

### WRITER

It is believed by most Bible students that the writer who identifies himself in this letter as a servant of Jesus Christ (1:1) is the Lord's brother whom Paul mentions in Galatians 1:19. Throughout the New Testament there is mention of at least five different individuals who are referred to as James. (1) There is James, the son of Alphaeus, who was one of the twelve Christ-called and sent apostles (Mt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; At 1:13). (2) There is James who was also one of the twelve whose brother was Judas (not Judas Iscariot) (Lk 6:16). (3) There is the James who is mentioned in Mark 15:40 (See Mt 27:56; Jn 19:25). (4) There is James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John (Mt 10:2; Mk 3:17; Lk 6:14; At 1:13). (5) Finally, there is James who was the brother of Jesus (Mt 13:55; Mk 6:3). It is this James that many believe was the inspired author of this epistle (See Jn 7:5; At 1:14; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Co 15:7; Gl 2:9).

The apostle James was killed early in the history of the church and before this letter was written (At 12:1,2). James, the brother of Jesus, became a prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem after he overcame his initial unbelief during the ministry of Jesus (Jn 7:5; At 15:13; Gl 1:19). These historical facts, combined with the Jewish nature of the letter, leads us to believe that James, the Lord's brother, wrote this letter to disciples who were of Jewish heritage.

### DATE

It is believed that James was martyred around A.D. 63. Therefore, the book is dated by Bible students anywhere from A.D. 45 to 63. However, the nature of the content of the book concerning the Jewish problem in the church, and the statements concerning the coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel (5:7,8), indicates that the book was probably written in the early or middle 60s. In his exhortations to encourage the faithful brethren, James wrote that they be patient for the coming of the

Lord that was at hand (5:8). Since the Lord was coming in judgment on national Israel in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy of Matthew 24, then the more probable date of writing would be the early or middle 60s.

### **THEME**

In contrast to the nature of the rich among the brethren whom James sharply condemns for their hypocritical living, James contrasts the behavior of the rich with the virtues of true Christianity. There were those who had deceived themselves into believing that they could profess a form of Christianity, and yet, dismiss their responsibilities of fellowship that are inherent within the community of God. James exhorts that his readers be doers of the word (1:22). This principle is followed by James' definition of the nature of true Christianity, that is, it is reflected in one's relationship with other disciples, specifically in reference to the relationship that the rich are to have toward the less fortunate disciples (1:27).

### **PURPOSE**

The specific problem that seemed to influence the fellowship of the disciples to whom James wrote, was the separation of the rich and the poor (2:1-13; 5:1-6). The rich Sadducean Jews who were converted brought into the fellowship of the church their economic protectionist attitudes that they maintained in the economic environment of the business world. They shunned the poor in the socioeconomic world in order to protect their riches. When the rich came into the church, they brought in their secular attitudes toward the poor. They thus molded their beliefs around their arrogant attitudes and unconcern for the poor brethren. James wrote, therefore, in order to sternly rebuke the rich who would eventually pass away as the grass of the field (1:10). The poor, however, who are rich in faith, would endure the miseries that were soon to come upon the rich (5:1-8).

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

After the establishment of the church in Jerusalem, James became a prominent personality of the church in

Judea. The Jerusalem church was primarily composed of Jews who were converted from Judaism. Therefore, because of the cultural environment in which the Jerusalem church dwelt, the members were evidently intimidated into maintaining a strong Jewish culture (See comments At 21:15-25). The Jews in Judea were becoming more arrogant and militant toward the occupation of the Roman Empire by the 60s, and thus, the church in Judea was in a very precarious cultural environment. The hostility of the Jews toward Rome eventually grew to the point where Rome decided to eliminate the Jewish problem of the Empire. A military campaign was thus launched against the Jews. The military campaign continued until the eventual destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (See comments Mt 24). Therefore, when studying those New Testament documents that were written during the 60s, we must keep in mind the struggles of the Jewish brethren in the Judean area. We must keep in mind that the Judean church struggled in an environment where the tension between Rome and national Israel increased until Rome eventually took military action against the Jews.

Since most of the members of the Judean church were Jews, their unconverted friends, family and business acquaintances would certainly have exerted great pressure on them to conform to the Jewish mood of the day to rebel against the Roman occupation of Palestine. Since James was a leader of the Judean churches for several years, it would only be natural for him during the last days of national Israel to write a letter to Jewish Christians throughout the Roman Empire. In view of the impending calamity of the destruction of national Israel, his letter is directed to Jewish Christians throughout the Empire in order to focus their attention on the Lord Jesus Christ as opposed to arrogant rebellious attitudes of the rich Jews who were oppressing the poor. The letter of Hebrews dealt with the doctrinal apostasy of those Jews who were being intimidated to return to Judaism. James deals with the socioeconomic rich Jews who were marginalizing the poor.

**The Test of Faith**

(1:1-27)

**Outline:** (1) Greetings (1:1), (2) The testing of faith (1:2-4), (3) God's wisdom (1:5-8), (4) The instability of riches (1:9-11), (5) Origin and consequences of sin (1:12-15), (6) Begotten by the word (1:16-18), (7) Pure religion (1:19-27)

**Chapter 1****GREETINGS**

**1:1 James, a bondservant:** James was actually the half-brother of Jesus since Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. He identifies himself here as the *doulos* (bondservant) of God and Jesus. He is thus one who had been spiritually born into Christ through obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:3-6). **Twelve tribes:** If James wrote in view of the coming wars of Rome against the Jewish State, then we would assume that he was making a final plea to fellow Jews throughout the Roman Empire. However, many Bible students affirm that he was referring to the spiritual Israel of God, the church (See Mt 19:28). In view of the problem that prevailed in the church concerning the rich and poor, we would conclude that James' principal concern was the problem of partiality that was manifesting itself among the Jewish brethren who were scattered throughout the world (At 8:4). Nevertheless, we certainly would not assume that James had completely forgotten his Jewish heritage in his address to those who were scattered abroad. **The Dispersion:** James uses a Jewish word here (*diaspora*) that the Jews used to refer to the Jews who were scattered throughout the nations by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. At the time of writing, they would be scattered throughout the Roman Empire, since the Roman Empire encompassed the former Assyrian and Babylonian territories. This scattering of the Jews resulted from the Assyrian captivity of 722/21 B.C. and the Babylonian captivity of 586 B.C. Since the times were perilous in reference to the impending Roman suppression of Jewish insurrection, James writes to warn against arrogant Judaism as opposed to the humble servitude of the Christian life (See comments Mt 24:30). However, we would assume that since this is a letter that was written to Christian Jews, James' primary concern

is for these brethren lest they be caught up in the Jewish political fervor of the day. James calls us to recognize the spiritual Israel of God. Those who are of this Israel are those who are sons of Abraham by faith (Rm 2:28,29; 4:11,12; Gl 3:26-29). It is this Israel that is scattered among the nations (See At 8:1-4).

### THE TESTING OF FAITH

**1:2 My brethren:** This address is to fellow Christians who were of the dispersion of Jews throughout the world. **Count it all joy:** Christians rejoice in persecutions because they understand what brings the persecution (Mt 5:11,12; Ph 4:4). Their godly life in Christ brings persecution because Satan will rise up against all that God represents in this world (See comments At 14:22; 2 Tm 3:12; see Hb 2:10; 12:3,10,11; 1 Pt 1:6,7; 4:16). Christians must understand, therefore, that persecution is an occasion for joy when the persecution comes as a result of one's commitment (At 5:41). They must also understand that the many trials are an occasion for spiritual growth and development of character (1 Pt 1:6). Since God uses Satan's work against him, then persecution manifests that God is going to use Satan's work to accomplish something that is good in the life of every disciple (Rm 8:28). Christians understand the purpose for the world and its environment of trials. Because they understand that candidates for heaven must be tried in the fires of hard times in order to prepare their characters for eternal dwelling, they can thus count it with all joy when they have to endure many trials (See comments At 14:22).

**1:3 Produces patience:** One must acknowledge that the proving or testing of one's faith produces a character that is able to endure trials (See Rm 5:3-5; compare Gn 22:1). The trying of the Christian's faith is the opportunity for one's faith to be proved and strengthened. Trials are a test to determine if one's faith is genuine. Therefore, trials bring out the ability of an individual to be able to remain steadfast (See Lk 21:19).

**1:4 Perfect:** This is not a reference to living a sinless life (Rm 3:9,10,23). Our heavenly Father is perfect in the sense that He is complete (Mt 5:48). Jesus was made per-

fect (complete) because He obediently suffered in order to redeem us from our sins (Hb 2:10; 5:9). We become perfect in Christ because of the continual cleansing of our sins by the blood of Christ (Cl 1:28; see 1 Jn 1:7; Jd 24). Therefore, when one lives the Christian life, which is evidenced by persecutions and trials for Christ, then one is made perfect in Christ. **Lacking nothing:** Because of one's obedient walk of faith in Christ, he is deficient in nothing. James uses a racing term here which would indicate that the one who is perfect in Christ does not lag behind in the spiritual race (See comments Hb 12:1-3).

### GOD'S WISDOM

**1:5 Wisdom:** There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom is the skill or ability to correctly handle the knowledge of truth and facts. James says that if one lacks this wisdom he must ask of God. Therefore, God is the source of true wisdom. He generously and freely gives wisdom to those who ask (See Mt 7:7,11; Lk 11:9; Jn 14:13; compare 1 Kg 3:9; Pv 2:3-6). **Without reproach:** God does not reproach us for asking. He does not become weary of our asking (Jr 29:12; 1 Jn 5:14). **Will be given:** James' statement here affirms that God gives wisdom to those who ask of Him. God answers our prayers in the affirmative, though His answers may not come at the time we want our prayers to be answered. God's answers may not come in the manner by which we seek our prayers to be answered. Nevertheless, we must be confident that God will answer our prayers (Compare Mk 11:24; 1 Tm 2:8).

**1:6 Ask in faith:** Faith is the foundation upon which all prayer must be made. In this case, it is the condition for which our prayers are answered (Hb 11:6). **He who doubts:** Disciples must pray with the attitude that God will answer their prayers (Mk 11:24). The one who doubts in his prayers also doubts in the rest of his Christian life. He is unstable in the sense that he is not a spiritually responsible person upon whom the others can depend. Since his attitudes and actions are determined by the circumstances in which he lives, he is not a person on whom one can depend in times of crisis.

