

# *The Epistle of James*

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**(1996 Study with an Excerpt from a 1982 Study)**

The following notes on the Epistle of James were compiled from a Bible study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996 plus an excerpt from a 1982 study. They should be utilized with the following understanding:

1. Each paragraph preceded by **“Comment”** or **“Q”** (an abbreviation for **“Question”**) was introduced by someone other than Bro. Frank.
2. The original study did not follow a prepared text but was extemporaneous in nature.
3. Although the transcriber tried to faithfully, with the Lord’s help, set forth the thoughts that were presented in the study, the notes are not a verbatim rendering and, therefore, should be considered in that context.
4. Finally, Bro. Frank did not review the notes for possible errors that may have inadvertently entered the text.

With this disclaimer in mind, may the notes be a blessing as a useful study guide.

# GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

(Study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1996)

**James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.**

James is a general epistle, the first of seven general or catholic epistles that were not addressed to any particular group or ecclesia: James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; and Jude.

The author was James, but which James? Only two would be viable: James of Alphaeus and James of Zebedee, both of whom were apostles. The author would have to be an apostle because the Church was founded on Jesus Christ and his twelve apostles. Therefore, all of the New Testament writings had to be authored by an apostle. Peter was responsible for the Gospel of Mark, and Paul was responsible for both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. The four Gospels are both instructional and historical, telling what Jesus said and did, whereas the Book of Acts is just historical, telling primarily about the ministries of Peter and Paul. The epistles are instructional.

Although modern scholarship almost unanimously cites James of Alphaeus as the author of the epistle, James of Zebedee was actually the author. Ancient authorities and also some from the Middle Ages concur with this conclusion. Reasons why James of Zebedee was the author are set forth in *The Keys of Revelation*, pages 594-598. An excerpt follows:

“It appears that the message was composed under urgent circumstances and penned by some gifted amanuensis who faithfully and accurately translated the Apostle’s dictation into Greek, the international language of the day, expressing the thoughts in the spirited fashion so characteristic of James of Zebedee. The message does not have any of the usual concluding remarks, salutations, etc., but comes to an unannounced and unexpected conclusion. This abrupt termination suggests that it was written shortly before James Zebedee’s martyrdom at the hands of Herod Agrippa in A.D. 44. Thus James of Zebedee is the logical author of the Epistle of James, for James of Alphaeus was not martyred until A.D. 62—too late to account for such an abrupt ending of the letter.

“The epistle reveals the character of its author as a dynamic reasoner not given to mincing words but to forceful exhortation, exposing matters to the very core and propounding pure religion in *open and easy-to-be-understood practical terms.*”

The fact that verse 1 does not say “James, an apostle” should not be surprising, for his brother was John of Zebedee, who, in humility, did not use his name in his Gospel and epistles but kept himself in the background. A certain type of parental influence is sometimes exercised on children. For instance, John the Baptist said of Jesus, “I am not worthy to even unloose the shoelace of Messiah” (Mark 1:7 paraphrase). John’s mother, Elisabeth, manifested similar humility when Mary came to visit her. Elisabeth said the babe in her womb leaped for joy when Mary spoke. Then Elisabeth said she should have gone to greet Mary, and not vice versa, for the one in Mary’s womb was much superior. And Paul said of Timothy, “I see in you your grandmother, as well as your mother” (2 Tim. 1:5 paraphrase). Both James and John of Zebedee were self-effacing, but it was necessary for James to at least attach his first name to this epistle so that we can discern who the author was.

“James, a servant” is rendered “James, a bondservant” in some translations, the implication being that he was purchased with a price. The human race was under bondage to sin and death, and Jesus Christ, as the Redeemer, paid the debt that was owed. James went directly to

the point with no flowery language and humbly stated that he was “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The epistle was addressed “to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,” that is, to the Jewish Christians of the twelve tribes of Israel who had a foreign residence. James felt an obligation to fortify fellow Jews who had accepted Christ but who were scattered abroad. In the first century, prior to the Diaspora of AD 69-70, so many Jews were living in foreign nations that there was a synagogue in almost every major city in Asia Minor and in Rome. Jewish Christians scattered out of fear because they had accepted Christ. For example, before his conversion, Paul was so determined to expunge the “heresy” of the followers of Jesus that he even traveled to Damascus for that purpose. He was like an incendiary bomb in his efforts.

When Jewish Christians moved abroad, they went to places where other Jews had previously lived. In 606 BC, Jews were taken captive to Babylon, and in 536 BC, Cyrus issued a decree that any Jews who so desired could return to their homeland to worship their God. Only a relatively few went back, however—approximately 50,000. The majority, who did not return and were primarily of the ten tribes, were eventually dispersed and are sometimes called “the lost tribes of Israel.” Much of what Anglo-Israelites say is true, and much of what they say is not true. They trace the dispersion of Jews into various lands, even to England, and notice the names of towns, traditions from ancient times, etc. The throne of England is supposedly sitting on the stone on which Jacob rested his head.

At any rate, Christian Jews were dispersed abroad, and James was addressing those Jews. This emphasis indicates an early message; that is, the Epistle of James was written before the message went in a large degree to the Gentiles by the hand of Paul.

Notice the unusual and terse “Greeting.” “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.” James used no flowery language or decoration.

Peter, James, and John were considered ignorant by the world’s standards. It is true they were uneducated, but they were not ignorant. An examination of their epistles and John’s Gospel shows they were well above average in their reasoning. Wisdom in that sense has nothing to do with formal schooling. Important wisdom is the individual’s ability to analyze and to use discretion as to what he accepts as true or false. Of course these three apostles were begotten by the Holy Spirit, so whatever natural capabilities they had in reasoning were greatly enhanced by the Holy Spirit.

**James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;**

**James 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.**

Notice the blunt way in which James started his instruction. “Count it all joy” means to “reckon it as a blessing.” Jesus stated this principle in his Sermon on the Mount. When we are persecuted for truth or for righteousness’ sake (not for abrasiveness and stupidity on our part), we should rejoice, knowing that our reward in heaven will be great. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12). Jesus’ words made such a deep impression on James that he started his epistle abruptly with this principle.

**Comment:** Acts 5:40,41 illustrates this principle, although it is not certain James was among the apostles who were present. “And to him [Gamaliel] they [the council members] agreed: and

when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they [the apostles] departed from the presence of the council, *rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*”

For verse 2, the Revised Standard Version has, “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials.” “Temptations” in this context would be trials, testings, and provings. There are different types of testings—trials come from God, whereas temptations come from Satan. One can fail to do good, and one can fail to resist wrong. The trials of verse 2 are not necessarily lustings of the flesh. God’s method of testing and trial will be discussed in more detail when verse 13 is treated.

**Comment:** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed us to look past our trials to see their results. Paul picked up this theme in Hebrews 12:11, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Peter continued the theme in 1 Peter 1:6,7, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” The point is that we will have trials, but we should look beyond them to see what their purpose is. We can rejoice when we see that purpose.

Years ago we had many discussions with Bro. Krebs about principles. He said that while Peter spoke in his epistle about the value of trials and testings, the emphasis was on the *proof* of the trials and testings (1 Pet. 1:7). Coming through a trial of faith is an invaluable experience, but the point Bro. Krebs was making is that the *trial itself* is also invaluable. From that trial, if we are faithful, comes the proof, the reward, the fruit, but James was saying that the *very trial* we are privileged to suffer as a Christian is invaluable. James was not discussing the proof, the reward, that results from the trial; rather, he started at the very beginning. Because of what it will lead to, the *testing itself* is invaluable if we rightly receive it.

James was suggesting, too, that these Jewish Christians were already being tested. He was empathizing with those who were suffering because of their identity as followers of Christ. His advice was to reckon their current experiences as a blessing if they allowed the trials to produce the proper fruitage, such as patient endurance. It takes *faith* to believe this and to *act* on that faith by living humbly, being true to Jesus, and witnessing—and then to accept the resultant persecution. Patient endurance of persecution and trials brings spiritual “muscles,” fortitude, and strength to the inner man. Stated another way, the testing of our faith brings the fruit of patient endurance.

**Comment:** The thought of development is brought out in Romans 5:3-5, “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience [patient endurance]; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

**Reply:** This early hope of the Church was expressed by James, Peter, and Paul.

**James 1:4** But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

James boiled down the Christian experience to two cardinal factors: faith and patient endurance. Peter, on the other hand, listed eight: “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Pet. 1:5-7). James was saying that *faith* overcomes the world, that *faith* is the

victory. If the Christian *holds on* to his faith to the end of his life, he will receive a crown. “Be thou *faithful unto death*, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). Faith is the victory, but *maintain* it. Faith will work patient endurance, and patient endurance has a crystallizing and fortifying effect.

We say, “I would like to have that kind of faith.” As the woman of Samaria said, “Lord, give me to drink of the water you are speaking of so that I will have life within me and not need any more water” (John 4:15 paraphrase). Next we ask, “How do I go about getting such faith?” Verse 5 gives the answer; namely, *pray for wisdom*. Wisdom is the natural desire of one who is hungering to be faithful.

**James 1:5** If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

**James 1:6** But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

We pray a lot but sometimes have difficulty seeing the answer. At times the answer comes even before we pray, but we do not realize it until later. Here James spoke strongly about the *importance of faith*. “Let him ask in *faith*, nothing wavering.”

**Comment:** Proverbs 2:3-6 reads, “Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

**Reply:** The value of that text is to show we do not merely ask but must *exert effort*. We must search for wisdom and knowledge as one would search for silver and gold. Because they are found in nature in very minute quantities, one must dig through a lot of rubble before striking the silver lode or the gold vein. Praying for wisdom does not mean waiting for something to miraculously occur but means we are to persistently and doggedly pursue the goal of obtaining wisdom from on high. We must be hungry for wisdom in order to persistently and consistently pursue its attainment. We are all fallen creatures by nature and have leaky vessels and wandering minds. It is often difficult to maintain our focus of concentration, especially as we get older. Therefore, *faith* and asking—without doubting—are based on a persistent pursuit and a realization that the gracious Lord, who knows our desire and the sincerity of our prayer, will answer our prayers for wisdom. “Let him ask *in faith*, [*with*] *nothing wavering*” is a lot of meaning in very few words.

James was very blunt. We identify him as the fourth stone in the high priest’s breastplate because he was very practical with a no-nonsense, pragmatic type of reasoning.

James was telling us to pray for *practical* wisdom and saying that such a prayer *will be answered*—if we have the proper motive for desiring the wisdom and *if* we are obedient to what we have already received.

**Comment:** God granted such wisdom to King Solomon so that he could judge the people.

**Comment:** Many of the apostles amplified and repeated themes they heard from the Master. About faith Jesus said, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). And in Matthew 17:20, he said, “If ye have *faith* as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.”

**Reply:** Yes, but a characteristic of James is that he did not change the subject like the other apostles. They branched out, but when James had a certain subject in mind, he allowed nothing to distract and used a practical, common-sense type of reasoning. He gave basic “meat and potatoes” instruction.

**Q:** Does “ask in faith, nothing wavering” mean, as in Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace”? Does it mean that we are to pray boldly and sincerely and that we should not be wishy-washy in our requests?

**A:** Yes. Those are the cardinal points, but James will bring out some other thoughts later. For example, he will ask, “Is what you are requesting in prayer right for you as a Christian? Why are you making this petition?” However, it is always proper to ask for wisdom from God and His Word and for understanding what His will is. Our prayer requests should generally include the clause “if it be in harmony with thy will.” For instance, we may request restored health for a brother, but it may not be the Lord’s will to grant the petition. Because God knows our frailty of endurance in certain areas, we hope we will develop in an experience and then pass on to another experience. Sometimes God’s will is for one to remain in an experience until his or her dying day. Meanwhile, it is good to have sympathy for others and not just for self.

“For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” James likened *wavering* faith to wind-tossed waves of the sea. Strong winds can blow one off course, in another direction, but the primary motion of the waves is up and down. Accordingly, some brethren have highs and lows. The literal result of an angry sea is seasickness. Spiritually speaking, the Christian hopes to go resolutely on, by God’s grace, steering a straight course in spite of the winds of adversity and the slough of despondency. Some pursue the Christian course as if it is a hundred-yard dash, but we are in a marathon, a *lifelong race* toward the goal of the high calling.

During severe weather, the man at the helm in the smaller vessels of the past had to hold the wheel with all his strength, for if the vessel was blown off course, the wheel spun around and the craft turned and was difficult to get back on course without breaking the rudder. Proper spiritual steering is based on faith and the knowledge of God’s Word and will. We all need more and more of such wisdom.

**Comment:** Perhaps in the back of James’s mind while he was writing this portion of his epistle was his experience when the Twelve were in the boat on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus and the storm and angry waves were about to overwhelm them. They cried out, “Master, carest thou not that we perish?” (Mark 4:38). He replied, “O thou of little faith” (Matt. 8:26). The connection between waves and faith may have been very real to him.

**Reply:** That is why it is important to realize James of Zebedee was the author of this epistle. Although all twelve apostles were in the boat, only about five or six apostles went through all or most of the experiences during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Even to this day, severe storms are characteristic of the Sea of Galilee.

The Epistle of James furnishes the barest material that is necessary for a Christian to make his calling and election sure. Of course other factors enter in, based on the period of the Church in which a Christian lives. Sometimes dispensational truth is essential for making the high calling, but the information James provided is the basic substance needed to prevent spiritual shipwreck. James stressed the importance of some simple but fundamental truths.

**James 1:7** For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

**James 1:8** A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

Curt and abrupt, James talked no nonsense and got right to the point. He was telling us to have resoluteness of purpose, tenacity of will, persistence, and perseverance. God wants to bless us in abundance, but certain prerequisites must first be pursued.

**Comment:** Mark 11:24 reads, “Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

**Reply:** Yes, James drew from the Gospels. An interesting talk or study would be to show where Paul, Peter, and John differed from James. They branched out and introduced some new thoughts, whereas James kept emphasizing what Christ had said and done, yet he mentioned the name of Jesus only twice in his entire epistle (James 1:1; 2:1). Had James not mentioned Jesus and not given his own name, we would not know who wrote the epistle. James gave the barest of information, but he supplied what was essential to be certain his epistle is part of the canon of Scripture.

If Christians are not to be “double minded,” then they should be single-minded. They must have a *single* eye.

### Comparison of Sermon on the Mount and Epistle of James

*The Keys of Revelation*, page 597, states that the Epistle of James “consists of a series of mini-topics that to a remarkable degree in subject matter, parallels, and tone bear semblance to the Sermon on the Mount, with which the author was obviously familiar.”

**(James 1:2)** - “My brethren, *count it all joy* when ye fall into divers *temptations* [testings or provings of your faith].”

**(Matt. 5:12)** - “*Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”

The common denominator is rejoicing in tribulation.

**(James 1:5)** - “If any of you lack wisdom, let him *ask* of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”

**(James 5:13-15)** - “Is any among you afflicted? let him *pray*.... Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them *pray* over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the *prayer* of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

**(Matt. 7:7-11)** - “*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*”

The common denominator is asking in prayer and the willingness of the Father to answer prayers in the affirmative that are in harmony with His will. Wisdom and spiritual sickness are certainly proper subjects of prayer. (Healing is needed so that spiritual sickness does not interfere with one’s worship of God.)

**(James 1:4)** - “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be *perfect* and entire, wanting



nothing.”

**(Matt. 5:48)** - “Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father which is in heaven is *perfect*.”

**(James 2:13)** - “For he shall have judgment without *mercy*, that hath shown no *mercy*; and *mercy* rejoiceth against judgment.”

**(Matt. 5:7)** - “Blessed are the *merciful*: for they shall obtain *mercy*.”

**(Matt. 6:14,15)** - “For if ye *forgive* men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also *forgive* you: But if ye *forgive* not men their trespasses, neither will your Father *forgive* your trespasses.”

**(James 2:5)** - “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the *poor of this world rich in faith*, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”

**(Matt. 5:3)** - “Blessed are the *poor in spirit*: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

These comparisons did not just happen. The similarities are intentional, for the Sermon on the Mount left a deep impression on James of Zebedee.

**(James 4:4)** - “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the *friendship of the world is enmity with God*? whosoever therefore will be a *friend of the world is the enemy of God*.”

**(Matt. 6:24)** - “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and *mammon*.”

**(James 4:11)** - “Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and *judgeth* his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and *judgeth* the law: but if thou *judge* the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a *judge*.”

**(Matt. 7:1,2)** - “*Judge not*, that ye be not *judged*. For with what *judgment* ye *judge*, ye shall be *judged*: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

**(James 5:2)** - “Your *riches are corrupted*, and your garments are *moth-eaten*.”

**(Matt. 6:19)** - “Lay not up for yourselves *treasures upon earth*, where *moth and rust doth corrupt*, and where thieves break through and steal.”

These verses show the deterioration and the corruption of riches and the goods of this world.

A quiet consideration of the Epistle of James and the Sermon on the Mount reveals many similarities. There are also comparisons between James and Peter, and between James and Paul. For instance, James spoke of the importance of works in the sense of their being an evidence, or proof, of a living faith. He did not contradict the truth that faith justifies, but he showed that we must have a *living faith*, a *practiced faith*. James mentioned the importance of deeds in his epistle, using common-sense reasoning, whereas Paul emphasized that faith does the justifying. For example, he said that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. If James had been familiar with Paul’s reasoning on these subjects, he would have been careful to insert some type of modifying clause to show he was not contradicting Paul. However, because James died relatively early compared with the other apostles and because Paul’s ministry was among the Gentiles, there was very little communication between the two apostles. The point is that James, the first apostle to be martyred, wrote his epistle much earlier.

