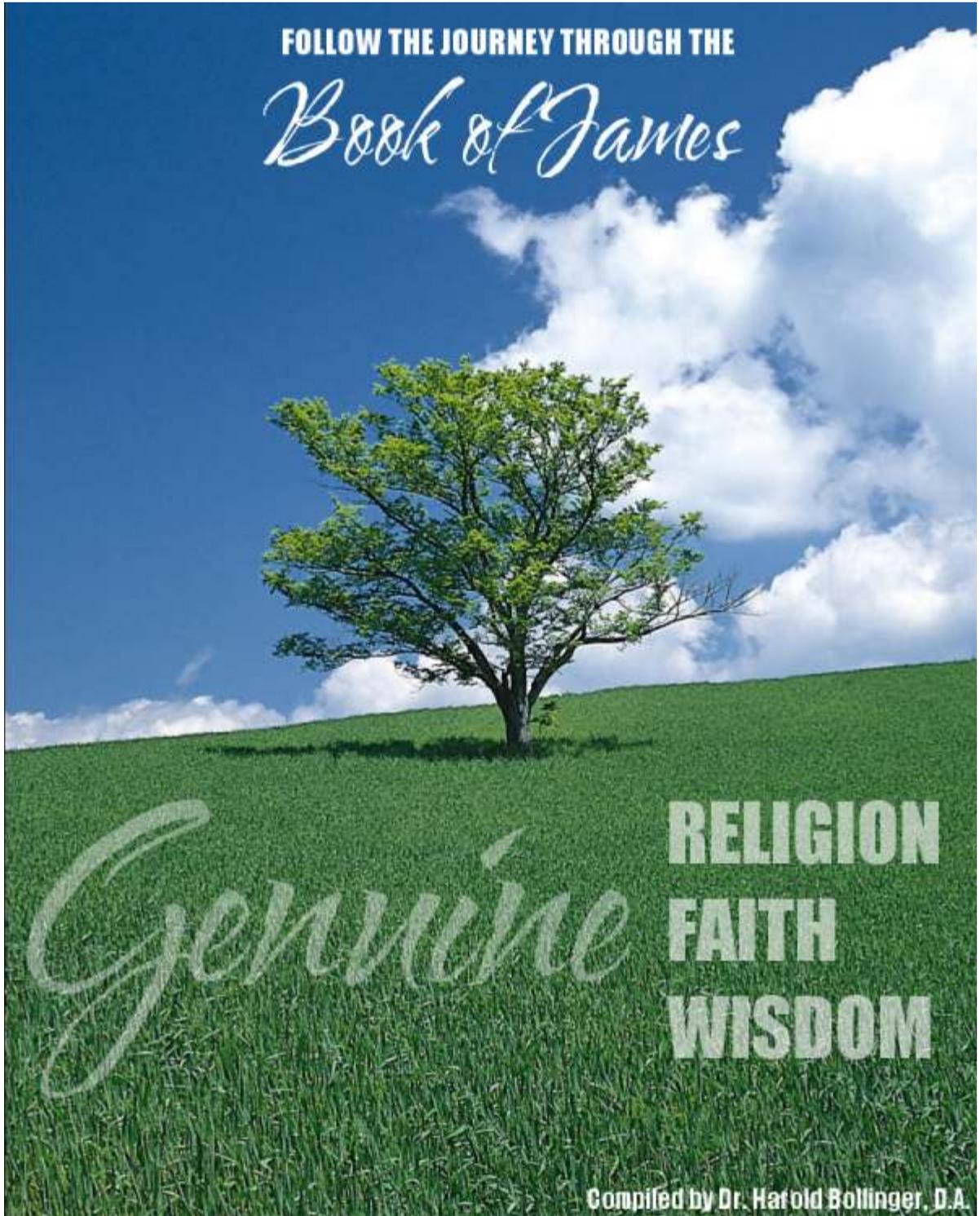


FOLLOW THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE

# *Book of James*



*Genuine*

**RELIGION  
FAITH  
WISDOM**

Compiled by Dr. Harold Bollinger, D.A.

## **A Journey into the Book of James**

From Heaven comes the message of Christian conduct to James. He shares with the church how Christians should conduct themselves. He sees the need of being faithful, even in the midst of offence, hardships and even death. Do not be offended. It will stop the flow of the Holy Spirit working in believers; only through continued faithfulness can sinners be converted and brought into the Kingdom of God.