**1:7,8** The unstable man will not receive anything from the Lord because of his lack of faith. James says that he should not expect anything. In fact, the one who doubts usually does not expect an answer to his requests because he has a weak faith. **Double-minded man:** This defines the doubt about which James speaks. The word James uses here literally means a “two-souled” man. It is used only here and in 4:8 in the New Testament. This is the man who has two minds. He is trying to serve the Lord Jesus with one mind and this world with the other (Mt 6:24; see Js 4:4). Because he does not totally commit himself to the Lord, he is undependable in reference to his service to the Lord. His commitment to God is always hindered by his compromises with the world. He can never give himself fully to God simply because he has partially given himself to the world. This is the person who doubts because he is not fully committed to depending on the Lord.

### THE INSTABILITY OF RICHES

The context of verses 9-11 affirms that God does not respect persons in reference to their social or economic status (At 10:34,35; Rm 2:11). The amount of riches one possesses does not put him in a better relationship with God. In fact, in this context James argues that those who trust in riches are in greater danger of being tempted than those who are poor. The souls of the rich are in danger because they have exalted themselves in society to the point that they believe the God who created all things would have special regard for them. If one thinks that his great possessions or positions exalt him above his fellow man in relation to God, then his mind is twisted. It is twisted because he thinks that he can possibly exalt himself as a man who in some way has a closer standing with God. This was a common cultural belief among the Jews, and one that had evidently made its way into the fellowship of the disciples.

**1:9 *Humble circumstances:*** This is the financially poor disciple who is considered by the rich to be of a lower class in society. However, in Christ there is no social or economical classification that depends on either

race or finances (Gl 3:28,29). Since all men are one man in Christ, the poor can have confidence in the fact that they are equal with all disciples through the blood of Jesus. Because emphasis in Christ is on spiritual wealth, then there is no reason why the poor should feel insecure in their relationship with any brother who may be financially wealthy. The rich disciples must accept the poorer disciples as brethren. The poorer disciples must not envy the rich (Compare comments 2 Co 8:1-4; Ph 4:10-18; 3 Jn).

**1:10 *The rich:*** In the eyes of the world, the rich brother would be considered to be in a high position. However, in Christ he becomes equal with the poor. He is thus humbled in Christ to be considered on an equal basis with all those who are in Christ. For this reason, it is difficult for those who are rich, or in high social or political positions, to humble themselves at the foot of the cross. ***Will pass away:*** Since the riches of the rich are temporary and limited to this world, then when the riches pass away, the rich pass away if their trust is in riches (See Ps 37:2; Mt 5:20; Jn 14:2; 1 Co 7:31). James may have been writing these words in view of the destruction of the riches of the rich Jews in the coming destruction of the Jewish state (5:1-8).

**1:11 *Burning heat:*** Those who trusted in the riches of this world will lose the source of their trust when their riches are taken away (Compare Ps 103:15,16; Is 40:6-8; Ez 17:10; Jh 4:8; see comments Mt 6:28-30). When Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies in A.D. 70, the rich Sadducean Jews in Judea lost all their riches. Since over one million Jews were killed in the destruction, many of the rich lost their lives. When the riches of those who have their security in such pass away, then the rich pass away. ***Fade away:*** This is from the Greek word that refers to extinguishing or putting out a flame (See 4:14). James' warning here is to the rich, for it is they who will be extinguished with their riches if they do not put their security and trust in the Lord (See comments 1 Tm 6:17-19). Their riches will fade away, but those who trust in the Lord, and not in their riches, will endure past the termination of all things of this world. Therefore, Christians must trust in that which will endure into eternity.



## ORIGIN &amp; CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

**1:12** *The man who endures:* The man who endures the testing of temptation is happy because the outcome of his endurance manifests that he trusts in God, not in the things of this world (See Jn 14:1; compare Jb 5:17; Pv 3:11; Lk 6:22; Hb 10:36; Js 5:11). **Temptation:** Reference here is to the one who overcomes the trials of life (vss 2-4). When he has endured the tests of this life, then he will receive the reward for his faithfulness (See Hb 12:5-8; compare At 14:22; 1 Pt 4:12,13). It is not that his reward is a meritorious accomplishment, but a rest from his labors (See comments Rm 8:28). **Crown of life:** This is the victory crown (*stephanos*). This is the same as Paul's crown of righteousness (1 Co 9:25; 2 Tm 4:8) and Peter's crown of glory (1 Pt 5:4). Though the Christian has eternal life in this life by the grace of God (1 Jn 5:1,2), he will realize the final end of his faith by receiving eternal life in the world to come (Mt 10:22; Mk 10:30). **The Lord has promised:** It is hope of eternal life that keeps the persecuted Christian focused on Christ in order to endure the hardships of life (Ti 1:2; 1 Jn 2:25). Since God has brought about all His promises in the past, then the Christian can be assured that He will bring about all His promises in reference to the future.

**1:13** James now turns from discussing the outward trials that affect one's character to inward lusts that are manifested when one yields to temptation. **"Tempted by God":** Temptation of man does not originate from God. However, God does allow Satan to go about doing his work to tempt men (1 Pt 5:8). Since there is no darkness in God, then it is impossible for him to tempt man (1 Jn 1:5). Temptation of man to turn away from God would be contrary to the very nature of God. God is good. All that comes from Him is good, and thus, there is no evil that would proceed from God. Since God has allowed the environment of the world to exist to be the proving environment of true free-moral agents, then there must exist the presence of Satan. And there must exist the possibility of a truly free-moral individual to make a choice to yield to the temptations of Satan. If men had no opportunity to choose evil, then they would not be

true free-moral individuals. Because God allows Satan to offer an opportunity for man to sin, does not mean that God is the source of the temptation. God has simply created the best of all possible environments to exist that will prepare characters for eternal dwelling.

**1:14,15 Every man is tempted:** The origin of sin is manifested when one yields to the temptation to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life (1 Jn 2:15,16). Therefore, when one gives himself over to selfish lusts and pride, he is drawn away from what God would have him be. Sin results when uncontrolled lusts and pride come into contact with the temptation to fulfill such. **Brings forth death:** Evil desire must first be conceived within the mind of a willing and selfish spirit (Jb 15:35; Ps 7:14; Is 59:4). When one then yields to the temptation, he sins. When the onetime sin becomes a behavioral pattern of life, then the result is separation from God and spiritual death (Rm 6:23). Sin brings spiritual death because sin separates us from God (Is 59:1,2; see Rm 5:12; 6:20,21; 8:6; Ep 2:1-3).

### BEGOTTEN BY THE WORD

**1:16,17 Deceived:** This is the medium of human frailty through which Satan works to lead people into his domination. It is possible for the Christian to be deceived, and thus, fall away from the faith in order to lose his soul (See 1 Co 6:9; 15:33; Gl 6:7; Cl 2:9; Hb 3:12,13). **Every good and ... perfect gift:** The gift that the Father gives is good since He is good. His gifts are perfect in that they are complete and full (Compare 3:15; Jn 3:27,31; 19:11). **Father of lights:** God is not only the originator of the sun, moon and stars from which we perceive light (Gn 1; see Jb 38:24; 2 Co 1:3; Ep 1:7), He is also the originator of the Light that came into the world for the salvation of man (Jn 8:12). **No variation nor shadow of turning:** The eternity of God assumes that He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Though the heavenly bodies may change from the positions from which they light the world, we must never assume that God changes (Nm 23:19; Mc 3:6). The fact that He is unchangeable means that He is dependable. What He has said concerning our salvation will not be

changed because He is unchangeable.

**1:18 His own will:** It was by His grace that God manifested mercy for the salvation of man (See comments Ep 2:1-10). The cross was the work of God (Jn 1:13; 1 Co 4:15). The preaching of the gospel through which men are called was through the ministry of dedicated evangelists (Mk 16:15,16; 2 Th 2:14). Therefore, we have been born again because of the work of God on our behalf (See Jn 1:11-13; 1 Jn 3:1). **By the word of truth:** The medium through which the message of the gospel went forth into all the world was the preached word of the apostles and evangelists (See comments 1 Co 15:1-4; see 2 Co 6:7; 1 Th 2:13; 2 Tm 2:15). One is thus born again, not by obedience to the medium through which the gospel is communicated, but to the gospel itself (See comments Rm 6:3-6). However, it is only through the inspired written word of God that we know of the gospel event today whereby we have the opportunity to be obedient to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. **Firstfruits:** This metaphor is taken from the Old Testament where the harvesting of the firstfruits was a time of celebration and thanksgiving for the fruit that was to come (Lv 23:16; Dt 26:2; see Ep 1:12,13; Hb 12:23; Rv 14:4). The first cuttings of the harvest were the indication of the greater harvest to come. In this sense, the first converts in the 1st century were the "firstfruits" of the greater conversions that would come throughout the world and history.

### PURE GOSPEL LIVING

In verses 19-27 James identified the nature of the pure and undefiled faith that is pleasing to God. He defined the godly character of those whose lives would be worthy of the gospel (Ph 1:27). He now turns to a definition of faith that is expressed through one's behavior in response to the gospel.

**1:19** The key to maintaining and growing in the godly life is to control one's mouth, and the manner by which he speaks. **Swift to hear:** The one who is wise and grows in knowledge is the one who listens more than he speaks (Ec 5:1). Wisdom is manifested in how much one listens, not in how much one speaks. **Slow to speak:** Wisdom is

manifested when one considers the words he would say before he speaks (See vs 26; 3:1-18; 4:11,12; 5:9; Pv 10:19; 13:3; 14:29; 17:27; 29:20; Ec 5:2). **Slow to wrath:** Wrath is the manifestation of a spirit that is not yet brought under control by self-discipline (See Pv 14:17; 16:32; Ec 7:9; Ep 4:26).

**1:20** Uncontrolled anger leads to all sorts of sin on the part of the one who does not control his speech. Those who cannot control their speech are not suitable for dwelling in the eternal kingdom of God because they do not have the ability to peacefully dwell with others who may disagree with them (See 2 Co 12:20; Gl 5:20; Ep 4:31; Cl 3:8). **Righteousness of God:** This is the reason why the wrathful man is not a suitable candidate for heaven. His wrath is the manifestation of his pride and conceit that leads him to be disobedient to the will of God (Compare Ps 119:172; At 10:34,35; 1 Jn 2:29; 3:7). It also manifests his inability to cohabit with his fellow man in this life. If one cannot live with his brother in this life, then certainly he cannot eternally live with his brother in heaven.