James spoke of a justifying faith that is practical and *can be seen* (James 2:14-26). If a person expresses that he has a lot of faith in God, his deeds should not belie his words. A faith that justifies is evident *before men*; it is manifested in deeds. On the other hand, Paul spoke of faith in the sense of being justified *with God*. This perspective of faith is not seen but is part of the secret inner life of the Christian and includes his hopes, his aspirations, and his love for and fealty to God. Thus James spoke of faith as being justified in the sight of *men*, and Paul spoke of faith as being justified in the sight of *God*.

**(James 2:17)** - “Even so faith, if it hath not *works*, is dead, being alone.”

**(James 4:17)** - “Therefore to him that knoweth to *do* good, and *doeth* it not, to him it is sin.”

**(Matt. 7:21-23)** - “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

**(James 1:26)** - “If any man among you seem to be religious, and *bridleth not his tongue*, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”

**(Matt. 5:22)** - “But I say unto you, That whosoever is *angry* with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall *say* to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall *say*, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire [eternal destruction].”

**(James 3:2-18)** - “For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the *tongue is a fire*, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”

These last three citations—James 1:26; 3:2-18; and Matthew 5:22—are comparisons between a bridled, or controlled, tongue and an unbridled one. A bridled tongue fosters peace, goodwill, mercy, good fruits, etc. An unbridled tongue causes much harm. Once again James was greatly influenced by Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Similarly, the Apostle John was greatly influenced by Jesus’ talks on the night of the Memorial.

**(James 5:12)** - “But above all things, my brethren, *swear not*, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but *let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay;* lest ye fall into condemnation.”

**(Matt. 5:33-37)** - “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, *Swear not* at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, *Yea, yea; Nay, nay;* for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

Both James and Matthew said one should “swear not” but should let his yea be yea and his nay be nay.

On another occasion, the comparison between the apostles Peter and James will be treated. Peter was in the vicinity of Israel longer than Paul, who was from Tarsus. Even though Paul was on the scene with the stoning of Stephen, the bulk of his time was spent among the Gentiles. In the beginning of his ministry, he went to Damascus and then to Saudi Arabia for three years (Gal. 1:17,18). However, Peter and James were contemporaries for quite some time, and it is interesting to see how much each influenced the other. Peter echoed what James Zebedee, the firebrand, said. The Epistle of James was written very early, before the epistles of Paul and Peter; and in the most ancient manuscripts, the Epistle of James was placed ahead of Paul’s epistles.

**(James 2:21-23)** - “Was not Abraham our father *justified by works*, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.”

**(1 Cor. 10:1-9,31-33)** - “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.... Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or *whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”

Abraham was justified by *good* works that evidenced *faith*, whereas the works in the tenth chapter of 1 Corinthians were *negative*. The children of Israel failed in the wilderness because their works were not mixed with faith. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, *not being mixed with faith* in them that heard it” (Heb. 4:2). Thus Paul equated works with faith but in a negative way. James did not contradict Paul but said that faith would be manifested by good works.

**(James 2:25)** - “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot *justified by works*, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”

**(Heb. 11:31)** - “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”

James and Paul both mentioned Rahab. James was a deep thinker but was given to very few words. His type of reasoning influenced both Peter and Paul in another way. For instance, in later years, Paul had to counteract Jewish Christians who felt that the Christian must obey the Law (be circumcised, observe holy days, etc.), as well as have faith in Christ. Hence he tried to separate faith and works, and he said that faith justifies, not works. However, earlier James had said that works manifest a *living* faith, although he also inferred that faith justifies. In his earlier years, Paul did not have to refute the thought that the Christian must obey the Law because he went into virgin territory and introduced a new religion, but after Gentiles were converted and established in the faith for a while, the Jewish Christian element began to trouble them. Paul wrote epistles (such as Galatians) and/or went back a second time to try to straighten out the confusion. The point is that the writings of Peter and Paul did not contradict those of James; rather, they were a confirmation.

**James 1:9** Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

**James 1:10** But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

**James 1:11** For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

**Comment:** Verse 9 in the NIV has “humble circumstances” instead of “low degree.”

**Reply:** Yes, the humble brother with little of this world’s goods is contrasted with the rich brother of verse 10.

**Comment:** The Holy Spirit is a balancing factor if we fully submit ourselves to God’s will. The humble ones are given the necessary strength and encouragement, and the ones with more temporal means, who might have too much self-esteem, are given experiences to develop meekness and humility.

Why is the “brother of low degree” told to rejoice? What is the problem? He may feel inferior to the brother with more of this world’s goods or even be envious. As a result, discouragement may set in. In reality, however, the very fact the “brother of low degree” has been called by God is a great honor. By being singled out and called, he has actually been exalted. He should dwell on the future, on the treasures in heaven, rather than be concerned with treasures on earth. “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

**Comment:** The humble brother with less means gets greater pleasure out of the things the Lord provides. For example, a gift that might mean little or nothing to the rich person is a great blessing to the humble one.

**Reply:** That is true when one has the proper heart attitude of contentment.

There is the expression “He does not have a dime in his pocket, but he likes to window-shop.” A certain satisfaction comes from seeing material things without feeling the need to possess them. In the next life, all things will be ours, as it were, if we are faithful now.

**Comment:** Because of the large middle class in this country, we do not see the contrast as much between rich and poor. Brethren in countries like Poland and Romania are a mixture of some

having very little and others having a lot.

**Reply:** There should be a feeling of sensitivity to the condition of other brethren so as not to place a stumbling block before them.

“As the flower of the grass he [the rich] shall pass away” (verse 10). “You can’t take it with you” is a common expression. The passing, or fading away, of the rich man (verses 10 and 11) is usually considered from the standpoint of death, but his riches can pass away earlier.

**Comment:** Since we know that not many rich are called, the Lord has given us blessings as brethren in Christ to try to supply the needs of one another and to receive help joyfully when we ourselves are in need.

Generally speaking, it is much more difficult for one of the “have” class to lose his wealth than for one of the “have not” class to gain riches. When high-paid executives lose their jobs in a merger or downsizing, they do not immediately think of liquidating their assets and lowering their standard of living. Instead they are miserable, thinking they must maintain the status quo. They do not realize they are much better off than the poor who are unemployed. They should humble themselves. Any of the consecrated who lose their jobs are in a much better condition because they have the Holy Spirit, the friendship of the brethren, and rich hopes and dreams of seeing God and being with Jesus. Their attitude should be to count the trial as joy and to realize that Divine Providence permitted the trial to humble them.

And another point. It is even hard for a wealthy person to be immersed, for taking this first step requires a humbling. No wonder Jesus said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23,25). If those with means use their wealth in the Lord’s service—and sometimes this is done secretly so we cannot judge—that is a great credit to them, for who knows if we would be faithful if we were in their position? One danger is that people feel power when they have money, and they tend to become disoriented as regards the truth. The principle is that the one who has ten talents *and faithfully uses them* in the Lord’s service will be greatly blessed. The one who has, and faithfully uses, only one talent will be blessed proportionately less. However, to attain a position in the Little Flock is such an honor that we would not murmur or complain if we made the grade as the very humblest Christian on the lowest level. When a brother is exalted in the present life in popularity, influence, etc., that is between him and the Lord. If that exaltation carries through to the next life and the individual is part of the Little Flock, God bless him, for the exaltation is deserved from God’s standpoint. God will grant proportionately more honor and distinction as He sees fit, for “one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Cor. 15:41).

**Q:** Was James talking about a person’s lifetime? The humbling process is only for a relatively short life span, for we will all die.

**A:** That would be considering the matter from the standpoint of time, which is one perspective. When verses 11 and 12 are considered in the same context, James was saying that one’s circumstances can change overnight. A brother may be rich one day and then be greatly humbled overnight by a change in circumstances when the sun arises with its heat.

Consider the sun in nature. The sun in conjunction with moisture makes plants grow, but the burning heat of the sun by itself causes plants to wither and die. Moisture in the air moderates the sun so that it heals, nourishes, and encourages the growth of grass. With the consecrated, however, the situation is different. They are expected to patiently endure the heat of the noonday sun, realizing God saw fit to permit the trial, the testing, to prove their faith in Him.

**James 1:12** Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [trials, testings]” to the end of his course, for then “he shall receive the crown of life.” How we receive and/or accept our trials determines the benefit we derive from them. Remember, it is not the gale but the set of the sail that determines the goal.

**Comment:** The NIV reads, “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” Also, Strong’s gives the meaning for the word “endureth” as “to have fortitude.” The idea is to stand and persevere through the trial, to have fortitude, so that our characters will be developed.

**Reply:** We must all be tried. God tests or proves us to see if we love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Blessed is he who overcomes in the testing, who surmounts the obstacles.

**Comment:** *Reprint No. 5499*, entitled “The Purpose of Our Trials,” is pertinent. A portion follows: “The word *blessed* does not, of course, always suggest a happy condition as relates to the feelings, or emotions, but rather as relates to the outcome. It is used here in connection with the results of trial to the Christian. The child of God who wins the crown of life will be very highly favored or blessed of God; then whatever conduces to this end is a very great blessing, even though it causes much pain to the flesh.... What is signified by enduring temptation? Evidently the thought is not the enduring of one temptation for one time or for many times.... The reference is to the retaining permanently of the attitude of patient endurance and faithfulness when tempted, of remaining true to God under temptation and stress.”

**Comment:** Verse 2 says we are to “count it all joy” when we have various trials. Then James went on to discuss some of the different trials we could have; for example, double-mindedness, humble circumstances, and being rich.

The term “for when he is tried” covers one’s lifetime. The reference is not to a momentary trial but to enduring until death. “Be thou faithful *unto death*, and I will give thee a crown of life” is the thought (Rev. 2:10). Incidentally, there are two types of patience: cheerful endurance and long-suffering endurance. Both qualities are needed in the Christian life.

**Comment:** The “love” of verse 12 is from the Greek word *agape*.

**Reply:** We do not want to discuss *agape* versus *phileo* love now, for to do so would divert the study. A discussion would involve the different types of love and whom they are manifested toward. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16), but doesn’t He love the Church more than the world? Those who are of an evangelistic frame of thinking put such an emphasis on John 3:16 that they vitiate the type of *fervent, emotional love* we should have for Jesus and for God. Many of us came into the truth because we saw that God has *agape* love, but when He adopted us into His family, we then had *phileo* love, emotional love. We felt that if Jesus died and bought us with his blood, we had an obligation to serve as bondservants of God.

The word “temptation,” which means trial or testing, can be used in various ways. Sometimes temptation has an evil connotation, and sometimes it does not. For instance, we are tempted with evil when lust is involved in the temptation. However, verse 12 is more theoretical, just meaning we should endure the test, whatever the trial might be. Verse 13 treats temptation

from the evil standpoint. Other trials, if we successfully pass through them, are actually stepping-stones to making our calling and election sure. While the *proof* of our faith is precious, even the *testing* itself is an invaluable experience. If we pass the test, so much the better. Our attitude should be as the hymn states: “Send grief, send pain. Sweet are thy messengers, sweet their refrain.” All who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12), so if a Christian does not suffer persecution, something is wrong and he should re-examine his life. If everyone thinks favorably of a Christian, he is not living the Christian life as he should.

**Comment:** The same *Reprint* article (No. 5499) comments about the variety of our temptations. “Temptations come from a variety of sources. They may come from friends, who may tempt us to live a life of more or less self-indulgence, to relax in a measure our fidelity to the Lord. The enticements of wealth or worldly society, a natural love of ease and disinclination of the flesh to endure hardness—any or all of these may prove strong and subtle temptations to the Christian.”

**Comment:** We get a wonderful schooling in the consecrated life. All the circumstances that are put together for our *individual* testing also test *other* brethren as well. While we may learn lessons along one line, others may be receiving lessons in another area—all from the same trial.

**Reply:** Yes, the schooling we receive is invaluable, and we hope to graduate.

**James 1:13** Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

God does not test us to cause our downfall but tests us for beneficial reasons. His tests are constructive in that successful overcoming helps us to attain more and more to His likeness. On the other hand, the Adversary tempts us to cause our downfall, to wean us away from God and Jesus, to destroy us as new creatures. For those who succumb, there is only a temporary feeling of pleasing the flesh, but if not reversed, walking after the flesh leads to death.

The subject of temptation is a lifetime study. Many Scriptures in the Old Testament show God doing the tempting, and we must study the background of each situation in order to understand the thinking. James stated the matter very succinctly when he said that God Himself cannot be tempted with evil. God does not try to cause our downfall but tests for our benefit.

1 Kings 22:12-23 reads as follows:

“And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the king’s hand.

“And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.

“And Micaiah said, As the LORD liveth, what the LORD saith unto me, that will I speak.

“So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the LORD shall deliver it into the hand of the king.

“And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the LORD?”

“And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

“And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?

“And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left.

“And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner.

“And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him.

“And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so.

“Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee.”

The king of Israel's northern kingdom sought advice as to whether he should go to a battle in Ramoth-gilead, which was east of the Jordan. All of the king's prophets told him to go ahead and that he would prosper, for the Lord was with him. When Micaiah, the true prophet, was consulted, he said sarcastically, “Go and prosper. Do what the other prophets say.” His manner of speaking was really indicating, “If you are dumb enough and headstrong enough to follow the advice of your prophets, the result will be your destruction.” The king's reaction was, “Didn't I tell you that Micaiah never has a good word for me?” In the near future, the authorities will feel the same way about us, for we believe Satan is the god of this world and its kingdoms. As citizens in a foreign land, we obey the laws, but we look for a future kingdom.

Micaiah then told about a hypothetical situation in which he saw Jehovah in heaven asking the angels, “How can I tempt the king of Israel to go to the battle in Ramoth-gilead?” God rejected various suggestions until one angel said, “I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of the king's prophets.” God said, “Go ahead and you will prosper.” (We know this incident is hypothetical because God would not seek advice from angels.) Micaiah told the king of Israel, “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills like sheep without a shepherd.” He meant that in going to the battle in Ramoth-gilead, the king would die, leaving the throne vacant.

The scenario indicates that *God* would send a lying spirit in the mouth of the false prophets to entice the king of Israel, but that did not actually happen. Micaiah was saying that if the king of Israel went into battle, he would not be successful. The king responded, “Put Micaiah in prison until I return,” and Micaiah replied, “You will not come back.” This account is only one of many incidents in Scripture where, according to the wording, evil actions seemingly attributed to God need to be explained and understood. A familiar and prominent such statement is that Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart in connection with the ten plagues and the Exodus from Egypt (Exod. 4:21; 7:3; 14:4). The net effect is that God *permits* certain trials to come on each of the consecrated by *not destroying* the individuals or circumstances that cause the trials. God loves righteousness and hates iniquity; He is all pure and holy and has no evil thoughts or motives.

In Deuteronomy 8:2,16, Moses said, “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD



thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.... Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.” Only two individuals, Joshua and Caleb (and Eleazar and Ithamar in the priesthood) successfully passed the tests in the wilderness. The nation made a covenant with Jehovah at Sinai, saying, “All these things will we do” (Exod. 24:3,7). Even if the people could not keep the Law perfectly, they would have met the various trials properly if their heart attitude had been right. Approximately 2 million Israelites perished, and then another 2 million—that is, the next generation, the children of the parents—entered the Promised Land. The purpose of the wilderness experiences was to test the Israelites and *to do them good*.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 reads, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a [miraculous] sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder *come to pass*, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, *Let us go after other gods*, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” This type of test would be searching, for the false prophet produces signs and wonders, that is, miracles, and mankind generally assumes that anything supernatural is good. The bottom line of the test is that while the sign or wonder comes to pass, it is a means of seducing people to “go after other gods.” The test is whether one will follow the sign or *God’s Word*. Furthermore, under the Law, if one overheard a false prophet trying to entice others, the individual was required to bring the matter to the authorities. Failure to do so brought death to the individual.

Notice that the false prophet says, “Let us go after other gods,” and not “You go after other gods.” The fraternal attitude can be very seductive because we all crave recognition, love, sympathy, and the interest of others. Since the human heart is deceitful, an emotional appeal can be misleading. Therefore, we should try to view a matter from God’s standpoint by asking, “How would God or Jesus view what is happening?”

**Comment:** The next few verses—Deut. 13:6,8,9—are sobering: “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; ... Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.”

**Reply:** Yes, under the Law, this would be righteous indignation. While in the present life in the Gospel Age, the Christian is not to commit murder, yet sometimes it is necessary to kill the influence of an evil person. If a person in our area, either by conduct or teaching, is seducing others away from the Lord, it is our responsibility to negate that influence. We are not the policemen of the entire country, but each ecclesia is responsible for those in its midst.

**Comment:** A beautiful promise pertaining to temptation is 1 Corinthians 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Of course we are responsible for recognizing the way of escape that the Lord provides.

**Reply:** Yes, that promise is beautiful. If one fails under certain circumstances, there are steps for recovery, but such failures would normally be the exception, not the rule, for those of the Little Flock attitude and condition.

**James 1:14** But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

In this case, the temptation arises from one's *own* lustful or sinful desires. It is true that Satan uses tactics to encourage the Christian's weaknesses, but the illegitimate desires usually arise from within the individual rather than from an outside source.

**Comment:** An evil thought that is not rejected is dangerous.

**Comment:** An example of such a temptation is a play or movie that is reported to be somewhat risqué. The Christian should not willfully go to see it under the assumption that he or she is above the temptation.

