



This letter has several topics to cover and is often described as a book that cannot be easily outlined. This is inconsequential since an apparent order is not required to understand even the sections that appear to be disjointed with the surrounding verses. There does seem to be clear evidence that a predominant theme is that of “faith” and its validity versus pseudo-faith that is such because it is professed but, in reality, not possessed. It is a letter that not only deals with various forms of hypocrisy, but also truly practical insights into how to think, pray, behave and discern.

James (the writer of this letter) was the brother of Jesus (half-brother since Mary was the mother they had in common) and who became the apparent leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the “brothers” in John 7 that did not believe in Jesus and offered worldly counsel to Him that He might “show yourself to the world” (John 7:1-5). Sometime (likely after the resurrection of Christ) James believed. The other popularly known “James” was James the brother of John and he was martyred (Acts 12:1-2).

Right at the beginning of this letter James deals with the “testing of your faith” and the expectant posturing of ourselves for it, along with the trusting pursuit of “wisdom” from the Lord. Such a wisdom is founded in trusting the Lord through it all, without yielding to double-minded doubt (1:2-16). Rather than doubting there is to be a determined obedience to “the Word,” expecting that genuine faith will produce genuine works (“proof of life” of faith - 2:1-26). A major part of this “proof” will be the control of the tongue (speech) that is reigned-in and used for the Lord’s use, because an unbridled tongue is inconsistent with true faith. The tongue is to be controlled in wisdom and utilized for its propagation (wisdom “from above” versus “earthly” wisdom - (3:1-13)). If there are “quarrels” and “fights” among believers, the source of such needs to be seen for what it is (that being internal, uncontrolled passions of all sorts and the resulting frustrations that ignite conflicts (4:1-12)). There will need to be a constant remembering that our time/days are in the Lord’s hands and that we not presume upon it. (4:13-17). Genuine faith will not be tied to earthly wealth (5:1-6) but will instead be characterized by patient waiting on the Lord as our life focus, enabling an enduring life in the face of all sorts of suffering (5:7-12). The epistle ends with a directive in how to handle physical sickness, though with a priority in the dealing with personal sin, countered with righteous praying (5:13-18) along with the priority focus of bringing back one “wandering off” in their sin for the sake of their soul, and as the only way to “cover a multitude of sins” identified by our “brothers” (5:19-20).

I. Joyfully Steadfast in Trials, Understanding their Purposes - 1:1-12

A. Before directing his readers to face the various trials coming, James greets them with his credentials - vs. 1

1. James introduces himself as a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ

It would have actually been a prestigious position to claim rather than one of embarrassment or resentment - everyone is slave to someone or something so best to serve the Lord of all who is the pure definition of true love

- The order of the first sentence in the Greek actually reads more like, “James, of God and the Lord Jesus Christ a slave...” - not just any slave (non-freeman, possessed of another), but one with the highest of callings, the slave of God and Jesus Christ (the God-man, who was Lord) - such a slavery was not forced enslavement as the term carries with it today, but one of privilege
- With this high honor came the reality that He truly belonged to the Lord, and his life was defined by the service of another, so another’s will over his, a predefined purpose
- The listing of two masters does not place one against another, but listing both as master equates them as far as authority is concerned

2. The letter is addressed to “the twelve tribes who are dispersed”

- This term is used to reference the Jews who were not located in Israel but scattered throughout the Roman Empire (as was implied in John 7:35 and I Peter 1:1)
- These were Christian Jews that James desired to encourage, challenge and teach
- It is commonly believed that the letter from James was written early-on and was likely one of the first letters written (that are contained in the New Testament)

Notice it is addressed to the 12 tribes (no notion of 10 tribes being lost)



B. Let endurance have its full impact, resulting in maturing “completeness” - vs. 2-4

1. Regard it as “altogether joy” when facing varied (also numerous) trials - vs. 2

To the faithless this is more a fearful thing to consider since they desire their character to remain hidden and are actively seeking to avoid Christlikeness or anything that truly involves soul-building endurance

This “joy” is also fulfilling (satisfying, contentment producing) - fighting against it only delays the beneficial results - there is a need to trust the process (in faith)

- a. “Trials” is a word often translated “test” or “testing” and rightly so since it (πειρασμός) comes from a word meaning “to put to the test” - it was sometimes used to indicate “temptation,” though here it is intended to reveal the inner character, the real self (which is truly a point of “all joy” when realizing its purpose is to show us what we’re really made of because of Christ) - as in getting to try out a “super” power”
- b. These trials are “περιπίττω” (all-around pitfalls) that are varied (and so not typically predictable because they are diversified) - the objective is not (here) to be able to avoid these tests/trials, but to stay focused by realizing their outcome - such is (truly) to be a source of complete/total joy - so consider it a point of joy **at the start** because there is certainty of where it is all leading to - the issue would be if one is not truly desirous of this “steadfastness” and actual “maturity” described here - see also I Peter 1:6-7
- c. We (as these were commanded) are also to see these times for what they are rather than fight against them, yield to despairing frustration, or just become an addicted complainer
- d. Note that the word for “trial” (testing) is used for a testing either direction (one, to show the genuineness of something and the other (translated “temptation”) to show that someone is not genuine (as temptation to sin is used for))

2. Let endurance complete (completely) its work in you to complete/finish/mature you - vs. 3-4

The end-goal of endurance/steadfastness makes sense because one’s faith will have been proven to be reliable/trustworthy so why would one stray from it?

This is comparable to the shield of faith in Eph. 6 - it is proven to be dependable because it actually does protect against the “fiery arrows of the Devil”

There is a clear indicator that there will be the urge or sense to buckle under the trial and allow doubt or disbelief to control/dominate the thinking/will

This is very personal to all of us and such determined resolve and fortitude is to be encouraged in each other, though we must be focused on being faithful ourselves before we look to offer our counsel to others to remain faithful/focused in their trials

And so again the reason to “count it altogether joy” knowing the thorough equipping for the work of God that is being accomplished in each trial

- a. The “testing of your faith” is the purpose of these trials, so testing here being a way to prove genuineness and actuality/reality (δοκιμίων - put to the test to prove trustworthiness and genuineness) - there is an objective side to this as well as a subjective side - it tests the reliability of the object/content of what “you” believe as well as whether or not “you” really believe it (have true faith)
- b. The joy (inner, unyielding contentment) makes sense also, for who would not desire to have firm footing and a reliable source to trust when the “waves of change” and unpredictability (unreliability) sweep through life? Though the costs in the moments of testing will seem high, joy is unswervingly focused upon the result not the moment
- c. These varied trials work out (produce, or literally work down to) endurance (ὑπομονής, a holding-up under and so building constancy) - it is essentially a strength grown under and out of resistance against self and would be a desirable quality in a soldier who was proven to withstand multiple, varied (of different kinds) of attacks
- d. How long and often is this to be endured (the tests of faith/belief)? It is this type of questioning that is addressed in verse 4 - the practice of endurance (patient resolve) is not just passive (as in “just take it” (whatever the trial is)), but is to be active, aiming at the maturity and full equipping that it is producing - compare to Rom. 5:1-5
- e. Let endurance (in the trials) finish its “work” - how do we know when this is the case? To yield in the trial (which is often done inwardly, giving-up inside and letting a wrong, untrusting, complaining attitude rule inwardly) is what is being forbidden
- f. The idea of “let” is actually “ἔχτω” (“have” in the imperative, so one must let it have) its completed work - let it finish and so bring you to a finishing of inner character through this trial/test or set of trials (challenges) - the purpose/reason to “stay under” the trials is to be “completed” (often translated “perfected,” though we might be more inclined to handle the idea as being in the process of **being** perfected (finished) as (we) being the Lord’s work and not our own) - Eph. 2:10; Php. 1:6
- g. The other reason is the detailed use of each trial in working toward our being completely equipped for (and in) each test that we are brought into - the word (for complete) here being “ὁλόκληρος” describing something being “complete in all its parts” (as in attention to detail to assurance of “soundness” and reliability) - note II Tim. 3:16-17 for a similar idea
- h. The reason for “maturing completeness” is to avoid the alternative and that being deficient, unprepared, having left behind a needed quality that was being worked in us for a future test/challenge/trial - this is the issue with buckling (yielding) under the pressure - the goal is to not yield in perspective of what is really happening (what God is really doing) for to do so is to cultivate a bad attitude, a faithless reaction of discouragement, leading to depression, and so ending up in despair (producing inactivity, disobedience, bitterness)

The joy is focused on the assured character that is being produced in the trials (each one) regardless the apparent outcome of any of the trials - their purpose isn't necessarily outward "victories" against challenges, but more so inward victories over self and a limited focus

- i. Such wording demonstrates an aspect of God's generosity that is often not noticed (or appreciated) - He equips us thoroughly in the preparation of us for the highest of callings
- j. Patience/endurance having its finishing work is not necessarily to be seen as one trial but the various trials throughout life - each one, in light of God's purposed plan in it, being another opportunity for faith- proving growth - all that nothing is "left-behind" (lacking)
- k. See II Peter 1:3-12 for another perspective we are to have regarding the growth we are expecting and working toward (we are to be "increasing" (super-abounding), for lacking progress/growth demonstrates a short-sighted blindness)

C. The pursuit of wisdom (not the pursuit of release/escape) - vs. 5-8

1. It might seem odd to deal with "wisdom" at this point since wisdom is often just seen as "knowing," yet it is more associated with thinking/seeing/realizing/perceiving correctly (and so "wisely") - vs. 5

"Wisdom" here being along the lines of what to do/not do, what to think, how to respond, how to feel and why- it's a directing correctly perspective and so insight into daily life situations/circumstances

see also Prov. 2:1-8 where wisdom contains the fear of the Lord - note also Prov. 9:10-12

True wisdom must recognize, first of all, dependence on the source of true wisdom - many others have abundant knowledge but it cannot be true wisdom if it cannot be aptly applied to life (life purpose)

- a. Everyone goes through hard times throughout life with varied responses - even the Godless could respond to hard times cheerfully, hoping, but that would not entail true "wisdom" for it would be handling difficulties with an artificial way of life (for it is limited to this life only)
 - There really is such a thing as blind optimism (dealing with life unrealistically)
- b. True wisdom affects the life (living) positively as seen in James 3:13-17
- c. So what if we don't know how to handle a trial (or trials) and sense ourselves defeated with a defeatist spirit (the result of not knowing how they are used)? The direct answer is to "let him ask of God," for it is assured that this request is always answered in the affirmative and is granted "generously" (literally "without reserve," not holding back)
- d. In contrast to most, God does not "reproach" (not scolding, humiliating) - this sense pictures God as expecting, ready to provide true wisdom to the one that comes and asks - there is a clear indication of the need to realize the need and so to come to Him for insight
- e. "... it will be given to him" - this is an absolute statement which, since we're dealing with God, demands an expectation (that it will be received) - it is all based in faith (the asking for it and the trust of its receipt; for it will likely come in a way not anticipated, containing a new insight/understanding that may not "fit" what we expected) - many seem to hope this "wisdom" will be a way to remove the trial, but it is more likely to involve the way to live with it/in it (because of its heavenly benefits and results)

2. Beware double-mindedness (being so, because of fluctuating doubt that is trusted) - vs. 6-8

That doubt is believed is a blockade to the free flowing source of understanding wisdom from God - this might have some of its source not in the never receiving wisdom, but not liking it

It is translated as "doubt" here because it is a second-guessing (hesitating), inward critiquing of God's wisdom (its actually being given and its content)

Doubters are carried along with a semblance of pursuing answers but they keep changing because the "answers" keep changing (because the "landscape" keeps changing)

The unstable/ungrounded (doubters) will come and go as they pass by with the ever changing currents of life circumstances

- a. Anticipating the common response of those merely "going through the motions" (but only to make the point that they knew it wouldn't "work" anyway), James clarifies the necessity of faith (submissive trust in God and not self-perception or self-insight)
- b. "The declaration of the character of God as generous is effectively a central message of the gospel: God provides what he demands. Recognition of this character of God is faith, and nonrecognition of God's generous character is doubt. To doubt God's generosity is to cast aspersions on His character, and that makes wisdom unattainable." Dan McCartney
- c. The asking must be "in faith" (submissive trust and so expectation He will and that we must also not give weight/credibility our own disapproval of the wisdom (its content, its application and even the timing of its provision)
- d. The phrase "without doubting" is the word "διακρινόμενος" which is used of a discerning judgment (which can be positive in many cases) but here it is negative because it is judging God and His answer/wisdom (as in placing the determination of the value and legitimacy of it under our own "authoritative judgment")
- e. Such a person (doubter) is compared to a wave that fluctuates based upon the winds and currents, so it is unstable, unreliable and doesn't have consistent stability - to this one, trials will be the currents that drive them with the ever changing tides of life rather than being anchored and stable through the roughest of times - these truly "waver"
- f. The picture here is interesting to think through - the stable one is one who asks with an unswerving trust in God for insight and direction, so as the waves of trials come, they remain while all others "go with the flow" - though it seems to be the path of least resistance, it leads to an incompleteness in life (in contrast to verse 4) and so these are the opposite of "steadfastness"
- g. Having no doubt here doesn't necessarily indicate absolute certainty, but more a sense of not having divided loyalties (trusting a negative (personal) "read" more than God)



This type of doubt is often given credit because we trust it (because we feel inclined to believe the pain/discomfort we are experiencing) and so, we are inclined to not trust God as long as we feel the pain (as long as we are in the trial)

Israel constantly saw first-hand God's power and rescue and still succumbed to doubt the next time difficulty arose

A believer may struggle with uncertainty, but this is not the same as being uncommitted to trusting (relying upon) God (seen in being crippled with our questioning of God and His will (at least in how we perceive it))

h. It may seem harsh at first to read verse 7, for "doubting" seems so normal to all of us (almost at times as though it was the sensible thing to do) - but realizing who we are doubting (judging with our disbelief) it is suddenly seen for what it truly is

- i. This "wisdom" is proper insight/thinking/perspective in light of what has already been revealed - He gives to all (asking) "liberally" (the sense is He is giving it and it needs to be seen/understood/discerned/realized) - His Word, for instance, is easily accessible to us and we are exposed to it often, yet we (often) do not see it, listen and discern it so as to actually live in its truth (trust it because we trust Him)
- j. Someone, as we now see, who is siding with their doubt against God (His wisdom, power and omniscience) should not expect to receive anything from the Lord - but why? Wouldn't they be convinced to trust Him when He gives them what they ask, when and how they ask it? As much as we are inclined to think we would, we wouldn't because the issue wasn't the need for relief, but the need for trust /faith - compare to Job 23:8-14
- k. That person (wavering) should not expect to receive God's wisdom for he is "double-minded" (διψυχος - two-souled, conflicting "selves") and so is unsettled (not established, uncommitted, undecided) in everything he does - they have as it were, a drive to keep all options open for they only trust what they have now, see now, and feel now - see Eph. 4:14
- l. "When our faith and spirits rise and fall with second causes, there will be great unsteadiness in all our conversation and actions. This may sometimes expose men to contempt in the world; but it is certain that such ways cannot please God nor procure any good for us in the end. While we have but one God to trust to, we have but one God to be governed by, and this should keep us even and steady." MH

D. Living life, enduring trials for the crown of life promised by the Lord - vs. 9-12

1. A view of life/living that is focused beyond this world - vs. 9-10a

These seek a way to balance a sense of God with a heart/character set on this world-though there be a sense of honoring God, God is deemed too restrictive, too demanding and in need of reform if He is to be commonly accepted

So the lowly (as the world would estimate) Christian is unswayed because he knows how fortunate he is (regardless who else sees or acknowledges it)

Some claim no shame in association with Christ but are embarrassed to associate with His people

- a. The wisdom from God is just that... wisdom beyond/above that of this age - the double-minded (debating heart) was characterized by John Bunyan as "Mr. Facing-Both-Ways" along with other characters focused on the time/wisdom of their age, all with seemingly convincing arguments for their viewpoints
- b. Such a divided outlook on life (a desire to live for God but live for what is "now") is why each grouping of "brothers" (believers) needs to see themselves in light of what they have and who they are in Christ - compare to Mt. 6:19-25
- c. James first deals with "the brother of humble circumstances" who is to boast (καυχᾶσθαι which describes a glorying-in something) in the reality of what he has/is in Christ - for being a "brother," regardless of his earthly situation/position, he is in a high position (exalted - ὑψεῖ meaning elevated) - for He is a child of the King and as such, His inheritor
- d. The rich (also should boast/glory) in his "humiliation" (his being brought/made low) - this could refer to his losing power and influence (and reputation) because of his association with Christ and His people (for to suffer for any association with Christ is a privilege)
- e. It is also possible that this also references the lowliness of heart and mind that comes when a wealthy person truly is in Christ - they no longer glory in or seek the prestige associated with wealth and influence, but glory in the humble estate of Christ's work and name in this world

2. Living for the "glories" of this age cannot help, but end in disappointment - vs. 10b-11

But the "rich" that are in Christ are to boast in their being brought low (in the eyes of the world) because all other boasting is fleeting

This picture is also in Isa. 40:6-8 and I Peter 1:24-25

Note Luke 12:13-21

- a. The "rich" can find fulfillment in his position in Christ and will boast in it, not out of arrogance, but with the realization that all else will wither and fade (pass away) - most would expect (as is normal to humanity) to boast in wealth (even the charitable wealthy are often loved because of what their money can do and get recognized for it)
- b. The temporariness is illustrated with the "flower of the field" - such flowers stand out in their beauty from the rest of the grass (as the wealthy and famous do in society) but it will be a very short amount of time - as the heat and "scorching wind" come and wither the flowers, so also will the wealthy "fade away" while still in their "pursuits"
- c. The wealthy believer rejoices in Christ because he is spared the futility of the typical response of the "well-to-do" for their comfort, security and bragging (pride) is all based upon something that is fading away (even while they live)



It is truly best to be aware of constant dependence on God, for all else is misdirected faith

Just think of how stable we would be against the trials just discussed and the temptations about to be discussed if we were content! Contentment cannot be tempted away from its recognized source

One of the ways we demonstrate a love of God is the trust we have toward Him in our trials, trusting (and so entrusting ourselves) to Him - note also Phil. 1:6-11 and 1 Thes. 5:23-24; Eph. 2:8-10

This is no crown of ranking over others (as if a point of pride through eternity), but one of reward

- d. The word for “fade away” is μαραίνω (only used in the NT here) and pictures a drying-up because of depleting resources - this, the wealthy believer “glories” in (versus the boasting in the growing or maintaining of their “more than enough” supply)
- e. It is always a good thing for those in Christ to lessen their grasp on the things of this life while tightening it on the “things” of the next

3. Truly and firmly contented are those that endure trials - vs. 12

- a. The first word of this sentence (blessed) is “Μακάριος” and is the adjective form of the same word Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount (the “Beatitudes”) - it describes one that is contented to the core because they possess all they could ever hope for, for their being completely, constantly satisfied (fulfilled)
- b. This DOES NOT describe anyone who is or has been under a trial, but only one who has endured it to its end (or is enduring it), for those that yield to defeat in it (yielding to despair, faithlessness, anger, bitterness, defeatism, etc.) do not benefit from its completing/maturing work - trials such as these test our love and loyalty as well as faith
- c. For having been “approved” (found to be genuine in faith) he knows he will receive the victor’s crown (στέφανος) which has been promised to those that love Him - it needs to be noted that core to the motivation to endure in faith (trust) is the love of the Lord
- d. This ties back to verse 2 in answering “why” we should count it pure joy, because we know where it is heading, how it will end (the crown of life), in eternity - and in the meantime, we get the thrill of being “approved” (proven to be genuine, the “genuine article”)
- e. This “crown of life,” this crown of victory is one of “life” (true life, eternal life/living to its fullest, which is what all of these are “crowned” with)