**1:21 Lay aside all filthiness:** The Christian should view all sin as filthy. He should abhor the sight of sin lest he be desensitized to sin, and thus, either condone or neglect his duty to openly condemn such (See Hk 1:13; Cl 3:8; 1 Pt 2:1; 2 Pt 2:7). **The implanted word:** The will of God is implanted in the hearts of those who conduct their lives according to God's will. Therefore, the word of God does not indwell us unless we behave what we know (See comments 3 Jn 3). James' command here is that one take the initiative to accept meekly and obey God's instructions to allow the seed of the kingdom to germinate and grow in his life (Lk 8:11; see Cl 3:8,16; 1 Pt 2:1). **Save your souls:** The word of God is able to save only insofar as one obediently conforms to it (vs 18; At 13:26; Rm 1:16; 1 Co 4:15; Ep 1:13; Ti 2:11; 1 Pt 1:22,23). It is not that one meritoriously saves his soul by legally obeying a checklist of laws that has been handed to him for perfect law-keeping. One cannot be saved in such a manner simply because one cannot keep any law perfectly in order to save himself (See comments Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). The truth about which James is speaking is manifested in verse 22.

**1:22 *Be doers of the word:*** One's relationship with God must pass from an intellectual knowledge of God and His word to a behavioral obedience of the instructions of God. Being a "doer of the word" is the manifestation of one's humble acceptance of God's direction in his life because of the grace of God (Mt 7:21-28; 1 Jn 3:7). In other words, if there is no obedience, then there is no manifestation of gratitude on the part of the one who seeks to be led by God (See comments 2 Co 4:15; 1 Jn 4:19). ***Deceiving yourselves:*** The one who is deceived is the one who has led himself to believe that he can do God's will by developing his own system of obedience (See Lk 6:46-49; 11:28; 1 Jn 3:18). The lazy Christian has deceived himself into believing that God is pleased with his inactivity in reference to the will of God (2:14-20; 1 Jn 2:4). The one who has developed a system of religion by determining his own laws has deceived himself into thinking that God is pleased with his self-imposed religiosity (See comments Mk 7:1-9; Cl 2:20-22). Both the lazy Christian and the one who has imposed on himself his own religion deceive themselves into constructing a religion after their own desires. It is imperative, therefore, that we have a knowledge of the word of God in order to determine if we have deceived ourselves into obeying that which is actually not the word of God (Compare comments 2 Th 2:10-12).

**1:23,24** The one who hears the word and does not do it is the one who refuses to correct his sinful life-style. He sees his true self through the word of God, but he does not seek to change his life. Because he refuses to change his life and live according to the word of God, he willingly forgets what was revealed concerning his life.

**1:25** In contrast to the forgetful hearer, the willing believer who seeks to be directed in his life by God will seek to follow God's will (See comments Rm 3:31). ***Law of liberty:*** This is not a contradiction in terms. Law restricts and controls. However, the law of Christ sets one free (See comments Gl 5:1,2; see 1 Co 9:21; Gl 6:2). It sets one free in the sense that principles are given with freedom for implementation. Verse 27 is a principle that widows and orphans are to be cared for by the disciples of Je-

sus. However, there is freedom as to how the principle is to be carried out. The law of liberty is perfect in the sense that the willing hearer submits to the direction of the principles of God's will. Because he is motivated by gratitude for the grace of God, he seeks to do the will of God (2:12; 2 Co 4:15; see comments Rm 3:13). **Continues:** James' emphasis here is that one must walk in the light (1 Jn 1:7-9). The Christian life is a way of life. It is not a way of life that is legally directed by precepts of law, but by principles of law wherein God has given freedom for obedience. Law restricts one's obedience, whereas grace sets one free to grow beyond the requirements of law. Law confines. Grace compels (See comments Gl 5:1). Happy is the man who discovers the nature of the law of Christ in responding to the grace of God (Jn 13:17). There are no limits to what grace will lead one to do in carrying out the law of Christ (See comments 1 Co 15:10).

**1:26 Seems to be religious:** One can create a religion that conforms to his behavioral pattern of life. There were those who believed they could be religious while maintaining an unbridled tongue. A host of other illustrations could be listed. James' point is that religion cannot be determined by the desires of men. If one would simply claim to be religious, then certainly his faith must be defined by looking into the word of God, and subsequently, guiding his life by what he discovers. If men seek to please God, then they do not have the option of inventing some religion (See comments Mk 7:1-9; Cl 2:20-22). If anyone seeks to please God, then his life must be directed by the word of God. **Useless:** Any religion that is created after either the selfish lusts of man or traditions of the fathers is a worthless religion in reference to being pleasing to God (See comments Mt 7:21,22).

**1:27 Pure and undefiled:** James uses the word "religion" as a sarcasm in reference to those who pretended to live by the gospel. At least the person who claims to be religious is benevolent toward others (Mt 25:34-36). **Take care of:** If religious people take care of orphans and widows, then certainly those who live by the gospel should do the same (See Is 1:7,16; Mt 25:36). **Keep oneself:** James places the responsibility of maintaining the pure

and undefiled faith on the shoulders of each individual disciple (Rm 12:2; 1 Jn 5:18; Jd 21; see 2 Co 7:1; 1 Tm 5:22; 1 Pt 1:15,16). **Unspotted from the world:** The one who seeks to allow the gospel to direct his life must, to the best of his ability, keep himself from the things of the world (4:4; Rm 12:1,2; 1 Jn 2:15; 5:18). Though one cannot live a sinless life, if he assumes to live by faith he should at least seek to live in response to the gospel (See Rm 3:9-12,23).

### The Nature of Faith

(2:1 - 3:12)

**Outline:** (1) Faith and impartiality (2:1-4), (2) Honor of the poor (2:5-7), (3) Love without hypocrisy (2:8-13), (4) Manifestation of faith (2:14-26), (5) Control of the tongue (3:1-12)

## Chapter 2

### FAITH & IMPARTIALITY

**2:1** James here discusses another topic that affects the relationships of the disciples. He calls fellow Christians not to practice partiality in reference to rich and poor disciples. Though there are economic and class separations among people in the world, such should not influence the fellowship of Christians. **The faith:** One must not pretend to be a Christian while at the same time manifest a spirit of respecting persons because of financial advantage. The "faith" here would refer to the whole of fundamental teaching in reference to what one would know and behave in order to be a Christian (Jd 3,20). Such faith would certainly include belief in Jesus as the Lord of all things. However, specific reference would be to the belief and behavior of one in reference to the revelation of the mystery of the gospel. **Glorious Lord:** A literal translation of this text would be "Lord Jesus Christ of glory." Jesus was glorified when resurrected from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father (Ep 1:20). At the time of His ascension, there was given to Him dominion, glory and kingdom reign over all things (Dn 7:13,14; Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-23). He is thus the Lord Jesus Christ in glory (At 7:2; 1 Co 2:8). **Respect of persons:** In this context, reference is to showing favoritism to those who are wealthy, and thus, considered by society to be of high social standing. God does not show respect

of persons in reference to what one may materially possess (Lv 19:15; Dt 1:17; Mt 22:16; At 10:34,35; Rm 2:11; Ep 6:9; Cl 3:25; Jd 16). Therefore, if anyone would seek to live a godly life, he must emulate in his life the character of God. Christians must not show respect of persons to those who are financially wealthy.

**2:2** These verses are questions that James asked his brethren to answer in reference to how they treated the rich and poor. They were practicing respect of persons, and thus, he asks them to judge themselves concerning their behavior during their assemblies. **Assembly:** The Greek word here is the word for synagogue. We do not have to assume that James is here addressing a Sunday assembly of Christians in the synagogue. He is writing to Jews of the dispersion (1:1). Though disciples sometimes met in the synagogues (see At 18:26), this was not a common place of meeting. The reason is that there were not synagogues in all the cities where there were Christians. Christians were often banned from the synagogues when they accepted Jesus as the Messiah and Savior. The homes of the Christians were the common meeting places (Rm 16:5; 1 Co 16:9). Some Christians took the opportunity to meet with the Jews in the synagogues in order to have an opportunity to teach (See At 17:1,2; 18:24-28). **Gold ring:** These ornaments were worn by the rich in order to manifest social position in society. **Fine clothing:** Bright and colorful clothing was also worn by those of high social status. The rings and clothing were indications of one's social status, and thus, were meant to set one apart from others of lower financial status. **A poor man:** In contrast to the fine clothing and ornaments of those who manifested an air of high social status, the poor brother came with only that which he could afford. Because his clothes were "filthy," according to the rich, he was judged to be socially of a lower class. When disciples dress in unique clothing in order to attend assemblies, invariably the clothing becomes an identity of either their wealth, social status, or simply pride in reference to their presentation before others.

**2:3** James is attacking their culture in these verses, which culture was manifested in their synagogue assem-



blies. In their culture, the fine clothing and gold rings indicated high social status. They were bringing these attitudes into their relationships with other disciples. By doing such, they were violating a fundamental principle of the gospel. That principle is that through the gospel all those who have obeyed the gospel are created as one man in Christ (Gl 3:26-29). **A good place:** The rich and arrogant were seated in the assembly in a prominent place of honor. The poor were rudely told to sit in a less conspicuous place. Disciples often fall victim to this sinful behavioral practice because of our worldly desires to conform to the norms of society. In our efforts to be socially acceptable in the societies in which we live, we often take on the nature and behavior of societies that exalt the rich and famous. In our efforts to attract the rich and famous, we seek to conform to their life-style. In doing such, the poor are dishonored (1:9,10). In dishonoring the poor, we sin against God.

**2:4 Judges with evil thoughts:** The answer to the question that James asks is that they had become respecters of persons. They had become prejudicial judges with corrupt motives and hearts. Every time someone entered the assembly, they made themselves judges of where such a person should be seated according to either economic or social status. By doing such, they became judges with evil thoughts.

