

James Bible Study #1: Introductory Matters

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.

Introduction

The Epistle of James is at once one of the most valuable books of Holy Scripture...and also one of the most terrifying. As a didactic Epistle, it is the closest thing in the New Testament to the Wisdom Literature in the Old: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, etc. There is a dire need for wisdom and direction that is directly applicable to Christians, being written *to* Christians, and St. James' book is exactly that. But on the other hand, the author writes with an incredibly harsh tone, and he makes demands of the believer which appear unreasonable if they are not read carefully. Those who miss the mark in their reading of James may find themselves tempted either to despair or to begin trusting in their works for salvation.

It is easy to miss the point of St. James' Epistle, getting lost in the weeds of particular verses. Ultimately it is a letter which aims to take Christians and make them *better* Christians, actively contributing to their sanctification in a way which glorifies God through the use of the Law. In particular, the author seeks to employ the second and third uses: to shame the believer for their failures, and then provide positive steps to strengthening them, assuming they have repented. We would do well to think of this Epistle as an exercise in spiritual bodybuilding.

Authorship

The author identifies himself as James, making matters easier than finding the identity of other writings like Hebrews. However, there is a question of *which* James is being referenced here. There is St. James the brother of our Lord, St. James the brother of John the Apostle, St. James the Lesser, and James the father of St. Jude.¹ Making matters even trickier, the name *James* is an English variant of the original name Jacob, which was understandably a common name in first century Judea.

Early Christian references do not help with regard to authorship, although they do help with authentication. St. Clement quotes the Epistle extensively,² demonstrating that the Apostolic Fathers concurred that the letter was legitimate Scripture. However, the Church Fathers (beginning with Origen and Eusebius) are not in accord as to the popular belief that St. James the brother of our Lord Jesus wrote it. Thus we are left with one conclusion: the Church received and authenticated the Epistle as canonical Scripture from the beginning, but the authorship is in some doubt outside the name "James." However, given the audience, dating, language and occasion for the book, we operate in this study on the assumption that St. James the brother of our Lord was the true author. Contextually, this identification makes the most sense.

Audience

The first verse directs the Epistle to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion." This cannot be a reference to the Jewish diaspora as a whole, or to all people of Jewish extraction outside Judea. If it

¹ Acts 1:13

² A few examples are found here: <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/e-catena/james4.html>

were written to the Jewish diaspora, one would expect the author to engage in an apologetic defense of the Christian faith. To the contrary, he writes under the assumption that all of his readers are already believers.

Perhaps, as some commentaries have suggested, St. James writes only to Christians with Jewish heritage.³ This is also unlikely, as he addresses the twelve tribes rather than the predominant tribe of Judah. Furthermore, as the northern ten tribes were absorbed into other populations after the events of the Assyrian Exile, few – if any – Hebrews could lay claim to being a member of the tribe of Issachar or Asher. It would make little sense for the author to be addressing Samaritans with this language either, even though they *might* count as part of the twelve tribes; Samaria was not geographically considered part of the diaspora, and their ethnic heritage was so mixed as to constitute ethnogenesis. One might claim that addressing the twelve tribes *en toto* is a general greeting shared among Jews during the first century, but if so this writer sees James 1:1 as the *only* instance of such a greeting, making it even less likely.

The most satisfactory answer that can be given is that St. James concurs with supersession along with St. Paul,⁴ St. Peter,⁵ and St. John.⁶ This is to say, that he holds the Church to be the true Israel and greets them thusly, with the congregations spread throughout the Roman Empire constituting a “dispersion.” During the time in which this was written (detailed below), the clash between the orthodox believers and the Judaizing sect was a real concern which required a united front between the Apostolic writers. Supersession is just one of these points which emphasizes that the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles had been broken down,⁷ and it directly contradicts what the Judaizers were saying.⁸ Furthermore, and the Church has correctly recognized this, James is one of the “Catholic,” or general, Epistles. Everything the author writes can be applied to every believer at all times; it is not limited by name, tribe, nor affiliation, and it is not restricted to a historical context in order to be applied. The command, “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom”⁹ applies to a Gentile Christian just as much as it would a Hebrew Christian; it would be absurd to claim otherwise. Thus his greeting, “To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” is a semi-tongue-in-cheek way of acknowledging Supersession.

Occasion and Dating

There is nothing in the Epistle of James that is not said elsewhere in Holy Scripture. His message is a high-density concentration of Biblical moral commands and theological statements more than revelation of anything new. As we move forward in the series, we will demonstrate with thorough cross-referencing and explanations that St. James is aiming for *impact* as much if not more than proper doctrinal instruction.

This impact-oriented way of writing is done with a purpose and for an occasion. If St. James is compiling points of ethic from other places in Scripture, then he is doing so to make an argument, aiming towards something. As Craig Davis has noted, there are similarities in diction between the letter from the Apostles in Acts 15 and St. James' word choice, and given the issues surrounding the

3 <https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney1/18-letters-from-james-jude-peter35508/the-letter-of-james-to-the-jewish-believers-in-judaea-samaria/>

4 Romans 9:6

5 1 Peter 2:9

6 Revelation 2:9, 3:9

7 Ephesians 2:14

8 The central claim of the Judaizer is that Gentiles must become Jews in order to be saved, giving up their cultural, ethnic, and national identity while observing the Law of Moses. These were demanded in conjunction with faith in Christ.

9 James 3:13

Jerusalem Council, this puts the Epistle at 48 A.D. at the latest.¹⁰ This means the Epistle of James is likely written in preparation for the Council, seeking to counteract any misunderstandings or exaggerations concerning St. Paul's teaching. St. Paul wrote Galatians in response to the Judaizers around the same time as James was written, and not only are both inspired Scripture, they both serve as historical-literary *snapshots* of the prevailing orthodox attitudes that Christians took in countering the judaizers and preparing for the Jerusalem Council. St. Paul emphasized Christian freedom, while St. James emphasized the *new obedience* to which the Christian is beholden.

Make no mistake though, St. Paul and St. James are in harmony, as future lessons will demonstrate. In Galatians, St. Paul teaches about freedom from the Law and belonging to Christ, being justified by faith.¹¹ St. James is in agreement, teaching about a law of *liberty* that the Christian is under.¹² St. James teaches that the Christian must do good works, and St. Paul concurs! Despite what some apologists for various sectarian denominations have claimed, they are in agreement at every point.

The Structure of James:

1:1 Introduction
1:2-8 The Trial Thesis
1:9-15 Riches and Steadfastness
1:16-21 Emulating God's Grace
1:22-27 Introducing the Law of Liberty

2:1-13 On Partiality
2:14-26 On Vindication

3:1-12 On the Tongue
3:13-18 On the Two Wisdoms

4:1-10 On Worldliness
4:11-17 On Slandering and Boasting

5:1-6 On the Rich
5:7-12 On Steadfastness
5:13-18 On Prayer
5:19-20 On Re-evangelism

Note from this topic list that St. James includes both external (that is, deeds committed or omitted) and internal (attitudes, thoughts, dispositions) matters in the Epistle, with very little separation made between them. This will become a running theme, seeing the Christian as a *whole* rather than as a collection or deeds or a mishmash of thoughts.

¹⁰ <http://www.datingthenewtestament.com/James.htm>

¹¹ Galatians 2:16, 5:1-6

¹² James 1:25, 2:12

James Bible Study #2: The Trial Thesis

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 1:2-8

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, **3** for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. **4** And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Introduction

St. James penned his letter as an address to all Christians in the dispersion of various churches outside Judea. As James was written around the same time as Galatians, the primary purpose of the Epistle is likely a clarification regarding practical Christian life as preparation for the Jerusalem council. In Galatians, St. Paul rebuffs the Judaizing heresy which claims that Gentile Christians must be circumcised, follow the Mosaic Law, and essentially forfeit their identities as Gentiles in order to be saved; the Epistle of James reminds the reader that though St. Paul is correct, it does not mean that believers exist in a state of moral *anarchy*.

But before St. James begins straightening us out and correcting misinterpretations of *Sola Fide*, he offers a simple but powerful thesis: our trials are good for our sanctification, and to navigate our circumstances we must appeal to God in faith. In other words, to a persecuted Church the message must ring loud and clear: rejoice and request. We rejoice to know that this will make us stronger; we request wisdom from God to make it through.

Vs.2-3

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

St. James is in agreement with the author of Hebrews that the crucial virtue to hold to in times of testing is endurance, or steadfastness.¹ A key difference, however, is that the author of Hebrews extols endurance as *a means* of going through God's discipline, while St. James speaks of the testing itself as *producing* this same steadfastness while going through trial.² So which is it? Do we need endurance for trials, or is endurance the reward of trial? While it is true that there is a distinction between trial and discipline as both authors speak on the matter, either way both are a *good* thing which yields greater character by our Lord's doing.³ In one sense, there is an element of needing the thing to get more of it – the same way someone might opine “you need to have money to make money.” The believer must learn to exercise steadfastness in order to make gains in endurance itself. The point stands though that St. James counts this as a *good* thing, despite our instincts to the contrary. The world weeps at painful circumstances and rejoices at poor character; the Christian is to rejoice at painful circumstances and lament poor character.

1 Hebrews 12:7

2 Both authors utilize the term *Hypomone* for endurance in various forms: <https://biblehub.com/greek/5281.htm>

3 James 1:2, 1:17, Hebrews 12:11

Vs.4

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The Christian who is steadfast, able to endure any trial which threatens his faith, has become the saint whom God wants him to be. The difference between an immature Christian and a mature Christian is *not* the level of education in Scripture or the amount of devotional acts one participates in, but instead the endurance of faith. The mature believer, while not *morally* perfect, has a strength which ensures that he is rock solid; in other words, St. James is saying that undergoing trials is a part of sanctification *and* preservation in the faith.

The Christian is preserved in the faith by several things. St. James's audience would be aware that the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper all produce and maintain faith.⁴ Here, he emphasizes *trial* as an aspect of preservation as well. Whoever has their faith made stronger by persecution is also better preserved therein. Endurance makes the believer “perfect,” accomplishing a maturity of their character, and the one who is mature has a faith unshaken by outside circumstances. As greater maturity is part of the goal of the Epistle, here the author also signals that his harsh tone in the coming chapters is something of a trial itself: he speaks roughly, with the voice of the Law, so that the readers will respond with growth in the faith.

Vs.5

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Concurring with the Apostles, King Solomon and the Psalms, St. James says plainly that our Lord gives wisdom to those who seek it from Him.⁵ “Wisdom” is best defined as a skill of living, a disposition and aptitude to make good decisions based on knowledge, observation and experience. Mankind, who suffers from sinfulness, cannot obtain true wisdom by himself: no amount of study, meditation, or asceticism will suffice to achieve it. Any worldly “wisdom” we might claim for ourselves is foolishness to God,⁶ so we are guaranteed to be fools unless God makes us wise. St. James encourages his readers that God is generous, gracious even, to those who ask and earnestly believe God will grant it.

In context, given that trials were just mentioned, one might be tempted to believe this is merely asking for wisdom *in the moment of trial*, as though the believer is asking for deliverance through correct decisions. This is certainly part of it, but we cannot forget that wisdom and faithfulness – *moral* faithfulness – are tied at the hip in Scripture.⁷ Wisdom exhorts men to continue in obedience, and thus the wise man obeys God. While St. James certainly does not discount that wisdom helps us endure trials, he also points to God as the great Sanctifier of believers; all of our obedience comes ultimately from Him. As St. James has it as his goal to make us into better believers, it is crucial that these verses open the chapter.

Vs.6-8

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

4 John 21:25, Acts 2:38, John 6:54, and later Romans 10:17

5 Psalm 36:9, Proverbs 2:3-6, Colossians 2:2-3

6 1 Corinthians 3:19, Job 5:12-13

7 Proverbs 1:7

The only way by which someone can please God is by faith.⁸ If someone asks for something without faith in our Lord, then such a request is unlikely to be granted because it is not pleasing to Him. Thus faith is a prerequisite to receiving wisdom from our Lord; though it is certainly wise to believe in God, to believe in the Gospel and to believe in the gifts He gives, faith is first and foremost a gift itself – it is distinct from the wisdom St. James speaks of.⁹ How then does St. James call for us to actively believe something, if faith is a gift? He does not call upon us to create faith so much as he tells us to exercise the faith which we *do* have. Here the believer is called to say in his heart, “I have been brought to Christ and converted as a believer; because of this, I should trust that my God is a gracious God who makes this promise for wisdom.” He is called to expel any doubts by reassuring himself in the promise which our Lord makes here, that his request may be made pleasing to our Lord. The Christian thus does well to maintain study in the Word, that he may place his faith in the promises God speaks plainly and be certain that God is truly generous.

