

SHOW ME

The Epistle of James

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes when we listen to people tell about how they became a Christians, we hear them use words like "I had this wonderful feeling come over me," "I felt like I was being drawn to the front by a power outside of me," " There was this fantastic sense of love," " I believed," and other superlative words and phrases. Great claims of faith are made and professions of trusting God or having a change in their lives are testified to. The right answers are given perhaps, but the actions that follow and the lifestyle lived is the same as before these claims were made. The lives of many who profess to be Christians are no different than many people who are not children of God. The book of James addresses this problem.

Counterfeit Christianity may have some "Christian" characteristics and words but the reality of faith is seen by the works that follow the profession of faith. Talk is cheap and boasts of faith are hollow when there is no evidence of being made "a new creation" in Christ. If "old things" have not passed away and if "newness of life" is not evident, then the reality of faith in Christ is not there. To claim to be a Christian and live like the world is a contradiction to the Gospel. True, Christians often say a lot and produce little. They make great claims regarding faith but show little signs of life and light, but when the Spirit of God is indwelling a person, there will be evidence of the new nature that can be seen. James addresses the matter of how faith and works go together, and the impact of what we speak.

The reality of true faith is a changed life that includes a new attitude toward God and His people. There will be a Christ-likeness personally, and there will be godly living that can be seen by those who know us. True faith and good works come naturally to a believer in Christ in whom the Spirit of God lives, producing a lively faith. Some characteristics that are seen in God's people is a consciousness of sin and an abhorrence of it. There will be an inward compassion towards those who are lost and a desire to see them saved. There will be a sense of justice and fairness in the society in which they live. They will be able to recognize the fact that faith and action go together. The words they use and the way they speak will be honorable, not crass nor embarrassing. They will speak with grace and at the same time will mean what they say because they know their testimony of faith depends on good speech. A believer knows the difference between worldly wisdom and wisdom "that is from above." Children of God want to please their heavenly Father and will turn from evil with a desire to obey their Lord. There is a sense of trust in the Lord and rejection of trust in one's own plans and possessions as the final authority. Patience will follow times of difficulty because they have learned from their Master "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame." The writer of this epistle writes of "faith" twelve times, "works" thirteen times and being "doers" five times. The practical application of the book is summed up in this verse - *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."* [2:26]

James, the Lord's half-brother was the writer. He was called "the Just," even though he was opposed to the Lord during His ministry. He was converted during a private meeting with the Risen Lord [1Cor.15:7] and soon was a recognized leader of the church in Jerusalem [Acts 15:13-21; Gal.2:9]. The book was written by a Jew to Jewish Christians who were just learning what it meant to be a follower of our Lord. The book was written with the character of James: stern, severe, curt, bold, rapid. He used metaphors that made his message clear (1:6,10,17,18,21,23; 5:5). The book was perhaps the first of the epistles written. Paul wrote particularly to the Gentiles with the book of Hebrews being perhaps the exception. It was written before the book of Romans, so the book of James was not written to contradict in any way the teaching in the book of Romans. James was killed by the Jews around AD 62. There are others who were called James in the scripture: 1] James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John. 2] James, the son of Alphaeus.

The purpose of the writing of this letter was to comfort and encourage suffering Jewish Christians who were going through severe trials and temptations. Also, it was written to correct disorder in the early Jewish Christian assemblies and to counteract the tendency to separate faith and works. The proof that I am justified by faith is seen in my works. The presentation of the writing is a very practical presentation of morals and practice. There is not much doctrinal teaching in James but it is rather a book of holy living. James lived what he preached.

An overview of the book of James is the teaching regarding genuine religion, 1:1-27; genuine faith, 2:1-3:1; and genuine wisdom, 3:13-5:20. In persecution we can be tempted to let intellectual agreement pass for true faith. True faith transforms lives. We are to turn faith in to loving actions toward others. Living faith is

contrasted to empty faith. Living faith makes a difference in lives. Overcoming trials and temptations produces maturity and character. We should not resent the trials we are called to pass through but rather pray for wisdom as we pass through them. The law of love saves us because of God's mercy. Showing love overcomes our own selfishness. Wise speech reveals spiritual wisdom. God's wisdom helps control the tongue and can help control our actions. Your words will convey true humility and lead to peace, especially when we think before we speak. Compromise of truth and righteousness because of wealth is not acceptable. We are accountable for how we use what we have. We must have right attitudes.

A CHAPTER STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES:

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

TWO BROTHERS

He knew there was a difference between them, that much was easy to tell.
The rest of the family seemed normal, Jesus "did all things well."
It was a cause for resentment, even when Jesus began to preach.
The standard of holiness in Jesus, was beyond James ability to reach.

People by the thousands came to hear Jesus; they hung on His every word
Those disciples who followed Him closely, were not ashamed to call Him "Lord."
How can a brother compete, the bitterness inside him was real;
James was a sinner by nature; Jesus could forgive sins and heal.

Then there came that day in Jerusalem, the brother heard about it from afar
All that had been obscure before, now to James became very clear
He may not have seen Jesus die; but saw Him then after His resurrection -
James realized through Him alone was granted God's great salvation.

It doesn't take long when we know Him, to know there is a change inside.
There is a desire to serve Him, our gratitude is impossible to hide.
We learn, and we take action by faith, in Him who saved us by His grace
It is perfectly normal for us now to show new life, when works testify to our faith.

"Father, it must have been a wonderful moment when James and Jesus met together after His resurrection. I know some things between brothers are best kept private, but I expect our Lord Jesus was delighted when James opened up to Him by faith. May I never just say I have faith without showing it by works. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

James 1:1

JAMES, A SERVANT OF GOD

In the greetings that are given in the Jewish way by identifying the writer first, James speaks of himself as a servant of God. He makes no reference to his family relationship to Jesus. In the book of Galatians, he is identified as "the Lord's brother," and we know that after the private meeting he had with the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection, James was a different man. For whatever reasons, James soon became a leader among the believers who were in the church at Jerusalem, even though he and other members of his family did not believe in Jesus during His earthly ministry. He may have heard about the scenes at the cross from his mother, but the encounter with Jesus after His resurrection changed everything. Jude who was a brother of James and a half-brother of Jesus, became a believer in Him as well. At the beginning of his brief letter giving warnings of apostasy, he writes: "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James..." Neither man spoke of their earthly relationship with the Lord Jesus in a way that set them apart from other faithful servants of the Lord.

The two times James mentions Jesus, it is with reverence and devotion. In his case, familiarity did not breed contempt. He took his place alongside of his Jewish brethren as one concerned about them because of the persecution of Christians that was increasing in many places. He knew many who had been saved on the day of Pentecost, were from various countries, "scattered abroad," and they had also been scattered because of the persecution under Saul of Tarsus. This letter was written to those who had professed faith in Christ and had returned to their homes in different parts of the world, and also to those Jews who were confronted with the Gospel but were still uncertain about what it meant to be a Christian.

James was well aware of the Jewish law and the effect it had on those who followed Judaism. He knew the true implications of what it meant to follow the law and he also knew the true implications to follow the teaching and ministry of Jesus. When the time of conflict came between these two groups of Jews, James was able at the council of brethren that met at Jerusalem, to discern how best to bring these two groups to the common ground of consensus. In both the letter in Acts 15:23 and here, James uses his unique word of "greeting" which none of the other New Testament writers used in this way.