### HONOR OF THE POOR

**2:5 Chosen the poor:** The poor do not often have the problem of stumbling over their pride when they come to the Lord. Because of their humble position that is often assigned to them in society, they are of a nature that lends itself to submission to the Lord (Jb 34:19; Lk 6:20; Jn 7:48; 1 Co 1:26-30; 1 Pt 5:5,6). The rich, however, are often in positions in society wherein it is difficult for them to submit to the carpenter from Galilee. It is often difficult for the rich, who are considered to be in high positions in society, to consider themselves equal with the poor. **Rich in faith:** Whether rich or poor, this is what is important (Lk 12:21; 1 Tm 6:18; Rv 2:9). Because of their position in society, the poor focus more on faith in God who will

eventually deliver them from the miseries of this world. Their trust is not in the things of this world. Their minds are focused on that which is above this world (Cl 3:1-3). **Heirs of the kingdom:** Because the poor have submitted themselves to King Jesus in His present kingdom reign over all things, they will inherit the eternal kingdom that is yet in the future (See Mt 19:29; Lk 12:21; Cl 3:24; Hb 9:15). **Promised:** The poor cherish the promise of the kingdom to come for they know that in it riches will mean nothing. In heaven riches will not have a part in separating people from one another (See Mk 10:30; Ti 1:2; 1 Jn 2:25). **Love Him:** Love is manifested in this life through obedience to the commandments of God (Jn 14:15; 15:14; 1 Jn 2:4,5; 5:3).

**2:6,7 Despised the poor:** They had brought disgrace upon the poor brethren by exalting the rich (See Pv 14:21; 1 Co 11:22). **Rich oppress you:** The answer to James' question is affirmative. The rich were oppressing the poor by lording over them. **Into courts:** Reference here could be to the tribunals of the synagogues where the rich Jewish brethren would seek to deprive the poor of that which they could not pay (Compare Is 3:15; Am 4:1; At 9:1; 13:50; 16:19). **Blaspheme:** The rich were speaking evil against the name of Jesus (Compare At 11:26; 1 Pt 4:16). The very conduct of their lives was blasphemous against the humble and meek nature of Jesus.

### LOVE WITHOUT HYPOCRISY

**2:8 Love your neighbor:** This is the principle upon which human relationships are established (See comments Mt 22:35-40; Gl 5:14,22,23). One does well if he manifests loving concern for his neighbor as he does for himself (Compare Jn 13:34,35; see Lv 19:18; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27). Therefore, in reference to members distributing and receiving the necessities of life, this principle would be the foundation upon which relationships are maintained. One responds to the needs of his neighbor when he loves his neighbor as himself.

**2:9 Favoritism:** Showing respect of persons works against the principle of loving one's neighbor as himself. The sin is manifested in being partial to one person over

another, and yet, claiming to be a disciple of Christ. If one seeks to choose who he will respect while choosing to ignore another, he is guilty of hypocrisy. The unconditional love by which Jesus said His disciples will be known does not manifest partiality (See comments Jn 13:34,35). Manifesting partiality, therefore, violates the fundamental teaching of Jesus that we unconditionally love one another as He has loved us. The Christian is identified by doing good to all men (Gl 6:10).

**2:10 Guilty of all:** James' judgment here is against those who claimed to be legally correct in reference to law, but in truth, had violated the principle of law on the point of manifesting respect of persons. Therefore, the law condemned them because of their unloving partiality. One sin makes a sinner. One unforgiven sin is sufficient to bring spiritual death as a result of separation from God (Is 59:1,2; see comments Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16; 3:10). If one feels confident in keeping the whole law, and yet shows partiality, the whole law condemns him to be a sinner.

**2:11** The legalistic Jew sought to establish his own system of religiosity. In establishing what he felt was either right or wrong according to his own desires and interpretation of the law, he actually forsook the commandments of God in order to keep his own established religiosity (See comments Mk 7:1-9). He assumed that he was legally justified before God according to his own righteousness, where in fact he violated the law of God by showing respect of persons. **Commit murder:** James is as direct in this matter as John. *"He who does not love abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (1 Jn 3:14,15). *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"* (1 Jn 3:17).

**2:12** Christians must remain sensitive to the fact that they will give account of themselves before God (2 Co 5:10). All men must speak and work in view of the final judgment (Dn 12:2; Mt 12:36,37; Rm 14:12; Rv 20:11-15). Jesus will be the final judge (At 17:30,31). It will be by His word that the world will be judged (Jn 12:48). **Law of lib-**

**erty:** The principle of law and liberty do not work against one another in the context of the Christian's obedience to God, for without law there is no liberty. For example, the principle of law is to care for the poor, orphans and widows. The principle is in loving one's neighbor as himself. Therefore, as long as one loves his neighbor, he needs no law to feed his brother who has no job. Though there is no specific commandment to either buy or produce food to feed one's brother, the law of love is sufficient to move us into action. The law is to love. We are at liberty as to how to carry out the principle of love. We are thus under the commandment to love, though the commandment allows freedom as to how it is to be implemented in our lives with reference to our neighbor (See 1:25).

**2:13 Without mercy:** The condition for receiving mercy in judgment is to exercise mercy toward others (Jb 22:6; Mt 5:7; 6:14; 1 Jn 4:17; see comments Mt 18:21-35). In this context, mercy must be shown toward the poor (See Mt 25:41-45; 1 Jn 3:17,18). Those who do not manifest mercy toward their fellow man will receive no mercy from God.

**Mercy rejoices:** Law says that one must be condemned because of the violation of law. Since all men have violated the law of God, then all men are worthy of death (Rm 6:23). But thanks be to God for His mercy by which He has poured forth His grace (See comments Ep 2:4-10). Since God has extended great mercy toward us through His grace, then we should be moved to extend mercy toward others (2 Co 4:15). The unmerciful brother, therefore, does not understand the grace and mercy of God. He will be lost because he did not express gratitude for God's mercy on him by showing mercy toward others (See comments Mt 18:22-35). The nature of Christianity, therefore, is forgiveness. The Christian does not retaliate, but forgives. Forgiveness brings freedom from the bondage of those who would produce in us a bitter spirit of unforgiveness.

### MANIFESTATION OF FAITH

In verses 14-26 James corrects a common misunderstanding concerning faith. What he says is closely related to the problem he has just addressed concerning

those who have professed allegiance to Christ according to their own conditions. However, their behavior was contrary to the benevolent nature of Christ. James' rebuke of these religionists in the following verses is that they did not have the faith of our Lord Jesus, since the faith of Jesus was and is manifested by actions toward those who are in need (vs 1).

**2:14 What does it profit:** The answers to the two questions in this verse are in the negative. If one claims to have faith in God, and yet does not manifest such in the behavior of his life, then his faith is of no profit toward salvation. Faith without benevolent actions is self-deception on the part of the one who seeks to please God on his own conditions (See Mt 7:21-26; 15:11; 21:28-32).

**2:15,16** Again, the answer to the question of verse 14 is in the negative. John said that one cannot say he loves God if he does not care for his destitute brother (1 Jn 3:10-17; 4:7-16). James says that one cannot say that he has faith if he does not care for his destitute brother (Compare Mt 25:36; Lk 3:11). **"Depart in peace":** The emphasis is that one would wish that his destitute brother quickly depart from his presence in order that the destitute brother not be an interruption in his business. The problem with being rich is that one develops an attitude of defense around himself in order to guard himself from the pleas of others who might be seeking his possessions. When a rich person becomes a Christian, he often brings into the fellowship of the disciples the defensive mentality that he had in the world. It is thus difficult for the rich disciple to bring down his standard of living by breaking down his materialistic defenses against those who would need his help. In the context of James' discussions on this matter, there were evidently some rich Sadducean Jews who were converted who brought their attitudes of financial separateness into the fellowship of the disciples. By manifesting their lack of concern for the destitute brethren, James is challenging the sincerity of their faith. In fact, James says that they do not have the faith of Jesus if they persist in their financial defenses against the poor that they maintained while living in the world. **Needful to the body:** James identifies

the destitute brother as the one who is in need of food and clothing. He is not talking about the one who will not work. The brother who can work, but will not work, is not to be fed (See comments 2 Th 3:6-15). The church has no obligation to feed those who refuse to work with their own hands in order to support themselves (See At 20:34,35). The one who will not work in order to provide for himself is selfish because he is not working in order to help others (At 20:35). But such is not the case with the destitute brother of this context. James has not explained the reason for his destitution. The fact is that he is destitute and needs the help of brethren who have the means by which to deliver him from his destitution.

**2:17,18 Works:** The works listed in this context do not refer specifically to keeping the commandments of law. For this reason, one must not confuse the works of faith that James discusses with the works of law about which Paul spoke in both Romans and Galatians. Reference here is to good deeds toward one's fellow man. Such deeds are the manifestation of one's faith. Therefore, one's faith must be manifested by his benevolent actions toward others. **My faith by my works:** True love of God cannot be seen without obedience to the commandments of God (1 Jn 5:3). True faith in God can be seen with benevolent actions toward one's fellow man (See 3:13; Gl 6:10; Cl 1:6; 1 Th 1:3; Hb 6:10).

**2:19,20 Demons also believe:** There was a greater response from the demons than these disciples who claimed to have faith. These who claimed to have faith manifested no benevolence toward their destitute brethren. At least the demons trembled because of their belief. Those who do not tremble in their belief in reference to the awesomeness of God have no better faith than the demons (See Mk 1:34; Lk 8:28; see comments Lk 8:26-28). **Faith without works is dead:** The supposed Christian who has convinced himself that he can live the Christian life without being benevolent toward destitute brethren, is vainly living in the uselessness of his own selfish religiosity. His religion is impure and defiled (1:27).

**2:21** James uses the life of two people, Abraham and Rahab, to illustrate that true faith responds both to the

will of God and to the needs of one's brother in Christ. **Abraham ... justified ... offered:** Abraham was not performing a meritorious work of law when he sought to offer Isaac (Gn 22:9-18; see comments Rm 4:1-25). Because of his faith, he was responding to the will of God. The fact that he would obey God without question was evidence of his obedient faith. Those who respond to the will of God because of faith and love are not seeking to meritoriously justify themselves before God (1 Jn 5:3). Abraham was justified because his single response in seeking to obey God to offer Isaac manifested the obedient nature of his life (Compare Mt 12:37; At 13:39). The manifestation of Abraham's justified relationship with God was manifested because of the obedient life of faith that he lived in response to the needs of his fellow man. He was not justified by the legal performance of one commandment. His obedience in offering Isaac was the manifestation of the nature of his life of faith (Compare Hb 11:8-10 with Gn 12:1-3; 15:6). In the context of James' argument against the indifferent rich Sadducean Jews, the opportunity to do good works for others must be manifested in one's obedience to the commands of God. If one is indifferent toward the needs of others, then certainly he does not have the faith that would move him to be obedient to the will of God. The principle is that if one does not love his fellow man, then he cannot say that he loves God. Our relationship with our fellow man, therefore, is the test of our relationship with God.

