



Study Notes

ON

The Epistle of James

CHAPTERS 1-5

WITH INTRODUCTION

And

CLASS QUESTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

- I. James is one of the “catholic,” or general, books of the New Testament. Whereas many of the letters are directed to named churches or individuals, the recipients of James, First and Second Peter, First John, and Jude are not specifically designated by the writers. James was sent to “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad;” First Peter to “the pilgrims of the Dispersion;” Second Peter to “those who have obtained like precious faith with us;” Jude to “those who are called..sanctified...and preserved in Jesus Christ.” First John gives no identification at all of its recipients until the very end of the letter, where they are spoken of simply as “little children.” In contrast, Paul in all his letters, excepting Hebrews (If indeed he wrote Hebrews), not only identified himself as the author but also specified to whom he was writing.
- II. “James,” a “servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,” is clearly the writer of this book called by his name. Less clear is which James is intended. Several by that name appear in the New Testament, some of whom were:
 - A. James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John. He was an apostle and suffered an early death at the hands of Herod, according to Acts 12.
 - B. James, the son of Alphaeus, also an apostle of Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:3).
 - C. James, the father or brother of the apostle Judas (not Judas Iscariot) who was also known as Thaddaeus.
 - D. James, the brother of Christ (Mark 6:3; Galatians 1:19). This person probably is the most popular choice because of his prominence in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15: 13-21 and Galatians 2:9).
- III. The literary style of James is diverse. The writer uses vivid illustrations; Old Testament quotations and Old Testament characters as examples; questions; the inclusion of references to different groups of people; paradoxes (seeming contradictions); sharp contrasts; numerous reminders of brotherhood; figures of speech--metaphors (comparisons), similes (“like” or “as”), and personification; harsh rebuke of sin and sinners; and a clear call for many of those addressed in the letter to repent.
- IV. The epistle of James was sent to “the Dispersion.” This referred either to converted Jewish nationals or to Christians from a wider physical background who were now considered to be “spiritual Jews” or the “Israel of God” (1:1,2). Regardless, there is now no respect of persons with God, so these lessons apply equally to all disciples.

- V. The book launches immediately into its theme: “A tried faith produces completeness.”
 - A. Christians should expect “various trials” of their faith (1:2). See Matthew 5: 10-12; 2Timothy 3:11,12.
 - 1. The nature of these trials is uncertain: daily personal trials or organized persecutions initiated by the government or other sources.
 - B. Christians should welcome these trials with “joy.” This is a remarkable statement!
 - C. Two types of trials/temptations are confronted:
 - 1. Those we “fall into” (1:2) by natural means or through others, such as sickness, financial distress, etc. These trials may be initiated by others: Satan! Job, designing brothers/Joseph, evil men/ Daniel. God *allows* these trials as a means of testing the genuineness of our faith.
 - 2. Those we actively participate in (1:13,14). We are “drawn away” from within by our own “lust.” These temptations test our character.
 - 3. Both types will reward us with favor from God *if endured acceptably* (1:12).
 - a. Examples of trials from without: oppression of poor (5:4); afflictions (5:13); sickness (5:14).
 - b. Examples of tests from within: respect of persons (2:1-9); uncontrolled tongues (3:2-12); envy and strife (4:2,3); greed (5:1-5).

V. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF JAMES: *What God expects when we are tried:*

- A. We are to exhibit wisdom and faith in our responses. 1:5-11
- B. We should understand the source and purpose of our trials. 1:12-18
- C. We must appreciate to role of God’s word in facing our problems. 1:19-27
- D. We should apply God’s word to each trial situation:
 - 1. Our attitude about social status. Chapter 2
 - 2. Our attitude about teaching God’s word. Chapter 3
 - 3. Our attitude toward *things*. Chapter 4
 - 4. Our attitude toward daily problems. Chapter 5
 - a. Mistreatment in the workplace. 5:1-8
 - b. Conflicts with brethren. 5:9-13
 - c. Sickness. 5:14-18
 - d. Unfaithfulness of brethren. 5:19-20
- E. We must cultivate PATIENCE!
 - 1. It will: make us perfect (1:3,4); give us a crown (1:2); bless our labor (1:25); bring the grace of overcoming (4:6-10); prepare us for judgment (5, 7, 8).
 - 2. Examples of patience should inspire us. (5:10,11).

Chapter One-- "The Testing of Your Faith"

Verse 1--James, a servant... In his letters, Paul almost always identifies himself as an "apostle," as does Peter. John takes the name of "elder" (2John ; 3John). James chooses to be recognized as a "servant," perhaps because his letter emphasizes the absolute need for humility in every Christian's life.

"to the twelve tribes...scattered abroad..." The Jews had been dispersed into "every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:6 and 2:9-11) for some time. Jewish disciples had been "scattered" throughout Judea and Samaria by persecution (Acts 8:1). These "twelve tribes" possibly included Jews and Gentiles who were now regarded as "spiritual Israel" wherever they lived (Romans 9:6).

"Greetings." "To address, especially with *kind feelings*" (Webster). These feelings of love and concern laid the foundation for the stern "tough love" lessons to follow.

Verse 2-4-- "The testing of your faith produces patience." This is the theme of the letter. James reveals how to endure trials: (1) Be patient (2) Let patience grow and remove all impure impulses that focus on the here and now, such as wealth, rank, influence, justice, health, etc.; (3) Then, the Christian will be complete and lack nothing.