It is a wonderful example of the grace of God when we read about the different ways the Spirit of God brings individuals to put their faith in Christ. Paul was different than James. Each of us has our own personal experience of putting faith in Christ. Each of us also has a particular work to do for our Lord for which we are responsible. James was concerned about the "twelve tribes." The place and purpose in which we are found is where the Lord of the harvest has deemed that we are best suited to serve Him. It may be in our own family sphere. It may be in a community or in a particular ethnic group. Some stay in a certain geographical area in which they have a singular interest. We can appreciate each other and pray that God will bless the efforts and labors others put forth even while we are fulfilling our own calling

James 1:2-8

TESTING TIMES

In every Christian's life there will be times of testing that cannot be avoided. These trials are not necessarily because something is wrong, or because we have done something our Gracious Father is taking steps to correct. As a matter of fact, God allows these as opportunities to prove our faith in Him is real. The testing times puts out into the open, testimony as to the reality of our profession of faith in Christ. Trials usually include suffering of one kind or another. Mature believers can be identified by their attitude toward suffering physically, emotionally or in other ways.

The trials we are called upon to go through test our maturity. A mature believer will not make it a point to complain about them but will seek to profit from the testing knowing a trial is an opportunity to prove our faith. A trial has a reason and must be allowed to run its course. We may not know the reason, so ask God to let you know the reason.

Trials also define our faith. The early Jewish believers in the church at Jerusalem where James was, were experiencing severe testing times, and it would spread throughout the whole world. Stephen was the first martyr. James the brother of John had been put to death. The hardships associated with faith in Christ are going to happen because the god of this world knows living faith has divine power motivating it. It is inevitable that trials come, but to "count it all joy" when they come makes true faith obvious to those who do not have it.

Trials develop our faith when we have a positive outlook during them. We learn perseverance during testing times. Trials reveal our faith in that they will mean we know we need God's help to behave wisely when insulted. Our character is revealed under the pressure of trials. The depth of our character is revealed under pressure and the testing times develop our character beyond what was previously normal to us, to becoming more Christ-like. God promises to be with us when we "pass through the waters," so we can ask Him for the wisdom we need and remain patient during the testing, the outcome will be what He wants for our good.

Trials lead to God-given wisdom to make right decisions in difficult circumstances. Wisdom brings us into a place of practical discernment with respect for God. Those tests lead us to know and have the ability to do what is right and a willingness to do right. When we ask God for wisdom, we learn that it is not isolated from the suffering we may be called to endure, but is the tool by which we learn the needed action to take in the circumstances in which we are found. The wisdom we ask for is not only practical but it is divine wisdom that goes beyond common sense. It is then we learn that trials endured are blessings. Divine wisdom given us enables us to believe and not doubt, to not have a critical attitude, and be willing to accept a "no" as an answer that is in harmony with God's principles (see Mat.21:22).

Trials bring reward from the Lord Himself. We trust God and don't allow ourselves to waver from being loyal to Him. In the testing times we commit ourselves completely to God knowing that trials bring out the best in us. Doubt leaves a person unsettled. We must rely on God to show us what is best. Then our decisions will be sure and solid. We can be sure of the purposes of God in times of testing, even though we may not know them ourselves while we are passing through them. He is developing the *perfection* of character in His children in order to *produce patience* like He did with Joseph in the Old testament and Paul in the New Testament. By *prayer* on our part, our Father provides needed wisdom. There are three *perfect* things in this first chapter that comes through the process of suffering. The perfect work having to do with God's purpose,

1:1-12; the perfect gift having to do with God's goodness, 1:13-20; and the perfect law having to do with God's word, 1:21-27.

Some lessons we can learn from this portion of the epistle of James that are similar to the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ on the sermon on the mount are: when your life is full of difficulties and persecutions, be glad. A reward awaits you [Jas.1:2; Mat.5:10-12]. You are to be perfect, mature and complete; not lacking anything [Jas.1:4; Mat.5:48]. Ask God and He will answer [Jas.1:5; 5:15; Mat.7:7-12].

James 1:9-18

NEW DIGNITY

Doubts have a way of leaving a person unsettled and unsure of themselves. The wisdom we receive from God enables us to trust Him and the answers to our questions that He chooses to answer make sense. When we are in fellowship with our Lord, we can find ourselves in fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ no matter what their station in life is or our own situation. The poor and those not so socially accepted by the standards of the world, have a new dignity that is seen in the local assembly of believers. Class distinction should not be evident there because of our oneness in Christ. People in low positions are not overlooked by God. They are great in God's eyes.

All believers have a God-given dignity because of the Person of Christ in whom we have been accepted by our Righteous God. A consciousness of this acceptance promotes a dignity that expresses itself in our worship and our words. Riches don't mean much to God who is the Source of everything. Riches can come and go like dry grass and fading flowers. True riches are in a person's heart because those unseen things endure forever. What you have in your heart, not in the bank, is what matters to God and for eternity. Showing favoritism is wrong because it is inconsistent with Christ's teachings and results in evil thoughts. It insults people who are made in Christ's image as a new creation. Favoritism is a by-product of selfish motives that go against the biblical definition of love. It shows a lack of mercy towards the less fortunate. It is hypocritical and it is sin. A lesson we can learn from James that the Lord taught on the sermon on the mount is those who are humble (lowly by the world's standard) should rejoice in their position as those whom God loves [Jas.1:9; Mat.5:3].

The crown of life is the reward of living the consistency of eternal life here on earth and being with God forever. We have eternal life now and are expected to be faithful to our Lord and love Him in times of suffering and in difficult circumstance. Temptation comes from evil desires, not from God. God tests us but in no way does He deceive us. Testing calls for help from God to behave wisely when wronged and insulted, v.5-11. Never let it have its way [Mat.4:1-11; 1Cor.10:13; 2Tim.2:22]. Testing brings blessing to the one who conquers temptation, v.12. Testing by evil does not come from God, v.13-18. Times of testing are allowed by God to strengthen our faith and produce spiritual maturity in our lives. We are able to resist temptation effectively by obeying God's word and by getting our spiritual strength from Him to deal with temptation when it first raises its head. To make excuses for ourselves when we yield to temptation is when we sin. When this happens, we take responsibility for that which we have done that is wrong, confess it as sin to God, and forsake it.

We should not ever be deceived about God. He never entices people to do evil. His light casts no shadows. God tests, not tempts. He allows Satan to tempt us to refine our faith and dependence on Christ. Strength to resist comes from God and His Word. Trials bring out the best in us. Temptations come from Satan to bring out the worst. To lay blame and make excuses like 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, is spiritual immaturity. A Christian accepts responsibility for his actions; right or wrong. We can be sure of the goodness of God. God gives only good gifts from above and His will is worked out in us when we are patient, not angry.

There has always been light because God is light. He put light into certain forms like the sun, moon and stars at creation. The darkness was made to reveal light for what it is. In heaven there is no need for the sun because "the Lamb is the Light thereof." The "Father of lights" has always existed and the energy emitted from Him does not increase or decrease. What God does is forever, and "nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it" [Ecc.3:14]. Anything that "turns" in on itself will soon entropy, which is what that word comes from. It will soon become disorganized, then deteriorate and become chaotic - and then dies. God is not bound by the laws He put on His own creation. There is not even a "Shadow of turning (entropy)" with Him.

And more than that, He has given us new birth by "His word of truth" and that new life does not entropy either. It is evidence of all the eternal blessings He has provided for us. The new-born Christians in the first

century were "a kind of first-fruits" of all who will be saved by His grace. Our Lord Jesus Christ was the first-fruits in His resurrection of all those who have died and who will be raised at His coming. Those Hebrew believers were the first-fruits of all who have been born again by the Spirit of God in this church age.

James 1:19-27

LISTEN AND ACT

Real living faith is always known by its fruits. Faith is tested and shown by our temptations. Faith is also shown by our works. This is the heart of the message of this epistle. The goodness and light of God is contrasted with evil and darkness [Ps.27:1; Isa.60:19-22; Jn.1:1-14]. Those first-generation Christians were a "kind of first fruits" of that which we are and have by faith. There are three areas of our lives we need to be very clear about that James pointed out. Do not be deceived about God, v.16, do not be deceived about ourselves, v.22, and do not be deceived about religion, v.26.