### **A Broken Pocket**

By Harold Bollinger

Within my heart, I found a broken pocket  
From hurts, harsh words, and rejections of the past,  
New joys, I tried to place within this pocket  
Yet they quickly slipped away, and would not last.

To mend this fracture, I tried to reminisce.  
I'd check each event in hopes to understand.  
In my distress, I could not patch this pocket.  
While holding on to memories of the past.

Slowly Hopes for a future glumly rose before me  
While holding on to past, unforgiven deeds.  
To change my heart and plan a new beginning  
The memories of the past, I choose not to feed.

Bad memories past slipped slowly from my pocket,  
Replaced by new loving, much more fulfilling ways.  
The mended pocket holds now a new beginning.  
Containing space for new memories and new days.

The purpose of the book of James is to expose hypocritical practices and to teach right Christian behavior. James, Jesus' brother, was a leader in the Jerusalem church

The book was probably written around A.D. 49, prior to the Jerusalem council held in A.D. 50. This letter expresses James's concern for persecuted Christians who were once part of the Jerusalem church.

Talk is cheap, as we see from advertisement and too often we soon realize that the boasts were hollow, quite far from the truth.

“Jesus is the answer!” . . . “Believe in God!” . . . “Follow me to church!” Christians also make great claims but are often guilty of belying them with their actions. Professing to trust God and to be his people, they cling tightly to the world and its values. Possessing all the right answers, they contradict the gospel with their lives.

With energetic style and crisp, well-chosen words, James confronts this conflict head-on. It is not enough to talk the Christian faith, he says; we must live it. “What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” (James 2:14). The proof of the reality of our faith is a changed life.

Genuine faith will inevitably produce good deeds. This is the central theme of James’s letter, around which he supplies practical advice on living the Christian life.

James begins his letter by outlining some general characteristics of the Christian life (James 1:1-27). Next, he exhorts Christians to act justly in society (James 2:1-13). He follows this practical advice with a theological discourse on the relationship between faith and action (James 2:14-26). Then James shows the importance of controlling one’s speech (James 3:1-12). In James 3:13-18, James distinguishes two kinds of wisdom, earthly and heavenly. Then he encourages his readers to turn from evil desires and obey God (James 4:1-12).

James reproves those who trust in their own plans and possessions (James 4:13-5:6). Finally, he exhorts his readers to be patient with each other (James 5:7-11), to be straightforward in their promises (James 5:12), to pray for each other (James 5:13-18), and to help each other remain faithful to God (James 5:19-20).

This letter could be considered a how-to book on Christian living. Confrontation, challenge, and a call to commitment await you in its pages. Read James and become a *doer* of the Word (James 1:22-25).

James wrote to Jewish Christians who had been scattered throughout the Mediterranean World because of persecution. In their hostile surroundings they were tempted to let intellectual agreement pass for true faith. This letter can have rich meaning for us as we are reminded that genuine faith transforms lives. We are encouraged to put our faith into action. It is easy to say we have faith, but true faith will produce loving actions toward others.

## CHAPTER SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

James 1	Confident Stand	What a Christian has
James 2	Compassionate Service	What a Christian does
James 3	Careful Speech	What a Christian says
James 4	Contrite Submission	What a Christian feels
James 5	Concerned Sharing	What a Christian gives

1. Genuine religion (James 1:1-27)
2. Genuine faith (James 2:1-3:12)
3. Genuine wisdom (James 3:13-5:20)

James wants believers not only to hear the truth, but also to do it. He contrasts empty faith (claims without conduct) with faith that works. Commitment to love and to serve is evidence of true faith.

Living faith makes a difference. Make sure your faith is more than just a statement—it should also result in action. Seek ways of putting your faith to work.

In the Christian life there are trials and temptations. Successfully overcoming these adversities produces maturity and strong character.

Don't resent troubles when they come. Pray for wisdom; God will supply all that you will need to face persecution or adversity. He will give you patience and keep you strong in times of trial.

We are saved by God's gracious mercy, not by keeping the law. But Christ gave us a special command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:19). We are to love and serve those around us. It is important to keep the law of love shows that our faith is vital and real. When we show love to others, we are overcoming our own selfishness.

