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The Epistle of James

Dr. Grant C. Richison

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Foreword

These lessons in **James** are compiled from the writings of Dr. Grant C. Richison, which were published on the Internet beginning in 1997 in the Campus Crusades (Canada) daily online devotional Today's Word.

Dr. Richison is a highly experienced pastor, lecturer, and Christian servant who is dedicated to a lifetime of studying and teaching God's Word. Almost immediately after his salvation he began to desire to teach the Word, and he set about a lifelong program of preparation and ministry.

Dr. Richison has a diploma from Detroit Bible Institute, a bachelor's degree in religious education from William Tyndale College (Detroit), a Masters in Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a doctorate in ministries from Luther Rice Seminary in Jacksonville, Florida.

Dr. Richison has been pastor and senior pastor of Baptist churches from 1965 to 1992. His most recent pastorate was at Grant Memorial Baptist Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, where, over a 20 year period, he had oversight of a ministry that expanded from about 350 to more than 2500 communicants. During the period of his pastorates, Dr. Richison was also a lecturer at Detroit Bible College and Winnipeg Theological Seminary.

From 1993 to 1995, Dr. Richison was Director of Leadership Ministries for Campus Crusade for Christ (Canada). He currently has a world-wide lecture ministry with Campus Crusade.

Dr. Richison is an experienced writer, and he provides materials for three areas on the Internet: Sermon on the Net; Today's Word, and Pastors' Power Points. He has considerable ability to communicate God's Word verse by verse in a relevant, clear, applicable and insightful manner and to communicate vision and establish a philosophy of ministry in the local assembly. .

Dr. Richison has served on the following boards and conferences:

- Lower Michigan Baptist General Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, board member)
 - Great Lakes Baptist Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, chairman)
 - Central Canada Baptist Conference (district of Baptist General Conference, chairman)
 - Child Evangelism Fellowship (Manitoba)
 - Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
 - International Ministries to Israel (Canada)
 - Chairman of Greater Manitoba Sunday School Convention
 - Chairman of Marney Patterson Evangelistic Crusade (city-wide in Winnipeg)
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- Chairman of Terry Winter Evangelistic Crusade (city-wide in Winnipeg)
 - Chairman of the "Why Campaign" (city-wide evangelistic trust in Winnipeg)
 - Chairman of the Board of Regents of Canadian Baptist Seminary (part of consortium of seminaries on Trinity Western University)
 - Baptist General Conference of Canada (board member)
 - Briarcrest Bible College and Seminary, Moose Jaw, Sask.
 - Electronic Bible Society, Dallas Texas
 - President's Cabinet, Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada

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Verse-by-verse courses are available in more than 30 books of the Bible. Some of the courses include word studies (categorical doctrine) or historical articles (isagogics) that are relevant to the passages being discussed. Other courses offered are Bible character studies, comprehensive studies of the Christian Life and Basics of the Christian Life, an extensive series on the Person and Word of Jesus Christ, and a thorough study of the Attributes of God. You are invited to write to the address below, or write by e-mail, to inquire about Grace Notes materials.

Warren Doud, Director
1705 Aggie Lane
Austin, Texas 78757
E-Mail: wdoud@bga.com

INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR

A. James, the brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:58; Mark 6:3)

B. James initially rejected Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:21,31-35; John 7:3-9, especially John 7:5). However, in Acts, he had a sudden change of heart toward Jesus. Explanation of change in James the man—the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:7)

C. James became the leader of the Jerusalem church [not Peter].

1. Peter sends news of his escape from prison to James (Acts 12:17).

2. James presides over the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:13-21).

3. Paul met with Peter and James when he first went to Jerusalem after becoming a Christian (Galatians 1:19; 2:9).

4. Paul brought a collection to James (Acts 21:18-25), Paul obviously held James in high regard.

D. Jude calls James the "brother of the Lord" (Jude 1).

E. James means "Jacob."

RECIPIENTS: Christians of the 12 tribes of Israel [Christian Jews] scattered

throughout the Roman Empire (1:1). This dispersion may have been due to the persecution described in Acts 12.

PURPOSE: To expose the fallacy of dead orthodoxy [profession of faith without producing results].

A. Action must match profession.

B. Right acting must match right thinking and right believing.

C. Christians should not separate doctrine from practice.

THEME: Faith works.

A. Active, living faith verses a theoretical belief.

B. Faith produces a life governed by the Word of God (1:22).

C. Life divergent from God's Word denies faith.

D. Antinomianism is contrary to God's Word.

E. Morality is a by-product of Christianity.

F. Obedience is the watchword of faith.

DATE: A.D. 45-49

KEY VERSE: 2:17

BACKGROUND AND DESTINATION

A. Israel went into captivity by the Assyrians, 721 B.C.

B. Judah went into captivity by the Neo-Babylonians, 588 B.C.

C. Alexander the Great transplanted a great number of Jews to Egypt, especially in Alexandria.

D. Pursuit of commerce caused many Jews to disperse to other countries (James 1:1).

E. Note the diversity of people who came from the dispersion in Acts (Acts 2:9-11; 6:9).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK

A. No New Testament book is more Jewish.

B. James is an interpretation of the Law of the Old Testament and the Sermon on the Mount.

C. James obviously depends on the Sermon on the Mount.

D. Imagery drawn from nature (1:6,10,11; 3:4,5,7,12; 4:14; 5:2,3,7,18).

E. There are 54 commands in 108 verses.

F. James is the oldest New Testament book.

G. Five chapters; 108 verses; 2,309 words in KJV.

H. Christ's name occurs only twice (1:1; 2:1).

I. No mention of incarnation or resurrection.

J. Martin Luther called James that "straw epistle" because he thought that it taught justification by works.

K. James is a general epistle [along with Hebrews, Peter, John's epistles, Jude], addressed to believers in many locations.

L. The book of James was to pass cyclically from one group to another.

M. James was omitted from some early lists of New Testament books that belong in the Bible.

N. Style: exhortation in the form of a letter.

O. James calls his readers "brethren" 15 times.

P. More than any other book, James deals with our outward life.

Q. The Word of God is our mirror to show our character and conduct.

R. The only true hearer is the doer of work; all inner grace produces fruit.

OCCASION FOR WRITING THE EPISTLE

Christians in the first-century dispersion suffered persecution and lived under Pharisaical self-righteousness.

James defines the nature of sin, that sin is more than an act. Therefore, he appeals to the Sermon on the Mount

to show sin is an attitude controlled by a motive.

CONTRASTS BETWEEN PAUL'S & JAMES' JUSTIFICATION:

Paul: Justification before God

James: Justification before man

Paul: Faith is the root of justification.

James: Works are the fruit of justification.

Paul: Faith is the cause of justification.

James: Works are the result of justification.

COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND JAMES:

James 1:2 -- Matthew 5:10-12

James 1:4 -- Matthew 5:48

James 1:5 -- Matthew 7:7f

James 1:9 -- Matthew 5:3

James 1:12 -- Matthew 7:14

James 1:20 -- Matthew 5:22

James 1:22 -- Matthew 7:24f

James 2:5 -- Matthew 5:3

James 2:10 -- Matthew 5:19

James 2:13 -- Matthew 5:7

James 3:10-12 -- Matthew 7:15f

James 3:6 -- Matthew 5:22

James 3:18 -- Matthew 5:9

James 4:4 -- Matthew 6:24

James 4:10 -- Matthew 5:5

James 4:11,12 -- Matthew 7:1-5

James 5:2f -- Matthew 6:19

James 5:10 -- Matthew 5:12

James 5:12 -- Matthew 5:33-37

TRANSITION NATURE OF JAMES

James wrote during the time of transition in the early apostolic church. The book does not have the full-orbed doctrinal scope that later New Testament authors develop since he stands at the beginning of the New Testament chronologically.