**Reply:** Especially if the Christian has weaknesses along that line, he should not think he is strong enough to resist the allurements or enticements by shutting out the evil and concentrating on what is good. The following incident is an example along this line. Years ago a mind-reading exhibition was to be given in a theater in Connecticut. A consecrated brother suggested that attendance would be beneficial in order to "show up" the man doing the mind reading. We wanted nothing to do with the exhibition because it utilized occult powers.

**Comment:** Verse 14 is telling us to be aware of our weaknesses, and we all have them along one or multiple lines. We should avoid anything that would put us in the path of temptation.

**Reply:** We are to make straight paths for our feet (Heb. 12:13) by going nowhere near the temptation. A person can be drawn away of his own lust and enticed (fall, be overcome).

**James 1:15** Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

There is a saying: "Sow a thought; reap an act. Sow an act; reap a habit. Sow a habit; reap a character. Sow a character; reap a destiny." From the seed thought, the progression of evil can continue and continue until a destiny is formed, the destiny being the destruction of the new creature. The reference is not to a temporary shortcoming but to the danger of *repetitive* wrong thinking and wrongdoing, which wear down resistance and hopelessly ensnare the individual.

**Comment:** The emphasis is on the importance of the beginning or *thought* stage. We are not to harbor wrong thoughts. Part of Christian maturity is to know from Scripture what thoughts the Lord would disapprove.

**Reply:** Yes, we are responsible for trying to resist wrong thoughts. God created us with a free will, and that freewill capability incurs responsibility. God does not tempt us with evil thoughts.

**James 1:16** Do not err, my beloved brethren.

**James 1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

There is another saying: "We cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from making a nest in our hair." God does not test us with lustful desires and evil; such temptations come from either Satan and the fallen angels or our own fallen flesh. Every test from the Father is intended for our good—for our edification, growth, and spiritual health. He is all light, and "in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

The term "Father of lights" is meaningful. God's thinking on our behalf is *for our good at all*

times, whether it results in a chastisement or a suffering experience or is otherwise. His motive is always with good intent and is not ephemeral. He has a well-thought-out interest in our welfare, which starts even prior to our consecration (such as providential watch-care and seeing that we get certain training for use after consecration). It is the Father who calls us, but He uses the technique of drawing us to Christ. He is a kindly Father with pure intentions for our welfare and salvation, and He is interested in all aspects of our development.

**Comment:** His being called the “*Father of lights*” indicates His benevolence.

**Comment:** The nominal Christian response to a person who has lost a loved one, even a baby, is that God wanted the individual so He took him. Such reasoning maligns God’s character.

With God there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” God is the same at all times; with Him there is not even a hint of “turning.”

**Comment:** Verses 16 and 17 in the NIV read: “Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

There is a progression to sin: lust, sin, and finally death. What the flesh wants at the moment is nothing (and is often sinful) compared with the good and perfect gifts the Father will give ultimately to those who are faithful.

**James 1:18** Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Verse 18, which is related to verse 17, shows that God’s motive in calling us is for our good, so “that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” *God* calls us, rather than Jesus. “The Father himself loveth you” (John 16:27). And when called, we look to Jesus as our instructor, Redeemer, and Savior and for further counsel. “No man cometh unto the Father” except through the Son (John 14:6).

*God* does the calling; *He* decides who should be favored with the Word of truth. Humanity is not the source of the call. The new creation is begotten “not of blood”; that is, not through heredity, friends, man’s power, or man’s authority (John 1:13). Individuals who are called are *personally* called, and not because of their parents. Moreover, the new creation is not begotten of the will of the flesh—not of one’s *own* will or desire. “Draw nigh to me [God]” is part of the call, for God must issue the invitation (James 4:8).

Acts 2:39 reads, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God gave the promise, not man. The children of the consecrated are temporarily justified through the parents. When vacancies occur, God will look first among the children of the consecrated.

**James 1:19** Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

How does this verse, beginning with “wherefore,” tie in with verse 18?

**Comment:** We are to be “swift to hear” the Word of truth that begets us and “slow to speak” until we grasp the principles of that Word of truth.

**Reply:** Yes, the Father begot us with the Word of truth; therefore, it behooves us to pay strict attention to that Word.

How does the caution to be “slow to wrath” fit into the picture? What wrath?

**Comment:** James was referring to our *own* wrath. He was talking not about righteous indignation but about improper or rash wrath.

**Comment:** Christians are to turn the other cheek and not return evil for evil (Matt. 5:39; Rom. 12:17,21). To use a cliché, they should not fly off the handle.

**Reply:** We should not be too hasty and thus jeopardize our calling by acting rashly. The high calling to the divine nature is the best gift we could ever have.

**James 1:20** For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

The wrath usually expressed is not justifiable. However, the Scriptures do not say we should *never* be angry. Before getting angry, we should ask, “Is this really a case of righteous indignation in harmony with God’s will, or is it just selfish wrath that would inflict injury on others?” *Man’s* wrath does not accomplish the righteousness of God.

**James 1:21** Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

“Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.” We are to put away and avoid *all* forms of evil, *all* filthy habits, *all* wickedness—in thoughts, words, and deeds. The tongue is inclined to looseness, to gibberish. And foolish, jesting talk, which may not start with evil intent but at times can cut sharply, is dangerous. The best advice is to avoid foolish talk and jesting.

Other translations read: “Rid yourself of all filthy habits and all wickedness.” “Put away the malice that runs to excess.” “Do away with all impurities and bad habits.” Motives, as well as conduct, must be considered by each individual, not just in regard to the grosser sins but in regard to everything.

“Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” The word “engrafted” carries the thought of being incised, of being cut in stone. The engrafted word is not superficial, and it cannot be erased. Moreover, it should be studied with the intent of *doing* God’s will.

**Comment:** The “engrafted word” refers back to the initial begetting with the Word of truth. We are to nurture that Word and let it grow and become *deeply implanted* in our hearts, minds, and souls.

**James 1:22** But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

There is a difference between hearing and doing, between writing that is superficial and that which is incised.

**Comment:** Not only are we to be swift to *hear* God’s Word, but having heard, we must be swift to *obey*.

“Deceiving your own selves.” There can be self-deception in the sense that familiarity with Scripture is not necessarily an indication of the development of the individual in the real knowledge of God. “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov. 14:12).

**James 1:23** For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

**James 1:24** For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

“For he beholdeth himself.” In looking in the mirror of God’s Word, we should see not only our own *imperfections* and impurities but also the *perfect* pattern, Christ. The comparison, showing where we fall short of the perfect pattern, is not to be forgotten but is to be worked on. In other words, if we just see ourselves in the mirror and not the perfect example, pride is a danger—pride in regard to *our* influence, popularity, works, abilities, etc. We need to *grow* in Christlikeness.

**James 1:25** But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

What is the “perfect law of liberty”? Sometimes the perfect law of liberty is misinterpreted as meaning that we want to do things our *own* way. That is the philosophy of the world today. Regardless of how many people are hurt, fancy rights are claimed, such as free speech. However, these supposed “rights” curb the feelings and liberties of others and thus are devilish. What is considered liberty today is actually *license*.

The “perfect law of liberty” means the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. In becoming a slave of Christ, we are to do *his* will, which is true freedom: *freedom from sin and death*.

**Comment:** Of course the “looking glass,” or mirror, is God’s Word, but we are reminded of the laver, in which the Israelites could literally see their own faces (Exod. 38:8).

**Reply:** Yes, and their blemishes were symbolically washed away with water from the laver. We, as Christians, are washed with the *water* of truth and the *blood* of Christ.

If we are “not a forgetful hearer, but a *doer* of the work,” we shall be blessed. It is our free choice to receive the Word properly and to adjust our lives accordingly. God has given us all the helps and promises, so it is up to us to earnestly receive the Word and to obey it.

The “perfect law of *liberty*” is *full* liberty to do *God’s* will. As the Apostle John said, “The truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). As a bondservant of Christ, the Christian has a yoke of liberty to do what *God* wants. The man who hears and obeys shall be blessed in his “deed” of a *lifelong* looking into the Word and following the instructions therein.

**James 1:26** If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.

James warned of the danger of not bridling the tongue. One bridles the tongue by being swift to hear and slow to speak. Those who speak too much, too freely, and too quickly are bound to sin, for they do not have time to control their thoughts. “Look before you leap” is the principle.

**Comment:** We should become aware of the situation before we speak.

**James 1:27** Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

“Pure religion and undefiled before God, *even* the Father.” The Greek word *kai* can be

translated either “and” or “even” depending on context; here it should be “even.”

Bridling the tongue, visiting orphans and widows, and keeping unspotted from the world are all a *part* of having pure religion. But there is both a literal and a higher meaning regarding orphans and widows. We are to preach the Word to others so that they will get the Heavenly Father for a father and so that those who are spiritually hungry and lonely widows will become espoused to Christ. With this double significance regarding orphans and widows, one meaning is along practical, natural lines of daily living and showing concern and interest in others among the brotherhood. The other meaning is from the spiritual standpoint, for the gospel message is the best medicine of all.

**Comment:** In prior centuries, there was more of a necessity to provide temporal help for orphans and widows.

**Reply:** Paul gave advice that younger Christian widows should remarry but that it was better for the older ones to remain separate and single. If possible, the immediate family was to take care of temporal needs for their own.

To keep oneself “unspotted from the world” is difficult. We are to be in the world but not of it.

**Comment:** James 4:4 emphasizes the danger of the world for the Christian: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

**Reply:** Leading evangelists who cater to influential persons with money and in government positions are establishing friendships with the world. Such alliances and friendships are dangerous for Christians, for their consecrations are compromised and jeopardized. James called them *enemies* of God, and they do not even realize it.

**Comment:** The use of worldly music to attract young people is also dangerous.

**Reply:** Yes, that is a worldly method.

It is necessary for us to be in the world for employment purposes, but we must guard carefully the time outside of work. We must be alert and study surrounding conditions lest we get distracted or entangled.

There are two methods for keeping unspotted from the world. (1) We are to make “straight paths” for our feet and thus avoid harmful situations (Heb. 12:13). (2) When our robes become spotted, we must wash them by asking forgiveness in Jesus’ name.

A wrinkled robe is different from a spotted robe, for wrinkles come from inactivity. One might keep himself unspotted from the world yet be sitting (inactive) and thus creating wrinkles.

**James 2:1** My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

**James 2:2** For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

**James 2:3** And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

These “brethren” were Jewish Christians scattered abroad. Hence this epistle, like the Epistle to the Hebrews, was directed primarily to Christian Jews. The Revised Standard reads, “My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.”

**Comment:** Deuteronomy 1:17 states, “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great.”

**Reply:** That Scripture pertains to judgment in legal matters and court proceedings, whereas James 2:1-3 applies to the Church, to those in attendance at a meeting. Of course the principle of not having respect of persons would be the same in both cases. The crucial point is how one judges in his mind or heart as he leads the entering person to a seat.

The setting here in the second chapter of James pertains to having respect of persons who are outwardly attired in expensive garments. Regarding them as superior leads to preferential treatment. The Bible shows that the Lord had respect of persons according to *character*, but not according to matters of judgment, wealth or poverty, or type of clothing.

For example, a historic church in Boston had reserved box seats for the wealthy. And the same practice is followed in synagogues that have paid seats. On high holy days in Israel, one cannot be seated in the synagogue unless money was paid for that purpose.

**Comment:** That reprehensible practice is followed in this country too. Enormous fees are charged for seats in the synagogue, for the higher the price, the better the seat.

Suppose someone enters an ecclesia meeting who is not a regular attendee, yet he is known and respected by the congregation for being helpful to the brotherhood in various ways. He has given evidence of sincerity of conviction and depth of consecration over the years. To greet such an individual with an above-average welcome would not be wrong, whereas for an unknown person to enter and be granted preferential treatment because of his outward appearance would be wrong.

In regard to honoring a known and respected person, Jesus particularly favored Peter, James, and John. The Apostle Paul said to grant “honour to whom honour” is due (Rom. 13:7). He also said to “obey them that have the rule over you” (Heb. 13:17). Deferential treatment should be based on known facts about the inner man. The inner man manifests his spirituality by *outward* works over a period of time.

**Comment:** A person who is poor should keep himself clean and neat.

**Reply:** To come into an assembly in “goodly apparel” means to have expensive clothing. In other words, the caution is against being deceived by the outward appearance of the rich, but if a person enters in a disheveled condition with lice on his body and clothes that have a foul odor, a distinction should be made. Otherwise, what about the brother the person sits next to?

**Comment:** According to Young’s *Analytical Concordance*, the word “vile” means “dirty,” “filthy.” The RSV uses the term “shabby clothing.” The implication seems to be that even if the individual has dirty clothes, he should be treated impartially.

**Comment:** The advice here in the Epistle of James pertains to a *first-time visitor*. Obviously, if someone attends the meetings regularly in a filthy condition, he should be told about the importance of cleanliness. Cleanliness is expected for the consecrated.

**Comment:** We tend to view verses 1-3 from our own circumstances in this country, but in other parts of the world, not everyone has running water. James seems to be saying that no matter

what one's appearance is, if it is due to poverty, we are not to discriminate. We are to look at one's heart condition and relationship to the Lord.

**Reply:** The context is discussing a person's *initial* appearance: "if there come unto your assembly." It is not referring to one's usual attendance with either rich or dirty garments. In the case James was describing, absolutely no distinction was to be made, but later on, when the individual and his background were known, the brethren would be in a little better position to know what a person should and should not do.

**Comment:** Verse 3 shows that the context applies to one who has a direct responsibility in guiding a person to a seat, as opposed to the individual's seeking a seat by himself.

**Reply:** Yes, the context pertains to decision making on the part of one who is acting as usher. Inferentially, there is a secondary lesson for the congregation. Notice that the one making the decision is like a host, for he has a "footstool." It is his footstool, and he himself is certainly not sitting on it. We are living in a different society today in this country where we can hardly tell the difference between rich and poor. In olden times, the distinction was more apparent.

**James 2:4** Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

In what sense would showing partiality make the brethren "judges of evil thoughts"? The verse should read "judges *with* evil thoughts" or "judges *entertaining* evil thoughts." Thus they were entertaining thoughts and drawing conclusions that were evil and wrong from God's standpoint.

**James 2:5** Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?

Verse 5 is essentially saying that when James wrote this epistle, the great majority of the brotherhood were "the poor of this world." Today in this country, the brotherhood are primarily of the middle class, which is a relatively new development in the industrial age. The average person is not brought up in poverty and the gutter—at least not from a literal standpoint but perhaps from a moral or mental standpoint. The average person is of average means. In prior ages, the disparity between upper and lower classes was a wide gulf.

Thus far in this chapter, James was advising the Christian to carefully observe his conduct toward others with regard to means and dress. He was cautioning about the inherent dangers that exist. Generally speaking, God has chosen few of the rich (1 Cor. 1:26).

**James 2:6** But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

As a class, the rich were viewed disparagingly by James. Chapter 5 is very strong along this line. "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter" (James 5:1-5). James was prejudiced against the rich as a *class*, but not as regards individuals. As a class, the Lord favors the poor, but individuals are judged as individuals.

James was particularly talking about the last days, but he gave a partial application to his day.



He was inferring not only that the judgment John the Baptist predicted would fall upon the generation of his day but that it was a picture of the judgment to come at the end of this age.

Discontent is growing today. People distrust government and are prejudiced against authoritarian figures. Although the situation is not heated yet, the discontent is starting, and the gap between rich and poor is currently widening in this country. Another factor today is that the rich are not necessarily the educated. We are living in a very unusual time when, for example, a boxer got 30 million dollars for a fight, yet he grumbled that he was underpaid. Other sports figures receive millions of dollars annually.

**James 2:7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?**

As a class in the apostles' day, the rich in influence and power looked down on those who espoused the cause of Christianity. Subconsciously they viewed the preaching of Christianity as a rebuke. Seeing in the teachings of Christ a tacit rebuke as to their manner of life, they resented the teachings and hence blasphemed both Christianity and the name of Jesus.

Since this epistle was directed primarily to Jewish Christians, the setting was the synagogue. When the Apostle Paul entered a new area, he started his preaching in the synagogue, and generally speaking, the rulers of the synagogue led the opposition to his doctrine. A notable exception was Crispus. "And he [Paul] departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:7,8).

**James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:**

The "royal law" is to "love thy neighbour as thyself." The Golden Rule is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matt. 7:12; Luke 6:31).

**James 2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.**

"Convinced" means "convicted." James said in verse 8 "ye do well" if you fulfill the royal law. He was contrasting love for a neighbor with having respect of persons. What is the difference?

**Comment:** Love for a neighbor is love for a person in the world, whereas respect of persons comes into an ecclesia, into the midst of the brotherhood, which is a higher level and, therefore, a greater sin in the Lord's sight.

**Reply:** Yes, there is a distinction, a contrast, between love for neighbors and love within the ecclesia.

**James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.**

If one desires to keep the whole law yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all points. How can this be?

**Comment:** Jesus said that the Law could be summarized as two commandments: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" and "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:36-40).

**Comment:** Without the Day of Atonement, the nation of Israel would not be forgiven at all. They were not really without sin, but observing the Day of Atonement typically cleansed them for the coming year. Only by being under Christ's robe of righteousness is one truly reckoned as free from sin. Imperfect man cannot keep the perfect Law.

**Reply:** A person is condemned under the Law whether he has broken one little part or a major part. The nation of Israel was justified only ceremoniously once a year through the Day of Atonement.