Talking and listening are both basic ways of communicating. If we talk more than we listen, we are telling others our thoughts and ideas are more important than theirs. We should value what other people say and give others the courtesy of listening and evaluating their viewpoint. We should not allow anger to erupt when we fail to win an argument, are offended or ignored. Self-centered anger never helps anyone. The Lord taught this same lesson in His sermon on the mount. Watch out for your anger, it can be dangerous [Jas.1:20; Mat.5:22]. Testing requires patience and quietness, v.19-21. "Swift to hear", v.19 is a reminder to us to hear and obey the Word of God.

We can be sure of the word of God. When we practice truth, compassionate service is evidence to the watching world of the reality of our faith. Our Lord directed us to be merciful as does James 2:13. Our faith expresses itself in helping others, James 2:14. We must get rid of anything that is wrong, the "superfluity of naughtiness" is any abundance of wickedness. When we receive the word of God with conviction and the strength of meekness, that "engrafted word" takes root because it is planted in us right from the time we were saved. It is by that "engrafted" word that the contrast is made with the rank growth of wickedness (weeds).

When we hear the word of God, it is important that we do what it says. That which we learn and practice is reflected in our behavior and attitude. When we read and [practice the word of God we see what we really are. The law gives us a reflection of our sinful condition and gives us the opportunity to confess our sins and be forgiven. We should not be deceived about ourselves [1:22]. We are saved by grace and freed from the power of sin to live in the spiritual freedom God gives us. That frees us to obey Him and serve Him acceptably. Faith is shown to be real in the actions of a "doer" of the word. God's Word does not keep us in bondage, but liberates us to act in coordination with God's orderliness around us. That control is true liberty. Do not be deceived about religion [1:26]. Talk, without the life of faith to back it up, is valueless. The life of faith is hardest to live in places and among people that are most familiar. The Word of God is a mirror. We must obey what we read. When we look carefully into the Word, study it, and through it see ourselves; the obedience it produces, is spiritual liberty [Jn.8:30-32]. This is in the private life of the believer.

We may think we are spiritual because of all we know and do, but if our tongue is not controlled and our words are not appropriate, we are not spiritual. It is incumbent on us to control our speech with a tight rein. The public life of a believer and our practice of the Word is seen in verses 26-27. The characteristics of pure religion are 1] Self-control – a bridled tongue [3:2], 2] Love for others, and 3] a clean life. To "visit" means "care for". This is more than stopping by someone's home to have a little conversation. A controlled tongue, sacrificial service and a clean heart come from acting on the Word of God. We need to care for the powerless people. Don't adapt to the world's value system.

"Perfect" is used several times: 1] God's perfect work [v.1-12] is His purpose to mature us. 2] God's perfect gift [v.13-20] is His goodness to us in times of testing. 3] God's perfect law [v.21-27] is the Word that strengthens and sustains us. When we are committed to caring for other people, for their comfort and acceptance among God's people, this is fundamental to being a child of God. Powerless people need an advocate and they particularly need to know they are people of significance in the church of God when they are widows or orphans. Putting the truth of God into practice by meeting the needs of others with no hope of receiving a return, is true service for the Lord. We serve God when we serve people.

At the same time, we are meeting the needs of others, we must keep ourselves from the moral and spiritual pollution of the world. Divine truth, high ethical standards and morals are diametrically opposed to the world system. True faith is not based on money, power and pleasure. Christian faith is not religion. It is unreserved trust in the Righteous God and our Gracious Father.

James 1:19-20. "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."

HOW YOU SPEAK.

The words can be right and the motive right, when I stop to talk with my friend;
But for me to say what needs to be said, my ears must to his voice bend.
When I am about to communicate truth, or correction, or whatever I believe is right;
There is more than my mouth and my mind that's involved: there is vision, and thought and sight.

To communicate well, begins with love that shows; I must want what is best for my brother.
The actions of the past lend power to words, when the time comes to talk to one another.
If it is evident to him that I want what is best; my caring is really consistent;
Then he will consider my words and the way they are given; he will know - and he'll truly listen.

My brother and friend, will know he can say, what he needs to, and I will hear what he means.
To be able to speak of what has burdened his heart, will help him more than it seems -
For in the temptations of life that conspire together, to bring ruin to a life that is true;
The listening ear of one you can trust; gives relief as the past you review.

And then when it's my turn to speak from my heart, all that my brother needs to hear;
By the tone of my voice, and expressions of face; he will be convinced that I really do care.
I won't dump on him a torrent of words that will seem to pour out like a flood;
But with slow and deliberate words I will give, what has come to me from the Lord.

Even though there may be, issues arise from me, that could create serious anger in us;
I'm responsible to God, to keep under my wrath that would lead me to say things not just.
Provocative words, inflections and tones, or even the look on my face;
Could make a thing worse than really it is, if my truth is not seasoned with grace.

The ways of the Lord, and His righteousness too, are not right when spoken in wrath.
His truth and His grace, will finally bring peace, when His truth is mingled with faith.
God is not honored nor His Gospel work furthered, when I use truth as a hammer on men;
For it is Christ-likeness seen in the face of a friend, that will cause a hearer to listen to him.

I need to make sure that all I will say, has the promise of God's blessing on it;
God can use words spoken with love from the heart, when those words to the issues do fit.
Deeds and words go like a hand in a glove, we need both to accomplish the task.
When spoken and done in the way God intends, He will make the right come to pass.

"Father of truth and grace: I am more conscious than ever that what I say has no real value if I say things in a wrong way. It must be that I speak as my Savior spoke - with gracious words. Yet those gracious words did not always bring comfort, but did bring change and light and life. Help me please, to keep my tongue inside my face with my lips closed until I am sure that what I say will be a help and profit to the hearers. I pray this sincerely and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

James 2:1-13

FAITH REMOVES DISCRIMINATION

The faith of a believer is *proved* by works, and it is also proved by love as the first verses of this chapter teach us. *Principles* of faith by which we live are a commitment of our minds and hearts to the Lord and His people. The changed lives and right actions are natural to those who have true faith, as are good works. The believer and his service are the subject matter of this whole chapter. The *purpose* of faith is to bring salvation as Paul writes in his epistles. The results of faith are good works in a changed life according to the epistle of James.

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ know the value of every person because they have experienced the blessing of God's grace themselves. Favoritism is condemned, not just by James, but by every child of God who knows "God is no respecter of persons." The Lord looks at the poor with equal favor as He does with the successful, and even more when the poor are "rich in faith." An impressive, well-dressed person may look better to us, but "God looketh on the heart." To have respect of persons is discourteous, bad manners and sin.

The rich and impressive often gain their social superiority at the expense of the poor. The Lord Himself was here as a humble, lowly servant with whom God was well-pleased. Faith removes discrimination among the people of God. The word "assembly" in this passage is the same as "synagogue," indicating a meeting of Christian-Jews who gathered for Christian activity rather than the practice of Judaism. When Gentiles and Jews came together as Christians there was hostility against them by Jews and they called that gathering "church." The "haves" and "have nots" were not to discriminate even in the places where they sat, because before God they all are equal.

In some ways God favors the poor because they have already learned how to deal with suffering, which in many cases is associated with godly living. Wealth on the other hand, may indicate hard work, wise decisions, intelligent choices or simply that a person was born into a wealthy family. In some cases, wealth is gained by greed, dishonesty or covetousness. In our assemblies, character is what is important, not the way a people dress. Modesty is the criteria to guide us as to how we dress. Any wrong motive behind the way we dress, whether to dress "up" or "down," whether we are rich or poor, is not right because it shows some kind of discrimination.