Verses 5-8-- If any of you lacks wisdom... Patience is impossible for one lacking wisdom, and without patience one cannot endure his trials and temptations. Wisdom is the ability to see things as God sees them, which is not natural to the human mind. Therefore, "ask of God" and wisdom will "be given." But, asking must be done "in faith," and faith comes only through trusting God's promises in His word (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 4:12). Wisdom is "given" (acquired) only to/by those who learn to use the scriptures in resolving the knotty issues of life. The person who doubts and is unsure about God's solutions can never develop the patience needed to endure his trials. He will not receive "anything" (any satisfactory resolution of his troubles) from the Lord.

"The Christian's Problem -Solving Process"

Problem---Faith in Word---Prayer for Wisdom---Wisdom---Act/React---Perfect Solution

Verses 9-11-- "Let the lowly brother glory..." The first and greatest obstacle to seeing our problems as God does, is being blinded by those measures which worldly people use to judge the quality of life, principally money and power. Hence, both rich and poor must understand that *status* does not determine *stature* in God's eyes. He who depends on his *worldly* defenses when confronting difficulties will surely "fade away in his pursuits." Physical status is only temporary and unimportant to God, and should be to us.

Verse 12-- “Blessed is the man who endures temptation...” The only worthwhile goal for the rich or the poor is God’s “crown of life,” Only those who love God enough to be content with His view of how to address worldly issues may expect to achieve that goal.

Verses 13-18-- “Let no one say...I am tempted by God...” Some might plead the inability to overcome trials by charging God as their source. However, God is not in the business of *condemning* souls, but of *saving* souls! The devil “tempts”(Matthew 4:1); God “proves”(tests). Bad teachers may be guilty of deliberately causing students to fail by using “trick” questions, but good teachers use their tests to allow pupils to assess their progress and to make adjustments to improve. The “Father of lights” always deals in “good and perfect” gifts to our benefit. Any negative outcomes to our problems spring from *within ourselves*, not from God. Our sinful desires draw us into *sinful conduct*; sinful conduct, if unrepented of and allowed to spread its influence over our lives, will soon draw us down into *spiritual separation* from a God who has never wavered in His righteous desire to make of us the “firstfruits” (best) of all His creatures. And this plan can be accomplished only when we follow His word,

Verses 19,20-- “...let every man be...” In view of our personal responsibility for failures to overcome our trials, and since overcoming is directly related to our dependence on God’s word for guidance, three attitudes must be cultivated by each disciple:

- (1) Be “swift to hear” what God’s wisdom (word) advises in each situation;
- (2) Be “slow to speak” (determine) solutions based on our own wisdom;
- (3) Be “slow to wrath” against God or man because of the frustration, anxiety, or disappointment that accompany human solutions and that prevent reliance on heavenly solutions.

Only the first action results in man’s improvement; the others are unproductive.

Verses 21-25-- “Therefore lay aside all filthiness...and receive with meekness...the word...”

God’s truth is the sole remedy for all our problems, but it can do its work in us only when we use it properly in the problem-solving process:

- (1) We must receive it with meekness. Sins and problems must be acknowledged;
- (2) We must be proactive in applying God’s wisdom to our problems. An illustration shows the importance of both steps in our problem resolution: A mirror (God’s word) can help us “fix” our physical defects (life problems) only when we *accept* the reality of what we see and *act* accordingly. Even God’s “mirror” will not resolve problems if its solutions are not applied to those problems. How sad that men will ignore the “perfect law” that provides “liberty” (relief) from their overwhelming life situations and resort instead to an imperfect and unsatisfactory human wisdom to try to get that relief. God’s wisdom is embodied in His “law” which is to be followed *exactly* if it is to be effective. *Work is involved* in applying heavenly wisdom!

Verses 26,27-- There are two classes of “religious” people: (1) Those who *think* they are religiously acceptable to God, and, (2) those who *are* acceptable.

- (1) An uncontrolled tongue (especially in those who encourage human solutions to men’s problems--to be discussed in chapter 3) is characteristic of teachers whose guidance offers no truly “religious” solutions to men’s trials,
- (2) Action to give assistance to the underprivileged (widows and orphans) is indicative of one who displays a heavenly wisdom sensitive to social needs, even when no social advantage is to be gained--to be discussed in chapter 2. These are the really religious.
- (3) Another element of “pure religion” involves personal morality. Moral living is fundamental in any effort to show respect for God’s wisdom in the governance of human conduct. One must “keep himself” from any behavior that will identify him with *worldly wisdom* rather than with *heavenly wisdom*.

1. What surprising direction does James give about dealing with trials? (vs. 2) Why is this good advice for us? (vs. 3)
2. What perfect(ing) work can patience perform in our lives? (vs. 4)
3. In what particular matter is it vital to possess wisdom? (vs. 5, 2)
4. In what should the “lowly” brother glory? (vs. 9) The “rich” brother? (vs. 10) Why? (vs.10,11)
5. Describe the process of sin that results in spiritual death. (vs. 14,15)
6. Does God use trials in our lives to lead us into sin? (vs. 13) Give three reasons why this would be impossible. (vs. 13, 17, 18)
7. What negative response to trials do men often make? (vs. 20) Instead, what three responses should we make in an effort to overcome our trials? (vs. 19)
8. Sinners must *reject* _____ and _____ and receive the _____ in order to overcome sin (vs. 21; also, see Luke 8:11,15.)
9. What illustration is used by James to emphasize the necessity of obeying God’s word? (vs. 23-25)
10. What connection might there be between trials and the tongue? (vs. 26,13) Between obedience and the tongue? (vs. 27)

Chapter Two-- "Faith and the Social Man"

In this chapter, James instructs his readers about the importance of appropriate conduct in their social contacts with other people. The **"social man"** is man in his "physical contacts with other men." Christians must understand that *all* men are made in God's image and are to be treated with the same consideration given to them by their Maker. Wealth and position must not influence us in our behavior as we live in contact with others.