II. Do not be Deceived by Temptation to Sin - 1:13-18

A. The origin of temptation to sin - there is only one source - vs. 13-14

1. Don’t let it be said that anyone is being tempted to sin/evil by God - vs.13

If there is ever a thought or conclusion that God forced us or influenced any to sin it must be dismissed as absolutely false - James tells us why

All the world may be cheering for our sin to blossom, and all circumstances pushing toward it, and even God seeming to be inattentive, yet blame for personal sin is always personal (only on self... always)

There will be attempts to “tempt God” as warned against in Mt. 4:7 and Deut. 6:16 but those are more along the lines of putting Him to the test (as in trying to force Him to prove Himself) on our terms

Read Mark 7:14-23 for a clear declaration of this fact by our Lord - defilement is already within each of us (naturally) and that is what defiles us on the outside as well

There is an inner captivating enticement to come and explore something that is inwardly desired- it is often seen as a harmless flirting

- a. The first usage of the word for trial/test (πειράζω) in this context is that of testing for genuineness, and that for true growth/maturity, producing embedded joy, while the second usage of this word (starting in verse 13) is as an enticement to sin/evil
- b. God never “tempts” anyone to sin - all His works and even allowances are for righteousness (one way or another, even if we cannot determine how) - for the believer, we can rest in the fact that all things do work together for the good, to those who love God (Rom. 8:28-29)
- c. First of all, God Himself cannot be tempted “with/by evil” - there is no inclination to evil/sin in Him whatsoever (not in the least) - all His works, thoughts, purposes are pure and right/holy - this needs clarification because of the inclination (from the beginning) to shift blame on Him (as Adam and Eve attempted (instinctively as a result of sin) to place blame on God... “the woman You gave me” and “the serpent” that God made) - Gen 3:1-14
- d. Blame of circumstances or “environment” (and even society) will not work either, for none of these can make anyone sin - it, sin (temptation to it) must be yielded to
- e. Since God is utter perfection, there is nothing in His character that would consider, in any way, tempting one to sin - He may “rouse” them to it (let them loose to fulfill their desires) as in Romans 1 where He gives them over to their desires, and in Romans 9 where Pharaoh was “hardened,” yet all of this was not forced on any of them - each was, to some degree held-back and then freed to be what they actually were to the fullest (sinners)

2. Temptation finds its strength and source from within ourselves - vs. 14

- a. The brutal truth of our sin, personal sinning, is that it is all in and of ourselves - not only can’t God be blamed, but no other (person or thing) can be blamed - it is sad to realize how many still trust the validity of their “blame shifting” and then add an extra “perimeter fence” of protection by no longer identifying sin as sin - sinners are encouraged by other sinners to find shelter in their being a victim
- b. The process is illustrated by James as being, first, each person being tempted (tested to prove slavery to sin) by their own desire/lust (ἐπιθυμία - passions, inner cravings and inclinations) - this process of temptation first “lures” (NASB has “carried away”) - “lure” is a better descriptive word since it was used of luring a fish with bait and visuals

Entrapment/enslavement is the end goal of this temptation and since it is from within, we are naturally cooperative participants

So rather than being a victim of the external influences to sin, we discover we are instigators, working with even the enemies from without to conquer any convicting and motivating work of God within us - the "conspiracy" ends up being us

- c. Then they are "enticed" (another hunting/fishing term) and so are trapped and ensnared - there is an attraction, leading to exploration, ending in entrapment (hooked) - these lusts then become the trap itself (prison, unhookable hook)
- d. This can be pictured as if there are internal counselors working to achieve an inner desire- the counselor of **feelings** begins to prod us for attention for some "needed relief" or fulfillment, followed closely by the advisor of **reason** (not considering that **feelings** has paid-off/bribed or blackmailed **reason** by its relentlessness and insistence) - the advisor of **reason** is then accompanied by the scholar of **memory**, vividly portraying past yieldings, only showing photos of the "good times" - with all such counsel, we play along (disregarding the Holy Spirit) and so the manager of **decision**, believing all needed research has been dutifully done, signs-off to action (sin)

There can even be a sense where the sin is inaction

B. The offspring of sin and its end - vs. 15

1. The next stage of the process of sin is described (temptation becomes action)

There are consequences to thoughts - it is dangerously naive to think that thoughts are essentially harmless - bad thoughts/thinking need to be dealt with swiftly and effectively (and thoroughly)

Compare to Psalm 7:14-16, Proverbs 7

"The child of lust is sin, of sin is death..." RWP - there is the stench of death always surrounding sin, but sin deadens the spiritual senses and even the mental sensibilities

- a. When "desire/lust is conceived" (when it is acted upon) it "gives birth to sin" - there are varying lusts and each gives birth to its own set of sins - it is as if a reproduction factory
- b. Lust excites the imagination and it settles into the thinking, thoughts surrender to it welcoming it rather than resisting it, and such activity impregnates the soul/will (as in a child being conceived in the womb), growing into a fully formed result/action (here it is "sin," the living out of the lust/desire) - the end goal is habitual action leading to a set character
- c. James isn't necessarily describing a process which is unstoppable, just the process itself if left to go its course - repentance is crucial at this stage, but is often thought to only be needed after active sin has been birthed - "When sin is born of the fleshly lust that is still lingering in the believer, the question still remains whether his faith, which is crushed down for the moment, will not again assert itself and rid itself of the deadly hold of sin by true repentance... Sin is brought to completion when repentance is blocked." Lenski
- d. The wording and word picture here is direct - lust, when conceived gives birth to sin, and sin, when fully grown bears death (as in when it is ready to reproduce) brings forth (has as its offspring) death - this is the general word for "death" (θάνατος) used to describe physical and spiritual death, which at its core meaning is a separation (the soul from the body, loss of life (livingness, productivity, activity)) - sin (conceived and birthed by lust/illicit, wrong desires) can only give birth to death in all its forms and effects
- e. We have all around us, throughout our lives, the physical reminders of this process already in place - there is sickness, disease, turmoil (physical and mental), fear, dread and hopelessness all stemming from desires that were contradictory to/of God, and were so proven "to be" by defiance of Him, His Word and His character

2. "Full-grown" (matured) sin dictates the life, consumes its resources till death

"James therefore gives the story of three generations; the grandmother is lust, the mother is sin, and the daughter is death." Hiebert

- a. The sin, fully completing its life drive/purpose (from the verb "ἀποτελέω" meaning to completely bring something to an end), gives birth to death, having slowly devoured its producer (its parent)
- b. It is crucial that lust and sin be seen for what they have to offer - rather to endure the maturing (completing, fulfilling) trials from God than to foster lust, cultivating it till it conceives action/inaction (sin) which, left to grow and dominate brings forth death of all sorts

C. All/every truly good "gifts" are from the Father above (He being above all/everything) - vs. 16-18

1. Don't be deceived (don't allow yourself to be led astray to wonder aimlessly) - vs. 16

Don't be led into any thinking that portrays/represents God as leading or pushing anyone into what is less than best - such leading will always be wrong and will always have an evil source - note Paul's personification of sin as such in Rom. 7:7-14

- a. This verse is transitional and can apply to what has come before and what follows - something in the sense of "Do not be tricked into falling for the lures and entrapments of lusts, instead keep on course, realizing that anything good that is to be had will come from above, from God and not from anything below, (the "below" being dominated/directed by "lusts" (passions, feelings, senses(sensuality)))
- b. Note also that such an emphatic point is made with deepest of affection in James' address to them as "beloved brothers" (for this is a desire for the best for them)
- c. Note that there is a clearly implied aspect of this statement that we are responsible for the avoidance of misdirection and avoiding any notion to follow after it - it must first be identified for what it is (misdirection and not "a good/novel idea!")

see Col. 2:1-10; Heb. 3:12-13

Lust/sin always takes as a result of what it seems to give, while God is the only source of pure, unadulterated, unending gifts/giving

It is often seen that we become more focused on the gift more than the giver - even the timing and order of His giving is perfect

There will be many sources of apparent "good" and promises of fulfillment in life but none will remain consistent and will always (even at their best) have the likelihood of some change (either in character, or opportunity)

Notice the contradicting "parents" - one bears forth sin to death and God, by means of His word (of truth) brings us (set for the crown of life) forth. It would seem like the preference would be clear except for the deceitfulness of lust/sin

This seems plausible because of the use of "κτίσμα" being "creatures" used of the physical creation

- d. Do not be deceived into thinking that God is ever a part of luring anyone into sin - do not also (likely the main point James is driving at) be deceived into thinking that anything truly "good" and anything that is complete (nothing lacking) comes from anywhere or anyone but God
- e. Sin gets an "in" when it is believed to offer what is "good" and "perfect" (fulfillment) - this is countered with the understanding/insight of where, what we really desire, comes from

2. The completely, totally reliable goodness of God's generosity - vs. 17

- a. In contrast to the lures of lust to sin, James contrasts them to God and what He offers categorically, consistently and completely (thoroughly) - Rom. 2:1-4
- b. Each (and so every/all) act of giving (the process of giving itself) is "good" (truly useful), and here it is good in its timing, its consistency, so it is not only good in its content, but in its delivery also (the precision and the flawless wisdom demonstrated in it)
- c. The giving of God is good and the gifts themselves are "perfect" (τέλειον) in that each is complete (nothing lacking) and so truly fulfilling (bringing contentment) - the process, the giving was first because there needs to be trust in the giver over the gifts themselves
- d. Such an understanding of where the truly "best" things come from is important in dealing with the grip of the lust mentioned in verses 14-15 - contentment is the great defender against and over-thruster of lust, and contentment is founded upon a proper understanding driven more by truth than desire - lust always settles while patient trust is fulfilled
- e. These gifts from God are not only good and perfect, but consistent and reliable for they come from, as James puts it, the "Father of lights" (the heavenly lights of the sky), yet He is better than even they, for He never casts a shadow of changing
- f. With God, as contrasted to the lights of the sky and all other sources one might look to for goodness and grace, there is never any "variation" (or hint of it) or "shifting shadow" (a shadow cast because of a change in position) - all the "omni's" of God deny any possible change
- g. Such gifts are always coming down to us (present tense, ongoing)

3. We are His by His will to live as His - vs. 18

- a. "Having willed it, He brought us forth" - this is in direct contrast to sin (being full grown bringing forth death (which is the end of the process of lust)) - He (God), of His own will (His choosing), birthed us - this, the truest and best of gifts, and is the foundational proof of all that comes from Him being good/best
- b. This occurred (practically) "by the word of truth" (the word that is truth) in contrast to the "birthing processes" of sin that are deceptive, offering gifts that quickly fade and become a burden and disappointment to its possessors
- c. All of this was for a purpose (again in contrast to the disappointing, shallow results of sin), this purpose being that we would be "a kind of first fruits" - "first fruits" described the first of any production, typically the best of it, that was set aside (consecrated) to God and that was the indication of more to come (more production/fruit)
- d. The Christians in James' time were the first of more to come, but taken generally (to all of us) this phrase can also be used to indicate we, as all believers, represent the hope that all creation has for deliverance from its futility - see Rom. 8:18-23

III. Prove Yourselves Doers of the Word - 1:19-27

A. Realize the significance and importance of our attitude (posture) toward God and His Word - vs. 19-20

1. "Know this" ("ἴστε" from "εἰδῶ" to see/perceive) has better/older textual support than "wherefore" (as seen in the KJV) - it is either "you know this" as an indicative, or "know this" as in an imperative

It is common to come at the Word in an intellectual, ritualistic, legalistic way failing to see its essential part in the "saving of our soul" not just in a future way, but in the present... ongoing

- a. Either way, there needs to be an understanding (realization) of what was said regarding the significance of the gift of God's Word in "birthing" us as well, then, its significance in how we will grow because of it in knowledge and character (it is expected)
- b. The way His Word is seen and approached is key in multiple ways, which is core to the setting up of this next section - James presents this in a heart-felt manner as he references them again as his "beloved brothers" - affectionate speech is most sincere when it involves more than just pity or sympathy, but also carries with it positive encouragement to responsibility and proper perception of how things really are (versus just how they "feel")

2. Hurried, urgent listening “disciplines” along with controlled, tempered speaking and anger - vs. 19

Many will give lip service to their honoring of God and His Word, but will act out the opposite - listening is essential (which most know) but will then fail to pay true attention or give proper patience in “hearing it out” (stopping short of actual learning)

Being swift to speech here indicates either an over confident, resistant or lazy approach to God and His Word

We need to realize the natural opposition of our pride and see that it does not have our best interests at heart - this is especially true when in trials/temptations where self-reliance is not reliable

- a. These commands (swift to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger) are good and general instructions for every day life - but James’ usage of these is more than just proverbial
- b. “Quick to hear” - swift/fast to listen which is put first to keep the next two “in check” - this will be necessary to implement the “receiving the implanted word” of verse 21
- c. This leads to the controlled tongue (which begins with a controlled, disciplined (to listen and learn) ear) - “slow to speak” (“βραδύς” - unhurried, and so here taking time to think it through) - this is again mainly (because of the context before and following) to the Word
- d. Be tamed (reigned-in) in responding to Scripture - this assumes some prep work as pictured in the word “tamed” - this is a self-imposed discipline pursuit, realizing the need, for if we talk/respond too soon (typically out of a reaction) we are likely to miss something (not a thorough hearing) - as in “answer a matter before hearing it” - Pr. 18:13
- e. If we are swift to speak and slow to listen we will be swift to anger (ὀργή - inner wrath/bitterness and so “settled” anger”) - it is preset and ready to “pounce” (react)) - to be angry at God and His Word is deadly and dangerous - such a posturing will be a profound obstacle to any receptivity to the Word - note Pr. 16:32
- f. These admonitions presuppose an inclination in us to be apprehensive toward Scripture (the truth) and that there needs to be some preparation to ready ourselves (in meekness) to receive the Word - being a self-authority will detract from this - note that this is all related (and setting up) some of what will be discussed in chapter 3 (the control of the tongue) which is introduced in the warning to not be “many” seeking to be teachers

3. The “anger of man” (resentment, bitter dislike bubbling over into emotions) is not capable of producing the righteous results/works of God - vs. 20

Such a fostered, cultivated response against God and truth (reality) can be easily seen as being something that stifles righteousness and its development in our lives

- a. This is still dealing with personal anger, and so its opposition to the production of what is right (what ought to be done) as far as God is concerned (He being the definer of such)
- b. This is the opposite of the “meekness” of verse 21 - we often apply this verse to the anger of others or even our anger at others or circumstances, but the main focus is anger (in varying forms) against God which will cause resistance and resentment toward Him
- c. There is, of course, the understanding that the anger of a person (of themselves, for themselves) cannot lend to the producing of righteousness - God is not lessened in His righteousness by our anger, but our part in its promotion is

B. Prerequisites to receiving the “implanted word” - vs. 21 (what to be rid of and an attitude to maintain)

1. The Word of God is far more than what is superficially studied/learned

As in the Parable of the Sower, there will be many that receive the word, but because of various competitors to it, it is choked out or it does not take root and will not withstand the contradictions of a faithless world - Luke 8:4-15

- a. As revealed in verse 18, anyone who is truly in Christ is so because they are born (regenerated) by His work, by His Word (the truth and faith in it/of it) - but it does not stop there, seeing that this Word is, in a sense, the germination of life which will by its nature/design continue to grow within
- b. It might seem a simple and obvious point, but it is to be received - this is emphasized here because there is a natural tendency to refuse or disregard it, not necessarily in its informative content, but in its demanded application/integration into the life

2. In truly receiving this Word there is to be a moral cleansing of self - this is a reasonable response to the saving work of Christ in us (if it is truly at work), so it is not describing a way to be “saved” but an expected response to this saving Word

A good majority of this epistle is focused on dealing with genuine salvation in contrast to professed but hypocritical “Christianity”

All such is to have been rejected and abandoned as an acceptable pursuit in life - so the expected result being a life focus (strategy) to avoid, reject and oppose with the intent to “make room” for the growth of God’s Word within

- a. To “put aside” is the objective (lay it aside, let it go, abandon it and so renounce it) - the tense of the verb is past, better to say “having put aside” (as should be expected) - it must never be assumed that one who is flaunting sin is in Christ
- b. “all filthiness” is first mentioned as something that is to have been relinquished - this does not describe “perfectionism” but does describe one’s life position (having renounced) such sin (this sin being “ῥυπαρία” a “moral filth” that builds as it is continually in contact with what is dirty) is a “build-up” of sin (likely particular sins that have become habits/character)
- c. So also the “overflow of wickedness” (“περισσεῖαν κακίας” as in the surrounding, excesses of evils) and looks to describe the infections and influences of surroundings full of sinful exploits and philosophies - as they “spill over” from society they are likely to influence (taint/infect) whatever it comes in contact with

compare to I Peter 1:22-2:3 where there is to be a putting away sin and a hungering for the "pure milk of the Word"

There is a humility in this process of not only the receiving, but in the realization of the need of it- because of this, there is no resistance to it

James mentions only the saving of the soul here (without reference to the body) - in light of the context it would be more in reference to saving a life from the destructive influences of sin in the life of a believer - which fits well with the emphasis on doing versus just hearing

Many believers (as was true in the first century) are susceptible to presuming upon the grace of God, as though they are now untouchable from the results of their own sin (practically and as regards their soul) - note 1:8 again

d. This "excess of evil" also references the inner "remnants of the old man" that still seek to influence and dominate our lives - such battles are expected to be life-long (as in the "left-overs" of the sin nature that will need to be regularly put away and not cultivated, coddled or defended) - sins are seemingly little but are destroyers of the soul (life)

3. Having been obedient in the inner "house cleaning", there is to then be a readiness to receive with meekness the "word implanted" - it will never be enough to be those who focus only on cleansing out the bad while not filling in the "room" with the ingrown Word of God

a. How it is "received" is important, realizing what it will lead to (being "doers of the Word")

b. The "meekness" description is put before the receiving in Greek, stressing the humble, unassuming, moldable, teachable spirit with which it is welcomed - the opposite would be a self-defensive attitude, lazy and unmotivated because of pride or irritable anger

c. This "word" is "implanted" (as in it has already been implanted and now is to be used) - it is at salvation/regeneration this is integrated into us (as prophesied by Jeremiah regarding the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)), and we know now, it is by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit

d. This "putting away" the residue of sin and humbly submitting to the Word is of utmost importance since it is "able to save your souls" - this "saving of the soul" is multifaceted in its reference to the complete salvation (as in Rom. 1:16), yet taken in light of the Word as (assumed) already being implanted, it seems reasonable to see this as the practical "saving" (rescuing) of the life from the results and effects of sin (even on the believer) - he's addressing believers and not "potential" believers

e. We realize also that the saving affect as regards full salvation (body, soul, spirit (I Thes. 5:23-24)) is completely efficacious as God's work, but there is the remaining need to utilize it this side of eternity ("working it out" (Php. 2:12-13)) and if not done, there will be the destructive results of sin on/in the life of the Christian (which is the crux of James' point) - this explains James' use of "is able" (as in its potential), for the only alternative would be interpreting eternal salvation as being dependent, to some degree on our cooperation (and if this is the case, it stirs the centuries old questions of how much cooperation, how much/many sins, etc. till one is "saved")

C. Prove yourselves to be doers and not the self-deceived "hearers only" - vs. 22-27

1. True, active reception of God's Word results in action (obedience) - vs. 22

This was a common problem in the first century and we can expect it to be so now- there is a self-deceiving contentment that excuses self from duty because it has heard/listened (just not acted on it)-see Mt. 7:21, 24-29, Rom. 2:12-16