Riches are not necessarily a sign of God's blessing. If we have riches, we should possess them, not let them possess us. We should "not set our heart" upon them. We should be willing to let them go for the kingdom of God's sake. There is no virtue in poverty or riches. Some people are content to serve in poor circumstances. Their values are different as far as social standing and material benefits. This does not mean they will go to heaven because they are poor, nor does it mean the wealthy go to hell because they are rich. It does indicate that poor people are more often conscious of their powerlessness, and that makes it easier for them to admit to their need of God and His salvation.

The pride often associated with rich people is a barrier to salvation because they "have need of nothing." To admit to inner need and spiritual bankruptcy is harder for them. Bitterness is a barrier to poor people when it comes to accepting Christ and a guilty sinner. They often point to others in blame for their situation rather than accept responsibility for themselves. A lesson in this attitude from the sermon on the mount is for us to be merciful to others, as God is merciful to you [Jas.2:13; Mat.5:7; 6:14].

The "royal Law" is quoted in scripture eight times. It sums up the whole law given to Moses dealing with human behavior and interpersonal relationships. This is the basis as to how people should relate to each other. It is our responsibility to treat others the way we want them to treat us. The poor should not despise nor ignore the rich because if we did, we would not be loving them. We should not favor them in view of what they might do for us, nor should we ignore the poor who can't offer us material things.

Showing favoritism or discriminating is sin, and if we sin in one point, we are guilty of breaking the whole law. This standard God has defined, reminds us that whoever we are, or whatever our station in life, we need God's forgiveness and must put our faith into practice. Believers in Christ are saved by grace alone, and because of that we are required to obey our Lord who saved us. The "law of liberty," or the law that gives us freedom in Christ, does not mean we have no obligations. Our obedience to God is based on new motives that are normal to the new nature. We love Him who in mercy has forgiven our sins because of the "riches of His grace." Now we want to obey Him, and find joy in serving Him and showing the characteristics of the new life we have in Him, toward those who need mercy from us. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

James 2:14-26

THE PROOF OF FAITH

Everyone has faith of some kind, even those who do not believe there is a God. It is the object of faith and the results that come from that faith that determine the validity of that faith. So-called faith with no object is not real faith at all. Some people who claim to have faith mean they assent to Christian teaching, but that is all it is. A mental assent to biblical doctrine is not faith. Faith in Christ changes us. It changes our thoughts about God, and because of that, our life changes. Transformed conduct indicates faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is real because our desire is to please the Living God. Faith and works go together because faith is shown by works, not words.

It is possible to even teach the truths of God and not have true faith, Words by themselves need the kind of evidence that produces commitment to God and His word. That gives authenticity to our verbal professions. Without that kind of evidence, other people will not understand the reality of salvation by grace alone. We do not earn salvation by serving others and obeying God, but we do verify our faith in Christ that way. When our faith is motivated by God and His wisdom, it is proved by works.

Genuine faith is demonstrated when mercy testifies to our love for others. Works of righteousness don't produce salvation but promotes peace and consideration for others as things that accompany salvation. Submission to God, to His word and even to other people when it is appropriate, indicate the reality of faith. Service from the heart that brings benefits and blessing to others is a visible way for our faith to be verifiable by those who look on to determine if our testimony is real. Sincerity and impartiality on our part may be what is needed for unbelievers to be convinced of the reality of the Gospel message. Righteousness and faith do go together with a faith that works. James gives another similarity to the Sermon on the Mount by teaching us that our faith must express itself in helping others [Jas.2:14-16; Mat.7:21-23].

Demons believe and are afraid, but they do not obey the Lord nor are they saved. Speech when motivated by Satan, is full of bitter envy, selfish ambition, earthly concerns and desires, unspiritual thoughts and ideas, disorder and evil. God knows the heart and what is real in any profession of faith in Christ. In Romans the testimony about Abraham is that he was righteous because he believed God. In James' epistle, Abraham was considered righteous because of what he did. These two views are not contradictory statements, but are rather complimentary in that they give the full picture of faith. We are justified by faith in God's sight. We are justified before men when active obedience to God demonstrates the reality of our faith.

The testimony of Abraham being the friend of God was fulfilled when his faith was such that God opened up His heart to Abraham to tell him what He was going to do, and Abraham opened up his heart to God in response. Even in spite of her lifestyle, Rahab, when she heard all that God had done for the Israelites from the crossing of the Red Sea to coming to the Jordan River, believed God. For that reason she received the messengers (spies) who told her what was going to happen. She believed the message they had to tell her and acted in blessing toward them because of that faith.

James 2:18. *"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.'"*

BALANCE.

Balance is not easy - we are creatures of extreme.
Often things are not really just the way they seem.
Faith may seem strong when we life's event will share;
But do the things I say and the works I do equally compare?

To maintain an honest balance in the acts of life each day,
Means what I do will really correspond with what I say.
And I can often spend my time on work I think is for God;
But all that effort has no worth if not in faith for the Lord.

To balance faith with works, is a great way for me to show,
The reality I have in Christ, that others too may know
The truth we teach is practiced daily as I live my life,
So the faith I have is balanced out, by works out in plain sight.

Grace and truth as Christ lived them, go together well,
The grace I experience goes along with truth I to others tell.
Truth well preached, needs a life of grace to visibly be seen;
And grace needs truth to make it clear, and tell what might've been.

Another pair of virtues that balances the life I live;
Is love and light, these both are gifts that God to us does give.
Love makes it clear that a God of love, cares for every one;
And light explains what God is like, lest we His love do shun.

Saying and doing are a balanced pair that really go together;
One can't be active and function right, and overlook the other.
To say a thing and never act, seems to indicate,
"I am what's important here" when I a step won't take.

In this Christian life of mine, the walk and work both count;
What I do speaks louder than the words that I might shout.
An attitude of gracefulness is balanced out by truth,
Both can be in balance, when tempered out by faith.

As those who know me well look on, I wonder can they see;
A balanced life with virtues working out their roles in me?
I know I use a lot of words when I talk about my faith;
May my works too show to others, the greatness of God's grace.

"I thank Thee today, O gracious heavenly Father, for reminders in the Bible of how important the visible parts of my Christian life are. I sometimes take for granted those unseen blessings, and forget that people around me are wanting to see evidence of the value I place on the things of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

James 3:1-12

FAITH CONTROLS THE TONGUE

Teaching down through the centuries has been a respected profession in most cultures. The responsibilities associated with teaching is very high. Next to parents, teachers most affect the lives of people and of nations because they influence the lives of students to the extent they teach the values, ethics, morals, occupations and attitudes of young impressionable people. These same students then move on further to the social, political, economic and religious life of a nation and make or break the future of that society. A teacher's responsibility is great because their words and example affects so many other people. Because of that they should be held to a higher standard of life and character than is common. Any leadership role has a high standard of righteousness in every way. Teachers are in such a position that the lives of children are molded by their teaching. Those who teach will be judged more strictly than those who listen. A teacher's responsibility is great because their words and examples affect the spiritual life of other people.

We can identify mature Christians by the way they speak. The exhortation in the first verses of this chapter is that the person who controls his tongue, controls his body. What you say and don't say are both important. When I speak I need to ask myself - Is it true? Necessary? Kind? When it comes to teaching God's word, it is presumptuous for one to teach who has not been called and equipped by God to teach the truth in all of its completeness. In teaching, what one says and what one does not say is significant. Proper speaking and teaching means we say the right things at the right time. There are "teaching moments" in which a situation or an event puts those who are learning into an attitude of expectation and special interest.

