

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

by
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This little epistle is a masterpiece. It has a strong Jewish flavour, even referring to the Christian assembly (church) as a “synagogue” (2:12), which is the Greek word for congregation (Sunagwgh) that eventually became used exclusively for Jewish congregations.

James is a very practical epistle. It deals with controlling one’s tongue, the rich and proud, the need to show that our faith is real by our lives and works, etc.

Many Bible names were changed in their journey from Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and French into English. But none is more different from its original than James, which in Greek is Iakobov, taken from the Hebrew *Yaakov* (Jacob). The name Jacob (James) was very popular among the Jews, and there are four men so named in the New Testament:

1. James the Apostle, son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matthew 4:21)
2. James the son of Alphaeus. He is almost unknown except that he is in the list of apostles. (Matthew 10:3)
3. James the father of Judas, not Iscariot (Luke 6:16)
4. James the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55 and Galatians 1:19)

This last James is the author of the epistle we are studying. He is well known yet modest. James is the man who presided at the Jerusalem Council and stayed in the city until his death. He was known as a very Jewish Christian, extremely strict in lifestyle. Actually, he is remembered by historians (i.e. Josephus) and church tradition as a Christian who would have written just such an epistle as *James*.

Josephus says that James was killed in 62 AD, so the letter must have been written before that. There are many resemblances to the book of Proverbs. Like Proverbs, the style is rugged, vivid, graphic, and difficult to outline. The word *wisdom* is used often. Another word used frequently is *brethren*. It occurs 15 times and reminds us that “James” is written to believers, even if at times he seems to address the unconverted, too.

In some ways, this letter of James is the most authoritarian in the New Testament. That is, James issues more institutions than any other writer. In the short space of 108 verses, there are 54 commands. There are two themes throughout the letter: *persecution* from the outside and *problems* on the inside. The believers were going through trials and James sought to encourage them. The believers were going through sins within the community and James sought to help them confess and forsake their sins. One of the key thoughts is *perfection* or spiritual maturity. These Christians needed to grow up in the Lord and their various trials would help to mature them if he would obey God.

Outline of James

1. Salutation (1:1)
2. Trials and Temptations (1:2-17)
3. The Word of God (1:18-27)
4. Condemnation of Partiality (2:1-13)
5. Faith and Works (2:14-26)
6. The Tongue: Its Use and Abuse (3:1-12)
7. Wisdom: The True and the False (3:13-18)
8. Covetousness: Its Cause and Cure (4)
9. The Rich and Their Coming Remorse (5:1-6)
10. Exhortation to Patience (5:7-12)
11. Prayer and the Healing of the Sick (5:13-20)

CHAPTER 1

Verse 1 — Salutation

The writer introduces himself as “James a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” We see a wonderful change in the life of James. At one time, he had not believed in Jesus; John 7:5 says, “For even his own brothers did not believe in him.” He may have even shared the view that Jesus was out of His mind (Mark 3:21).

But as Jesus sowed the seed of His word and taught the great message of the Kingdom of God, the seed took root in the life of James. This was a great transformation. The sceptic became a servant. And he was not ashamed to say so! By calling himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” James correctly put God and the Lord Jesus on the same level as equals. He honoured the Son just as he honoured the Father. John 5:23 says, “That all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.”

James knew that “no man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24) yet he spoke of himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus. There is no contradiction here because God the Father and God the Son are co-equal.

The letter is addressed to “the twelve tribes” – to Jews by birth, belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel. Because of sin, these people had been driven out of their native land and were dispersed in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean sea. The original dispersion took place when they were carried into captivity by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.

Verses 2-17 — Trials and Temptations

In verses 2-12, the trials referred to are what we might call holy trials or problems that are sent from God, or that God allows and that test the reality of our faith and produce likeness to Christ. In verses 13-17, on the other hand, the subject is unholy temptation, which comes from within and which leads to sin. The Christian life is filled with problems. They come uninvited and unexpected. Sometimes they come one at a time and sometimes in droves.

James does not say “*if* you fall into various trials” but *whenever*. We can never get away from them. The question is, what are we going to do about them?

There are several possible attitudes we can take toward these trials and tests of life. We can rebel against them (Hebrews 12:5) by adopting a spirit of defiance, boasting that we will battle through to victory by our own power. Or we can lose heart or give up under pressure (Hebrews 12:5). This is nothing but fatalism. It leads to questioning even the Lord’s care for us.

We can grumble and complain about our troubles. This is what Paul warns us against in 1 Corinthians 10:10. Or we can indulge in self-pity, thinking of no one but ourselves, and trying to get sympathy from others.

A much better choice is to be exercised by the difficulties and perplexities of life (Hebrews 12:11). We can say, in effect, “God has allowed this trial to come to me. He has some good purpose in it for me. I don’t know what that purpose is, but I’ll try to find out. I want His purpose to be worked out in my life.” This is what James advocates: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” Don’t rebel, don’t lose heart. Rejoice!

In verse 3, James speaks of “the testing of your faith.” He pictures faith as a precious metal that is being tried by the assayer (God) to see if it is genuine. The metal is subjected to the fires of persecution, sickness, suffering or sorrow. Without problems, we would never develop endurance.

Verse 4 tells us that “perseverance must finish its work”. Perseverance here denotes endurance. Sometime, when problems come, we become desperate and use frantic means to cut short the trial. Without consulting the Lord as to His purposes in the matter, we rush to shorten the trial. By doing this, we actually may be interfering with God’s will in our lives. And it is possible that we may have to undergo a longer trial in the future before His particular purpose is realized in us. When we face problems in life that God obviously isn’t going to remove, we should be submissive to His will.

Verse 5 assures us that we don't have to face the problems of life in our own wisdom. If, in the time of trial, we lack spiritual insight, we should go to God and tell Him all about our perplexity and ignorance. We all lack wisdom. The Bible does not give specific answers to the innumerable problems that arise in life. It does not solve problems in so many words, but God's Word does give us general principles. We must apply these principles to problems as they arise day by day. That is why we need wisdom. Spiritual wisdom is the practical application of our Lord's teachings to everyday situations.