OUTLINE

Salutation, 1:1

I. Faith's Test, 1:2-27

A. Faith's Stability, 1:2-11

B. Faith's Endurance, 1:12-18

C. Faith's Action, 1:19-27

II. Faith's Nature, 2:1-3:12

A. Faith does not discriminate, 2:1-13

B. Faith works, 2:14-26

C. Faith tames the tongue, 3:1-12

III. Faith's Wisdom, 3:13-5:18

A. Wisdom Defined, 3:13-18

B. Wisdom about the source of sin, 4:1-10

IV. Faith's Application, 4:11-20

A. In judgments, 4:11-12

B. In commercial ventures, 4:13-17

C. In labour problems, 5:1-6

D. In victory over sin, 5:7-20

1. Patience for imminent coming, 5:7-11

2. Prayer, 5:12-20

James 1:1

"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings"

The first verse of James contains the conventional salutation or greeting.

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

James does not call himself "the Lord's half-brother" or the leader of the church in Jerusalem but the "bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus

Christ." He viewed himself as a slave to his half-brother! Mary had six children.

James gives full credit to the deity of Christ. He puts the Lord Jesus Christ on the par with God. We should translate the word "and" in the phrase "and of the Lord Jesus Christ" as "even." Thus the phrase should read, "a bondservant of God even of the Lord Jesus Christ."

James means "Jacob." He was a half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 1:25; 12:46-47; Luke 8:19-21; John 2:12; Galatians 1:19). Jesus' other half-brothers were Joseph, Simon and Judas. Mark says that Jesus had some half-sisters (Mark 3:31-35). His brothers did not initially believe on Him but thought He was crazy (Mark 3:21).

"Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, 'Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.' For even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:2-5).

The resurrection changed James' view of Jesus (Acts 1:13,14; 1 Corinthians 15:7). After the resurrection, Jesus personally appeared to James. After that James believed on Him and eventually became the key leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:1f; 21:17-18; Galatians 2:9-12). According to Josephus, James was martyred about A.D. 62.

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:

The words "scattered abroad" in the Greek is the word "dispersion." This word initially referred to Jews scattered among Gentile nations, the Diaspora (John 7:35). This dispersion began in the sixth century B.C. when the Jews were exiled to Babylon. In this case, "scattered" means Christian Jews dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. The 12 tribes were Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

Greetings

The word "greetings" means be glad, rejoice and was a common greeting by everyone of that day.

Principle:

God does not favour us on the basis of privilege but on the basis of grace.

Application:

Christian servitude to Jesus the Lord is not by coercion but by choice. As James did not claim fame on the back of his brother the Lord Jesus, so Christians should not care about fame but about service to Jesus.

There is no advantage in physical birth in knowing Jesus personally. James was the Lord's half-brother but rejected Him as Saviour until the resurrection. Although he was a member of the royal family of the Messiah, he remained an unbeliever until the resurrection. No assets such as physical birth gain any approbation with God. Natural ability does not cut any ice with God. God uses people with and without talent.

God always uses people because of His grace and God's grace always excludes human assets or merit.

James 1:2

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials...

My brethren,

James viewed dispersed Jewish Christians throughout the world as his "brethren." He uses this affiliation with Christians 15 times in his epistle. He balances his commands with compassion.

count it

Christians under duress should face trial with an attitude of joy. They should look at trial as the sovereign plan of God for their lives. We should not descend into a sad dejected state of mind that does not allow us to face our problems.

The word "count" is an accounting term. It means put trial to the positive side of the ledger. Christians face their trials head on by understanding God's sovereign working in their life.

"Count" is an imperative, a command. Christians must choose to calculate joy in their lives because facing trial in this way is not natural. We must

consciously choose the attitude of joy in trial based on the fact of God's sovereignty. Christians are to take control of their attitude by orienting to God's plan for their life.

Principle:

God's sovereign purpose allows us to put our trials in perspective.

Application:

Christians must intentionally put their trials under God's plan in their attitude. Christians are to calculate each experience God sovereignly allows into our lives as a point of joy because we know it is from the hand of God. Nothing is capricious in God's plan; everything has a purpose.

Mature Christians carry an attitude of joy under trial. Carnal Christians complain and gripe about their lot. They seem to have no sense of God's sovereign plan for their lives. Mature Christians clearly understand God's sovereignty and purpose for them.

all joy

The degree of our joy in trial is "all." We should see no trial that comes into our lives as an exception. God places all trials into our lives for a purpose. Instead of complaining about our troubles, we rejoice in them in a total point of view. Christians should not divide life into enjoyable and not enjoyable experiences. Everything that comes into our lives as Christians is a point of joy.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Principle:

The fundamental orientation of a believer in trial should be joy.

Application:

It is important to distinguish "joy" from happiness. Happiness depends on positive circumstances to happen to us. "Happiness" comes from a root that means circumstance. "Happen" has the same root as "happiness." When we face severe circumstances, we cannot be happy because the circumstances are not good. However, we can have joy in adverse circumstance because we know that God has a plan for our lives. Joy is the inner animation of our soul independent of circumstance and situation. We have no regrets because we know we are in God's plan.

Trial in itself is no joy; but knowing that God's sovereign hand put it into my life is a joy.

"So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41).

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory..." (1 Peter 1:6-8).

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:12-13).

when you fall into various trials

The word "when" indicates that it is inevitable that we will encounter trial. No Christian escapes trials. The idea of the Greek word is whenever, not if we fall into various trials. There is no doubt that trouble will come.

Principle:

It is inevitable that every Christian will face trial.

Application:

All trials benefit the believer. The trials here are not temptations but trials of the soul. No one gets through life without trouble and trial. That is the result of the Fall. Every Christian should expect trial and develop a biblical coping mechanism for dealing with trouble.

"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20).

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

fall into

The words "fall into" mean to fall into something so as to be encompassed with trials. Christians at times find themselves enveloped and surrounded by trials.

Falling into trials involves both movement and impact. Christians come suddenly upon adversities and encounter deep difficulties. This trial is something we "fall into" not by our own devises. This trial did not come as a result of our personal sin but by God putting it into our life.

Principle:

God puts trials into our lives not due to our own making but to His designs.

Application:

Most of us count it all joy when we avoid trial. Some of us get into trouble by our own folly. This trial is something we "fall into." It is not a trial of our own making but something of God's making.

various

Christians fall into "various" or variegated trials. We do not face trouble on one front but on many fronts. We encounter diversified, manifold trials. The word "various" carried the idea of many-

coloured. Trial comes in all shapes and colors. There are many hues to the trials of a Christian.

Principle:

God allows all shapes of trials to come into our lives to develop different aspects of our character.

Application:

The Christian must cope with all kinds of trials. The emphasis is not on the number but the variety of trials we face. Everyone has trials and has them regularly and in different ways. We face loss of loved ones in death, loss of financial expectations, misunderstanding, broken relationships, criticism or judgment from others.

Christians will also face trouble because of their testimony. We should expect this and should be no surprise. God wants to test the effectiveness of our faith.

Sometimes our problems come in the form of people. Some people are blatantly infuriating. We might face financial problems. Some might miss out on a great career opportunity. All these areas try our faith.

"Yet man is born to trouble, As the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

"Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).

"Be not far from Me, For trouble is near; For there is none to help" (Psalm 22:11).

trials

The word "trial" means trying, testing, assaying, or proving. An athlete must test himself to be the best he can be. He pushes weights to optimize his physical strength. She runs to maximize her cardiovascular system. She puts her body to the test to get the most out of it. God puts us under severe strain to get the most out of us.

Principle:

Most trials are not a mark of God's disfavour but of His determination to mature us into the image of Christ.

Application:

Trials teach us to be faithful and live with integrity. They help us to depend on God.

Trials are not a mark of God's disfavour but of His interest in our development. Christians of the highest character go through deep waters. Deep waters produce character. Joseph's attitude toward adversity was acceptance of God's plan in his life.

"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Resentfulness, self-pity and bitterness toward trial reveal a weak faith. The person who rests in the Lord during duress demonstrates a powerful faith, and knows that God has a purpose.

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

God puts all trials into our lives to test us for His approval. Carrying the right attitude under duress demonstrates our confidence in God when things do not go our way. Confidence in God's plan produces strong and mature believers. These are Christians who know that all trials are not a mark of God's disapproval of them but evidence of the authenticity of their faith. How we react to trial shows how strong our faith really is.

James 1:3

"...knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience."

knowing

It is not enough to have the right attitude; we must have right thinking about trials. This Greek word for "knowing" is personal knowing, knowledge that comes from our personal experience. James' readers knew from personal experience that "faith produces patience."