This they do to themselves even while hearing the Word - there is an absence of a meek reception of it

a. Avoid self-deception - it is interesting to consider the idea of one deceiving themselves since a deceiver is usually out to trick another person for the deceiver's own gain (or amusement) - but there is, without doubt, the reality of those who deceive themselves (they play along with a train of thought to gain some perceived advantage or excuse (from responsibility))

b. James emphasizes to the beloved brothers the urgency of being a "doer of the word" (here the word is "ποιηταί" as in performing, acting it out, and here also the tense "be being/ becoming doers" (as an actor acting out the given script rather than just reading it)

c. It is apparently easy to become self deluded when thinking (here it is "παρολογίζομαι" describing an intellectual reasoning and so concluding) that hearing (and likely knowing) the Word is enough - as still happens today, it is sadly common to see many who read, study and hear the Word yet it does not lead to action (obedience, active repentance)

2. "Hearers yet non-doers" are compared to inactive, unresponsive mirror-gazers - vs. 23-24

a. Both the examples about to be described are hearing the Word, but this first one is compared to someone looking at his own face in a mirror while the second (vs. 25) looks into the "perfect law of liberty" (this is the first difference)

b. In this first illustration, the Word would be (could be) compared to the mirror, showing the man what he looks like, yet even though he would see something that needs to be addressed he does not act on it and, being unmoved by what he sees, so he moves on to something else and forgets what he was shown to truly be

c. Compare this with God's warning and rebuke in with Israel in Eze. 33:27-33 - there was an apparent interest in hearing the prophet, only it was to satisfy some covetous purpose and no intent in actually doing (responding) to what God was telling them

d. There is no determination to respond in loyal, consistent obedience to the Word at the start, so the hearing will be half-hearted with no provision to remember/implement

In this case, inaction is the oddity, for why not deal with whatever was shown in his reflection ("what kind of person he was") rather than stop looking, moving on and forgetting (and we forget the consequences of forgetting what we have forgotten)

3. "Hearers who do" are compared to "intent lookers" into the "perfect law" and who prove themselves to then be "effectual doers, blessed in his doing" - vs. 25

- a. The intent looker (παράκλπτω, stooping down for a closer look) - both men in this illustration look intently, though this one is more taken with the standard (perfect law of liberty), so much so he "abides in it" (he continues in it, and so does not move on to other things)
- b. His focus is on the "law" (which here is synonymous with the Word, for the traditional use of "law" was in reference to the Torah, which was more than just Law, but its practice)
- c. It is the "perfect law" because it is without error or flaw, and is complete (thorough) - it is "the law of liberty" because it is the means (positionally and practically) to true freedom - yet how can "law" be freedom? It frees from the true enslaver of sin (as in "thou shalt not covet" ultimately free from the slavery of greed and binding/controlling discontent)
- d. The first man looked but did not see past his "natural face" into his heart and character, while this next man looks even at the Law, continues and acts on it (versus forgetting) and because of this is "blessed" in his action of obedience
- e. To be "blessed" (μακάριος) pictures not just a form of success, but more so fulfillment/contentment because he says it within this cycle (looking, persevering, doing) - note Psalm 19:7-14 raves about the Law and God, while praying to be kept back from "presumptuous sins" (ultimately sins continued because of unwarranted self-confidence) and that they not "have dominion" over him (enslaving him)

Note one of the key differences between these two - the first looks a while and then moves on: this man continues to look - the persevering in it is the difference

One of the reasons to continue in the hearing/looking intently is to ward off forgetfulness - forgetfulness is more than just losing the memory but also losing the sense of urgency

4. "True religion" (true faith) acts (in what it does and even in what it restrains) - vs. 26-27

- a. What is "religion" here in verse 26? The Greek word "θρησκός" pictures more a worshiping, being devout (dedicated) in one's faith - here, James describes someone putting on the appearance of piety, thinking themselves to be so and expecting to be recognized as such - they are focused on the religious-looking externals/practices/rituals
- b. This person's "religion" is worthless (unreal and so profitless) if he does not "bridle" his tongue - this is a main point of James (in chapter 3) where he deals with the bridling (rightly harnessing) the tongue (speech/communication) because it can inflict much pain and damage ("... set on fire by hell") - with this in mind, the issue of the tongue is its potential, evil/destructive influence
- c. It is worth considering why, of all sins/vices that James could point out, James focuses on the tongue - to bridle something is to reign it in, control it - just limiting this to a sense of holding back the tongue from "meanness" (unkind/destructive words) does not fit well in context with what James just dealt with (in being a learner/applier of the Word) as well as when he takes it up again in chapter 3 when dealing with "teachers"
- d. To control the tongue there needs to be inner self-control (as in James 3:2) where it is associated with controlling the whole "body" - an overall lack of self-control is often evidenced by an unbridled tongue (even in too much talking - read Pro. 10:17-22)
- e. The dreadful word in this verse is "ἀπατάω" translated "deceives" (deludes, even including the idea of cheating (so here, cheating self out of something... truth)) - they are confident and so still convincing themselves that they are religions (worshipful)
- f. Such "religion" (profession of faith) without self-control (it is professed but lacks evidenced of possession) is **worthless** (vain, empty, without force, so useless)
- g. "Pure and undefiled" religion is genuine in that it is clean (unadulterated) on the inside (of what it is actually made up of) and unstained (on the outside as to what can be seen/observed by others) and in this case, before the One that sees all... the Father - His view is most important for He sees past all masks
- h. So if it is genuine, it will result in at least two ways - it will be gracious in meeting the needs of the truly poor (in their affliction/tribulation) and will also keep itself unstained/unblemished from the influence of the world
- i. Genuine faith will be motivated to be actively compassionate when dealing with the poor around them - the word for "visit" is translated well since it carries far more than just a contribution to the needs of such, but involves actual "looking into the state of and well being of" those most destitute - "orphans" and "widows" were truly the most needy in society as they had no way of support other than the generosity of others

In light of this text and what is coming, it looks like James' focus on the tongue here is more than just saying mean things or "cursing" but also includes those who talk too much (and so do not listen) - such show they are self-deceived because they are not listeners/learners but talkers (or as in chapter 3, they boast)

It is a controlled tongue in all aspects (not just in holding back speech but in directing it correctly... saying what is true and what ought to be said and as it should be said - is us under constant direction being controlled)

More will be said of such a religion (as if faith) in chapter 2 - these lacking in control of their tongue are hearers but not doers

Mutual excusing amongst hypocrites while also validating each other's masks/facades will often prove to be common but is without any use when seen before the all seeing eyes of the Father

Widows and orphans had no power to support themselves and had the most legitimate need in their society - true religion gets personally involved with them

IV. Live As Those Who Will Be Judged By The Law of Liberty - 2:1-13

A. The sin of partiality (being “judges with evil thoughts”) - 2:1-11

1. There is a reason (about to be explained) why “partiality” is a sin - it is common and considered normal in humanity, and though it is frowned upon by some, most seem to accept it as an expected way of life - but for the Christian this must not be so - vs. 1

At the core of such favoritism lies some sort of selfish motive (where the interest is in how one will treat them or think of them and then the other in caring less what the poorer would think of them)

Partiality is clearly, immediately distinguished as absolutely incompatible with the Lord and His glory while favoritism is motivated by some type of “glory of man”

This wealthy man may or may not have been proud, but the response to him and the affects of these externals is the topic

Note Rom. 2:11, Mt. 22:16, Gal. 2:4-6, I Pet. 1:14-19

It was likely a place others would recognize as a place of honor (or possibly more comfortable because it was off the ground)

The true value in a person is their soul (eternal soul) and that is to be the priority focus, and certainly not the temporal traits that those living for the temporal admire

What they were doing and allowing was far worse than they realized

This is in harmony with I Cor. 1:26-31 - “boasting” (glorying) inside and out is to be directed to God’s glory

The aspect of being “rich in faith” isn’t indicating they were chosen of God because of their faith, but more so that because, in their being truly poor and God’s preference for them, as such will end in richer faith

- a. The word for “partiality” is προσωποληψία which describes the receiving of someone based upon their externals (what can be observed) and was typically describing the preference given to those in power or with substantial wealth
- b. The way James begins this new section is key in how he not only references the impact that their faith in Christ should have, but that it is a faith also in the glory (associated, and in Christ) - His glory should easily outmatch all others with ease - yet here, there were those (and it looks to have been a common practice (expected)) showing commonly accepted favoritism
- c. To “hold your faith” is along the lines of having a “connection with” as in James commanding them (imperative) not to allow any association of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ to be tainted with any partiality

2. The scenario - a rich man and poor man enter the assembly - vs. 2-4

- a. The wealthy man enters their gathering (literally here, their “synagogue”), he is identified as such by his “gold ring” which was a sign of significant wealth (and could possibly be translated “gold-fingered” indicating multiple rings of gold) - he is also identified as rich by his “fine clothes” (likely extravagant in comparison to “average” and “poor” styles)
- b. A poor man then enters and he is quickly identified by his “dirty clothes” (he’s unkempt either by being monetarily poor or possibly poor in his mental, societal and practical characteristics) - he is one the world would typically have an instinctive bias against
- c. It is key to realize that at the heart of partiality like this, is the instinctive motivation to treat others based upon what we can estimate they might be able to do for us
- d. The key is in verse 3 with the phrase “pay special attention” (ἐπιβλέπω picturing a fixed gaze/focus, catching the eye and so the attention) - this priority attention is placed on the one with the “splendid” clothing - special seating is arranged for the rich man
- e. The poor man is also dealt with and given two options, either to “stand here” or if there was a desire to sit, to “sit at my footstool” (as in next to the footstool and so on the floor) - it may have been that many sat on the floor and some had seats, so James is using this scenario to demonstrate why one is given preferential treatment over the other - such a decision demonstrates the character
- f. The issue now is clearly stated in the form of a question - in making such distinctions (based on the outward, typical, worldly-prioritized standards), they have done so by means of “evil thoughts” (διαλογισμός - reasonings and calculations that are πονηρῶν (wicked)) - as evil judges, they acted on their conclusions (our reasonings dictate our actions)

3. Doing well versus being transgressors of the “royal law” - vs. 5-11

- a. This being a crucial point, James tells them (imperative) to listen (pay attention, not allowing the distraction from a lazy focus) and again addressing them as “brothers who are loved” (so this is not like a boss barking out instructions but more an earnest plea to listen and heed) - true love is often evidenced in fervent instruction
- b. God’s choice of who/what He has (as His own) and those He uses, are those the world would typically look on as “poor” (πτωχούς - destitute, very poor) yet with the purpose (while in the world) to be “rich in faith,” and as such because they are and will be “heirs of the kingdom” - normally this term is used of those physically and monetarily poor, but there are other ways to be poor (even as a rich man, in Christ, is to glory in his “humiliation” (made low) (1:10))
- c. Those “poor” are more likely to be richer in faith because of their needed dependence on God - clearly this does not mean all poor people are “chosen” of God (for many are just as greedy as the rest of the world and direct their “great faith” to the wrong sources)
- d. So those who are to be characterized as living by faith, and those who actually are heirs of the kingdom ought never to be treated as of lesser worth than anyone that might happen to be admired/respected/revered by this age
- e. This coming kingdom is promised (guaranteed) to “those who love Him”

One popular response to the poor is to donate to them but there is apprehension to have them as a part of "us"

There are whole church structures built around social structures defined and prioritized by the world and not by the Lord

Even though the common character of such people is seen to be harsh and cruel, they still had enough of the world's ideology and values that they would fall over themselves to show special treatment to the rich

As an example, many Christians highly respect and admire movie stars who openly blaspheme God/Christ- they would be unable to hide their preference if one of them would walk into their church

The answer to such social sins is not to attempt to "even the scales" but to focus on treating all equally - we will never make-up for past wrongs by wronging the originating wrong-doers

The way this is worded makes it clear that partiality is no trivial matter - since it's demonstrated to be a fundamental breaking of God's Law as well as defying Christlikeness, steps must be taken to avoid it and remove it

In matters like partiality it is easy to excuse it (allow it) as just a matter of choice or decorum, but it is not to be excused as allowable and is to be identified as being the evilness of heart that it actually is

Any form of a works based salvation or a works secured/maintained salvation is impossible - only Christ's perfect work on our behalf will meet the demands of our Holy God

- f. Many that claim to love the Lord end up proving they love this world and love its loves more than the Lord (and this could be what this partiality is demonstrating) - again, many poor in this world still love the world rather than Christ, thus this qualifier of loving the Lord
- g. In contrast to these truths (what it really means to be in Christ and a Christian), those James was addressing were living-out the opposite (as though it wasn't the truth) and they did this in their dishonoring (treat as without value) the poor man
- h. Cliques come to exist in churches because these truths are ignored or only given lip-service and so there are "class" divisions in local assemblies of Christians, and such a thought should seem dreadful and not accepted as though it's "just the way things are"
- i. James goes on to clarify the contradictory priorities reflected in such favoritism to someone just because they are wealthy - for instance, they apparently had been experiencing the mistreatment of the rich who "oppress" ("lord it over") them
- j. These particular "rich" were taking them to court (so forcefully, James uses the word "drag")- they were persecuting Christians and treating them with contempt, and yet these of this church were inclined to still seek their approval /acceptance - it still is also not uncommon for many to use the judicial system to persecute and attempt to drive away/remove Christians- this was something Paul forbade Christians to do to each other - I Cor. 6:1-8
- k. These same people that they were showing preference to, based upon their wealth/standing, were the same known to "blaspheme the honorable name by the which ye are called" - could they not see the blatant inconsistency in their actions and source of their motives?- this does not mean that there wouldn't ever be an attempt to see these "rich" converted, but it will not happen if they are shown favoritism because of their wealth and influence (because such a partiality is sin (see verse 9)) - they need to see their need also... first!
- l. This behavior (James points out) was the opposite of what their faith stressed (they belittled the poor and honored/preferred those that dishonor Christ) - also, to dishonor the poor that are in Christ is to dishonor their Lord (for He loves them) - see Pr. 17:5
- m. So, would the opposite then be right? Should they then mistreat the rich and honor the poor over them? This is answered in James' reference to the "royal law" that each is to treat others (love others) as they love themselves - to "love your neighbor as yourself" is to give them the treatment/respect/graciousness you would hope to have for yourself from others
- n. Why is it called the "royal law" (Lev. 19:18) - it is "royal" in that it is in a sense "rules over" all the other laws (that deal with our treatment and interactions with other people) - see Gal. 5:13-15 and Mt. 22:34-40
- o. But no one can both love as the "royal law" demands and show partiality at the same time- so if there is partiality (and each must discern their own motive) within their heart, they are sinning and the law "convicts" them (finds them guilty) as those who are "transgressors" (literally those who deliberately step out of bounds)
- p. James then demonstrates how true righteousness is measured - it IS NOT a greater majority of righteous deeds over against bad deeds, but is a focus on the respect of the entire law of God (as the ideal standard of Godliness and righteousness), so if one was (theoretically) keeping all the law and yet fails in just one point, that singular failure convicts them of breaking the entire Law - vs. 10
- q. In case it isn't a clear enough point (ranking sins one above another so as to excuse/justify "lower-ranked" sins), James demonstrates the reality (that ought to be obvious) that if one doesn't commit adultery but murders, they are still considered a "transgressor of the law"
- r. This is a common workaround attempted by humanity in general - there is a magnifying of sins that are commonly agreed upon as being particularly evil, and then downplaying other sins that are known to be commonly practiced (mutually excused sins)
- s. It must be stressed (in light of verse 10) that the standard of true righteousness cannot be obtained/reached by human effort, for we all will fail in some point(s) - this, judicially condemns us before God and His Law (which was/is its purpose in leading us to Christ), so the only way to hope for resolution is through Christ
- t. Yet this truth must not be used to excuse our sin as though it is inevitable - for though we are not saved by keeping the Law, the moral law of God should still be obeyed

For some might be able to think that at least they showed “love” for the wealthy man which should excuse their unloving attitude toward the poor

Some in the day of James placed such a strong emphasis on the keeping of the ceremonial law that they believed it freed them up to fail in other areas

Note how James uses adultery and murder in the same sense of sin as partiality (as a “sin” often not looked on as being very serious)

We are not to look on the time we have here, under the sun, as if it is just a time to “wait it out” till the Lord returns or we go to Him—we are still here to use the freedom to live and speak as we ought as those redeemed by the work of Christ

For many words and actions, even though rooted in sin, will appear as being “good” until properly judged by God for not only its actual content, but its actual motive

So it is the “now” that we speak and act as those about to be held accountable for the words and deeds we are about to do

Because of the issue about to be addressed next (pseudo faith), James must deal with the fact that some will face an unexpected negative judgment

The account in Matthew 25 demonstrates, not that any one of us will be saved by works, but that “works” will evidence whether to not we were truly in Christ - there, and in our context, these works are shown to “brothers” and “the least of these My brethren”

- u. It is not too uncommon to find the line of thinking that gives itself “allowances” to sin, certain sins, because other “laws” are kept/followed meticulously - yet if one law is “stumbled” in, the guilt is still upon him in sinning - there is no truth in a type of indulgence that excuses (or pays for) sin because of other good deeds - note Gal. 5:16-26
- v. Others might be tempted to react to this truth as though it is useless to even try since one offense still brings full guilt (before God and His Law) - yet, to think on this correctly would be to realize that, rather than taking away incentive to obey all God’s laws, it stresses the importance of each - some laws are put over others as the focused points of practice and “lesser” offenses are then disregarded; this ought not be
- w. The focus of verse 11 is “He who said” and not necessarily the two laws referenced - it was the same One (God) that both said not to commit adultery and not to murder - to put one above another, at the expense of either, is to demean the Law Giver, and this is the issue with the disregard of any of God’s laws/commands
- x. So if one murders but has not been adulterous, they are still an actual “transgressor of the law” - it “honors” God in some obedience and yet to still permit some dishonoring disobedience categorizes such a person as dishonorable altogether

B. Speak and act as those to be judged (accountable for both speech and action) - vs. 12-13

1. Living in light of our accountability (in the use of our freedom from sin) - vs. 12

- a. It is true, that for those in Christ, there will be no condemning judgment for sin, for it (the condemnation) was taken on Himself by the Lord Jesus Christ, but there is another judgment (accounting of what was done with what was given) - II Cor. 5:10, Rom. 14:10-12
- b. Would any of us assume that having been given so much (liberation from sin, its condemnation and its dictatorial rule) that there would be no answerability for how and if it was used throughout the time God gave us here in this world?
- c. As first referenced in 1:25, James again refers to the Law of God as the “Law of Liberty” which many commentators will identify as just another way of referencing the Gospel - this is fundamentally true, but by referencing it in conjunction with “law” it demonstrates the true purpose of the Law as that as freeing from the bondage and dominate rule of sin
- d. Sin, because it controls the heart/mind/ will/emotions (and so the overall perspective and perception of a person) directly dictates the speech and actions of a person (and their source in the motives of the heart)
- e. So, speak and act as those who clearly realize their speech and actions will be “judged” in light of the comprehensive liberty they have been given from sin - the word “judged” (κρίνεσθαι) is from the root of “κρίνω” which simply means to distinguish/separate - this judgment, considering this context, is that of distinguishing speech and works as utilized properly/responsibly in light of the freedom that was given in Christ