Verses 6-8

We must approach God in faith, without doubting. We must believe that He loves and cares and that nothing is impossible with Him. If we doubt His goodness and His power, we will have no stability in times of trouble. One minute we might be resting calmly on His promises and the next we feel that God has forgotten us. We are like the surge of the sea, rising to great heights, then falling back into valleys, troubled and tossed.

In verses 5-8, the source of wisdom is identified as God. This wisdom is obtained by prayer, it is available to everybody, and it is given liberally; the important condition is that we ask in faith, without doubting.

Verses 9-11

At first glance, verses 9 to 11 seem to introduce a completely new subject, or at least a parentheses. Actually, James is continuing with the subject of holy trials by giving specific illustrations. Whether a person is poor or rich, he can receive lasting spiritual benefits from the trials and crises of life. The Christian attitude is to accept from God the things we cannot change, and we should make the most of them for His glory and for the blessing of others. We should say with Apostle Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." (1 Corinthians 15:10)

As we forget our disabilities and lose ourselves in service for others, we will come to realize that spiritual people love us for who we are and not for our appearances.

Note that James addresses the rich but he does not say, "Let the rich man rejoice in his riches." Rather he says that the rich can rejoice in his low position. He agrees with Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says: 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

The point is that any trial that takes us away from the love of possessing things and sets our affections on things that are spiritual and of above is a blessing in disguise.

Verse 12

James concludes his discussion of holy trials. He gives a blessing on the person who stands up under afflictions. When such a person "has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life."

Now let us make this part of our study on holy trials practical in our own lives. How do we react when various forms of testing come into our lives? Do we complain bitterly against the misfortunes of life, or do we rejoice and thank God for them? Do we advertise our trials or do we bear them quietly? Do we live in the future, waiting for our circumstances to change and improve, or do we live in the present, seeking to see the hand of God in all that comes to us? Do we indulge in self-pity and seek sympathy or do we get ourselves in a life of service for God and others?

Verses 13-17

The subject now switches to unholy temptations. Just as holy trials, or trials in general, bring out the best in us, unholy temptations bring out the worst in us when we give in to them. We must clearly understand that temptation does not come from God – ever!

God allows trials to come our way but He never tempts us to commit any form of evil. God Himself has no dealings with

evil and does not entice us to sin. Man is always ready to shift responsibility for his sins; if he cannot blame God, he will adopt modern psychology, which says that sin is a sickness. Thus, he hopes to escape God's judgment. But sin is not a sickness; it is moral failure for which man must be accountable.

Some will try to blame material things for sin, but "things" are not sinful in themselves. Sin does not originate in things. James points to the source when he says, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed" (verse 14). Sin comes from within us, from our old, evil, fallen, and unregenerate nature. Jesus said, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." (Matthew 15:19) The word "desire" in verse 14 could refer to any form of desire, good or evil. The word itself is morally neutral. With a few exceptions, it is used in the New Testament to describe evil desires and that is the case here, too.

Every one of us is tempted; our lusts and impure appetites constantly urge us to sin. Are we helpless victims when we are dragged away by our own evil desires and enticed? No! We may reject all those sinful thoughts from our mind and concentrate on subjects that are pure and holy (Philippians 4:8). Also, in moments of fierce temptation, we may call on the name of the Lord, remembering that "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe." (Proverbs 18:10)

Verse 15

If that is so, why do we sin? Here is the answer: "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." Instead of rejecting the bad thought, we may encourage, nourish and enjoy it. To put it another way, if we think about a forbidden act long enough, we may eventually commit it. The whole process of lust conceiving and bringing forth sin is clearly illustrated in the incident of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-27).

"And sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death," said James. Sin produces death. Sin is not a barren and sterile thing; it gives birth to a new generation of sins. The sin of Adam brought physical death on himself and on all his descendants (Genesis 2:17). Sin also leads to eternal, spiritual death – the final separation of man from God and His blessings (Romans 6:23a).

It is not unusual for people who fall into sin to blame God. By doing this they say to their Creator: "Why have you made me this way?" But this is a form of self-deception; only good things come from God. In fact, He is the source of "every good and perfect gift" (verse 7). James describes God as "the Father of heavenly lights." In the Bible, the word Father sometimes means Creator or Source (Job 38:28). Therefore, God is the Creator or Source of lights. Lights includes the heavenly bodies (the sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 1:14-18, Psalm 136:7)). But God is also the Source of all spiritual light. In fact, He is the Source of every form the light in the universe. "Who does not change like shifting shadows"... God is not like the heavenly bodies He has created. They are undergoing constant changes. He never does. There are no variables in Him. It is unthinkable that He would ever tempt someone to sin. Temptations come from man's own evil nature.

Let's test our faith on the subject of unholy temptation. Do we encourage evil thoughts to linger in our minds, or do we get rid of them quickly? When we sin, do we say that we couldn't help it? Do we blame God when we are tempted to sin?

Verses 18-27

James has been speaking of God as the Father of lights; now he reminds us that He is our Father also, and that He has given us a unique role in his vast creation. We can fulfill that role through obedience to the word of truth.

Verse 18 outlines the part the Word of God plays in the new birth. We are told that "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created." He was not forced to do it by any merit in us. He did it of His own will. His love for us was unmerited – we did not deserve it. It was entirely voluntary on His part. This should cause us to worship Him! "*He gave us birth*" describes the fact of the new birth. By this spiritual birth we become His children.

"*Through the word of truth*" – the Bible is the instrument of the new birth. Every time there is a genuine conversion, the Scriptures are involved, whether orally or in printed form. Without the Bible, we would not know the way of salvation.

We would not even know that salvation was available!

“That we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created” – The Christians to whom James was writing were among the first believers. Of course, all believers are “a kind of first fruits” of His creatures, but the primary reference here is to the Jewish Christians to whom James wrote. Though the verse refers primarily to first-century Christians, it applies to each one of us who honours the name of Jesus Christ.

The rest of the chapter gives practical instructions about how we can be first fruits of His creatures. It talks about the practical righteousness that should characterize those who have been born again by the Word of Truth. For example, “we should be quick to listen.” This is an unusual command, with almost a trace of humour in it. It’s like saying, “Hurry up and listen!” What it means, though, is that we should be ready to hear the Word of God, as well as all godly counsel and admonition. We should be teachable by the Holy Spirit.