Verse 1-- "...do not hold the faith...with parity." The message of the gospel is: "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). Therefore, one's prejudices toward others cannot be rationalized by an appeal to one's relationship to the gospel. The gospel does not alter men's social status, just their spiritual status. We cannot preach equality in the gospel and practice inequality in our social behavior.

- (1) Moses' Law condemned unfair treatment of *any* man (Deuteronomy 1:17).
- (2) Jesus' behavior validated the ultimate worth of *every* man (Luke 7:36ff).
- (3) The gospel is based on the impartiality of God (Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:11).
- (4) Prejudice is rooted in our backgrounds, our fears and anxieties, our pride, our misfortunes, and our sins.

Verses 2-4-- "For if there should come..." A not-so-hypothetical illustration calls attention to our submission to social prejudice. Its religious context ("assembly" or "synagogue") brands prejudicial behavior as especially out-of-character for the Christian.

- (1) The rich man is favorably treated-- "*sit* in a good place."
- (2) The poor man is badly treated-- "*stand*" or "*sit* at my *footstool*."
- (3) "Evil" (discriminatory) thoughts prompt men to evil (discriminatory) actions.
- (4) Do **we** sometimes equate a person's desirability in the (local) church in terms of his social standing or material wealth? Is he judged in terms of how his presence or membership might *physically* benefit the church? A "rich man" is honored because of his wealth, appearance, influence, etc. A "poor man" is dishonored when he has no such things to offer. Yet, God well might judge that the spiritual dedication of the poor man is of far greater value to His kingdom and its work than anything that the rich man can provide.

Verses 5-7-- "Listen, my beloved brethren..." Even common sense, in addition to spiritual sense, will reveal the folly of social prejudice among God's people:

- (1) As a rule, the "poor of this world" are more inclined to be interested in things of faith and the kingdom of the Lord. They are really rich!

- (2) As a rule, the “rich” are oblivious to the restraints of morality in their treatment of other people, and they are contemptuous of others’ religious scruples, even to the point of “blaspheming the holy name” of Christ when that serves their purpose.
- (3) “Who is on God’s side?” is the only criterion by which honor and dishonor can be dispensed by the thoughtful child of God. See Matthew 5:3 and Matthew 19:23.

Verses 8-13-- “If you really fulfill the royal law...” The Christian is governed by law in his social conduct as well as in his personal religious conduct:

- (1) The Law of Moses was a “royal law” because it concerned a nation especially related to the Royal God. That Law required *all* members of the royal brotherhood to give advantageous treatment to *all* other members (Leviticus 19:18). This was how God’s Old Testament people were to act! Transgression of the law of brotherly behavior was no less serious than any other violation of the Law.
- (2) The law of Christ likewise demands complete obedience to *all* commands. Acts 20:7 (eating the Lord’s Supper) is no more essential than James 2:1 (don’t show worldly-based partiality). This is how God’s New Testament people are to act!
- (3) The “royal law” taught the Jew that God condemns *all* sins-- those of immorality (e.g., adultery) as well as those involving the mistreatment of others (e.g., murder). Similarly, Christ’s law demands as much attention to our improper social behavior (figurative “murder”) toward others as it does to our personal immorality.
- (4) God is a God of fairness in all His dealings. This is how He acts! It should be no surprise that He requires fair dealings by His people. Fairness will very much be a part of our judgment by His “law of liberty,” which frees *us from* any need to be arbitrary in our dealings with our fellows and *frees us to* judge the worth of others by God’s criteria and not by the world’s.
- (5) If we desire fair judgment in eternity, fairness (“mercy”) must govern our social behavior before eternity.

Verses 14-26-- “What does it profit, my brethren...” A lengthy illustration is provided to demonstrate the absolute necessity to prove what we believe about God’s standards of fairness by what we do as we deal with our social contacts. “Prove it by the things you do” is an accurate reflection of God’s generous Nature and a meaningful statement of His expectations for all of us. If we truly believe what the gospel says about the equality of men, then we will be more considerate of the disadvantaged and unfortunate and show our concern by our treatment of them.

While James uses his illustration of faith and works to drive home the connection between *thinking* right and *doing* right about those of lesser social acceptability, the same connection exists between whatever truth we believe and how we behave with regard to that truth. Thus, belief and baptism in primary obedience (Mark 16:16);

the theory and practice of the Christian life (Philippians 2:15); revering God and worshiping Him regularly (Hebrews 10:25) ; feeling grateful and giving our money (1 Corinthians 16:1,2) must always exist together. What we *believe* to be right means nothing unless we put our *faith* into *practice*.

Verse 14-- Faith in God's way of salvation is useless to us without the works of obedience He has attached to that salvation.