Principle:

Genuine Christianity necessitates facing ourselves for what we truly are.

Application:

Each one of us must face ourselves. When we do this truthfully, our faith will enable us to persevere through trial. If we know by faith that

the trial of our faith produces tenacity, then we will be strong in trial.

The biblical Hall of Fame [Hebrews 11] and Jesus are our examples to enable us to recognize each situation we face is there to develop "endurance." We must see that God designs every encounter we face in life as a test of our faith.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 11), let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1).

that the testing of your faith

The purpose of testing our faith is to show how real and strong our faith truly is. "Testing" means proving. God wants to prove how genuine our faith is.

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love" (1 Peter 1:6-8).

James mentions "faith" sixteen times. The book of James exalts faith. He views it as the engine for works. He does not exalt works over faith but faith as the source for works.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Principle:

God will prove our faith by trial to see how genuine it is.

Application:

We need to know that God will test our faith. He so values our faith that he puts it to the test to make it stronger. God wants to verify the genuineness of our faith. A genuine faith is a trustworthy faith.

The test of trial will prove whether we have a genuine gold faith. The fire shows faith as the supreme energizing principle of the Christian life.

produces patience

The word "produces" is a strong term for "do." The idea is to work out, render to work, to do something with thoroughness. Trials thoroughly produce a faith that results in tenacity. The test of one area of our lives produces power in another area.

There are two Greek words for "patience." One has to do with patience with people [not our term] and the other has to do with patience with circumstances. "Patience" in this verse comes from two words: under and to stay, to abide, to remain. The idea is to remain under. Our term deals with staying power, the ability to hang in there during difficult circumstances. It is the character of tenacity under difficult situations. This person does not give up and throw in the towel. "Patience" does not carry the idea of passive endurance but the notion of tenacity.

Principle:

Trials are God's means for making the faith of the child of God strong with fortitude. A patient person is someone who hangs in there and does not give up; it is someone who overcomes and accomplishes God's designs for his life. His faith does not falter or wane. He does not run from his problems but faces them head-on.

The idea of "patience" is perseverance through trouble. If we face trial with trust in God's plan for us, we will receive a reward for tenacity of character. Each time we face trial with faith, our endurance gets stronger. Trials produce staying power and tenacity.

"I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry" (Psalm 40:1).

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4).

"Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

How do you react to trial, negatively or positively? If we react negatively, that demonstrates lack of faith in God's sovereign plan for our lives. God uses trials to develop our character. Each time we overcome a trial, we get stronger spiritually.

God puts each one of us in the School of Suffering. Each one that receives this training with faith will develop the strong character of tenacity. He will hang in there through the most difficult situations.

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:6-9).

James 1:4

"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing"

Verse 3 notifies us that capacity for tenacity is a result of God's proving by trials. This verse informs us about the work that tenacity does on us: 1) Perfects us, 2) Completes us and 3) Makes

us deficit in nothing. Perseverance produces clear benefits to those willing to exercise their faith in the face of trials.

But let patience

A genuine faith produces perseverance and genuine perseverance produces maturity. The believer must be careful not to delimit the full force of the work of patience in his life. He must yield his will to issues revolving around perseverance. It is important not to resist God's work in our lives. Many of us argue against God's plan for pain in our lives instead of yielding to it.

have its perfect work,

The perfect work of patience results in three ends: "perfect," "complete" and "lack nothing." This is the full effect of the principle of perseverance working in our lives.

The word "work" indicates that perseverance is not passive but active. Heavy trial should not daunt or defeat us. Instead, perseverance creates power to cope with trial. There is nothing static or stationary about it. When we cope with trial with a sense of perseverance, we attain God's purpose in putting them into our lives.

Principle:

Spiritual maturity comes from perseverance.

Application:

A tested faith produces perseverance and perseverance produces by-products of maturity. Trial is necessary for our personal development for it demonstrates to us how genuine our faith is. God has a purpose for each trial we encounter. A diamond needs polishing and fruit needs pruning.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him" (Job 13:15).

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father

does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:5-11).

"But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing"

that you may be perfect

The word "perfect" means to finish, to reach an end. The idea is perfection toward a given end or purpose (1:17,25; 3:2). God's system of trials is not capricious but purposeful. God is interested in bringing us to a successful completion through His sovereign plan.

"Perfect" here does not refer to absolute sinless perfection but to spiritual stability. The more mature we are, the more useful we become for God's kingdom. Mature people are those who attain the aim God has for them. Maturity does not mean someone who reaches perfection but someone who applies the principles of the Word in a maximum way to his experience. A mature person may stumble, fall, and revert on occasion but he always applies truth to experience to most situations. The fact that he stumbled along the way is incidental to his ultimate maturity.

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. Nevertheless, to

the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind" (Philippians 3:12-16).

Principle:

It is one thing to be a Christian but it is another to be a mature believer.

Application:

A baby is person but not an adult. The baby must go through many years of development before he is at the place where people call him an adult. Initially, when he tries to walk, he often falls down. We do not discourage this because it is part of the process of learning to walk. Pain is part of development.

Perseverance produces maturity in the believer. Those who handle bad situations in God's way will end up mature and will live with the integrity of someone who learned to walk with God by faith in the face of trials. We then grow up to be genuine spiritual adults (Hebrews 5:14). Maturity is the goal for each believer to pursue.

and complete,

The idea of "complete" is sound in every part. "Complete" comes from two words: whole and portions. A mature person has all the portions in place. The person who reaches this level of maturity does not leave any spiritual development wanting. There is no unsound spiritual dimension to his or her life. This is the consummate spiritual believer, a well-rounded and sound Christian.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Deuteronomy uses the word "complete" of "whole stones" that were not hewed or polished. They were complete because they lost nothing and maintained their originality.

"You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 27:6).

lacking nothing

"Lacking" signifies to forsake, leave, lag behind, be left destitute, fall short. This believer does not leave any obligations to God. His spiritual development lacks no shortcoming. Nothing of spiritual significance is lacking in the mature believer. Mature believers leave immature believers behind.

Principle:

Each decision to persevere builds a stronger platform for further growth.

Application:

Some Christians give up before perseverance by faith gets a chance to go full-term in developing them. They never become all that God wants them to be. They cave in before God's trial can teach them what He wants them to know. They leave the race before they cross the finish line because the pain was too great. We gauge things by pleasure rather than by what is best for us. Those who squirm out of their problems miss the opportunity to mature by faith.

Determination to persevere through pain and problems is not fatalism or resignation. Despair is not a quality of biblical character. Neither is blunting our true humanity God's will. Perseverance by faith in God's plan for our lives directs our human nature, not stuffs it.

Perseverance by faith in God's plan allows us to bear anything that may come our way so that we can make effective use of our problems. Each act of resistance results in stronger character and competence. Each victory of faith builds a stronger platform for further future success. Every act of faith we make, we either build a stronger base for maturity or we weaken that base. At any point in time, we are either fit or unfit ourselves for God's plan for our lives.

God wants us to get our PhD in Christian maturity. Many of us drop out in grade school. Those who keep on keeping on will get their SmD, their doctoral degree in spiritual maturity.

James 1:5

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and

without reproach, and it will be given to him"

As perseverance comes from trial (vv. 3-4) so wisdom [the ability to cope with deep difficulties] comes from prayer.

If any of you lacks wisdom,

James assumes that his readers lack wisdom. If a Christian does not possess "wisdom," God will give it to him. The word "lacks" is a banking term for falling short in one's account. Testing always requires special wisdom to cope with trials beyond our ability to manage. Trials should improve our prayer life.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Principle:

A person with wisdom can make solid decisions.

Application:

A believer with "wisdom" has biblical common sense. He knows how to use his biblical knowledge. He knows how to apply the Word to experience.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

Wisdom is the correct use of knowledge. It is the ability to exercise the discernment and judgment of God's Word. We might possess great knowledge of the Bible but not know how to live it out.