In discussing wisdom, James shows itself in speech. We are responsible for the destructive results of our talk. The wisdom of God that helps control the tongue can help control all our

actions. Accepting God's wisdom will affect your speech. Your words will convey true humility and lead to peace. Think before you speak and allow God to give you self-control.

In discussing wealth, James taught Christians not to compromise with worldly attitudes about wealth. Because the glory of wealth fades, Christians should store up God's treasures through sincere service. Christians must not show partiality to the wealthy, nor be prejudiced against the poor.

All of us are accountable for how we use what we have. We should not hoard wealth, but be generous toward others. In addition, we should not be impressed by the wealthy nor look down on those who are poor.

Unlike the apostle Paul, James was no urbane man of letters. He was a simple, homespun preacher, perturbed at people who were not living right. His letter covers a wide range of topics, applying the Christian faith to specific problems, and commanding readers to live out their beliefs.

Be humble! James orders. Submit to God! Stop sinning! James is as forthright as an Old Testament prophet; it is hard to miss his point.

Modern readers of James face the same dilemma as the first recipients of this unsettling letter. His words are easy enough to understand, but are we doing as he says? What kind of motion characterizes our spiritual lives? As Luther himself said, "You are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone, it is not faith."

As leader of the headquarters church in Jerusalem, James knew how to speak with authority. You don't have to look for hidden meanings in this book. James tells you clearly how you should act in 54 direct commands. Note that many of these have parallels to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. As you study these verses, keep in mind the diverse audience he was addressing which included the rich and the poor. Note, too, his "asides" to specific groups.

When a person becomes a Christian, new life begins, and inevitably that life must express itself through "spiritual motion," or good deeds. In James' words, "What good is it ... if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?" (2:14)

Movement does not cause life, but it does inevitably follow life. It is a sure sign that life is present. Similarly, genuine faith in Christ should always result in actions that demonstrate faith.

# James

## Chapter 1

### Genuine religion

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

After Stephen was martyred (Acts 7:55-8:3), persecution increased, and Christians in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the Roman world. There were thriving Jewish-Christian communities in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus, and cities in Greece and Asia Minor. Because these early believers did not have the support of established Christian churches, James wrote to them as a concerned leader, to encourage them in their faith during those difficult times.

The author of this letter can be found as James, the brother of Jesus as you study the following reference. (Matt 13:55, Mark 6:3, Luke 24:10, Gal 1:19)

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience“.

James doesn't say *if* you face trials, but *whenever* you face them. He assumes that we will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. The point is not to pretend to be happy when we face pain, but to have a positive outlook (“consider it pure joy”) because of what trials can produce in our lives. James tells us to turn our hardships into times of learning. Tough times can teach us perseverance. For other passages dealing with perseverance (also called patience and steadfastness), see Romans 2:7; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:24-25; 2 Cor. 6:3-7; 2 Peter 1:2-9.

We can't really know the depth of our character until we see how we react under pressure. It is easy to be kind to others when everything is going well, but can we still be kind when others are treating us unfairly? God wants to make us mature and complete, not to keep us from all pain. Instead of complaining about our struggles, we should see them as opportunities for growth. Thank God for promising to be with you in rough times. Ask him to help you solve your problems or to give you the strength to endure them. Then be patient. God will not leave you alone with your problems; he will stay close and help you grow.

James became a disciple of Jesus sometime after Jesus' resurrection. Prior to that, James is mentioned only as Jesus' brother and not a disciple or church leader

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 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”. (1 Cor 15:7)

By *wisdom*, James is talking not only about knowledge, but about the ability to make wise decisions in difficult circumstances. Whenever we need wisdom, we can pray to God, and he will generously supply what we need. Christians don't have to grope around in the dark, hoping to stumble upon answers. We can ask for God's wisdom to guide our choices.

*Wisdom* means practical discernment. It begins with respect for God, leads to right living, and results in increased ability to tell right from wrong. God is willing to give us this wisdom, but we will be unable to receive it if our goals are self-centered instead of God-centered. To learn God's will, we need to read his Word and ask him to show us how to obey it. Then we must do what he tells us.

“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.”

To “believe and not doubt” means not only believing in the existence of God, but also believing in his loving care. It includes relying on God and expecting that he will hear and answer when we pray. We must put away our critical attitude when we come to him. God does not grant every thoughtless or selfish request. We must have confidence that God will align our desires with his purposes. See Matthew 21:22.