We should be “slow to speak.” It’s surprising how much James says about our speech! He cautions us to be guarded in our conversations. Even our body teaches us this. We have one tongue, but two ears, that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak. Solomon once said, *“He who guards his mouth guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.”* (Proverbs 13:3) He also said, *“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”* (Proverbs 10:19) Compulsive talkers eventually sin.

We should be “slow to become angry.” A person who is quick tempered “does not bring about righteous life that God desire.” (vs. 20) Those who lose their temper give people a wrong impression about Christianity. *“Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.”* (Proverbs 16:32)

Verses 23-24

Anyone who hears the Word but does not change his behaviour is like a man who takes a quick glance in the mirror and then forgets what he saw. There is no benefit for him to look into the mirror. Of course, there are some things about our appearance that cannot be changed, but we should pay attention to the sight! When the mirror says “wash”, “shave”, “comb”, or “brush”, we should do as we are told. Otherwise there is no advantage to looking into the mirror.

If we read the Bible casually or out of a sense of duty, it is like seeing what we ought to see but quickly forgetting and living as if we were perfect. This type of self-satisfaction prevents spiritual growth and progress.

Verse 25

In contrast is the man who looks into the Word of God and does as he is told; to him the Bible is the perfect law that gives freedom. As he obeys, he finds true freedom from human traditions and carnal reasoning. The truth sets him free. This is the man who benefits from the Bible. He does not forget what he has read. Rather, he wants to live it out in daily practice. His simple childlike obedience brings many blessings to his soul. *“He will be blessed in what he does.”*

Verse 26-27

Worthless religion and pure, faultless religion are contrasted. Religion here means the external patterns of behaviour connected with religious belief; the outward form rather than the inward spirit; the outer expression of belief in worship and service rather than the biblical truths and doctrines we believe.

Anyone who thinks he is religious but cannot control his tongue deceives himself and his religion is useless. He may be observing all kinds of religious activities and ceremonies that make him appear very pious and religious, but he is deceiving himself. God is not satisfied with rituals; He is interested in a life of practical godliness. An uncontrolled tongue is only one example of empty religion.

Any behaviour inconsistent with Christian faith is worthless. The story of a religious grocer is a good example. The grocer lived in an apartment above his store. Every morning he would call down to his assistant, “John!” “Yes, sir.” “Have you watered down the milk?” “Yes, sir.” “Have you coloured the butter?” “Yes, sir.” “Have you put chicory in the coffee?”

“Yes, sir.” “Very well. Come up for morning devotions.”

James says that such religion is worthless. What God looks for is the practical type of godliness that takes a compassionate interest in others and keeps his own life clean. And James gives examples of pure and undefiled religion in the person who visits needy orphans and widows, and who keeps himself from being polluted by the world. In other words, the practical outworking of the new birth is found in acts of grace and a walk of separation. These are virtues of practical love and holiness.

We should put our own faith on trial with the following questions: Do I read the Bible with a humble desire to have God speak to me, teach me, and change me? Am I eager to have my tongue controlled? Do I justify my temper or do I want victory over it? How do I react when someone starts to tell an off-colour joke? Does my faith manifest itself in deeds of kindness to those who cannot repay me?

CHAPTER 2

Verses 1-13 – Condemnation of Partiality

The first half of chapter two denounces the practice of showing respect of persons. Favouritism is foreign to the example of Jesus our Lord and to the teachings of the New Testament. There is no place in Christianity for snobbishness or discrimination.

Verse 1

First of all, the practice is clearly forbidden. Please note that this admonition is addressed to believers. We see this by the salutation: “My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ...” James is saying, “My brothers, in your practice of the Christian faith, do not show partiality.” Snobbery and caste distinctions are inconsistent with true Christianity. Contempt for others because of birth, race, sex, or poverty is a practical denial of the faith. This commandment does not contradict other portions of the New Testament where believers are told to pay proper respect to rulers, masters, elders, and parents. There are some divinely ordained relationships that must be recognized (Romans 13:7).

Verses 2-4

James confirms this by giving a vivid example in verses 2-4. Someone has called this section “the short-sighted usher.” The scene is the local church (assembly). A distinguished looking man, with fancy clothing and an expensive gold ring, has just come in. The usher greets him with a big smile and a warm handshake and then escorts him to a prominent seat in the front, where everyone can see him. Then, when the usher gets back to the door, he finds that another visitor has come in. This time it is a “poor man in shabby clothes.” The King James Version says “vile raiment.” This time the usher wants to save the congregation the sight of a poor man in filthy clothes and so he takes the visitor to the back of the church and asks him to stay there. You may think that it is impossible for anyone to ever act like this but it happens often.

We may think that this illustration is an exaggeration, but when we look into our own hearts, we will find that we often do make these artificial class distinctions among ourselves, and so becoming “judges with evil thoughts.” The Christian must be faithful to divine principles. Our obligation is to give practical expression to the truth that all believers are one in Christ Jesus.

Verses 5-13

Partiality has no place in our Christian faith. James demonstrates this in verses 5-13. He gives four strong reasons why it is ridiculous for a believer to favour the rich and look down on the poor.

1. It means that we dishonour a man whom God honours. “*Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*” How foolish, then, it is to treat with contempt those who will one day be honoured in the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.
2. It is foolish to show deference to the rich, a class that has at times oppressed the people of God. James is saying this: “Why show favouritism to people just because they are rich?”
3. It is foolish to be partial toward the rich since they often use evil or harsh words involving the name of Christ (although this is not a sin on which the rich have a monopoly).
4. The final argument is that showing favouritism to the rich violates the law to “love your neighbour as yourself.” It is

called “the royal law.” If we really loved our neighbours as ourselves, we would treat them all the way we would want to be treated.

Certainly we would not want to be despised simply because we were poor. Then we should not show contempt to others for this reason.

Of all the teachings of the Bible, this is one of the most revolutionary: “You must love your neighbour as yourself.” And if we ask, “Who is my neighbour?” the answer is in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) – our neighbour is any person who has a need that we can help to meet (verse 8).

