of suffering and of patience; but, in the next verse, James would mention only the example of Job, perhaps singling out this one because of the significant time element involved in his example, exactly the crucial factor in the problem of the brethren addressed by James.

#### **Verse 11**

“We count those blessed who endured . . .” The true meaning of “patience” in this section is inherent in this. In the sense of stoicism, Job would hardly classify as “patient;” however, he endured despite every temptation.

“The Lord is full of compassion and is merciful . . .” E. G. Punchard, *op. cit.*, p. 378, suggested that James wrote, “In the fullness of his gratitude, coined a word for this single phrase. ‘Great-hearted’ would be close to its meaning.”

The particular purpose served by the introduction of Job as an example here is explained by James Moffatt, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, James p. 74, where he wrote, “(The point of this is that) patient endurance can

sustain itself on the conviction that hardships are not meaningless, but that God has some end or purpose in them which He will accomplish.”

The marvelous endurance of Job’s faith in God is inherently visible in his reaction to one disaster after another. When death overtook his family, he said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21)

When even his wife suggested he curse God and die, he said, “What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10)

When his philosophical friends accused him of sin, citing the calamities which had overwhelmed him as proof of it, he said, “Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.” (Job 13:15)

#### **Verse 12**

“Above all . . .” This should be understood merely in the sense of “especially.” It was a common sin of that day to punctuate ordinary conversation with all kinds of imprecations and oaths used as a device for establishing credibility. Apparently, many to whom James wrote were guilty of this, hence the emphasis upon it. J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 1037, paraphrased it, “Avoid especially the use of an oath to strengthen your assertions in ordinary conversation.” The words “above all” have the additional utility of identifying the admonition here as having been given originally by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. (Matthew 5:34, 37)

This verse is plain in that it was dealing with the demeanor and attitude of those awaiting “the coming of the Lord” in judgment against Jerusalem.

#### **Verse 13**

Here begins a series of separate admonitions making up the final section of the epistle.

“Is anyone among you suffering? . . . Let him pray . . .” This was, and is, the general rule for suffering of all kinds. In a sense, all healing is Divine. Over the main portal of the great Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan, New

York, there are engraved the words, “All healing is of God; physicians only bind up the wounds.”

“Is anyone cheerful? . . . Let him sing praises . . .” Singing, from the earliest New Testament times, was used by the church of the purpose of sanctifying times of emotion, whether joyful or sorrowful.

God’s church is a singing church. As early as 111 A. D. when Pliny wrote the Emperor Trajan that the Christians assembled very “early on a fixed day and sang by turns a hymn to Christ as God.” (Henry Bettenson, Documents of the Christian Church, p. 6)

Even today, the churches of Christ ring with the songs of praise and adoration. What a contrast this is with every other religion ever known! William Barclay, op. cit., p. 129, wrote, “In the orthodox Jewish synagogue, since the fall of Jerusalem in A. D. 70, there has been no music, for, when they worship, they remember a tragedy; but, in the Christian church, from the beginning until now, there has been the music of praise.”

The Moslem shouts from his minaret at morning, noon, and night, “To prayer! To prayer! The pagan temples for centuries resounded to the brassy cacophony of trumpets and horns. The primitives of the African interior beat their tom-toms. Only the Christian sings!

### **Verses 14-15**

James in this remarkable paragraph plainly has under consideration the charismatic gift of healing, one of the special gifts that attended the early propagation of Christianity for the purpose of confirming the word of God. As R. V. G. Tasker, op. cit., p. 130, wrote, “It is probable that the mention of oil in this passage is to be regarded as one of the accompaniments of the miraculous healing which was no infrequent occurrence in the apostolic age, and is regarded in the New Testament as a supernatural sign vindicating the truth of the Christian gospel in the early days of its proclamation.”

Supporting this view is the fact of the apostles, upon the Lord's instructions, using such a method when they were first sent out by Jesus. (Mark 6:13)

## **EXTREME UNCTION**

Any interpretation of this passage must take account of the Roman Catholic doctrine of extreme unction which is erroneously based upon it. James did not make known the doctrine mentioned. Indeed, it was never even heard of in the Catholic Church itself until centuries after the New Testament was written.

“The Douay Bible, in loco reads: In the twelfth century, Petrus Lombardus named this as the faith of the Roman sacraments; and three centuries later the Council of Trent established the Catholic sacrament as we know it today.”

Of the many contradictions in the Roman “sacrament” against the New Testament itself, the following may be noted:

- (1) The end in view in this passage is the recovery of the patient; in “extreme unction,” it is death which is imminent.
- (2) In the New Testament, it is the elders of the church who were to be called; in “extreme unction,” it is a priest.
- (3) In the New Testament, it is the bodily recovery of the patient; in “extreme unction,” it is the alleged salvation of the soul that is accomplished. “Anointing in the name of the Lord” does not mean that a so-called “sacrament” is in view; because, as R. C. H. Lenski, op. cit., 665 pointed out, “All that we do in word or deed is done in the name of the Lord.” (Colossians 3:17)

Before leaving these two verses, the sharp distinction between verses 13 and 14-15 should be marked. The rule for all ages includes prayer for the suffering (verse 13); the special rule for the miraculous healing still available when James wrote is given in the next two verses. For those who believe that miraculous cures are still being affected, the consideration should be pondered that such “cures” carry no universal conviction, being neither like the truly

miraculous cures of the New Testament, nor in any manner serving to confirm the word of the Lord. Those “performing” the cures are also different.