A mind that wavers is not completely convinced that God's way is best. It treats God's Word like any human advice, and it retains the option to disobey. It vacillates between allegiance to subjective feelings, the world's ideas, and God's commands. If your faith is new, weak, or struggling, remember that you can trust God. Then be loyal to him. To stabilize your wavering or doubtful mind, commit yourself wholeheartedly to God.

“For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways“.

If you have ever seen the constant rolling of huge waves at sea, you know how restless they are—subject to the forces of wind, gravity, and tide. Doubt leaves a person as unsettled as the restless waves. If you want to stop being tossed about, rely on God to show you what is best for you. Ask him for wisdom, and trust that he will give it to you. Then your decisions will be sure and solid.

“Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:”

Christians who aren't in high positions in this world should be glad, because they are great in the Lord's eyes. This “brother in humble circumstances” is a person without status or wealth. Such people are often overlooked, even in our churches today, but they are not overlooked by God.

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

The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God; otherwise these people would be considered unworthy. The rich should be glad that money means nothing to God, because money is easily lost. We find true wealth by developing our spiritual life, not by developing our

financial assets. God is interested in what is lasting (our souls), not in what is temporary (our money and possessions). See Mark 4:18-19 for Jesus' words on this subject. Strive to treat each person as Christ would treat him or her.

If wealth, power, and status mean nothing to God, why do we attribute so much importance to them and so much honor to those who possess them? Do your material possessions give you goals and your only reason for living? If they were gone, what would be left? What you have in your heart, not your bank account, matters to God and endures for eternity.

“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”

The crown of life is like the victory wreath given to winning athletes (see 1 Cor. 9:25). God's crown of life is not glory and honor here on earth, but the reward of eternal life—living with God forever. The way to be in God's winners' circle is by loving him and staying faithful even under pressure.

“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: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

People who live for God often wonder why they still have temptations. Does God tempt them? God *tests* people, but he does not *tempt* them by trying to seduce them into sin. God allows Satan to tempt people, however, in order to refine their faith and to help them grow in their dependence on Christ. We can resist the temptation to sin by turning to God for strength and choosing to obey his Word.

“Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. “

Temptation comes from evil desires inside us, not from God. It begins with an evil thought and becomes sin when we dwell on the thought and allow it to become an action. Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin grows more destructive the more we let it have its way.

The best time to stop a temptation is before it is too strong or moving too fast to control. See Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 10:13; and 2 Tim. 2:22 for more about escaping temptation.

It is easy to blame others and make excuses for evil thoughts and wrong actions. Excuses include (1) it's the other person's fault; (2) I couldn't help it; (3) everybody's doing it; (4) it was just a mistake; (5) nobody's perfect; (6) the devil made me do it; (7) I was pressured into it; (8) I didn't know it was wrong; (9) God is tempting me. A person who makes excuses is trying to shift the blame from himself or herself to something or someone else. A Christian, on the other hand, accepts responsibility for his or her wrongs, confesses them, and asks God for forgiveness.

“Do not err, my beloved brethren. 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“.

The Bible often compares goodness with light and evil with darkness. For other passages where God is pictured as light, see Psalm 27:1, Isaiah 60:19-22, John 1:1-14.

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”

First-century Christians were the first generation to believe in Jesus Christ as Messiah. James called them “a kind of first fruits of all he created.” The Jewish leaders would be well aware of the practice of offering the first crops to ripen just prior to harvest as an act of worship, and also as a blessing on the rest of the harvest (see Deut. 26:9-11). In 1 Cor. 15:20, Paul refers to Christ as the first fruits of those who have died.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God“.

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs. James wisely advises us to reverse this process. Put a mental stopwatch on your conversations and keep track of how much you talk and how much you listen. When people talk with you, do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value?

Verses 19 and 20 speak of anger that erupts when our egos are bruised—“*I am hurt;*” “*My opinions are not being heard.*” When injustice and sin occur, we *should* become angry because others are being hurt. But we should not become angry when we fail to win an argument or when we feel offended or neglected. Selfish anger never helps anybody.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.”

“James advises us to get rid of all that is wrong in our lives and “humbly accept” the salvation message we have received (“the word planted in you”), because it alone can save us“.