2. “Mercy triumphs over judgment” - vs. 13

- a. Still playing off of the example of partiality, James deals with the expected practice of “mercy” in one expecting to face judgment under the “Law of Liberty” - “mercy” is more than just not giving someone what they deserve, but it is also, at its core (ἐλεος) pity and compassion for the hardships of another
- b. It is a truth that one who has not been a mercy-shower (not compassionate, gracious to those seen as undeserving) will face a judgment that will not show them mercy - to show compassion on the needs of others, genuine compassion, is characteristic of one in Christ
- c. The Lord lays it out clearly in a court setting that examines the evidence of what someone actually is (over an above what they profess to be) in Mat. 25:31-46
- d. With the use of the phrase, “Mercy triumphs over judgment” (lit. “mercy/kindness, boasts/glories over judgment (here, condemning judgment)) and from our perspective, describes the glorious use of mercy shown to someone not deserving it rather than “writing them off”
- e. Some might try to use this verse to make a case that “justice” can be simply ignored if mercy is shown - from God’s perspective, His application of mercy has the demands of justice already met in Christ, and such mercy is then righteously applied (see Rom. 3:21-31)
- f. From our perspective, to show true mercy (kindness) to the undeserving makes sense, seeing we ourselves have received the mercy of God on/for us - active mercy is key here versus lip-service mercy



V. Faith Without Works Is Dead - 2:14-26

A. A claim to faith versus proven faith (by “works”) - vs. 14-17

1. Professed faith that is not saving faith - what use/profit is it (to the one professing it)? - vs. 14

James is not dealing with “meritorious works” - he deals with working from something not for something

Saving faith actually trusts the works of Christ for their salvation and any other “faith” is not true faith, yet true faith cannot help but result in works/fruits (evidences of its existence)

Many equate knowing the faith, knowing of the faith and about the faith as in actually possessing the faith - many know it but, ironically, do not trust it enough to live in light of it, be changed by it, controlled by it

- a. There has been much debate and concern over how James comes at the argument he is about to make - does he teach a justification by works in contrast to what Paul teaches in Romans? The answer is a definite “no,” for both defend the Gospel against attacks, from two different fronts; Paul fighting against working for salvation and James fighting for works from salvation
- b. It is very important, in avoiding any misinterpretation in this text, to understanding how James introduces his topic - he deals with the claim to faith in “πίστιν λέγει τις ἔχειν” (faith says anyone to have), so when referring to “that faith” this is what he is describing - clearly there are levels of differing types of “faith,” but they are insufficient to the saving of the soul
- c. So, James asks, what profit/use is it if someone (amongst “my brothers”) says they have faith (and here it would be in reference to “the faith”) and yet there are no resulting works from it in keeping with all that the faith teaches, commands and represents
- d. “James states with utmost plainness what sort of a faith this is that fails to produce the fruits of faith. It may be some sort of a faith, *fides generalis*, as the dogmatists say, faith that believes in God and in Christianity in a general way; *fides historica*, a faith that knows the outward facts of the gospel history and would not deny them; a *fides dogmatica*, one that is posted regarding doctrines and is perhaps keen to argue about them like the faith of some scientific theologians. It cannot be more than a mere *notitia* and *assensus*, a matter that was in the head, that dried up there and did not enter and vivify the heart.” Lenski

2. For instance - a basic scenario of what true faith would not do - vs. 15-16

Core to genuine faith is action in meeting needs versus just spotting them, defining them and prescribing a solution - many professing believers will express (even emotionally) their awareness of needs, but do not see themselves responsible to act on them

- a. James demonstrates his point with a situation of coming upon (discovering) a “brother or sister” in desperate need - this is not a push for general care of the poor and needy, but is here focused on those in the Church, fellow believers that are destitute
- b. The setting is one of happening upon a fellow Christian poorly clothed (“ill-clad” as some have it) and without enough food for the day, that day - and if in meeting such a person the one claiming to have faith (saving faith) just greets them (in a friendly way) showing concern and recognition of their need (wishing them to be clothed/warmed and filled/fed), yet they do nothing to actually meet the need

3. Such a “faith” stands all by itself, having no witness, no proof of its validity - vs. 17

Fervent and consistent defense and declarations of the details of the faith are of no value to the person themselves if they do not produce activity/action

The doing is key to the message of Jesus in Mat. 7:21-27 - there have been and will be many proclaimers of the faith but few that apply it (being too infatuated with just the learning or in trying-out the latest popular self-help resource)

- a. If there are no actual works (ἔργα - deeds, actions, tasks), “the faith” (here there is the presence of the proper article) is dead (in the life of this person)
- b. “The people who least live their creeds are not seldom the people who shout loudest about them. The paralysis which affects the arms does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue.” Alexander Maclaren
- c. The proclamations and conclusions of needs may prove to be beneficial to others, but to the one hearing/knowing (but not doing), they are profitless - for there is nothing wrong with the faith, but to the would-be possessor (self-deluded) it will not save them - it is astonishing to consider the possibility of those proclaiming the truth being used to spread the Gospel (by various means), but they not being saved themselves
- d. James uses the words “ἔστιν καθ’ ἑαυτήν” (is by itself) at the end of the sentence, demonstrating the issue of a professed faith standing alone without witnesses (“works”)

B. Do you really want to be shown the uselessness of such a “faith”? - vs. 18-20

1. This is a fair question to ask (in verse 20), so a basic test/challenge is put forward in a scenario - vs. 18

- a. “Someone” (a made-up person) asks for proof of faith (proof of life as it were) - one person has professed faith (they verify openly that they have this faith) and the other has “works” (along with their professed faith) - one is asked to show faith without works while the other is challenged to show (prove) their faith by their works
- b. The “I” would likely be James offering to “show” (exhibit, demonstrate to the eyes) his faith - the point is intended to be simple and obvious; there is no way the other can “show” their faith without some actual results of it (works/fruit) - this may seem absurd, but it is common to have those identifying with “the faith” but there would not be evidence of it actually existing in them if left to outward evidence

It is, though, plausible to imagine many believing their profession of the faith and its details should equate to proving they actually have it as their faith (their “belief” (trust)) - but just knowing is no better than demons



see Heb. 6:1-2 - repentance from “dead works” is also needed in a true believer

Distortions of the Truth will always seek to separate true faith from true works, replaced with professed faith alone or dead works alone

This is the type of faith that James must deal with - one that knows what to say and mentally assents to, but it does not rule their heart, it is not the driving focus/purpose of their life

This is a sad and startling reality that the demons are more consistent in believing and fearing than many professing “believers”

The use of the word “Θέλεις” (from “θέλω” meaning to wish for, desire, intend)) demonstrates what is at the core of this challenge; the will - is the will surrendered to obedience to the Lord, or the defense of pride and self-comfort and validation?

This is the same as those who are professors of the faith but who are not possessors (putting forward what they do not actually possess)

Compare this to I Peter 1:3-9 where in verse 7 we see the “proof” (tested genuineness) of “your faith” proven in their endurance (works within) the fire/trials

Would we, could we imagine a scenario where one genuinely believes (has faith) and yet there are no corresponding results (works)? Note also that these “works” are not defined by popular acceptance as such, but by God in His Word

- c. Considering this scenario (proving actual faith) will also involve the scrutiny and determination of what actual “faith works” really are - this idea is dealt with in texts such as II Tim. 2:20-22; Eph. 4:1-6; Col. 1:9-14; I Thes. 2:11-13
- d. It should be noted that there is another take on verse 18 - that James is being challenged by one claiming that you can have faith and another just works, and that the objector is countering James’ point, consoling the one that has a professed faith (even an orthodox one) but no works, and that the other can have just “works” (essentially placing faith and works as equal concepts, not that one must find its source in the other)

2. The sincere and emotional “orthodox” faith of demons... but one that does not save them - vs. 19

- a. These may say “God is one” (or “there is one God”) as would be expected of practicing Jews to do on a daily basis (as begun in Deut. 6:4, though vs. 6 and the reference to the “heart” can be overlooked and it become a rote routine only)
- b. To have truly orthodox beliefs (faith) based upon the Scripture is good (as James puts it, you “do well”) - but if it is not controlling your life, priorities and overall outlook on life, it is similar to the demons - they know/believe in God and know who He is, but it does not save them - James points out that they even “shudder” (picturing one shivering in fear)
- c. The demons are impacted by their “belief” (see Mt. 8:28-29) more so than people that profess and even proclaim the truth, but are not truly impacted by it (in a lasting way)
- d. It is interesting to realize that there are only “atheists” in this world and none in the spiritual realm - the devils believe in God and fearfully reverence the reality of it, so also there will be those who believe many of the truths (doctrines) of God and even experience fear of its reality, but they are not justified by it

3. Are you willing to be shown (come to know/realize) that faith without works is profitless? - vs. 20

- a. This is a prompting question - do you really want to be shown whether or not your “faith” is of no value (being inactive, unproductive)? It’s put this way because there are many (if not the majority) that would rather be left alone to believe whatever they want and however they want - James asks this in context of identifying those that are holding to a profitless (non-impacting) “faith,” being “foolish” (here it is “κενός” being empty, vain, hollow because their hands (what they could offer) are empty) though their mouth might be full of “faith”
- b. Think of the danger of such stubbornness! Where there is a forbidding of the truth about one’s self (especially in relation to their faith and whether or not it is truly saving faith) there is danger of the highest magnitude (thus another reason for the use of “foolish”)
- c. James is also asking if this person focused on the knowing aspects of the Faith, truly wants to learn that “just the knowing” is not enough - plainly stated, faith without works is “useless” (from ἀργή “ἄ” (without) and “ἔργον” (work, action, deeds)) and as summed up by Moo, “Faith that doesn’t work, doesn’t work.”
- d. This word for “useless” (ἀργή) is also used for “idle” or “careless” in Mt. 12:36 warning of the accounting to be give for every careless word spoken (stated, but no active content)

C. Abraham and Rahab, both justified by works - vs. 21-26

1. Abraham was justified by works and not by “faith alone” - vs. 21-24

- a. James begins this section with a question with what he puts forward as having an obvious answer - as if in saying, “Clearly, Abraham was justified by works” - if the context here is not the core focus, many will immediately negatively compare it to Romans 4 - but the context is crucial and we need to ask (first of all) what is meant here by “justified” and secondly what is meant by “faith was perfected” (faith “was completed, reached its end”) by works
- b. One of the uses of the underlying word for “justified (δικαιώω) means “to show, exhibit, evince, one to be righteous” and is the usage here, for Abraham was not declared righteous (“justified”) but was proven to be so by his works
- c. Note Paul’s challenge to the Corinthians in II Cor. 13:1-5 for them to “examine yourselves, to see if you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” They had an identity with the faith but with some their lives were inconsistent
- d. So, the question (in light of the context and one of the meanings of the word for “justified” and in balanced harmony with Romans 4) was, “Was not Abraham, our father, *proven to be righteous* when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?”

"It may be added, however, as pointing to the true reconciliation of St James and St Paul, that the very form of the statement implies that the faith existed prior to the works by which it was made perfect. - CBN

These works of faith will not be what we would necessarily deem as easy

Note the transition from Romans 4 into Romans 5 after Paul explained salvation by faith alone, not justified (the context being declared righteous) by works and then, in chapter 5 assumes the byproducts of faith in standing (firm), hoping, rejoicing in suffering, endurance, production of character leading to "hope" (life expectations)

There are no true works (of genuine value before God) without true faith, and there is no true faith without true works

The account of her faith-identifying works is in Joshua 2 - she heard of what God had done for them (2:9) and feared (as the entire city did) but she aided the people of God

Her actions would have been deemed treasonous by her people just as it still is in varying degrees when sinners truly repent and their former "friends" reject them

Both Abraham and Rahab's works were those that were life changing (leaving behind something in order to follow after another)

...as the body has no action, nor beauty, but becomes a loathsome carcass, when the soul is gone, so a bare profession without works is useless, yea, loathsome and offensive." MH



- e. This flows smoothly into verse 22 with James' explanation/clarification - "You see that faith was working with his works" and that was the expected result of faith, reaching its natural objective (ἐτελειώθη from τελειώω describing something reaching its goal) - faith was working with (συνεργέω) his works, formulating what they should be (because that's what faith does) with the unavoidable result of faith fulfilling its mission (the outworking of works)
- f. So there was no doubt that Abraham's faith was genuine because of his works, in particular his obedience in offering his son Isaac in which Abraham followed through everything leading up to it, and was fully committed to obeying God in it - his faith was vividly displayed to us all, and though God did not have him complete the act (the sacrifice of his son) the evidence (proof) of his willing obedience was obvious
- g. The overall point is again emphasized in the text James cites (as the Scripture that was fulfilled when he offered up Isaac) - James references Gen. 15:6, when Abraham believed God's promise of a son and descendants as the stars of the sky through this son of promise, long before Isaac was born and before Abraham offered him in obedience - so, clearly, faith came first, counting him as righteous and works inevitably came as a result
- h. So James' conclusion, again still closely tied to this context, a person is "justified by works and not faith alone" with now an emphasis on "alone" - for a professed faith, even if strongly professed, is not a justifying faith (counting/reckoning as righteous) if it is alone (without the byproduct of works) - this was the "fulfilling" of Gen 15:6 (bringing it to its demonstrative completion (proof) when he offered his son, the son of promise)
- i. This is why he would later be called "the friend of God," for a friend not only has affection (loves), the love/affection is acted out and not just professed - works without faith is demonstrative of a relationship without friendship, more obligation than from the heart - a true friend trusts (and here Abraham proved his faith/trust with obedient sacrifice) - note the depth of his trust in the Lord in Heb. 11:17-19
- j. So, in answering the question in verse 14, "What good is it... can that faith save him?" James declares, "you see" (it is clearly evident) one is justified by works (here proven to be justified/righteous) and not by a faith that is alone (that just declares itself with no outworking of the "faith")
- 2. Rahab "the harlot" was justified also as evidenced in her actions (works) - vs. 25
 - a. This is an interesting example to use since it is used to parallel the example of Abraham ("and in the same way"), and yet is in other ways a stark contrast - Abraham had been believing God for more than 30 years when his great act of faith was demonstrated, and Rahab was living as a "harlot" (a prostitute who sells herself) and was a part of a people who were completely pagan and who were the enemies of God
 - b. Because of her obedient/active faith, she and her household were saved from destruction and she married an Israelite (Salmon) and they were the parents of Boaz - she is also mentioned in Heb. 11:31 as having done what she had because of faith
 - c. She was proven to be righteous (justified) also, in contrast to what she would have normally been characterized as up to that point - faith produces a change in life/living
 - d. Rahab did not remain a prostitute, but was still identified by what she used to be (constantly being a reminder of the radical result of faith) - it is key to note that the whole city of Jericho feared the Israelites (which was a form of a faith), but it was not a saving faith that proved itself with a harmonizing with God and His Word (in contradiction to those with whom she had lived her life up to that point)
- 3. The final comparison of a "works-less faith" - vs. 26
 - a. There are and have been various types of "faiths" associated with Christ that love to promote themselves with outward expressions of validity and sincerity, but grimace, react or reject such when challenged to live by THE Faith
 - b. But there are not supposed to be "blurry lines" when it comes to genuine faith - for, as James stresses, just as the body apart from breath/breathing (from "πνεῦμα" - breath, and also of spirit) is dead, in the exact same way is a "faith" that is without works is dead (a corpse)
 - c. There must not be a pursuit to normalize a type of "zombie-ism" where it is considered normal to see spiritless bodies (lifeless) walking around yet are supposed to be looked on as just as alive and genuine as those truly in Christ (by faith that is clearly no alone)

VI. The Essential Need to Control the Tongue - 3:1-12

A. The stricter judgment upon those who are “teachers” - vs. 1-2

1. Having dealt with what genuine faith actually is and how essential it is to have its reality demonstrated in its outworking works, James moves on to another point he made in 1:26 (a person who claims to be righteous but does not bridle his tongue) to work through what it actually is to bridle the tongue, its importance, and illustrates what “bridling” is

There has also always been an instinctive desire (in situations of learning) for many to sense the need to express their “take” on what was being discussed, but such input was often unguarded, unlearned and in error (of content or emphasis)

To “teach” was not only to impart knowledge but to also direct in proper interpretation and application- for many this became dangerous because they were governed more by their or other’s opinions, popular thought, personal agendas and not by a strict handling of the Word

- a. James utilizes what he is about to cover to also stress the significant responsibility that comes with one of the Church’s “offices”, that of a teacher (which is characterized mostly of speaking)
- b. It was common for many to desire to be able to speak up in their synagogue/church meetings (as Paul dealt with also in I Cor. 14) and to become or act as a teacher
- c. This was typically an honored position and treated with respect, which is one of the reasons it became desirable (though this was not why one should seek it out)
- d. The reason James gives for not having many teachers come (literally) into being, was the strict accountability that comes with the responsibility (μεῖζον κρίμα λημψόμεθα - greater judgment (that comes with a verdict) that is received)
- e. He is dealing with (mainly) the teaching that takes place within the Church - judging by the emphasis he places on it in word order and tense (present imperative), it looks as though this was an issue (many clamoring to be teachers or to teach) - note Acts 20:25-31 and Hebrews 13:17
- f. James, in what he is doing in this epistle, is an example of a “teacher” seen in his inclusion of himself in the “we who teach”, and with the understanding of the greater accountability, there ought to be much greater caution when proclaiming/teaching Scripture

2. Realize, the probability of “stumbling” in our speech (and in other ways) is 100% - vs. 2

Though this does not indicate that any of us can cause another to fatally fall by our speech, but we can be hindrances to growth/progress

The same seriousness one has in handling a gun and treating it as though it is always loaded

This is an interesting point to include since it looks to group an unguarded/ uncontrolled tongue with a lazy, undisciplined body (overall life)

- a. Teachers are not the only ones that need to beware of the usage of the tongue, because it is a universal reality that we all “stumble” (from πταίω describing a tripping (though not necessarily an utter fall)) and in so doing can play a part in others “tripping”
- b. This does not just deal with teaching, but also with our day-to-day speech (talking in general), and with such a tendency to sin (ourselves) in its usage and possibly hurt others with it, we must be sober in our usage, always! For the potential is to cause others and ourselves to be tripped-up by our tongue is “in many ways”
- c. The next phrases do not need to indicate the impossibility of controlling our tongue as much as they indicate that such control is a sign of maturity - James makes it clear that if someone can so control their speech that they do not trip-up (themselves and others) in its usage, they are evidencing that they have grown and are also evidencing their control of “their whole body” as well - compare to I Cor 9:24-27

B. Understand the power of the tongue - vs. 3-6

1. Two examples of small things that can steer great power/strength/influence - vs. 3-4

To “bridle” the horse is to not just control it in a restraining way, but is actually more so the directing and utilizing the power of the horse

So much good can come out of the use of a horse and a ship even with the challenges of the natural inclinations of a horse or of the opposing winds and waves of the sea - a wise pilot of either is needed, realizing the responsibility and potential of directing such power

- a. To illustrate what he is about to say, James illustrates two instruments in life, that though they would seem insignificant, play powerfully influential roles... as the tongue
- b. “Bits” are placed into horses’ mouths to direct their whole body (by the one riding the horse) and can thus use such a small item to direct this powerful animal
- c. Along with this, so also the rudder of ship can be used to steer a great vessel through “strong winds” “wherever the inclination of the pilot desires” - these are not intended to be negative examples of the dangers of the tongue (speech/communication) as much as they are to demonstrate the immense power and influence is to be had in the use of the tongue
- d. This ought to motivate all of us (especially teachers) in the wise use of speech, realizing the potential power, yet sobered to the reality of the damage that can take place if it is used wrongly - think of the possible influence of the tongue! Its possible influence for the good all the way from basic information sharing down to the way through key points of inspirations/motivation on the lives of those we interact with... just as we have had with us

2. The dangerous, potential influence of the tongue - vs. 5-6

Note Psalm 12

- a. The tongue also, though a small member of our body, “boasts great things” - each tongue, to some degree, could tell of its exploits and the massive amount of damage that has been caused by it
- b. Just as a fire, though very small at the start, can cause significant damage

Most of us can speak first-hand of seeing seemingly little matters of the tongue become raging fires of wide-spread destruction

Notice that though the tongue can be used (powerfully) for good, it would seem its default is for evil purposes - as time is to be "redeemed" for good purposes, so also the tongue needs such practiced redemption

Think of the heart issues, the sleeplessness, the stress, the emotional hurts that turn into physical hurts because of our own tongue (not even considering that of others)

The underlying word looks to indicate the possible affects of the tongue altering/affecting the course of our lives

Such a concept should cause us to be extremely careful in the use of our speech!