Proper speech also means that one controls and refuses to say what they might want to say, because they know it is inappropriate and unnecessary. Control of our speech and careful use of words is essential to good communication of truth. A bit in a horse's mouth, a rudder on a ship and a tongue in a human body has great potential for good or bad. Gossip and verbal "put downs" may happen in a moment, but can ruin a person's life without just cause. The illustrations given show us that words have power to direct like the bit and rudder. Words can direct into wrong paths and words can lead a life into destruction. Exaggeration and bragging may ruin a person's usefulness because they cannot be trusted to tell the real truth. False teaching, manipulating the truth, flattery and complaining will soon catch up with one who does not bridle their tongue.

A person may have great natural skill and have a well trained intelligence, but when what they say is found not to be the truth, or has been for a manipulative or vindictive reason, they will no longer be trusted. The unbridled tongue has power to destroy, and through lies, gossip and angry words, a family or a church can be set on fire. No man can truly tame the tongue – only God can because the tongue is restless and unruly. Do not be careless with what we say. Scars remain if wrong things are said. A few words can destroy a relationship. You can't control words after they are spoken or reverse the damage they may do.

The speech of believers and the control of one's tongue is commanded and emphasized in the New Testament. Christians are to speak truthful words [Eph.4:25]. Our words should be gracious [Eph.4:29] and serious [Eph.5:4]. Relevant speech [Col.4:6], courageous [1Pet.5:15] and corrective words [Ti.1:9] that have a just purpose [Mat.12:36] are able to be used as ways of blessing others. The use of a bridled tongue should always be ready to bear testimony to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ in an appropriate way and in context. A right word can lead a person out of sin into salvation.

"Corrupt communication" that proceeds from one's mouth is "set on fire of hell." It is possible for people to use deceptive, abrasive and hurtful words and not realize the seriousness of the consequences. Trivial, foolish, compromising speech can hurt one's testimony to the extent that it may never be recovered. This mention of "hell fire" (the others were spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself) implies that hell is an awful place of wickedness, hatred and violent speech. To be separated completely from the holiness of God and never to hear words of peace, love and forgiveness is so terrible it is described as hell fire. Total depravity expresses itself in words that set on fire the "course of nature" or the circle of life even now.

We may not have perfect control of the tongue but we can reduce the damage and yield to the Holy Spirit for tongue control. Our speech patterns affect our true identity. The Holy Spirit gives self-control so a person's words will please God. A spiritual tongue is medicine [Pro.12:18] and has power to delight like the fountain and the tree. We can bless God and man in our praying and singing or we can curse in anger and impatience. The Holy Spirit can give the "living water" of the Word through our words. The same tongue can be used for destructive and evil words, or to praise God and bless people.

By our fallen nature, sin has made us prone to evil even though human beings are still made in "the image of God." By God's grace, depraved sinful people have been made "new creatures in Christ Jesus" and can

bring to God the praise due to Him. The Holy Spirit in a believer enables us from a cleansed heart to glorify God from a self-controlled and Spirit-controlled tongue. When that small member of our physical bodies is under control, there comes words that please God, comfort and bless our brothers and sisters in Christ, and gives the Gospel message to those who are still dead "in trespasses and in sins."

James 3:13-18

FAITH PRODUCES WISDOM

Apparently there was a great deal of wrong speaking among the Jewish Christians. Our words are proof of our justified state and when our words are ill-considered, offensive and self-assertive they produce angry debates that lead to bitter strife. Our words reveal what we are like and whose we are. Christians need wisdom directed by the Lord. When the Holy Spirit guides us, He uses our minds and we are practical in applying wisdom. The believer's tongue can be filled with wisdom from God or false wisdom from Satan. It is incumbent on us to make practical application of true wisdom.

True wisdom is measured by the depth of character in a child of God. A "wise man" in this context is the technical term for a teacher. There has been the time, training and experience taken place in his life that enables him to pass on to others those things he has personally learned and practiced. The knowledge he has gained is not just a casual awareness of many things, but the knowledge of an expert who has studied the subject, practiced the things he has learned and is now able to skillfully pass on those truths he knows well.

Wisdom is demonstrated by the fruit it produces in one's life. The way a person acts in any given situation is the way we can evaluate his wisdom. Wisdom and expert knowledge go together. These two things show themselves publicly by a "good conversation," or a godly lifestyle that is marked by humility that comes from the experience wisdom produces. Careless, foolish words and lifestyle leads to disorder and conflict. Wisdom leads to peace and goodness.

The uncontrolled tongue that passes on gossip, can create and escalate conflicts between people. Words repeated out of context or with malicious intent, promotes discontent and leads to discord and division. One wrote

"Boys flying kites, haul in their white-winged birds.
But you can't recall them, when you are flying words."

God's wisdom delivers us from the need to compare ourselves with others. Envy and selfish ambitions are inspired by the devil.

There is an earthly wisdom that comes from the devil and leads to strife and selfish ambition that consumes a person's attention. It has the potential of taking over a person's life. This kind of wisdom is not spiritual. It is a false wisdom that comes from below. This kind of counterfeit wisdom produces bitterness and envy in the heart. Jealousy, division and confusion come from the world (earthly), the flesh (sensual) and the devil (devilish). Spiritual ideas from any of these is false wisdom. Such humanistic, man-centered wisdom of the earth and hell can attract Christians by promoting the fleshly ambitions to which almost everyone is attracted. The advice of wisdom from beneath tells those who live by its teaching to "Put yourself out there." "Go for it. You can do it." "Don't let anyone tell you what to do." "Set your own goals."

True wisdom is from above. True wisdom is like the seven pillars of wisdom we read about in Proverbs 9 and verse 1. The man or woman of faith and true wisdom who lives a Christ-centered life, will show good works by good behavior and the meekness that come from those who take Christ's "yoke" upon them and learn from Him. He is the Source of true wisdom. You see true wisdom expressed in daily life (edifying conversation and good behavior) and attitude (meekness). Spiritual wisdom humbles us and keeps us from becoming arrogant.

True wisdom is "pure." It is that which comes from within a believer in Christ. The new birth brought about a new creation by the washing of regeneration. Purity of life and doctrine becomes the key pillar by which one lives and makes decisions. Pure wisdom knows there are no errors in the Word of God. "Peaceable" wisdom is evident by the way we consider the welfare and benefit of our actions toward others. That kind of wisdom leads to peace and harmony. "Gentle" wisdom is not crude nor rude. It is the kind of wisdom that includes patience and forbearance. It is appropriate in words and deeds toward those with whom we are in contact each day. Wisdom that is "easy to be entreated," indicates reasonableness and willingness to yield but not to compromise. A person with that kind of wisdom is approachable and willing to listen to what another person has to say.

Wisdom that is "full of mercy and good fruits" is not selfish but is helpful and considerate toward others and seeks to meet their needs if possible. Wisdom "without partiality" does not show favoritism. In that way true humility is demonstrated. One person is not set above another nor considered of more importance. Such wisdom is consistent and does not vary from one time or person to another. Wisdom "without hypocrisy" is always sincere in words and deeds. It does not act as a show to be seen by others. There is no "wax" covering the cracks of failure or deceit. When all of these are put together and are working together in one's life, there are positive results in daily living and we are able to live in peace with those around us. Our influence will be positive because of careful words and consistent actions that result from faith that produces wisdom. A lesson learned from the sermon on the mount is, blessed are the peacemakers. They sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness [Jas.3:17-18; Mat.5:9].

James 3:13. *"Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness and wisdom."*

WORDS OF FAITH.

A teacher speaks: his words have weight - let him speak truth.
He is wise - speaking of things he knows - experimentally.
Teaching and wisdom should go together - passing on knowledge.
Watch him: his behavior tells the whole story - his manner of life.