If we do not know how to apply the Word to our experience, we lack wisdom. This is especially true in trial. A person might be highly educated but devoid of wisdom. Conversely, it is possible to possess wisdom without a great amount of academic training. It is possible to have an educated imprudence. Yet, on the other hand, we

cannot utilize God's wisdom without God's a knowledge of God's Word.

let him ask of God,

The word "ask" means to request, to plead for, to call for. It is a term of urgency even to the point of demanding. The New Testament uses this word especially for individual petitions with a reference to the content. The suppliant petitions as one who is lesser in position.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

"You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3).

"And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:15).

Principle:

The exercise of prayer is a good indication whether we depend on God or not.

Application:

The Christian who recognizes his or her inability to cope with the circumstances of life is the Christian who seeks God's wisdom. Prayer does not inform God of something that He does not know but it is an act of dependence on Him.

Our verse does not say, "If any person lacks wisdom, let him or her go to university."

Education gives knowledge but it cannot impart wisdom in using knowledge. This wisdom can only come from God.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 God commands [imperative] us to ask as part of our prayer life because asking is dependence. This is no suggestion. There is no alternative to prayer. When we face trial and difficulty beyond our capacity to handle, we should cast ourselves at the feet of God to gain the wisdom we need to face the problem.

who gives to all

"All" here does not mean en masse. God gives to each person individually. He treats you as an individual when you come to Him in prayer. God does not reserve prayer for the spiritual elite for He answers all of our prayers.

liberally

It is one thing for God to give but it is another thing for Him to give "liberally." "Liberally" means simple, open, with no ulterior motive, wholehearted. The idea here is willing and generous giving on God's part.

and without reproach,

"Reproach" means to revile, to disgrace, to abuse, to upbraid. God will not insult or reprimand us if we ask anything of Him in prayer. He will not heap insults on us for exercising our right in prayer. God does not give to us according to a merit system but out of His sheer, unadulterated grace.

Principle:

God's heart is oriented to be generous toward you.

Application:

God is generous with those who ask from Him. He is a generous Giver who gives unconditionally. God has a singleness of heart in unconditionally giving to us without us having to bargain with Him for it. He has but one condition - that we ask Him for it.

God does not give His gifts grudgingly. He does not complain about answering our prayers. He delights in doing so.

God does upbraid us for unbelief and hardness of heart.

"Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their

unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen" (Mark 16:14).

and it will be given to him

God will give us the wisdom we need to cope with the difficulties we face. God is more willing to give wisdom than we are to ask for it. He answers prayer without reservation or reluctance.

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13).

"I am the LORD your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Psalm 81:10).

"And whatever [There is no blank check from God in the word "whatever." God answers prayer only on the condition of His will.] you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13).

Principle:

God guarantees to answer our prayers.

Application:

God will definitely answer our prayers. "Ask and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7-11). Answered prayer assumes an ask by faith (v.8). Genuine confidence in God's promise results in God's response to prayer. If we cast doubt on God's generosity, God will not answer our prayers.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

None of us deserve answer to prayer but that is not the point. The issue is God's intention and desire to answer prayer. Neither are our prayers nor are we worthy of answered prayer. We have

no merit before God; only Jesus is worthy. That is why we come to the Father "in Jesus name."

True prayer approaches God as credible and One who keeps His promises. He is trustworthy when it comes to prayer.

James 1:6

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind"

But let him ask in faith,

God is ready to answer our prayers (v.5). Faith is the vehicle that engages trust in God's readiness to answer to our prayers. It is the central requirement for answered prayer.

Faith is the basic operating principle for the Christian life. This is the main argument of the book of James. Here James applies faith to the exercise of prayer.

Principle:

Faith is reliance on the character and veracity of God's promises.

Application:

Faith is reliance on God's promise and trust in His character. Those who put their faith in Bill Gates to build the Microsoft computer giant made a lot of money. If we do not trust the market, we will not invest. If we do not invest, we will not make money. Faith is an important investment of every day life much less of a life of prayer. If we exercise faith in business and banks, we should trust God more so.

Faith engages us with the power of God. It is like a satellite receiver that brings in an array of programs. All those programs are out there but we cannot take delivery of them without the satellite receiver.

"And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22).

"So Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22).

With faith we can move mountains; without faith we cannot even move a molehill in God's economy!

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

with no doubting,

The idea behind the Greek word for "doubting" is to separate throughout or wholly. When people doubt God, they discriminate against Him and are divided in their own mind. They separate themselves from God. They prefer their own beliefs to God's Word.

To doubt is to be in a critical state of mind. Such people dispute what they see and thus hesitate to embrace the facts. They separate what they believe is likely from what they believe is not viable. If they deem something humanly impossible, they do not believe God will answer their prayers. Their prayers revolve around human possibility, not God's supernatural intervention.

for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind

A doubting person is like a wave that dashes and surges against the rocks on the shore. Doubters are vacillators. They sometimes believe and sometimes do not. Believing prayer steadily rests its confidence in God. An undecided, in- two-minds believer does not exercise prevailing prayer. Such people are at odds with themselves.

As a wave of the sea can be very active but not accomplish much, so the Christian can be very active in prayer but not accomplish much. Purposeless prayer of unbelief is inane and frivolous. It assaults God's character.

Reuben was unstable as water (Genesis 49:4) because he had no centre point. Circumstances tossed him one way and then another. When things go well for some Christians, they ride the crest of the wave. When things go bad, they go under. They need the keel of faith in God. That will give them stability. A boat with its keel broken in tempestuous weather is in for a rough

ride. Christians without daily operating faith are in for a rough ride because they have no captain they can trust at the helm of the ship of their experience.

"...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Ephesians 4:14).

Principle:

Doubt begets instability but faith brings about stability of soul.

Application:

The Christian who prays without believing God will answer is like a wave tossed back and forth. It does not proceed anywhere. Prayer without faith does not proceed anywhere. The prayer of faith has the single purpose of committing everything to God during trial.

It is absurd to ask for something from the Lord that you do not expect to receive. This dishonours the credibility of God's commitment to fulfil His promises.

Prayer that does not trust God's willingness or ability to answer is an affront to God's character. Doubt is the opposite of faith and assails God's character. God wants us to believe in His trustworthiness. He will never fail us because He is always faithful to us.

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11: 6).

James 1:7

"For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord..."

For let not that man suppose

The word "suppose" signifies to expect, imagine. The word "for" connects us to the vacillator who believes and then disbelieves (verse 6).

"That man" is emphatic. James makes a strong point about the kind of people to whom God responds with answered prayer. God does not

answer the prayers of presumptuous people who do not even believe their own prayers. He is not under obligation to answer anyone, especially those who seriously doubt His ability to answer prayer.

that he will receive anything from the Lord

If believers do not ask in "faith" (v5), they will not receive anything from the Lord. A distrusting vacillator does not receive answered prayer. Doubt cuts off answered prayer.

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures" (James 4:3).

Principle:

The flip-flop Christian does not receive answered prayer from the Lord.

Application:

Some of us make suppositions about prayer that are wrong. We think just because we pray that God will answer that prayer. No, God answers the prayer of faith. The person who exercises trust in God will be honoured for that trust.

God states that He liberally gives to those who ask of Him, yet some of us come to Him with the idea He gives to us like a pauper. Where do we get such audacity? If we ask something of God, we should expect to receive something from Him.

"If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18).

"Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart..." (Luke 18:1).

James 1:8

"...he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways"

he is a double-minded man,

"Double-minded" means "two-souled." A two-souled man wavers and is uncertain about God. He partly believes and partly disbelieves God – he debates whether he can trust God. This person lacks certainty because he is a man of no fixed or decided purpose.

This double-minded man is the person of verses 5-7 who lacks wisdom but does not ask God for it in belief. His prayer life is like a raging sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Unstable in all his ways

A two-souled person is inconstant, unstable and unsettled. His belief is like a drunk – a belief that staggers down the road of life. People whose faith falters with the ebb and flow of life do not have God's respect because they divide their loyalty between God and other things. It is usually pressure that cause them to crumble.

Doubt blunts the faith we need to receive from God. This creates a chaotic spiritual life, the opposite of a spiritual life that draws on God by implicit faith in God's promises.

Principle:

Stable Christians look to God for their resources by faith.

Application:

A double-minded person always serves two belief systems. Jesus said that you cannot do this and maintain your integrity of trust in God.