Verses 15,16--In the same way, we should understand that any concern we may have about another's needs will be of no benefit to the needy unless and until we join our concern with an action of benevolence. Perhaps the same passive attitude of the fortunate toward the unfortunate was also a basic problem that pervaded all areas of some Christians' lives, including their religious activities.

Verse 17-- Intellectual faith without accompanying action is useless, whether in man's salvation or in meeting the physical needs of the disadvantaged.

Verse 18-- An imaginary exchange between two persons follows. One tries to place belief and action into the area of personal choice (whether about salvation or social behavior). However, the other person points out something that should be obvious: one can remove any doubt about what he really believes by doing something that demonstrates what he believes. Someone has rightly said, "You can't argue with a demonstration!"

Verses 19,20-- All those addressed in this letter *want* to know that there is one true God. That had been the foundation of Jewish faith since the captivity. But, as Old Testament history proclaims, any degree of faith in God is of no benefit to the believer apart from the obedient acts that God attaches to faith. Demons provide a good example of this fact. They accept God's *Person*, but they haven't submitted to His *Dominion*. See Matthew 8:28-32; Acts 16:16-18; Job 1:6-12. Faith without action is no more acceptable to God in men than it is in demons.

Verses 21-24-- Abraham perhaps exerted a greater influence over the Jews than anyone else. He demonstrated the reality of his faith in God's providence when he acted ("offered") on his faith by giving his son as a sacrifice when so commanded by God. He *believed* that God could raise Isaac from the dead, but he only showed the strength of that confidence when he actually "killed" his son (in essence). See Romans 4:21.

- (1) He was justified as a righteous man only ~ he complied with God's command.
- (2) He worked because he had faith in God's wisdom and power to reward action.
- (3) He offered the ultimate proof of his confidence in God when he "killed" his son (Genesis 22:1-19) This was even stronger testimony than his "going out" (Genesis

12:1-4) or his accepting God's promise of a son in his old age (Genesis 15:4-6), He "fulfilled"(or "filled full") the confidence God had in his commitment at the time when his faith was first "accounted to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

- (4) *An active* faith was the basis upon which *friendthzp* with God was established.
- (5) So, "a man" (any man) is justified by a working faith, not by a faith which fails or refuses to work the "works of God." See John 6:29. This truth is so clearly and so frequently emphasized in Scripture that "you see" (or ought to see) it clearly.

Verse 25-- Rahab serves as a example to prove that Gentiles as well as Jews are bound by the same law of faith and works: only "faith working by love" means anything to God (Galatians 5:6).

Verse 26-- A cormnon-sense example of the importance of action in God's plan for all human behavior (social and religious) is drawn out of common human experience. When the spirit of a man leaves his body, that man is *dead--* useless and unprofitable for any purpose. Faith about anything (social or religious) is just as dead unless that faith moves men to appropriate action.

1. “The faith” (See Galatians 1:23) cannot be mixed with _____ (vs. 1)
2. What were the noticeable differences between the two men who came into the assembly of the saints? (vs. 2,3) Were these physical or spiritual differences?
3. What treatment was extended to each of these men? (vs. 3)
4. What was the sin of some brethren with regard to the two men? (vs. 1,4; also, see I Samuel 16:7 and 2Corinthians 5:12.)
5. What kind of treatment had the saints received from the “rich” (as a class)? (vs. 6,7)
6. What is the “royal law” as specified in the Old Testament? (vs. 8; also, see Leviticus 19:18.) Where is this law referred to in the New Testament? (See Matthew 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14.)
7. By what law will we be judged? (vs. 12) What is a fundamental element of this law? (vs. 13)
8. Verses 14-26 teach that faith must be manifested by works of obedience. How do these verses connect (or do they?) with the lesson taught in verses 1-13? (Qii~: verses 15-17.)
9. How must faith in any doctrine of the New Testament be proved? (vs. 18-20)
10. When did Abraham prove conclusively his belief in God’s complete authority? (vs. 2 1-23)
11. Why might James have chosen Rahab as the person other than Abraham to illustrate the principle of faith and works? (vs. 25; also, see Matthew 1:5.)
12. What *obvious physical* truth portrays the not-so-obvious *spiritual* truth about faith and works? (vs. 26)

Chapter Three— “Faith and the Faithful Teacher”

This chapter deals with overly-ambitious and self-serving teachers among the Christians. Their ambitions were a threat not only to their own spirituality but also to that of the entire church among whom they taught. Also, their apparent insincerity and inconsistent lives were a severe reflection on the image of the church among people of the world. *Faithful teachers* are important to the success of the gospel in converting the lost. (See Philippians 2:15,16.)

The background for this chapter:

1. The Jews were accustomed to free speech in their synagogues. See Acts 13:15.
2. Churches had no rules for appointing “teachers” as for elders and deacons, except when teachers were inspired. See 1Corinthians 14.
3. Scattered disciples had been preaching freely “everywhere” (Acts 8:4).
4. All faithful members are *expected* to become teachers (Hebrews 5:12; 2Timothy 2:2).
5. The *practice* and *expectation* led some into the sin of false teaching or into ineffective teaching. See 1Timothy 1:6,7; 1 John 4:1.
6. Others sought personal glory and influence through teaching (2Corinthians 12:14).

Verse 1-- “...let not many of you become teachers...” We should never rush into any form of service for which we are unprepared or uncommitted (physically and spiritually).