**Comment:** Galatians 3:10,11 reads, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

**Reply:** Some use the illustration that the Decalogue is like a necklace. If one link is broken, the whole is broken. Therefore, one is condemned by the infraction of even one little link of the Law.

**Comment:** The Law was a "schoolmaster" to bring the Jews to Christ by making them aware of their sins (Gal. 3:24).

A lesson of verse 10 from a practical standpoint is that since all are condemned under the Law, one should be merciful. James was also saying that as Christians, we should not be high-minded toward others. There is great danger in having respect of persons, for doing so is disobeying *God's* Law and convicts us, and all of the Ten Commandments except the first four concern our dealings with other persons, our "neighbors."

**James 2:11** For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The word "kill" should be "murder," which is different from killing in warfare (see the New International Version). Verse 11 continues the philosophical discussion about whoever breaks one part of the Law is guilty of the whole Law. Stated a little differently, whether a person is guilty of one premeditated murder or six premeditated murders, the penalty should be the same: death.

**James 2:12** So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Verse 11 was talking about the "Thou shalt nots" of the Law Covenant. Why did James now mention the "law of liberty"? God gave the Law to Israel, but He attached conditions. When the nation consecrated, the people approved the standard of the Law, saying, "All these things we will do" (Exod. 19:8 paraphrase). Of course they did not realize that the Law was much deeper and more serious than their level of understanding. However, even in the interpretation of the strict Law ("thou shalt not do this," "thou shalt not do that"), the Lord generously introduced mercy and consideration. For example, premeditated murder was not considered the same as accidental manslaughter. James was saying, "If God makes provision for mercy in His own Law, then you, as Christians, should make allowances and consider carefully and thoroughly the circumstances of each case. You are not to jump to arbitrary conclusions without proper reflection."

The "whole law" (verse 10) is more than just the Decalogue. The ceremonial and the doctrinal aspects with case-by-case histories for use as guidelines help to mollify, or cushion, the severity of the Law. Even though the Israelites got lax about the Law and did not keep it, the Law is very educational because it shows *God's* thinking. Therefore, if we fault the Law, we are

faulting the One who gave it.

In other words, in verse 12, James was saying that we should put ourselves in the place of the accused. Suppose we were the one against whom the Law was going to be adjudicated, but the act was not premeditated. We would want the severity of the Law to be allayed because the act was committed under duress and under circumstances where we were not morally in tune with it. A real murderer would deserve the full penalty and severity of the Law, but if there were extenuating circumstances, we would like consideration. If we are merciful to others, the Lord is more apt to be merciful to us. If we are too stringent in our judgment of others and do not exercise the law of liberty, we should not be surprised if the same attitude is exercised against us personally.

**James 2:13** For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shown no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

If there are extenuating circumstances, God shows His mercy against full judgment. Even if the Law is broken, certain allowances are made.

**Comment:** Matthew 7:1,2 reads, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

**Reply:** Yes, in the examination of others, one should consider himself. However, the Scriptures tell us there are things that we should judge, such as conduct, but we are to “judge not” in a condemnatory sense. In other words, we should not place someone in Second Death but should leave such judgment in the Lord’s hands. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). It is better to leave these matters with the Lord and to clean out the mind.

We should judge proper and improper conduct, but we are not to judge where an individual stands with the Lord. The *degree of culpability* of the one who is doing wrong is up to the Lord. Remember, we were called as sinners, and the Lord was merciful to us, so we are to leave such judgment with Him. We should judge improper conduct that is repetitive and will have a continuing effect if not dealt with.

Although mercy should not override justice except where permitted by Scripture, mercy should *desire* to rejoice over judgment. Mercy rejoices in the *rescue* of an individual. Mercy looks for a way of escape and returning, such as with the Prodigal Son, who was in an attitude of repentance, and with the individual in 1 Corinthians 5 who committed gross sin and later learned the lesson.

**Comment:** The NIV says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment!” The context gives the thought that in judgment, mercy can make allowance.

**Reply:** That statement is true as long as mercy is not misconstrued so that it is too libertarian. Mercy should desire to rejoice over judgment when it does not violate scriptural principles. The great danger today is in being more merciful than God. Both polar positions are wrong, namely, (1) justice without mercy and (2) mercy without justice. The true path is in between the two extremes where neither mercy nor justice is violated. We should be neither more loving than God nor more just than He is. God sets the standard.

We can be more lenient when wrongs are done to us, but we cannot forgive wrongs done to others. A transgression against us personally is one thing, but a transgression against someone else is another matter, for the wrong occurred between the individual and the third party. And if the transgression is against God, we must be very careful that we do not take the wrong side. Many are jeopardizing their future because they do not realize certain sins are against God. In

other words, we should proceed cautiously in these matters.

**James 2:14** What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

We must also be careful about our confidence and not boast about our faith lest we represent ourselves above that which we actually are. The one who says he has faith but does not have works probably does not realize that faith must produce some evidence, works of some kind. Otherwise, the person is speaking in vain and lacks substance.

**Comment:** The teaching “once in grace, always in grace” promotes overconfidence of eternal security.

**James 2:15** If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

**James 2:16** And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

It profits *nothing* to the individual who overlooks the opportunity to help. Notice, “if a *brother or sister*” (and not a drunk in the street, for example) is in real need, words alone are not enough. His or her needs should be observed and actual help given. Moreover, an expression of “you must have done something wrong” toward a brother or sister going through a trial can further discourage and depress that individual. How unkind!

**Comment:** 1 John 3:17,18 reads, “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue [only]; but in deed and in truth.”

**Comment:** And two other Scriptures are applicable. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9). We might reason, “I do not normally see someone who is naked and destitute,” but there are needs among the brotherhood. An example of the attitude of saying, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” could be where we see a need and just say, “I will pray for you,” but do not help.

**Reply:** This responsibility is doubled when the need or want is parochial. In other words, we should not make helping others our mission in life (such as going to Africa, India, the slums, etc.); we are not to have a social gospel. If, however, we have some of the wherewithal to assist an individual in need, we should do so—and such action would be a proof of our faith. Proper faith exercises proper works.

**Comment:** If we extend the lesson beyond the physical needs of a brother or sister to spiritual needs, which are even more important, we could say, “I do not have the financial means to help, but I will send a letter of comfort or make a phone call.”

**Reply:** In other words, back there James was talking about purely physical needs, but since today in the United States, we live in a society where the poorest ones are rich compared with some in other nations, we can extrapolate the lessons and principles and apply them along spiritual lines. Opportunities for applying the spirit of good works still exist.

**Comment:** If we personally cannot help someone but realize the need is desperate, we could always make the comment to others, “I think so-and-so’s situation is pretty bad. There is not

much food on the table.” If the need is genuine, the Lord will then see to it that others assist; He will put the need on their hearts and minds.

**Reply:** Stated succinctly, we should want to be solicitous regarding the welfare of the brethren.

**James 2:17** Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

The Apostle Paul said we are justified by faith and not works, whereas James emphasized that works are a proof of faith, that faith without works is dead. A simple equation can be used:

Faith + works = a *living* faith.

Faith – works = a *dead* faith.

**Comment:** In the Parable of the Talents, the individual who hid his one talent is an illustration of the dead faith that is described here.

**Comment:** Matthew 7:20 says, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Some reason that when a person does not manifest fruits, he or she may not be consecrated, even though such a profession was made. Such reasoning contradicts our Lord’s statement that some would be grafted in yet bear no fruit and, consequently, be cut off. Here, too, according to James, the fact that one does not have works does not prove he did not have faith, but it would be a dead faith.

**Reply:** Yes, it would be a dead faith, or certainly not the kind of faith God is looking for.

**James 2:18** Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.

One may say, “I have faith,” and another may say, “I have works,” but both are needed. Either one separate, or apart, from the other is null and void.

**James 2:19** Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

Notice, a person does well to believe “that there is *one God*.” This statement refutes the Trinity.

**Comment:** The fallen angels had faith *without works*.

**Reply:** The New Testament contains some instances of this lack of proper works, as follows:

1. Legion said, “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not” (Mark 5:7).
2. A possessed damsel followed Paul, crying, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).
3. An evil spirit said to the seven sons of Sceva, a chief priest, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” (Acts 19:14,15).

**James 2:20** But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

James used a hypothetical confrontation to get his point across, but no doubt he (and we) did meet people who zeroed in on the importance of faith and not works, and vice versa.

**Comment:** Even though some are sincere and do works, it is like raising a red flag for us to

mention works coupled with faith. They cannot see that although faith saves a man and not works, the two are inseparable. Can we be saved without works? No, but the works do not save us.

**Comment:** Matthew 7:22,23 reads, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not ... in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I [Jesus] profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

**James 2:21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?**

Abraham is an illustration of the importance of works. This statement bears consideration. Abraham was justified by “works” (plural). Two particular instances stand out: (1) when he left Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 15:7) and (2) when he offered up Isaac (Gen. 22:9,10). Usually we think of “works” as witness activities, for example, but the “works” of Abraham were *obedience*. An *obedient faith* creates outward deeds that are manifest to others of the same faith. Faith, obedience, and works are all interconnected and related, but faith is the start—faith must precede the works; faith begets the works. Also, the statement “the just shall live by faith” shows that faith pertains not just to the beginning of our Christian walk when we consecrate but *throughout* our Christian life (Rom. 1:17). Faith is necessary to the *end* of our course. “Be thou *faithful unto death*, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

James was saying that those who have the faith God is looking for will respond accordingly and obey. Consider the time in which James wrote his epistle. Being a different type of society, it lacked certain complications that we have today. For instance, to espouse Christ back there caused one to be immediately marked, whereas today conditions are different in much of the world. As a result, many mistakenly follow a social gospel; for example, Martin Luther King preached that love for God produces humanitarian deeds. The works that are generated tend to be of the Christian himself and not of God. In other words, the works are according to what Christians *imagine* they should be doing and not according to what God’s Word teaches. There was a black and white demarcation in the apostles’ day, whereas our complex society has gray areas in which works are interpreted along many lines, such as giving food to the poor and building hospitals in Africa. Another area of misguided Christian works is getting involved with and/or trying to influence government. It is permissible to pray for those in authority that we may lead a peaceful life in doing God’s will, but we are not to enter politics (1 Tim. 2:1,2). The Church should not be a friend of the world (James 4:4). One who is not sufficiently familiar with the teachings of the Bible can be deceived into thinking he is doing God’s will. The motive may be right, but the works can be a deception.

**James 2:22 Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?**

“Seest thou how ... by works was faith made *complete*.” The completion of faith was manifested by the *obedience* of Abraham.

**Comment:** The NIV reads, “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.” And Hebrews 11:6 states, “Without faith it is *impossible* to please him [God].”

Abraham’s leaving Ur of the Chaldees is common to all of the sincerely consecrated. They have all taken that one first wonderful, definite step of consecration and entered the race course.

Abraham’s offering up Isaac was such a supreme sacrifice that he is pictured as the father of the faithful (Gal. 3:7). He was the example, and we are children of Abraham if we develop to that

act of faith, that is, if we step out into the unknown in obedience to God when we are given a crucial test. The offering up of Isaac showed Abraham's sealing, or the crystallization, of his character.

**Comment:** In the Dark Ages and in times past, children were sometimes killed in front of their parents, but it was a much stronger step for Abraham to be asked to *kill Isaac himself*.

**James 2:23** And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Being a "Friend of God" was the highest relationship available at that time because justification through the blood of Christ is needed for sonship, not just a belief in a coming Messiah.

**Comment:** The statement "Abraham *believed* God" is significant, for it refers back to the confirming of the Abrahamic Covenant. More than just knowledge, his believing was based on action (obedience) plus knowledge.

**Reply:** Depth of belief produces obedience, and obedience produces works.

**James 2:24** Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

The word "only" is very important in the debate between justification by faith and/or works: "not by faith *only*."

**James 2:25** Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Rahab said the Hebrew spies went out in a particular direction, when in reality they went the opposite way. The fact that the lineage of Jesus can be traced through Rahab shows she was approved of God.

**Comment:** Rahab's very lie was the *proof* of her faith.

**Reply:** Yes, for there were some modifying factors. Today, with the philosophy of love being espoused even by the world, almost every case is considered a modifying factor. For example, one who has committed murder may be excused because he was abused by his parents, is very poor, is mentally unsound, etc. The reasoning is unbalanced. Unless a person has a tumor on his brain that can be surgically removed or there is some other circumstance that clearly made him not morally responsible, the *deed* (not the individual) should be judged. In other words, capital punishment is taught in the Scriptures.

**Comment:** It is interesting that Rahab did not have much knowledge. She was not an Israelite and hence lacked the background and teaching of the Scriptures. She had simply heard reports of how God had protected the Israelites, yet she said to the spies: "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:9-11).

**Reply:** The implication is that subsequent to that experience, she was no longer Rahab "the harlot." That term describes her *previous* condition, just as Mary Magdalene was filled with

seven spirits, or demons, *prior* to her becoming a follower of Jesus (Mark 16:9). And Jesus knew about the background of the Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands (John 4:18). Rahab's act was like the giant step that begins one on the path of justification. The one of the lineage of Judah who subsequently married her had to take her past into consideration.

**James 2:26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

This statement is like the climax to the reasoning James was presenting. The “spirit” is the breath of life (Greek *pneuma*). “As the body without the breath of life is dead, so faith without works is dead.” *Pneuma* means “wind,” “breath,” as opposed to *psuche*, which means “soul.” In the King James Version, the word translated “spirit” sometimes means “soul” (*psuche*), but not here. *Psuche* and *pneuma* are two different words with two different meanings. In the Old Testament, there are more complications in understanding the soul versus the spirit.

**James 3:1** My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

The thought is, “Be not many *teachers*.” The RSV reads, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.” This verse is very sobering. However, if one is a faithful teacher, the reward is greater. The inclusion of this verse indicates that there were problems in *Christian living* in the early Church. Other doctrine was relatively pure in this “white horse” period (Rev. 6:1,2).

In the human spirit, and especially when one first consecrates, there seems to be a tendency to want to teach. Some who have not been long in the truth have even wanted to write on the Book of Revelation. The seriousness of the Scriptures requires maturation first, particularly since the Apocalypse is predicated on the Old Testament in many different ways.

Some who seem to be qualified for eldership will decline throughout their consecrated life. We usually do not know why, but there may be a very justifiable reason. On the one hand, certain individuals who decline appear to be far more qualified than some who accept eldership. On the other hand, the *desire* to be an elder is set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1 and commended.

**Comment:** A brother should examine himself to see whether he has the qualifications for eldership. Then he would not labor for something for which he was not fit.

**Reply:** More so in the past, some who accepted eldership did so on a restricted basis, which was proper. For example, some felt they were qualified to lead a study but not to speak publicly; that is, they had the ability to teach but in a conversational way that was conducive to leading a fruitful study. Another example would be those who accepted eldership along evangelistic lines because they had the gift of attracting the attention of the public in witnessing the truth. These same individuals were not qualified to lead studies, so their eldership was restricted. It is also proper—and advisable—for an elder to say, where appropriate, “I am not versed in that subject, so I am not able to give a talk on it or participate in a panel.” Likewise it would be proper for an elder who has not studied a particular subject to refer the one seeking information to someone who has studied it. A spiritual doctor should recommend someone who is more qualified in a certain field of investigation or study. The spirit of humility is the spirit of truly wanting to help someone develop in the truth. It is wrong for an elder to feel he must sterilize the ecclesia, urging those in attendance to never go elsewhere lest they become contaminated by harmful spiritual bacteria. It is a necessary experience for the Christian to be in the world but not of it; combat is needed for spiritual development. Thus there are dangers and pitfalls, as well as blessings and advantages, in being an elder.

Regarding eldership, the Scriptures say, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto



him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal. 6:6). 1 Timothy 3:1-7 gives the qualifications for eldership: “This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop [elder], he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

**Comment:** Ephesians 4:11,12 gives a listing: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” All of these must start out as elders.

**Comment:** A brother should examine himself to see if he has the talent for eldership. If he does have the talent and fits those qualifications, he should not bury the talent.

**Reply:** He should look for the Lord’s leading and guidance in the opening of a door, which can happen in startling ways.

**James 3:2** For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

**James 3:3** Behold, we put bits in the horses’ mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body.

**James 3:4** Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

**James 3:5** Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

A little member, whether the tongue or the helm of a ship or a match, can produce great harm. James did not stress the positive aspect—the good that can be done—just the destructive tendencies.

**Q:** Does verse 1 stand alone, or is it tied in with the rest of this chapter?

**A:** It is related to the entire chapter.

**Comment:** Then all of these verses are even more significant for one who is an elder, a teacher, or a prominent personality.

**Reply:** That is correct, but even though these verses are directed primarily to those who are in a position of influence, they also apply to all of the consecrated in every situation (at work, in the family, in the church, in public). Because of the dangers, James cautions that not many should be teachers, bishops, elders. Although the desire to be an elder is a legitimate one, a brother should think twice before accepting such a position. And another point: The same caution applies not only to elders in the church but also to employers, masters of slaves, etc.

If one could completely master his tongue, he would be a perfect man, but that is impossible. Some use this Scripture as an excuse for making mistakes, but verse 1 says that greater condemnation can be incurred. Thus James did not pursue this subject from the standpoint of

the liberty of forgiveness. A little bit in the horse's mouth enables a person to control and turn the large animal. What a powerful influence!