"They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak" (Psalm 12:2).

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

"Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:8).

God wants us to possess a single mind, not a double mind. Christians who hold deep-seated convictions are powerful people. Divided souls do not stand.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

"Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name" (Psalm 86:11).

It is time that we settle our convictions. The longer we wait, the more power we lose for the Christian life. Opposing desires rip us apart spiritually. We cannot please both God and our sinful pleasures at the same time. True faith does not always operate with open options because this injects instability into the spiritual life. Genuine faith, however, can wholeheartedly commit to God's will and excellence in the Christian life.

"And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21).

"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

James 1:9

"Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation..."

Let the lowly brother

The "lowly brother" here is a fellow Christian of low position, poor, lowly, humble, undistinguished. This is a person low on the totem pole in society, who lives in humble circumstances.

This verse is a command – God mandates that Christians with very little material possessions rejoice in eternal things, not temporal things.

glory in his exaltation

Christians who possess very little here will obtain much hereafter. There is a day coming when God will exalt them. There will be no social standing in eternity. Although Christians may possess very little in temporal treasures now, God will give them eternal treasures that they will never lose. Christians with the least amount of earthly wealth are richer than the wealthiest of this world. Christians calculate their wealth in terms of eternity, not time; in terms of God's operating assets, not a given amount of mutual funds.

Principle:

Christians can have legitimate pride in their eternal possessions.

Application:

When we assume God's viewpoint on values, we broaden our perspective and elevate ourselves above our present situation. If we own very little riches in this life, we still can rejoice because of our eternal possessions. There is a day coming when no one will put us into a class distinction because of what we own or do not own. Poverty will not last long; it will not enter into the eternal state.

By operating on an eternal perspective, we do not joy in our wealth on earth but in our riches in Heaven. The Christian rejoices more in the future than in the present. Although people in present time might put us on a lower rung of social acceptance, God guarantees that He will place us on the high rung of His acceptance. That hope raises us above our circumstances to a new and higher plane.

"...and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:17).

Poverty is no absolute condition for unhappiness for the Christian. Christianity is not an economic worldview for it transcends finances, bank accounts and personal wealth. To be a child of God outranks any station in life on earth. In this we can rejoice in the face of any situation we might encounter.

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

James 1:10

"...the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away"

In verse 9 James gave the viewpoint of the financially poor, now in this verse he gives the viewpoint of the financially rich. The poor should glory in his spiritual wealth and the rich should glory in eternal things.

the rich in his humiliation,

There a humiliation in wealthy persons – one day they will die. Their wealthy status will not last forever. The rich person can rejoice in his future humiliation at death because he knows he has an eternal future ahead.

because as a flower of the field he will pass away

The rich will not be on top of the totem pole in Heaven. Wealth will give her no power there. Her wealth will pass away like a flower of the field.

Principle:

Temporal wealth is transitory; eternal wealth goes on forever.

Application:

It is important to our Christian life that we keep an eternal point of view. We all face deep grief in this life. Financial reversals and loss of loved ones bring us to our knees. Money cannot carry us through those kinds of trials. Both rich and poor cast themselves on God in the same way.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal

weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

James 1:11

"For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits"

After the burning sun falls on the flower, it is now an ugly stem. Wealth will lose its luster and appearance. There will come a day when wealth will lose its attraction. Wealth is a withering thing.

So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits

All the pursuit of wealth will ultimately come to nothing. It will count for nothing when God finally tallies the final and ultimate assessment of worth.

"In his pursuits" can mean "in his journeys" (4:13-15). The idea is that even the plans and projections, the way a rich man manages his wealth will pass away. Wealthy people need to give special attention to this. The crucial issue is to keep a proper perspective on wealth - personal wealth in the final analysis does not amount to much in the eternal perspective. Spiritual wealth is important in God's eyes. All personal possessions fall under that umbrella.

Principle:

The end-goal of life to get rich is short-term thinking.

Application:

Riches kept for ourselves do not make us better. The wealthier some people become, the more selfish they are. There is a great danger to self in this.

"There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt" (Ecclesiastes 5:13).

The great goal of life with many people in North America is to get rich. However, the day of their

death will come. If they lose their health, they cannot enjoy their wealth. A money-oriented goal for life is short-term thinking. Wealth is a withering thing. All the feverish travels to make money will ultimately come to nothing.

James 1:12

"Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him"

Blessed is the man

The word "blessed" carries more than the idea happy. The idea is that a "blessed" person is a privileged recipient of God's favor. The Christian will enjoy a certain favorable situation if he meets God's condition for receiving that blessedness. He is a fortunate person indeed.

This word for "blessed" is the same word as in the beatitudes (Matthew 5). Blessedness is a state that outside circumstances cannot affect. It is something that we carry within. It is a quality that we receive from God and that we cannot acquire apart from Him. It is the state whereby we enjoy God.

The New Testament calls God Himself "blessed."

"...according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Timothy 1:11).

"...which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen" (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Principle:

Our sense of satisfaction comes from the source of God.

Application:

We can carry blessedness within because of our association with God. Many Christians do not carry that sense of blessedness. They do not have what God has because they live apart from God.

Blessed people are those who need nothing. They are independent of the world. They don't depend on luck or a windfall coming their way but upon divine resources within.

who endures temptation;

Those who endure trial receive God's blessing. The Greek word for "endure" carries the idea of tenacity under adverse circumstances. The word comes from two words: under and to remain, to abide. The idea is to remain under the load. Don't give up. Stick with it. Hang in there.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls....If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Hebrews 12:1-3, 7)

"Temptation" in this verse means trial. The thought is not solicitation to evil but hanging in there under adverse circumstances.

for when he has been approved,

The idea of "approved" is someone who passed a test. This is a person who victoriously met the trial. An approved person never surrenders sure trust in God; he perseveres through anything that might come his way because He knows His God. The purpose of all trial is to demonstrate the quality of our faith.

Principle:

Trial determines what kind of faith we have.

Application:

God is in the business of approving our faith. If God takes the time to evaluate the quality of our faith, do we put any effort toward that end? We

want the Good Housekeeping seal of approval on products in our house. God wants the Good Lifekeeping seal of approval on our Christian lives.

Christians also carry a sense of blessedness in trial because they will receive a reward after it is over.

he will receive the crown of life

The term "crown" comes from the athletic area rather than the royal realm. It was a wreath of victory. God gives permanent reward to those who endure trials in a way that meets God's approval.

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy" (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20).

"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8).

"...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4).

"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

which the Lord has promised to those

A promise is something that God announces openly and that He will emphatically fulfil what He says He will do. We can count on His word. We can hold Him to His promises.

Principle:

God has too much integrity to break His promises.

Application:

Since a promise is something that God will keep without doubt, we can count on His word. We can indeed hold Him to His promises.

"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19).

"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God 2 which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures..." (Romans 1:1-2).

"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

"Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5).

who love Him

The motivation of those who undergo trials is love for God. Their love carries them through the trial. There is a clear connection between our love for God and our willingness to persevere under trial. Love keeps the bond of love strong, not superficial affection. We love God for who He is, not for what we want Him to be.

God gives His crown to those who love Him. The Greek conveys this idea: "to those loving Him." God does not reward those who on occasion love Him but those who love Him with continuity. These are people who love Him under any situation and until the end of their lives.

Principle:

Perseverance under trial is proof of a living and dynamic faith.

Application:

Those who love the Lord persevere through trial. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). If we do not love Him, we operate under a curse (1 Corinthians 16:22).

James 1:13

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone"

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God";

Out of trials come temptations. Trials come from God but temptations do not originate in Him.

We tend to cast blame on God for our sin. In this we avoid taking the blame ourselves. This is an attempt to manipulate God. We love to blame our environment, our genes, our tradition or even God Himself. All of this is the problem of transference. We want to transfer our responsibility to someone else. There is nothing in the character of God where we can cast blame.

Adam attempted to blame Eve for his sin. Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. There is no place for "The Devil made me do it" attitude.

"Then the man said, 'The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.' And the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'" (Genesis 3:12-13).

God did not design the tree in the garden as a point of solicitation to evil but as a point of testing or proving their faith. God is not the direct agent of temptation. The word "by" indicates that God is the indirect agent. God is not even indirectly accountable for soliciting us to evil. God tests us to approve us; He never tempts us to lure us into evil.