**2:22,23 Faith made perfect:** Faith is made complete only when it is coupled with a life of good works and obedience to God's will (See Jn 6:29; Hb 5:8,9; 11:17; compare Jn 8:31,32). Both Paul (Rm 4:1-3) and James are saying the same thing. Paul was speaking in reference to our relationship with God through works of law. James is speaking in reference to our relationship with our fellow man by responding to his needs. If our relationship with our fellow man is not correct, neither will our relationship with God be correct. Of Abraham, Moses said, "Then he believed in the Lord. And He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gn 15:6). This statement was made of Abraham before he was commanded to offer Isaac (Gn

22:9-18). Abraham was not justified because of the single act to obey God in offering Isaac. He was justified by his life of obedient faith (Rm 4:3). The manifestation of his life of faith was in his obedience to God as James here explains. His obedient faith thus manifested his justification before God. One's obedient faith, therefore, is not a meritorious system of one's efforts to earn the grace of God. Obedient faith is in response to the grace of God (See comments Rm 3:31; compare 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Therefore, if one does not obediently walk before God by faith, then he has manifested that the word of God has little effect on his heart. **Credited:** This word refers to being acknowledged, or reckoned. One is credited to be justified because of his obedient response to the will of God. One thus stands accredited before God through faith, not by meritorious keeping of law or doing good works. Obedience to law (Rm 3:31) and doing good works (Ep 2:10) are the response of one's faith in God. **Friend of God:** Because of his obedient relationship with God, Abraham manifested his friendship with God (Compare 2 Ch 20:7; Is 41:8; Jn 15:14).

**2:24,25 Not by faith only:** A confession of faith with one's mouth is not good enough (vss 18,19). It is for this reason that such pronouncements from one's own mouth cannot avail anything in reference to one's justification before God. Faith must be manifested in the demeanor of one's life. The faith James defines is not one that is spoken with words, but manifested through response (1 Jn 3:18). In the cases of both Abraham and Rahab, they responded to the will of God. **Rahab:** The answer to James' question of this verse is that Rahab acted on the basis of her faith. She was justified by obedient faith, not because of the single act of receiving the messengers of God. She was justified because of the faith that she had in God before the coming of the messengers (See Ja 2:1-24). The single act of her work in reference to the messengers was the manifestation of her life of faith in God, and thus, her justification by faith (Hb 11:31).

**2:26** At the point of death, the spirit of man leaves the body. Death is defined as a separation of body and spirit. Dead faith is defined by a separation of faith and



works. The absence of works, therefore, is an indication of a dead faith. One cannot claim to have an active faith if he does not respond to God's will in his life (See comments Mt 7:21,22). James' definition of faith is that it is not verbalized through words, but through action. For this reason, the Christian does not love in word, but in deed and truth (1 Jn 3:18).

### Chapter 3

#### CONTROL OF THE TONGUE

**3:1 Teachers ... judgment:** Teachers were those who were accepted by the Jews to be the religious leaders (Compare Mt 23:8; Rm 2:21; 1 Tm 1:7). Teachers led by what they taught and lived. Every disciple must have a knowledge of the truth in order to impart the gospel to others through word of mouth. They must teach that which they know (Hb 5:12-14). Therefore, those who would lead by their teaching carry the responsibility of being accountable for their leadership through what they say and do (See Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47). In this context, there were evidently some who wanted to be teachers, but were misleading teachers. They were misleading not only in what they said, but also in the loveless nature of their lives in reference to their brethren. For this reason, one must not assume to be a leader of the disciples if either his teaching or behavior is contrary to the life of obedient faith.

**3:2 Bridle the whole body:** No man is without sin (Rm 3:9,10,23). It is the result of being a free-moral individual that one has the choice of sinning against his Creator. James states that if one would be able to control the use of the tongue, then he would be able to control all his actions, and thus, not sin. However, all men sin by the use of their tongue, and thus, no one is able to live without sin. James' point is that no one can live without sometimes losing control of his tongue. The tongue is the hardest member of the body to control and the last thing that is to be brought under control in one's life.

**3:3-5** James uses three illustrations to show the great power of the tongue even though it is a small member of the body. Its power is manifested in the ability of men

to form words that greatly affect the hearts of others (Ps 120:2,3; Pv 12:18; 15:2; 16:27). **Horses' mouths:** Men can control and guide a large animal as a horse with a small bit in the horse's mouth. **Ships:** Large ships are controlled by a very small rudder. **Small fire:** No matter how small a fire might be, it has the potential of becoming uncontrollable, and thus destroying a large forest. Therefore, one may be able to control the behavior of his body, but he cannot avoid sin because he cannot totally control his speech.

**3:6 Fire:** The misuse of words can start small divisions among the disciples that will grow into an environment of great hostility (Ps 120:2,3; Pv 16:27; compare Lk 16:8; 18:6). Through the misuse of the tongue, the joy of the disciples is lost, and many are put in danger of falling from the fellowship of the disciples. **World of iniquity:** An uncontrollable tongue produces an environment of unrighteousness. Most sins are propagated through the misuse of the tongue. An unrighteous tongue is evidence of an unconverted life. **Defiles the whole body:** The fellowship among brethren can be destroyed by a careless word (See Mt 12:36; 15:11,18; Mk 7:23). If the tongue is not controlled in a time of conflict concerning matters of opinion and teaching, then the fellowship of Christians will be destroyed. **Course of nature:** Unholy words that come from the mouths of unrighteous men have destroyed many fellowships. Men with selfish ambitions who exercise dictatorial authority over their fellow man have destroyed the lives of many. Men with the desire to gain riches of the world have led many to deceive and manipulate governments and businesses into corrupt practices. **Set on fire by hell:** The Greek word here for hell is *gehenna*. Since *gehenna* is the final destination of Satan and his angels (Mt 25:41), James identifies hell as the source from which a wicked tongue originates. A wicked tongue works on behalf of Satan who would lead masses of people into *gehenna*.

**3:7,8** God instituted that man have dominion over the created world of animals (Gn 1:28). Though man has exercised his dominion over the animal kingdom, he has not been able to exercise control over his own tongue.

**Deadly poison:** One may be able to control his tongue for years, and yet, one uncontrollable word has the potential of damaging relationships that will never be the same again. Because there is always the potential that a harsh or unkind word can be spoken, James identifies the tongue as a restless and unstable part of man that can be poisonous among disciples and in society (Ps 140:3; Ec 10:11; Rm 1:29; 3:13; 2 Pt 2:14).

**3:9** One cannot propose to be giving praise to God while at the same time cursing those who are made after the image of God. **Likeness:** This is the image of God after which all men are spiritually made (Gn 1:26; 5:1; 9:6; 1 Co 11:7). It is not a physical image, simply because God is a spirit (Jn 4:24). We do not create God after our physical image. Doing such manifests the spirit of idolatry. The spirit of man is created after the image of God who is spirit.

**3:10-12** Praises to God and curses of men should not come forth from the same mouth. Hypocrisy is revealed in the one who speaks both blessings and cursings. James' point is that the hypocrite seeks to worship God, while at the same time, he harbors animosity toward his brother (See comments Mt 5:23-26). **Water spring:** Springs do not bring forth fresh and bitter water. Fig trees do not bear olives and grapevines do not yield figs. In the same manner, a sincere Christian does not speak blessings and cursings. As it is unnatural for trees and vines to bear that which is not common to their fruit. It is hypocritical for a Christian to speak good of God and evil of his brother in Christ at the same time (See Mt 12:33-35; compare Mt 7:15-20). James' conclusion is that a mouth that brings forth blessings and cursings is evidence of an unregenerate heart.

### The Works of Faith

(3:13 - 4:12)

**Outline:** (1) True wisdom from God (3:13-18), (2) The sin of materialism (4:1-6), (3) Call for repentance (4:7-10), (4) Do not judge (4:11-12)

### TRUE WISDOM FROM GOD

**3:13** James continues to discuss the subject of teachers (leaders) that he introduced in verse 1. Here he por-

trays the wisdom of good leaders who manifest godly conduct in their lives. The first qualification of a good teacher (leader) is that he manifests in his life that which he teaches. He must show good conduct through a submissive attitude and behavior (Mt 5:5; 11:29; 1 Pt 3:15).

**3:14** In contrast to the meek and humble life that would portray the character of a godly teacher, the hypocrisy of the ungodly person is manifested in the divisive life that he lives and is contrary to the teachings he proposes. **Envy and strife:** When one uses the church as an opportunity to carry out selfish ambitions, he will harbor envy against those with whom he competes for recognition or control (Rm 13:13; 1 Co 3:1-3). Among the disciples, leaders lead by being slaves to the needs of others (See comments Mk 10:35-45; 1 Co 16:15,16). They do not lead by invested authority, but by submission to the needs of others (See comments Jn 13:1-17). **Lie against:** The divisive conduct of those whose hearts were ungodly stood as a witness that there was no truth in their hearts. One does not have the truth unless he brings his life into conformity with the truth (See 3 Jn 3). Knowing the truth, therefore, refers to more than having a knowledge of what is right and true. Knowing the truth must be manifested in the demeanor of one's life.

**3:15 Does not descend from above:** The wisdom that is associated with selfish ambition and divisive attitudes does not originate from God (See 1 Co 14:33). This wisdom is described by James with three adjectives. **Earthly:** Divisive attitudes and actions originate from this world (Ph 3:19). One can know that he is being carnal and earthly, therefore, by manifesting in his life the attitudes that James herein describes. **Sensual:** Earthly attitudes originate from a depraved spirit. **Demonic:** These attitudes are after the nature of Satan and his demons.

**3:16 Every evil work:** The evidence of selfish ambition, jealousy and envy is strife and division. The Holy Spirit here identifies such to be evil. When selfish ambition, jealousy and envy exist among disciples, there will be confusion and vile practices carried out by those who harbor such evil attitudes in their hearts (See 1 Co 3:3; Gl 5:20). The fellowship of the disciples, therefore,

becomes the opportunity for evil attitudes to be manifested and corrected. Disciples who do not fellowship in a relational manner do not have the close fellowship that God desires that His people have with one another. It is the purpose of church to be the opportunity for every member to discover attitudes that are not conducive for eternal dwelling. The fellowship of the body, therefore, is the opportunity for each member to correct his unholiness in preparation for heaven.