The next illustration is of a large ship and the importance of its small helm, or wheel, which influences the rudder. In other words, the steering mechanism above deck controls the steering apparatus below the vessel. Similarly, a little wheel controls a long tractor trailer truck. James got his point across quickly and clearly.

Verse 6 gives the illustration of the tongue, which is likened to a little match. Notice that verse 5 ties in boasting with the teaching capacity. "The tongue is a little member, ... [yet it] boasteth great things."

**James 3:6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

**James 3:7** For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind:

**James 3:8** But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

**James 3:9** Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

James devoted many verses to the dangers of the tongue. Evidently, he was a very astute person, even though he was only a fisherman.

"The tongue ... setteth on fire the course of nature." In the Greek, the word translated "course" is "wheel." James was referring to the blood circulatory system in the human body. He was saying that the tongue can start out peacefully, but when trouble occurs, it can stir up wrath in the individual so that he begins to lose control. His face turns red and his blood vessels get distended. Before long, statements are made in the heat of wrath that have an injurious influence on others. Guilt and culpability are incurred that can lead to Second Death.

**Q:** Was the fire illustration used simply to show how the tongue can get out of control?

**A:** James was showing the *destructive* aspect of fire. (In a constructive sense, for example, fire produces heat for comfort and cooking and destroys noxious garbage.) In the destructive sense, a little match can set an entire forest on fire, and thus a little tongue can do a world of damage, defiling "the whole body," that is, the individual himself or the circle of his influence.

"The tongue ... is set on fire of hell [picturing Second Death]." Just as garbage was burned in the Valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem, so Second Death destroys those who go into it (Rev. 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8). Therefore, it will be a blessing for mankind at the end of the Kingdom Age when all of the incorrigible have been eradicated from the earth. God's name will no longer be slandered in any way. It is hard to serve God in the present age, for the environment is impure.

Constructively speaking, if the one at the helm of a ship (the tongue) is a good craftsman, his power can be for good. Even though the wind blows fiercely and the water is tempestuous, a strong, sturdy, knowledgeable, controlled helmsman can control the entire ship. Only Jesus is the perfect "helmsman," as manifested during his earthly ministry and with his current capabilities. We sing, "Master, the tempest is raging," wanting him to steer us.

**Q:** Was James speaking about the elders with these lessons?

**A:** Elders were particularly being addressed, but all Christians are responsible for how they use their tongues. James was telling about the dangers of an uncontrolled tongue, but at the same time, he realized we cannot have perfect control in the present life. Hence we may stumble in some matters, but care must be taken.

**Comment:** The responsibility seems to be primarily a personal one. In other words, each Christian must bridle his own tongue.

**Reply:** Although James was writing to Christian Jews who were scattered about the world, the epistle also had great value for Jews who were still searching for God.

These lessons have a personal, a practical, and an enlarged sense. In the personal sense, emotions, especially anger, stir up the circulatory system. As Jesus said, we must be careful not to call any man "Raca" or "Fool" lest we be in danger of Second Death (Matt. 5:22). James Zebedee took many lessons and principles from Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

**Comment:** In Matthew 15:18-20, Jesus spoke of the connection between misuse of the tongue and Second Death: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man." Fire coming out on the tongue is an indication of the inward heart condition.

**Comment:** An example of the tongue adversely affecting others is Mark 15:11, "But the chief priests moved the people, that he [Pilate] should rather release Barabbas unto them."

**Reply:** Yes, the chief priests and scribes influenced the mob to cry, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" There were degrees of responsibility in connection with Jesus' crucifixion: chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, Pilate, the mob, etc. The degree of culpability with any sin is up to God. He can determine what portion of a sin is due to Adamic weakness and what portion is due to willfulness. Of course most sins are a mixture. It is wonderful that the Lord knows us inside and out, our "uprising" and our "downsitting." We must leave the judgment to Him and just do the best we can (Psa. 139:2).

"Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind." All of these creatures are tamable; they can be and have been tamed. There are even tame alligators and crocodiles, BUT the tongue cannot be tamed completely and is "full of deadly poison." By nature, as children of Adam, humans are fallen, depraved, and born and shapen in iniquity (Psa. 51:5).

**Comment:** In verse 8, the *Diaglott* says "death-producing poison," which ties in with the "fire of Gehenna."

To go to the extreme position, consider the development of Papacy, whose adherents profess to love God and His Word. But during the Dark Ages, the clergy were responsible for burning people at the stake. Even the world of mankind realizes the danger of religious fanaticism, which can easily get out of control to persecute others. Jesus said that "Christians" who persecute religiously often think they are doing God a favor (John 16:2).

**James 3:10** Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.

**James 3:11** Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?

**James 3:12** Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

Verses 10-12 are sanctified common-sense reasoning, the spirit of a sound mind. James is the fourth stone on the high priest's breastplate, the chrysolite, which lapidarians used to call the "stone of wisdom." Wisdom was mentioned repeatedly by James (James 1:5; 3:13,15,17).

Verses 10-12 are contradictions, that is, contrary to nature. Does nature do these things? No, for nature is harmonious. In regard to humans, if both bitterness and sweetness emanate from the same heart, the person is manifesting a form of hypocrisy. Some of the most hurtful opposition can be done with the tongue of an orator—that is, with sweetness and honey—yet sting like an asp. The mixture can be, and is, done by humans, but not in God's arrangement. Such incongruities are incompatible with the way God has designed nature.

**Comment:** Just as the fountain is the source of water, the fig tree is the source of figs, and the olive tree is the source of olives, so the heart condition is the source of words.

**Comment:** Some Christians who go out preaching are very loving, but as soon as we disagree with their doctrines, they say we are going to hell. That is an example of incongruity, of blessing and cursing coming from the same mouth.

**Q:** Is judgment involved here? If we hear impure words coming out of the mouth, should we judge that the individual is impure?

**A:** The judgment ("greater condemnation") of verse 1 is *God's* judgment of the individual, the opinion of the divine court.

While James emphasized the importance of the relationship between faith and works, here he was describing unfruitful works.

**Comment:** These cautions seem to apply especially to *habitual* wrong words, to a *lifestyle* of evil use of the tongue. These verses help us to see the impact of our words on our characters. If we catch ourselves saying something amiss, we should ask, "What characteristic in me (the source) is causing such words?" Self-examination is important and necessary so that we are as correct as possible.

**Comment:** If we say something amiss publicly, we should confess the sin publicly. Thus we would be trying our best to undo any damage.

**Reply:** James did not use the word "stumble," but the implication was that it is impossible to perfectly control the tongue. However, a *lifestyle*, which can be seen, is different from *occasional* wrong words. For instance, the wicked are likened to thorns, thistles, and brambles. And some people seem to have nothing but criticism; there is nothing positive to build upon.

**Comment:** The Book of Proverbs contains a lot about the tongue. For example, Proverbs 18:20,21 reads, "A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof."

**Reply:** Those who studiously try to control the tongue will get the benefit of good fruitage. That proverb speaks from the positive standpoint, whereas James spoke from the negative standpoint, that is, of the dangers. However, from the negative, we can see the positive better and vice versa.

**James 3:13 Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.**

“Conversation” means “conduct.” “Meekness of wisdom” has many facets including approachability. In other words, a person with this characteristic is one who will discuss matters.

**James 3:14 But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.**

During Jesus’ earthly ministry and for a very short while after Pentecost, the Church was pure. However, the topics covered in this epistle indicate that a lot of problems developed in the early Church. “The truth” does not refer to dispensational or theoretical doctrine but to basic sound truth that is right, pure, clean, and good.

**James 3:15 This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.**

What is the difference between earthly, sensual, and devilish wisdom?

**Comment:** “Earthly” wisdom would be the world’s wisdom. “Sensual” wisdom is fleshly wisdom. “Devilish” wisdom pertains to the Adversary. In other words, improper wisdom is from the world, the flesh, and/or the devil.

**James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.**

Envying and strife cause tumult. There is nothing constructive or edifying for the inner man.

**James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.**

**Q:** Does this admonition pertain primarily to character development and secondarily to doctrine? The “wisdom that is from above” is contrasted with the earthly, sensual, unholy wisdom of verse 15.

**A:** The admonition pertains to character and morals. Philippians 4:8 is similar in principle: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Truth and purity come first. Words and actions should be chaste, pure, holy, wholesome, clean.

**Comment:** A statement that is not true and honest should not be uttered.

The next quality is “peaceable,” that is, that which promotes peace. In Ephesians 4:3, the Apostle Paul said, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

**Comment:** With a morals problem, for example, a statement might not initially promote peace, but it would be necessary to utter in order to bring peace in the final analysis.

James 3:17 and Philippians 4:8 mention only the positive, but there certainly are negatives to consider. The categories in both verses, which pertain to constructive, wholesome words and actions, are in an intentional sequence.

The third category is “gentle.” This word suggests that we should consider the feelings of others as long as we do not compromise principle. Being “gentle” means being meek, modest,

and, as much as possible, putting the best construction on the words and actions of others. In other words, it pertains to our dealings with others in the Christian fold.

“Easy to be entreated” is being approachable, open to reason, willing to yield to reason—hence not being stubborn or obstinate. “Full of mercy” signifies a readiness to forgive. “Full of ... good fruits” means to have an attitude that is spiritually productive, constructive, wholesome, and nourishing—in principle, it is being full of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

“Without partiality.” The King James margin has “without wrangling.” The next chapter of James begins with dynamite: “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” With the context continuing, the chapter division is arbitrary. The reference seems to be to differences within the Church itself, rather than between the Christian and the world.

“Without hypocrisy” means to be sincere and not pretending to be what one is not. In the Greek, the word *hypocrisy* means to have a mask or cloak that hides one’s true feelings. Hypocrisy is being double-faced.

**Comment:** Not having feigned love is another definition.

**James 3:18** And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

We are first to sow peace within ourselves, and then to promote peace in others. “Blessed are the peacemakers” pertains to sowing peace with others, but we must start with self (Matt. 5:9).

**Comment:** The NIV says, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”

**James 4:1** From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

**James 4:2** Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

Verses 1 and 2 describe the general condition and way of conduct that existed among the Jewish brethren in dispersion (James 1:1). The King James margin contains some strong thoughts: brawlings, pleasures, and envy (instead of “kill”). Briers, thorns, and thistles all cause discomfort.

**Comment:** 1 John 3:15 reads, “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.” Slander is a form of murder.

**James 4:3** Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

When the thoughts in verses 2 and 3 are combined, the Jewish brethren either failed to ask in prayer, or if they asked, they asked amiss. They consumed their prayers on their own lusts, or desires. In other words, they uttered “give me” prayers rather than trying to honor and please the Lord.

**Q:** What were they wrangling about? Temporal matters? Spiritual matters? Character matters?

**A:** There was a sectarian or party spirit with brethren trying to get other brethren to follow them, their doctrine, and/or their conduct. What a fractious condition existed within the Church, among the consecrated!

**Comment:** James was amplifying verses 14-16 of the previous chapter. Where these conditions prevailed in their meetings, the brethren certainly did not go home edified. “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil [worldly, sensual, devilish] work” (James 3:16).

**Reply:** Sometimes it is easier to see which way things are drifting if we just sit back and ask, “What is happening? Are we getting a blessing? Is this condition constructive or destructive?”

**Comment:** Verse 3 is related to Jesus’ thought in Matthew 7:7 of the Sermon on the Mount: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Jesus stressed the positive aspect of asking, whereas James stressed not asking amiss. He advised the brethren to ask, but to ask for the right things. 1 John 5:14 gives the same clarification: “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

**Comment:** The “lusts” of the Jewish brethren scattered abroad were pleasures, satisfying the old nature, self-gratification, and self-interest rather than interest in the Church at large. The brethren should have kept their professions pure in the public eye, honoring the Lord’s cause at all times.

**James 4:4** Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

**Q:** Does this verse indicate that worldliness had crept into their meetings?

**A:** Conditions were bad. There is nothing complimentary in verses 1-4. The brethren were lusting after worldly things, and James had to talk in a tough and severe manner in order to wake them up as to their true condition. Probably the majority did not heed his instruction, but the minority with the right heart condition hearkened.

It is apparent that James had the disposition of a “son of thunder,” although by this time, that disposition had been harnessed under the power of the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:17). This son of thunder was under the Lord’s control, and he was talking strong to those who needed it.

“Friendship of the world is *enmity with God*.” That is a powerful Scripture. Christendom today is courting the friendship of the world, including Evangelicals and the more conservative Catholics and Protestants. Friendship with the world is dangerous. An example would be catering to people of influence in political matters. How necessary it is for the Christian to adhere to this scriptural admonition in order to survive in the race for the high calling!

**Comment:** 1 John 2:15 reads, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

**Comment:** The phrase “ye adulterers and adulteresses” shows that these individuals were not false Christians coming in and stirring up the flock. They were consecrated Christians who had a relationship with the Bridegroom, but now they were adulterating themselves by having this relationship with the world.

**Reply:** Yes, James was associating friendship with the world with adultery. What a strong statement! “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” Most people want to be “a friend of the world.” For the Christian, this type of adultery can occur with government, business, worldly friends, seeking popularity, etc.

**Comment:** We must exist in the world, so the admonition is to be *in* the world but not *of* the

world.

**Reply:** The ship is in the ocean, but the water should not get in the ship.

**Comment:** 1 Corinthians 5:9,10 says, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.”

**Reply:** Business matters and earning one’s livelihood are one thing, but in the after-hours we must guard against courting the friendship, habits, and fellowship of the world. When the workday is done, we should separate ourselves and concentrate on the spiritual in order to survive.

**Comment:** John 15:19 states, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you [or should hate you].”

**James 4:5** Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

“The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy” the things of the world: money, popularity, power, friendship, etc. According to human nature, these goals are desirable, but they are harmful for the new creature.

**Comment:** The “spirit” that inclines toward envy is the old nature.

The clause “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain” does not necessarily mean that James had a specific Scripture in mind. He was referring to the tenor of Scripture; that is, the teaching of Scripture is contrary to the conduct of those he was addressing. It is interesting that James waited until chapter 4 to open this can of worms.

**Comment:** Perhaps the Jewish Christians scattered abroad would not have read this entire epistle if James had started with these strong statements.

**James 4:6** But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

**Q:** If verses 5 and 6 are combined, was James saying the following? At the present time, we are imperfect, so there is a constant battle going on between the flesh and the spirit, but if we humbly ask the Lord for help in overcoming the fleshly, carnal cravings, He will give us strength. That is where His grace comes in—grace and more grace.

**A:** Yes. God has already given grace, but “more grace” will be given to those who realize the situation and then ask for His help and for added grace to successfully withstand the lusts and cravings of the flesh and the natural man.

**Comment:** James 5:16 says, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” There are times when we should ask the brethren for their prayers.

**James 4:7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Temptations have to be confronted in a positive manner. The matter should be taken to the Lord in prayer.



**Comment:** In other words, if we start to reason with a temptation and do not strongly resist the sin, we are giving the Adversary an inroad.

**Reply:** “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you [*in that particular temptation and circumstance*].” Satan will not flee from you permanently, but God will give grace for that situation. The world, the flesh, and the devil will always be enemies of the new creature as long as we are in the flesh.

**Comment:** We have talked about the practical aspects of James. Not only did he forcefully admonish the brethren, but he gave the solution too. He told the brethren to pray correctly, to submit themselves to God, and to resist the devil. Verse 7 is a promise and a great comfort, for if we feel we are starting to slide or are failing in one area, Satan will flee from us in that area *if we resist him*.

**Reply:** We can see the positive way in which Jesus resisted three temptations of Satan in the wilderness. He strongly confronted the Adversary’s suggestions with Scripture.

**Comment:** The Apostle Peter also gave advice on resisting the devil. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet. 5:8,9).

The Epistle of James is strong language verse after verse after verse. To the strong, we should speak strongly; to the weak, we should speak weakly.

**Comment:** The preceding statement is interesting because James said just a few verses previous that the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, etc. James was not gentle in his epistle. Gentleness should be our general attitude but not when a serious matter needs to be dealt with.

**James 4:8** Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.

**Comment:** “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” applies not just to our initial consecration but throughout our Christian walk.

**Reply:** During periods of trial and temptation, there is a special need to draw nigh to God. Through prayer and the study of His Word, we know how to confront a situation.

**Comment:** Here James was enlarging on the thought in James 1:8, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”

**Comment:** The caution against being double-minded is taken from Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve [both] God and mammon.”

**Reply:** Yes, it is obvious that James had the Sermon on the Mount in mind. And it is interesting that his brother, John Zebedee, had a lasting impression of the Last Supper and Jesus’ discourses that evening.

James said, “Purify your hearts, ye double minded.” How would one do this? He would become single-minded. Let “thine eye be single” (Matt. 6:22). If we realize we are double-minded (with one foot in the world and one foot in the truth), we must change our conduct.

Double-mindedness is very subtle. For example, one might start making excuses for not attending meetings, and especially in the last days, we are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves with others of like faith (Heb. 10:25). This admonition suggests that the devil will raise all kinds of legitimate reasons for nonattendance.

**Comment:** It seems that obstacles arise particularly on study nights and days. Such occurrences are not a coincidence but the Adversary trying to draw us away.

**Reply:** Satan has various techniques to numb us spiritually. The last days, in which we are living, are very dangerous.

**Comment:** In one sense, James was harsh, calling the brethren sinners and double-minded, but in another sense, he was full of mercy, for he gave the brethren hope. He said, “Yes, you are sinners and double-minded, but if you turn around, if you cleanse your hands and purify your hearts, the Lord will accept you back.”