1. Teachers will receive a *stricter* judgment than non-teachers, because they affect the salvation of others as well as their own (Matthew 15:14).
2. It is vital that teachers “rightly divide” (handle) the word of truth (2Timothy 2:15).
3. Teachers must be unceasingly dedicated to imparting truth to others (2Timothy 2:2).
4. The remainder of this chapter deals with teachers who were unqualified by insufficient knowledge, inappropriate motivation, or unworthy personal lives. They were harmful to the cause of Christ. “These things ought not so to be” (verse 10).
5. While the following lessons apply to *all* abuses of speech among Christ’s disciples and govern our verbal communication in *every* life situation, apparently they deal primarily with false teachers who were guilty of causing spiritual harm~to others.

Verses 2-8-- “If anyone does not stumble in word...” The power of the tongue greatly impacts our own lives and the lives of others (verse 5). It is only with singular difficulty that any of us can successfully control its use. Such control is indicative of a well-controlled life in every respect. It should be no surprise that one of the *smallest* members of the physical body exerts the *greatest* impact over self and others since this phenomenon is not unique:

1. Large animals like horses are controlled by small instruments such as bits (vs. 3).
2. Great ships are directed by a very small rudder to overcome even the force of strong winds. A rudder *properly used* assures a safe voyage for ship and cargo; a rudder *improperly used* or *out of control* invites disaster (vs. 4);
3. Only a tiny flame is necessary to ignite a forest fire with catastrophic results (vs. 5).
4. The tongue also boasts “great things” either good or bad (vs. 3, 4 and vs.5).
5. One’s whole life (“the course of nature”) can be ruined by a “defiling” tongue(vs.6).

Man can comfortably predict the behavior of every creature over which God has placed him in control (vs. 7; see Genesis 1:26.) either by training or by containment. However, the “hellish” impulses (temptations) that can put the tongue (i.e., the mental and spiritual faculties that direct the physical member) out of control quickly and without warning so that we can *never* be comfortable enough with its behavior moves us to be very careful about what it may do (vs. 8)! The tongue is full of a “deadly poison” that we must keep “bottled up with the cap on.”

Verses 9-12-- “With it we bless God...and...we curse men...” The inconsistent use of the tongue (for good *and* bad) is highly symbolic of the inconsistency between false and incompetent teaching and the purpose for which God gave the task of soul-saving teaching. It makes no difference that false teachers claim loyalty to (“bless”) God. With their tongues (teaching) they “curse” (condemn) men with their error, though God desires the salvation of those made in His image [Genesis 1:27; 2Peter 3:9] (vs. 9,10).

1. It is physically unnatural for bitter and sweet water to flow from the same spring;
2. It is physically unnatural for the same vine to bear different kinds of fruit;
3. It is physically unnatural to find salt water and fresh water in the same source;
4. It is spiritually unnatural for a “sound” teacher to teach “unsound” doctrines (vs. 10-12).

Verses 13-18-- “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Only those teachers who use their tongues to impart sound doctrine are “wise” and “understanding” of the truth and warrant the confidence of other men (Titus 2:1). Only the conformity of their teaching and their personal behavior *with* the truth can demonstrate their devotion *to* the truth (vs. 13). Teachers among you speak contrary to one another, All claim to possess wisdom in their teaching. Be aware, however, that teaching may have its origin in wisdom that is from “below,” rather than in wisdom from “above” (vs. 15). The source of any professed “wisdom” may be identified by the influences it exerts on its recipients:

1. **Earthly wisdom** (to be avoided) is leaves a trail of envy, self-seeking, confusion, partiality, hypocrisy, and “every evil thing.” Teaching associated with this kind of “wisdom” is “earthly, sensual, demonic” and must be branded as *false teaching!* (vs. 14-16).
2. **Heavenly wisdom** (to be followed) brings purity (unity), peace, gentleness, submission, mercy, impartiality, sincerity, and other “good fruits” (vs. 17).

Identifying Marks of Bad (earthly) and Good (heavenly) teachers:

Bad:

1. They will manifest envy toward others (especially other teachers).
2. They will betray a desire for personal reputation through their teaching.
3. They will teach whatever doctrine(s) will enhance their reputation and position of influence.
4. They will teach and defend doctrines that clearly contradict plain Bible truth. They dare to “lie against the truth” (2Timothy 4:3,4).
5. Their “ministry” is beset with evil results among those whom they have taught.

Good:

1. Their teaching is accompanied by exemplary personal conduct at all times. Their nature is consistent with God’s nature.
2. Their teaching is characterized by peace, not confusion and turmoil. They will hold unity at a premium. See Proverbs 6:16-19.
3. Their demeanor will be gentle, not harsh and hypercritical.
4. Their treatment of other people will be uncompromising but willing to forego personal opinions for those of others.
5. Their attitude toward the erring is one of mercy, not resentment and bitterness. See ICorinthians 9:22.
6. Their goal in teaching will be to encourage righteous and fruitful lives in as many persons as possible.
7. Their teaching will always be without partiality or prejudice.
8. Their teaching will never defer to hypocritical self-serving.