Read II Chron. 28:1-3; 33:1-6 where it is documented that at least 2 of Israel's kings sacrificed their sons to Molech in this valley

Malicious gossip, lying, and generally bad uses of speech (even promoting error, evil) is what "Hell" promotes and those that misuse the tongue are in cohorts with such

So part of this point and illustration seems to be pointing out the lack of "mastery" over the tongue

When there is a lack of "wisdom" then the response is to be "ask of God" - 1:5)

A weapon, such as a gun, is to be handled in light of what damage it can cause if handled wrongly or flippantly



- c. Also, as with fire, the tongue's "boastable" power is by means of its influence, its potential affects to spread and that with only a little influence (a few words, a few sentences) - as a little flame or a spark can set ablaze an entire forest (with just a little kindling)
- d. Note some of the many word pictures of the tongue throughout Scripture - in Psalm 52:1-3 it's compared to a "razor", in Proverbs 12:18 the use of "rash words" are compared to the stabblings (thrusts) of a sword, in Jeremiah 9:3 it's compared to a bow ready to fire out an arrow, in Jeremiah 18:18 it's compared to an instrument to beat someone, in II Peter 2:18 it is described as loud-mouth boasting (of "folly") designed to stir-up sensual passions and lead others astray, and in Revelation 13:1-5 we see the "beast" given a special "mouth" to spew forth "blasphemies" against God and His dwelling (those that live there).
- e. James spells out the ingredients of an evil tongue (how is it this way... what is actually going on) First it is a "fire" (a flame, a spark), and of itself is a "world of iniquity/unrighteousness", so its natural influence will be to spread what is "unrighteous" - and know "unrighteousness" is essentially what is against God (and so is "of" (in its motive) "for" us, our pride/ego and agenda)
- f. The tongue is "set" as one of our bodily members and is what (practically) stains/tarnishes the whole of ourselves (all the other parts of us having to suffer because of its use and damage), it "taints" our reputation, soils our character (or at least reveals it as such) - it should be considered that there are times when we do lash out or let loose our tongue, and it represents unchecked thoughts and explosions of emotions that were not reigned-in (and may not necessarily reflect our overall character) yet we are still blemished by it
- g. This is followed by (in the natural progression) to the "setting on fire the course of life" our lives (days, years even the entirety of our time alive) suffering from the spreading fires that naturally follow the poor, unguarded, unsubmitive and faithless uses of our tongue
- h. There has been some speculation that James' use of the word "τροχὸν" (course, path, wheel) as in "the course of life" was meant to imply even the impact it can have on those who come after us... its ongoing, lasting affects that cannot be taken back
- i. We should also realize the other side of this issue being irresponsible silence (not speaking as and when we ought) also having in impact on the sphere of our life
- j. Its source (where such misuses of the tongue find their origin and are related to), what ignites it (its "pilot flame", or spark) is "Hell" - the origin of this use of "Hell" is the word "γέεννα" the Greek version of the valley of Hinnom a place south (outside the walls of Jerusalem) where some of the most wicked practices had taken place in Israel's history
- k. This "hell" (the Valley of Hinnom) was "defiled" by Josiah in II Kings 23 (read) - it is commonly accepted that this location became a place for the trash/garbage of Jerusalem and that it was known for a fire continually burning - this is the picture Jesus used of Hell (Mt. 5:22) and now James uses it in its association with an uncontrolled, evil tongue
- l. The tongue is even compared to an open grave in Romans 3:13 when detailing the natural depravity of mankind (along with the reality of the deceitfulness of the tongue and its danger being like the poison of deadly snakes)

C. The inability to "tame" the tongue - vs. 7-8

1. James demonstrates the unique inability to tame the tongue in comparison to nature - vs. 7

- a. The underlying word for "tame" is "δαμάζω" describing something controlled, subdued so as to be obedient to its master - all the kinds of animals and creatures are able to be tamed in some capacity (animals/creatures without the intellect and reasoning skills of humans) and yet humans, even in their seeming mastery over animals cannot tame their own tongues
- b. Yet, in contrast, no one (no human being) can tame the tongue (his own or that of others)- some may take this verse to try to make the point that since this is true then "why try?" - yet James did not endorse this type of fatalistic thinking early on in chapter 1 when he revealed the true source of lust/temptation to sin... within self - James pointed to the "Word" and being obedient (a "doer") and in 1:27 stressed what "pure religion" looks like, indicating that it is possible, but the solution will originate outside ourselves, our strength and the strength of our will (self-determination)
- c. Having the power that the tongue has been shown to have, it would be irresponsible to handle as though it is a "given" that it will always be uncontrolled

2. Yet, James makes it clear that the tongue cannot be “tamed”... by man - vs. 8

Often, this will translate into holding back on talking at all - much of the urgency we sense is that in the defense of our pride or in the promoting of ourselves in the attempt to put another down

The tongue is “μεστή ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου” (full of poison, death-bringing) - it, as poison, can eat away at its surroundings

- a. The point here is not for us to give up trying to control what cannot ever be controlled, but to come to realize the need for such control by God’s power (grace)
- b. All of this begins with the realization of the need to truly think (rightly/responsibly) before we speak and to weigh what we are about to say before we say (communicate) it
- c. Also, considering how broadly James handles this concept in this verse, he is making the clear fact that no one can tame (subdue) all tongues - human speech will not be reigned in universally and cannot be, so there is a reasonable expectation of the ongoing destructions of the tongue - the phrase exactly is “οὐδείς δαμάσαι δύναται ἀνθρώπων” (... no one to subdue the power of men... as in no one has the power to subdue the tongues of men/mankind) - it is an assured form of destruction/damage that will continue
- d. Within the tongue is an unsettledness (restlessness) as with the unstable “double-minded” man in 1:8 (trying to be focused and dedicated to more than one priority/standard) - so the tongue is also restless and with a ready “poison” to bite with when threatened, attacked or just out of some idea of perceived self-preservation

D. The inconsistency of the tongue - vs. 9-12

1. Building on the “unsettledness” of the tongue, James demonstrates its contradictory behavior in that it (at one moment) could be “blessing” the Lord and then in another moment “cursing” people who are made in God’s likeness - vs. 9-10 - oddly, this does not seem odd to most

It is crucial that we not condemn people for at least two reasons - they deserve special care in consideration because of their being made in the image of God, and second, we do not have the perspective of God as to what He will make of them yet

- a. The two contrasting words are “εὐλογοῦμεν” (blessing, as in saying good words to and about) and then “καταρώμεθα” (from “κατάρα” a word for condemning, in the truest sense of “putting them down”) which is more than using “curse words” (though they’d be included) - it is the verbal condemning of another (out of hatred, anger, bitterness, wishing them the worst possible outcome)
- b. Think on this picture - we have those, religiously, maybe even sincerely praising the Lord and then using the same mouth to condemn people (which in creation still are “image bearers” of God, His special design/creation)
- c. This sheds more light on what it truly means to “bless God” - it must also entail blessing Him in faith with careful use of what we verbalize regarding His creation of not just people in general, but of ANY person specifically
- d. Having opposite moral uses of the same member of our body “ought not to be so” - note the loving response of James in his use of “my brethren” - he is not rebuking them on this (having also included himself to some degree in his use of “we”), but is lovingly pointing out that this is something they must not accept as normal or as unavoidable
- e. This concept is in line with texts where the Lord tells us to “love” our enemy (Mt. 5:43-48) and Paul instructs the Romans to “bless those that curse you” (Rom. 12:14) - so we come to know it is not loving their sin nor blessing their cursing of us, but a love for them and wishing them (blessing) better (truly “better” in Christ and the hope He gives)

Sometimes it is good to have our sin shown to us in a different light to help us not just see it for what it is, but to see its inconsistencies and contradictions to reality

2. Understanding the source and nature of ourselves (who/what we are) - vs. 11-12

Such a spring would be known for its inconsistency and mixture of bad into the good, and would then be categorized as just “bad,” even though sometimes fresh water comes from it

- a. James uses two examples of nature to illustrate the absurdity of opposite things being the same - the source of a spring/pond cannot be fresh water and also salt water - if we could conceive of such a spring we would not drink from it since it would be a mix and the threat of the salt water would be enough to make us avoid it
- b. A tree or vine cannot (does not) bear two opposite kinds of fruit - their nature (their kind) is set and what comes from it is expected to be consistent
- c. One core point of these illustrations is that the sweet/good loses its impact because of the bad (the unsweet) - we might think that the “good” we say makes up for the “bad,” failing to realize the impact of the “bad” countering the good (for “bad” can still be bad even with some “good” in it, but “good” cannot be “good” with some “bad “ in it)

3. So, true faith will result in true works, and such faith (working) will be characterized by a pursuit of a controlled/tamed and so “bridled” (rightly directed) tongue and in this faith expects control

- a. For, many can use their tongue to say anything and in an attempt to defend it, will declare their “wisdom” - but the content of the tongue’s declarations will also need to be proven
- b. This brings us back to action (what we do versus just what we say)

VII. Wisdom From Above Versus Earthly Wisdom - 3:13-18

A. Just as making a claim to faith was not enough, so also a claim to “wisdom” and “understanding” cannot be taken at face value, and with such terms being applied and defined in an earthly (of this age) way, it was difficult to retain (and so recognize) what true wisdom was - vs. 13

1. The question could be taken as “who is really wise/understanding among you?” as in dealing with many making an open profession of their being wise - but are they, really?

As James began this chapter (3:1) warning against large numbers seeking to be teachers (because of the greater accountability), so this idea relates in that there might be ones thinking themselves to be teachers, but who don't actually possess actual wisdom from above - the goal then is to know how to differentiate between them

- a. There are so many ideas of what is “wise” and the term/idea was morphed into the idea of man's wisdom, which was essentially “smarts” and intellect, and the ability to showcase it better than others - it can and has become a field of competition
- b. Yet, what is about to be described is the proof of actual wisdom/understanding and it is not defined in amounts of knowledge and in skills of debate
- c. The two words used by James (“wise” and “understanding”) are very similar in meaning; the first describing general cleverness and one well learned, and the other though similar in meaning, looks to describe the “know-how” of applying/using it (for some know a lot of information but do not know how to properly use it)
- d. As in their day so we still see many who can study, learn, and retain information, but it is not processed well or correctly and is utilized to build and sustain pride

2. True wisdom will likely involve learning (especially a learner's spirit) and will pivot on the content of what is learned, the source, and then the usage and purpose of it

Wisdom is generally taken as not just intelligence and knowledge but in the apparent amount of it in comparison to most, but this is fundamentally wrong as shown here - some may have double the amount of knowledge but it could be the wrong knowledge or even if it is “good” might be accumulated for competitive, self-glorifying purposes (and self-serving purposes)

- a. James' handling of this would likely be a surprise to many that see themselves as wise, for the standard is one of behavior/conduct (again, similar to the case for true faith being proven in works) - true wisdom will be applied as “good” and in “meekness”
- b. It is clearly seen that there are many endowed with heaps of “worldly wisdom” and this, no matter how magnificent it is esteemed by popular opinion, will never be able to reach the threshold of true wisdom/understanding because its source/focus is just “earthly”
- c. This is important to understand in this context because only the right source and right content of knowledge will result in purity, actual “peace”, genuine gentleness, a willingness to learn (be persuaded), mercy and righteousness, unshakable (unwavering) and genuine (in verse 17)
- d. True wisdom must be “shown” not just talked about or professed, and this display is to be in the form of “works” and that “his good behavior in deeds” - this proof of wisdom strongly contrasts how mankind has generally sought to prove wise - the Greek word is “ἀναστροφῆς” describing how one conducts their lives in day to day activities
- e. “Wisdom” is so often narrowed down to intellect/knowledge that even those with bad character or those generally destructive to themselves (and those around them), are still viewed as wise or smart
- f. This is a must because “meekness” is a direct byproduct of wisdom - the word for “meekness” (or gentleness) is “πραΰτης” and not an easy word to translate - it is commonly translated as “humble”, “meek” and “gentle” but it contains the idea of the gentleness of modesty, not out of weakness, but with the presence/reality of great power and ability
- g. The way this is worded indicates “meekness” as always being with wisdom (such as in James 1:21 where the Word must be received with meekness) - plus, true wisdom is evidenced in its resulting good works implemented in meekness (and as is about to be dealt with, this is directly pointing to a type of selflessness)

This is in keeping with qualifications of Church leaders who must not just know the truth and be able to defend it, they must demonstrate that they live it (Titus 1:6-9)

“Meekness” is having great power (and here, wisdom), but it is controlled (bridled) for “good” purposes and not for selfish motives

B. Characteristics of earthly, physical (fleshly), demonic “wisdom” - vs. 14-16

1. Inward signs of false “wisdom” - vs. 14-15

The wise of this world are not as wise as they think themselves to be or as wise as others declare/document them to be since they do not (cannot) see /think beyond this realm

- a. “If you have” is how James directs their focus to discerning if they are truly wise - this scrutiny is needed because the earth will be full of (naturally) a type of wisdom (intelligence, cleverness, brilliance) that is not actually true wisdom - wisdom is much more than learned facts, documented observations and the like, since true wisdom (from above) considers (constantly) what is going on behind/beyond the physical/mental/emotional
- b. The first indicator (to the those looking to truly discern) is the presence “bitter jealousy” (“ζῆλον πικρὸν” zeal/jealousy (for self) that is sharp, cutting and so malignant/deadly) - true wisdom will not lead to this, because its focus is so firmly focused on God and His power/ purposes, that zeal for self just does not come into focus

Those that would be teachers must be very wary of this in their own lives before they look to critique the "competition"

James is indicating some outward results-based evidences of the types of "wisdom" but this does not replace the objective wisdom in/of Scripture

Such earthly "wisdoms" begin by automatically assuming they are already above all other philosophies and "truths" and so boast - this must never be the case with Believers! We are here to declare, share and teach God's truth (wisdom) and do not posture an attitude of superiority in ourselves

Scripture validates God and His rightness not ourselves

When it comes to considering things related to this earth and our lives just as they are here, bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are considered reasonable and even "smart" (and normal)

This word is also translated as "natural" in I Cor. 2:14 and such cannot understand what is spiritual - their spirit is dead in sin

Our emotions are under constant need of scrutiny for rightness

This is illustrated as such from the beginning in Gen. 3:5-6 where devilish wisdom encouraged disobedience (self will) as means to "wisdom"

This earthly wisdom has made havoc of governments, families, Churches, organizations and other relationships and structures since it promotes life for self

- c. This characteristic is "in the heart" so, although it is likely to display itself in an aggressive, proud, self-serving manner outwardly, it is an inward trait of how they see their version of "wisdom" and will be pushy or rejectionary toward others in its pursuits/objectives
- d. "The adjective pikros ("bitter") describes a harsh stance of demanding to be recognized as wise, instead of being willing to learn." George Stulac - we should note that there is to be an expected reaction as such by the "earthly" wisdom, and that genuine Christians will be criticized as being unwilling to learn (desiring only to teach) - compare to I Cor. 3:1-13
- e. This approach and inward perspective of personal "wisdom" is "prickly" because it is driven (in the heart) by selfish ambition (and why the word typically translated "zeal" is translated here as "jealousy" because it is focused on the zeal (jealousy) for self) - it is very common for all of us to (naturally) desire to be perceived as wise (sometimes "in our own way") and James is working through this to show it for what it really is - note also Gal. 5:16-26
- f. The danger of such characteristics is to be considered acceptable (normal) and such competitive "wisdoms" allowed to set the mode of operation is the detrimental and will come to "lie against the truth" - so James demands that if such is truly in your hearts, "do not boast" (κατακαυχάομαι - to brag/boast over above another) - note Gal. 6:3
- g. With personal, political, promotional pursuits comes a lying against the truth, because the aim in such is harsh, "in the heart" self-pursuits of recognition (as to personal rightness) the Truth itself of God and His Word is contradicted (because it does not exist to glorify us!) - we were not given the Bible to prove our wisdom, but to show us God's - so many, in the pursuit of self-ambition in God's work end up "disproving" the truth by their lack of proper action/obedience (and so failing to "show His works in the meekness of wisdom")
- h. All of this is evidential of being "not the wisdom which comes down from above" - so what James has just been describing is in no way a "good and perfect gift from above" (1:17) - so, if it is not from God it can only be from (originating from) somewhere else
- i. This "wisdom" is "earthly" (ἐπίγειος - belonging to just this age, of this world only) which fits well with lives lived in the pursuit of the "now," but then cannot see life for what it really is and where it is all heading, because it works to maintain a focus on here, this world's agendas, priorities, values and aspirations - to the humanist, it truly is wisdom and the wisdom from above is considered foolish, absurd and not forward -thinking
- j. This pseudo wisdom is also described by James as "natural" (or "unspiritual (ESV)) - the underlying word being "ψυχική" which describes the soul, but in this case, it is the soul without the spirit, so it just identifies with the feelings, passions and senses of this earth/age - it is translated also as "sensual" because it is driven by feelings and is often how it is validated as "wisdom" (because of how it makes one "feel")
- k. So bitter jealousy and selfish ambition are the result of such since, if life is just about this life only, then there is so much to be grieved and disappointed about, and priorities focus then on the only pursuit that makes sense in such a context... live for self
- l. But, such pseudo wisdom is also described as being "demonic" (δαμονιώδης - "such as demons have"), so it is "spiritual" in the wrong way - the agents of Satan (and so agents of evil) use this type of thinking (wisdom), for they are for whatever is in opposition to, contradicts or does not consider the "heavenly" (the realm, kingdom, and so the rule and purpose of God for everything)
- m. "The context in James is best understood if the word is taken as "having to do with the ψυχή" (*psyche*, self, natural life, or soul), and so we might cautiously translate it "self-ish," that is, focused on the advancement of one's own earthly personal welfare. Earthly wisdom offers a person counsel about self-advancement." Dan McCartney

2. Outward evidences of "wisdom from below" - vs. 16

- a. The first resulting evidence is "disorder" (ἀκαταστασία - instability akin to anarchy) being the natural response/result of so many living by and for self-will (evidenced in the "jealousy" (zeal) and that for self's ambitions) - the wisdom of this earth teaches to live for self (self is authority and purpose) and with everyone trying to live by such a philosophy, there can only be some form of confusion, disillusionment, disappointment and then continuous uprisings (revolutions, struggles for power)

“φᾶλλον” describing here situations where much is said and is done, but is of no true value and so inherently lends to sin/evil - evil is fought actively not passively

James is not describing just wisdom in any setting, but in particular wisdom at work (and so present) in the church (amongst a grouping of believers) and could apply even to families