In verse 9, we see that showing partiality is a violation of the royal law. It is both a sin and a transgression. Sin is a failure to meet God’s standards. Transgression is the breaking of a known law. Certain acts are sinful because they are basically wrong, but they become transgressions when there is a specific law which forbids them.

Showing partiality is sinful because it is essentially wrong in itself. But it is also a transgression because there is a law against it. To break one part of the law is to be guilty of all. The law is like a chain of ten links. Break one link and the chain is broken. God does not allow us to keep the laws we like and break others (verse 10).

The same God who forbade adultery also forbade murder (vs.11). What James is saying is: “As believers, you are no longer under the law of bondage, but you are under the law of liberty – liberty to do what is right. The law of Moses required you to love your neighbour but did not give you the power, and condemned you if you failed.”

Under grace, you are given the power to love your neighbour and are honoured when you do it. You don’t do it in order to be saved but because you are saved. If we do not show mercy to others, we are not walking in fellowship with God and can expect to suffer the consequences of a backslidden condition.

Let us test ourselves, then, on this important subject of partiality. Do we show more kindness to those of our own race than those of other races? To the young than to the old? To good-looking people than those who are plain? Are we more anxious to befriend prominent people than those who are unknown? Do we avoid people with physical infirmities and seek the friendship of the strong and healthy? Do we favour the rich over the poor?

As we answer these questions, let us remember that the way we treat the least loveable believer is the way we treat our Lord and Saviour (Matthew 25:4).

Verses 14-26 – Faith and Works

These verses are perhaps the most controversial in James’ letter. Even Luther thought he saw a conflict between James’ teaching on justification by works and Paul’s “justification by faith.” These verses are commonly used, or rather misused, to support the wrong doctrine that we are saved by faith plus works, also called “synergism.” In other words, we must receive Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, but that is not enough. We must also add to His saving work our own deeds of charity, devotion and works.

This portion actually could be entitled “Justification By Works” because there is a sense that we are justified by works. In fact, in order to grasp the full truth of justification, we should clearly understand that there are six aspects of justification.

1. We are justified by grace (Romans 3:2-4). This simply means that we do not deserve to be justified; in fact, we deserve the opposite.
2. We are justified by faith (Romans 5:1). Faith is the human response to God’s grace. By faith we receive the free gift.
3. We are justified by blood (Romans 5:9). Here blood is the price that had to be paid in order to receive our justification.
4. We are justified by God (Romans 8:33). The truth is that God is the one who justifies.

5. We are justified by power (Romans 4:25). Our justification is linked to the power that raised Christ from the dead.
6. We are justified by works (James 2:24). Works are the outward proof of the reality of our faith. They give outward expression to what would otherwise be invisible.

We see that a person is justified by grace, faith, blood, God, power, and works. Yet there is no contradiction here. These statements simply present different aspects of the same truth. Grace is the principle upon which God justifies; faith is the means by which we receive it; blood is the price the Saviour had to pay; God is the active Agent in justification; power is the proof; and works are the result.

Verse 14 – James insists that faith that does not result in good works cannot save. James is describing the man who says he has faith, but there is nothing about his life that indicates it.

Verses 15-16 – The emptiness of words are now illustrated. We are introduced to two people. One is very poor and does not have enough food or clothing. The other has both, but he is not willing to share. Speaking like a generous person, he says to the poor brother, “Go and put on some clothing, and eat a good meal.” But he does not raise a finger to make this possible. What good are such words? They are totally worthless.

Verse 17 – “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.” A faith without works is not faith at all. It is only words. James is not saying that we are saved by faith *plus* works. To believe in such a view would be to dishonour the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were saved by faith plus works, then there would be two saviours – Jesus and ourselves. But the New Testament is very clear that Jesus Christ is the one and only Saviour. Works are not the root of salvation but the fruit; they are not the cause but the effect.

Verses 14-26 – Faith and Works

Verse 18 – “*You have faith; I have deeds.*” True faith and good works are inseparable. James shows this by giving us the example of a debate between two men. The first man, who is a saved person, is the speaker. The second professes to have faith, but does not demonstrate that faith by good works. The first challenges the other.

Let’s paraphrase the conversation: “Yes,” the first man may correctly say, “you say you have faith, but you do not have works to demonstrate it. I believe that faith must be backed up by a life of works. Prove to me that you have faith without a life of good works. You cannot do it. Faith is invisible. The only way others can know you have faith is by a life that demonstrate it. I will show you my faith by what I do.

The key to this verse is in the word show. To show faith without works is impossible.

Verses 19-20 – The debate continues. A person’s professed faith may be nothing more than acceptance of a well-known fact. Such faith or acceptance of facts does not involve a true commitment of the person and does not produce a transformed life. It is not enough to believe in the existence of God. True, this is essential, but it is not enough. “*Even the demons believe in that and shudder.*” (vs. 19) The demons believe this fact, but they do not surrender to God and are not transformed. This is not a saving faith.

When a person truly believes in the Lord, it involves a commitment of spirit, soul, and body. This commitment in turn results in a changed life. Faith apart from works is *head* belief and, therefore, *dead* belief.

Verse 21 – Now James gives two examples of faith that works, from the Old Testament: Abraham, a Jew, and Rahab, a Gentile. Abraham was justified by works in offering up Isaac his son on the altar. Genesis 15:6 says, “*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*” Here Abraham was justified by believing; in other words, he was justified by faith. It is not until we come to Genesis 22 that we find Abraham offering up his son. It is then that he was justified by works. As soon as Abraham believed in the Lord, he was justified in the sight of God. But then, seven chapters later, God put Abraham’s faith to the test. Abraham demonstrated that it was genuine faith by his willingness to offer up Isaac. His obedience showed that his faith was not only a head belief, but a heart commitment.

Verses 22-24 – It is clear then that Abraham’s faith inspired his works, and by his works his faith was made perfect. *True faith and works are inseparable.* The first produces the second, and the second gives evidence of the first. We conclude from verse 24 “that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” Again this does not mean that he is justified by faith *plus* works. Abraham was justified by faith. His act of faith was the proof of the genuineness of his faith. The only way to show the reality of our faith is by good works.