Wisdom has its own characteristics - meekness.
Wisdom's works are known by orderliness - appropriateness.
Wisdom's words are known by understanding - thoughtfulness.
Wisdom is visible to the watchers - righteousness.

Words of faith have no evidence of bitterness nor envy.
Words of faith avoid and reject strife.
Words of faith do not glory in self or personal attainments.
Words of faith never lie against the truth.

Words of faith are words of wisdom from above.
Words of faith are pure - what is inside becomes public.
Words of faith are peaceable - consideration for others.
Words of faith are gentle - there is no crudeness.

Words of faith are full of mercy - compassion is evident.
Words of faith are easy to be entreated - approachable; not harshly opinionated.
Words of faith are without partiality - favoritism is not there but a balance of light.
Words of faith are without hypocrisy - they are not just a show but are real.

Wisdom and words need to be consistent.
Wisdom and words need to be persistent.
Wisdom and words need to be insistent -
Let wisdom and words show the man.

"O God, my Father: may it always be a desire of mine to speak carefully and with a sense of the power and influence of the spoken word. I know people will often quote what is said publicly. Help me to watch my words, that they will be words of faith. Help me to keep the door of my lips shut when they should be shut. Help me to use words to give life and light, and to express love when the Spirit of God opens this door. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

James 4:1-12

FAITH IS SHOWN BY GODLY LIVING

Faith shown by a life of unworldliness that produces humility that differentiates a believer from the world. The world is the system of things around us. The cosmos is the world that is blind and deaf to spiritual things and careless to God's will. Unworldliness is a proof of being justified and that we are really saved and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Divisions and disputes are caused by disobedience. The enemies we must face are spoken of in the first seven verses of this chapter.

The flesh [v.1-3]: lusts simply mean desires. The flesh is human nature apart from God. It kills to obtain. It may even pray selfishly. The world [v.4-5]: Four dangerous steps: a] Friendship with the world [Jas.4:4]. b] Soiled by the world [Jas.1:27]. c] Love with the world [1Jn.2:15-17]. d] Conformity to the world [Rom.12:1-2]. Believers who love the world are at enmity with God. The devil [v.6-7]: Pride is one of Satan's chief tools.

Christians must use the Word of God to resist Satan. God resists the proud but gives grace to the lowly. Submit to God first. Then we can effectively resist the devil.

Conflicts between believers come from wrong desires. We need to submit ourselves to God. The problem of conflicts and quarrels among believers will always bring harm to the assembly as well as to those directly involved. The desire for status, more recognition, more authority, more possessions and envy over another person's position - even the desire for more money can set people against each other. They may even aggressively push others aside, or fight, to grab what they want. However they cannot get it unless God allows it because He is in control.

Even when we pray, the most common problems are not asking God for what is needed in the first place, or asking for the wrong things and for the wrong reasons. Allow God to change your desires to His will for you. We need to first of all to submit ourselves to His divine will and ask that our selfish interests and desires be removed. Then we can pray in faith and trust Him to do what He wants and give us what we need. The practice of prayer then becomes an integral part of one's life. It is then we will recognize it as a time of communion and fellowship with a Gracious Father. Prayer is not like going to a store with a shopping list of things we want or demands to suit our own personal desires. Rather than getting God's approval for our plans, we need the fellowship of prayer to move us into the condition of body, soul and spirit to fit into His will for us. When we pray "In His name" we are submitting to divine authority. That keeps us committed to asking and acting for the glory of God. In that way He will be glorified by the answers and results of our prayers.

Pleasure that comes from friendship with the world or at the expense of obedience to God, is sinful. Anything that hinders our fellowship with God and does not please Him is lustful, worldly sin. Pleasure that keeps us from pleasing God is sinful; pleasure from God's rich bounty is good. James had already written, "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 cure for evil desires is humility. God gives grace for grace needed. A general teaching of Scripture is we have a tendency toward evil.

When believers compromise in order to adapt to the present world system, they are placing themselves in the position of being an enemy of God. To compromise scriptural doctrine for philosophy that comes from human thought places one in the position of being an enemy of God. If our behavior is such that we fit in with the ungodly lifestyle of the world, or if we adapt the sensual dress of the world, we step away from the fellowship of God to the self-centered position of an enemy of God. To compromise the preaching of the Gospel in order to make our message more acceptable and "seeker friendly," cheapens the truth to where it is not truth at all. Cheap substitutes for what God gives comes from the enemies of the people of God. The world, the flesh and the devil place us with those who are friends of the world and enemies of God.

In summing up the general teaching of scripture [v.5], James points out the fact that the Holy Spirit desires God's children to love Him faithfully and oppose any attitude of discontent, covetousness or envy in their hearts. God resists the proud whether they are elders [1Pet.5:5] or any other of His children. When we humble ourselves before Him and understand that all we need is what He desires for us, then we will be freed from the bondage of our own self-centered desires for the world's cheap substitutes.

To resist the devil doesn't mean we have the power to defeat him in the energy of the flesh or by our own willpower. We have the strength of Lord already in us and the word of God with us to defeat His attempts to subjugate us and defeat us. The Lord Jesus quoted scripture when He was tested - and so should we. To be "steadfast in the faith" keeps us from compromising godly living. Satan tries to win us with his influence. God has already defeated him [Rev.12:10-12] so we are to "Submit to God." We draw near to God when we submit to Him and yield ourselves to His authority, His will and His control over us. Then we are willing to follow Him. "Submit to God" comes before "resist the devil."

We draw near to God when we resist the devil and do not allow his temptations and attacks to turn us away from the path of godly living. When we draw near to God, the activities in which we are engaged, and with which our hearts are concerned will be pure in God's eyes. Our own desires are rejected, and by the cleansing of the word of God, we are committed to do the will of God. We draw near to God when there is genuine sorrow and repentance for sin. There is a rejection of that in which we have been involved that is not for the glory of God. We draw near to God when we choose to humble ourselves before Him. Pride is a sin of the devil and the hardest sin human beings have to overcome. It is possible for a person to even be proud of his humility. True humility realizes that any worth we have comes from God.

When one is humbled, that person is not independent nor self-centered. Guidance from God is gladly received because experiencing God's love gives worth and dignity to one's life. That dignity and an awareness of our worth in His service is because we have learned that "It is God that worketh in us, to will and to do of His good pleasure." There are five ways to draw near to God: [1] Submit to God, 4:7. [2] Resist the devil, 4:7. [3] Wash your hands... purify your hearts, 4:8. [4] Grieve and mourn, 4:9. [5] Humble yourselves, 4:10. v.10. Humbling is not acting independently, but with His power and guidance, we have worth and dignity.

Three important warnings we do well to heed in this chapter. There is the warning against pride [v.8-10]. We must have a chaste and faithful heart. We need to be serious and sober, and be serious about putting sin away. Warning against criticizing [v.11-12] is plainly stated. We need discernment but are not to judge the hearts and motives of others. We must first judge our own sinfulness so we can see clearly enough to help others. The only one with the right to judge is the One with the power to punish – namely, God. Warning against arrogant self-confidence [v.13-17], pride, criticism and self-confidence go together. The humble know how to say, "If the Lord will," when they make plans. To boast of going someplace, setting up business and coming back wealthy is dangerous. God is the only one who knows about tomorrow. We can sin by neglect as well as by deliberate actions.

Our attitude and actions toward other people demonstrates whether there is love in us that satisfies the law. If there is not love for God and our neighbor, we are breaking God's law. Obeying God's law of love will move us to bless and build up our brothers and sisters rather than finding fault and trying to bring them down. There will always be some good and beneficial things we can say about other people that will keep me from focusing attention on that which I perceive to be a reason to tear them down. When we fail to love, we break God's law. We are to build people up. Faith produces godly living and promotes humility.