**3:17** In contrast to the wisdom that is carnal and earthly, the wisdom that originates from God will manifest itself in the lives of those who are submissive to the word of God (1 Co 2:6,7). **Pure:** This is the nature of the wisdom that is manifested in the hearts of those who do not assume that others work because of evil motives (1:17; Ps 19:8; 1 Co 13:6,7). **Peaceable:** Those who manifest in their lives the wisdom from above work to maintain peace among brethren (Nm 6:24-26; Mt 5:9; Jn 14:27; Cl 3:15; 2 Th 3:16). **Gentle:** The peaceable person works with a gentle spirit in order to calm the atmosphere for discussion and not argument (Ph 4:5; 2 Tm 2:24; see comments Ti 3:9-11). **Reasonable:** Godly wisdom does not seek to enforce one's opinion on another. Therefore, a person with such wisdom is easy to be approached. He will reason in the midst of differences in order to gently bring harmony to potential discord. **Full of mercy:** Those who have characters of peace and gentleness, show mercy toward others (2:13). They are not judgmental of others. The evidence of a godly person is manifested through mercy, for we worship a merciful God. **Full of... good fruits:** The person with godly wisdom is known for doing good to others (2:14-26; Gl 6:10). No true disciple of Jesus lacks good works, for it is through good works that Christians manifest their gratitude for the grace of God (2 Co 4:15). **Without partiality:** The one who manifests godly wisdom does not make decisions on the basis of showing respect of persons (2:1-13; At 10:34,35). Regardless of one's economic status or racial origins, the Christian does not relate with others according to either economics or race (See comments Gl 3:26-29). **Without hypocrisy:** The pure in heart are sincere. They do not

allow both blessings and cursings to proceed out of their mouth (Rm 12:9; 2 Co 6:6; 1 Pt 1:22). They do not determine their relationship with others according to economic status or racial origins.

**3:18** The reward of peacemakers is the fruit of righteousness that they sow in the lives of those they affect. Peacemakers sow the character that James mentions in verse 17, and thus, they reap the goodness of others (Pv 11:18). “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God*” (Mt 5:9; see comments Gl 5:22,23).

## Chapter 4

### THE SIN OF MATERIALISM

**4:1 Wars and fights:** The “wars and fights” that were going on among the disciples manifested the carnality of those who were involved in such (See Rm 7:23; 1 Co 3:1-3; Gl 4:17-20; compare Gl 5:17; 1 Pt 2:11). As James turns to portray the carnal hearts of the materialists, he is stern by using words that clearly identify the selfish hearts of those who manifest wisdom that is earthly, sensual and demonic (Compare 2 Co 7:5; 2 Tm 2:23; Ti 3:9). He reveals the struggles that go on among those who harbor attitudes that are earthly, sensual and demonic.

**4:2 You lust ... you kill and desire ... you fight and war:** This is not a pretty picture of the state of the relationships between some disciples to whom James wrote. Those who engage themselves in disputes over senseless issues need to read these words of what the Holy Spirit thinks of strife between disciples (See comments Ti 3:9-11). Those who propagate and promote such strife will certainly pay a heavy price for disrupting the flock of God. In the context here, James portrays divisive attitudes that centered around selfish ambition and materialism. The primary conflict here is a spiritual warfare that is going on with the materially minded individual whose desire for riches is choking out the work of the seed of the kingdom (Lk 8:14; see Rm 7:23; 1 Pt 2:11). The materialist's lust for riches was manifesting itself in carnal competition of one member against another. **Kill:** This is hatred that was motivated by indifference toward the poor (1 Jn 3:15; see Mt 5:21,22). Because of

his riches, the materialist spends his money on activities and possessions that he personally enjoys. The activities and possessions are consumed upon his own lusts, and thus, he develops a selfish attitude. He develops an attitude where he thinks that others are seeking to possess his possessions. He thus constructs a mental fence around his life in order to keep others out. He deceives himself into believing that he has a right to his pleasures and possessions that he consumes upon his own lusts. It is not wrong for the rich to enjoy the bounty of their labors. However, it is wrong for the rich man to enjoy his riches to the exclusion of his destitute brother. The selfish rich shut out the poor of the world, and thus, it is difficult for them to dwell in a peaceful relationship with the poor. Their riches have changed their personalities from focusing on the needs of others to focusing on satisfying one's own pleasures (See comments Mt 19:16-30).

**4:3 Consume it on your pleasures:** This is the problem. This is the obstacle that blocks the prayers of the materialist (See Jb 27:8,9; Ps 18:41; 66:18). He asks for riches that he can consume upon his own lusts. We would assume, therefore, that the riches the materialist has did not come to him as the result of God's blessing. One deceptive means of Satan is to steal the seed of the kingdom out of the hearts of men by bringing them riches. Rich brethren who consume upon their own lusts without regard for the poor cannot give credit to God for their riches. God answers those prayers that are expressed to Him with unselfish motives (See 5:16; Ps 34:15; 145:18; Mk 11:24; Lk 18:14; Jn 14:13; 1 Jn 4:14,15; 5:14; see comments 3 Jn).

**4:4 Adulteresses:** The materialist is an adulterer in that he has wedded himself as a member of the body of Christ to that which is of this world. He has broken the covenant he made with Christ in order to give himself to the world (Ps 73:27; Is 54:5; Ez 16:32). **Friendship with the world is enmity with God:** If one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in his heart (1 Jn 2:15). Those who love activities and possessions of this world do not love the Father, for they are obsessed with the things of this world (See Mt 6:24; Jn 15:19; Rm 8:7; Gl 1:4,10; Cl 3:1-4).

One cannot love God with the love with which God seeks to be loved, and at the same time, engage himself in the pleasures of this world (See 1 Tm 6:16). This does not mean that the rich must forsake their riches, for many rich brethren have the gift of making money for the benefit of the work of the church (See comments 3 Jn). The rich are not obligated to give themselves into poverty. However, those who have been consumed with the things of the world have taken their minds off that which is to come. And that which is to come is the destruction of all that for which one has worked in this world (See comments 2 Pt 3).

**4:5 *The spirit:*** Though some translators capitalize the word “spirit” in this text, the reference here is probably to the human spirit since it is not the nature of the Holy Spirit to yearn with jealousy. What James is saying is that God did not create our spirit after His image in order to lust after that which is of this world (Nm 16:22; Ec 12:7; Zc 12:1). It is unnatural for one to live a spiritually adulterous life. God created us to seek Him, not this world (Gn 1:26). Therefore, the spirit that lusts after the things of this world in order to ignore God has degenerated to the point of allowing Satan to control his desires (Gn 6:5; see Ex 20:5; 34:14).

**4:6 *More grace:*** God's grace is extended toward those who have humbly submitted to Him (See Rm 5:20). ***Resists the proud:*** Those who are arrogant will not submit their lives to the will of God (Pv 3:34; see Jb 22:29; Ps 138:6; Mt 23:12; Lk 18:9-14). They resist submission, and thus, God resists giving His grace to them in order that they might be saved. It is the goal of the disciple of Jesus to learn to submit to one's fellow disciple (Ep 5:21).

### CALL FOR REPENTANCE

The following is James' call for repentance on the part of those who have loved this world. They must turn from their materialism and seek God. They must change their lives to be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Ph 1:27). This call for repentance, therefore, is a call for a paradigm shift in the thinking and behavior of those he has just described in the preceding verses.



**4:7** Since God will not save the arrogant, James' plea is that the first step in repentance must be to submit to the will of God (1 Pt 5:5,6). Only through the spirit of submission is God able to mold the demeanor of the obedient for eternal dwelling. **Resist the devil:** Since James states this as an imperative command, then there is within man the power to resist the temptations of the devil (See Ep 4:27; 6:10-18; 1 Pt 5:8). God has never given Satan the power to voluntarily subject people to his will. If one desires to seek God, then Satan has no power to subjectively keep one away from God. For this reason, each person will give account of himself before God (2 Co 5:10). **He will flee:** Our power to resist Satan is exemplified in the fact that we can make him flee. Since God will not allow the individual Christian to be tempted beyond that which he is able to endure, then we must assume that we have the power to make the devil flee from us (1 Co 10:12,13; see Mt 4:8). Since we have this power, then we will all stand before God in judgment and be held directly accountable for our deeds (2 Co 5:10). Our power to resist Satan makes us responsible for our own actions. However, we must keep in mind that no man has this power within himself. It is through the power of the gospel, and Christ working in us, that we are able to resist the devil (Ph 4:13). We must choose to unleash this power in our lives in order to flee from all temptations that come to us through the work of the devil.

**4:8 Draw near:** James' imperative command places the responsibility for our actions on our shoulders. He identifies the source of power to resist the devil. The individual must take the initiative to keep himself in the love of God (Compare 2 Ch 15:2; Ps 119:117; Zc 1:3; Mt 3:7; Hb 7:19; see Jd 21). **Cleanse your hands:** Those who have made their hands dirty by becoming a friend of the world, must repent. Those who have allowed their lives to be directed by the world in order to create religious behavior according to their love of the world, must repent (See Jb 17:9; Is 1:15-17; 1 Tm 2:8). **Purify your hearts:** This is the problem with the materialist. His heart is seeking the things of this world. He must become pure with the wisdom from above in order to remain in the

grace by which he is saved (3:17; see; 1 Pt 1:22; 1 Jn 3:3).

**4:9 *Be distressed and mourn:*** One will not come to repentance if he does not recognize his sinful condition (See comments Mt 5:3-12; see Lk 7:27-50; 18:13). One must recognize his spiritual poverty in order to seek the riches of God's grace (See comments Mt 5:1-16). One must realize his inability to save himself in order to understand that he needs the grace of God in order to be saved (See comments Rm 3:20; 5:1,2).

**4:10 *Humble yourself:*** It is our responsibility to take the initiative to deal with our pride. We cannot exalt ourselves before God on the basis of our works. Man's pride detours him from submitting to the will of God (Jb 22:29; Lk 14:11; 18:14; 1 Pt 5:5,6). In order to be lifted up by God, we must come to God with a humble heart (Mt 23:12). God is able to lift up the submissive. He cannot lift up those who feel that they have lifted themselves up apart from Him. Therefore, those who are proud will not submit their lives to God in order to be lifted up by Him.