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. [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: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. 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”

It is important to listen to what God’s Word says, but it is much more important to obey it, to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. Do you put into action what you have studied?

It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, but God’s law points out sin in us and gives us the opportunity to ask for God’s forgiveness (see Romans 7:7-8). As Christians, we are

saved by God's grace, and salvation frees us from sin's control. As believers, we are free to live as God created us to live. Of course, this does not mean that we are free to do as we please (see 1 Peter 2:16). We are now free to obey God.

“If any man among you seems to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. 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.”

In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. By caring for these powerless people, the church put God's Word into practice. When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others.

To keep ourselves from being polluted by the world, we need to commit ourselves to Christ's ethical and moral system, not the world's. We are not to adapt to the world's value system, which is based on money, power, and pleasure. True faith means nothing if we are contaminated with such values.

# James

## Chapter 2

### Genuine faith

In this chapter James argues against favoritism and for the necessity of good deeds. He presents three principles of faith: (1) Commitment is an essential part of faith. You cannot be a Christian simply by affirming the right doctrines or agreeing with Biblical facts (James 2:19). You must commit your mind and heart to Christ. (2) Right actions are the natural by-products of true faith. A genuine Christian will have a changed life (James 2:18). (3) Faith without good deeds doesn't do anybody any good—it is useless (James 2:14-17). James's teachings are consistent with Paul's teaching that we receive salvation by faith alone. Paul emphasizes the purpose of faith—to bring salvation. James emphasizes the results of faith—a changed life.

“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. 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; 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: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?”

Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness.

By honoring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character. Sometimes we do this because (1) poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do; (2) we want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end; (3) we want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially. All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship. If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.

We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19-21; Matthew 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7-10; Titus 3:4-8).

“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?”

When James speaks about the poor, he is talking about those who have no money and also about

those whose simple values are despised by much of our affluent society. Perhaps the “poor” people prefer serving to managing, human relationships to financial security, peace to power. This does not mean that the poor will automatically go to heaven and the rich to hell. Poor people, however, are usually more aware of their powerlessness. Thus it is often easier for them to acknowledge their need for salvation. One of the greatest barriers to salvation for the rich is pride. For the poor, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

“But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?”

James condemns acts of favoritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks shabby. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus, who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame? Are you partial to the “haves” while ignoring the “have nots”? This attitude is sinful. God views all people as equals, and if he favors anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

“If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”.

The *royal law* is the law of our great King Jesus Christ, who said, “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). This law, originally summarized in Leviticus 19:18, is the basis for all the laws of how people should relate to one another. Christ reinforced this truth in Matthew 22:37-40, and Paul taught it in Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14.

We must treat all people as we would want to be treated. We should not ignore the rich, because then we would be withholding our love. But we must not favor them for what they can do for us, while ignoring the poor who can offer us seemingly so little in return.

“For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all”.

Christians must not use this verse to justify sinning. We dare not say: “Because I can’t keep every demand of God, why even try?” James reminds us that if we’ve broken just one law, we are sinners. We can’t decide to keep part of God’s law and ignore the rest.

You can’t break the law a little bit; if you have broken it at all, you need Christ to pay for your sin. Measure yourself, not someone else, against God’s standards. Ask for forgiveness where you need it, and then renew your effort to put your faith into practice.

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

As Christians we are saved by God's free gift (grace) through faith, not by keeping the law. But as Christians, we are also required to obey Christ. The apostle Paul taught "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:10) to be judged for our conduct. God's grace does not cancel our duty to obey him; it gives our obedience a new basis. The law is no longer an external set of rules, but it is a "law that gives freedom"—one we joyfully and willingly carry out, because we love God and because we have the power of his Holy Spirit to carry it out (see James 1:25).

"For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

Only God in his mercy can forgive our sins. We can't earn forgiveness by forgiving others. But when we withhold forgiveness from others after having received it ourselves, we show that we don't understand or appreciate God's mercy toward us (see Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21ff; Ephesians. 4:31-32).

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"

When someone claims to have faith, what he or she may have is intellectual assent—agreement with a set of Christian teachings—and as such it would be incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged, we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe

"If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 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? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."

We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God. But such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ.

"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works".