- b. With this jealous envy and self promotion comes (automatically) disorder (with everyone striving to be in-charge or self-governing) and along with such an environment comes every “evil” matter/situation (and so result) - note that the word for “evil” here is “φᾶλλον” (worthlessness, of no value) which is a component leading to true evil
- c. In a spiritually productive environment there is the opposite of these, so there is order (structure) which is kept in order because those submissive before God trust Him and His control and purpose, so they are not driven by self-ambition (rooted in zeal for self)
- d. We must realize this is focused on the evidences of wisdom from above or from beneath in the individual - wise/right order is not made up of compromises to Truth or to God’s clear guides (in His Word), so there might be separations (as seen throughout Scripture and the early Church), but those united were united around something above themselves

C. Characteristics of heavenly, Godly “wisdom” - vs. 17-18

1. One that is characterized by “wisdom from above” will have the following qualities - vs. 17

The thoughts of one with such wisdom will be pure/holy and so their behavior will follow in harmony (the person with such wisdom is characterized as “pure” (holy, set aside for God’s use)

- a. Someone (their self) as well as the content of their thinking will be “pure” - note the underlying wording is “πρῶτον μὲν ἀγνή” (primarily (first of all, above all others) indeed pure (also used in the ceremonial sense where something has no defilements since it is set aside (sacred) for God’s use and honor)
- b. If it is truly pure, then it can be truly “peaceable” (εἰρηνική - from εἰρήνη, characterized as tranquil, inwardly calm and so in harmony with God and others) - this is sometimes a difficult concept to practically define since so much of the “peace” promoted is one of immoral compromise, but here it is a compromise of sort stemming from a lack of self-ambition and so a yielding of perceived rights) - true wisdom seeks/strives for living peaceably (in purity) with others
- c. “There must be no attempts to reach peace by overleaping purity. The maxim that a pure heart ought not to sacrifice truth on any consideration whatever, never gave rise to persecution: it has made many martyrs, but never one persecutor; it has pined in the dungeon, but never immured any there; it has burned amid the flames, but never lighted the faggot; it has ascended scaffolds, but never erected them; it has preserved and bequeathed civil and religious liberty, but never assaulted them...” Barnes
- d. In seeking to make for pure peace, it is “gentle” (ἐπιεικής - patient, forbearing) and strives as it were to meet people where they are at (seeking to be approachable and not condemning)- it handles with care because it does care
- e. In its gentleness it is also “reasonable” (εὐπειθής - compliant, persuadable, poised to learn and obey) and so the ESV translates it as “open to reason” - true wisdom of life is open to being convinced (taught) rather than stubbornly “dug-in”
- f. Wisdom from above, lived-out, is characterized as “full of mercy” (μεστή ἐλέους - filled with compassion, a desire to relieve pain/suffering (or even future suffering)) - it feels-with and seeks to identify with others in their struggles (though, being wise, never to a degree that it compromises truth or what must be done)
- g. In contrast to the “wisdom from below” true heavenly wisdom is “full of good fruits” (what it dispenses is “good” (ἀγαθὸν - excellent, useful, morally upright and honorable) - its possessor is marked as such (his/her “produce” is “good” (as God defines it)) - many profess to have Godly wisdom but their lives are characterized (full of) by “every evil thing” (vs. 16), what may not be seen by many as “evil” but is evil in its worthlessness/uselessness from an eternal scale of measurement - - plus, this also shows that true wisdom is productive and not just “smart”) for many who see themselves wise showcase it by finding fulfillment in just pointing out the wrong in others
- h. Wisdom from above is characterized by being “unwavering” (ἀδιάκριτος - without uncertainty) being driven by convictions (a confidence of what is right and that is what motivates/directs versus feeling, circumstances and general consensus)
- i. So, such wisdom in a life produces a genuineness (“without hypocrisy”) the word being “ἄνυπόκριτος” describing being a “WYSIWYG” person (in a good sense) - hypocrisy (literally “mask wearer”) is such because it has things to hide and ulterior motives/agendas- the context would lean more to the absence of a pretend religion/piety

True wisdom has as a priority objective the pursuit of peace with others (just not at all costs)

Note this concept also in Rom. 12:9-21 and Heb. 12:14-15 - also note that true “peacemakers” are associated as children of God in aiding in the resolution of disagreements and conflicts (especially the ultimate conflict between God and man)

We need to keep in mind these are relational characteristic (results in us) if we live by wisdom from above

Mercy is a holding back what is deserved and is true mercy when focused on showing mercy and not seeking it for itself

One of the challenges we have with the word “good” is how we define it - it is natural to define “good” as that which is seen as agreeable to us and to those around us

The Greek word is also translated as “impartial” since it can also mean it does not make a distinction between (as in not being a “respector of persons” which would also fit with chapter 2)

The word is also translated as "sincere" in the ESV

- j. Since having (and so living by) this wisdom directs its possessor to trust God, there is no need to put on a front as if being someone or something we are not - this is a personal (and to some degree an outward) sign that one is living by wisdom from above - also, living by true wisdom (from above) there is no need for a mask since there's nothing to hide

2. Sowing the "fruit of righteousness" in peace - vs. 18

Yet so many, claiming to be proponents and promoters of "wisdom from above" use it to divide and beat down others rather than patiently seeking to convince/persuade

- a. The result of the "wisdom from above" in the life of someone, is the resulting fruit (produce) of true righteousness at work in the life of the possessor/practicer of God's wisdom - the opposite being unrighteous behavior and so unrighteous "produce" affecting those around them
- b. James clarifies the delivery method/style of the "sowing" of such fruit (not necessarily "seed" since James is focusing on the results of wise living which would be its "fruit") - it is "sown in peace" not in a contentious, divisive way (with ill intent)
- c. And, if peace is to be had in the life of an individual, a group, or peace with God, it will be sown by those who are truly "peacemakers" - note that "peacemaking" is not what many would define it today as "appeasement", for that would involve avoiding true wisdom (God's wisdom is likely to cause conflict (much of it internal) and yet leads to genuine peace in life with others and with God (and with self)) - this is in contrast to what was listed in vs. 16

An environment of peace will need to be developed and maintained (yielding self) to promote and produce true righteousness

VIII. The Inward Fight Against Living for Self, It's Outward Results and the Needed Redirection of the Heart - 4:1-12

A. The underlying cause of outward conflicts - vs. 1-3

1. The warring passions within with the "cause" being self - vs. 1

We get so used to focusing on the things that irritate and anger us that we allow ourselves to believe these externals (other people's issues) are the cause of our conflicts and fightings and then don't consider to look for the actual cause in ourselves - see Rom. 7:15-25

- a. James begins with direct, revealing questions to deal with the reality of the "fights" (quarrels) and "conflicts" among them - these were outward skirmishes of infighting in their congregations - why were they having them, so many, and so often?
- b. In Churches, in Christian families there are continuous conflicts ("wars") or even signs of upcoming fights - this is expected of the world but this ought not be the case with genuine Christians - in addressing this, James points to the cause
- c. "James did not argue for the existence of strife; he assumed it. Neither did he give his readers an opportunity to blame their quarrelsome spirit on environment beyond their control; he tore away the veil of every imaginary possibility and showed that their own greedy hearts were the real cause of their strife." Strauss
- d. Still in the form of a question (to answer his first question) James asks (as if it should be obvious) if the cause is not your "ἡδονῶν" (pleasures, driving desires and passions focused on self) and these drives/passions/desires are warring within your "members" - these members could be the individuals that make up a church body and can also be in reference to the members that make each of us up (our own "components")
- e. Our internal defenses become tuned to our actual priorities (regardless what we put forward outwardly) and come to our defense, stirring in us thoughts, feelings and then actions (often words) to pursue the inner goal of self-promotion, self-defense driven by a misinformed/misdirected definition of "happiness" (and what will truly lead to fulfillment/contentment)

These members (in each of us) could be the members of our body, our thoughts (thinking in conflict over wrong desires versus good desires) and even our conflicting feelings (for a "hedonist" lives by how he feels)

Note Col. 3:1-10

2. The internal fires of frustrated (unfulfilled), self-focused objectives - vs. 2-3

We are constantly deeming things as "needs" that are not actually needs and end up compounding our frustrations

Many of these lusts can become lifelong controllers blinding us in life, our purpose and wrongfully re-arranging our life priorities

- a. To some degree we've all come to know the incredible pain (frustration) that accompanies unfulfilled goals and desires - we (internally) assess some things as "needs" and essential to our contentment, and in trusting our "read" we act on the pursuit of "needs"
- b. James uses very severe wording in his description of the their response to unfulfilled desires- you "lust" (now the word ἐπιθυμέω describing a longing, coveting for something to such a degree that the heart (the focus) is set upon it) - this is a word/concept we are all familiar with in some capacity where we set our heart on something we desire (we believe we are in "want" of it) and can quickly escalate ourselves into a type of obsession over it
- c. If what is craved cannot be obtained it leads to "murder" - this is at the heart of the cause of actual murders so it can be included, but it is likely that James is using the word "murder" in a fuller sense to demonstrate the severity and danger of being covetous
- d. If one is not to possess whatever the focus of their heart desires, then they are driven to destroy others (either in an attempt to still get what they lust for or to act out their inner rage/hatred for others whom they believe contribute to their frustration/unfulfillment)

Many will "murder" in various ways without ever actually taking their life- one can murder a reputation, or even the circumstances of another



These inner drives are the reasons there is so much fighting and conflict in their midst - it doesn't need to involve all parties since just one or a few who are driven by self-zeal will cause tension and a competitive spirit even with those not looking to "compete"

It is not hard to figure out the reasons why we don't pray or even don't think to pray - if our heart is full of self, our thoughts won't be inclined toward God; God will not be in our thoughts/thinking much at all and when He is (as is about to be discussed), He is often looked to as a possible means to fulfill our lusts

We mustn't permit an "at least I'm praying" attitude as though somehow we are making a moral/righteous concession to God in just acknowledging Him in the required process of getting something we desire

When we pray for ourselves we are to pray for our true good and not seek to be the definers of what is "good" for us unless it is clearly attached to God's revealed best

As a child might consider their parents as failing them when they don't give them what they want

It is made clear by James what is at the heart of this issue; their love of the world, its values/priorities and so live accordingly - yet these worldly drives are motivated by self-zeal and self-ambition and so naturally (unavoidably) result in fightings (vying for self over others) - even in the world's charities there is a need for self-fulfillment and glory in the process

- e. Note (as we continue) the tense is present; these were current issues
- f. "You are envious" and yet they were unable to "attain" (not just have something as in being covetous, but as in aspirations to something or to some situation or position in life) - this is more in line with the "self ambition" versus the "lust"
- g. This then results in "fights and quarrels" (the underlying words picturing arguing and "wrangling" (even as if "going to war" with them))
- h. This pent-up frustration fuels these fires of conflict - Hiebert quoting Winkler wrote, "This is the condition to which lust consigns its votaries; it disappoints them, and makes them mutual tormentors." ["votaries" are dedicated followers]
- i. Dealing now with the reasons they do not "have": the first is the reality that they just aren't asking (this is in the present tense) - for whatever reason, they do not ask God and set out to either secure it on their own (possibly for self-credit) or by some sense of "luck" (that they just don't think too deeply about and through their situations and just "hope for the best" only to see a trend of their "unluckiness")
- j. The lack of prayer (conversing with, fellowshiping with God) will always be at the heart of frustrations, worries and discouragements - a great deal of our prayers will be asking (as in James 1:5, asking for wisdom while, in faith, anticipating/expecting God's working and timely provision) - note Mt. 7:7-11 where Jesus instructs to ask, followed by a "seeking" (expecting/anticipating God's work however He knows best) and then persisting in action with our "knocking" (trying to move forward while waiting on God to open the doors)
- k. There would have been (just as there still are today) those that would have answered back that they are asking and yet they still do not have/receive - the general reason given is that their asking is done wrongly (κακῶς - improperly, evilly) and this is so, because of their motive in their asking - prayer (asking of God) is to be a good thing but there must be a consideration in all praying of the One we are talking to
- l. What makes the request evil is its underlying purpose, "ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε", lusts/pleasures/drives of/for self to spend it on (to squander it, as in spending just to spend), not considering a greater purpose/cause than self - it might be startling to us to come to realize how often we would not deem these types of requests of ours as wrong/evil - a true servant of God asks for supplies to fulfill purpose/responsibility and not to spend what is sought on self (self-comfort, promotion, self-will, even the general category of self's wishes for self)
- m. "Nowhere is deception more likely to creep in than into such prayers; nowhere are we more likely to be mistaken in regard to our real motives, than when we go before God and ask for success in our worldly employments." Barnes
- n. Such requests can even lead to a type of frustration and then quarreling with God since He does not oblige what we might consider reasonable requests, and is at the heart of so many situations where God is accused of not "answering prayer"
- o. Notice also that James does not clarify what they are lusting for, just that they are driven to pursue what pleases them, and that is at the core of this issue

B. Humbly submit before the Lord Who is the giver of grace (to those that are humble) - vs. 4-10

1. To be a friend of the "world" is to be hostile to God - vs. 4

- a. To be a "friend" (ἡ φιλία - a particular fondness/affection for) of the world (τοῦ κόσμου - of the world order, system, and so here its priorities, purposes and values systems) is to be rightfully called out to be an "adulteress" seeing that affections, loyalties and obedience/submission has been transferred to the "world" instead of God, and this is particularly evil because the "world" as used here is hostile toward God
- b. As is true in adultery, one cannot be "in love" (endeared) with the world and God at the same time since to love the world is to be at odds (as an enemy) with God, and to love God is to be at odds (as an enemy) with the world - the use of the term "adulteresses" demonstrates also that even in our marriages, the focus of each is to be on the other and not on themselves, for at the core of adultery (actual and in the heart) is a life being lived for self
- c. One need not even to be successful in establishing a friendship with the world, for just the intention causes this rift (the word for "wishes" is βουληθῆ and describes having an intention to or toward something)

Living for the world, seeking to be its friend, is at the root cause of the bitter jealousy and self ambition- there is a driving desire in some for this age (the world) to accept, admire or at least put up with us

In asking it this way, it's as though James is making the point as to whether or not the Scripture's emphasis actually means something to us, individually, as to its necessary application and the expected impact it should be having

Though there is no specific text James is referencing, he makes the point that this is a common concept

The core of the debate regarding this verse is whether or not it is man's spirit that is "lusting" or if it is God's Spirit that is yearning for us

Compare to Rom. 8:5-11

So, rather than the main focus of this verse (5) being on the lusts of man and the conflicts they create, the stress shifts toward why friendship with the world is so wrong - for as a husband/wife would be jealous for the heart of their spouse, so God is for us and His Spirit within us that is intended to direct us toward Him and not toward the world

He gives more grace - as more trials/temptations come, there will always be more grace to deal with them

The attitude of coming to accept sinful tendencies as inescapable and as an expected norm belittles/discounts God's grace

The "pride of life" was one of the core motivators in the Fall of Man and is listed by John in I Jn. 2:15 as one of the three ingredients that is at the cause of the "love of the world"

d. But in so looking to pursue, they make themselves an enemy of God in what they are seeking to do - "It is not a matter of a Christian quite unintentionally finding himself in an atmosphere pervaded by worldliness. He has made his deliberate choice to be a friend of the world. Neutrality toward God is impossible. His decision to love the world defies God's rightful claim to his total allegiance." Hiebert

e. These place themselves in the position of living like (thinking like) God's enemies - this might not seem unreasonable to those who have a difficult time distinguishing much difference between the world and God - note Rom. 8:5-8, John 15:18-23, I Jn. 2:15-17

2. Submit to God, resist the devil, and humbly draw near to God - vs. 5-10

a. Do not disregard the Scripture or treat it as though it is unimportant - James uses the word "κένωζ" to describe a theoretical response to Scripture, as though one could conceive of it having anything to say that is to no purpose - the question is to be taken as rhetorical, anticipating that they all should know that nothing in Scripture is useless, especially the general conclusion from God's Word as to God's "yearning" for us and His own Spirit within us

b. Expecting the response that these believers expect the Scripture to be revealing God's will for their obedience (attitudes and overall respect), then would there be any thought to disregard God's particular interest (focus) in each of us?

c. This is more than a hint to the idea of the "jealousy" of God for us, especially in light of any of us flirting with the world and preferring its acceptance/affection over His

d. Note that the KJV translates this as, "... The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" - this has led some to interpret this verse as describing the internal struggle with our own lusts and then on to envy. This is not a bad translation and fits the context well. But the next verse looks to be playing off of the subject of verse 5 which would then make the yearning (earnest desire) God's since He is then the giver of grace

e. This then is to cause us to abhor the idea of a life characterized as a "friend of the world" and to understand why, for the true believer, the pursuit of being friends of the world is wrought with so much "push-back" from God and His resistance to the "proud"

f. It is true, that we all are by nature, prone to "φθόνος" (typically translated as envy, ill-will) and would then fit well with the next word in the Greek (ἐπιποθεῖ) a longing/yearning for someone or something with the idea of a "lusting" - Scripture definitely demonstrates this about us - and yet, if seen that this speaks of God toward us, it shows us an incredible idea of God's affection/attention to us that He does long for us (the spirit He made to dwell in us) and our affection, though it seems most probable that this "spirit" is His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) that He made to dwell in us

g. "But He gives more grace" - this is a profound statement and demonstration of His incredible love, for many of us, when passionately yearning for another's attention/affection, we retaliate and even come to hate the former object of "love" when they stray - but God, even in all of our inconsistencies gives us grace (literally "greater grace", greater in power and so grace, as it were, to overcome) and this because of His favor to us and so for us

h. This grace is empowering grace, not just a general favor, but one that enables us to outgrow and conquer these natural inclinations so though many would say these are "just the way we're wired" we can expect to conquer them by His grace

i. This being an undeniable fact, James references (likely) Proverbs 3:34 ("Toward the scornful he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor." ESV) that God is in opposition to the proud (ὑπερηφάνοις - those seeing themselves (considering themselves) before and as above others) - "opposes" here is "ἀντιτάσσομαι" describing God arranging Himself in a battle against and in contrast to that He gives grace (His blessing, favor and so benefits (enablement)) - the word "ταπεινός" is the word for "humble" and pictures/describes something that is "low-lying" and doesn't just deal with those "lowly in spirit" but even those made so by being brought "low"

j. With this all being the case, then submit (ὑποτάσσω - arrange under, subordinate), be subject to God - He "arrays Himself" against the proud so we are to "array ourselves" under Him in contrast to the constant striving for self rule (autonomy) - these desire to be self-sufficient so as to be self-glorified (they are driven to be impressed with themselves and this has become to be what many believe is a necessary self-love)

Part of the result of submitting to God (He being the top authority) is the responsibility to be in opposition (postured against) the devil - to resist God is to submit to (be under) the agenda and influence of the devil - it is natural to submit to the devil and resist God, so it will come naturally if these orders are not followed and treated as non-optional compare to Eph. 6:10-13 and I Peter 5:8-9

The agenda of the devil is the destruction of Christians and when we seek to destroy Christians we are more like him

Note the reason we can and should draw near to God in Heb. 10:19-25 - see also Psa. 73:24-28

In washing hands, the first step is removing the hands from the dirt and using cleansing agents to remove the residue of dirt (sin) - they do not want to contaminate what they work on and with from here on out

This double-mindedness can be looked upon by some as an attempt at a form of "balance" for they always see "the truth as being somewhere in the middle"

"To purify the heart is to be sincere, and to act upon this single aim and principle, rather to please God than to seek after any thing in this world: hypocrisy is heart-impurity; but those who submit themselves to God aright will purify their hearts as well as cleanse their hands." MH

There is no laughter and any sense of fulfillment within when we live and allow ourselves to act as was described at the start of this chapter