The contrast is also made with the doubter. A doubter is unstable because, like a wave, he permits himself to be a victim of circumstances, thoughts, emotions and opinions which are not in his control. A doubt is fundamentally intrusive to the mind: to ask something while doubting is to argue with one's beliefs while making the request! The term St. James employs for “doubting,” διακρινόμενος, carries a connotation of “back and forth.”¹⁰ The doubter never moves beyond deliberation, leaving him captive to objections that come from outside himself. As the nature of a Christian is changed,¹¹ this means that doubts come from something alien to himself: the old Adam (that is, our old sinful nature), the influences of worldliness, etc. To submit to doubt is ultimately to submit to an attack on our faith, which runs counter to the steadfastness that St. James wants to see in the believer.

And it is this steadfastness which comes from trial by means of rejoicing and request. St. James will continue on to develop this trial thesis in the coming verses and chapters.

8 Hebrews 11:6

9 Ephesians 2:8-10

10 Transliterated “diakrinomenos,” from Strong's #1252. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1252.htm>

11 2 Corinthians 5:17

James Bible Study #3: Riches and Steadfastness (The Trial Thesis Part Two)
For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek
Bible study session.

James 1:9-15

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, **10** and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. **11** For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. **13** Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **14** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. **15** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Introduction

St. James has introduced the "Trial Thesis" as we have called it. In short, the testing of our faith through difficult circumstances produces a greater steadfastness in the faith, resulting in a stronger and more faithful Christian.¹ In order to undergo trials, we must therefore appeal to God for wisdom; both practical and moral wisdom, making right decisions and obeying God's commandments, come from God. Yet this appeal must be made in *faith*, lest the man making the request be a victim of outside circumstances like doubt.

In our passage today, the author develops more of the Trial Thesis. He has demonstrated the opposing values between the Christian and the world: the Christian rejoices in trial and laments his sin, while the world rejoices in sin and laments trial. To expand on this further, today's passage presents two more distinctions which run counter to sinful instincts.

Vs.9-11

Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

The rich have always had a habit of showing their wealth, whether through gaudy clothing or expensive possessions or holding extravagant events, etc. The world values this, praising the rich and berating the poor; to the Christian, however, the poor has distinct advantages which the rich man does not, thus deserving a certain admiration from St. James.

The Psalms are replete with praise for God's special care and compassion for the poor.² The poor man is delivered, exalted, and subject to God's provisions in a way that shows direct favor; because he is already humbled, he is raised up by our Lord. The impoverished brother relies on God more by faith, leading to greater sanctification. The rich, on the other hand, is instructed to boast in his humiliation. This is not to imply that it is *humiliating* to be wealthy; instead the rich man is exhorted to *be* humble, and to find in that his proper outlook. Later on, St.

1 Of course, the author of Hebrews speaks of endurance or steadfastness as a *prerequisite* to undergo chastisement, but this is in agreement with St. James; we use what we have and by the Grace of God we get more of it.

2 Psalm 9:18, 35:10, 40:17, 72:12, and so forth.

James will zero in on the contrast between humility and exaltation as a matter of *sequence*: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.”³ If the rich man wishes to have what the poor man already has (God's favor), then he does well to be lowly.

The tenth and eleventh verses discuss both plain reality as well as identity. Even if the rich man is a believer, his riches do not go with him into Heaven. One day, no matter how much money he made or possessions he had, these will go into the possession of someone else or be destroyed. His identification with wealth is like a flower; dead and forgotten when his time comes. However, it is *identification* with wealth, and the pursuit of it especially, which leads to dying and being forgotten. Humble rich men are often remembered fondly, even as heroes or saints when we consider Abraham or David. Both were fantastically wealthy, beyond what most of us could even dream to have, yet their humility and dependence on God delivered them from the obscurity and frivolity which mark the rich of the world.

In other words, St. James warns the wealthy to be humble and to not set their hearts on riches. His similitude between the wealthy and the flower of the field is reminiscent of King Solomon's meditations on the vanity of greed: “Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, 'For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?' This also is vanity and an unhappy business.”⁴ Greed, or the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, is pointless, as it does not produce happiness nor eternal life. Those men who are well off but *Godly*, like the Patriarchs or the righteous among the Kings of Judah, found their joy in faith rather than possessions.

Vs.12

Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Steadfastness is hardly something to boast about by itself. The steadfast man is steadfast *in* something; in the context of James 1, that something is faith. James 1:3 identifies this, saying “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” Having stood under trial with one's saving faith intact, the believer receives eternal life in Christ our Lord. This is a promise from God which is reserved for “those who love Him,” approximated from a number of places in Scripture. Daniel 12:12-13 makes mention of a blessing for those who persist past the symbolic 1335 days, that they may stand in their “allotted place.”⁵ More than once, our Lord Jesus says that the one who endures to the end will be saved.⁶

Someone might opine that God is promising eternal life based on *Agape*, and indeed this is the case. However, it does not entail from here (as our Roman Catholic friends may claim) that one is saved *by* loving God. One does not love God without first believing in Him. And Agape being an orientation toward action is only something that flows from the believer's awareness of God and faith in the Gospel. St. James is no fool, he does not claim that our salvation rests in our own hands, with the crown of life being bestowed *on account* of one's love for the Lord; if he were, he would be undoing the Atonement entirely. In truth, one loves God for the same reason he receives the crown of life: because of the faith which God has granted and strengthens through Word, Sacrament and testing.

3 James 4:10

4 Ecclesiastes 4:7-8

5 Someone may claim the final verse of Daniel is only applicable to the prophet himself. The immediate context suggests expansion to this writer.

6 Matthew 10:22, 24:13

Vs.13-15

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

God does not tempt anyone to sin. However, God *does* test the believer. Though St. James uses the same root word for "tempting" as "trial" between the twelfth and thirteenth verse, context shows that he is speaking of two different kinds of testing.

Trial

-From verses 2-12, the trials that the believer faces are indeed at least ultimately from our Lord, and the intention is good. Just as God tested Abraham with the Binding of Isaac,⁷ chastisement and testing from God results in greater sanctification and opportunities for heavenly rewards. The author of Hebrews goes into this kind of ordeal in more detail in Hebrews 12.

Temptation

-From verses 13-15, St. James is speaking on this occasion of temptation *to sin*. Rather than God's testing, which seeks to establish one's character and improve it, the wicked sort of testing which God never engages in is enticement, or an attempt to get someone to sin.

Enticement does not come from the devil. Though the devil and his demons *do* tempt people, that is not the source of it. To our shame, temptation finds its source in human desire, the sinful and rebellious part of us which wishes to tear ourselves away from Christ. This is of course a foolish thing that our "Old Adam" or "sin nature" wishes to do, as doing so kills us.

St. James points out that our desire to sin leads to sin which leads to death: in contrast to the life which comes from steadfastness in the faith and earnestly seeking wisdom from God, the ultimate goal of a corrupt human nature is suicide. Certain Church Fathers, namely Athanasius in *On the Incarnation*, describe sin as an undoing of God's creation. St. James supports this characterization on account of the inevitable death which sin procures in the sinner. In an overwhelmingly positive sense then, the Epistle of James teaches Christians how to wage war on death, namely with the art of steadfastness.

Jeremiah asks,

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"⁸

St. James replies,

"And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."⁹

7 Genesis 22

8 Jeremiah 17:9

9 James 1:4-5

James Bible Study #4: St. James Proclaims the Solas

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 1:16-21

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. **17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. **18** Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **21** Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Introduction

The Lutheran interpretive structure for understanding the Bible is Law and Gospel. These two voices with which God speaks to us are essential to our salvation in Christ. According to its second use,¹ the Law (namely the Ten Commandments) pierces us through with guilt over our sins, because we cannot meet its demands by our own power. No man may say he has only ever worshiped the true God, nor may he say that he has never borne false witness, committed adultery in his heart, and so forth. The Law shouts in our ears that we are damned unless a Savior redeems us. The Gospel is then preached, which *provides* that Savior, raising our spirits by telling us that Christ has died to pay for our sins and rose again for our justification. It is spoken of in many ways, usually by bringing up the unqualified promises of our Lord to us. The Gospel provides a soothing balm for our troubled consciences, and by the Mercy offered sweeps away our guilt. *Then* the Law does not accuse us, but acts as a guide as we walk by the Ten Commandments and spread the Gospel to others.

The Epistle of St. James does not neglect this hermeneutic. Some commentators – even Luther at first – see only Law in it, and only in the condemning, accusing Second Use. Yet today's passage speaks of the Gospel *and* its sanctifying effect on us. While the book of James is primarily concerned with the Third Use of the Law, to help the Christian become stronger and navigate dire circumstances, the author does not ignore the other uses and nor does he ignore the Gospel. Instead, he brings them up that we may understand the motivations we have for doing good.

Vs.16-17

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

In the preceding verses, St. James brought up that the steadfast believers receive the crown of life, and he warned us temptation comes from our own desires, which leads to death. It

¹ The first use of the Law is to curb evil, the second is to show us our sins, the third is to guide our lives as beneficiaries of the Gospel.

might seem attractive then to see this as an exhortation to *earn* this crown of life by avoiding temptation, extirpating our own desires, and fostering our own steadfastness in the faith. He does not want the believer deceived into thinking they can do such a preposterous thing. He does not want us deceiving *ourselves*.

To the contrary, St. James wants us to know that *all* good gifts come from God. Salvation is just such a gift, as is the aforementioned wisdom and steadfastness. One does not merit these things by their works or dispositions, but receives them by faith as a gift.² In other words, he does not believe in earning our salvation. To the contrary, even our *sanctification* is by and large a gift in which we participate.

In speaking this way, St. James is bringing up the Gospel and highlighting the way it is a gift from our Lord. He even says that this is from the Word which makes us the “firstfruits,” reflecting St. Paul's teaching that by the Word preached we are brought to faith.³ And he says this in order that we may not be deceived. It is not St. James's intention that his Epistle should be misconstrued as a return to the judaizers' way of works-based salvation, in spite of his previous, seeming association with them.⁴ If there ever was a time in which he was a judaizer, he repented of it.

Vs.19-21

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

With the same openness to the Word of God which implanted their faith, St. James urges believers to be listeners first, and patient with their circumstances, avoiding a bad temper. When he says “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God,” this is to say that the righteousness which we *want* to foster comes from the “implanted word” and not our own indignation.

Few realize just how angry we are at sin. While we are simultaneously saint and sinner, the “saint” part leads to a natural aversion to sin in all its forms. As we seek greater sanctification, there is a temptation to be angry at the sin of others or our *own* sin, and this is not productive. A man who falls to temptation – perhaps in his struggles with pornography or over-drinking, for instance – may feel angry at himself, angry at his tempters, or even just frustrated in general. But doing so does not actually stop one's addictions nor end the temptation.

Instead of being angry, the author urges the believer to repent of sins by “putting away” (that is, renouncing) their iniquities and *receiving the Word*. It is a different way of saying “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”⁵ *Instead* of becoming angry, we must go confess, “put away” our iniquities, and receive the Word – that is, the Gospel. If we receive absolution in faith, humbly listening to the words of Grace poured out on us, then we are saved.

Conclusion

If every good gift comes from God alone, then salvation is a matter of Grace, not merit: St. James teaches us Sola Gratia – Grace Alone. And if this salvation is received by hearing the Word which He has implanted in our hearts, then we are forgiven and declared righteous by

2 Of course, faith is a gift as well (Ephesians 2:8), meaning that all is Grace from our Lord!

3 Romans 10:17

4 Galatians 2:12-13

5 1 John 1:9

faith: St. James teaches us Sola Fide – justification by Faith Alone. While it is predictable that someone might bring up the next chapter in objection,⁶ these six verses demonstrate that their objection is incorrect. Sola Gratia requires Sola Fide: if God saves us by His Grace, such that all good promises and heavenly gifts only come from Him, then any merit on our part cannot be received by earning it. Grace is *received*. If it is paid for, then it is no longer grace.⁷

Even more fascinating is that he appeals here *not* to tradition nor hierarchy for salvation. For St. James, it is the *Word of God* which can save our souls, not adherence to the proper authorities. He appeals to the Word as the means by which God brought us forth into faith, salvation, and forgiveness. By stating the Word to be sufficient for this, and granting absolutely no additional requirements, traditions, magisteria, etc., St. James proclaims Sola Scriptura – the Word of God Alone is the origin of our dogma, and is both clear to understanding and sufficient for salvation. Someone may object that James is not talking about the Scriptures when he speaks of the Word, but such is beside the point. He says “he brought us forth by the word of truth;” What has God promised to be true? The Word – that is, the Scriptures.⁸

The text offers us no escape from the conclusion that the author supports Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Sola Scriptura. This means, if we may be so bold, that St. James was a Lutheran.