James 4:13-17

FAITH PRODUCES DEPENDENCE ON GOD

It is good for us to have a strategy for living. A stated goal establishes an objective to be reached or a work to be accomplished, and by implication, need a framework for daily living to achieve them. But goals by themselves can be dangerous if they are not qualified by the assurance that we know they are God's will for us to reach. When we know they are His goals for us, we submit to Him and plan ahead but put God's desire at the center of our planning. Goals disappoint us if we leave God out.

Goals are powerful and primary motivators in living for God. We need to live for God today and every day. Life is short. A goal is a statement of faith in which we live our Christian life in response to God's revealed will. They define our lives as spiritual motivators so we do not waste our time chasing shadows. A defined goal should be measureable, manageable and meaningful.

When the purpose of a goal is clarified and plain enough to us that we can describe it in prayer to God, and if need be, in words to others. Then we need to prioritize our activities with that in view. We need to plan a course of action with that goal in mind, and then go ahead and take the necessary action in daily living to reach that goal. A primary goal in life is to "glorify God" in our bodies and spirits that are His. Another primary goal is to spread the Gospel. We need to seek the lost so the Holy Spirit can bring them into the kingdom of God. Producing spiritual fruit and good works are also primary goals in the life of a child of God.

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 10 years from now? One year from now? Tomorrow? How will you react if God rearranges your plans? Plan ahead but hold you plans loosely because we do not know "what shall be on the morrow." When we put God's will and desire for us at the center of our planning, and our goals are consciously subject to His divine authority, we will never be disappointed at the outcome. Life is short no matter how we look at it or how long we live. We don't want to be deceived into thinking we have lots of time.

Moses compared life to a sleep. David spoke of life as a shadow. Job lived around two hundred years but spoke of life as wind and as a weaver's shuttle. Peter said life is like grass that grows up and soon withers. James speaks of life as a vapor, a mist, that briefly appears and then is gone. None of us has a very long time to live here. To live for Christ in this brief time is what is important. Enjoying family life, reaching out to be a blessing to others, showing and telling people what it means to live for God is what gives meaning and joy to our brief life.

To boast and brag about what we are going to do, or even about what we have done, is evil. "It is God that worketh in you." We can do nothing on our own without God allowing it. We are to "do all to the glory of

God." Faith in a believer's life makes us conscious of God and His will in all that we do - or all that we do not do. Sin is not doing right. Sin is doing wrong.

Eight of the Ten Commandments forbid doing certain things. Two of them require doing certain things. So doing wrong or not doing right are both sin. It is a sin to lie, and it is a sin to know the truth and not tell it. It is sin to slander or speak evil of another person and it is also sin to avoid that person when they need our help or our friendship. The Holy Spirit within us guides us to do what needs to be done and well as to make us understand when something is wrong.

He may guide us to a person and direct us to give assistance and act on behalf of one who is in need. It may be there is a physical need we are able to meet. We may be called upon to be a mediator to bring about a reconciliation. Perhaps it may be our voice that someone needs to hear in order to give hope to the hopeless. When we do that which is good, there is a vitality that refreshes us. There may be also a vigor that reaches beyond us to benefit others and there is a vision that makes the fulfillment of the divine commission a reality.

James 4:7-8. *"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded."*

GRACE GIVEN.

Enemies are around, we must face them every day -
Implacable and powerful, they try to make of us a prey.
Spreading evil suggestions; even influencing what we say -
Changing black and white into an insidious form of grey -
But God gives grace!

The flesh is always with us, it creates in us a lust
For things forbidden and unclean, lest we in God do trust.
Its nature is a fallen one, making appetites a must -
And it will challenge us until this body turns to dust -
But God gives grace!

The world has a plan to bring the Christian down in flames;
Friendship with the world is more dangerous than it seems.
It soils us, tempts us, and when we fall, it will always blame.
It never ceases to try to conform, those who Jesus claim -
But God gives grace!

The devil comes when least expected to try to bring us down.
To resist this enemy with God's Word is the only way to win.
He will return with tactics new, to attack us once again;
And will attract and tempt the saint to make us fall in sin -
But God gives grace!

"Submit" to God, "resist the devil," and purify your hands.
It is only when we act this way, the child of God can stand.
Grieve and mourn for sin that's done, and humble while you can;
God resists the pride in us, but gives grace to the humble man -
God gives grace!

A chaste and faithful heart, with a serious frame of mind;
Enables me to stand for God when temptations try to find,
In me a place to lodge, and then in subtle chains, will bind
My mouth in silence, hands in bonds, and sins around entwine -
Thank God for grace!

"Father, I do not know what is ahead of me today, let alone tomorrow. But I know You know all about tomorrow. So I take comfort and confidence in the fact that there is provision made to deal with these enemies. I would seek to be - and stay - humble, so I can always experience needed grace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

James 5:1-12

FAITH SHOWN BY PATIENCE WHEN WRONGED

The humble and poor were being defrauded and oppressed by the wealthy. Every period in church history has had the problem of disparity between the rich and poor. Not only under the iron fist of communism, but

in democracies the difference is obvious. Political leaders, intellectuals and the wealthy concentrate the wealth of a nation in the hands of a few. Common sins of the wealthy are hoarding their money, stealing the wages of the poor who labor for them, extravagant living and injustice.

James is stating the fact that money is worthless in view of the coming of the Lord. Money will have no value in the eternal future. Accumulating money is not the problem, but the love of money is. In this present time, money is needed to support families, spread the Gospel and support those who are taking the Gospel to other parts of the world. The rich of which James was referring, were hoarding their money, amassed their wealth and keeping it for themselves - and then it fades away. Some of the sins of the rich were stealing by holding back the wages of the poor. In their extravagant living they were spending recklessly and using money that wasn't theirs. There was injustice when the rich took advantage of their power to abuse and kill. The believers did not resist. Faith in Christ and assurance of His coming enables us to suffer patiently the evils we cannot avoid.

Oppressing the poor to get more riches is an evil practice. Looking at money from the world view instead of God's standard, leads to the sin of the love of money. The rich had apparently been afflicting the poor who could not pay their debts and were forced into slavery, and perhaps starvation. Doing this to innocent people who were not oppressing them is called murder. Treasure is still being "heaped together for the last days." Indulgent living and exploiting those who work for the wealthy, is seen by God who will avenge the innocent. He is the "Lord of sabaoth (hosts)" who hears and knows all that happens, and will not ignore injustice. Financiers, politicians and bankers are the ones who profit during times of war. The poor lose everything - often their lives.

When Christians honestly look for the return of the Lord, the evidences of this hope show up in their lives. Riches are worthless, not the rich people. We need to keep to God's standards. The innocent are defenseless people who are to be prayerful in economic troubles and patient when wronged even when they are enduring hardships and injustice. Patience is learned in tribulation. The Lord allows some things to happen to bring good results.

Endurance in bearing burdens and fighting battles until the Lord comes is illustrated by three examples: The farmer [v.7-8] who prepares the soil and plants the seed and then waits for God to do His work and add His blessing. In the same way we apply ourselves to the on-going work of watering the seed and continually being engaged in kingdom work. By faith, believers like farmers, look ahead to the results of their labor bringing fruit that blesses others as well as themselves. They have to leave the results with the Lord who sends the rain and sun needed to produce the fruit. We stir up the ground in preaching the Gospel and planting the seeds of truth. Then we wait for the life-principle that God controls to work out the results that please Him.

At the appointed time our Lord will come. Until then we must be patient, remain firm in our stand for the Lord, and not complain about others or speak against them whether they are rich or poor. It is the Judge [v.9] who has the right to deal with critical and complaining people. We need to be reminded that Christ, the Righteous Judge, is standing at the door of our lives and who will evaluate everything in righteous judgment. We cannot get away with shifting blame to others.