Verse 25 – The second Old Testament illustration is of Rahab. She was not saved by good character (she was a prostitute!) but she was justified by works because “she received the spies and sent them off in a different direction.” Rahab was a Canaanite, living in the city of Jericho. She had heard that a victorious army was advancing toward the city and that no opposition had been successful against this army. She had concluded that the God of the Hebrews was the true God and decided to identify herself with this God, whatever the cost might be. In doing so, she proved the genuineness of her faith in the true and living God. She was not saved by helping the spies, but this act proved that she was a genuine believer.

Verse 26 – James ends the passage with the statement: “*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*” Here the matter is summarized very beautifully. He compares faith to the human body, and works to the spirit. The body without the spirit is lifeless, useless, and valueless. So faith without works is dead, ineffective, and worthless.

Let us test our own faith by our answers to the following questions:

Am I willing, like Abraham, to offer the dearest thing in my life God?

Am I willing, like Rahab, to turn my back to the world in order to be loyal to Christ?

CHAPTER 3

Verses 1-12 – The Tongue: Its Use and Abuse

The first twelve verses deal with the tongue (also mentioned in 1:19, 26; 2:12; 4:11; and 5:12). Just as a doctor would examine a patient’s tongue to help him with his diagnosis, so is a person’s spiritual health tested by his conversation. Self-diagnosis begins with sins of speech. James would likely agree with the person who said: “Watch your tongue. It’s in a wet place where it’s easy to slip!”

Verse 1 – The subject is introduced by a warning against the hasty desire to be a teacher of the word of God. Although the tongue is not specifically mentioned, the underlying thought is that the one who uses his tongue in teaching the Scriptures assumes added responsibilities before God and people. The words, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers,” may be paraphrased: “Do not become unduly ambitious to be teachers.” This should not be interpreted as a warning against the use of our gifts if we are actually called by God to teach. It is a simple warning that this ministry should not be undertaken lightly. Those who teach the Word of God will receive harsher judgement if they fail to practice what they teach.

Verse 2 – James moves from the specific ministry of teaching to the general area of conversation. We are all prone to stumble in many areas but, if anyone can control his tongue so that he does not commit the sins of speech, that person is well disciplined. If we can exercise control over our speech, we should not have any difficulty in practicing self-control in other areas of life as well.

Verse 3 – Five figures of speech, or pictures of the tongue, are given here. First, it is compared to a bridle. A bridle goes over the horse’s head and holds the bit in the mouth. Connected to the bit are the reins. Although the bit itself is a small piece of metal, if a person can control that bit, he can control the behaviour of the horse. So the tongue can direct life – for good or evil.

Verse 4 – The second picture is that of a rudder. Compared with the ship, a rudder is very small. It weighs only a fraction

of the weight of the ship. Yet when the rudder is turned, it controls the direction of the ship. We should not misjudge the power of the tongue by its size. Though it is a very small member of the body, and relatively hidden, it is a powerful muscle that can accomplish great things – good or evil.

Verses 5-6 – A third picture of the tongue is fire. A lighted match, carelessly thrown, may start a brush fire. This in turn may start a forest fire and leave a mass of ruins. James speaks of it as “a world of evil among the parts of the body.” The word “world” is used to express vastness. The tongue can “corrupt the whole person.” A person can corrupt his whole personality by using his tongue to slander, abuse, lie, blaspheme, and swear. A wicked tongue “is itself set on fire by hell.” All evil speech has its source in hell. It is hellish in its very character.

Verses 7-8 – The fourth figure to which the tongue is compared is a wild, untameable creature. All kinds of animals can be tamed. But man’s success with wild animals does not extend to the area of his own tongue. If we are honest, we would admit that this is true in our own lives. Human nature (because of the fall) does not have the ability or strength to govern this little member. Only God can bring it under control. James next characterizes the tongue as “a restless evil, full of deadly poison”... like a restless serpent with poisonous venom. A drop or two would be fatal. In the same way the tongue can poison minds and assassinate characters. We all know how easy it is to gossip about others. The price we pay for the undisciplined use of our tongue is enormous.

Verses 9-12 – It is inconsistent to use the tongue for both good and evil. It is completely unnatural; there is nothing like it in nature. One minute a person blesses God with his tongue, the next he curses those who are made in the image of God. All that we say should be subject to the threefold test: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary? We should always ask God to set a guard before our lips (Psalm 141:3; 19:14). No spring gives fresh water and bitter at the same time. The tongue should not do so either. A fig tree cannot produce grapes, neither can a grapevine bear figs. How is it then, that the tongue can produce two kinds of fruit – good and evil?

Let’s put ourselves on trial as far as our speech is concerned. Before leaving this section, let’s ask ourselves the following questions. Do I teach others things that I have not obeyed myself? Do I criticize others behind their backs? Is my speech always clean, edifying, and kind? After a spirit-filled meeting, do I engage in empty or silly talks about sports, films, or just anything, forgetting all the blessings the Spirit of God gave me? In telling a story, do I exaggerate in order to impress others? Do I habitually tell the truth, even if it means loss of face, friends, or finances?

Verses 13-18 **Wisdom: The True and the False**

James now discusses the difference between true and false wisdom. When he speaks about wisdom, he is not thinking of how much knowledge a man has but how he lives his daily life. It is not the possession of knowledge but the proper application of it that counts. We have here a portrait of the truly wise man. Basically, this man is the Lord Jesus Christ; He is wisdom incarnate (Matthew 11:19; 1 Corinthians 1:30). Also the wise person is one who reflects the life of Christ, one in whom the Fruit of the Spirit is evident (Galatians 5:22-23).

We also have a portrait of the worldly-wise man. He acts according to the principles of this world. His behaviour gives no evidence of divine life within.

Verse 13 – If a person is wise and understanding, he will demonstrate it by his good life and deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom. Let us not forget that Jesus, who was the embodiment of true wisdom, was not proud and arrogant; He was “gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Therefore, all who are truly wise will have the hallmark of genuine humility.