### DO NOT JUDGE

**4:11 *Judges his brother:*** The person who speaks against his brother is actually making himself the judge of his brother (Mt 7:1-5; Rm 14:4). Slander is a sin of jealousy on the part of one who wishes to destroy the reputation of another (5:9; 2 Co 12:20; Ep 4:31; 1 Pt 2:1-3; 3 Jn 10). Among James' readers, some sought to bring judgment on others through slander. ***Judges the law:*** The law of liberty allowed freedom in order to carry out principles of the law (1:25; 2:8,12). If one judges as evil that which was in the area of freedom, and thus opinion, then one is judging the law to be insufficient. Those who judge their brothers in the areas of freedom, are making laws by which men are to be judged. They are binding where God has not bound, and thus, they are judging the law to be insufficient and unable to furnish the man of God unto every good work (2 Tm 3:16,17; compare Mt 16:18,19).

**4:12 *One lawgiver:*** The one who would seek to be a judge according to his own laws that he has established where God has not established law, must remember that

there is the Judge of all things before whom he must stand (Jn 12:48; Rm 14:4). It is this Lawgiver who will judge all men according to His law, not the religious laws and traditions of men (Mt 25:31-46; Jn 5:37; 12:48; At 17:30,31). **Who are you:** One has the right to judge according to the law that is given by Christ (See comments Gl 6:1). However, if one's motives are evil, then he has no right to judge. The one who would seek to judge out of evil motives, or judge in areas of freedom, has placed himself in competition with Jesus who is our only judge.

### The Living of Faith

(4:13 - 5:20)

**Outline:** (1) Depend on God (4:13-17), (2) Ungodly life-style of the rich (5:1-6), (3) Coming of the Lord (5:7-12), (4) Caring for one another (5:13-18), (5) Restoration of truth (5:19,20)

### DEPEND ON GOD

**4:13,14 What is your life:** Men often live like they will live forever (Pv 27:1). However, life is short in comparison to eternity (1:10,11; Jb 7:7; Ps 102:3; Mt 6:30; 1 Pt 1:24). Many who have died in our ancestry only two or three generations in the past are forgotten, even by great grandchildren. In this context, James attacks those, who in their zeal to consume this world's goods upon themselves, are ignoring their responsibility to serve God. Every man must eventually understand that the things of this world are passing away. Once one comprehends that this world will soon be gone in reference to his life, he will often focus on those things that are beyond life.

**4:15-17 If the Lord wills:** James' use of the word "if" assumes that one may not know how God is working in his life. Therefore, he should walk according to the direction of the word of God in his pursuit to maintain sustenance for life (See At 18:21; 21:14; 1 Co 4:19; 16:7; Hb 6:3). In every aspect of life, one should prayerfully petition God to work on his behalf (See Cl 3:17). **Your arrogance:** These materialists were self-confident because of their financial power. Because they boasted in the power of their wealth, their boasting was evil (1 Co 5:6). They were haughty with vainglory (1 Jn 2:16). They should have been, as Paul, boasting in Christ (2 Co 7:4; 10:17; 2

Th 1:4; Hb 3:6). **Knows to do good:** The law of liberty establishes the principles by which one must conduct his life. It is a principle to take care of the orphans and widows (1:27). However, there are no specific mandates as to how one must carry out this principle of law. Nevertheless, it is doing good to take care of widows and orphans. One must determine for himself how he will do the good of taking care of widows and orphans. If he does nothing, then he sins. Most Christians sin because of their lack of initiative to do that which they know should be done (See Mt 23:23; 25:42,43; Lk 12:47,48; Jn 9:41; 13:17; 15:22; 2 Pt 2:21). When one fails to do good when he has both the opportunity and time to do good, then he sins. It is for this reason that Christians must be cautious to maintain good works. *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before that we should walk in them”* (Ep 2:10). *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of the faith”* (Gl 6:10).

## Chapter 5

### UNGODLY LIFE-STYLE OF THE RICH

**5:1** In this context, James was harsh in reference to the exploitation of the poor by the rich. This same social injustice was characteristic of Israel prior to God's judgment on the nation by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. They had fallen into the same social sin at the time James wrote. Those Jews to whom James wrote could understand James' condemnation of the oppression of the rich because such existed during the years prior to their destruction by the Babylonian Empire. **You rich:** Because of the sickness of materialism that destroys the benevolence of Christians toward the poor, orphans and widows, James here pronounces a stern condemnation of those disciples who have brought their worldly thinking into the church. In 4:7-10, he called them to repent. However, if they persist in their arrogance, he explains here what is in store for them if they do not repent. We would assume that everything that James revealed in this context was in reference to the impending destruction of national Israel that was, at the time of writing,

developing in the Near East. Rome was in the process of dealing with the insurrection of the Jews, which process would eventually lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and national Israel in A.D. 70. **Miseries that are coming:** James uses the present participle of the verb here in order to express the meaning that these miseries were in the process of coming. In view of the “coming of the Lord” in verses 7,8, and the fact that James was writing in the early or mid 60s, the miseries that would come upon them would be the coming destruction of national Israel (See comments Mt 24; see Pv 11:28; Lk 6:24). These rich Jews would lose their possessions, and possibly their lives, since they continued to thrive in the Jewish financial economics of the day. All such things were coming to a close through God’s judgment that He was bringing down on national Israel in A.D. 70.

**5:2,3** The material things in which these rich Jewish brethren trusted were rotten, moth-eaten and tarnished (Jb 13:28; Jr 17:11; Mt 6:19; Rm 2:5). Because these rich had suppressed the poor in order to acquire their riches, their riches were tarnished with the stain of selfish inconsideration. **Witness against you:** Pure gold and silver do not tarnish. Only an alloy would do such, and thus, the tarnished gold and silver were evidence that these rich people had cheated those with whom they dealt in gold and silver. The tarnishing was a witness to their dishonest and fraudulent characters. **Eat your flesh:** This figure of speech indicates that their fraudulent activities would be the basis upon which they were being judged unrighteous. **The last days:** They were in the last days of the nation of Israel (See comments Mt 22:7; 24; At 2:16,17). Their treasures that they had accumulated would be destroyed in the years following the writing of this epistle. All that they had worked to accumulate would be taken from them.

**5:4 Wages of the laborers:** The rich had not paid the laborers for their work of harvesting their crops. The rich were treating their laborers as slaves by not paying them their fair salaries (See Lv 19:13; Dt 24:15; Jb 24:10; Jr 22:13; Am 6:1; Ml 3:5). **Lord of Sabaoth:** The word “Sabaoth” in Hebrew referred to the armies of nations or hosts of heavenly armies (Rm 9:29). Jesus is now the

Lord the heavenly captain of angelic armies. He will come with all the heavenly hosts to bring judgment on the wicked (2 Th 1:7-9). He will punish the ungodly for their ungodly deeds (Jd 14,15; compare Ex 2:23; Dt 24:15; Jb 31:38). This was a coming in time in judgment on national Israel. James and his readers were living in the time of the consummation of Israel.

**5:5,6 Lived in pleasure:** The rich Jews had lived a luxurious life. They had lived off their fraudulent gains and in disregard for the poor (See Jb 21:13; Am 6:1). **Day of slaughter:** The day of slaughter was coming in A.D. 70 wherein the destruction of national Israel would end with the destruction of Jerusalem, the center of commerce for the Jews. Over one million Jews would be killed in the destruction, and the rest would be sold into captivity. Therefore, the sins of the wealthy would eventually be judged in the destruction of Jerusalem. **The just:** Jesus was the "righteous One." He was the innocent Lamb of God whom the Jews murdered at Calvary (At 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; see 1 Jn 2:1). However, the oppression of the poor was continually carried out in the lives of the rich. In this they were considered murderers (2:11; 1 Jn 3:13-17). **Does not resist you:** As Jesus who kept silent when He was led to be crucified, so the innocent poor brethren kept their silence as they were unjustly exploited by the rich. The poor brethren were in a cultural situation wherein any resistance would have been futile since the courts were on the side of or controlled by the rich (2:6). The poor had no recourse, and thus, James writes this stern condemnation of those in society or the church who would gain their riches by exploiting the poor. These harsh revelations from God through the Holy Spirit inform us that any government officials or businessmen who gain and maintain power and prosperity at the expense of impoverishing the people, will be dealt with harshly by God. In this context, God was bringing judgment upon the ungodly rich Jews within the lifetime of James' readers (See comments Jd 14,15). God will eventually bring judgment upon all those who have oppressed the poor when Jesus is revealed from heaven with His host of angelic armies (2 Th 1:7-9).

**COMING OF THE LORD**

In order to understand this context of James' message to the faithful, we must understand that God was bringing judgment upon national Israel within only a few years from the time of the writing of these words. Israel was in the last days of its existence as God's people (See comments Is 2:1-4). It was the last days of national Israel. Jesus' prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was coming to fulfillment (See comments Mt 24; see Mk 13; Lk 21). The fulfillment of the prophecy would be the loss of the riches of the Sadducean Jews.

**5:7 *The coming of the Lord:*** James encouraged the faithful to be patient. The immediate audience was to be patient for the coming of the Lord in their lifetime. James was not discussing something that would happen over two thousand years later in reference to the hardships of his immediate readers. He was talking about something that was "at hand." The faithful must be patient for this coming judgment of the Lord, as the farmer waits for the October-November rains (early) and April-May rains (latter).

**5:8 *The coming of the Lord is near:*** The phrase "coming of the Lord" is judgment language that is taken from the Old Testament (See comments Mt 24). The Lord came many times in judgment on people in the times of the Old Testament. He was coming again in judgment on national Israel in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that is recorded in Matthew 24. Since both Ezekiel and Daniel prophesied the consummation of national Israel upon the coming of the Messiah, the New Testament prophets affirmed that the end was near. James says that in reference to the lifetime of his immediate readers, the coming judgment of national Israel was at hand. Since he was writing in the early part of or mid 60s, then the coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel was only a few years away (See Ph 4:5; 1 Pt 4:7). It was truly at hand. Reference here would not be to the final coming of Jesus because the Holy Spirit would not deceive James into writing a message that would lead people to believe that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime. And since the Holy Spirit did not deceive James

into believing and writing that Jesus' final coming was "at hand" in his lifetime, then we cannot use this passage to refer to the final coming of Jesus.

**5:9 Do not complain:** In view of the coming relief that would happen from Jewish persecution and oppression by the rich, James encouraged the faithful of his readers not to murmur against one another (4:11). The reason they should not murmur against one another is that they not face condemnation for their grumbling. **At the door:** The emphasis of this statement indicates that something immediate was about to happen. Jesus was the judge and He was about to bring judgment on national Israel (See Mt 24:33; Mk 13:29). The language of the book indicates that James wrote only a few years before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. This language does not indicate that James was referring to something that would take place at least two thousand years later. The historical context in which he wrote assumes that there was great social chaos that was impending in the lives of those to whom he was writing.