6 That is, the tired misuse of James 2:24

7 Romans 11:6

8 2 Timothy 3:16-17

James Bible Study #5: Introducing the Law of Liberty

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 1:22-27

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **25** But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Introduction

In the last passage, St. James provided the reader with a salutary warning before he went any further in his epistle: “Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.”¹ From there he shared a proclamation of three Solae – Sola Gratia, Sola Scriptura and Sola Fide – to keep the reader from being self-justified:

- “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights”
- “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits”
- “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”²

The reader is thus encouraged to see how God is gracious, the only Actor in salvation, and He does this work within us by His Word through faith. So we are warned against any attempt to be deceived by our own merits or the teachings of those who preach works righteousness. Yet St. James does not intend for the reader to veer off into the *other* extreme, known as antinomianism.³

Antinomian thought presents the Christian faith as little more than a mental exercise. They are hearers of the Word, but action is discouraged. In their heretical understanding, justification by faith is warrant for sin, leaving the believer in a state of spiritual anarchy. And since God is the only actor in salvation, preaching the Law is either to be discarded entirely, or relegated to its second use alone – that of convicting us enough to receive the Gospel. The judaizing heresy taught that people were saved by their observance of the Law of Moses, thus being justified before God by their works; the antinomians serve as the polar opposite, teaching that the believer seeking to obey God's Commandments (particularly the Ten Commandments) is actually departing the faith by desiring to be justified by their works. By warning against both, St. James exhorts us to seek the narrow path of salvation in Christ.⁴ Like Solomon's warning,

1 James 1:16

2 James 1:17-18

3 “Antinomianism” simply means “Against the Law.”

4 Matthew 7:13-14

“Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil,”⁵ the author warns us against self-righteous sin and anarchic sin.

Vs.22

22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

First we must understand that the Word of God is not merely a *book*. The Word intended to affect our entire lives, and we must interact with, obey, *and* believe it. Christianity is not merely a set of doctrines; it is also a *life* that we live, a path we take, and a faith which we hold to. For someone to believe that they are saved merely by intellectual assent, having no orientation of the heart to trust in God (from which our good works flow) is to deceive oneself about what the Word actually teaches.

Vs.23-24

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

Sts. Paul and Peter will word this message differently, but harmonize with it for our understanding. From Romans 6,

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

From 2 Peter 1,

5 make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, **6** and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, **7** and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. **8** For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. **10** Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Behold the harmony of these messages! St. Paul says that to continue in sin is to not live according to the new life we have in Christ Jesus. St. Peter adds that to refuse seeking virtue is to forget that we were forgiven of our sins entirely. St. James summarizes both points by likening the antinomian position to forgetting one's identity; who we are in Christ *matters*, and to be a “hearer” only, not seeking God's will in our lives, is to be inconsistent with the transforming power of the Gospel itself.

Vs.25

25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

The “Law of Liberty” is one of the most important concepts for understanding the Epistle of James. At first we may sense a tension in the phrase “law of liberty,” as the word ἐλευθερία⁶⁷

5 Proverbs 4:27

6 Transliterated “Elutherias,” Strong's #1657

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1657.htm>

truly means freedom. How is one free if there is a law to their freedom? It helps to understand it in terms of *paradigm*. The author does not deny that we have freedom in Christ Jesus; He died for our sins, thus liberating us from the condemnations and restrictions of the Old Covenant. But He freed us for a *purpose*, namely good works prepared beforehand,⁸ that we may make good use of our liberty. God did not set us apart from the Law that we may sin; instead, we are now able to make true choices which increase our love for the Lord, show love for our neighbors, and make us better as individual believers.⁹

Vs.26-27

26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. 27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

This is one of the few times the word “Religion” is mentioned in Scripture. Against the antinomians, St. James asserts that good works are necessary for the Christian, with helping widows and orphans, and avoiding worldly sin being examples. Are they necessary for salvation? No, as the writer has already established that we are saved by Grace through faith; but they are indeed necessary. Meanwhile, against the judaizers he asserts that religion does not consist of following rules divorced from virtue. The word θρησκεία¹⁰¹¹ implies rite, devotion, and ritual; since we are freed from the Old Covenant, we do not have to be circumcised or observe dietary laws, strict calendars, or animal sacrifices to be in a good relationship with our Lord.

While many have posited the fantasy that St. James was a leader of the judaizing faction and that St. Paul slandered him as a mutilator,¹² these two verses put the fiction to rest. By the time he wrote this Epistle, any relationship he had with the judaizing faction was put to rest as he began teaching *liberty* in Christ and seeking after good works that are actually good and holy before our Lord.

8 Ephesians 2:8-10

9 Matthew 22:34-40

10 Transliterated “Threskeia,” Strong's #2356 from #2357

11 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2356.htm>, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2357.htm>

12 Here is just one example: <https://ayoungvoice.blogspot.com/2009/05/was-james-judaizer.html>

James Bible Study #6: On Partiality

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 2:1-13

1 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. **2** For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, **3** and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” **4** have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? **5** Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? **6** But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? **7** Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. **9** But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **10** For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. **11** For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **12** So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. **13** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Introduction

Having proclaimed salvation by grace through faith, according to the Word of God, St. James then rebuffed the errors of both the judaizing and antinomian heresies. The Christian is to live according to the new paradigm of the “Law of Liberty.” This is to say, we are freed from bondage to the Law, but we are freed *for a purpose*, namely to do good works and make choices in accordance with Christ's instructions.¹ Yet it is not an “out of one law and into another” situation, as the believer truly *does* have both the positive and negative formulations of freedom. We are free *to* make real choices, but we are also free *from* the curse of the Law and the sentence of death.

Now, having introduced the Law of Liberty, St. James intends to guide the reader in living a life consistent with it. Starting with the second chapter, he gives examples and exhortations for the free life which are not found in the confines of judaism *or* antinomianism. An essential message throughout the Epistle is that we must guard our freedom against the rhetorical tricks played by both of these parties, and live the way that Christians do under the freedom given to us. This means rebuffing the judaizing trick that says “of course you are free – free to do as I say,” and the pro-sin position of willingly entering slavery to sin.

The first exhortation, or description of how Christians live in regard to the freedom they have, is to perceive people in a fashion alien to the world. The world values the external, the shows of wealth, prestige and beauty which garner material success; the Christian should not do

¹ James 1:27, Ephesians 2:10

so, as this keeps him able to deal with individuals based on their actual identity.

Vs.1

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

The word for “Partiality” is προσωπολημψίας,²³ meaning a judgment based on outward, external circumstances in persons. In other words, “Prima Facie” or “face value” determination of merit, ignoring the actual merit of the individual as shown by their deeds and heart. As we are in Christ, we are to see people the same way our Lord Jesus sees them instead of how the materialistic, ugly world sees them.

As an aside, we must also note here that St. James calls our Savior “the Lord of glory.” There have been some commentators who claim that James is a fundamentally Jewish Epistle, having little (if anything) to do with the Gospel, “barely” mentioning Christ, etc. In other words, they believe there is some contrast between how St. Paul or St. Peter writes about Jesus, and how St. James speaks of Him sparingly. Our disagreement with these individuals cannot be understated. By identifying Christ as the Lord of glory the author lays a title upon Jesus which, properly speaking, only applies to God.⁴ To show no partiality in light of our faith in Christ is to show no partiality in light of our faith in the Lord. St. James firmly teaches that Christ *is* God; that His centrality to our lives is the foremost motivation for our behavior, and the freedom which He gives us one of our greatest concerns, makes the entirety of the Epistle Christological in nature.

Vs.2-4

For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Since προσωπολημψίας entails assigning value based on the appearance of others and our assumptions about them, a well-dressed, clearly rich man is the perfect example. Partiality as a sin looks like this: we see the man who appears rich, make the assumption that he is, and then *treat* him with honor based on this assumption, though it is unmerited. Yet this is not relegated solely to economic status. The prettiest girl in the crowd typically gets lots of unmerited favorable attention from males while more stout or homely girls are ignored or mistreated.⁵ The man who walks into a church wearing a clerical collar is assumed to be holy by virtue of his office alone, having built no reputation as a capable minister! Such is an abominable activity; not only is it a worldly way of thinking, but it puts the Christian under the power of another human being without their realizing it. The congregation or individual that practices partiality is *willingly* submitting to the earthly power of the rich man, the allure of the pretty girl, or the feigned authority of the untested priest,⁶ regardless of whether these have any right to fealty!

Note, however, what St. James is *not* saying. He does not take this exhortation against partiality and morph it into a demand that Christians treat or value everyone *equally*. Such an idea, peddled by modern egalitarians, is ridiculously unbiblical. A husband is to love his wife as

2 Transliterated “prosopolempsiais,” Strong’s #4382

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4382.htm>

4 Psalm 24:7-8

5 Modern readers will understand this as the very definition of “simpling.”

6 If deacons are to be tested (1 Timothy 3:10), how much more so the minister?

Christ loves the Church;⁷ he is called to love her *more* than any other human being on the planet, and to treat her accordingly. St. Paul teaches that “double honor” be afforded to ministers.⁸ Unequal treatment is part and parcel of a well-ordered Christian congregation, family, and society at large. However, the author continues in his warning against partiality lest we presume that position and appearance are all that matters.

Vs.5-7

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

Simply put, we cannot miss the fact that God loves the lowly, and offers salvation to all regardless of their station in life; the sin of partiality blinds us to this fact, motivating us to treat people God loves as though He hates them, and people God values less as though He loves them more. A devout man who suffers poverty is honored by our God, whereas a rich man (whose occupation necessitates taking from the poor) has a harder time of having faith in Him; to be a respecter of persons is to invert this dynamic and to become a slave to it. See a church with a rich man tithing, and you will see a church constantly tempted to rely on his offerings...and then tempted to submit to his fleshly will, lest he rescind his donations.

Vs.8-13

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

People in our lives are our neighbors, whether they be poor or rich, beautiful or mundane, clergy or laity. We are to love them all as ourselves. Partiality – judging, assuming, and treating differently based on appearances – is a crass refusal to love one neighbor as yourself, while insisting on loving another neighbor *more* than yourself. And if one refuses to keep the Second Greatest Commandment, there is no excuse nor sly rhetoric which shall save them.

Here, St. James affirms a place for the Law, namely the Ten Commandments, in the life of the Christian. Truly we are to live under the Law of Liberty, but the Decalogue informs our decisions and guides us; this is referred to as the Third Use of the Law. If we refuse to live according to the word and example of Christ, then the Law returns under its Second Use: it convicts us of our sins and pronounces judgment upon us. If we abuse our liberty, then we are brought back to the judgment of the Commandments. As St. Paul says, “the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, homosexuals, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”⁹

7 Ephesians 5:25

8 1 Timothy 5:17

9 1 Timothy 1:9-11

If someone decides that they shall not live consistently with the new nature given unto them in their Baptism, and if they shall not live according to faith in Christ and consistently with the Law of Liberty, then they shall (whether they like it or not) be living under the Law once more. And if they are living thus, the Law shall return to convict them until they repent. Thus St. James writes that the merciless – that is, the one showing partiality – shall receive no mercy. But if he ends his partiality, if he repents, then the mercy of our Lord shall overcome the judgment against him. In other words, should we find ourselves slipping into partiality, we must repent of it, seek forgiveness by Christ, and then see to it that we show partiality no more.

James Bible Study #7: Kinds of Faith (On Vindication)

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 2:14-26

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? **17** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! **20** Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; **23** and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. **24** You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Introduction

The first thirteen verses of chapter two begin to describe the consistent Christian life under the Law of Liberty. St. James's primary concern is that the believer should sway neither to the right nor the left, avoiding both the judaizing and antinomian heresies; both threaten the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. Using the sin of partiality as an example, he develops his theology of liberty by declaring the sinner, if unrepentant, to be back under the Law: “if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.”¹

The Christian, living under the outlook of Christian liberty, has a responsibility to *maintain* and *safeguard* his freedom from all threats. St. James is in complete agreement with St. Paul, who places this responsibility on believers as well: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”² This means being on guard against the judaizing heresy (and indeed, any heresy which teaches works-righteousness) which submits willingly to the yoke of the Law. It also means being on guard against antinomianism, which leads to slavery to sin – and raises up the Law to the believer for condemnation.³ Citing some of the Ten Commandments in James 2:11, the author *includes* the Decalogue as a part of the Law of Liberty under which we live – not as a matter of salvation, but as a matter of conscience and guide. Should we violate one of these, we are brought back to the threat of the Old Covenant and exhorted to repent and be restored.

Having spoken about the dynamic between freedom and commandment, now the author turns to the matter of faith. There was as much confusion surrounding the topic of faith as there is in the modern world, leading some to the conclusion that their mental assent to the contents of the Gospel was sufficient for salvation – and perhaps even what they *thought* was devout faith

1 James 2:9

2 Galatians 5:1

3 James 2:10-12, Romans 6:1-12

and trust in our Lord. Here, he corrects the record in a powerful way that should be treasured by all believers, because it teaches us more about what faith *is*.

Vs.14

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

If a man says he has faith, but he does not have good works, this tells us that something is *wrong*. Both questions are hypothetical and are answered with “no.” It is *no* good if a man says he has faith but he does not have works, and *no*, that man's “faith” cannot save him. Note here that the *opposite* must also be true: if a man says he has faith and he *does* have works, then his faith *can* save him. Nowhere will St. James say that our works can save us – if that were the case, he never would have become a Christian. But this verse, along with the declaration that receiving the Word can save us in James 1:21, amounts to a declaration of Sola Fide: St. James teaches that we are justified by Faith Alone, but he wants to make sure it is the *correct* faith.