**Q:** Is there a distinction between hands and hearts?

**A:** Yes. “Hands” would be *outward* actions and conduct, while “hearts” would be *inward* desires. The heart has both pure and impure desires, so a battle must be fought.

**James 4:9** **Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.**

Normally speaking, the Scriptures encourage us to rejoice and be happy in the Lord and to pray that our joy will be increased. Therefore, why was the admonition negative here?

**Comment:** James was directing the admonition to double-minded sinners (verse 8).

**Comment:** The advice here is similar to Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 5. When repentance and reformation are needed, the brethren should recognize their sad, undone condition and not have a boasting, self-confident attitude.

**Comment:** When we see our own shortcomings and feel we are not making much progress, when we are ashamed of our condition, it helps to mourn and be contrite and feel afflicted in our desire to be straight with the Lord.

**Comment:** Earlier James said that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Pride went hand in hand with these sinners. To get rid of the prideful condition, the brethren needed humbling to the point of repentance.

**Reply:** Various conditions call for mourning, sorrow, and weeping. Not only do the proud and the double-minded need to mourn, but if we, as individuals, have a sin that easily besets us, we should mourn.

**James 4:10** **Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.**

Of course if one is lifted up, he is no longer mourning but is praying for renewal. And it is always in order to renew our consecration, especially if a drowsiness starts to overcome us. In fact, we should pray daily for renewal.

The humbling may include a period of fasting and prayerful asking for help in this direction. Although we would not confess all of our faults one to another, it is beneficial to ask for the prayers of others in some instances. Public confession is also necessary in the case of public sin.

**Comment:** Part of the humbling process may include restitution where another has been wronged. In other words, deeds, as well as words, are in order.

**Reply:** When public statements are made, it is in order to question them, especially to make sure we understand the statements.

**Comment:** James seemed to be referring to a more short-term, immediate lifting up, whereas the Apostle Peter said, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you *in due time* [that is, at the end of our Christian walk]” (1 Peter 5:6).

**Reply:** The conditions requiring humility are different. For instance, Peter did not mean that we should always mourn and weep, but he did say later that since we feel the day of the Lord is approaching, we should examine ourselves and have holy conduct (2 Pet. 3:11).

**James 4:11** **Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.**

This condemnation is not criticism of a statement or of the conduct of an individual but is a judgment as to where the brother stands with the Lord. “He that ... judgeth his brother[’s standing with the Lord], ... judgeth the law.” In Jesus’ sermons, John’s epistles, and Paul’s statements, some very strong criticisms are uttered. For instance: “Ye are yet carnal” (1 Cor. 3:3). “Ye have need that one teach you” (Heb. 5:12). There are occasions where it is necessary to point out the wrong, although we should not think in terms of destiny (Great Company or Second Death). We judge the matter at hand, not the destiny.

**Comment:** Romans 14:13 reads, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.” And in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1).

**James 4:12** **There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?**

**Comment:** James was saying that judging another’s eternal welfare makes one a lawgiver, but only *one* Lawgiver has the ability “to save and to destroy.” Stated another way, the one Lawgiver has the ability to judge eternal welfare, whereas the brethren do not.

**Q:** Would verses 11 and 12 be considered a Nicolaitan spirit—to lord over others their eternal destiny?

**A:** Yes. As a whole, the first church was relatively pure. Jesus commended the church of Ephesus because they could “not bear them which are evil: and ... hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and ... hast found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). However, a minority did manifest the Nicolaitan spirit, and that leaven grew with succeeding churches. A true shepherd tries to restore one who leaves the way.

**James 4:13** **Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:**

This thought is also in the Sermon on the Mount: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34). However, James was speaking of those who plan a year in advance. Sometimes such advance planning is necessary, but James was faulting the accompanying

attitude. We cannot be certain we will be on the scene a year from now.

**Comment:** James particularly criticized those who were planning material gain.

**Reply:** Yes. This epistle to the Jews was addressed to two classes: (1) the truly consecrated and (2) nominal Christian Jews. Proof that the latter are included is the scathing denunciation of “rich men” in the beginning of chapter 5. The criticism of holding back wages would not apply to the consecrated, although that spirit can have some wholesome lessons. Not only is the long-range forecast improper for the Christian, but the love of money is the root of much evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Our thoughts should be on the future in heaven, not on the future down here.

**Comment:** The Christian should use a more common-sense approach by planning for what is reasonable but not letting those plans consume his days. He should not stockpile and hoard.

**Reply:** Yes, the words “get gain” are very significant.

**Comment:** We are told to seek “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added” (Matt. 6:33).

**James 4:14** Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Several Scriptures come to mind. “O remember that my life is wind: mine eye shall no more see good” (Job 7:7). “Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah” (Psa. 39:5). “For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth” (Psa. 102:3). “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Pet. 1:24).

**James 4:15** For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

**Comment:** These Scriptures are so practical for our daily living. When Jesus said, “Take no anxious thought for tomorrow,” we might think, “Well, I will take thought for tomorrow, but I will not worry about it.” But here James was saying that whatever plans we have—for a house, for retirement, for a job, etc.—we must realize they are not set in stone but “if the Lord will.”

**Reply:** The expression “if the Lord will” gave rise to the acronym D.V.M. (“God willing” in Latin).

**James 4:16** But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

The Jews were rejoicing in their “boastings” in connection with business successes. They boasted in their arrogance, self-assurance, and self-gratification of lusts. Under the Law, a Jew who obeyed got material rewards. Hence when a Jew became a Christian, he had to change his thinking. Prosperity and worldly gain were not signs of spiritual obedience and growth. Worldliness was a definite problem.

Paul said, “All they in Asia have forsaken me” (2 Tim. 1:15 paraphrase). What a devastating experience, even though the “all” would not mean literally every single one of the brethren! Years ago *The New York Times* had articles about missionaries who had gone to Africa to lay down their lives on behalf of the people, but later the people killed them. As a result, the missionary effort there dried up. How disappointing to those who witnessed this collapse!

**Comment:** Paul rebuked the Corinthians for boasting of their magnanimous attitude toward a

gross sinner in their midst (1 Cor. 5:2,6).

**James 4:17** Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Knowing “to do good” would mean to have a knowledge of what is proper to do. Knowing but not doing is sin. The Apostle Peter said, “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet. 2:21). And Jesus said, “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth” (John 9:41).

**Comment:** It is better to be either hot or cold than to be lukewarm (Rev. 3:15,16).

**Comment:** Under the Law, sins of ignorance had to be atoned for once the individual became aware that sin was involved.

**Reply:** The laws in chapters 1-7 of Leviticus applied to sins that were committed ignorantly. When the individual became cognizant of his sin, he had to offer a certain type of animal. Sins committed against knowledge (that is, willful sins) cannot be summarily forgiven but must be expiated.

**Comment:** Jesus said, “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin... If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15:22,24).

**Reply:** Satan has a clever stratagem today. The people are not supposed to do or say anything that is biased (anti-Semitic, anti-Black, etc.). It is even getting to the point where those who know too much about the Bible are considered cults. All of these restrictions are done in the guise of liberty, whereas actually the opposite is true. This policy is fettering and/or curbing straight talk and truth. People get offended and can even sue for statements uttered. Sexual harassment charges can be filed for imagined wrongs in offices. Instead of liberty, this condition is one of despotism. Satan is working up to persecution of “cults.” Not only are Christians targets, but there are unfavorable remarks about Israel, the nominal people of God. The news media writes as if Israel deliberately and without provocation seeks to kill Arabs.

**Comment:** Verse 17 is discussing sins of omission. Sin is not just committing a wrong act, but it is also failing to do things that should be done.

**Reply:** Yes, that is the particular slant.

**Q:** Wasn't the boasting here in verse 17 in connection with material prosperity?

**A:** Yes, that may have been the particular theme, as verified by the beginning of the next chapter.

**James 5:1** Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

James wrote his epistle shortly before AD 44, which was prior to the trouble that came on the nation of Israel in AD 69-70. The accumulated wealth of the nation was doomed to destruction.

While the main thrust, or focus, of this epistle was to Jews who had accepted Christ, yet every so often James inserted thoughts for the unconsecrated. In chapter 5, he admonished this latter element. Probably he had in mind the admonitions of John the Baptist, which pertained to the

trouble that was to come on Israel in AD 69-70 (Luke 3:10-14). However, God overruled so that the admonitions back there apply equally to the coming Time of Trouble at the end of the present age. In our day, the words of James apply to all of the consecrated, as well as to anyone else who hears them.

**Comment:** Matthew 6:19, part of the Sermon on the Mount, corresponds with James 5:1-3, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.”

**Q:** Would James 5:1-6 also have an application to the end of this age? Would there be a correspondency with Revelation 3:17,18? “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”

**A:** The Laodicean message is addressed to those who take the name “Christian.” In regard to the end times, James 5:1-6 is addressed to the professed Christian, and not just to the Jewish Christian. The “richness” that is condemned in the Laodicean message means a satisfaction with the measure of spiritual development already attained. Such professed Christians feel spiritually rich and fed. However, this passage here in James also has an application to the public because of the mention of the poor whose wages are held back and of the farmers who are not properly reimbursed. Incidentally, the Pastor felt that the agrarian element is the backbone of the nation, and once that is eroded, any kind of trouble can develop.

**Comment:** From the standpoint of principle, Proverbs 11:26 applies, “He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.”

**James 5:2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten.**

**James 5:3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.**

“Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.” Today the gap is widening between the rich and the poor. True Christians who are accumulating wealth improperly will lose all in the giving of their life in the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” period after the Little Flock is gone.

**James 5:4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.**

Again an agrarian emphasis is shown, this time by the phrase “reaped down your fields.” Those who work by the sweat of their brow, tilling the ground and taking all the risks of nature, are not profiting.

**Q:** The word “sabaoth” appears only twice in the New Testament, here and in Romans 9:29. In the Old Testament, the term is translated “LORD of hosts.” Wouldn’t the thought in James 5:4 be the Lord of *armies*, the Lord of *hosts*? God is the Lord of all nationalities, all peoples, who have been oppressed and unjustly treated.

**A:** Yes, that is true in this context, but of course the title, as originally given, pertains to the heavens as the Lord’s army, or host. When the phrase is translated in terms of down here on earth, it pertains to human beings. Just as all of the planets obey God and His laws, so He has

laid down, with regard to the conduct of physical (human) beings, principles and laws that are based on common sense and fair play.

**Comment:** The same philosophy of the poor getting their hire is found in Deuteronomy 24:15. “At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.”

**Reply:** For thousands of years, most people were day laborers (today we call them migrant workers). These were poor people, so their pay was to be given to them regularly and not withheld or delayed. When workers are dependent for their *daily* bread, employers have a tremendous responsibility to be fair.

In countries where child labor is practiced, additional problems can be created when some from the United States interfere and tell them to cease from the practice. The supposed cure makes the condition of the poor ten times worse if child labor is the only means of the family’s getting sustenance. We should analyze a problem from the other person’s standpoint and not just legislate and talk without considering the ramifications. In fact, so many laws are passed each year in this country that it is virtually impossible to be informed on all of them. And riders tacked onto the end of other bills can be especially dangerous. If God’s *perfect* law failed because of man’s imperfections, then man’s *imperfect* law makes conditions a thousand-fold worse. The Kingdom is needed for perfect law and perfect power to enforce that law.

“The cries [of the poor] ... are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.” This statement reminds us of the children of Israel in Egypt. The Lord hearkened to their cry and sent them a savior, Moses.

**James 5:5** Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

“As in a day of slaughter.” As a principle, cattle are fattened for the slaughter. Here James was saying that those who store up riches are unknowingly heaping condemnation on themselves because they are not fulfilling the responsibility of fair play toward others that possession entails. That responsibility seems to be directly proportional to the amount of goods possessed. Riches heap up condemnation instead of real security.

**James 5:6** Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

**Comment:** “The just [One]” would be primarily Jesus, but the use of the present tense (“he doth not resist you”) indicates a secondary application to the body members.

**Reply:** The word “just” is in the singular in this instance, showing that originally James was referring to Jesus, who went like a Lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). But at this end of the age, the reference broadens to include the body members. The Second Psalm is another example of Jesus as the primary application and the body members secondarily.

The context suggests that when conditions ripen and repressive measures are taken, which will ostensibly be done for the common good, the just will become targets. The Adversary’s technique is to have prohibitions in speaking against this or that, and it will get down to the very principles of the Bible and our liberty in Christ. We see the net closing in little by little. The progressive throttling cannot be stopped, and it is just a matter of time until it chokes. Satan wants to throttle true liberty in the name of liberty, but the world’s idea of liberty is license. Everything can be done except the right thing.

**Comment:** Acts 3:14 is a good parallel text: “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and

desired a murderer to be granted unto you.” And 1 Thessalonians 2:15 illustrates the principle: “Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.”

**James 5:7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.**

The “early and latter rain” would be the special outpouring of truth at the beginning and at the end (or Harvest) of the Gospel Age. The husbandman (God) waits until He receives the produce as a result of the early and latter rain. Some of the “latter rain” was very heavy during the general Harvest. When the Pastor died, the truth began to lessen as a worldwide work. The brethren being found in Romania, the Ukraine, Brazil, etc., are the remnant of the latter rain.

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming [Greek *parousia*, presence] of the Lord.” As the under-Shepherd, Jesus is charged with the oversight, but the “husbandman” is God. The husbandman “hath long patience” for the development of the precious fruit. With principles so upside down today, we would like to intervene if we had the power, but God is patient because He is looking for the last members of the Little Flock. They are so precious in His sight that He is withholding the trouble, but once they are gone, swift retribution will occur.

“Until he [it] receive the early and latter rain.” The ground that produces the fruit—that is, the soil of the heart—receives the early and latter rain. From another perspective, the early and latter rain can be considered the outpouring of truth at both the beginning and the end of the Harvest period.

**James 5:8 Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.**

Again the word “coming” should be “presence,” from the Greek *parousia*.

**Q:** Here at the end of the age, we feel the sense of Jesus’ drawing nigh, but did this verse apply to the early Church too from the perspective Paul mentioned in Romans 13:12 of the night being far spent? In the history of the human race, the Christian dispensation is the last third of 6,000 years.

**A:** Paul, who was caught up to the third heaven, had an awesome perspective of the truth (see 2 Cor. 12:2). Therefore, his saying that the Kingdom was drawing nigh was from his special sense of comprehension, but why did James think of the Lord’s presence as being near? The prophecy recorded in John 21:21-23 made the disciples think it was imminent: “Peter seeing him [John] saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me. Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?” With John and James Zebedee being brothers, this prophecy particularly influenced James. Also, the disciples asked Jesus, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Several other Scriptures also sounded as if the kingdom was at hand.

Most of the Christians in the first dispensation (up through AD 69) were Jews. Therefore, the Epistle of James was especially beneficial to Jews, whereas Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, also addressed to the Jews, was of such a high nature that it is very helpful to Gentiles as well.

Not only do each of the stones in the high priest’s breastplate fit the characteristics of an apostle, but also each one corresponds to an Ancient Worthy. Although we cannot pin down the apostles’ counterparts with certainty, nevertheless, it is interesting to observe that Joseph of



Egypt displays some of Paul's characteristics.

**James 5:9 Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.**

“Grudge not one against another, brethren” indicates there was a prevailing condition that could prevent brethren from making their calling and election sure. James warned not to speak evil of one another in the condemnatory sense of saying one was not of the Little Flock (James 4:11). After all, how do we know where we ourselves stand with the Lord? The distinction is as follows. Although we may see symptoms of *conditions* that can be detrimental to the new creature's development and making his calling and election sure, that observation is not the same as judging an individual's destiny, for we are all in process of development. It is the Lord who reviews a life to determine if one is qualified for the Little Flock, not fellow Christians. Evidently, James was warning some who went that far in judging individuals. John even gave the name of such a person: “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (3 John 9,10). Diotrephes criticized those who met with John and pressured the brethren not to attend the fellowship of John, who was an *apostle*.

In Ephesus, the first period of the Church, the general attitude of the brethren was favorable, but certain *individuals* manifested the Nicolaitan spirit. Probably many brethren got life as part of either the Little Flock or the Great Company, and only a few, relatively speaking, went into Second Death. When the Nicolaitan spirit manifested itself by some calling themselves apostles, it was immediately pointed out.

“Behold, the judge standeth before the door.” The “judge” here is Jesus. “For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). This portion of verse 9 reminds us of Genesis 4:7, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin [Satan] lieth at the door.” Cain was being warned that he was coming close to the danger line of willful sin.

Incidentally, with Jesus being the “judge” standing before the door, the *double* message continues for the beginning and the end of the Gospel Age. We are reminded of Jesus' standing at the door and knocking in the message to the Laodicean period of the Church (Rev. 3:20).

**James 5:10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.**

This kind of “patience” is long suffering, patient endurance (as opposed to cheerful constancy).

**James 5:11 Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.**

At the conclusion (“the end”) of his trial, Job could be counted “happy,” but during his trial, he found no relief either according to the flesh or from his three supposed comforters and Elihu. Hebrews 12:11 tells us, “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are [rightly] exercised thereby.”

Job was considered by others to be unfaithful, but his suffering proved the opposite—that he had God's favor. We, too, should be tenaciously faithful under affliction. We are to obey conscience and principle and then *hold fast*. Job had physical sufferings, temporal deprivations,

criticism from his wife, and ridicule from others, yet previously he had been a judge with great deference and respect paid to him. He experienced a real reversal in his circumstances. Afterward, because of his patient endurance, he was blessed abundantly. Verse 11 is a good clue that Job pictures the Church, not the world of mankind.