Principle:

There is a tendency in us to find excuses for our sin.

Application:

It is difficult for us to bear responsibility for our sin so we try to shift the blame to someone else or even to God. We make excuses for sin because we want to justify ourselves in the face of the facts.

Christians should not blame heredity, circumstance, our genes or the cultural situation.

We take responsibility for our acts. We do not say, "God put me into these circumstances so it is His fault that I am in this situation." The first tendency of the spiritually minded Christian is not to exonerate self but to accept responsibility for sin. It is hard to say to God, "I was sinfully angry with my wife."

for God cannot be tempted by evil,

God is incapable of being tempted by anything or anyone. He cannot be tempted because He is absolute in His nature. Sin does not appeal to anything in the capacity of God. He has no vulnerability to sin.

Genesis 22:1 says that God tempted Abraham but the tempting there is proving rather than tempting. On another occasion the Israelites tempted God at Meribah by their unbelief. They tried his patience but they did not solicit Him to evil.

We cannot indict God for anything. Since God is absolutely free from the power of being solicited to evil, this precludes the possibility of Him tempting others.

nor does He Himself tempt anyone

God does not directly tempt anyone but He does allow us to be tempted. It would be evil for an absolute God to solicit people to sin. God cannot champion for others what is adverse to His character.

2 Samuel 2:1 appears to contradict the idea that God does not tempt anyone. However, the parallel passage, 1 Chronicles 21:1, says that Satan did it. The idea is that God allowed Satan to tempt David.

"Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah'" (2 Samuel 24:1).

"Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1).

Principle:

It is not a sin to be tempted but it is a sin to yield to temptation.

Application:

No one can avoid temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted. The Devil tempted the Lord Himself (Matthew 4:1). It is not a sin to be tempted but it is a sin to yield to temptation. We cannot keep the birds from flying around our heads but we can keep them from making a nest in our hair!

James 1:14

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"

Rather than blaming God for our sin (v.13), we must face the fact that sin comes from self (v.14).

But each one is tempted

Temptation comes from the self, not God. Temptation comes when we allow our lusts to lead and entice us. There is no temptation without something within that is a catalyst for it.

"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans 7:17-25).

The Greek tense of the words "is tempted" refer to repeated temptations. There is no final victory over sin until we meet the Saviour face to face.

Temptation comes from a duo of sources: 1) from something within and 2) from something without. Temptation is both internal and external. When

temptation comes from within, it is lust; when temptation comes from without, it is lure.

"Each one" indicates the universality of temptation. No one is immune and there are no exceptions.

when he is drawn away

First, temptation comes from within – "drawn away by his own desires." We would not succumb to temptation if there were no desire or capacity for the temptation. Inner desires propel us into sin.

God did not put our sin capacity out of commission when we became Christians. That will happen when we meet the Saviour face to face. Jesus judicially defeated it on the cross but He will wipe it out of existence when we meet Him in Heaven.

The words "drawn away" mean to lure away, to pull out, to drag. Secular Greek used this word for animals lured into traps. The idea is to be lured away from a standard by lust. Temptation traps us by our own desire.

by his own desires

The word "by" in the Greek conveys the true source [agent] of our sin. The cause of sin lies in our own breast – from our sin capacity. As a seductive woman allures a man [or vice versa], so our sin capacity allures us from loving God and keeping a close relationship to Him. Our desires capture us and imprison us in them.

The word "own" indicates that the nature of a lust pattern for each individual is different. One individual's lust is another person's aversion. Some of us would never be tempted to homosexuality because it is so repulsive to us yet others face this as a real temptation.

The word "desires" refers to strong lust to get something. Temptation primarily comes from a traitor within, not Satan or circumstances. "I have met the enemy and it is me."

Principle:

Sin begins in the heart.

Application:

Sin begins in the heart. The true source of temptation is in the self – our sin capacity.

Everyone, non-Christian and Christian, has a capacity, a proclivity toward evil. We can trace all acts of sin back to our sin capacity.

**"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me"
(Psalm 51:5).**

**"The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked; Who can know
it?" (Jeremiah 17: 9)**

**"If we say that we have no sin, we
deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in
us" (1 John 1:8).**

There is a depravity within that will drag us down if we let it. If we let it loose, we will develop compulsions that will gain even further control over us. Sin is always attractive, pleasurable and powerful. It deceives us because we always pay a price for sin.

and enticed

We have two sources of temptation – both from within and from without. The first temptation has its source in our sin capacity ["drawn away"]. Secondly, there is an external attraction that will pull us down – "enticed." Our sin capacity is our internal foe and Satan is our infernal foe. He is the foe from without. We always face two foes, that is why we need to stand on guard against a fall. Satan could not entice us without co-operation from our sin capacity.

The word "enticed" is literally to lure with bait, beguile by blandishment as with fish. As a fisherman uses a lure to attract a fish, so our lust lures us from self-control. Temptation prods and baits us by appealing to our dark side. Sin looks so inviting but in the end we become enslaved to it. The bait looks so inviting yet we know the deadly result of biting it.

Knowledge does not seem to prevent us from yielding to temptation. Temptation is more powerful than our knowledge. Sin can "overtake" us by surprise (Galatians 6:1). This means that we do not know ourselves sufficiently and the capabilities that lie within us.

Peter uses "enticed" for people who have "eyes full of adultery" and who operate on "the lusts of the flesh."

"...having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children.... For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error" (2 Peter 2:14,18).

Principle:

Satan is the prod to our sin capacity.

Application:

We both set the trap and step into the trap of sin. First, our lust draws us away from God then we yield to Satan's enticements to sin. Thus, in dealing with sin, we need to address it at two levels - from within and from without. First, temptation draws us away from God. Then once we are away from Him, then Satan entices us at a vulnerable point. As we come under attack at two points so we must deal with it at two points: 1) by forsaking sin and 2) by embracing fellowship with God.

Ultimately, we cannot blame God for our sin nor can we blame Satan; we must blame ourselves. Victim mentality always shifts blame to something or someone else.

James 1:15

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death"

James changes his metaphor to childbirth in verse 15. This verse tells us of the product of sin.

Then, when desire has conceived,

Literally, the word "conceived" comes from two words to take and together meaning to take together. It carries the idea of impregnation in the sexual sense. When the believer gives consent to temptation, sin forms a launching pad for action. Temptation evolves into the framework for sin.

it gives birth to sin;

Lust gives birth to sin. Just like a woman gives birth to a child so lust gives birth to sin. Sin is now in its embryonic form.

Principle:

We most effectively deal with sin at the point of temptation.

Application:

There is enormous power in a lustful thought. The Christian must deal with sin at the point of temptation, not at the point where we choose to sin. Once we choose to open ourselves to sin, the overt action of sin is almost inevitable. We most effectively deal with sin at the point of temptation.

None of us can avoid temptation. It is not a sin to be tempted but it is a sin to yield to temptation. Evil ideas will birth in our minds until we go to meet the Saviour.

The Internet, movies and television today present great temptation to the believer. Lust comes charging into our minds through these vehicles. It comes unexpectedly and quickly. That is why we must guard against temptation by first preparing our minds with the Word of God.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22).

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled." (2 Corinthians 10:4-6).

"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

and sin, when it is full-grown,

Sin produces something as well – death. "Full-grown" has the idea of bring to completion, finish, come to completion, be fully formed. The idea is that when sin has fully run its course, it will bring forth death. Sin develops like an embryo in a womb and has a way of coming to life.

brings forth death

As lust gives birth to sin so sin gives birth to death. It is ironic that birth brings death! If we allow ourselves to go through the full cycle of lust and sinning then we will die in our fellowship with the Lord. If we stay in a state of alienation to God in our time on earth [not in eternity], then God may kill us physically.

"For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [died]. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

"If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that" (1 John 5:16).

This "death" stands in striking contrast to the "crown of life" of verse 12. If we let sin dominate us, our spiritual life will be like a stillborn baby. Death is separation. Sin always separates us from God.

Principle:

The hope of sin results in stillborn satisfaction.