It has become acceptable and expected even in Christian circles for some to be pushy and demanding and even rude so many observers may come to like what they see rather than see it as sin

- k. Realizing that the world seems to provide ways to cater to and substantiate one's pride, there is then a draw to it since God will not oblige our pride whatsoever seeing He "resists" it and those living by and for it
- l. Hand-in-hand with this, James continues these militaristic imperatives (commands) with the recognition of who the enemy is, the devil (who is the "prince of this world" (John 16:11)) and the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4) and is to be withstood (set against) - we are to "ἀνθίστημι" (withstand when attacked, and take the initiative to oppose) the devil (τῷ διαβόλῳ) defined as the slanderer, accuser, knowing he is a liar - note John 8:44
- m. This "resisting" can have more the idea of standing up against (going on the offensive against his agendas), so not so much as just retreating or holding back, but even being aggressive against him (versus cowering in fear/intimidation or resolved to stay out of the conflict)
- n. The response of the devil, "he will flee from you" (run, escape), not because of our fortitude but because of the submission to God and not to him (again, not a passive/ignoring of him, but in purposed, determined opposition of him) - remember the context being that of envy, strife, bitterness and so fightings for self (and so against each other)
- o. The devil runs but we are not to stand alone in the struggle; we are to "draw near to God", approaching Him, as it were in prayer, in our heart, in our daily focus - this is also done in contrast to a submitting to self/world/the devil and in "drawing nigh" to those things (seeking them out) - in His grace He will "draw near" to us - note the "cleansing of hands" comes after the approaching God (we are not to see this as needing to "get our act together" before we approach God; we approach, He is approachable and draws near us; He does not reject/resist the humble, needy, dependent approach)
- p. This drawing near to God involves appropriate action on our part, the first being "cleanse your hands" describing a removal of our hands (our activities and efforts) from sinful exploits, for such are how "**sinners**" live (James calling them this as it being such behavior they were initiating and participating in that "sinners" do (ἁμαρτωλοί - the detestable because they do what is wrong because they live as "missing the mark", in not just doing bad things, but in not striving for what is right) - see Isa. 1:15-20 - note also these are at least professing Christians, so they are not doing this to come near to God in salvation but as a child who has done wrong, looking to keep the relationship with their parent unobstructed
- q. Their issue was one of "double-mindedness" (as if two perspectives, two opinions, divided loyalties) and assuming they could be Christian and of this world at the same time (as many try in their attempts to be friends with two who fundamentally (principally) oppose each other) thinking they actually can serve two masters - yet these, as identified in 1:8 are unstable in all they do, not being fully committed to either side
- r. These "looking both ways" people are needing to "purify your hearts" as in the removal of any conflicting loves/affections and loyalties to what is in opposition to the Lord (the "friendship of the world" being (always) in opposition with God) - this is truly a matter of the heart ensuring that the reformation is not merely external (just the hands)
- s. This ought to be a time of mourning (not in defeated despair) in grief over what has been done and allowed in living a life in such contradiction to the Lord (and that against His children (our brethren)) - a true sense of the actual wrong done in such infighting and the actual reasons for it on our part, will lead to a grievous, internal affliction of mourning (often compared to the grief shown by Peter after he denied the Lord) - in contrast to the laughter and joy that was demonstrated (and felt) when acting out of pride and self-promotion, it is now being seen for what it truly is and what it actually does and so is turned into a mourning over the sin (and the joy of self-exaltation and its pursuits now creates a cloud of gloom in us) - compare this to Luke 6:20-26
- t. "Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding." ESV for Proverbs 10:23 - note also Proverbs 26:18-19
- u. To be truly be ("ὑψώω") exalted (properly "lifted up" and properly honored) there **MUST** be a humbling of self before the Lord - notice this is not a humbling of self before others (though this may be a result) for the sins are against the Lord - this is directly in-line with the concept of submitting ourselves before God

We “humble ourselves” but there is more the sense of participating in this process by allowing it, submitting to it

To humble self before God can also include the idea of resignation to His all-knowing, gracious will

- v. Note the two contrasting words - to “humble yourself” (ταπεινώω- make low, as we see often illustrated with animals posturing themselves as if smaller to indicate submission) and then the work of the Lord with us to “lift” (ὑψώω - raise, lift-up to where something should be) rather than our attempts to exalt ourselves and maintain it on our own
- “The passive here has almost the middle or reflexive sense. The middle voice was already giving way to the passive.” RWP

C. Do not “talk down” your brother, as if making self a judge even over the Law - vs. 11-12

1. When dealing with (or just recognizing) the faults in others (especially the ones that we find most personally annoying/bothersome), it is of utmost importance that we remember our place under the “perfect Law of Liberty” (1:25) - vs. 11

The other two uses of this word being I Pet. 2:12 and I Pet. 3:16 both describing the slanderous attack on another’s character carried out by those outside the Church

- a. The key to properly understanding this verse (and so applying it properly) is found in the underlying word for “speak against” (NASB) or “speak evil against” (ESV) is the word “καταλάλω” which simply means to “talk down”
- b. This is describing the tearing down of another person, and here a “brother” - it is not describing the recognition of and the dealing with the faults/weaknesses in each other (for this must be done), but describes the “character assassination” that is not seeking the good, betterment or even the repentance of another; just their destruction
- c. James, still in the imperative, stresses the unacceptability of talking-down your “brothers” -he addresses them as “brothers” dealing with “brothers” - this provides one of the first reasons not to do what he is about to describe... you just don’t tear down (seek to destroy) family
- d. “All that he reproves is the setting up of our own tribunals, in which we are at once prosecutor, witness, law, lawgiver, and judge; not to say executioner as well.” Ellicott’s
- e. For, as James clarifies, to “talk-down” a brother and in so doing “judges” him (condemns, seeks to enforce a judicial sentence on his own) is then, now (at the same time) “talking down” the Law (for the Law must be observed in not only dealing with sins/evils, but in the authoritative definition of sins/wrongs, so, far more than our own personal sense of right and wrong) - the Law must not be used to condemn a good thing or to condemn something it does not (or to handle a sin in a manner not dictated by it)
- f. We can be guilty, in a sense, of standing in judgment over the Law when we do not think it is enough to deal with sin - this sin of slander and/or talking down another (to destroy them or taint their reputation) is most certainly a breaking and an active judgment over and against the “Royal Law” (to love our neighbor as ourselves)

It is important to remember the reason for such “law” for the believers - we are freed (now) to do what is right, freed to know what is truly right and freed from the bondages (enslavements) of sin (thus the “liberty”)

To break the Law of God or to become a law to ourselves is to place ourselves above it as a judge (in thought, word and action)

2. One lawgiver and one judge - vs. 12

- a. It is important to consider that there is the possibility of having a conscience that dictates what it supposes others ought to follow and obey - the Lord is the lawgiver and as such needs to be looked to as the authority over ourselves and so our own consciences - and then, when we believe there is a need for judgment (enforcement of the Law when confident we see it being broken), the Lord is the ultimate, singular judge
- b. This, of course, does not mean sins cannot be dealt with by us - they must be dealt with but this “dealing” must also be done lawfully - we are apt to overreach either when we believe some might need “saving” because of their apparent wrong or when we believe others might get away with their apparent wrongs - yet there is only one who is able to save and destroy
- c. So, who exactly do we think we are condemning (judicially sentencing) another?
- d. One of the dangers of this type of “judging” is that it is likely to produce in its “victims” a reciprocating judgment/condemnation on the “attackers”

Note the added explanation of Paul to this idea in Romans 14:1-12

If we see others doing wrong (or even what we think is wrong) we ought to approach them, but always with a humble, cautious spirit and not with a thought of how we, personally, can administer some type of cost to them

IX. Living Life, Daily, With a Clear Understanding That Each Day is Dictated by the Lord’s Will - 4:13-17

A. James, in these few verses, takes on a concept that many in our time would have a tendency to take issue with (as if planning ahead is what is being reproved here) - We must note immediately that at issue here isn’t planning ahead, but placing confidence in it to the disregard of God’s control - vs. 13-14

1. As will be dealt with in verse 16, “boasting” is the issue, as though our ability to plan and predict (anticipating all the variables and possibilities because of our research or personal experience) is what makes things happen or how we can almost make it happen
- a. Believers are not guiltless in this area and can (sadly) place faith/confidence in “the data” and “experts” over and even against God’s providence



To humble self before the Lord will include a life focus on His purposes, His control and His sovereign rule over all, all of which expects to have Him as a core focus in day-to-day life

Not only do we regularly presume on the future (immediate future), but even the expected quality of it, setting ourselves (our attitudes) up for disappointment/discouragement as though we really should be able to predict tomorrow consistently - yet note how often we find ourselves being surprised

Note also the cause of such presumption being associated with lazy irresponsibility and greed in Isa. 56:9-12- compare this also to the Lord's example in Luke 12:13-21

This is part of the underlying ideas the Lord deals with in Mat. 6:25-34, where He directs from the anxiety of tomorrow (even of the basic needs), but to focus on the time we have (the very day we have, now) seeking His daily agenda (His kingdom) righteousness in whatever He has given for that day (for we are incapable of truly dealing with tomorrow and are not guaranteed we'll have it

- b. James uses here an example of a tradesman planning out the next few days, the travel and the expected duration of the business agenda and finally, the expected "profit" - this is not just a set of challenges to business people; they are examples of a typical mindset that establishes day-to-day life (being lived to the disregard of God)
- c. James had just been dealing with the issue of wishing to be a friend of the world at the expense of friendship with God - he now goes on, still building on this point, of another way God is left out of daily living/planning/thinking
- d. The beginning words "Ἄγε νῦν" (come now) are designed to draw special attention (as if in an excited/amplified way) as we might say "Look here" or "Come on!" and it directed at those planning out their days and year presuming they have another day, let alone another year
- e. Notice this example involves short time planning (today or tomorrow) of a trip to end in a year's stay of "trade" and the full expectation of making a profit - this hits all major areas of our planning (and all of it susceptible to exclude an acknowledgment (internally and externally) of its dependence upon the Lord - basic questions could be asked, "Is God in my focus in thinking of tomorrow, in my daily journey and its connection to longterm activities and being able to make a living off of it?"

2. This is not unreasonable when considering how (of what) our lives "consist" - vs. 14

- a. James, still in a stressed mode of communication, contrasts the seemingly normal planning of a business man with the first unavoidable fact; none of us truly knows what tomorrow actually hold for us - Pro. 27:1 states what should be obvious to a believer, that none of us should boast as to what we believe we can be assured that tomorrow will "bring forth"
- b. Not only do we not know tomorrow's outcome, but we do not even know if we will live to see it - James uses vapor (mist/steam) as an example of the fleetingness of our life - it is easy to focus on (and is commonly encouraged even in Christian circles) to be focused on the goal of a personal legacy, yet James brings us back to the simplicity of what our focus should be - be faithful, obedient and strive to be productive for the Lord in the day we find ourselves living, for if driven for a "legacy" we might sacrifice individual days for some presumptive amount of time and accomplishments we expect (hope) to achieve for our own name's sake
- c. The picture of mist/vapor is multi-faceted - life, like mist, is short-lived and is subject to the wind currents of the time of its existence and so is feeble - the realization that the breath of our life can be gone at any time, within seconds, should not cripple us with fear or cause us to despair of life, but to be motivating to utilize the opportunities of time and life that God has given us every day

B. Live, daily, by the motto, "If the Lord wills" - vs. 15-17

1. Our daily thoughts of planning ought to be prefixed with the actual concession of what every moment of life rests upon, "If the Lord wills..." - vs. 15

- a. So, "instead" ("ἀντί" in direct contrast, the opposite) of saying/thinking being just the planning out of the day's agenda and how it might lead to future endeavors, we ought to be focused on the dependence on the Lord's will (firmly, consciously above our own), and not just that "my plans" may not work out, but that I ought to be biased toward seeking out His agenda/ will/purposes in the day about to be faced
- b. Note James first mentions in light of the Lord's will, whether or not we will live - the constant awareness of our mortality and impending death should not be a morbid thought but one of the urgent realization that the time being spent now is limited, and has a personal deadline - and if the Lord wills we live the day through, then we are ever aware of His control and overriding control/direction of the doing of "this or that"

2. As it stood "now", these were glorying in their pride - vs. 16

- a. The wording is interesting, "καυχᾶσθε ἐν ταῖς ἀλαζονείαις ὑμῶν" (you boast/brag in the pride of yourself) as in openly bragging about personal confidence in self - it is not uncommon to find variations of some being proud of their pride - yet, rather than looking on this as being offensive to humanity, it is uniquely evil against the Lord
- b. All of this type of glorying (confident, internal/external self-dependence with a focus of self-glory) is "πονηρά" (wicked, malicious, vile, evil)

compare to Pr. 19:21, Rom. 1:10; 15:32, I Cor. 4:19; 16:7

This ought to be part of the thought process we use in humbling ourselves before the Lord (willfully submitting to His will in whatever each day brings, and this being the comfort of our thoughts of each tomorrow)

"Practical atheism" is a term that can be applied to many of us when describing how we really come at each day, as though it pivots on us, our will and determination

With all that exists being dependent upon the Lord "holding everything together" (Col. 1:17), it is not only sensible, but is the right thing to do in recognizing and acknowledging His control in/over all and seeking to be in-tune with His purposes

For, to deliberately avoid knowing the Lord's will and actively seeking it (which we already know) is at the heart of "knowing to do good" is actively sinning (and a sin particular to them)

It cannot be stressed enough (to us) that the word for sin here (and so often throughout the NT) is "ἀμαρτία" which simply means "missing the mark" - not actively succeeding in what ought to be done

- c. Their arrogance is tied not only to their confidence in their ability to make things happen and properly predict (with confidence in their abilities), but in their failure to also be considering, if what they are doing or planning to do, is within "what the Lord wills" morally/ethically- many come to trust their own "moral read" and equate it as from the Lord (or in harmony with His will, and so are not apt to continue to pursue learning (or challenge) to have these areas further developed)

3. Knowing, then, that each day is to be lived like this, it is sin not to - vs. 17

- a. This verse can stand alone as being true in all areas, but with James' use of "οὖν" (then/therefore) he intends it to be tied with what has just been covered (living life in light of the Lord's will and seeking His will in it) - whoever (anyone) then that knows what he/she ought to be doing is the subject here in this verse
- b. Lest anyone try to out-maneuver this verse by reasoning themselves to a deliberate ignorance (as though it will excuse them), we should realize in light of this context, that the neglect of seeking to grow in better understanding the "will of the Lord" (His control and His revealed purposes and commands) is "sin" also
- c. So here, not seeking out and living by "if the Lord wills" in our life's daily/regular focus, this is "sin to him" - this neglect (which is actually deliberate/willful) then disseminates to all other areas of life, where one would seek to excuse themselves from responsibilities (obedience) to life's daily particulars ("knowing what the right thing" in the moment is TO DO and not doing it), though there has been active evil, the failure to fulfill "the right" is sin - "The omission of a known duty, as well as the commission of a known sin, is criminal." John Gill
- d. As a point of clarification, to avoid a condemning conscience, we may know what the right thing to do is but may not be able to do it (at least as far as we might define it), but this is under the realization that all is subject to the Lord's will - our goal is to be poised to obey and to act as far as God gives us opportunity

X. Focus on Being One of The Blessed Perseverers - 5:1-12

A. The coming miseries of those who live for self-indulgence - vs. 1-6

1. The subject of these first verses in chapter 5 are "the rich" but in particular, those that are rich and have gained their wealth unethically or to the disregard of the needs of others - vs. 1-3

James will use these types of people as contrasts to what true believers should seek to follow/mimic and the reasons why - even today many know that the "rich" (and influential) may have miserable lives (in reality), yet still long to meet them, idolize them and dream of becoming like them (even if in lesser degrees)

Joy and fulfillment founded on the temporal cannot help but succumb to fear/dread since it is all fleeting- and even the joys originally found in it begin to fade, levels of euphoria can no longer be maintained

It is not only "normal" but is even encouraged that we all store up more than enough to prepare for the future - there may be some merit (basic) in this, but as soon as faith turns to what has been stored-up, it will produce the types of miseries James describes here

- a. "Come now" is a phrase used as we would call one to consider something, thinking it through to completely understand where things, as they currently stand, are headed
- b. The "rich" represent all those that people throughout history have envied, who would be those typically looked upon as having succeeded in life, and would be the ones sought out and looked to for advice - as we still see today, that even though their counsel may be ill-informed regarding what is most important, they are still looked on as the ultimate goal
- c. Even though the ones these first few sentences are addressed will never hear the warning, James still proceeds for the sake of his readers - rather than looking to flaunt their "success" James tells them to "weep and howl" (describing overwhelming grief (like that of those without hope and who are overcome with grief/despair at a funeral))
- d. The reasons given are summarized, first of all, as "miseries that are coming upon you" (the word "ταλαιπωρία" describing a wretchedness as a result of ongoing hardships and disappointments) - as with so many earthly "successes", there are moments of euphoria at achievement followed by increasing fear of loss or failure of what has been gained
- e. The evidences that are or will be seen are seen in the decay of all that they have cherished and use to measure their wealth and status (all of it fading, and they are unable to maintain their fame/fortune/success), yet they are addicted to their pursuits and lifestyles (priorities) - they will come to see it "rotting" and their symbols of success "moth-eaten" and even their wealth corroded/rusted (these being signs of types of hoarding, heaping wealth/possessions upon more wealth only to see it suffer from decay... like so many see when various investments lose value (e.g. inflation and the devaluing of money or possessions)) - and, as James describes this, it will be as "evidence against you" (proofs of excessive resources unused/uninvested in eternal or better things)



The rich man who continued to store-up for himself met his death unexpectedly, "... So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God." Lu. 12:21

- f. It seems to have missed their attention that they are doing all this "in the last days" - this is generally accepted to be the time after the Lord, all the way till He returns, and that since it could be a short time, it is futile (and even wrong) for them to hoard such wealth for themselves - for believers there ought to be storing up treasures in Heaven (Mt. 6:19-21)
- g. The use of the words "last days" also shows the perspective we all ought to have, not with a focus of expecting a long life here, but that of a possible short life (either in our death or the Lord's return) - either way, life will still seem shorter than anticipated when we reach its end

2. The evil works of these serve as witnesses against them - vs. 4-6

To pay a workman his wages (and the worth of the work or agreed pay) was a part of the Law as seen in Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14-15 - successful cheaters or perpetrators of fraud will not go unpunished

It is telling to note how many of the world's wealthy, though charitable to their own causes, are often most aggressive against the thought of God and those that are His people - the "age" has been good to them and they do not like to consider their mortality nor their accountability

- a. When describing these deeds as "reaching the ears of the Lord of Hosts" it is fully intended to indicate something dreadful - these are guilty of holding back (cheating) their workers
- b. Note that it's the "wages" that are crying out to the Lord as witnesses against these, and the voices of the "harvesters" (those bringing in the profits for the owner) cry for vengeance
- c. The use of "the Lord of Hosts" pictures the reality of Him being arrayed against such as these
- d. The warning will mostly be unheard and unheeded by these "rich" who do not know what is really happening - they live life "on the earth in luxury" and they are self-indulgent (uncontrolled/unrestrained excesses) yet do not realize they are fattening themselves just as an ox is fattened-up till and for the "day of slaughter" - just as an animal intended for slaughter eats all it can will do so even till its last day, so are these
- e. These "rich", who should be weeping and howling in repentant grief and regret, are instead condemning and murdering "the righteous person" (a person whose life and priorities are in contrast to theirs)
- f. This "righteous man" does not fight back - possibly because they cannot or they know the situation is one of suffering for/with Christ - either way, it further illustrates their viciousness