Verse 14 – The worldly-wise man is characterized by bitter envy and selfish ambition in his heart. His only passion in life is to advance his own interests. He is jealous of any competitors and ruthless in dealing with them. He is proud of his wisdom that has brought success. But James says that this is not wisdom at all. Such boasting is empty. It is a practical denial of the truth that the man who is truly wise is truly humble.

Verse 15 – Even in Christian service, it is possible to be bitterly jealous of other workers and to seek a prominent place. There is always a danger that worldly-wise men will be given places of leadership in the church. We must not allow

worldly principles to guide us in spiritual affairs. *Earthly* means that this wisdom is not from heaven, but from this earth. *Unspiritual* (sensual) means that it is not from the Fruit of the Holy Spirit, but of man's lower nature.

Verse 16 – Wherever you find envy and selfishness, there you will also find confusion, discord and every kind of evil.

Verse 17 – The wisdom that comes from God is first of all *pure*. In thought, word, and deed, it is clean. In spirit and body, in doctrine and practice, in faith and in morals, it is pure. It is also peace-loving. This simply means that a wise man loves peace and will do all he can to maintain peace without sacrificing purity. The next characteristic is *submissive* (willing to yield). It means conciliatory, approachable, open to reason, ready to give in when truth requires it. Wisdom from above is “full of mercy and good fruits.” It is without partiality, that is, no favouritism. It is impartial in its treatment of others. Finally, true wisdom is without hypocrisy. It is sincere and genuine. It does not pretend to be other than it actually is.

Verse 18 – James closes the chapter with the words, “Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” This verse is a link between what we have been discussing and what is to follow. We have just learned that true wisdom is peace-loving. In the next chapter we find conflict among God's people.

Once again, James has put our faith on trial, this time with regard to the type of wisdom we demonstrate in our everyday life. We must ask ourselves: Do I respect the proud man of world more than the humble believer in Jesus? Do I serve the Lord without caring who gets the credit? Or do I sometimes use questionable means in order to get good results? Am I guilty of flattery in order to influence people? Do I harbour jealousy and resentment in my heart? Do I resort to sarcasm and unkind remarks? Am I pure in thought, in speech and in morals?

CHAPTER 4

James has pointed out that the wise man is a peace-loving man. Now he is reminded of the tragic strife that often exists among believers. What is the cause of it? Why are there so many unhappy homes and so many churches torn by division? Why are there so many bitter feuds among Christians and Christian workers? The reason is that we are unceasingly striving to satisfy our lust for pleasures and possessions, and to outdo others.

Verses 1-2a – The sad fact is that there are wars and fights among Christians. To suggest that this paragraph does not apply to believers is unrealistic and it takes away from the passage all its value for us. What causes all this fighting? It's the strong desires within us that are constantly struggling to be satisfied. There is the lust to accumulate material possessions. There is the drive for prestige. There is the craving for pleasure, for the gratification of the body's appetite. These powerful forces are at work within us. We are never satisfied, we always want more. And yet it seems we are constantly frustrated in our desire to get what we want. The unfulfilled desire and longing becomes so powerful that we trample on those who seem to hinder our progress. James says, “You kill.” He uses the word in a figurative sense. We don't literally kill, but anger, jealousy and cruelty that we generate are actually murder in embryo.

Verses 2b-3 – We “covet, but we cannot have what we want.” We want to have more and better things than others. And in the attempt, we find ourselves quarrelling and hurting one another. The sources of bickering and strife among believers are the desire for more and jealousy of others. “Keeping up with the Joneses” is a polite name for it; more accurately, we should call it greed, covetousness and envy. People are slow to learn that true pleasure is not found this way, but in contentment with food and clothing (1 Timothy 6:8). Prayer is the right approach to this problem. “Don't argue. Don't fight. Pray.” James says: “You do not have because you do not ask God.” Instead of taking these things to our Lord in prayer, we try to get what we want by our own efforts.

What a great lesson we have in these first three verses! If we were content with what God has given us, so many problems and so much unrest would be avoided. If we loved our neighbours as ourselves, and were more interested in sharing than in acquiring, what peace would result! If we would follow our Saviour's command to forsake all instead of to accumulate, to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, most fights and contentions would cease.

Verse 4 – James condemns the love for material things as spiritual adultery. God wants us to love Him first and foremost. Covetousness is a form of idolatry. It means we strongly desire what God does not want for us. We have set up idols in

our hearts. We value material things above the will of God. Therefore, covetousness is idolatry, and idolatry is spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord. Worldliness (friendship with the world) is also enmity with God – “hatred toward God.” “The world” does not refer to the planet earth or nature. It is the system that man has built in an effort to satisfy the lust of the eyes, the flesh, and the pride of life. In this corrupt system there is no room for God or His Son Jesus. It may be the world of art, culture, education, science, or even religion. But it is a “world” in which the name of Jesus Christ is not welcomed or is even forbidden, except of course, as empty formality. To be a friend of this system is to be an enemy of God. It was this world that crucified our Lord. In fact, it was the religious world that played the key role in putting Him to death. How unthinkable it is that believers should ever want to walk arm-in-arm with the world that crucified their Saviour.

Verses 4-17 Covetousness: Its Cause and Cure

Verses 4-5 – It is spiritual adultery to be “married” to Christ (Romans 7:4) yet love the world (2 Corinthians 11:2-3). In the Old Testament, God called Israel’s idolatry “adultery” because the idols had robbed Him of their devotion. How can Christians have one foot in the world and the other in “heaven” when they have been called out of the world? (John 15:18-19) We have been (or must be, if not yet) crucified to the world, and the world to us (Galatians 6:14). When the believer becomes a friend to the world, he becomes at enmity with God. He grieves the Holy Spirit within, who jealously yearns for our love and faithfulness. It is sad the way many Christians live in and for the world. In fact, it is difficult to tell whether or not they are even saved!

Verses 6-7 – When a Christian lives for the world and the flesh, he becomes proud, and this is where the devil goes to work, for pride is one of his best tools. God wants to give more grace more than Satan can ever give! The Christian must use the Word to resist Satan (Luke 4:1-13), and the Holy Spirit will help him to do this. But God cannot help the Christian who is proud, who refuses to repent of sin and humble himself. Grace is for the humble, not the proud. We must first submit to God; then we can effectively resist the devil. It is important that the Christian examine his heart to see if any of these enemies are making progress.