Application:

Our will is influenced by our desire. Sin is more than a single action; it is the result of a process. The sequence of lust, deception, choice and disobedience will produce spiritual death. The

earlier we address ourselves in this process, the easier it will be to overcome sin. Conversely, the longer we wait in the process the more difficulty we will have in overcoming the sin.

Before we became Christians, we were enslaved to lust (Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; 1 Thessalonians 4:5). Lust is morally neutral. It is an illegitimate desire. The hope of sin results in stillborn satisfaction.

James 1:16

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren"

Verse 16 is a transition between the preceding and the following verses, linking the ideas together. Those who blame God for their sin need to understand something about the nature of God.

Do not be deceived,

We get our English word "planet" from the Greek word for "deceived." A planet wanders in the skies. Deception makes us wander from the truth.

James warns believers scattered in the Roman world against a particular misunderstanding about the nature of God (v.17-18). The most fundamental error we can make is misunderstanding the nature of God. If we attribute evil to the nature of God (v.13), we commit the most egregious error. God is the source of good (v.17), not sin.

my beloved brethren

James clearly loves those to whom he ministers. It is wonderful to be the object of love. It is one thing to be in the family of God; it is another to be loved as a member of the family of God.

"Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1).

Principle:

The doctrine of God is the foundational doctrine of Christianity.

Application:

If we go astray on the doctrine of the nature of God, we will wander into error. People can deceive us about the nature of Christianity. We will move into all kinds of irregularities doctrinally.

James 1:17

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning"

James now shifts gears and moves from evil to good, from the source of lust to God's provisions for us. God is a giving God.

Every good gift

The word "gift" denotes the act of giving. The emphasis is on the Giver. God is the Author of each and every good gift. He never solicits us to do evil; He always does good. He always gives on the basis of His character. He does not stop giving to us just because we fail Him.

God gives to us on the basis of His character and not on the basis of our character. God never gives us anything on the basis of who and what we are. God does not bless us because we tithe, witness or pray. We never earn or deserve anything from God.

The word "good" means good of intrinsic value. God's gifts to us are good because they come from His character and not from our performance. Because God is God, His gifts never lose their intrinsic value. God does not stop giving to us when we fail Him. To insinuate that God is not good or generous is to misrepresent who He is.

and every perfect gift

This second word for "gift" is different from the previous word for "gift." It refers to the thing given, rather than the act of giving. This is a gift granted as bounty, benefaction. The first word for "gift" emphasizes the donation while the second word for "gift" emphasizes God's generosity in giving to us. God is both the Giver and a generous source of "good" gifts.

The word "every" emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of God propensity to give. Everything that God gives, whether it is spiritual, physical or social, is "perfect."

is from above,

We do not merit God's gifts. He gives His gifts "from above" as an act of His grace. The source of our gifts is in the person of God.

and comes down from the Father of lights,

"The Father of lights" is a reference to God as Creator of the heavenly luminaries, the sun, moon and stars.

Principle:

God is bountiful in His giving to us.

Application:

God never lets us down. We fail Him but He never fails us. None of us deserves the right to live on the face of this earth. We deserve death and Hell. The only reason God allows us to walk on this earth is because of His grace. He never charges us for anything. We do not pay Him for the sunshine we enjoy.

"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32)

"For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Some people have a high IQ. They did not give themselves this ability. God gave them the mental capacity. Everything that we have is "from God." We love to take the credit for who we are and what we do. When we stop to think, we remember we operate by God's unadulterated grace. Any prosperity that we possess came from God.

with whom there is no variation

The light of God's character and nature never changes. He is immutable.

"For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (Malachi 3:6).

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

"This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5).

or shadow of turning

The idea of a "turning" is a change, variation. God does not vary in His nature. There is no occasion where a shadow passes over God's character. He has never had a single change in His character.

We can render this phrase "a shade cast by change." Shade changes with the movement of the sun and thus constantly changes. There is no mutation in God.

Principle:

God does not change so we can count on Him to be consistent with Himself.

Application:

God does not change. He does not have the capability to change Himself much lest being changed by someone else. We can therefore count on Him. He is always true to Himself.

James 1:18

Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures"

Of His own will

The phrase "of His own will" is emphatic in the Greek. The word "will" carries the idea of "counsel." God conferred with Himself about what He would do if mankind fell into sin. He counseled Himself, resulting in a decision to regenerate those who believe in His Son. He would give them a second birth.

Regeneration is an act of God, not of humans. Born-again people come into the Kingdom by God's will; this is not a capricious action. From eternity, God determined that this would happen. People cannot come to God strictly by their own will. They need the sovereign intervention of God to become Christians. God initiates regeneration.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12).

Human beings do not have the capacity to come to God independently. We need God to give us that capacity in the first place.

"But the natural man [non-Christian] does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Principle:

Creation has cosmos rather than chaos because God ordered the universe by His will.

Application:

There would be no salvation had not God willed to save some of His creatures. It is God's will that all come to repentance, but not all do (2 Peter 3:9). That implies we have a choice in the matter.

If God did not rule the universe according to His will, creation would be both capricious and chaotic. In God's sovereign approach to the universe, he logically thought out the implications of creation. From eternity, He willed salvation in Christ to come to pass. He willed both the right of human beings to exercise their free will and the solution to the negative consequences of free will. He planned this from eternity past. There is no need to concern ourselves with who is among the elect. That onus is on God.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:3-6).

First God wills then He acts. Ever since God planned our salvation, He has used the truth of Scripture to bring us into His Kingdom.

He brought us forth

The words "brought us forth" come from a word that means to be pregnant. The idea is to bring out of the womb, to give birth. Sin "brings forth death" (1:15) and God brings us into a new state of life by the word of truth. Sin brings forth death; God brings forth eternal life. This is the new birth.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God....' Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:3, 7-8).

"...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever..." (1 Peter 1:23).

The word "regeneration" occurs only two times in the New Testament:

"So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matthew 19:28).

"But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

Principle:

A second and spiritual birth is necessary for eternal salvation.

Application:

Before anyone can enter into God's heaven, he must first embrace Christ's death to forgive his sin by faith. Once he does this, he immediately by faith enters into eternal life.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

Eternal life begins at the point of salvation, not at the point of death. The moment we believe God's promise, He ushers us into eternal life.

by the word of truth,

The tool that God uses for our regeneration is the "word of truth" [Scripture and the gospel].

Principle:

The Bible is the best means for declaring the gospel message.

Application:

There is no part or aspect of Scripture that is untrue. The Bible accurately recorded the lie of Satan. Satan's lie was an untruth but the accurate recording of it is true. We can believe the entire Bible because God the Holy Spirit wrote it by directing the human authors as they penned the passages.

"Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar" (Romans 3:4).

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Since the Bible is unadulterated truth, it is the supreme vehicle for declaring truths about God. Preaching and drama are good systems for

declaring God's truth but they cannot measure up to God's Word.

that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures

The idea of "firstfruits" is an Old Testament expression that communicated the idea of the first portion and best crops (Deuteronomy 26:1-19). The first crops announce the new season. They are a pledge of a new order. The priest would save a sheaf of the firstfruits before the Lord (Leviticus 23:11). This signaled that the crop came from the Lord.

Those who come to Christ in new generation [regeneration] are a foretaste and pledge of the kind of people God brings into His Kingdom. As God's "firstfruits" [born-again people], we can resist temptation with a new capacity to serve God. God gives us eternal life, new life, regenerated life, so He is not responsible for temptation. Christians of the first century are the first installment of God's new order of believers in eternity. In heaven, we will be God's treasure because God concentrated us to Himself.

Principle:

There is a great harvest coming whereby everything will be new for Christians.

Application:

The Christian will not only experience the regeneration of her soul at salvation but a complete regeneration of her body, soul and spirit at her entrance into God's kingdom.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we

ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:18-23).

Because they belong to His family, God will exalt Christians above non-Christians. We are the "bride of Christ" (Revelation 2:19).

James 1:19

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath..."

We now come to the third movement of James, chapter 1. The first movement is how a Christian copes with trial; the second is how she copes with temptation; and now the third is how she connects with the Word (1:19-21).

James calls the Word of God by different terms in 1:18-21: "the word of truth," "the implanted word," "the word," "the perfect law of liberty." This section is overwhelmingly about the Word.