Vs.15-17

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Asking another hypothetical question to clarify the matter, it is evident that if someone does not do good works, their faith is likely not inspiring those good works. Note that in the example, St. James asks if giving benedictions alone is any good: the answer is *no*. Someone may be quite devout in their faith, but if it does not produce concrete results then that faith is not good because it is dead. By dead, we are to think of such a “faith” as being inanimate, doing nothing for the believer. It is not a faith that *works through love*, which according to St. Paul is essential.⁴

Frankly, this should cause the magisterial branches of Christianity to examine themselves. Both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox have proclaimed that, ultimately, the believer is saved by a conjunction of faith and works.⁵⁶ This a denial of St. James's teaching that proper faith can save while works cannot (explained further below). Worse yet, even if these churches were correct that faith in conjunction with works is what justifies us before God, they bind the consciences of their laity to perform works that St. James would *not* consider “good.” Eastern Orthodoxy requires that the individual believer fast for more than half the year.⁷⁸ Roman Catholicism has commanded the observance of “holy days of obligation.”⁹ Both require prayers to the saints, and count all of these as “good works” which contribute to justification, a lapse into judaizing ritualism which is not comprised of caring for one's neighbor and moral excellence; as such, they are defiled.¹⁰ Tragically, for many of them their faith is shown to be dead by a refusal to do works which God actually wants us to do – namely loving Him above all and loving one's

4 Galatians 5:6

5 https://www.k-state.edu/english/baker/english233/Council_of_Trent6.htm#:~:text=Canon%209.,will%2C%20let%20him%20be%20anathema.

6 <https://www.goarch.org/-/how-are-we-saved->

7 <https://orthodoxpebbles.com/orthodox-basics/fasting/>

8 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC156653/#:~:text=Orthodox%20Christian%20holy%20books%20recommend,and%20Friday%20throughout%20the%20year.>

9 <https://www.omvusa.org/blog/catholic-holy-days-of-obligation/>

10 James 1:27

neighbor as themselves. A rosary or prayer bracelet might be beneficial, but no amount of rosaries accomplishes love for one's neighbor in the real, material sense which St. James speaks of in his Epistle.

Vs.18-19

But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

A faith that saves is manifested in the material world through good works. The believer with living faith helps those less fortunate than himself, avoids sin, holds to true devotion to our Lord and believes right doctrine. This is because his faith *produces* these works. Note that verse 17 states “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” The faith one has in Christ is the thing which possesses good works, meaning someone has good works only secondarily; we may not boast “let me show you how good of a person I am through my works,” for we are unworthy servants.¹¹ Instead, we are to say that we show the faith which is given by God through the works He gave for us to do. As St. Paul says,

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.¹²

There are three kinds of faith: *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*.

-*Notitia* is the simple knowledge of the contents of the Christian religion. Someone with *notitia* may know what the Gospel says without believing any of it.

-*Assensus* is mental assent to the contents of the Christian faith as true. To believe that Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind and rose again from the dead is to have *assensus* faith. St. James states that even demons have *assensus*, being well aware that the contents of Christian doctrine are factual. *Assensus* does not save, however, as agreeing with something is not *trusting* in it nor belonging *to* the object of faith.

-*Fiducia* is saving faith in God, by virtue of *trust*. The man with *fiducia* faith says “Jesus died for my sins and rose from the grave, so I worship Him, rely on Him for my salvation and wish to do as He commands.” This is the kind of faith which saves and produces good works in the Christian, who says to our Lord, “I am Yours: save me.”¹³

Vs.20-25

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

The Justification of Works

The Epistle of James is short, but the language used is incredibly careful. St. James says “faith apart from works is useless,” not “faith apart from works cannot save.” He has no desire to pronounce infants, coma patients, dementia patients, the cripples, and the mentally retarded all damned on account

11 Luke 17:10

12 Ephesians 2:8-10

13 Psalm 119:94

of their inability to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, honor their parents or visit prisoners. Someone may very well have fiducia faith in Christ while being unable to perform good works.

Note also that he brings up the Binding of Isaac,¹⁴ an event which occurs *after* Abraham was declared righteous by faith.¹⁵ Before there was any justification by works, there was justification by faith *alone*. Yet St. James points out that faith is completed by works; after salvation, works are the *telos*, the reason and goal, of faith here on earth. Abraham believed God, then God declared him to be righteous; from there, God sanctified Abraham until he was not just counted as righteous, but a better person than he had once been – obedient to our Lord to the point of raising the knife to Isaac's throat. Likewise, Rahab the wife of Salmon¹⁶ believed in the Lord before her faith bore the fruit of obedience.

To Whom?

St. James says plainly that works justify. The question to ask is, “justify to whom?” St. James has proclaimed in the first chapter that God saves us by His Grace Alone, and he has stated that receiving the Word (that is, having faith) can save us; he does *not* teach that our works save us. He has thus far shown complete agreement with St. Paul's concept of “forensic” justification, or being declared innocent by God (and thus heaven bound) by faith alone. St. James has even gone so far as to speak of Abraham being justified by faith *before* his works justified anything! But if Abraham was already counted righteous by God in Genesis 15:6, then there was no need for God to count him as righteous once more; the justification is for someone *else*, lest we accuse God of making a mistake or accuse Abraham of mortal sin and needing to be restored through his works.

It is a justification by works before someone other than God. That *someone* is the believer, as well as others. It may be better use the term *vindication* or *confirmation* instead of *justification*, as one's faith is confirmed by the actions it inspires.¹⁷ This is the justification which tells oneself inwardly that God has been faithful to complete the work which He started in the believer upon the bestowal of faith.¹⁸ To be certain, good works are not to be the sole assurance of our salvation, and not even a major assurance. But our works done in Christ demonstrate and confirm to the individual believer that the Gospel is true in its promise of sanctification. This is the justification that works provide through a living faith. God brings us to faith, and then has us completing good works which then reinforce our faith.

It is also a justification by works toward *others*, as verse 18 speaks of in context. Let me restate that works are *an* assurance of salvation, not *the* assurance of salvation. We are to trust God's Word first and foremost,¹⁹ and to rejoice in our Baptism and Communion for the promises they deliver unto us; it is only after receiving these in faith that our good works (namely observance of the Ten Commandments and pursuit of St. Peter's virtues)²⁰ confirm the Gospel to us. It is a demonstration that Sanctification is truly occurring. However, other believers do not have the knowledge that God has of our inward being. A fellow believer cannot determine whether you are a true Christian based on your declaration of faith – simply declaring that you are a believer means nothing to him until you are vindicated by your works in front of him. In other words, while God declares us righteous by faith alone, we *earn* the reputation of “Christian” to other Christians by our actions.

14 Genesis 22

15 Genesis 15:6

16 Matthew 1:5

17 Hebrews 11 demonstrates this dynamic perfectly.

18 Philippians 1:6

19 Mark 16:16 being the single most simple assurance of salvation for all who believe and are Baptized.

20 2 Peter 1:3-8

Barring the Legal Sense

This cannot be forensic justification, or the “legal” declaration of righteousness before God, as the papists and easterners assert. Our Lord Christ states “wisdom is justified by her deeds” in Matthew 11:19. Wisdom, as a concept, does not need to be declared innocent by God; wisdom is instead proven correct, or *vindicated* by the deeds of wisdom. If the word “justification” was always utilized in a fashion that means legal declaration of innocence, then we would have to conclude that Christ was saying Wisdom is a person who had to be justified by deeds. This is the thesis of the Gnostic heresy with their “Holy Sophia” entity, and it cannot be true because Christ Himself is identified in the Scripture as the true wisdom of God.²¹ Being God Himself, our Savior did not need to be legally justified to the Father – who shares the same essence and Divine nature, knowing always that His eternally generated Son is perfect just as He is. Yet His deeds, namely everything He has done for the sake of our salvation, demonstrate to us through the Word that He is *exactly* who He and the Apostles sat He is – the Lord of Glory.²² After we are justified before God by faith alone, we are justified by works in the same sense that Christ was – our deeds showing to others that we are genuine. Unlike Christ, who needed to reassurance, our works also justify us to ourselves.

Vs.26

For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

In conclusion, St. James teaches two justifications which spring from the same saving *fiducia* faith. First is the legal forensic justification, in which God declares the believer righteous on account of the life, death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, as one is sanctified, that same *fiducia* faith produces works which vindicate the believer to himself and others by his works: this confirms and assures all that the believer is the Christian that God wanted them to be. He or she is living a consistent life under the Law of Liberty, rejoicing that God continues to fulfill His Word in them and conform them to the image of Christ.

21 1 Corinthians 1:24

22 James 2:1

James Bible Study #8: On the Tongue

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 3:1-12

1 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. **2** For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. **3** If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. **4** Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. **5** So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! **6** And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. **7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, **8** but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. **10** From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. **11** Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? **12** Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

[NOTE: The Deacon or Lay Leader running this Bible study would do well to spark conversation between the members of their home congregation regarding sins of the tongue and to go over strategies and disciplines for helping to gain that control. Having discussed the bulk of St. James's theology in the first two chapters, with him now moving to practical considerations we now have more breathing room for honest discussion between believers regarding our faults and correcting them.]

Introduction

St. James spends the latter part of the second chapter discussing the need for a true faith which produces good works. While he has already agreed that we are justified by faith before God, it is a different story where the hearts of others and our own hearts are concerned. One cannot merely proclaim their faith before others and assume that this makes them a Christian. To the contrary, when living faith in Christ produces good works, we witness the *telos* of faith (hence Abraham's offering of Isaac coming *after* his justification by faith in Genesis 15:6). Having been assured of our salvation and genuineness by faith in the promises of God, our works turn around and bolster our assurance even further.

Having established this as a crucial motivation for our actions, the author changes topics to begin his long discourse on the tongue, teaching, and the proper use of both. We might be confused by this, since he spoke so heavily and harshly on good works; why change the topic to the tongue when he could discuss charity more, or honoring the Ten Commandments? The answer is likely two-fold. First, he already mentioned alms as a full half of what pure religion means,¹ and brought it up as an essential aspect of the good works being a reflection of true

¹ James 1:27

faith;² he has already brought up the “Royal Law,” or Second Greatest Commandment.³ Second, he writes to an audience who already knows the Gospel, meaning he likely assumes they know catechesis. So now, in urging the Christian to live consistently according to the Law of Liberty, it is time to address a vector for misbehavior and sin that they perhaps had not considered: the tongue.

Vs.1-2

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.

The first priority in matters of the tongue is on teaching. Obviously, by “teacher,” it is assumed that this is according to the specific office of teacher in the early Church, not just anyone who teaches on any topic.⁴ Yet there is a kernel of wisdom in applying this to spheres of life outside the Church. A school teacher is accountable to parents and society for helping to raise up a new generation of adults. If that teacher intentionally or unintentionally sabotages the students' lives by giving them erroneous, subversive, or downright foolish teachings, then this does a disservice to the whole of society and potentially ruins the students. Hence teachers should be judged more harshly in the civic sphere. So it is with the teachers of the Church; one wrong doctrine, one erroneous method, or even a single comment being blown out of proportion can mean souls go on the path to hell or the dynamics of congregational life become disordered.

Thus the teacher in the Church (whether pastor or theologian, or anyone who runs a Bible study like this one) must be careful to execute the duties of their vocation with utmost sincerity, humility, and thoroughness. They will receive a harsher judgment should they fail, and a worse damnation if they are false believers peddling heresy. St. James says that “not many” should occupy this office on account of the hazards involved with it. New converts may be full of zeal, perhaps even broaching the “cage stage” in which they are cruel, judgmental know-it-alls; they should be instructed by more mature believers to remain a student for a *long* time before discussing doctrinal matters with people.

At the same time though, it is inescapable that almost everyone at some point is called to teach. St. James says “we who teach,” not necessarily “we who are ordained to the teaching office.” He says not many should occupy the office, but when a father must teach his family in devotions, a mother must teach her children, and even when the Christian layman interacts with the skeptic and answers questions, all these are called in that moment and must be aware of the harsher judgment. Thus *all* of us must take care not to stumble when called to instruct in matters of the faith, and especially so for those ordained to teach as vocation.

Vs.3-6

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

These verses apply to daily life just as much as they do to teaching. A single word can

2 James 2:15-17

3 James 2:8

4 Ephesians 4:11

make the difference between someone who is saved and someone who is damned: one says “Jesus is my Savior,” while the other says “Jesus is *not* my Savior.” In the same way, a marriage is preserved or destroyed with the absence or addition of a word: “I love you” versus “I don’t love you.” While these examples may seem obvious, others are less so. During the debates concerning Christ’s Divinity around the time of the Nicene Council, it was found that one single letter, *iota*, made all the difference in the world for whether the Creed would be faithful or heretical.⁵ Wars have been waged for less. So too can even a stutter or a bad tone of voice destroy entire relationships between friends and family members. Bad communication has led to such massive suffering that we cannot tally all the damage it has done. Such is the power of the tongue, our power of speech, leading Christians to understand that we must take great care in *all* that we say, not just regarding what we teach.⁶

Vs.7-12

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

St. James is being hyperbolic in his analogy here, obviously, as it is doubtful that anyone could tame a giant squid or a flea. But the takeaway he wants to impart to believers is that the tongue is *untamable*. We cannot, for better or for worse, fully control every single syllable we pronounce or every letter we write. Having warned us regarding the teaching office in the first verse, we recognize the dangers of teaching; what should frighten us is how we are *incapable* of speaking perfectly, let alone teaching perfectly. If “we all stumble in many ways,” then the ability of a teacher to teach rightly concerning the Word of God must be a gift from God Himself; mistakes in the teaching office are from our sin, leading the pastor and theologian to understand that their vocation must be carried out with penitent faith and prayer for protection.