James turns now to three important warnings and calls these Christians to repent of their sins. Unless individuals in the church are right with God, there can be no peace.

Verses 8-10 – Warning against pride

Wherever there are wars and fights, there must be pride; the wise Christian sows seed of peace. Pride puts us at a distance from God. Pride defiles our hearts and hands. It is the sin of double-mindedness, and this is basically lack of surrender. “Purify your hearts” carries the idea of having a chaste and faithful heart, not loving the world or grieving the Holy Spirit. These believers were living in worldly pleasures and laughter was their main joy. They needed to be sober and serious and put sin out of their lives. James promises that if they humble themselves, God will lift them up. See Matthew 23:12, Luke 14:11, 1 Peter 5:6, Proverbs 29:23.

Verses 11-12 – Warning against criticism

When a man is worldly-minded and proud, he is always quick to criticize others. The fights among these Christians had their origin here: They were judging one another and speaking evil of one another. Here is the tongue again! Read James 1:19-20, 26 and 3:5-6 again. How many churches have been divided and disgraced by hateful, critical tongues? The Bible teaches us that we must have Christian discernment (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22, 1 John 4:1-6), but this does not mean that we can judge the hearts and motives of others. If every Christian would devote himself to obeying Christ and His commands, and not seeing how well others obey Him, our churches would have harmony and peace. James suggests in verse 12 that the only one with the right to judge is the one with the power to punish; and only God has this power.

Verses 13-17 – Warning against self-confidence

Next, James denounces self-confident, boastful planning independent of God. He pictures a man who has a complete plan laid out for the future. Notice the details. He thought about when: today or tomorrow; the persons involved: we; the place: this or that city; the duration: spend a year there; the activity: carry on business; and the anticipated result: make money.

What is missing in this picture? He never once brings God into the planning and business. In life, it is necessary to make some plans for the future, but to do so in self-will is sinful. To say “we will” or “I will” is, in essence, sin. Note, for instance, the “I wills” of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:13-14... *“I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the top of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”*

It is wrong to plan as if tomorrow was certain. *“Do not say...tomorrow.”* (Proverbs 3:28) We do not know what tomorrow holds. Our lives are as frail and unpredictable as a puff of smoke. God should be in all our plans, and our plans should be made in His will. We should live and speak in the realization that our lives are under His control. We should say: *“If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”*

“You boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.” They were arrogant in their confidence that nothing would interfere with their time schedule. They acted as if they were masters of their own fate. All such boasting is evil because it leaves God out.

James sums up the chapter and points out that we can sin by neglect as well as by deliberate action. It is not simply what we do, but what we do *not* do that is sin! Life is so brief that we cannot afford to waste it. We must make our lives count for Christ before He returns.

“Anyone, then, who know the good he ought to do and he doesn’t do it, sins.” (v.17)

CHAPTER 5

Verses 1-6 - The Rich and Their Coming Misery

This is one of the most searching and piercing sections of this letter. James now denounces the sins of the rich. The words fall like hammer-blows: blunt and unsparing. In fact, the denunciation is so strong that these verses are rarely preached on. It seems that these are not Christians, for James warns them to repent and weep because of the coming misery. Verses 1-6 are similar to Old Testament declarations of judgment against pagan nations.

James is in the role of a prophet of social justice. He cries out against the failure of the rich to use their money to help the needy. He condemns those who have become rich by exploiting their workers. He rebukes their use of wealth for self-indulgence and luxurious living. Finally, he describes the rich as arrogant oppressors of the righteous.

He calls the rich to “weep and wail” because of the miseries that they are about to experience. Soon they will meet God. Then they will be filled with shame and remorse. They will wail over missed opportunities. They will mourn over their covetousness and selfishness.

James mentions several cardinal sins of the rich:

1. First, he names hoarding (vss. 1-3) and shows that the rich had accumulated their wealth, only to have it fade away. The Bible never says that it is a sin to be rich. For instance, a person may inherit a fortune and become rich. Someone may work hard, save, and invest wisely and thus become “rich” (or relatively rich). James is talking about the selfish rich, who heap up riches and treasures, but forget the poor and needy.

Jesus forbade the hoarding of wealth. He said, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:19-21)

James speaks of wealth in four forms: riches, clothes, gold, and silver. In Bible times, wealth was generally in the form of grain, oil, and other produce, clothing, gold and silver. When James says, “Your wealth has rotten,” he means that the grain has become wormy and the oil has become rancid. The point is that these things had been hoarded to the point where they were spoiled. They could have been used at one time to feed the hungry; now they were worthless.

“Your clothes are eaten by moths,” he says. This doesn’t happen to clothing in regular use. But when the closet is full of unused clothing, they are subject to moth damage. To James it is morally wrong to hoard clothes when so many in the world are in desperate need.

“Your gold and silver are corroded.” Corrosion, speaks of disuse and decay. Gold and silver do not rust, but they do tarnish and become discoloured, and under bad storage conditions, they could corrode. Instead of putting their money to work, to feed the hungry, clothe the destitute and spread the gospel, the rich were saving their money for a rainy day. It benefited no one, and eventually rotted away.

2. The second sin is stealing wages. James attacks those who acquired wealth by not paying proper wages. The rich had held back the honest wages of the poor. They used fraud to steal their wages, but one day their sins would find them out!
3. The third sin is extravagant living. Certainly God wants us to enjoy the blessings of life but He does not want us to be wasteful and extravagant while robbing others in need.
4. The fourth sin is injustice. The rich took advantage of their power to abuse and kill the poor. But these Christians did not resist; they left their care in the Lord as the Righteous Judge. (Romans 12:17-21)

Exhortation to Patience (verses 7-12)

Verse 7 - James now turns to believers who were being oppressed and encourages them to be patient. The motive for patience is the coming of the Lord. The farmer illustrates the need for patience. He does not reap the same day he plants; rather, there is a long period of waiting. First must come the early rain, causing the seed to germinate. Then, at the end of the season is latter rain, needed to bring the crop to successful fruition.