Quite a number of the prophets of the Old Testament [v.10-11], suffered patiently at the hands of sinners, and yet left their trials with God. Each person who suffers may have a different kind of problem that caused it, but we learn by their example to be patient while the suffering lasts because God has allowed it. Job didn't understand the trial, but knew that God did. They also were patient when wronged.

The "patience of Job" is an example of one who persevered through all of his great trials. The Lord brought about a good ending in that Job learned the fullness of God's compassion and mercy in a way he had never known before, nor could he have learned it without the trials.

Christians are to be pure in speech. We are to have such honest speech that it doesn't have to be backed up by taking oaths. An honest person says, "Yes" or "No," and people believe what he says. He must avoid half-truths, exaggerations and omissions of the truth and false statements or else his word will mean very little and he will not be trusted. The Christian must always keep his word, even if it hurts him or her personally. We must commit ourselves to be trustworthy.

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

PRECIOUS FRUIT.

Be patient in trials: some come unseen, unexpected and unwanted - but they come.
Others marching openly, blatantly, challenging, demanding - trials in warfare.
Silently, unbidden, unknowing - without fanfare - they are here before we know it -
Trials come darkly from the least expected sources - trials in the darkest night.
With pain and anxiety; with doubts and fears; with tears and hopelessness -
Emotions rise and we wonder how much more can we take -
We wait for the precious fruit that can only be harvested here on earth.

The seed has been sown: fields once fallow have been plowed and cultivated.
The sweat of honest toil and hard work dampens the ground where precious fruit grows.
The footsteps of the husbandman mark the fields where he has labored long.
He sows when the time is right, and waits, and waits for the early and later rain.
He lifts his eyes to the sky and waits for the Light of the Sun to stir new life.
The laborer and the Source of life each do what needs to be done, and doubtless -
The long waited for precious fruit is harvested here on the earth.

The heart is burdened and the knees are bent in earnest prayer for those around.
Names are mentioned as the intercessor goes again and again to the throne of grace,
Awareness of the lateness of the hour presses hard upon the mind of the bowed head,
Assurance of the coming of the Lord brings the mixed emotions of hope and fear.
Those thoughts purify and intensify the prayers, and urgency is mixed with faith.
"Even so come Lord Jesus," and "Wait a little longer, please Jesus" - combine -
And the precious fruit of the intercessor is harvested here on earth.

The saints who suffer the loss of all things, and wonder why, but keep on trusting;
The African believers who think that times of tribulation are upon them already;
Those who watch their loved ones who they love more than life - turn away -
The aged lovers who have lived many decades for the Lord - together in service;
Watch age take its toll on the mind and body that is more precious than my own;
And a heavenly Father watches over each one allowing only what can be taken -
And accepts the precious fruit of the sufferer here on the earth.

In spite of the challenges of the trials caused by continual warfare against the godly;
In spite of the emotional pain of trial caused by the uncertainty of the dark night of sin;
In spite of the on-going labor and toil in the great husbandry of the Lord;
In spite of the burdens of those who labor fervently in prayer for others;
In spite of the sufferings of life that we do not have an answer as to why they come:
We will trust the Lord our God who knows the needs of the farmer, judge and prophet -
And gives without measure the precious fruit of the earth.

"Father, I am thankful that Thou art not limited to what I think is precious fruit of the earth. Keep me from passing judgments upon the labors and lives of others. What may to my dim view be wasted trash, may be to Thee "precious fruit of the earth" that brings glory to Thee. Amen."

James 5:13-20

FAITH SHOWN BY BELIEVING PRAYERS

People of faith are prayerful in times of trouble, whether they are in economic suffering affecting daily living, v.1-9; physical suffering affecting us personally, v.10-16; national suffering that impacts not only the people but also the Gospel, v.17-18; or in the church, v.19-20. When a trial is specifically planned by God [2Cor.12] – Pray. God will give grace. When a trial is the result of sin [1Cor.11:30] – Pray, and ask others who are elders to pray for you. Use the means God has supplied for health. Oil was a common medicine. "Anoint" is the word for "massage" [v.14].

When a believer is afflicted and "suffering trouble," that is not a case of sickness because of sin. "Enduring hardness" is part of what happens when one lives for Christ in a godless world. Our response to those times should not be retaliation or complaining but rather prayer. The Lord will answer in a way that best pleases Him and serves the purpose for which He allowed it. When there is cause for rejoicing, our expressions of thanks and joy should not be meaningless nor mindless, but directed in praise to God in words the Holy Spirit provides for us.

The sickness, "illness," in verse fourteen is different than the trouble and affliction in the previous verse. This is a chastening from the Lord in the form of sickness because of sin. When illness because of sin is imposed by God's will to bring correction as happened in Corinth because of disorder at the Lord's Supper, hopefully

those involved will confess and forsake their sin. Sin has to be confessed to God, and to those who were injured in some way by that sin.

Those are represented by the elders of the church who come when the ill person takes the initiative in the matter and calls for them to come. At the sinner's request, the elders are to pray for his genuine repentance to be evident and the evil has been acknowledged. The oil represents the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the person back to the Lord and His people. There is no magic in the oil although there may be some medicinal value. It is a reminder that our spiritual and physical well-being and life cannot really be separated. When the Holy Spirit is not quenched or grieved, and the sin that brought the sickness has been confessed and forsaken, a person can be brought back to serve the Lord in an appropriate work.

When you have sinned against another, confess your sin and – Pray for each other. God works through prayer from a clean, dedicated heart. Elijah was a dedicated man of faith. Physically incapacity affects our spiritual life. Oil can represent both the spiritual and medical spheres in which the Holy Spirit works. The anointing oil in the Old Testament set priests apart to serve the Lord in the capacity He designated. Members of the church should support and pray for the other believers. The faith of praying people is part of the healing process. It is God who heals, and yet He is willing that our prayers be part of the healing process. Our prayers are not wasted when they are subject to God's will. By prayer we go directly to God regarding specific matters.

Confessing faults and sin to each other is important in order to maintain a vital and meaningful fellowship as believers 1] If we have sinned against another, we must ask forgiveness. 2] If our sin has affected the assembly, we must confess it publicly. 3] If we need support of other, we should confess that sin to others whose support we need. 4] If we need assurance from others we may have to confess our sins to them. Our most powerful resource is communion with God in prayer. When believers pray in faith one can be delivered from depression caused by guilt that has not been faced. Guilt is not dealt with by one being assured of self-worth in spite of what they have done. Repentance and confession of sin to the Lord, and to any people involved, brings relief from hidden guilt.

When the conditions have been met for healing, they will also have been met for forgiveness. Confessing "faults" means we have to face them and deal with them. That makes prayer energized, "effectual," when one is righteous in their state before God. The barrier caused by sin is removed and fellowship with God and fellow-believers is restored. The providential miracle in answer to Elijah's prayer is a reminder that God's timing and orders are a factor in when we meet God's conditions in our prayers.

People of faith are persistent in soul winning. Saints are to bring those wandering in sin back again to where they can hear the Gospel and be converted. Our brothers and sisters in Christ also need us and we need them. There are those, like the one who was sick, who need a brother to come alongside and urge him to change his ways and deal with the sin problem in his life. If he is a believer, he may not be aware of the dangers on the course of life he is traveling. If his profession of faith in Christ is real, he needs to be "converted (to turn back again) from what he is doing. That would save him physically. One who has fallen into sin, needs someone to take the initiative, pray for them and act in love to bring them back to God. If a person has professed to be a Christian, but continues to go the wrong way in his life and does not come to the place of repentance in his life, he need to be saved both physically and from eternal, spiritual death. Faith in action is the evidence and result of real faith. We live out God's word as well as speak the truth.