At first glance, this verse seems to contradict Romans 3:28, "man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." Deeper investigation, however, shows that the teachings of James and Paul are not at odds. While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. Paul speaks against those who try to be saved by deeds instead of true faith; James speaks against those who confuse mere intellectual assent with true faith. After all, even demons know who Jesus is, but they don't obey him (James 2:19). True faith involves a commitment of your whole self to God.

"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 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. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only“.

James says that Abraham was “considered righteous” for what he *did*. Paul says he was justified because he *believed* God (Romans 4:1-5). James and Paul are not contradicting but complementing each other. Let’s not conclude that the truth is a blending of these two statements. We are not justified by what we do in any way. True faith always results in deeds, but the deeds do not justify us. Faith brings us salvation; active obedience demonstrates that our faith is genuine.

“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”

Rahab lived in Jericho, a city the Israelites conquered as they entered the promised land. (Joshua 2). When Israel’s spies came to the city, she hid them and helped them escape. In this way she demonstrated faith in God’s purpose for Israel. As a result, she and her family were saved when the city was destroyed. Hebrews 11:31 lists Rahab among the heroes of faith.

“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

# James

## Chapter 3

### Genuine wisdom

“My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”

Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in Jewish culture, and many Jews who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers. James warned that although it is good to aspire to teach, the teachers’ responsibility is great because their words and example affect others’ spiritual lives. If you are in a teaching or leadership role, how are you affecting those you lead?

“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.”

What you say and what you *don’t* say are both important. Proper speech is not only saying the right words at the right time, but it is also controlling your desire to say what you shouldn’t. Examples of an untamed tongue include gossiping, putting others down, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering, and lying. Before you speak, ask, “Is what I want to say true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?”

“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.”

James compares the damage the tongue can do to a raging fire—the tongue’s wickedness has its source in hell itself. The uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another. Idle and hateful words are damaging because they spread destruction quickly, and no one can stop the results once they are spoken. We dare not be careless with what we say, thinking we can apologize later, because even if we do, the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire—you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do.

“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.”

If no human being can control the tongue, why bother trying? Even if we may not achieve perfect control of our tongues, we can still learn enough control to reduce the damage our words can do. It is better to fight a fire than to go around setting new ones! Remember that we are not fighting the tongue’s fire in our own strength. The Holy Spirit will give us increasing power to monitor and control what we say, so that when we are offended, the Spirit will remind us of

God's love, and we won't react in a hateful manner. When we are criticized, the Spirit will heal the hurt, and we won't lash out.

"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?"

Our contradictory speech often puzzles us. At times our words are right and pleasing to God, but at other times they are violent and destructive. Which of these speech patterns reflects our true identity? The tongue gives us a picture of our basic human nature. We were made in God's image, but we have also fallen into sin. God works to change us from the inside out. When the Holy Spirit purifies a heart, he gives self-control so that the person will speak words that please God.

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew 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"

"Bitter envy and selfish ambition" are inspired by the devil. It is easy for us to be drawn into wrong desires by the pressures of society and sometimes even by well-meaning Christians. By listening to the advice: "Assert yourself," "Go for it," "Set high goals," we can be drawn into greed and destructive competitiveness. Seeking God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves to others and to want what they have.

"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 intreated, 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."

Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be wise but who acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person's character. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you act. Foolishness leads to disorder, but wisdom leads to peace and goodness. Are you tempted to escalate the conflict, pass on the gossip, or fan the fire of discord? Careful, winsome speech and wise, loving words are the seeds of peace. God loves peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

# James

## Chapter 4

### Drawing Close to God

“From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? 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. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”

Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. James explains that these quarrels result from evil desires battling within us—we want more possessions, more money, higher status, more recognition. When we want badly enough to fulfill these desires, we fight in order to do so. Instead of aggressively grabbing what we want, we should submit ourselves to God, ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires, and trust him to give us what we really need.

James mentions the most common problems in prayer: not asking, asking for the wrong things, asking for the wrong reasons. Do you talk to God at all? When you do, what do you talk about? Do you ask only to satisfy your desires? Do you seek God’s approval for what you already plan to do? Your prayers will become powerful when you allow God to change your desires so that they perfectly correspond to his will for you (1 John 3:21-22).

“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.”