If the tongue is untamable, how shall the believer proceed? Of course we must repent of mixing the venom of cursing fellow believers⁷ with the blessing we pronounce upon God, and seek absolution from our Lord. St. James says this contradictory situation should not be, because we are regenerate believers; yet on account of being simultaneously saint and sinner, we cannot help ourselves. So if it is in fact happening on account of our wicked tongues, then we must confess our sins. Prayer, confession and praise are *good* uses of the tongue, and these are to be encouraged by all.

Yet from there we must do the work of a believer, seeking to control our tongues as best as possible. If we cannot tame it, then we must remember that the best way to control an untamed animal is to *cage it*, and only release it when necessary. If we are afraid that we might say something sinful, then it is best to say nothing. If we must speak, then we must speak with clarity and stop ourselves if we go too far – lest we take God’s Name in vain, dishonor our parents, bear false witness, engage in gossip or defraud someone of what is rightfully theirs. A caged animal bites no one; may we remember this when communicating.

5 <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2019/01/06/christology-when-an-iota-of-difference-really-matters/>

6 This of course includes the written word just as much as the spoken word. St. James uses “the tongue” as a catch-all term for human communication.

7 Properly speaking the “image of God” is God’s *righteousness*, not some particular ability on our part. We lost the *Imago Dei* at the Fall in Eden, and it is brought back to us through faith in Christ Jesus.

James Bible Study #9: Two Wisdoms

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 3:13-18

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. **15** This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. **17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Introduction

The first twelve verses of chapter three are dedicated to the hazards presented by human communication, *especially* in terms of the teachers within the Church. The tongue is a dangerous and untamable rudder by which we both curse and bless, leading St. James to conclude that it, like a wild animal, must be kept under strict control. Though he begins this section of the epistle by warning teachers specifically, the warnings are applicable and beneficial to all that our Lord may call to teach...which means all of us. By virtue of our vocations, especially those related to the family, any believer may be called to teach, clarify, or bear witness to the dogmas which have been passed down to us from the Word, and thus we must pray for self control in our speech.

However, the author will not leave his discourse on the tongue at the need to cage the tongue. For this passage, he begins to discuss the *content* of what is taught. When one is called to speak in one capacity or another, the inner man must be granted wisdom which will inform their choice of words. This will either be the wisdom of demons and sinners (“lower wisdom”), or the wisdom granted by God alone (“higher wisdom”). Here the reader is warned against the former and encouraged to seek the latter for the sake of peace and righteousness.

Vs.13-14

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

St. James opens with a rhetorical question: “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Before someone may answer by raising his hand, the author adds a qualification. A wise man *would already* have good conduct on account of the meekness which wisdom produces. The word translated “meekness” is *πραῦτητα*,¹² suggesting one's possession of power or strength being subdued with gentleness and reservedness. In other words, the wise man does not blurt out whatever comes to mind, but only employs, teaches, or imparts his wisdom when the occasion calls for it. For the most part, his wisdom is shown through his righteous, humble way of living. It is as if St. James were saying to his audience, “Wisdom is known by the works the wise perform; if you were truly wise, you would not go about telling everyone.”

1 Transliterated “Prowteti,” Strong's #4240

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4240.htm>

Those who would boast in their wisdom only demonstrate that they are “false to the truth,” or bearing false witness concerning themselves. A man who goes to the congregation looking for applause, puffing himself up from the revelations he imagines he has peered into or lauding his own accomplishments, is not wise at all. The author seems to be referring to the public behavior of the Pharisees, as his words could be seen as a continuation of Christ's warning: “when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.”³ The Pharisees (indeed, the judaizer's of St. James's day as well) made a habit of loudly praying or proclaiming their deeds, prayers, and teachings so that everyone would see them and think highly of them; they receive a far smaller reward than the *actually* wise, holy and righteous person who requires no attention. Their motivations were jealousy and “selfish ambition.”

We must note here that the term translated “selfish ambition” does *not* prohibit Christians from being ambitious in the first place. The word is ἐπιθειάν,⁴ which describes a *mercenary* ambition, not someone having a passion for a particular skill, trade or hobby. The man poisoned by ἐπιθειάν thinks only of his own earthly good – riches, reputation, pleasures, etc.: a *teacher* or one claiming to be wise that has this problem is never teaching the truth for its own sake. Thus St. James places the word next to envy or jealousy on account of its *other* connotation, which is “rivalry.” The man with ἐπιθειάν can frequently be found intentionally causing division and drama between groups, bleating about his qualities – whether that be his high I.Q. or his academic qualifications or the inferiority of other men. The man without it lets his works, words and portfolio speak for themselves. This malady is the opposite of the humility of St. John the Baptist. When Christ's ministry began to overtake John's, instead of feuding with our Lord, he submits to the course of teaching and says “He must increase, but I must decrease.”⁶

Vs.15-16

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

We should not be surprised that St. James says there is a demonic and earthly wisdom. Indeed, the world *does* perceive jealousy and selfish ambition as wise. After all, if one's goal is the accumulation of riches or reputation, jealousy and mercenary self-centeredness certainly help achieve such a goal. It is earthly because it concerns earthly desires. It is unspiritual because it does not seek anything related to the Kingdom of God. It is demonic because this kind of wisdom, *lower wisdom*, is exactly what the devil wants people to learn instead of the true and Heaven-sent wisdom. It creates disorder because of the inevitable fracturing of all groups where it is present; it involves “every vile practice” on account of the sin being necessary to achieve the ends of lower wisdom itself.

As a prime example of lower wisdom, consider the actions of Jeroboam, the first king of Northern Israel.⁷ After he led a successful secession movement against Judah, he decided to do the following to maintain his hold on the people he ruled:

- Build two temples in the kingdom
- Train and hire priests from all tribes, not just Levites

3 Matthew 6:5

4 Transliterated “eritheian,” Strong's #2052

5 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2052.htm>

6 John 3:30

7 1 Kings 12:25-33

-Build golden calves

-Change the dates of feasts away from what Moses proscribed

These are all actions contrary to the Mosaic Law, and the Christian balks at them as deeply unwise. Jeroboam created a religious schism to go with his political schism, making it certain that his actions greatly displeased our Lord. Yet according to lower wisdom, these were ingenious reforms. Separate temples meant that the children of Israel would not feel required to return to Judah for holy days like the Day of Atonement. Priests taken from other tribes would disrupt the propagation of Mosaic Law, which the Aaronic priests would certainly teach; thus the masses would not hear that they must go to Judah or be united with them. The golden calves provided cultural distinction from Judah and set in place a narrative in place that Judah misunderstood the golden calf incident of Exodus 32. Changing the feast dates further disrupted the common cultural bond between North and South. By his “reforms,” Jeroboam effectively created a new kingdom with a new culture and a new worldview, by which he prevented any chance at reconciliation between the tribes of Israel.

Jeroboam's motivations were earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. He cared only for his power in his earthly life; he made his reforms not because they were true but because they were useful; and in sinning this deeply against our Lord, the demonic involvement could not be clearer. The same “wisdom” is peddled to young men today by earthly teachers like Andrew Tate, the “liver king,” and others: women receive the same through the so-called “female dating strategy” women who teach them to be shameless gold diggers. Ours is the heyday of lower wisdom, unfortunately, with the central divide being between selfish hedonists and the selfish status-seekers.

Vs.17-18

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

In keeping with his pronouncements in the first chapter – that all good gifts come from God, that God alone grants true (or higher) wisdom, and all is given to us by His Grace⁸ – St. James confirms that higher wisdom is not from the earth. It must be given to us unilaterally, mostly through the Word taught to us.⁹ But here he speaks of the characteristics of the wise; this is in contrast to the book of Proverbs, where King Solomon speaks primarily of what wisdom *does* for us and what being wise looks like in our actions.

What is wisdom going to be like in us?

- Pure, unstained by the world or sin
- Peaceable, not initiating conflict and only fighting when necessary¹⁰
- Full of mercy, forgiving as we were forgiven
- Full of good works, busy with pleasing our Lord
- Impartial, avoiding the sin of partiality
- Sincere, loving the truth and holding to it, avoiding hypocrisy

The man imbued with higher wisdom does not wear masks, seek after filthy lucre, nor divide for the sake of division. To the contrary they make for peace. Not the kind of peace that is free from conflict (such is impossible per John 16:33 - “in the world you will have tribulation”), but rather the wholeness of the believer and the wholeness they impart toward others. The term

⁸ James 1:5-8, 16-18.

⁹ James 1:21

¹⁰ Romans 12:18

translates as “peace” is εἰρήνην,¹¹² which literally means “joined together into a whole.” Certainly it can mean that one is in concord with another human being; however as this is not always a possibility, the internal peace of the individual is both a greater priority and a more Scripturally coherent understanding – especially as God is the one bringing us wisdom, not our relationships with other people!

Underlining the need for an “inner” peace, or wholeness, the author also says “a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” This hearkens back to his earlier statement that “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”¹³ If our anger cannot make us righteous, what will? The answer is the wholeness produced by wisdom, which is passed unto the elect by God Almighty. If one is secure in their identity in Christ, standing upon the firm foundation of faith and the assurance of salvation, then they are whole. If they are whole, then they sow righteousness with their lives (including devotions and deeds which make for peace). And if they sow righteousness, they shall surely reap through the steadfastness which both St. James and the author of Hebrews praise in unqualified terms.

11 Transliterated “eirenen,” Strong's #1515

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1515.htm>

13 James 1:20

James Bible Study #10: Worldliness

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 4:1-10

1 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. **4** You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” **7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Introduction

In the latter half of the third chapter, St. James spoke of two wisdoms. Lower wisdom is found in the ranks of the Christian's enemies – the world, the flesh and the devil. It may appear clever or cunning, but its ultimate aims are contrary to the will of God. Higher wisdom, which comes from God alone, is shown through the conduct and teaching of the wise man, who remains humble as one who has been blessed rather than one who has earned his wisdom. Someone who supposes himself to be a teacher is going to be driven by either wisdom to the way he teaches and the contents therein, hence St. James discussing these right after warning us that we must control our tongues.

Nonetheless, St. James is no fool to suppose that only the *divine* wisdom will dwell in someone. To the contrary, he is well aware that we are *simul iustus et peccator*: simultaneously saint and sinner. Lower wisdom arises from passions within the sinner, and thus we are warned in today's passage that following after them is an act of betrayal against God. In a word, St. James informs us that one cannot have a foot on both sides of the door, so to speak; just as we cannot serve both God and mammon,¹ we cannot be on God's side while also taking the world's side. Someone with motivations and desires following the world's ways demonstrates that they lack faith in the true God. Here he provides the remedy.

Vs.1

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Lower wisdom is predicated on jealousy and “selfish ambition,”² and the result of this is predictable – fighting between believers and factions within the Church.³ Yet here, translated

1 Matthew 6:24

2 That is, mercenary self-seeking.

3 James 3:16

“passions,” St. James takes aim at ἡδονῶν,⁴⁵ or pleasures, as the ultimate cause of these sinful motivations. The author is not condemning the existence of emotions within man, listening to these emotions, or any other semi-buddhist heretical concept. To the contrary, he condemns pleasure being sought for its own sake, or *hedonism*. Selfish ambition and jealousy are seeking the good feelings we receive when we receive or earn something (money, status, attention, etc.).

The hedonist, putting the cart before the horse, desires the *result* of something good as a good in and of itself. Forgive the crass example,⁶ but people fornicate because they are seeking pleasure for its own sake. Properly speaking the act of coitus between spouses is a union of man and wife, a celebration of their relationship, and it is a *good* thing which *results* in pleasurable sensations. The hedonist selfishly seeks these physical sensations as good in themselves rather than the reward of something good; thus he is willing to sin in order to receive it. To use a different example (and certainly a more family-friendly one), we may consider reputation. Having a positive reputation before others is a great feeling; yet St. James would point out that this reputation should come from earning it through one's righteous conduct, dogmatic expertise and charity – it should not be sought nor claimed for its own sake. The hedonist, through his selfish ambition, seeks the good reputation without seeing that it is a reward for *being* good.

A believer must not be a hedonist, but our sinful nature inflicts us all. Thus St. James states that our “passions,” or pleasures, are at war within us even though we are regenerate. This is in agreement with St. Paul's formulation: “I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”⁷ This is to say, though the believer understands the difference between right and wrong, and seeks to do right before God, our “passions” rise up and declare war on our new nature; thus we are called to do battle against concupiscence, or the desire to sin.