Verse 8 - The wrongs of the earth will be made right when the Lord returns. Therefore, His people should be patient like the farmer. Their hearts should be established with the certainty of His coming.

Verse 9 - During persecution and difficult times, it is not unusual for people to turn against one another. It is a curious twist of human nature that in times of pressure we build up wrath against those we love most. And so James warns the servants of the Lord working together under difficult circumstances. “Don’t grumble against each other brothers, or you will be judged.” We should not let resentment build up. After all, the judge is already at the door! He knows what we think. Soon we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account. We should not judge for we will be judged, too.

Verse 10 - The Old Testament prophets are used here as an example of suffering and patience. “Suffering produces perseverance.” (Romans 5:3) Patience in the New Testament means fortitude or steadfastness. Because of their faithfulness in declaring the word of the Lord, the prophets were persecuted without mercy. Yet “he saw him who is invisible.” (Hebrews 11:27, 32-40)

Verse 11 - Job is a fine example of perseverance or fortitude. Few – if any – men in the history of the world have ever suffered so much loss in so short a time as Job. Yet he never cursed God or turned from Him. In the end, his endurance was rewarded. God revealed Himself, as He always does, to be compassionate and merciful.

Verse 12 - Impatience in times of trial is also manifested in swearing. Here it is not a question of profanity or cursing. Neither is it a matter of taking an oath in a court of law. The practice that is forbidden is thoughtless use of the Lord’s name or some other name to test the truthfulness of one’s speech. The Christian should not have to swear by anyone or anything, in heaven or on earth. Those who know him should be able to depend on the fact that his “yes” means yes and his “no” means no. This passage could also be applied to forbid such needless expressions as “For heaven’s sake,” “As God is my judge,” “By Jove,” and such minced expressions as “gee” (contraction for Jesus), “gosh” and “golly” (slang for God). “Or you will be condemned...” warns James, who may be thinking of the third commandment: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” (Exodus 20:7)

Prayer and the Healing of the Sick (verses 13-20)

The theme of the closing verses of James is prayer. It is referred to seven times, either as a noun or verb.

Verse 13 - In every circumstance of life we should go to the Lord in prayer. When in trouble, we should approach Him with an honest attitude and faith. In times of rejoicing, we should lift our hearts to Him in praise. He wants to be brought into all the changing moods of our lives. We should see God as the first great cause of all that comes to us in life. We should not look into what Rutherford called the “confused rolling of the wheels of second causes.” It is defeat to allow ourselves to be victims of circumstances, or to wait for our circumstances to change. We should see no other hand but God’s in our life. This is one of the most disputed portions of the epistle, and maybe of the entire New Testament. It brings us face to face with the place of healing in the life of the believer today. Before looking at the verses in detail, let’s look at what the Bible teaches about sickness and healing.

Divine Healing

1. We (Christians) agree that all sickness is, in a general way, the result of sin in the world. If sin had never entered, there would be no sickness.
2. Sometimes sickness is a direct result of sin in a person’s life (1 Corinthians 11:30).
3. Not all sickness is a direct result of sin in a person’s life. Job was sick in spite of the fact that he was a very righteous man (Job 1:8). Other examples are the man who was born blind (John 9:2-3), and Epaphroditus, who was sick because of his tireless activity in the work of the Lord (Philippians 2:30).
4. Sometimes sickness is a result of satanic activity. It was Satan who caused Job’s body to be covered with boils (Job 2:7). It was Satan who crippled the woman in Luke 13:10-17. Paul had a physical problem caused by Satan. He called it “a thorn in the flesh... a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7).
5. God can and does heal. In a very real sense, all healing is divine. One of the names of God in the Old Testament is Jehovah Ropheka – “the Lord who heals you” (Exodus 15:26). We should acknowledge God in every case of healing. God uses different means of healing. Sometimes He heals through natural bodily processes. He has placed within the human body tremendous powers of recuperation. He heals through medicine (1 Timothy 5:23). He heals through physicians and surgeons. Jesus taught that sick people need a physician (Matthew 9:12). Paul spoke to Luke “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). God uses doctors in the ministry of healing. As Dubois, the famous French surgeon said, “the surgeon dresses the wound; God heals it.”
6. God also heals miraculously. The Gospels contain many examples of this. There is nothing in the Bible to discourage us from believing that God can heal miraculously today.
7. We must also be clear that it is not always God’s will to heal. Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). The Lord did not heal Paul of his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). If it were always God’s will to heal, some would never grow old or die!
8. God has not promised to heal everyone; therefore, healing is not something we can demand from God. In Philippians 2:27, healing is spoken of as mercy, not something we have a right to expect.
9. It is not true that failure to be healed indicates a lack of faith. If it were, this would mean that some would live on indefinitely, but no one does. Paul, Trophimus, and Gaius were not healed, and yet their faith was strong and active.

Verses 14-15 - Returning to James 5, we see how it fits in with what the rest of the Bible teaches about healing: *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be*

forgiven.”

If these were the only verses in the Bible on healing, we would assume that a Christian could be assured of healing from every illness that comes in life, if he met the conditions listed. However, we have already seen from other Scriptures that it is not always God’s will to heal. Therefore, we conclude that James is not talking about every kind of illness, but only about a certain form of sickness; that is, a sickness that is the result of specific circumstances.

The key to understanding the passage is found in the words: *“If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.”* Healing in this section is connected with the forgiveness of sins. To summarize, then, we believe that verses 14-15 apply to a case where a person is sick as a direct result of some sin. When he realizes this and repents, “he should call the elders of the church” and ask them to pray for him and he should make a full confession to God. They can pray for the person’s recovery in faith, since God promises to heal the person.

Verses 16-20 - A casual reading of this statement might give the impression that we are to tell other people all about our secret sins. But that is not at all the thought! Primarily, James means that when we sin against someone else, we should be quick to confess this sin to the person we have wronged. Also, we should pray for each other. Instead of holding grudges and allowing resentments to build up, we should continue fellowshiping with others through confession and prayer.

Finally, faith goes out in love and compassion to those who have backslidden.

Your faith and mine are on trial each day. What is the Judge’s verdict?