There is nothing wrong with wanting a pleasurable life. God gives us good gifts that he wants us to enjoy (James 1:17; Ephesians. 4:7; 1 Tim. 4:4-5). But having friendship with the world involves seeking pleasure at others’ expense or at the expense of obeying God. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing God is sinful; pleasure from God’s rich bounty is good.

“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”

This verse may mean that because of our fallen nature, we have a tendency toward envy. James is not quoting a specific verse or passage—he is summing up a teaching of Scripture. See Romans 6:6-8 and Galatians 5:17-21 for more on the human tendency toward envy and discontent.

“But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

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The cure for evil desires is humility (see Proverbs 16:18-19; 1 Peter 5:5-6). Pride makes us self-centered and leads us to conclude that we deserve all we can see, touch, or imagine. It creates

greedy appetites for far more than we need. We can be released from our self-centered desires by humbling ourselves before God, realizing that all we really need is his approval. When the Holy Spirit fills us, we see that this world's seductive attractions are only cheap substitutes for what God has to offer.

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Although God and the devil are at war, we don't have to wait until the end to see who will win. God has *already* defeated Satan (Rev. 12:10-12), and when Christ returns, the devil and all he stands for will be eliminated forever (Rev. 20:10-15). Satan is here now, however, and he is trying to win us over to his evil cause. With the Holy Spirit's power, we can resist the devil, and he will flee from us.

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

How can you come near to God? James gives five ways: (1) *Submit to God* (James 4:7). Yield to his authority and will, commit your life to him and his control, and be willing to follow him. (2) *Resist the devil* (James 4:7). Don't allow Satan to entice and tempt you. (3) *Wash your hands. . . and purify your hearts* (that is, lead a pure life) (James 4:8). Be cleansed from sin, replacing your desire to sin with your desire to experience God's purity. (4) *Grieve and mourn and wail* in sincere sorrow for your sins (James 4:9). Don't be afraid to express deep heartfelt sorrow for what you have done. (5) *Humble yourself before the Lord*, and he will lift you up (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

Humbling ourselves means recognizing that our worth comes from God alone. To be humble involves working with his power according to his guidance, not with our own independent effort. Although we do not deserve God's favor, he reaches out to us in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.

“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. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?”

Jesus summarized the law as love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40), and Paul said that love demonstrated toward a neighbor would fully satisfy the law (Romans 13:6-10). When we fail to love, we are actually breaking God's law. Examine your attitude and actions toward others. Do you build people up or tear them down? When you're ready to criticize someone, remember God's law of love and say something good instead. Saying something beneficial to others will cure you of finding fault and increase your ability to obey God's law of love

“Go to now, ye that say, today or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: [14] whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For

what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Life is short no matter how many years we live. Don't be deceived into thinking that you have lots of remaining time to live for Christ, to enjoy your loved ones, or to do what you know you should. Live for God today! Then, no matter when your life ends, you will have fulfilled God's plan for you."

"For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil."

It is good to have goals, but goals will disappoint us if we leave God out of them. There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist, because the future is in his hands. What would you like to be doing ten years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will you react if God steps in and rearranges your plans? Plan ahead, but hold your plans loosely. Put God's desires at the center of your planning; he will never disappoint you.

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

We tend to think that *doing* wrong is sin. But James tells us that sin is also *not* doing right. (These two kinds of sin are sometimes called sins of commission and sins of omission.) It is a sin to lie; it can also be a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is a sin to speak evil of someone; it is also a sin to avoid him or her when you know he or she needs your friendship. We should be willing to help as the Holy Spirit guides us. If God has directed you to do a kind act, to render a service, or to restore a relationship, do it. You will experience a renewed and refreshed vitality to your Christian faith

# James

## Chapter 5

### **The Worthlessness of Riches.**

“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. [2] 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 laborers who have reaped down your fields, which are 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. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.”

James proclaims the worthlessness of riches, not the worthlessness of the rich. Today’s money will be worthless when Christ returns, so we should spend our time accumulating the kind of treasures that will be worthwhile in God’s eternal kingdom. Money is not the problem; Christian leaders need money to live and to support their families; missionaries need money to help them spread the gospel; churches need money to do their work effectively. It is the *love* of money that leads to evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and causes some people to oppress others in order to get more. This is a warning to all Christians who are tempted to adopt worldly standards rather than God’s standards (Romans 12:1-2) as well as an encouragement to all those who are oppressed by the rich. Also read Matthew 6:19-21 to see what Jesus says about riches.