Vs.2-3

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

These are the results of living by one's pleasures. We harm others, scheme to have what they want, break away from one another, and fail to pray. When we do pray, we are not asking in alignment with God's will. Typically God does not grant the request of one seeking selfish gain or pleasure. If He does, such granting is almost certainly a form of discipline, as the individual praying sinfully for something will surely regret receiving it!

Vs.4-5

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”?

The author here addresses “adulterous people” in his audience. These are people who are living according to lower wisdom rather than God's wisdom, being motivated by their pleasures into lives of jealousy and selfish ambition. He is *not* speaking about those who are struggling against their sinfulness, but rather directly addressing a particular group. The word employed is

4 Transliterated “hedonon,” Strong's #2237

5 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2237.htm>

6 For Deacons and Lay Leaders using these materials in a family setting, perhaps a better (if less apt) example would be the enjoyment of food compared to the good of cooking for others.

7 Romans 7:23

Μοιχαλίδες,⁸⁹ literally “adulteresses,” and it uses what is called the “vocative case,” or a direct address. Speaking of “adulteresses,” St. James is connecting his words directly with the prophetic utterances against Israel, wherein the prophets compared Israel's idolatry with literal harlotry.¹⁰¹¹

This explains the next clause very clearly. If someone lives according to their pleasures, they are idolaters, and are thus engaged in the same spiritual harlotry as ancient Israel and Judah, making them enemies of God. Where do idols come from? They come from the world, as St. John says, “all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”¹² The world, or organized sinful humanity, is one of the three enemies of the Christian (the other two being the flesh and the devil); all three are *also* enemies of God. So to have *phileo* love for the world is to renounce loyalty to the true God and suffer His condemnation on account of it.

St. James also says that the Scriptures say “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us” This is not a direct quote of any verse, but pointing to the themes present in the Old Testament which speak of God's jealousy. This would of course include Hosea and Ezekiel's condemnations of the Israelite's idolatrous harlotry. We worship a jealous God,¹³ who does not accept any competition for ownership of the believer. He will not share space on His Throne for any worldly pursuit, idol, or fleshly desire.

Regarding the “spirit” which God has made to dwell in us, this is a reference to one of two things. Either the author is speaking of the Holy Spirit, who is offended when we sin, or he is speaking of the new creature, the saint, born in Baptism.¹⁴ If the former, then the sense of the text is that the relationship between Persons of the Trinity is such that if one Person is offended, the other two are as well. If the latter, then the sense of the text is that God loves the believer and wishes to claim them, hence the deep offense at sinful waywardness. Either way, both are technically valid understandings given similar statements elsewhere in Scripture.

Vs.6

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Grace is receiving freely the good which we do not deserve. In spite of God's fierce jealousy, He is still gracious to those who approach Him with the request for mercy, sanctification, and Divine wisdom. St. James, addressing the adulterous crowd of selfish people in his audience, reassures them that God is still gracious enough to them to forgive and restore should they be humble enough to come back to Him in penitent faith. Emphasizing the humility necessary for this, St. James backs up his saying with the Septuagint version of Proverbs 3:34. The term “giving grace” is an expression of a positive perspective on the person to whom one is being gracious. It is to be in a state wherein God looks favorably upon the believer.

8 Transliterated “Moichalides,” Strong's #3428

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3428.htm>

10 The book of Hosea is the most blatant example, as is Ezekiel 16 and 23

11 For more reading: <https://sundaymorninggreekblog.com/2011/11/27/adulteresses-%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%B9%CF%87%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%B4%CE%B5%CF%82-in-james-44-excursus-on-authorship-of-hebrews-and-james/>

12 1 John 2:16

13 Exodus 20:5

14 John 3:5, 2 Corinthians 5:17

Vs.7

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

If one submits himself to God, he will repent of his sin, turning away from and rejecting iniquity. He shall not cherish it nor ignore it, but instead he will go to our Lord for forgiveness (discussed in the next two verses). The disposition of penitence and the act of repentance are connected with resisting the devil as well. By going back into God's fold, one is no longer an enemy of God through friendship with the world: this means that the believer is no longer under the power of the devil.

However, that is a change in *status*, not necessarily an activity; we are not to say that turning away from one's sins means we have fulfilled what this verse would have us do. St. James is not saying "if you resist the devil, he will flee from you." Instead he is *commanding* us, saying "Resist the devil. He will flee from you." How does one resist the devil? By rejecting the lower wisdom and all that the devil would have us believe, resisting temptation (fleeing it if it is sexual in nature per 1 Corinthians 6:18), and obeying God's commandments.

There is also something to be said regarding this verse's use in matters of exorcism. To resist an opponent is to stand firm against them. In the face of demonic infestation, one must not run away nor be afraid, but rather rebuke the evil spirits in the Name of Jesus Christ and command them to depart. While the primary application of this verse is in how we live our lives generally, it does teach that we have been granted the authority to stand against demons when we encounter them.

Vs.8-10

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

The author speaks of repentance and forgiveness here. When made aware of our sins, we are to draw near to our Lord in penitent faith. If we go to Him in this humility, He exalts us by forgiving our sins. St. James adds no acts of penance to the Sacramental rite of confession and absolution; he tells us to merely go to God while mourning our sins, that we may be brought back into good standing before Him. In not adding anything, St. James paints a picture of God's incomparable mercy on the sinner; Jesus Christ has already paid the price for our sins, so there is nothing to be done in order that we may merit this restoration.

Regarding the emotions and acts of mourning which St. James speaks of, note the parallels between his words and Psalm 24:3-4, which says this:

3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

To be wretched and weep and mourn is a result of the repentance shown in the heart. I do not put on sackcloth and ashes because that is required for penitence. I put on sackcloth and ashes because I *am* penitent *first*, going to our Lord for freely offered forgiveness. This is not the author demanding that we do these things in order to sufficiently repent: it is him saying that a heart which rejects former sins should be motivated to feel this way, listening to the Holy Spirit and conscience which tell us we have done wrong. Let us not accuse St. James of commanding us to pretend!

The author is not saying here that emotions are our infallible yardstick for whether we are penitent enough to merit forgiveness. More important is the recognition that we have sinned, which may lead to a stirring of the heart in sorrow. However, each individual is different and may perceive guilty emotions differently, so this passage is not necessarily a blueprint for emotional precursors to absolution. To the contrary St. James is doing what faithful preachers have been doing since Pentecost: preaching Law and Gospel, and pointing us to our merciful Lord who saves us freely.

James Bible Study #11: Slandering and Boasting

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 4:11-17

11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. **12** There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— **14** yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. **15** Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” **16** As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. **17** So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Introduction

St. James began the practical application of what saving faith *does* by bringing up the tongue and its dangers. Then he moved on to discuss the motivations behind what people say – whether they are animated by the lower wisdom of demons and sinners, or whether they are brought to speak by the Higher Wisdom which comes from God alone. This leads to a condemnation of worldliness and an exhortation to repent and receive forgiveness. Now, having brought his reader to penitent faith, he begins to teach more about the tongue and the things it says.

Vs.11-12

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

Here the author refers to the Eighth Commandment. When commanding us to not speak “evil” of our brother, he is not telling us “if you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all.” To say evil of someone is not the same as to say something “true but uncomfortable” about them. To the contrary, we speak well if we speak truthfully of our brother without distortion or wicked intent.

If one speaks evil of his brother, it is to bear false witness about them or to speak with the direct malicious intent to ruin their reputation. Thus he is speaking about an *unjust* judgment, a slanderous one – St. James is not contradicting the Christian responsibility to judge others in terms of discerning their actions and beliefs, to settle disputes, etc.¹ If we decide to unjustly judge, or slander, someone, we are standing in judgment against the Eighth Commandment and thus attempting to take the Throne of God; God will quickly remove us from our attempted usurpation of His position. As He is the One capable of saving or destroying us, we do well to know we should never slander our neighbor. True judgment belongs to God.

¹ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, 6:1-8

Vs.13-15

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”

There is an apparent uncertainty to our future which renders boastful statements meaningless; it is only *apparent* because God knows what the future has in store for us, while we are kept from seeing it until it happens. On account of our short sojourn here on earth, to say “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit ” downright silly. We do not know whether we shall be *alive* tomorrow, let alone that we will have success in our ventures! Thus while man may make plans, he is still subject to the decisions God makes regarding his future. One who belongs to God submits to God's will with such humility as to allow Him to make all decisions regarding the future and the results of their deeds. This is not to say that a believer makes no choices at all (such would violate the concept of the Law of Liberty introduced in earlier chapters), but rather that the future belongs to God and that our speech should reflect our submission to Him.

Vs.16-17

As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Boasting is refusing to submit to God's will, claiming power over the future for oneself, and as such is a sin of omission. Just about no one making a general boast is saying “I refuse to honor God's plans for the future.” Yet in not giving the matter to God, they sin by neglecting to trust in Him, and St. James wants to remind us all that sinning by omission (whether by boasting or any other neglect).

A sin of omission is that sin which we are guilty of through neglect. Using the previous example from James 2, seeing a homeless brother or sister in need of food or clothing, yet doing nothing to alleviate their suffering, is sin. As St. James has stated though, it is a matter of *knowing* the right thing to do and failing to do it. If we were held accountable for every ignorant moment of spiritual sloth we have committed in our lives, none of us would leave Church on account of endless confession.

To sin by omission is to say that one's own priorities are above the Lord's priorities. Using the example of the poor man on the side of the road, for me to ignore him so I can get to work early is to say that I do not love that man with God's love; in that moment of willful neglect, I am telling God that my morning commute is more important than helping the poor man survive. This means that my character is not aligned with *God's* character, my morals are different from His, and thus I become opposed to Him. St. James says that this is the same regarding boasting of the future, as it demonstrates a disconnect between God's priorities (whatever He intends to happen in my future) and my own priorities (what I have decided will happen). The solution to such sins of omission, after confession and absolution, is to trust the Lord, and to act in accordance with His character rather than our own. This requires a kind of humility which will only come by God's Grace, namely the higher wisdom.

James Bible Study #12: On the Rich

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 5:1-6

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. **2** Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. **4** Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. **5** You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Introduction

In the previous passage, St. James rebuked the worldly arrogance of boasting that one decides their own fate by their own power. To illustrate, it, he gave a particular example of conducting business: “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit.”¹ This marks a transition from the sins of the heart and sins of the tongue to the sins of the rich, who embody *both*.

The rich man serves as an icon for the lower wisdom.² Selfish ambition (understood to be mercenary self-centeredness) can indeed make someone rich, as it gives someone the willingness to manipulate and abuse others into giving them money or closing on unfair business deals or accepting unjust terms of employment. St. James condemns boasting as well, and no one is a greater picture of boasting than the man flaunting his wealth in front of the poor. A greedy, selfish elite is emblematic of refusing to help one's neighbor, as the rich are loathe to actually help the poor.

In our modern, materialistic societies there is a tendency to downplay today's reading. After all, the author is not making a blanket condemnation of *all* rich people as we will discuss below. However, in both his time *and* ours, the rich often earn the contempt which St. James pours out on them, because their lifestyle and worldview are fundamentally opposed to the ways which God says we must pursue.

Vs.1-3

1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. **2** Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.

First, for context's sake, let us understand what being rich *meant* in St. James's day. Home ownership was easier to attain than it is today, and a man could provide for his family without having to rely on his wife also working;³ these things, though a sign of wealth today, were not so in the first century. Infrastructure was based on mounted travel (horses, camels, donkeys, etc.) or

1 James 4:13

2 James 3:14-15

3 Certainly though her labor was harder given the lack of modern appliances, and wives often helped in the family vocation.

walking on foot, so there was no pressure like there is today for someone to own a modern industrial vehicle; much of today's "wealth" is simply having the necessary gadgets for getting to work and paying for said gadgets with debt. In the first century, being rich meant having a large amount of tangible assets, both real and chattel, reflected in St. James employing a term for "rich" that implies a vast amount of possessions.⁴ A rich man today has a large number in his checking account and perhaps a nice house; a rich man in the first century would have a massive villa, farmlands, and slaves.

In a scarcity environment, wealth inequality is both inevitable and more freely available to those willing to sin to get it. Rome had a caste system based on who was rich and who was poor;⁵ in ancient Israel, the caste system was based on the monarchy, priesthood and commoner classes but this resulted in a similar dynamic. This meant that the common man was not only somewhat disposable to the elites, but also required to produce even greater value. Social mobility was limited, so those who wished to be wealthier had few options, ranging from the cutthroat life of an itinerant merchant to the sinful life of a highwayman. There was no 401K investment system, no social security, no futures market or stock exchange where people could amass money ethically. If you wanted to be rich, you had to either be born into it, pillage it, or risk your life finding and selling until you had it.

Given these dynamics, it is understandable that St. James condemns the rich of his day. A righteous man being wealthy, like Abraham or King David, was a rarity; most of the time, rich men had their wealth based on the manipulation of others, to the point of hiring desperate people to *fight* one another for entertainment.⁶ It is on account of this sort of sinful parasitism that the author pronounces a judgment to come upon the wealthy.