“The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” In the allegory in the beginning, God defended Job with the Adversary (Job 1:8). Job’s designed experiences revealed his good character—his character became more fully developed through his trials—and his subsequent restoration and reward more than compensated for his sufferings. Not only were Job’s sufferings for his highest good and interest, but it was better that God did not comfort him too quickly. And there is another way that mercy was shown; namely, his “comforters” were made ashamed of their reasoning and put in their place. They had to recognize the wrong done to Job and ask for his forgiveness.

**James 5:12** But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

For more than four chapters, James had just given a lot of *strong* admonitions, so why now did he say, “*Above all things, my brethren, swear not ... but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation*”? Why did he give this type of advice?

**Comment:** He was warning those who were boastful, too confident, and overspeaking. Their own words would condemn them. By judgmentally condemning others, they were, in effect, judging themselves to be of the Little Flock.

**Reply:** “Let not him that girdeth on his harness [armor] boast himself as he that putteth it off” is the principle (1 Kings 20:11). We should not state too affirmatively what we will and will not do with regard to future experiences, for we do not really know the mettle of our own character. Talk is cheap! Even the Apostle Peter needed to be “converted” after consecration (Luke 22:32). We are not to be boastful but should *pray for help* that we will do what is right. A vow must be kept.

**Comment:** Again James was quoting Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount: “But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil” (Matt. 5:34-37).

**Reply:** One of the signs of the end of the age is the prevalence of “trucebreakers.” “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be ... trucebreakers” (2 Tim. 3:1-3). A “truce” is a promise. Today cynics say, “A promise is meant to be broken.” The standard of public morals is upside down, and the conditions in the world are coming into the Church. For example, many feel that getting a divorce with a legal paper ends the matter, but especially among the consecrated, it is necessary to know the grounds for the divorce.

**Comment:** What is equally bad is that the Church resents an investigation that helps one to judge righteously. Brethren feel that the divorce is past history and should not be reopened.

**Reply:** We would like to know the grounds of the divorce so that our own conscience will not be defiled and so that we will not make a wrong judgment of the matter. Otherwise, we might be favoring the one whom the Lord disapproves, and to favor the party who has committed the wrong does additional harm.

**James 5:13** Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

The implication is that the afflicted one is not rejoicing. To experience the suffering is not pleasant; it is afterward that the rejoicing comes. However, our *general* attitude should be one of cheerfulness, for overall we should rejoice. The instruction is to pray when we are afflicted, for in joy and in sorrow, we are to direct all to the Lord. Incidentally, we should not harshly judge one who suffers and mourns in a trial, for Christians are not stoics who are impervious to emotion.

**Q:** What about a person who has a nervous condition that causes weakness? Can the “affliction” referred to here be *either* spiritual or physical?

**A:** Yes, and having a spiritual sickness may or may not mean one is guilty. When we are going through an affliction, it is proper to ask in prayer, “Is this experience a result of my doing good, or is it because of disobedience?” Paul and Silas were severely beaten for preaching the Word, but afterward they sang for *joy* because they knew they were suffering for righteousness’ sake (Acts 16:22-25).

**James 5:14** Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

“Is any[one morally or spiritually] sick among you?” is the normal question, although physical sickness could be included in certain unusual instances. The Lord *can* *heal* if it is His will.

**Comment:** The distinction between verses 13 and 14 seems to be that one who is physically or spiritually sick where guilt is not involved needs to pray. One who is sin sick because of disobeying the Lord is in a more serious condition and needs to “call for the elders of the church ... [to] pray over him.”

**Reply:** That is true. For example, *isolated* periods of affliction caused by, say, side effects of medicine are one thing, but *continuous* depression requires more attention than just the individual’s praying. An individual in this latter circumstance wants and needs some assurance that he is not rejected by the Lord. Discouragement is a tool of the Adversary for assailing some of the best of the Lord’s people. The most conscientious brethren, those who are most introspective of their own life and deeds, are the very ones who can fall into this category by condemning themselves where perhaps they should not. Even the Apostle Paul must have had an experience along this line, for he said, “I judge not mine own self” (1 Cor. 4:3); that is, “I do not judge where I stand with the Lord.” Paul had a persistent fever, perhaps malaria, that caused him to have some down periods.

James was referring to a situation where the individual felt himself falling further and further from the Lord. Notice that the remedy for such sin-sickness is for the *individual himself* to “call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” The one who is “sick” must initiate the action.

**Comment:** The “elders” would not necessarily have to be elected elders, but should be mature brothers or even a sister. One who is really suffering from spiritual sickness and craves restoration to favor with the Lord would seek help from those he deems to have walked faithfully in the narrow way—and hence from those who would sympathetically and earnestly pray about the matter.

**Reply:** Yes, in time of need, one would want to look for the stronger brethren, for those in whom he had confidence and from whom he would get *scriptural* advice, even if they were far away. The individual could go to just one “elder,” but it is better if there are two or three.

In theory, elected elders are supposed to be above average, and it would be best, all things being equal, to go to the local elders. However, they may not be the ones in whom the individual has the most confidence—it would depend on the cause or manifestation of the sickness. For example, if one has been a thorn in an ecclesia, he should go to the ecclesia elders. Incidentally, in times of persecution, literal elders would probably be more qualified and sympathetic. In times of relative ease, one should select *mature* brothers or sisters, even from a distance.

“Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” Along with prayer, literal oil may have been used in the early Church, especially with the Christian Jews. Literal oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, would have been a visual token and one that could be felt.

**Comment:** The use of literal oil would be very humbling. Mark 6:13 states that when the twelve apostles went out, “they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”

**Reply:** When the seventy were sent out before Pentecost, they were endued with the Holy Spirit in a sort of mechanical manner. Jesus gave them of his spirit. Having had a Jewish tradition along the line of using literal oil, they were naturally disposed to anoint with oil, but down through the age, the literal aspect was dropped and just the spiritual aspect retained. For one to have a feeling of the Lord’s presence in his life was far more important than the use of literal oil.

**Comment:** Whether or not literal oil was used, the important point is that those who were spiritually sick needed more of the Holy Spirit in the sense that it was the Comforter.

**Reply:** The “elders” should use comforting and unctuous words. Communal prayer is intended. With the elders standing, the “sick” one confesses his weakness and kneels down in humility. Then the elders pray over him.

**James 5:15** And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Paul said (paraphrased), “To the Jew, I am a Jew. To the Gentile, I am a Gentile. To the strong, I am strong. To the weak, I am weak” (1 Cor. 9:20-22). The opposite advice has been given in a testimony meeting, where one who was discouraged was told, “You should not be that way. You do not have faith.” Improperly, strength has been used for the weak one, and weak and submissive advice has been given to the one who is overly strong. If a person is strong in committing the wrong, would talking to him meekly (“Dear brother ...”) change him? No! If strength is met with strength—for example, with a Scripture that is blunt and to the point—it will hopefully accomplish some good. The manner in which the sick and the weak are treated becomes important, as well as the steps that are to be taken. And prayer is a very important element in the advice. If a brother is already discouraged and condemning himself, someone can push him off the cliff by suggesting that his suffering is caused by something he did wrong.

“The Lord shall raise him up [restore him].” Verse 15, which pertains primarily to spiritual or moral sickness, is related to verse 14, the reference being to group prayer. The prayer of faith of the group will save the spiritually or morally sick individual. The healing can even begin immediately. However, it is important for all parties participating in the group prayer to be in heart sympathy with the situation and to do the procedure according to the Scriptures. And if the individual has committed sins, he will be forgiven because in *true repentance*, he asked for this prayer.

“And if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” The word “if” shows that one’s mind can also get “sick” without sins being committed. For example, physical sickness can result in mental fears and depression, and abnormal pressures can cause a nervous breakdown. One who cannot reason straight cannot pray or study properly. Low blood sugar can affect the mind, and another example would be a severe brain tumor, where this prayer of faith might be offered in order to avert suicide. Thus soul sickness can come from conditions other than sin.

**Comment:** Faith healers have abused this practice in some nominal circles, but the abuse notwithstanding, these Scriptures are good advice.

**James 5:16** Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

“Confess your faults one to another.” An example of a “fault” to be confessed would be when the mind keeps returning to unwanted thoughts, such as envy. However, verse 16 does not mean we should confess *all* of our faults.

**Comment:** The Greek word translated “faults” is rendered “sins” in both the RSV and the NIV: “Therefore confess your sins to one another.”

**Reply:** If one feels he is starting to sink spiritually and is in need of help, he should ask for that help. However, the group should be sympathetic enough to realize the situation and to desire to help such a one lest he fall out of the way. Unfortunately, some brethren are in a group that is so hard and lacking in feeling that a brother or sister can faint by the way because of being afraid to confess the fault(s). In other words, some individuals feel we should not have such faults. Thus this verse is a lesson to the ecclesia, and especially to the elders, to be approachable and amenable.

**Comment:** “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” We often quote this portion of verse 16 in the context of private prayer on behalf of an individual, whereas the context includes public prayer.

**Reply:** This text is also related to Jesus’ ministry and his healing of certain ones. Jesus commended individuals for their faith, saying, “Thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matt. 9:22). “I have not seen such great faith in all Israel” (Matt. 8:10 paraphrase). It is interesting that James brought in the subject of faith, for most people think of him as emphasizing works, particularly in the earlier part of his epistle—works of faith. But now, in the end of his epistle, he stressed the subject of faith. Thus James was rounded out on the subject with a practical application.

In the statement “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” notice that the word “prayer” is in the singular. Therefore, under this condition, a sincere group prayer offered by an elder or elders is favorable. In fact, the sincere prayer of any righteous consecrated Christian, in whom the Lord is pleased—whether or not the individual is an elected elder or is a man or a woman—will have some effect. Of course the effect, the answer to the prayer, may not be in the sense that the afflicted individual had in mind, but the Lord will show compassion and a way out, an alternative.

**Comment:** This is good, practical spiritual advice because if something a brother has done, is doing, or is feeling is so grievous that he thinks he cannot bear the trial, the Adversary will try to take advantage of the situation. Confessing this weakness and need for prayer before others is helpful.

As stated earlier, verse 15 is related to verse 14. Although verse 16 is related to verse 15, James was putting in the clutch. Verses 14 and 15 showed the effectiveness of group prayer, but now

he was sliding into the thought that it is good as individuals to confess faults one to another. Thus there is a double application because James was going from the group into the singular application. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. [Then] the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Verse 16 goes down to the individual case, for it is not always practical to bring up faults before a group. A cold group cannot understand the weakness and the struggle that a Christian is having.

**Comment:** Both aspects of verse 16 are helpful. At one time or another, we are all in the situation of the individual who has the sin or weakness and needs the prayers of others. It is difficult to make the confession to someone else, yet confession is important, for it shows the proper heart attitude in desiring to be healed. The other aspect is that of being the one who is willing to help. We can pray for the individual and be the strong one at that point. There is a great weight of responsibility. The NIV says, "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." The power of the Holy Spirit is behind the prayer, and the effectiveness is that the prayer works; it makes the change.

**Comment:** Sometimes weaknesses remain with us for a long time. We receive help and relief in answer to prayer, yet that weakness may persist or reappear so that we have to ask again and again for help. Therefore, if a weakness is not permanently lifted, we should not give up and/or get discouraged.

If we *privately* misjudge or incorrectly reprimand another, we should *privately* ask for forgiveness. If we *publicly* issue a rebuke that is improper, we should *publicly* admit our fault and ask for forgiveness. It is a serious matter to misrepresent an elder and thus to adversely affect his ministry. And if an elder realizes he has been promoting a wrong important doctrine, he should state the matter publicly in a succeeding talk.

The "fervent prayer of a righteous man" has great power in its effects. Notice that there are two requirements in finding one to pray for us. (1) He must be "righteous"; that is, he should be one who has tried to obey God over a period of time. (2) The prayer must be fervent. Stated another way, the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerfully effective.

**James 5:17** **Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**

Elijah felt overwhelmed when he said, "I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life," yet he did some very courageous things (1 Kings 19:10,14).

James revealed something that is not in the Old Testament, namely, that Elijah prayed for the famine to come on the nation because he felt the people needed to be humbled for their sins in worshipping other gods. In addition, we are not told that the length of the period without rain was 3 1/2 years. Elijah was zealous for God to bring the people to their senses, for under the Law, disobedience was not to be accompanied by temporal prosperity (Leviticus 26). Of course a prayer of faith must be in harmony with God's will in order for it to be answered in the affirmative. God fixed the "no rain" period as 3 1/2 years to fit in with the prophetic 1,260 years of famine for the Word of God.

Note: At the end of the age, the leaders of Christendom will give the prayer of faith, and a dramatic answer to that prayer will be permitted in order to deceive all but the very elect (Matt. 24:24; Rev. 13:13,14).

**James 5:18** **And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.**

The Old Testament also does not reveal the detail that Elijah “*prayed again,*” and the rain came, that is, after the fixed period of time determined by God had elapsed. In other words, when Elijah bowed himself down to the earth, he was praying, and then he saw a cloud in the shape of a man’s fist (1 Kings 18:41-44).

James introduced Elijah into the account as an example of one who offered *undoubting* prayer. Likewise the Christian tries to aid the sin-sick, afflicted individual through fervent *undoubting* prayer. Job was brought into the account from the standpoint of his afflictions (verse 11).

**James 5:19** Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

**James 5:20** Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

One who saves a soul from Second Death hides a multitude of sins, but whose sins—the sinner’s sins or the sins of the one who does the saving, or converting? This situation is serious, and a principle is being enunciated, so it is important to determine whose multitude of sins is being hidden. The sins of the *sick* person are covered. Some evangelists like this text because they feel they can continue to live their careless and immoral lifestyle and still be approved of God as long as they convert others. A wrong lesson is thus drawn, for they believe that the success of their ministries hides the multitude of their sins. However, sins can be forgiven only through the merit of Jesus Christ. A realization of the need for cleansing, the attitude of repentance, and then looking to God through Jesus are what saves sinners. It is a dangerous and false concept for an evangelist to feel that the successful results of his ministry in converting others gives him a good standing with God.

The very fact that the individual asks for prayer shows he is in a penitent attitude. “Is anyone spiritually sick or weak among you? Let him call for elders, and let them pray over him.” By confessing his need for help, the sick one manifests repentance. Realizing that there is a barrier with his prayers to God, that he is having difficulty getting through, he asks for help. Verse 20 refers back to verse 15, “If he [the sick one] have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.” Sins are covered for the one who is seeking help, not for the one who is being used as an instrument of help.

**Q:** Is there a correlation, in principle, to the role of a watchman as stated in Ezekiel 3:20,21? “When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, ... he shall die: because thou [as a watchman] hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.”

**A:** That text is indirectly related and is like an addendum, for it shows the responsibility of the one who is a watcher and is giving the advice. However, James was talking about the one who is being advised and helped. Ezekiel was strong about one who turns from his righteousness.

**Q:** In regard to hiding a multitude of sins, the sins of the sinner are being covered. Are past sins being hidden or future sins that would have been committed if the individual had not repented? Past willful sins would still have to be expiated; they could not be hidden. But possible future sins would be hidden because they would not be committed.

**A:** That would be correct and makes sense.

**Comment:** Although this portion of James is directed to the one who is the sinner, another lesson is the responsibility we have for helping our brethren and being involved with those

whom we see are slipping out of the way. We should not just sit back and say, “Too bad,” or simply, “I will pray for them,” for *action* is indicated in verse 19: “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one *convert* him.” The only way to convert a brother is to be actively involved with him and to help him see the error of his way.

**Reply:** Ezekiel 3 brings out that thought, which is a good point but is not the particular point James was emphasizing. Whoever is instrumental in helping a morally sick or weak brother will certainly get a blessing.

**Comment:** That will be the Church’s job in the Kingdom, so we should have that attitude now.

**Comment:** In saving a soul from Second Death, we are really saving two souls, the sinner’s soul because he has hearkened and our own because we have taken the right action.

**Reply:** There are two types of deliverance. What James was saying can be taken from two different standpoints. One is from the standpoint of the individual who is asking for help. But at the end of his epistle, he was also saying, “If you see one going astray, you have a responsibility to warn him of the error of his way and to try to stir him up and save him.”

If a brother gets despondent and gives up, he is lost. His attitude should be such that he goes to the class or to some trusted individual for advice and help. God can save unto the uttermost if one is humble and desires help after “erring” (wandering from the truth or going astray). It is sad when one goes beyond the point of retrieval.

In regard to the sinner, we can use the illustration of a river and a waterfall, like Niagara Falls. As one is drifting downstream and getting nearer and nearer the falls, the tug of the water becomes stronger and stronger. Therefore, to take a step of retrieval becomes more and more difficult. But if one in that position does take a stand, it is all the more creditable because of the difficulty. Hence he can be forgiven *more*. A step of faith taken at one’s weakest moment is rewarded. The *principle* is the same with one who has a lot of this world’s goods (power, influence, wealth, or whatever), for he could more easily go astray. However, if he is *faithful*, he will receive a greater reward than one who had less but was equally faithful.

In summary, a multitude of sins—many, many sins—will be forgiven, and the individual will be saved from Second Death *if the right steps are taken*. After he has gone astray, he must *desire* forgiveness and *turn back* to harmony with the Lord.