*Innocent men* were defenseless persons, probably poor laborers. Poor people who could not pay their debts were thrown in prison or forced to sell all their possessions. At times, they were even forced to sell their family members into slavery. With no opportunity to work off their debts, poor people often died of starvation. God called this murder. Hoarding money, exploiting employees, and living self-indulgently will not escape God’s notice.

“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. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

The farmer must wait patiently for his crops to grow; he cannot hurry the process. But he does not take the summer off and hope that all goes well in the fields. There is much work to do to ensure a good harvest. In the same way, we must wait patiently for Christ’s return. We cannot make him come back any sooner. But while we wait, there is much work that we can do to advance God’s kingdom. Both the farmer and the Christian must live by faith, looking toward the future reward for their labors. Don’t live as if Christ will never come. Work faithfully to build his kingdom—the King *will* come when the time is right.

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”

When things go wrong, we tend to grumble against and blame others for our miseries (see the

second note on •Genesis 3:11-13). Blaming others is easier than owning our share of the responsibility, but it can be both destructive and sinful. Before you judge others for their shortcomings, remember that Christ the Judge will come to evaluate each of us (Matthew 7:1-5; Matthew 25:31-46). He will not let us get away with shifting the blame to others.

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. 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.”

Many prophets suffered and were persecuted, such as Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah

“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.”

A person with a reputation for exaggeration or lying often can't get anyone to believe him on his word alone. Christians should never become like that. Always be honest so that others will believe your simple yes or no. By avoiding lies, half-truths, and omissions of the truth, you will become known as a trustworthy person

“Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. [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: [15] and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

James is referring to someone who is incapacitated physically. In Scripture, oil was both a medicine (see the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37) and a symbol of the Spirit of God (as used in anointing kings, see 1 Samuel 16:1-13). Thus oil can represent both the medical and the spiritual spheres of life. Christians should not separate the physical and the spiritual—Jesus Christ is Lord over both the body and the spirit.

People in the church are not alone. Members of Christ's body should be able to count on others for support and prayer, especially when they are sick or suffering. The elders should be on call to respond to the illness of any member, and the church should stay alert to pray for the needs of all its members.

“The prayer offered in faith” does not refer to the faith of the sick person, but to the faith of the people praying. God heals, faith doesn't, and all prayers are subject to God's will. But our prayers are part of God's healing process. That is why God often waits for our prayers of faith before intervening to heal a person.”

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“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. [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. [18] And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.”

Christ has made it possible for us to go directly to God for forgiveness. But confessing our sins to each other still has an important place in the life of the church. (1) If we have sinned against an individual, we must ask him or her to forgive us. (2) If our sin has affected the church, we must confess it publicly. (3) If we need loving support as we struggle with a sin, we should confess that sin to those who are able to provide that support. (4) If, after confessing a private sin to God, we still don't feel his forgiveness, we may wish to confess that sin to a fellow believer and hear him or her assure us of God's pardon. In Christ's kingdom, every believer is a priest to other believers (1 Peter 2:9).

The Christian's most powerful resource is communion with God through prayer. The results are often greater than we thought were possible. Some people see prayer as a last resort to be tried when all else fails. This approach is backward. Prayer should come first. Because God's power is infinitely greater than ours, it only makes sense to rely on it—especially because God encourages us to do so.

“Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one converts him; 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.”

Clearly this person who has wandered from the truth is a believer who has fallen into sin—one who is no longer living a life consistent with his or her beliefs. Christians disagree over whether or not it is possible for people to lose their salvation, but all agree that those who move away from their faith are in serious trouble and need to repent. James urges Christians to help backsliders return to God. By taking the initiative, praying for the person, and acting in love, we can meet the person where he or she is and bring him or her back to God and his forgiveness.

The book of James emphasizes faith in action. Right living is the evidence and result of faith. The church must serve with compassion, speak lovingly and truthfully, live in obedience to God's commands, and love one another. The body of believers ought to be an example of heaven

on earth, drawing people to Christ through love for God and each other. If we truly believe God's Word, we will *live* it day by day. God's Word is not merely something we read or think about, but something we do. Belief, faith, and trust must have hands and feet—ours!

Read James and go forth with a faith rooted in love, and evidenced by action

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