Note that St. James accuses the rich of laying up treasure "in the last days." This is a clear reference to Matthew 6:19-21, in which our Lord says "**19** Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Some commentators may find a supposed eschatological fervor in the author's words here and connect the phrase "last days" to an expectation that Christ will return to earth within the next year or so after the Epistle was written. However, the "last days" is a *category* of the time, not a *measurement* of time. By "last days," the understanding ought to be that the single, final prophetic event to be fulfilled is the return of Christ for Judgment Day; it is the last earthly epoch before the eternal state, the Church Era, the Millennium of Revelation 20, to which St. James refers. Those who live after the Gospel has been spread and the commands of Christ have been taught are to know better than to enshrine wealth as an idol in their hearts.

Vs.4-5

4 Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. **5** You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

The question is does this condemnation extend to the rich of today? This is likely on the mind of anyone living in the modern "first world." The answer is "yes, if." Yes, St. James condemns a rich man today if he keeps back his laborer's wages by fraud; this would include

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4145.htm>

5 <https://ancientromesdailyives.weebly.com/caste-systems.html>

6 <https://bigthink.com/the-past/wealth-history-inequality/>

suppressing his wages by inflation, immigration, or any other number of tricks. Yes, St. James condemns the rich man today if there is an outcry to the Lord against him on account of his shady practices and abuse of his workers. If a rich man refuses to be generous, but instead lives an opulent and indulgent lifestyle, then God condemns him through these words. These markers of condemnation demonstrate a life in service to money as deity,⁷ and a refusal to heed St. Paul's exhortation to those with wealth:

“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.”⁸

Note that the Biblical instructions for those who are rich is *not* to give up their riches. Scripture in no place demands that all people take a vow of poverty. To the contrary, from Job to Abraham to David to Solomon to Hezekiah to many other rich saints, the funds that they possess can make the difference between a Church in dire straits and a Church that is blessed with enough to spread the Gospel. Yet as Christ says, it is an extra challenge to have saving faith in Him,⁹ hence St. James urging the wealthy to humility in James 1:9-11.

Vs.6

You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

It is unlikely that the author means this in a sense that suggests elites were going around slitting the saints' throats personally. Yet during this time (indeed all times since), those calling the loudest for persecution of the Church were most often wealthy people: the priesthood, the pharisees, Roman officials, etc. A poor man in the first century A.D., one with a full work schedule, would have too much to lose and too little time to try to extirpate Christianity from society. Let us not suppose that Nero was a beggar!

It is also this way today. Organized persecution of Christianity has historically been performed or ordered at the hands of those with the power of mass communication, the power of the sword, authority to command poorer people to sharpen the blade and the funds to pay for a campaign against Christians. From the patrician class of Rome to the brigands of the Vikings to the feudal lords of Japan to the sheiks and warlords of Arabia to today's elites, attempting to kill off a religion has been the project of those who followed the lower wisdom to the greatest extent. Thus St. James spend this moment to pour contempt upon them which they have truly deserved. While this does not mean that the believer must be some delusional marxist, we do well to have the same skepticism of the robber baron, wicked manager, or tyrannical magistrate.

7 Matthew 6:24

8 1 Timothy 6:17-19

9 Matthew 19:24

James Bible Study #13: On Steadfastness

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 5:7-12

7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. **8** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. **9** Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. **10** As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. **11** Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Introduction

St. James has just finished condemning the rich in his day (and for the most part, the rich in our day as well). They are living symbols of the lower wisdom, of vanity and selfish ambition, and their judgment is near if they do not repent. But having said this, what positive message could St. James offer to those who are *not* worthy of the attacks he has just made? What can be said to those who humbly hold to penitent faith in our Lord?

His message to the faithful is this, that they must garner steadfastness. This includes patience, rejoicing while under trial, and continuing on in following God's ways. In the first chapter, the author already praised steadfastness as a virtue *par excellence*, as something that results in receiving the eternal life which God promises to us by faith.¹ While he has proclaimed *sola fide* in various ways throughout the Epistle, St. James recognizes that faith is tested, put under trial, and refined through struggle; this requires us to do our best, both praying for and exercising steadfastness that we may recognize when we receive blessings and rewards from our Lord. Agape love may be the highest virtue for the believer in their obedience to the two greatest commandments, but steadfastness is right behind it in terms of importance, especially as it carves out a path forward in this life.

Vs.7-8

Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

We are called to be patient, or longsuffering, until the return of Christ. The Second Advent is the moment which all Christians look to in hope. It is the moment Judgment Day occurs, in which our Savior comes to the world to gather His Church together and take us to the New Jerusalem to enjoy eternal life. When this day comes, He will come to us as our Redeemer, while coming to the nonbelievers as their Judge.

¹ James 1:12

To the believer, this Day appears to tarry. St. James says that the coming of the Lord is at hand, yet he also demands patience on our parts for it. This is no contradiction, and nor is it an indication of some delusional “Jesus returns next week” mindset on the part of the early Church. To the contrary, that Christ could return at any moment, whether in the next five minutes or a thousand years from now, means He is *always* at hand the same way the early or late rains happen whenever God wills them.

Vs.9

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Christ is not only near in the sense that He may return at any time. He is also near in His presence at our gatherings,² at our Baptism,³ *and* the closeness of the Eschaton.⁴ Having put on Christ at our Baptism, and having His presence at our gatherings, means that He knows exactly what we do, what we say about one another, and what discipline ought to occur if we sin against Him. Remember also that Christ shall only appear to you in one of two ways: either as your Redeemer (for believers) or as your Judge (for those outside the faith). St. James here warns that the grumbler, the complainer who tries to disrupt the Church, risks being in the latter camp.

This is not to say that *all* complaining is wickedness or puts someone outside of the Church. Otherwise, there would be no opportunity for Church discipline,⁵ let alone reform. In the context of St. James's pervasive attacks on sins of the tongue, he is referring to slander, gossip, unfair treatment or anything else motivated by the lower wisdom. Before someone complains about bad conditions in the Church or bad actions taken by another believer, they are here advised to make certain that their case against these is Biblical, reasonable, and motivated by care for the other rather than out of spite, envy, or malice.

Vs.10-11

As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

The prophets suffered. Almost every single prophet who spoke in God's Name was persecuted by nonbelievers, by their countrymen, and by circumstances related to their ministry. Yet the prophets of note, those who are commended by Scripture, are commended for patiently enduring, even unto death. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, St. John the Baptist, Noah, Moses, all these and more were harmed over the course of their labors for God. Here St. James draws a direct line between Old Testament prophet and Christian believer, as the believer is now expected to undergo similar trials as the prophets did. Whether our sufferings are at the same scale as the prophets or not does not matter. What matters is that we, like the prophets, remain steadfast. Those who remain are considered blessed, called saints and remembered fondly by the Church; on the flip side, those who apostatize are considered cautionary tales at best, and wicked traitors at worst.

Job is St. James's prime example of steadfastness. He is mentioned in the same breath as the prophets, most likely because he was a prophet himself (as this writer believes firmly that Job

2 Matthew 18:20

3 Galatians 3:27

4 Mark 13:32

5 1 Corinthians 5:13

wrote the book named after him). Yet as St. James says that the message of Job is how God is compassionate and merciful, Job becomes even more of a centerpiece for the virtue of steadfastness on account of the problem of suffering. When we suffer trial and struggle, it may very well appear that God is *not* compassionate or merciful to us; the book of Job highlights how He still loves us and helps us despite the doubts that may creep in when suffering arises. We are to not look at appearance nor circumstance as reassurance of God's blessings, but rather to trust in our Lord and believe His Word the way Job learned directly.

Vs.12

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Citing Matthew 5:37, St. James highlights the necessity of being honest. The swearing or oaths that he speaks of are not mundane oaths or promises, lest Christians everywhere be unable to purchase property, sign covenants to own land, or even make Baptismal promises when Baptized as adults. Rather than being a blanket prohibition on taking oaths or swearing, we are instead exhorted to be such men of our word that people trust us.

In St. James's day, oaths and swearing were forms of solidifying or highlighting a truth or a promise. “I adjure you by the Most High God, swear to me you are telling the truth!” a judge might say to us. Our response ought to be “I need not make an oath, for I am trustworthy. I do not lie, and you know it.” When we say that we shall perform such and such a task, we need not meet some demand that says “swear to me you shall do this.” Such should be our reputation as steadfast Christians, that oaths are unnecessary.

St. James highlights this honesty “above all” because honesty and conviction of the truth are the bedrock upon which steadfastness is built in the Christian's heart. Without a firm foundation of faith in the Word, we become no better than the Roman Stoic philosophers, who were known to be steadfast...for no reason whatsoever, except for some idea of personal excellence. Christians, on the other hand, speak the truth because we have faith in the Truth, are sanctified and justified by that faith, and shall proclaim it, whatever the cost may be.

James Bible Study #14: On Prayer

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

James 5:13-18

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. **16** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. **17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. **18** Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Introduction

St. James has given his second praise and exhortation toward the virtue of steadfastness. Yet unlike a Stoic philosopher, who exercises steadfastness for its own sake (or no reason at all), the author highlights it as a means by which the saints are called blessed. Despite all persecution, trial and suffering, the steadfast one remains faithful to our Lord, and is thus commended by Scripture and all other believers.

Yet what is the means by which the believer is made steadfast? How shall someone endure the tribulations we face today? St. James answers this question primarily with individual and group prayer. Prayer is the air which the Christian breathes, and it has immense power which God uses to bestow grace upon the one praying. One might say that, like marriage it is not a Sacrament – but has a sacramental nature (one that is Grace-bestowing) to it. While there are two more verses which will be addressed in the next lesson, this passage is the general conclusion to the Epistle.

Vs.13

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

In bad times and good, the believer is to pray. We are to speak to God and make petition whether we are in pain or in high spirits. Though praising God is commendable as an expression of gratitude, it is also a protection against the complacency which prosperity may bring.

During times of trial, we must pray. If we do not, then we are likely to either attempt to fix the situation by our own power and thus lead ourselves into frustration, or we may sin in response to our pain and thus displease God. He tells us to call upon Him in the day of trouble,¹ and this means prayer. God does not answer unprayed prayers, but He rejoices to respond to the one who reaches out to Him in faith.

During times of plenty, we must pray. If we do not, then we are likely to become lazy, indulgent, self-congratulatory and proud – all of which shall incur our Lord's wrath.² The man in plenty must certainly express his gratitude toward our Lord, but also mercy, that God may

¹ Psalm 50:15

² Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 29:23, James 4:6

protect his heart from slipping away into pride. St. James brings up prayer in all situations after having extolled the virtue of steadfastness, demonstrating the essential quality of prayer for attaining such virtue.

vs.14-15

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

This passage is considered the basis for the rite of extreme unction, which was developed by the Roman Catholic church with the intent of obeying this passage. St. James commands that if any are sick, the anointing with oil by elders accompanies the prayer for healing and forgiveness. However, the idea that extreme unction is a *Sacrament*, as Rome teaches, is not true. In order for a particular rite to be a Sacrament – that which by its nature confers grace, holiness and salvation onto he who receives it by faith – there must be two distinct elements:

- The command of God to do this rite, with its physical element.
- The promise of Grace added to the rite – that is, forgiveness of sins and eternal life.³

Anointing of the sick does not necessarily carry the promise of eternal life: it is not the oil, the physical element, which saves, but the “prayer of faith” - that is, the faith of the believer and the intercession *for* faith made by the elders. With the writer's command we have the former element, but not the latter, for a Sacrament: again it is not the anointing which saves but the believer's faith. With Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution however, we see the act itself as being efficacious unto salvation for the one who *receives* it in faith. It becomes a vehicle of salvific Grace to be conferred onto the believer.

Nonetheless, while anointing the sick and dying is a commendable act on the part of elders for their congregation, it is part of St. James's overall *point* regarding prayer. Prayer is not solely for the individual. Using anointing of the sick and prayer for them as an example, it is clear that St. James wants believers praying for *each other* and in the presence of one another. We are to pray for one another and intercede for one another in prayer, especially as it pertains to our afflictions; in this way we help bear one another's burdens.⁴

Vs.16a

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Healing is not just physical. The conscience may also be healed as absolution is pronounced upon he who confesses; this is a spiritual healing which removes guilt, shame and unrighteousness.⁵ Thus, he who confesses his sins to a fellow believer and hears the words of Absolution in response is participating in a Sacrament; it has the command of God (“confess your sins to one another”) and the promise of His Grace (“that you may be healed”).

It is from the first half of James 5:16 that we have a direct basis for the rite of Confession. Interestingly enough, and counter to the claims of various denominational bodies, this is not a rite restricted to the clergy alone. The author does *not* write “confess your sins to a priest,” but “to one another.” While Confession and Absolution is a responsibility typically assigned to the pastorate, in deference to the universal priesthood of all believers it is a power even of the

3 Augsburg Confession, article VIII, par.3-4

4 Galatians 6:2

5 1 John 1:8-9

layman.