**5:10,11 An example of suffering:** The prophets endured the persecutions of their fellow countrymen in order to bear witness to the truth of God (See Mt 5:12). The prophets remained faithful to their calling regardless of the persecution they had to endure in their speaking against the apostasy of national Israel in their day. In believing the prophecy of Jesus in Matthew 24, the faithful disciples were undergoing the same intimidation from their fellow Jews. The early Christians accepted Jesus as the Messiah and Savior, and thus, they accepted the prophecies that national Israel would be terminated at the coming of the Messiah. However, those Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah refused to accept the teaching that the end of national Israel was at hand. **Count them blessed:** They considered the prophets blessed because they remained faithful in the midst of great persecution and death. Today, we count the first recipients of James' epistle blessed because they endured the intimidation and persecution of those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world (Compare comments At 14:22). We must therefore, remain faithful in the midst



of persecution in order that generations after us count us faithful, and thus, gain encouragement because of our belief that the end of all things will come. **The patience of Job:** Job endured one disaster after another over a period of time. Nevertheless, he remained faithful by trusting in God to preserve him (See Jb 1:21; 2:10; 13:15). **The outcome of the Lord:** The Greek text here literally reads "the end of [the] Lord." The end result of one's trust in the Lord is that the Lord will deliver. The hope of the righteous is that they will be delivered from the persecution of this world. Their deliverance also means the condemnation of the wicked (Compare Jb 42:10). Therefore, the Christian can better endure the hardships of this life by understanding that God will eventually deliver him from all hardships of this world (See Nm 14:18; Ps 94:12; Rm 8:28).

**5:12** In view of the imminent coming of the Lord in judgment on national Israel, faithful brethren must maintain their Christian integrity. **Do not swear:** Emphasis here is that they not make oaths as a promissory statement to fulfill a commitment. Making casual oaths was common in normal Jewish conversation in order to establish integrity or credibility. James is saying that the integrity and credibility of the Christian should be based on the behavior of one's life, not on casual statements continually made in conversation (Mt 5:33-37). The statements of Christians should be considered true and correct without the necessity of making oaths in order to reinforce what they say. A Christian should be good for his word.

### CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

**5:13 Let him pray:** This was not a request made by James to stimulate wishful thinking. The rule is that God answers prayer. Since the Holy Spirit directs prayer by the word of God, then certainly He can carry out the answer to the prayers of those who seek deliverance from suffering. Therefore, in times of suffering the first thing Christians must do is pray for deliverance (2 Ch 33:12; Ps 34:4; 50:14,15; Mt 7:7). **Let him sing:** The natural response of a cheerful heart is to sing (See Rm 15:9; 1 Co 14:15).

God expects joyous melody to come forth from the heart through the vocal instrument of those who want to give Him praise for His work in their lives. The joy of an individual can be expressed in various ways. However, God wants His people to be known for expressing their joy through singing. “*Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*” (Ep 5:19). “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Cl 3:16). The relational nature of singing is that it is inclusive, for everyone can participate. Singing originates from the hearts of those who join together in songs of praise and mutual encouragement. Instrumental music is an outside music that originates from outside of the heart, but vocal music originates from within the heart of man. When those who participate in vocal music admonish one another, they connect with one another’s melody that is within each worshiper’s heart. Singing together, therefore, is a God-ordained means by which disciples of Jesus are bonded together in their mutual praise of God.

**5:14,15 Call for the elders:** The natural desire of those who are physically sick is to seek healing. James here instructs that the shepherds (elders) be called in order to pray over the one who is sick (See 1 Tm 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9). The anointing of oil in such cases was only symbolic of their addressing the physical needs of the one over whom they prayed (1 Co 12:9; see Mk 6:13; 16:18). There was no healing power in the oil. It was simply a customary symbolic gesture that was used in Jewish culture. **Prayer of faith:** Faith was the condition upon which the sick would be raised up. If it is the Lord’s will (1 Jn 5:14), the individual would be healed. If there were any sins involved in the sickness of the individual, then God would forgive sin upon the basis of a repentant heart (1 Jn 1:7-9). God restores to health in a non-miraculous manner those over whom prayer is made. Though the restoration to health of the individual over whom prayer has been made is a work of God, the restoration to health is not a miracle of confirmation. This context is not discussing confirming

miracles, for those in this context who are restored to health are the believers, not the unbelievers. The believers already believe, and thus do not need a confirming miracle to validate the messenger and his message, or their faith (See comments Mk 16:15-20).

**5:16 Confess:** This often neglected command of the Holy Spirit is a practice in Christian fellowship that brings healing in relationships. Only when Christians are willing to confess their wrongs to one another will there be true relationships among those whom God seeks to bring together in Christ (Nm 11:2; compare Mt 5:23,24; 6:12-15). The purpose for the confession of trespasses to one another is to bring individuals together in prayer for one another. If there is no confession of our trespasses against one another, then there will be no prayer for one another. The relationships that God intended should exist among the disciples cannot exist in an environment where brethren are too proud or distant that they cannot confess their sins to one another. When Christians are confident in the prayers of one another, they will ask for prayer in areas where they struggle. Christians should have such a close relationship with one another that it is natural for them to seek one another's prayers. **The prayer of a righteous man:** Fervent prayer is the result of a righteous person. Righteous people pray fervently (See Jn 9:31; 1 Jn 2:29; 3:7,22; 5:14,15). "*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, salutes you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers so that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God*" (Cl 4:12). **Accomplishes much:** All prayer requests may not be answered by God. However, prayer is answered on the basis of righteous living. We must assume, therefore, that God answers our prayers in the affirmative, though our prayers may not be answered when we want them answered or in the manner we request that they be answered. The fact that God does answer prayer is evidence that He works in our lives. We may not understand the manner by which He works, but we can be assured by these statements of James that He does work (See Rm 8:28). Therefore, because one does not perceive the answer to his prayer should not be a reason for assuming that God has not an-

swered one's prayer. When the disciple of Jesus prays, therefore, he should be perceptive as to how God would answer his prayer. Many times, we cannot perceive the answer. But this is the prayer of faith. We pray, believing that God will or has answered our prayers. *"Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them"* (Mk 11:24).

**5:17,18 *Elijah ... prayed earnestly:*** Elijah was no different than any other man. Though he was a prophet, he was an ordinary man with faith in God as any righteous Christian. Elijah did not just make a casual request to God that it not rain (1 Kg 17:1 – 18:45). Because he was a prophet of God for a special mission, he prayed earnestly that Israel be restored to God. The passion of his ministry was manifested in the faith of his requests to God. The Greek verb "prayed" is aorist in tense. The emphasis of the verb is that Elijah made one fervent prayer that it not rain. The result of that one fervent prayer was that God stopped the rain for three and a half years. He did not have to make any repetitious requests to God in reference to the cessation of the rain. He prayed only once, and the rain stopped. ***Prayed again:*** The verb here is also aorist tense. In other words, a second prayer was made by Elijah three and a half years after the first prayer in reference to the rain. This was a prayer that restored the rain. As a result, the rains came. One prayer stopped the rain. Three and a half years later, a second prayer started the rain again. The power of prayer is not in the number of prayers that are made for a particular request. The power is not in repetitious phrases or words in prayer. The power of prayer is based on the righteous living of the individual who makes the prayer in faith (See comments Cl 4:12). The righteous demeanor of our lives, therefore, is the foundation upon which prayers are answered. This is true because God always works on behalf of His obedient children.

### RESTORATION TO TRUTH

**5:19,20** The exhortation of James in these two verses assumes that there is a truth from which one can stray. It is a truth that man can know, and thus recognize when

he has strayed from it. God revealed all truth to His people through the apostles (Jn 16:13). The apostles were given the truth, which truth they delivered to the saints. There is, therefore, a foundation of truth upon which one must remain faithful. This truth is not abstract, neither is it determined by the emotions and traditions of men. It is truth that can be known, and thus believed. God's word is truth, and the foundation upon which we base our faith (Rm 10:17). If one strays from the truth of God's word, he has strayed from God. One cannot affirm to be a child of God when he has based his faith on the traditions of men or his own subjective emotionalism. The children of God are known by their desire to listen to the truth of God, and thus base their faith on God's word. ***If any of you strays from the truth:*** The teaching that once one is saved, he cannot fall from the grace of God, is erroneous. This one statement in Scripture proves the fallacy of such thinking. It is possible for a Christian to stray from the flock, and thus fall from the grace of God (Gl 5:3,4; Hb 6:4-6; 2 Pt 2:20-22). And since one can stray from the truth, then he can stray from his salvation. When one is saved by the grace of God, he can endanger his salvation through disobedience. Therefore, Christians must make their calling and election sure by remaining close to Jesus and to one another in the truth (See 2 Pt 1:10,11). ***One brings him back:*** Christians have a responsibility to encourage one another to remain faithful (See comments Gl 6:1; see Mt 18:15; 1 Tm 4:16). If one does stray from the faith, the faithful have the responsibility of restoring the unfaithful. "*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted*" (Gl 6:1). ***Save a soul from death:*** When Peter denied the Lord at the time of the trials of Jesus, he fell away. However, he repented and returned to the Lord. As the brother here who has fallen away is converted again to the truth, Peter was also converted to the right way after his fall (Lk 22:32). The brother who is brought back to the truth has been delivered from his state of being lost. One can thus be alive in Christ, but if he returns to a life of sin, he becomes dead in sin. "*But if we walk in the light as He is in*

the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7). **Multitude of sins:** Sins are cleansed upon the condition that the sinning brother repents and returns to the obedient life (Ps 32:1,2; Rm 4:6-8; 1 Jn 1:7-9; compare Rm 11:14; 1 Pt 4:8). One can receive forgiveness of any sin for which he repents. However, if one persists in any sin as a way of life, there is no forgiveness (See comments Hb 10:26,27). There is no forgiveness unless he repents from the life of sin and returns to obedience to the will of God. God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should repent. *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. But He is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pt 3:9). It is for this reason, that God always stands ready to forgive those who would return to Him. James' final plea is to those who had fallen away from the truth because they may have been deceived into returning to the Judaism from which they were delivered by their obedience to the gospel. As the Hebrew writer pleaded that Jews not return to Judaism, James pleads that those who did should return to the truth (See comments intro. to Hb).

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson  
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## ABREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pi**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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