B. Patient, "established" hearts focused on the Lord's presence and return - vs. 7-11

1. Be patient (μακροθυμέω - long-tempered (versus short-tempered), so not quick to anger, yet also describing one "long of spirit" so they do not lose heart) - vs. 7-8

Those living for the return of the Lord as their daily focus are not apt to get caught up in the temporal values of this age or even its causes (and its points of "glory" that are encouraged as possible life pursuits)

The farmer (as will we) must do all he can in his preparatory work (hard work) but must wait, be patient, remain trusting and stay focused on the value of what he is waiting and working for

compare also to Pr. 4:25-27

- a. The standard by which they determine how long to patiently endure (suffer long) is to the coming (return) of the Lord - in light of the oppression just described, there will be judgment on their oppressors, so vengeance is not what these "brothers" should be seeking or striving to obtain
- b. James' illustration is one of a farmer who must patiently wait for the "precious fruit" - the fruit is of such value the farmer's life is determined/defined by it; it is what he lives for and he, with patience (long difficult waiting, and waiting in faith) must endure each day with its challenges and even braced for potential challenges
- c. The farmer must wait upon (depend upon) the "early and late rains" - even when in times of drought or the threat of it, the farmer still realizes his dependence upon it and realizes he may have to wait longer and endure further (added) hardships
- d. In like manner so we must be patient, but not in an inactive way - times of waiting and enduring are to include the establishing (στηρίζω - propping up, deeply grounding, fixing firmly in place) of the heart - the practice of anchoring the heart is ongoing and the need is motivating with the realization that there will come (constantly) times that will potentially shake our foundations - note Psalm 27 (especially verse 14)
- e. The reason James gives for an established heart (focus, will, thoughts, feelings) is the ever present realization that the coming of the Lord "is near" (it is already set in motion and may or may not happen in our lifetime) - yet it is a possibility that is to motivate to a heart not given to distracting fluctuations - compare to I Peter 4:1-9
- ### 2. Do not allow frustrations/pressures to be "taken out" on each other - vs. 9
- a. In keeping with the context, the complaining (grumbling/murmuring) mentioned here is "στενάζω" which is used of groaning or sighing in pain, and this would then indicate an improper way to respond to the stresses of having to patiently endure in taking it out on each other - stress on an unstable heart can result in anger and impatience, spilling over onto those closest to us - read Rom. 12:9-21
- b. This groaning looks to include a sense of anger directed at others and that in a critical way (as in acting as judge over a brother) even though we know the true Judge is near

The original standard for this concept is Mt. 7:1-2 which also clarifies that such judgment results in being judged by the same standard we judge other against

To “judge” in this way while knowing the Lord is the actual Judge is to stand in judgment of His judgment

This is a necessary distinction because many will suffer for a while and will exhibit patience, but will not remain in that state for long (either because they do not trust God’s control and grace or they just don’t believe it’s worth it)

Note that the motivating point is not that of escape from troubles or shortness of trials, but that the Lord is compassionate toward us in them - this should enable us to see that these sufferings are necessary and ultimately good which is why the focus is to be on the end result of them when God brings it to an end

So be an honest, trustworthy person not know for being caught in a lie or tricky wording to deceive (which can often be motivated by the pursuit of self-protection and a fear of suffering)

- c. This use of “grumbling” does not describe the “proper” assessment of another’s wrong and the pain that comes when observing it, but is more in keeping with the “judging” of another as to how they bother us personally - such an attitude makes us the standard by which we judge/complain, making us a “judge” over another - if we could be honestly objective we (personally) would not meet our own standard of judgment (ultimately)
- d. We are to focus on the needs of the other with a hopeful attitude (founded in faith in God’s work in them and not their own work) - if we see each other as fellow soldiers in the same struggle, we are apt to be forgiving of them (immediately) in their bothersomeness to us
- e. We also are to be controlled in our responses, realizing the actual/rightful Judge is “at the door” (He’s nearby and will do all the judging that will ever need to be done)

3. Strive to be like the blessed, patient longsufferers - vs. 10-11

- a. James appeals to the examples of the “prophets” using two distinct words when he wrote, “... κακοπαθίας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας...” the “suffering of evils (against self) and the patience/longsuffering” they exhibited in it - they received all sorts of evils against them yet received (accepted) it patiently
- b. “James refers to these OT examples of faith to show not how extraordinary people of extraordinary power did marvels, but how ordinary people who shared the common human experience of suffering became extraordinary through their persevering faith in the face of adversity. Thus, the blessedness of the prophets involves not their happiness in their earthly lives, but their wholeness in relationship to God.” McCartney
- c. James points to these as examples, not just of what to do (what to imitate), but the reason why - for “we count them blessed” (James and those he was writing to) consider these as fortunate and having all that would be needed to be fulfilled/content - but here he uses another word (ὑπομείναντας) which means to “remain under” (and so, endure)
- d. Notice that these prophets (who are to be imitated) were ones speaking for the Lord and were the ones being treated cruelly and spitefully, so there ought not be a surprise on our part when we suffer when properly serving and representing (standing with) the Lord
- e. In support of this, James points to Job and his sufferings (suffering with the open permission of God) and his endurance of them, which if the end not be known would have seemed tragic and something “just bad”, yet “we know the end” (τέλος) that was from the Lord, an end (predetermined purpose) that demonstrated the compassion (literally “many compassions”) and so abounding in compassion (deep sympathy) and mercy (tender pity)
- f. With Job, God’s compassion was not seen just in the final practical blessings in the double-restoration he received from the Lord, but in the Lord’s correcting of Him and the revealing of the wrongness of his accusers
- g. The focus of the sufferer must not be in the moment and on the suffering, but on the compassionate Lord who will assuredly get us through it, and that for our good - see Heb. 3:7-19; 10:32-39
- h. The idea of being “blessed” in suffering for the Lord was described also as “blessed” in Mt. 5:11-12 - the blessing there being “your reward in Heaven” and even the identifying with the prophets, “... for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

C. Regarding suffering and judgment, be a person of your word (trustworthy) - vs. 12

- 1. There is much debate as to the placement and purpose of this verse, since it seems to haphazardly switch topics for one sentence - but a focus on the first phrase, as a connection/transition may help alleviate confusion

- a. The first words “But above all” are “Πρὸ πάντων δέ” (in Greek) and mean “before all things however” and do not indicate priority as much as timing (placement), as in before any consideration of the suffering for the right, make sure not to suffer as a wrong-doer
- b. It was a very common practice in their day to include many “oaths” in discussions, since there was a presumed amount of dishonesty and attempts to deceive others with cleverly worded sentences and even oaths - see Mt. 5:33-37; 23:16-22

- 2. The Lord judges those who “grumble” against their brothers and will also judge those that are prone to lie or distort the truth

- a. As Jesus commanded in Mt. 5:33-37, we are not to “swear” (in the sense of having to take a solemn oath in order to be trustworthy)



This is always wrong and will be judged, but James' focus seems broader, dealing with honest, trustworthy speaking (being reliable and not deceitful in any communications)

It was common for many to swear by something less than God (or His Temple) and to believe they could still back out of it - we are to be people who are consistently reliable in all our responsibilities versus excuse-makers

- b. Such a practice stems from general mistrust - this is common among those outside the Church but must not be so within Christianity - here and with the Lord in Matthew, this is a forbidden practice with each other
- c. The idea of "swearing" is quite often associated with the swearing that indicates some form of profanity, and in particular the kind that references God and His names (as in everyday speech and used even as exclamations) being common in making oaths
- d. Do not make it so you ever need to swear by anything (as though including something "holy" or awesome (heaven or earth)), but it must be so (those who are of faith) that a "yes" is a reliable "yes" as well as the "no's" - legally, we might need to contract and swear to agreements/commitments, but it should still be the case that our word is completely trustworthy (not only in the lack of lying, but in the absence of exaggeration or guile (trickery))
- e. Our word should be consistent because an actual oath or even just to verbally consent/obligate, and then to fail, is to face "judgment" (from those lied to and/or the Lord)
- d. In being a perseverer there should not be the temptation to avoid stress/pressure by fudging the truth - keep your word, be dependable and honest not using pressure/stress as an excuse

XI. The Necessity of Praying and Faith - 5:13-20

A. This last section of this epistle is often referenced when those in our churches are seriously ill and look to follow the instruction in verse 14 in calling for the elders of the church to pray and anoint with oil - but these verses focus on faith and addressing our focus in dealing with our "nature" when things are stressful/challenging and even when things are well

- 1. The situations, no matter if they are suffering, joyful or even when physically ill, there is to be a posturing of submissive faith that responds with prayer and praise and is fully aware that the Lord's will, will be done
- 2. The healing dealt with here is far more than just the physical healing and is tied to confession and forgiveness of sins (assured), and all this is to be considered whenever there is suffering and then realizing what a reasonable response to it ought to be (again, in and because of faith)

B. The powerful prayers of the righteous - vs. 13-18

- 1. Three scenarios, all of which look to the Lord for aid (solutions) - vs. 13-14

Grumbling and complaining while in pain is very natural but the wrong response for us, for such complaining will work its way around to being focused on God and others, only compounding the pain and evils (like in trying to stamp out a fire while only spreading it more)

- a. The first question (scenario) is that of "suffering" (κακοπαθέω, evil/hurtful feelings, malicious pain) which is more emotional turmoil caused by the evils around us - these can be as bad and even worse than the pains of physical illnesses
- b. The command to this one is to "pray" (versus grumbling or cursing) - to pray (προσεύχομαι, literally to direct wishes/wants toward, in this case, the Lord) so when in emotional/mental pain/torment, bring it to the Lord in prayer (interact with Him constantly/consistently in it)
- c. Those that are "cheerful" (εὐθυμέω - good feelings, so those that are just feeling happy, contented) - these are to sing (ψαλλέτω a word that originally meant to "pluck a string" as in playing musical instruments, but came to be used of singing Psalms to the Lord, so praise songs) - don't just look on happy feelings as just a "stroke of luck", but as a time to direct its reason and source back to the Lord - sometimes a cheerful even song-inducing response (singing, humming, whistling, etc.)
- d. Those that are "sick" (ἀσθενέω - without strength, used of the infirm, ill and feeble typically from a physical condition/sickness) - the instruction here is somewhat surprising, for we would typically expect that the same command to prayer would be the answer - prayer is the answer but not alone, for the elders of the church (the church spiritual leaders, those of the proven character described in Titus 1:5-9) are to be called
- e. The Elders are to do two things - first they are to "pray over him" and we know this is in-person because the one who is sick is to "προσκαλέω" (call near/along-side) - this prayer is assumed to be for their healing (which ought to happen) but even these prayers must be always be including "if the Lord wills" (for it is the "prayer of faith")
- f. The prayer is to be accompanied by anointing with oil which many have come to take as ceremonial or as figurative, though the word is used for "rubbing them down" with the oil and not so much a traditional, ceremonial "anointing" - it is to be taken as past tense, with the idea then of being "having applied the oil already" before praying for them

We see right away that physical illness is not to be handled alone but those suffering from it are to seek out the in-person prayers of these elders

This includes the idea that there would be some comforting having healing steps taken (that can be taken by non-medical people) first, even if it just involves the general comfort of the person who is sick - there is nothing inherently wrong with those who pour some oil on the head of the sick as seeking a literal practice



2. The “prayer of faith” - vs. 15

Prayers of faith will always involve the idea of reliance upon the Lord and His will in the matter- it is always possible He may not will the continuation of life, though this text ought to motivate a response of health to seek out the Lord's healing work - it will take an act of faith to follow these directions

These are those that have been so sick they are failing in their strength and likely weary in their spirit also (possible even those losing a sense of hope in it as used in Heb. 13:3)

It should always be understood that it is ultimately the Lord that will “raise him up” and not a greater faith/focus in medicine like Asa - see II Chron 16:1-13

True repentance of sins can often be outwardly seen in the one submitting to the Lord and under spiritual authority- God can and will use sickness to refocus us and cause us to reconsider life decisions and priorities

This is not telling us to confess our “transgressions” (what we deliberately did wrong) to each other, but to openly admit when we have not been doing what we ought (thus the word “failings”)- this doesn't then end at forgiveness, but will result in a sense of obligation to fulfill responsibilities

It is sometimes noted, when making a case for good, gracious, consistent communication, that it be maintained so that we do not build “silos” (each separated from the other) - if this is allowed and continues, these “silos” will likely become fortresses

Another idea with a prayer of “great power” is that it is in earnest (it is sincere and not ritualistic and scripted or part of a “vain repetition”)

- a. Often, so much discussion is directed at the use of the oil, proper attention (and priority) is taken from the emphasis on faith, and it acting out in prayer - it is “ἡ εὐχή τῆς πίστεως” (the prayer of the faith) so it is more than just a general idea of praying, but one with a very specific purpose (and in this instance, the purpose to direct all attention and confidence (trust) to the Lord regarding the sickness)
- b. The faith seems to be directed at all parties involved in this prayer (the elders and the one who is sick) resulting in the sick one being “saved” (not in a spiritual sense, considering the context, but in a physical sense) - does this mean if this is followed verbatim that everyone will always be healed? there is no parallel to this absolute idea and the use of the term “saved” is typically used of a “rescue” (as in saved from a danger, likely death in this case)
- c. This “saving” (likely the idea of keeping someone alive) will only be temporary as all will someday die (even all those healed by the Lord died later) - the key is the continued focus on the Lord and His will in sickness (especially the serious ones) - the word for “sick” here is “κάμνω” describing the symptom of their being “weary” and without strength
- d. The second phrase regarding healing is “the Lord will raise him up” - if the Lord's will, these will be “raised up” as in restored to work/serve again - we ought not look on texts as these as though the purpose to continue on in life is to enjoy more leisure but, considering the Lord in it all, there should be an intent to continue in His work (in some capacity) and not to live to just live - faith in the Lord is not just trusting Him to live, but trusting Him in what living is all about
- e. James adds the possibility of sin being involved in this sickness - it is reasonable to consider the sins that James has dealt with specifically in this epistle (especially the quarrels and conflicts, grumblings and other things related to unrighteous discord) - if the sick person has committed sins (specifically leading to this sickness or not), they will be forgiven - repentance is assumed here since they have called for the church leaders - forgiveness of sins is the highest priority and if the sickness was used to lead to this, all the better

3. Understanding now the magnitude of sin(s), confess failures to each other - vs. 16a

- a. Seeing that some sin can lead to sickness, and seeing the forgiveness that is assured (by the Lord), we should then have a different outlook on our own failings - the word James uses is “ἐξομολογέω” (to outwardly agree (with God) that sin is sin and is wrong) and the “ἐξ” at the beginning shows this to be something that is not just between ourselves and God
- b. It is crucial to understand the word for “sin” is the popular word “ἁμαρτία” which describes more the sins of failing to do as we ought, and these are what we are open about with each other - though it can become common for us to confess our sins just to relieve of guilt
- c. If we are open to each other about our neglect of responsibility and focus, we are apt to hold each other accountable (and sometimes, just with being around each other) - the focus (corporately) will be one of encouragement and the ongoing need for it (not focusing on what was done wrong as much as what was missed in failing to do what is right)
- d. With open and consistent communication then comes the ability to better pray for each other, and James specifies that this prayer be “that you might be healed”, which could have several applications; one being that each pray for the other (the injured/hurt and the offender), second that each prays for the spiritual healing of each other, and third, that such confession and praying will lend to true healing

4. The power of the prayer of a righteous person - vs. 16b-18

- a. Keeping this in context, the first conclusion from James' usage of the description “righteous person” would need to be in keeping with the practice of confession and praying - the core idea of the underlying word (δίκαιος) is that of being “correct” (right) yet is typically used in describing someone who is “right with God” (morally and theologically)
- b. Such, when they pray, are used to pray a prayer that is described as “ἐνεργουμένη”, effective, “energetic”, and so “with power” as prayer that “works” - the core reason this is to be expected is the realization that such a person (being righteous) will pray seeking God's will and way in every matter, praying in faith (a focused trust in/on God)
- c. A righteous person's prayer will be humble, not presumptuous and will “ask in faith”

James phrases it this way to take away anticipated thinking (excuses) of most of us who would look on people like Elijah as being exceptional and specially gifted, and so not to be used as a normal role model (example) that is expected to be mimicked - yet his exceptionality was God's usage of him and his submissive posture before God

Elijah is a good example because his prayer was not for himself and not for his glory - his objective was the restoration of Israel's faith and obedience back to God (which our prayers should also be focused on when we pray for each other)

- d. As an example of a righteous man praying, James uses Elijah, who though he was a prophet and accomplished significant things as God's man in his day, he was (of himself) a "man with a nature like ours" - he was an average man profoundly used of God because he trusted God, obeyed God and prayed (sought what needed to be done from God and so by means of God's wisdom, power and timing)
- e. The word James uses for a "nature like ours" is "ὁμοιοπαθής" which describes having the same feelings, passions and so would have had the same type of ambitions, struggles, and fears like us (it was the same word used in Acts 14:15 where Barnabas and Paul were trying to get the people of Lystra to understand they were "normal" people like them (and not gods))
- f. Yet, Elijah "prayed earnestly" (literally he "prayed with prayer" as in he expressed his desire/wishes not just openly in what he said, but in prayer to the Lord) as seen in I Kings 17:1 with his open declaration of what would be while it was simultaneously directed to God
- g. Elijah's prayer was one of judgment and for the sake of Israel to repent from the pagan religions that had come in and were embraced - he prayed/declared that it not rain for three and a half years, followed by his praying again and rain returned - this was clearly a demonstration of the power that could come from such a person who was righteous

C. The magnitude of "bringing back" one who has wandered away from the truth - vs. 19-20

1. Restoring one that has been led away from the truth - vs. 19

This is generally what James has been seeking to do in this epistle - he's making the case for the positive significance of such a pursuit of returning erring brothers/sisters - it needs to be noted that the Truth is the standard and not opinions and personal scruples (which can easily become the pursuit over against the Truth itself)

Times of laziness and boredom can be prime time for straying/wandering which is another reason we need lives encouraged in purpose and responsibility always

- a. The word for "strays" is "πλανηθῇ" and is in the passive which provides us with the idea that the person is being persuaded and is not necessarily instigating the skeptical wandering away - these are straying from the Truth (likely the accumulation of seemingly "smaller" errors that lead to one walking away from it altogether to something else) - this could describe a large number of scenarios dealing with overall belief (theology) and practice (obedience), both of which are irrevocably linked together (in true truth)
- b. Everyone has a "truth" (reality) they follow because they believe/trust it, and James' urging here is to work to "turn back" those straying from the real truth back to it - this is a constant focus for believers with each other because of the seriousness of what is at stake - to turn them back (they repent) their soul is "saved from death" (and the death of one's soul is far more severe than the death of one's body)
- c. One of the worst, unloving responses we can have for another "brother" is to disregard their straying from the Truth - the urgency is so intense, we are driven to do it (if we truly care for them), which is why James is stressing this at the end (along with mutual confession of failures in responsibilities) - do we truly care for each other?

2. The practical result of such a saving of a soul from death is the covering of a multitude of sins (not the concealing of them, but having them dealt with and covered in Christ's work as well as) preventing the ones (the sins) that would have come in greater numbers had not the erring one been turned back

- a. Erring offenses are covered in forgiveness, primarily by God but also by us - we are thrilled to genuinely forgive wrongs against us and thrilled to share and promote the reality of God's forgiveness of sins
- b. This is one of the greatest ongoing healings needed in our churches!

Note also Psalm 32:1 and I Peter 4:8