The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* makes an important point though, that this is a reflexive exercise between brothers in the faith. The Reformers write:

*Perhaps some one may also cite Jas. 5:16: Confess your faults one to another. But here the reference is not to confession that is to be made to the priests, but, in general, concerning the reconciliation of brethren to each other. For it commands that the confession be mutual.*⁶

This is most certainly true. As it is beneficial for good order in the Church, *all* rites are normally to be exercised by the pastorate, the diaconate, and those whom they assign to assist them in such duties.⁷ However, just as a layman has the right to perform Baptism and consecrate the elements in the Eucharist during *abnormal* or emergency situations (and heads of household, being the priests of their families, retain these rights *en toto*), so too does the laity have the right to absolve. However, we would argue that St. James's direct command being to *all* Christians, not just the leadership, means that believers should mutually confess their sins to one another more frequently than the “emergency only” exercise of Baptism or the Lord's Supper. We are convinced the absolution offered by a fellow believer is efficacious, though it should never replace nor stop the normative Confession and Absolution (both private and corporate) offered in the Divine Service.

Note again the reciprocal nature of the confession which St. James commands. If the healing is real healing (spiritually first and potentially physical), one must come away with the impression that he means this clause expansively. We confess our sins one to another as a means of true repentance and receiving forgiveness from our Lord: the layman, hearing confession from his brother, has every right to say “our Lord Jesus has died for that sin and indeed all your sins. Upon hearing this, I declare unto you that you are forgiven, washed clean in His Blood.”

Yet more, confessing our sins to *one another* expands to the confession of those sins that we commit *against* one another. It is altogether predictable that Christians will inevitably harm one another; we are to apologize, forgive, make amends, and heal relationships. Should the Body of Christ appear torn asunder by the wounds which believers inflict upon each other, apologies and forgiveness are to be given freely lest these wounds fester.

Vs.16b-18

The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.

Earlier in the Epistle, St. James writes “You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”⁸ If God refuses prayers that are prayed wrongly, then what is a prayer that is asked *rightly*? The author points to Elijah as our example for this, the prophet who prayed in accordance with God's Word and Will. Speaking to King Ahab, he pronounces a drought and then prays for it while waiting by the brook Cherith; this continued until after the kingdom of Israel repented of their baal worship.⁹ Here Elijah's prayers do not reflect a simple desire to punish his own people. Instead, he prays as the Word of God declares in the Deuteronomic Covenant, the Law, which promises rain and

6 From the *Apology*, article XIIIb, par.12: <https://thebookofconcord.org/apology-of-the-augsburg-confession/article-xiib/>

7 Such is a necessity per the exercise of the Keys, per Ap.XIIIb par.2.

8 James 4:2-3

9 1 Kings 17:1-7, 18:20-46

fertile ground for obedience but drought and famine for disobedience.¹⁰ In other words, the prophet prayed according to the Scriptures, praying for one thing according to the Israelites' rebellion and for another according to their repentance.

The Christian does well if in their prayer he goes by the revealed Will of God in His Word. However, we are not to understand this as being so restrictive that we can only pray Bible verses. If one needs a new car, for instance, it would be foolish to refuse to pray for one on the basis that cars are not in the Bible! To the contrary, if we understand that the Ten Commandments restrain us from praying for something sinful or fleshly, and if we rejoice in God's good will for us, then we have the right to still pray freely and expansively for all which He has shown us. This is to say, the Law of Liberty permits the Christian to pray according to Law and Gospel. We pray for well-being, for sustenance, for all that God graciously provides; we pray for faith in others, because He wills that all should be saved; we pray against our sins and the sins of friend and foe, because God hates sin and desires repentance; in a word, we pray with the freedom to seek what our Lord says is good – *this* kind of petition is heard from on high the same way Elijah's prayers were heard.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 28:12, 28:23-24

James Bible Study #15: Overview

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Commands in the Book of James

Chapter 1:	Chapter 2:	Chapter 3:	Chapter 4:	Chapter 5:
<p>2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,</p> <p>4 let steadfastness have its full effect</p> <p>5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God</p> <p>6 let him ask in faith, with no doubting,</p> <p>9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,</p> <p>10 and the rich in his humiliation,</p> <p>13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God,"</p> <p>16 Do not be deceived</p> <p>19 Know this let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;</p> <p>21 put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness receive with meekness the implanted word</p> <p>22 be doers of the word, and not hearers only</p>	<p>1 show no partiality</p> <p>5 Listen</p> <p>8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.</p> <p>12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.</p>	<p>1 Not many of you should become teachers</p> <p>10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.</p> <p>13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.</p> <p>14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.</p>	<p>7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.</p> <p>Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.</p> <p>8 Draw near to God,</p> <p>Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts, you double-minded.</p> <p>9 Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.</p> <p>10 Humble yourselves before the Lord</p> <p>11 Do not speak evil against one another</p> <p>15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."</p>	<p>1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.</p> <p>7 Be patient</p> <p>8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts</p> <p>9 Do not grumble against one another</p> <p>12 do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.</p> <p>13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.</p> <p>14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, let them pray over him</p> <p>16 confess your sins to one another pray for one another</p>

Key

-Steadfastness
 -Relationship to God
 -Status and relationships
 -Call for attention
 -Speech
 -Internal/External actions
 -Corporate devotion & prayer

Introduction

St. James spends the vast majority of his epistle speaking with a didactic tone. Though there are brief statements concerning the Grace of God which saves us through faith in Christ, almost all of the text is in the imperative and instructive: command, explain, repeat. The author *assumes* that his audience is already catechized into the Christian faith, and thus they already understand the more important matters of the Gospel, the Atonement, Christ's Divinity, and the Resurrection promised to us all. His task in this book is to bring congregants to greater harmony with one another, and to ensure that they are all pleasing to God.

As charted above, thirty two of the one hundred and eight verses in the Epistle of James are commands, approximately one third of the entire book. The majority of the text outside of these commands is explaining *why* St. James is giving them, if not explaining why Christians must do Godly things in the first place (as with James 2:14-26).

This may very well lead to despairing of the Epistle, if not rejecting it outright (as Luther appeared to do in his earlier years, something on which he later changed positions). One may be confused by the flurry of imperatives, and perhaps confused as to what it is that St. James actually *wants* from them. Having organized the commands, let us clear up the matter with brief discussions on the themes of the book.

Themes and Priorities in James Collected and Summarized¹²

Steadfastness

1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

1:4 let steadfastness have its full effect

5:8 You also, be patient.

Establish your hearts

The author extols and commends the virtue of steadfastness in believers. To be steadfast is to stubbornly hold on to one's faith despite the various trials which happen to the Christian over the course of their life. But to be steadfast, one must see God's hand in their lives, make steadfastness a goal, and above all be *patient*; in so doing one establishes their heart as having enduring faith in our Lord. To summarize, one must be patient and aware of God's actions in their situation.

Submission to God

1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God

1:6 let him ask in faith, with no doubting,

1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God,"

4:7a Submit yourselves therefore to God.

4:8a Draw near to God,

4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord

4:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.

Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

St. James has much to say about submission to our Lord, especially in the topic of prayer. This means going to God with our petitions and praise, actively believing in His graciousness, seeking to obey Him, and going to Him in penitence. In a word, submission to our Lord is the

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- 1 Excluding the "call for attention" imperatives, highlighted in yellow. These are instances in which the writer is asking the congregation to focus on his words carefully. They are useful for highlighting how the writer was aware that he was writing Scripture.
 - 2 Of course, there is often a blending of these, as we see with James 2:12, which has imperatives for both word and deed. Where possible, we have separated them out for ease of understanding.

maintenance of a *real* relationship with Him, one which recognizes His supremacy over all and our own humble estate.

Status and Relationships

1:9-10 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation,

2:1 show no partiality

4:9 Be wretched and mourn and weep.

Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.

5:1 Come now, you rich,
weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

The author inverts the worldly order whenever the topic of personal status (estimation of self) and relationships (estimation of others) comes up. The rich must be humble, the poor must recognize that they are exalted. The worldly, who enjoy much, must cast down their pride and mourn their sinfulness, *especially* if they are the wicked among the wealthy. In the congregation (indeed, before all men), the Christian is vindicated by their deeds, not their riches. Therefore in these commands St. James calls for humility on the part of the self, and generosity toward others (hence also the mentions of charity in the first and second chapters).

Speech

1:19 Know this
let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

3:1 Not many of you should become teachers

3:10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

3:14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

4:11 Do not speak evil against one another

4:15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

5:9 Do not grumble against one another

5:12 do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath,
let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Speech and the wisdom behind it is a major theme in James. Because the tongue is uncontrollable, whatever it says will come from the motivations of the heart – and all of his commands here

Internal/External Action

1:21 put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness

receive with meekness the implanted word

1:22 be **doers** of the word, and not hearers only

2:8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are **doing** well.

2:12 **So speak** and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.

4:7b Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

4:8b Cleanse your hands, you sinners,
purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the entire Epistle is the author's advocacy of the active Christian life. The believer is expected to take an active role in sanctification. We should *want* our sin removed, and we should *want* to be better people than we once were. The Christian is uncomfortable with any sin in their life, and thus lives in penitent faith. Yet this is not the performative penitence of the monastic, one who beats himself or starves himself to purge wickedness through pain. The penitent faith espoused in James is an earnest desire to please God, an active rejection of one's sins, and an eagerness to do things conducive to our vindication as Christians. In other words, St. James wants us to be *Pietists*.

Corporate Prayer

5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, let them pray over him

5:16 confess your sins to one another pray for one another

The Epistle contains several commands which have to do with prayer, and although we could have gathered many of them into a distinct category of imperatives concerning prayer, that would miss the point. St. James is concerned chiefly with the attitudes of the heart which *manifest* in the ways we pray. He wants the believer to understand that it is the wisdom behind the prayer which will determine the character of what one says: it will fall into the overarching categories of higher or lower wisdom. Nonetheless, he does have these imperatives concerning *group* prayer and devotion, all four of which are concerning love for the other. He highlights the good that comes from us praying for one another and confessing our sins to one another, effectively declaring prayer to be a means of loving one's neighbor.

Explanatory Themes in James Briefly Discussed

Motivations for the Inner Man

Time does not permit us to go over every explanation St. James gives regarding his commandments. However, there are three overarching motivations which animate his explanations. Each of these are dynamics in the Christian life which will determine whether they are effective believers, and sometimes whether they are even believers in the first place.

The Law of Liberty

From James 1:25 and 2:12, there is a “Law of Liberty” to which the Christian is beholden and called to persevere, or abide, with. As Baptized believers, we are free from sin and death, and free to obey God. We now have the freedom to make meaningful choices, having been liberated from the Old Covenant, the condemnations of the Law (that is, the second use), and the sinful nature which once dictated our every decision. To live according to and persevere in this new Law, then, is to abide in Christ our Liberator and to act in obedience to Him.

Justifying Actions

From James 2:14-26, the writer emphasizes the place of good works in the believer. Facing God (*Coram Deo*), we are justified by faith alone: St. James makes this clear when he says that receiving the Word is able to save our souls,³ but does *not* say the same concerning our works. But insofar as it pertains to the self and other believers (facing the world, or *Coram Mundo*), we are absolutely justified by faith and works in conjunction. Using Abraham as an example, the author speaks of him first being justified, or declared righteous, by faith alone in Genesis 15:6 – but that righteousness is demonstrated in the works which his faith produces. Such a living faith necessarily produces good works which edify and assure both the Christian *and* other believers.

Higher and Lower Wisdom

From James 3:13-4:10, the notion of two distinct kinds of wisdom factors heavily into every command regarding speech, as well as the bulk of our actions. Either we will operate by

3 James 1:21

Higher wisdom, that which can only be granted by the Grace of God:⁴ or we will act according to the carnal, and demonic lower wisdom which informs the world's morality and operations. From the former one finds Christian love, good works, and mercy. From the latter one finds jealousy and mercenary ambitions, accompanied by all the wretched sins imaginable.

St. James's Motivation

James 5:19-20

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, **20** let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Finishing the Epistle, we see the prime motivation of the author himself. To inspire repentance and a return to faith in a wandering believer is salvific. This is to say, when a Christian helps a backslider return to the faith, God is using that Christian as His hands and feet to ensure that a soul is brought back to salvation. It is an immense honor for the believer to be a living means of Grace, by which death is prevented and sins are forgiven. The *person* whom God uses here is Sacramental in nature when this happens!

Though the book of James appears to end abruptly, as if he had run out of ink or parchment in writing it, these last two verses reveal his heart for the lost. When he says that bringing back a sinner helps to save them and cover their sins, it is exceedingly difficult to ignore the likelihood that this is what St. James has been doing the entire time. The stern rebukes which cover the entirety of the Epistle are done in order to bring sinners to repentance. The exhortations to works are meant to rise the complacent out of their stupor. The commands given are to fortify faith in those who already have it, people he already considers to be believers: otherwise he would not call his readers “my brothers.” Though harsh and full of imperatives, it is a work of love, and the same love which he hopes we have for others who are lost. Let us do likewise.

4 James 1:5-8