Instead of having humble servants of God who never took money for their miracles, the self-glorified “faith-healers” of today have made themselves fantastically rich; and far from being infallible, as were the apostles, in the performance of their wonders, the modern miracle workers fail more often than they succeed, and countless thousands have sought them in vain. Such considerations as these should give pause to any who might suppose that the power James mentioned in these verses is anywhere on earth available to men today.

### **Verse 16**

“Confess your sins to one another . . .” There is no class of men set up in God’s church to hear confessions. No so-called “priest” ever had the right to hear confessions of the penitent, unless he himself, in turn, would likewise confess his own sins to the confessor. As J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 173, wrote, “The Roman Catholic doctrine of auricular confession has no support from this passage. “Elders” does not refer to a priestly set of workers. And not even the elders ever had the power to absolve a sinner or set terms and conditions of his forgiveness.”

The purging effect of confession, as mutually engaged among Christians, is helpful and beneficial, the purpose of such confessions being that of enlisting the mutual prayers of Christians for each other. There is not in view here any requirement for Christians to confess their sins “to the whole church,” a practice which is not only not in view here, but which, under certain circumstances, can have a positively detrimental effect. The holy church itself is not a “priest” standing between the penitent Christian and his forgiveness.

It is felt that the comment of Walter W. Wessel, *op. cit.*, p., 962 on this verse is appropriate, “This does not mean that Christians are to indulge in indiscriminate public, or even private confessions; and certainly the passage has nothing to do with confession to a priest.”

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much . . .” Again, as Wessel, *Ibid*, said, “There is no unanimity as to how to render this; but the meaning is clear, “a good man has great power in prayer.” This is a good place as any to stress the meaning apparent here. No matter what circumstance of suffering or illness may overtake the child of God, the avenue of prayer is open for his seeking relief from the Father Himself through Christ. It has been the happy good fortune of this writer to behold many answers to prayers in conditions and circumstances approaching, but not reaching, the miraculous itself. God answers His children’s prayers; and the power of those prayers is sealed by James’ word in this place.

It is also wrong to take James’ words here as laying down any additional condition of a Christian’s forgiveness. The apostle Peter made repentance and prayer to be the sole conditions of a sinning, penitent Christian’s forgiveness; and it is not true that James here laid down another condition.

### **Verse 17**

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours . . .” The argument is that Elijah, despite the fact of his being a prophet, was nevertheless, a fallible and sinful man like the Christians of all generations; but that, in spite of his mortality, sin and imperfections, God mightily answered his prayers, and he will do the same for us.

“Three years and six months . . .” The event in view in these words is recorded in 1 Kings 17:1 to 18:1ff, where the exact duration of the drought is nowhere mentioned.

John W. Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, p. 415, wrote, “We may reckon ‘the third year’ of the Old Testament, not as indicating the length of the drought, but a reference to the sojourn of Elijah with the widow of Zerephath.”

In other words, the drought began six months before the famine did, the Old Testament “third year” having reference to the duration of the famine, and

the New Testament “three years and six months” referring to the duration of the drought itself. Jesus Himself endorsed this calculation. (Luke 4:25)

### **Verse 18**

Significantly, the Old Testament does not specifically mention the prayers of Elijah as being the cause of the drought; but, in this particular, James illuminates the Old Testament. All miracles were wrought in answer to prayers even those of Jesus, as indicated by John 9:31, 11:41. Thus, if all the miracles of Jesus were wrought in answer to prayer, it would be very illogical to suppose that those wrought by Elijah were achieved in any manner differently.

### **Verses 19-20**

The great difficulty for some in these verses, as stated by Ronald A. Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 1235, “Is the thought of the doom of a Christian.” Of course, the source of the difficulty is not in what James said but in the Calvinistic doctrine which has no support in the New Testament, and which, in fact, is contradicted on almost every page of it, including this one. It is no denial of this that the word “convert” used here is the same one used by Peter after he denied the Lord. (Luke 22:32) That usage merely confirms the thought that if Peter himself had not been converted even though he was a true believer, he still would have suffered eternal death.

J. W. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 179, wrote, “Death here is eternal death, the second death of the Bible. Repentance will not save a soul from any other kind of death.”

“If any among you strays from the truth . . .” That a Christian can err from the truth is not merely a possibility, but a frequent occurrence. Inherent in this is also the fact, as William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 133, wrote, “Truth is something that must be done.” Failure to do it is a failure to win eternal life.

Another question that surfaces in reference to these verses is the question of whether or not the covering of “a multitude of sins” applies to the sins of the



converted, or to the sins of the one doing the converting. The primary meaning must certainly be the former; although, of course there is a sense in which those who win souls may scripturally be said to “save themselves.” Thus Paul wrote Timothy, “In doing this you shall save both yourself and them that hear you.” (1Timothy 4:16) Barclay, *Ibid*, p. 134 caught the spirit of these words, “To save another’s soul is the surest way to save one’s own soul.”

Many have commented on James’ seemingly abrupt ending to the epistle; but this is altogether appropriate. He closed on the note of every Christian’s concern for the reclamation of the backslider, indicating also the larger sphere of winning the alien lost to Christ.

R. V. G. Tasker, *op. cit.*, p. 142, aptly phrased it, “No duty laid upon Christians is more in keeping with the mind of their Lord, or more expressive of Christian love, than the duty of reclaiming the backslider.”

Here there is no signature, no farewell greeting, no formal closure of any kind, just the bold imperious words of the inspired writer, standing starkly against the mists of fleeting centuries like a massive inscription chiseled into a granite mountain. James carries its own inherent testimony of the truth and inspiration of God.