1. What “strange” instruction is given by James to his brethren concerning teaching? (vs. 1) Why did he give such advice? (vs. 1)
2. What particular thing should a teacher strive not to do? (vs. 2)
3. The tongue’s power is illustrated by James by “little” and “big” things (vs. 3-6):

| <u>Little</u> | <u>Big</u> |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. Tongue | a. Whole body |
| b. | b. |
| c. | c. |
| d. | d. |
4. Where do sins of the tongue come from? (vs. 6)
5. According to James, how dangerous is the wrong use of the tongue? (vs. 8)
6. What contradictory actions were practiced by some of those who had become “teachers”? (vs. 9, 10; see chapter 2:6.)
7. Two truths from the natural world show how wrong it is for teachers not to “practice what they preach” What are these truths? (vs. 11,12)
8. “Wise” teachers demonstrate their wisdom (and reliability) by what means? (vs. 13)
9. What behaviors of teachers (and others) *lie against the truth* they teach? (vs. 14)
10. List the characteristics of two kinds of wisdom described by James. (vs. 15-18)

| <u>Heavenly Wisdom</u> | <u>Earthly Wisdom</u> |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| a. | a. |
| b. | b. |
| c. | c. |
| d. | d. |
| e. | e. |
| f. | f. |
| g. | g. |
| h. | |
| i. | |

Chapter Four— “Faith and the Man Within”

James had already warned these Christians that human lusts, if allowed to lead them into sinful behavior, could very well result in the loss of their souls (Chapter 1:14,15). In this chapter, he rebukes them harshly for the lifestyle into which some had fallen. Oblivious to the qualities of the Christian character toward which the gospel had pointed them, they were embroiled in relationships among themselves and with people in the world characterized by strife and bitterness, worldliness, unwarranted criticism, greed, and pride. A failure to change these relationships would be disastrous to their hope of eternal life. Faith could not do its work in their lives until a significant impact had been made on “the man within!”

Verses 1-3-- “Where do wars and fightings come from...?” How can people behave themselves in such a shameful manner when they had been taught so differently? The gospel is a gospel of *peace*. God desires that His people live at peace with Him, with one another, and with all their associates. Furthermore, righteous living by Christians can be nurtured only within an environment of *peace* (chapter 3:18).

The answer lay within the disciples themselves. Hearts had not been changed. Worldly attitudes remained the same as before their “conversion.” James attributes their ungodly behavior to ungodly “desires for pleasure.” “Wars and fights” among themselves sprang out of a determination to “gratify their natural desires” (Vine), many of which God considers to be sinful. The *natural* (“*carnal*”) *man* had not been put to death (Galatians 5:24). The *spiritual man* was not in control of their thoughts and actions. The *natural man* will lead us into a lust for: (1) power, (2) prominence, (3) wealth, (4) independence, (5) the sheer enjoyment of strife, and many other hurtful behaviors. (See 1Corinthians 3:1-3.)

Many churches are still being harmed by the sinful exercise of human lusts. Church members continue to “war and fight” because the lustful flesh is winning the war against the law of God in their minds (Romans 7:23), if, indeed, that law is in their minds at all. Selfish ambition continues to cause people to “murder” (hate? 1 John 3:15), covet, cheat, and disregard the welfare of others.

But--the effort expended by lustful saints had been unsuccessful in attaining their worldly goals, or they had enjoyed no real satisfaction from what they had attained. Their aspirations centered on what they wanted for themselves and not on what they wanted for the kingdom (Matthew 6:33). They “asked amiss.”

Verses 4-6-- “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know...?” Just as the physical sin of adultery erodes the precious bond between husband and wife, spiritual adultery with the devil destroys the relationship between the disciple and his God. “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). The choice of one’s friends must be made constantly. It is either God or the world-- no room between! Human lusts will alienate the Christian from his Father. We *can fall* as surely through *evil desires* as from *false doctrine* (Galatians 5:4)!

“The Scripture” (*generally*) warns us about the extreme danger of longing for the things of the world instead of the things of God. (See Matthew 16:23.) But it is not unusual for man to ignore God’s admonition and go blindly ahead into sin, There is no easy remedy for the ills brought about by man’s obstinate pursuit of satisfying his lusts. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Those with humility enough to trust God’s grace to supply their daily needs, and who feel no need to trust in their own devices to supply those needs, can depend on the God of Providence to do what He has promised (Matthew 6:33).

Verses 7-10-- “Therefore submit to God. Resis the devil...” This offers a simple solution to a perplexing problem: (1) Submit to God; (2) Resist the devil, How? Several things are involved:

1. Draw near to God. God is never far from each one of us (Acts 17:27), but we allow our sins to separate ourselves from Him (Isaiah 59:2). Still, He is ever ready to receive us into His fellowship despite our going astray (2Peter 3:9).
2. Cleanse the hands. The sinner must change his behavior for the better before he can be acceptable to God. The “old man” must be put *off*, the “new man” must be put *on* (Ephesians 4:22-32; Colossians 3:5-14).
3. Purify the heart. Proper behavior must come from a heart that is “wise”and willing to “see things as God sees them.” From such a heart springs a trust in the Lord that will not allow our human lusts to dictate *how* our needs are to be supplied. A “double-minded” man receives nothing from the Lord (chapter 1:6,7).
4. Humble self before the Lord. Repentance born of a godly sorrow (2Corinthians 7:10) brings grief and shame over the sins of the past and a resolve not to repeat those sins in the future. This was the need of the Laodiceans (Revelation 3:17).
5. God will lift up the humble soul. Action is required by both the sinner and the Father before the problem of sin can be resolved. *WE* submit, *HE* lifts. Our must action must occur before His!