### James 5:13-20 Supplement

(From study led by Bro. Frank Shallieu in 1982)

**James 5:13** Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

A principle is stated here; namely, the one who is “afflicted” may not be in the same happy condition as the one who is “merry.” The afflicted individual has a right to be in an entirely different frame of mind. Opposite advice is sometimes foolishly given to those who are mourning and in an afflicted condition, the implication being that the Christian should always be rejoicing. It is true that the *general* attitude of a Christian should be cheerful, but the specific condition of an individual at a certain moment in time is another matter. Thus general rules cannot be applied to every specific incident. Nevertheless, exceptions to the overall picture are overruled by the *preponderant* number of experiences where the individual is in a happy and cheerful frame of mind. If that is not the case, the Christian is living below his privilege. Many Scriptures indicate that a trial is grievous for the moment, but rejoicing comes afterward, that



is, when the person sees the fruitage that results.

Therefore, we cannot judge one another based upon a particular experience. How the Christian meets trials, experiences, and calamities overall, throughout his life, is what matters. Some incorrectly feel the Christian should be like a stoic, impervious to emotion. However, emotion is proper on certain occasions.

**Comment:** Verse 13 is saying that whatever our condition, we should direct our thoughts to the Lord. If we are in trouble, we pray to Him. If we are happy, we praise Him. Everything should be directed to the Lord.

**Reply:** Yes, we may be praying to receive forgiveness or to know where we stand with the Lord. Or perhaps we are praying to know if a particular experience is a mark of disfavor or the result of doing good. For example, Paul and Silas were beaten with stripes and put in prison for preaching the Word. What did they do? They sang hymns because they knew their sufferings were for righteousness' sake.

**Q:** What kind of "affliction" was James speaking about here?

**A:** It could be any kind of affliction. The type of affliction cannot be tied down any more than the type of merriment. One might rejoice over receiving an answer to prayer, at seeing something beautiful in nature, for having a happy experience, etc. Similarly, the Christian would pray about a great variety of afflictions. Certainly we do not bring all our problems to the brethren, for if that were the case, we would be constantly talking about disappointments and trials. The great majority of our afflictions are taken privately to the Lord in prayer. Only when we need additional comfort or advice do we disclose our problems to others.

**James 5:14** **Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:**

What kind of "sickness" was James referring to? The *Volumes* explain the sickness as a spiritual sin-sick condition that an individual cannot handle. He may feel he is getting further and further away from the Lord.

**Comment:** Depression may not be the result of sin-sickness at all but could be the result of a mental breakdown, for example. Therefore, this "sickness" is not limited to wrongdoing. There is nothing wrong in having a prayer for one who is depressed and feels he cannot cope with the overpowering situation.

**Reply:** A physical condition in the mind sometimes affects our spiritual condition.

Several principles are involved. "Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." What principle in connection with this solution is first made manifest?

**Comment:** The suffering individual himself has to ask for help. The request cannot be initiated by others who see the problem.

**Reply:** Many try to influence or petition on behalf of others. There is nothing wrong with such efforts, but it is not wise to take the radical step of bringing the condition to "the elders" and to expect results unless the individual himself originates the request. Otherwise, the "formula" is almost doomed to defeat right away and is not helpful to the faith of either the individual or those trying to administer the solution.

**Comment:** The “elders” are not necessarily elected elders, but they should be brethren who (1) are living close to the Lord and (2) can enter sympathetically into the situation.

**Reply:** If we were living in a time of great persecution against Christians, the elected elders would be outstanding representatives. They would be elected because their lives manifest courage and conviction. However, in times of ease, peace, and prosperity, we do not know whether the elected elders are really mature. When Christians have to meet secretly because the empire is against them, the contrast is much more noticeable with those who are knowledgeable and courageous for the Lord. If we needed help, we would certainly go to such obviously strong elders for help.

The point is that the “elders” do not necessarily have to be elected but should be mature Christians. It would be better to call in elders from far away, elected or otherwise, than to just seek help from local individuals because they are elected elders. Normally speaking, with all things being equal, it would be logical to seek help from local elected elders, but things are not always equal. Moreover, an elder (singular) could be sought; a plurality is desirable but not essential. The elders should be sympathetic to the situation, yet rugged enough individuals that their sympathy would not override principle. Otherwise, they might agree with the one seeking help, even if the person is wrong. As the saying goes, “misery loves company,” so the tendency is to choose those who will confirm us in our problem, even if wrong advice is given. Rather, we should go to mature brothers (or sisters) who have manifested stability of character and sound sense in the past. Such individuals can provide help and advice for the circumstance.

**Q:** We have been concentrating on spiritual sickness or a mental condition, but sometimes even an extreme physical state may be involved. The point is that sometimes we, as a group or fellowship, go so far in the other direction that we do not believe in physical healing. However, physical situations may arise in life, perhaps even with our own child—and where would we go but to the Lord?

**A:** We each personally have to answer for these matters and conduct our lives accordingly. As individuals, we should try to base our reasoning on God’s Word. Our Heavenly Father is “very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (verse 11). A stoic might set up rules and regulations he is sorry for later. For example, if one has lived 50 years with a principle, then to rescind it is hard, even when the principle is seen to be not especially creditable. Generally speaking, verse 14 refers to spiritual sickness, and sometimes there is a mixture of both spiritual and physical. In rare cases, the sickness can even be wholly a physical situation, but the brunt of the advice is spiritual.

**Comment:** The “affliction” of verse 13 seems to be more physical, although it could include a spiritual affliction. Whatever the problem, we can always personally go to the Lord in prayer. According to His will, He may heal us through our own prayers. Then prayer accompanied with the anointing of oil would be more along the lines of, but not be confined to, a spiritual illness.

**Q:** Since the term “the elders” is followed by the phrase “of the church,” is the emphasis more on elected elders?

**A:** No doubt, generally speaking, the reference is to elected elders of the local ecclesia, but the verse is not limited to that interpretation. James was merely giving advice in a few words to answer a very real problem. He was giving *guidelines* of a way out and not saying that something else could not be done under another circumstance.

**Comment:** With regard to spiritual sickness, to call on the local elders for prayer might even be, in a sense, an admission by a person that he has been of a contrary disposition in their midst. In other words, he may have caused dissension in the ecclesia. Then, by asking the elders of the

ecclesia to pray for him, he would be admitting his fault and his desire to have God's favor.

**Reply:** Yes. Someone may have done something wrong and now, seeing the result of the wrong course and the injuries it has caused, he notices that his own relationship with the Lord has deteriorated.

What is the thought of "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord"? We believe literal oil was used in the early Church, particularly with the Christianized Jew. Certain signs or evidences (handkerchiefs, for example) were used back there when tongues and other gifts existed. However, *literal* oil is certainly not a necessity today, especially for *spiritual* sickness. The oil represented being anointed with the Holy Spirit. Comfort and unctuous words console the individual who is looking for help, advice, and sympathy through communal prayer. Notice that the elders pray "over him." The thought is that the suppliant, who was looking for aid, went to the elders, confessed his weakness, and knelt down before the standing elders. We see the practice being done in a visual way back there.

**Comment:** Baptism with water, water immersion, is a good step to manifest our consecration before the brotherhood. The use of literal oil would be the same in principle, manifesting the heart condition.

**Reply:** There would be nothing wrong in using literal oil today to try to fulfill the letter of the Word, but we do not see it as an essential requirement. Whether or not to use literal oil would be up to the feeling of the individuals who are involved. The letter and the spirit combined would be better than just the spirit alone.

What are "physical" afflictions? There can be material loss that has nothing to do with sickness or the body. Thus a Christian can be afflicted in any number of ways besides having a physical calamity. For example, the problem can pertain to one's family or his employment. For a brother with five children to be suddenly out of work is an affliction. He would earnestly pray to the Lord for help.

**James 5:15** And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

The "sick" are primarily the spiritually sick, but the physical is not ruled out entirely, especially since the two sometimes go hand in hand.

**Comment:** James stated unequivocally that the "prayer of faith" will be answered: "The prayer of faith *shall save the sick.*" Similarly, he said earlier, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and *it shall be given him.* But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:5,6).

**Reply:** Yes. Not only does God not upbraid a prayer for wisdom, but He is pleased to grant the petition that is asked, nothing doubting.

Notice that the sins of the individual who is in this state of sickness will be forgiven. This statement shows that verse 15 is primarily referring to spiritual sickness. But why would the sins be forgiven?

**Comment:** The person has truly repented by humbling himself *to ask* the elders for prayer.

**Reply:** Yes, forgiveness is contingent upon the individual's humbly requesting aid and a closer relationship with the Lord. Also, the person who presents himself for this healing is evidently kneeling in humble supplication.

**Q:** Is the word “if” correct? Should it be “though”—“and *though* he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him”?

**A:** Not necessarily. If a person is truly sick, the mind is affected. Some Christians who are introspective by nature are fearful, and they wonder and imagine things in an abnormal fashion because of a physical condition of the mind. The mind, or brain, can get sick just as a stomach, arm, or leg can ache. The brain can have a sickness that creates a melancholy situation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, even Jesus, who was not sick but weakened, had the great burden of wondering if he had been faithful in every matter. Sometimes a physical condition or other abnormal pressures in life can cause a nervous breakdown, adversely affecting the mind. Thus a spiritual sickness or feeling can prevent one from studying the Bible or from praying effectively, for example, without sins having been committed. From this standpoint, the word “if” is proper in verse 15, even though in most instances the condition probably results from sin or disobedience.

**Comment:** There can be pressures on the brain that have nothing to do with sin. Low blood sugar can also affect behavior and produce depression. During these periods, one cannot rejoice. It seems that to really enter sympathetically into another person’s infirmity, we need to have the experience ourself.

**Reply:** That is why this type of subject should be discussed and why a soul sickness due to conditions other than sin should not be ruled out. It is harder for those in present truth to humble themselves today because brethren generally think of verse 15 as applying only to those who do something wrong. They think one’s estrangement from the Lord is because of disobedience and sin. Because that is the only view usually entertained, a person suffering soul sickness becomes even more reluctant to humble himself lest the action put him in an unfavorable light. Meanwhile, the individual does not know what is causing the condition. The trial is especially difficult if the group the individual meets with on a regular basis is cold and not given to commiseration for this type of condition. Consequently, verse 15 is not practiced much in the Truth movement.

**Comment:** Job suffered along that line. He had not done wrong, but those who observed him—the supposed comforters—thought he had. Brethren can likewise jump to the wrong conclusion or assumption.

**Reply:** For that reason, Job was singled out by name in verse 11. In verses 17 and 18, Elijah was brought in from the standpoint not of the afflicted one but of the one who is trying to aid the afflicted one. Elijah’s faith is an example of those who pray *in a scriptural way* in faith over such a one and do not doubt. Such prayers will be answered, James tells us. “The prayer of faith shall save the sick [individual], and the Lord shall raise him up [restore him].” However, both the afflicted one and the comforters have to observe the mandatory contingencies.

When the prayer of faith is consummated, the afflicted one gets up off his knees, and something begins to happen. In fact, many sincere Christians who have been helped by the prayer of faith testify they felt something happen that they cannot fully explain. In other words, the healing process begins at the moment of the consummation of the prayer of faith when the individual starts to stand up.

**Comment:** A theoretical example of when the prayer of faith should be requested is the following. If a Christian has suicidal thoughts because of a brain tumor or some other physical condition with excruciating pain, he should call for the elders.

**Reply:** In order for the prayer of faith to be profitable, we can see the importance of the

proper atmosphere on both sides of the situation. If a person has difficulty going to others in his ecclesia for help because he knows they are not sympathetic along this line, that person should look for help elsewhere. Either others are not aware of this type of thinking, or they feel the individual should bear the trial himself.

**Comment:** We can see the necessity to study these verses now, for any one of us could be in this situation of soul sickness before the end of our consecrated walk. If we do not study these principles earlier, our head would be too confused at that time to know what to do or whom to ask for help.

**James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.**

Verse 16 can be viewed profitably from two standpoints. (1) If the fault were of the type where we misunderstood another person and *privately* judged and reprimanded him, then we should *privately* go to that individual and personally seek his forgiveness. (2) If the misrepresentation were done *publicly*, then it should be *publicly* renounced and confessed. In other words, if we slandered or treated another party wrongfully, then we should confess publicly that we were at fault in the words we had spoken. In a very extreme situation, we should apologize as well as publicly confess our faults to one another, but even with faults of a lesser nature, we should still confess and manifest our humility publicly.

Verse 16 is not saying to confess all of our faults to one another, but for a teacher to set himself up as not having faults would be wrong. A teacher does not have to specify each fault, but he should indicate that he has faults and problems too.

If a teacher is misrepresented and the misrepresentation kills his service, there is long-term damage. Another case would be where an elder taught a wrong doctrine over the years and now sees his error. ("Doctrine" uses a *series* of Scriptures to teach a certain lesson.) The elder would be obligated to confess that he now sees the subject in a new light. If his wrong teaching has been quite extensive and he cannot make the correction with everyone who heard it, he should make the correction as public as possible and try to get it on a recording. In other words, a "fault" in either habit (practice) or doctrine should be confessed.

"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." The RSV is better: "The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects." Not only is the prayer meaningful, fervent, earnest, purposeful, and done with heart and soul, but also it is given by a "righteous man," one who has been living in harmony with God's commands as far as possible. Thus the prayer should be done with meaning and emphasis, and it should be backed up with a life of trying to do God's will to the extent of one's ability. With this procedure being followed, we would read this portion of verse 16 as follows: "The fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerfully effective [or powerful and effective]."

**James 5:17 Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.**

**James 5:18 And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.**

Elijah, "a man subject to like passions as we are ... prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth" for 3 1/2 years. When he prayed again, "the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Elijah initiated these two prayers. Here is additional information not supplied in the Old Testament. There the impression is given that God purposed the withholding of rain and Elijah acted accordingly, but here we see that Elijah prayed earnestly

that it not rain. Why did the prophet pray to this effect?

**Comment:** Elijah wanted the Israelites to be brought to their knees because they were worshipping Baal.

**Reply:** Yes. True prayer is not credulity but the exercise of a belief in God and a trust that He will do certain things based on His Word and principles. Elijah saw that the great prosperity of the evildoer had fermented the entire nation. False prophets and false teachers proliferated. As a person, Elijah was very zealous for God, so he prayed earnestly, “Do not let it rain so that the people will be brought to their senses. You said in Leviticus 26 that if the nation did not obey, you would withhold the rain, causing our crops to diminish and our land to be unfruitful.” Thus Elijah *prayed in harmony* with what God had predicated and established as a principle. Similarly, Daniel, who understood by the books that 70 years of desolation had been predicted, prayed for the forgiveness of the people in harmony with God’s own words through Jeremiah the prophet.

Elijah prayed that the rain would be withheld for quite a long time, and God fixed the period as 1,260 days, for that specific time period would fit in with subsequent spiritual fulfillments. In other words, God used the initial asking of Elijah as an opportunity to bring in the 1,260 years of prophecy.

**Q:** Revelation 13:13,14 talks about the two-horned beast doing great miracles in the sight of men, making fire come down from heaven to deceive the people into making an image to the beast. Will that situation be similar to Elijah’s experience, whereby the great leaders of Christendom pray for something and the dramatic fulfillment makes the whole world think they are men of God? It will seem to be a prayer of faith in the eyes of the world.

**A:** Yes. A few Scriptures suggest that a supernatural manifestation will convince certain ones at the very end of the age, who will assume the answer to prayer came from God.

Elijah prayed again and asked his servant to go up into the mountain seven times. A little hand appeared in the distance, and the rain came (1 Kings 18:41-46). Meanwhile, God so energized Elijah that he ran ahead of Ahab’s chariot.

**James 5:19** Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

**James 5:20** Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

A “multitude of sins” of the one who has gone astray will be hidden if he sincerely repents. That soul is saved from Second Death, eternal death. The sinner is converted from the error of his way by changing his course and returning to the Lord. Unfortunately, as we grow older and older in our consecrated walk, several individuals come to mind who erred from the truth, and we wish we could have helped them. However, they came to a situation where they were beyond help. In some cases, we can see that a step was taken which makes retrieval impossible. With others, retrieval is possible but looks very, very unlikely. With still others, we feel that if they continue in the situation, retrieval will become impossible. To have the blessing and privilege of getting someone to act properly on the advice is a cause for much rejoicing.

Jesus “is able also to save ... to the uttermost [those] that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Thus if people who err from the way will just humble themselves and take the proper stand, the Lord will be very merciful to them. However, the more one goes downstream, the more difficult it becomes to turn around. Picture a river with a waterfall. As one gets nearer and nearer to the waterfall, the tug of the

water becomes stronger and stronger. To take the step of retrieval, a stand of faith, as one gets nearer and nearer the brink of disaster is extremely difficult and thus is more creditable if it occurs. The individual will be forgiven more for having taken a stand at his weakest moment. The principle is the same with those who have a lot of this world's goods in power, influence, wealth, education, or another area. If such individuals are faithful to the Lord, He will give them more than someone else who has less. The reason for the greater reward is that they could more easily go astray because of their possession of goods. Here that same principle is enunciated from the standpoint of the sinner. A "multitude of sins" will be forgiven if the person takes such a step.

When a woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, the Pharisees criticized him. Jesus replied, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47). The Lord considered her act of humility as evidence of her love in spite of her numerous sins. Many probably deceive themselves into thinking they can trifle with sin because the Lord is merciful and forgiving. Hence they get deeper and deeper into sin until they find they cannot fight the current and retrieval is impossible. The Apostle Paul said, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Rom. 6:1,2). To do so would be presumptuous.