Verses 11,12-- “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren...” Humility requires a good attitude toward our fellows, as well as a good attitude toward God. (See Philippians 2:3,4.) The “royal law” of fair treatment (chapter 2:8) requires us to be humble toward

our brethren. Anyone who knowingly mistreats another and seeks to justify his actions is guilty not only of bad conduct toward man but also of abusing God's law of fair treatment. He declares that *he* is right and *God* is wrong about human relationships. Our task is not to decide on the quality of the God's law but to obey it implicitly. Only the God who *gave* the law of fair treatment can dictate how that treatment is to be dispensed. He decrees fairness to *everyone*. It is not for man to adopt his own criteria for showing good behavior toward his associates.

Verses 13-16-- "Today or tomorrow we will go..." Human pride is the enemy of humility. Both cannot exist simultaneously in the same heart. Self-sufficiency causes men to forget God's control of everything in this world. "We will go" signifies a pride that depends on *human* determination and ability and not on *divine*. *Pride* crowds out the reality of the frailty of the human endeavor. It is vital that we never forget that the accomplishment of our goals is not in *our* hands, but *God's*. We cannot control either:

(1) Life's circumstances-- "what will happen tomorrow;"

(2) The continuation of life-- "it is a vapor that...vanishes away." Humility will always keep us aware, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." Pride (boasting) is evil because it refuses to acknowledge how completely God controls all men and all things on the earth.

Verse 17-- "Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good..." This is the conclusion of James' lesson about how we can overcome our evil desires and practices that keep us apart from God.

Those who *know* to do good (trust in God rather than in self), but who do *not* do it, declare that they deliberately refuse to accept *Gods* remedy for overcoming sin in their lives and choose instead to follow the impulses of their lustful hearts. They opt for sin instead of sinlessness and thus sin all over again!

1. What is the basic reason behind man's "warring and fighting"? (vs. 1)
2. List six useless and hurtful things men do to achieve their desires. (vs. 2,3)
3. What was wrong with the prayers (asking) of those who did not receive? (vs.3)
4. The fundamental choice about lifestyle is whether to be a friend of _____ or a friend of _____ (vs. 4)
5. In what different ways does God treat the proud and the humble? (vs. 6) What should the proud do to gain God's favor? (vs. 7)
6. What steps must a sinner take to "draw near" to God? (vs. 8-10)
7. How does one become a "judge" of God's law? (vs. 11) Why is it wrong to judge God's law? (vs. 12)
8. Why is it foolish to make plans in isolation from God's plans for us? (vs. 13-15)
9. What was the source of the "evil" boasting in verse 16?
10. How does God regard one's neglect of obedience to His commands? (vs. 17) How do we "know" what "good" we should do? (See John 8:32; 1Corinthians 2:10-13.)

Chapter Five— “Faith and the Reward of Patience”

The importance of faith to one’s status as a Christian is generally accepted. However, the practical application of faith to the daily encounters experienced by the Christian is not so well understood. In this chapter, James seeks to impress on his readers that faith is much more than a theory-- it is a way of life.

Applying faith to life’s problems in *living* as a Christian is as essential as applying faith to the problem of *becoming* a Christian. James explains the place of faith in the workplace, its role in disputes among brethren, its comfort in times of sickness, and its power to motivate the faithful to help the weak recover their faith.

Faith must be clothed in *patience* to accomplish its goal of Christian perfection (James 1:4). Few worthwhile things are done quickly, and discouragement is the enemy of success in our efforts to live by faith, We must never question the value of “keeping on keeping on,” and we must ever allow God to work things out “*in His time.*” (See Psalm 130:5)

Verses 1-6-- “Come now, you rich...” The problem of whom is addressed in this passage is difficult to answer. There are several possibilities:

- (1) Rich non-Christians? No doubt they needed to be warned about the abuses of which they were guilty, but it seems unlikely that admonishing them would make any real impact on their behavior.
- (2) Rich Christians? Possibly, but how long will such disgraceful, and apparently widespread, practices of wicked men be tolerated in the church? Surely, corrective action would have been taken long before now if this were a “church problem.”
- (3) Poor Christians? It is not uncommon in literature to employ the device of appearing to address certain parties while in reality directing the message toward other parties. It is probable that James here seeks to assume to role of condemning the rich oppressors of poor saints, thereby encouraging the saints to believe that their oppression has not gone unnoticed by God and that He will set the matter straight when and how He sees fit. (See verse 7.)

The rich would certainly receive retribution from the Lord for their mistreatment of the poor. “Weeping and howling” were more appropriate for them than good feelings about their ill-gotten and temporary gain. Their sins were many:

- (1) They had *heaped up* treasure for themselves to the neglect of others’ needs;

- (2) They had amassed their wealth by *defrauding* poor, defenseless laborers;
- (3) They had resorted to “*condemnation*” and “murder” (figurative?) to achieve their pernicious goals;
- (4) They had *lived on the earth in luxury* while their victims suffered in poverty;
- (5) They had *fattened their hearts* in self-satisfaction over their “successes;”
- (6) They had *ignored the warnings of Jesus and the apostles*:
 - a. Matthew 6:19,20-- Do not lay up treasures on the earth but in heaven;
 - b. Luke 12:21-- Fools choose worldly riches instead of riches toward God;
 - c. 1Timothy 6:9,10-- “Many sorrows” accompany greediness.

The consequences of their greed and oppression were serious:

- (1) Their wealth would be temporary and would be taken away from them;
- (2) Their riches would in some way become a “witness” against them;
- (3) Their prosperity would become a curse rather than a blessing (“eat you flesh”);
- (4) Their “fatness” would become to them a cause of “slaughter” (retribution).

Verses 7-12-- “Therefore be patient, brethren...” The oppressed poor must have *patience*.

They must trust the Lord to avenge the wrongs they suffered at the hands of the rich. Patience would “establish their hearts” in *spiritual* strength until the “coming of the Lord” *would* rectify the situation. Others had proved the value of patience:

- (1) Physically-- The farmer sows and then waits patiently for his harvest and for those things that produce the harvest;
- (2) Spiritually-- The prophets “endured” through their suffering for God’s cause and are “blessed” by God’s people today for their endurance;
- (3) Spiritually-- Job is a specific example of the connection between suffering and patience. Job’s perseverance made it possible for the Lord to show him compassion and mercy.

Christians must not “grumble” against one another for their problems. Blame is to be laid at the feet of Satan, and the Lord alone can thwart the devil’s harassment of the faithful. This lesson was hard for Job to learn, but learning it paid off handsomely.

Swearing by the virtue of any man or object is a dangerous practice. Even when dragged into the courts (chapter 2:6), Christians should let it be known that they are truthful people *because they are Christians*, and not because they have a special relationship to someone or something outside themselves. A Christian’s reputation for truthfulness should be adequate to establish his integrity in any circumstance.

Verses 13-18-- “Is anyone among you suffering?” Here follows a list of practical situations in which a patient faith must play a major role for the child of God. Three questions introduce these situations:

- (1) “Is any among you suffering?” Suffering is a severe test of one’s faith. Faith is easy to forget when the fires of pain or distress are burning hot. How does faith react both to seek a resolution and to protect its own being? “Pray!” This is a *divine* solution that allows Q,q~j to handle our problems (1Thessalonians 5:17).
- (2) “Is anyone cheerful?” Good fortune is not usually considered to be a problem, but it can easily move our focus from heaven to earth. We must remember man’s reliance on his Maker in good times and well as in *bad*. “Sing psalms” of praise and thanksgiving to keep faith strong!
- (3) “Is any sick?” Many are discouraged by serious illness and may be tempted to question God’s love and watchcare for them. Rather than to harbor doubt toward God because of sickness, let sickness serve as a vehicle by which God can demonstrate how powerful faith really is to “save the sick” and “raise him up.” By faith the remedy for sickness is prescribed:
 - a. Call for the elders of the church to anoint with oil and pray;
 - b. Their prayer of faith would secure healing of the sickness;
 - c. The sins of the sick person would be forgiven (by prayer springing out of repentance and confession). (See Acts 8:22.)

The circumstances surrounding this passage are unclear. Possibly, these elders were endowed with the spiritual gift of healing, and the recovery was sure. Or, the elders were assumed to be among the more spiritual of the church and thus became the logical choice to offer prayers as righteous men (verse 16). Recovery would come through natural means facilitated by a hopeful mental outlook on the part of the beneficiary of the elders’ prayers.

Prayers of faith are always and in all situations effective in solving *every* trial faced by the Christian:

- (1) Suffering, prosperity, and sickness (verses 13-15);
- (2) Sin-- coupled with penitent and humble confession (verse 16);
- (3) Situations that involve matters important to the execution of God’s plan in the world and to our place in that plan. Elijah prayed such prayers (verses 17,18).

Verses 19,20-- “Brethren, if any among you wanders from the truth...” Each faithful child of God has the responsibility to help others to develop wisdom and patience in their trials. When a disciple becomes discouraged because of his problems and displays a lack of faith and faithfulness, he is: (1) in error; (2) in sin; (3) spiritually dead (lost). He is in dire need of rescue!

Faithful Christians who have the *wisdom* to see trials as God sees them-- just steppingstones to stronger faith and trust in our Father-- will make every effort to help the weak cultivate that *same wisdom* about their own problems, too. “Someone” is needed to “turn them back” to faith, patience, and nearness to God.

We are all tools in the hands of God to help “raise up” and “forgive” the discouraged and sinful wanderers from the truth. Let us ever be concerned for patient faithfulness in our own lives, and let us help all others we can to be more patiently faithful as well!

1. The rich are severely rebuked by James. What did he foretell about their future? (vs. 1)

2. The riches of the rich were _____ and their garments _____ (vs. 2)

3. When had the rich heaped up their treasure? The corrosion of their gold and silver would testify about what bad decision on their part? (vs. 3)

4. Many had increased their profits by what kind of fraud? Who had paid attention to the plight of the defrauded? (vs. 4)

5. Describe the lifestyle of the rich. What did they not realize about the consequence of this lifestyle? (vs. 5)

6. What should be the basic reaction of victimized brethren to their ill treatment by the rich? (vs. 7a)

7. Cite the three examples of patience used by James. (vs. 7b, 10,11)

8. What (a) event and (b) its timing should be reasons enough for patience in the difficult time in which these Christians lived? (vs. 8,9)

9. What response should Christians make in each of these situations:
 - a. Suffering _____
 - b. Cheerfulness _____
 - c. Sickness _____
 - d. Sin _____

10. What two blessings come to those who help erring brethren overcome discouragement and sin? (vs. 19,20)