So then,

The words "so then" indicate importance of the following statement – "See this!"

my beloved brethren,

James again communicates his love to his readers, followed by a three-fold instruction. He is not afraid to instruct those he loves. True love carries a commitment to care for others. This is especially true when we teach the Bible for we must tell others the truth about themselves.

let every man be swift to hear,

Most of us are swift to speak rather than swift to hear. The hearing here has to do with the Word of God. If we do a lot of talking, we will have difficulty in listening to God's Word.

Principle:

A growing Christian should possess an attitude of keeping his ears open to God's Word.

Application:

Hunger for the Word is a clear manifestation of someone who wants to know God. In times of crisis this person turns to the Bible. He looks to the

Word for instruction and blessing for he eagerly expects God to minister to him through the Bible.

"But his delight is in the law [the Bible] of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

A person who delights in the Bible, hungers for God to speak to her. She does not read the Word because the Christian herd at church expects her to do it. She does it because of her love for God.

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:7-9).

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed'" (John 8:31).

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Note the attitude of the Thessalonians toward the Word – they listened to the Bible as if it were God were speaking to them personally:

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

David also wanted God to search and know his heart:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see

if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

slow to speak,

James uses the word "slow" twice in this verse. The Christian is to stretch out a period of time before he shoots off his mouth or explodes in anger.

Principle:

Words spoken quickly are difficult to recall.

Application:

The counterpart to "swift to hear" is "slow to speak." We cannot hear God speak if we are always speaking. If we care more about what we have to say than what God has to say then we have a spiritual problem.

"In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19).

"He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive" (Proverbs 17:27-28).

"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Proverbs 29:20).

If we try to resolve a difference with someone by doing all the talking, likely we will not resolve the problem. We say in effect, "I don't care what you think; I only care what I think about this problem." It is difficult to respond to God's Word if our attention is on our own thoughts.

If we wait before we speak, then when the time comes to speak, we will have the right basis for speaking. We will speak from God's perspective.

Our generation is full of quick-to-speak people. We encourage people to speak on everything in our small groups. Usually they have no knowledge of the subject. This results in a pooling of ignorance. No one has done any research. No one has carefully studied the Bible. No one has the gift of being a pastor/teacher. Result: a conglomerate of ignorance.

Words quickly spoken without thinking through the implications are very difficult, if not impossible, to recall. Hasty and unguarded words do great harm [James 3].

slow to wrath

The third command of this verse challenges Christians to be "slow to wrath." There are a number of Greek words for anger. The word "wrath" in our verse means a settled anger that abides in the mind sometimes with the idea of getting revenge against someone. Another Greek word for anger means an agitated outburst of inward indignation. In contrast, our word in this passage refers to an anger that is less volatile in its nature but more long lasting. It smoulders beneath the surface. It seethes against someone over a long period of time by harbouring a grudge against her.

James does not say Christians should never be angry but that we should be slow to get angry. As the command for slow speech is not an absolute command against all speech [although we might wish that for some individuals], so there is no absolute command against anger. God Himself gets angry. The issue is not anger but the speed of anger.

Principle:

Slow-developing anger is God's way of protecting us against making rash mistakes in our relationships.

Application:

Wrath generally results from continually trying to get things our own way but people keep creating obstacles. We resent them for getting in our way. We hold it against them. We want our way and we don't care what others think.

"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Those who are quick to anger have no desire to work out the problem with the other person. They care only about getting their own way. If we care

about the well being of the other person, we might get an amicable result.

A calm-spirited person can give a word of stability in a tense situation. He does not reply in kind but gives a "soft answer." We will avoid much heartache if we follow God's procedures for managing conflict. A soft answer turns away wrath:

"A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Psalm 15:1).

If we control our anger, God views us as possessing great wisdom:

"He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29).

A person who controls his anger is greater than a mighty conqueror:

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32).

James 1:20

...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God"

for the wrath of man

The word "wrath" here is the same word as in the previous verse. It is the word for smouldering anger that holds a grudge against someone. The word for "man" is the word for mankind.

"A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; For if you rescue him, you will have to do it again" (Proverbs 19:19).

does not produce the righteousness of God

The wrath of mankind cannot produce a dynamic Christian life. There is a contrast between the wrath of mankind and the righteousness of God. Sinful wrath does not operate in God's system of justice.

There is a possibility of exercising wrath toward someone without sinning. Objective anger is the kind of anger God has toward injustice. It is right for us to be angry at the exploitation of others but if we allow subjective anger to take hold of us, we give the Devil a foothold in our life.

"Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

Principle:

Subjective anger does not work the righteousness of God.

Application:

We cannot walk with God with wrath burning in our hearts. We can walk with God with anger in our hearts if that anger is just. As God does not tolerate injustice neither should the Christian.

Sometimes, the difference between objective anger and subjective anger is very fine. We need to know ourselves if we indulge in anger. We rationalize to ourselves that our subjective anger is judicial anger. A husband can think he is just in his anger toward his wife and the wife may think that she is just but they both hold subjective anger toward each other.

We can even hold legitimate anger too long. Just anger can convert into unjust anger if we allow it to become resentment. This does not work the righteousness of God either.

James 1:21

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"

Therefore

The "therefore" is a conclusion drawn from verse 18. The word of truth birthed us into the family of God and made us the firstfruits of His creatures. That was the initial planting of the seed of God's Word in our soul. Now this verse tells us what the Word of God will do for us beyond our initial salvation. Christians need to move beyond the seed stage of spiritual birth.

lay aside

The New Testament uses "lay aside" for Paul's clothes that were laid down at the feet of Stephen (Acts 7:57-60). When it comes to "filthiness," we must deliberately lay it aside like a filthy garment. The idea of "lay aside" is to put off from oneself.

Principle:

We must deal with sin decisively and radically.

Application:

The principle of laying aside is the first half of conquering sin; the other half is applying the principles of the Word to our experience.

Romans 13:12 says that we are to cast off sin as a definite act.

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:12).

Paul presents the tandem of both putting off sin and putting on the "new man" in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3.

"...that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Colossians 3:8-11).

Hebrews uses the term "lay aside" for setting aside non-sinful things that might impede our progress in the Christian life.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him

endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Peter uses "lay aside" for dealing with specific sins in our life.

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:1).

all filthiness

Christians are in a titanic struggle against sin. Satan pulls us in one direction and the Word of God pulls us in another direction. The filth of this world still lures the Christian away from God. She needs to do something about the "filthiness" of her life – Lay it aside.

Notice that little three-letter word "all." The smallness of that word does not detract from the immensity of its implication. No matter how little we might deem a sin, God considers all sin as a violation of His character.

Principle:

Any sin can break our fellowship with God.

Application:

Anything that separates our soul from the Saviour will disrupt our walk with God. Walking with the world and walking with God are incompatible. They cannot coexist. That is why a Christian must deal with all his sin if he wants to walk with God.

A Christian cannot minimize sin and get away with it. An Absolute Being cannot compromise Himself. A holy God cannot bargain with us about sin.

Our hearts are a filthy place because of our Adamic nature.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit,

lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man" (Mark 7:21-23).

Yet, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit indwells every Christian and gives him a new capacity to relate to God. We have a clear capacity to counter-act sin.

and overflow of wickedness,

"Wickedness" denotes dirt, filth. A person living in wickedness lives in moral filth and sordidness. "Wickedness" can refer to any form of malice.

Wickedness that goes to an exceeding measure is wickedness in "overflow." This is a wickedness that is above the ordinary – it is a superabundant amount of wickedness. A person involved in an "overflow of wickedness" is a corrupt individual.

Secular Greeks used the term "overflow" to describe the excess of wax in ears. When our ears plug from too much wax, we cannot hear very well. We cannot be receptive to truth when sin plugs our spiritual ears.

Principle:

Sin defiles us and we must deal with it radically.

Application:

Any form of sin will blunt our relationship with the Lord and deflect us from fellowship with Him. When Christians get involved in wickedness that is above the ordinary, they must deal with it drastically. They must lay it aside.

and receive

The word "receive" in "receive with meekness" means to welcome. The idea is to appropriate God's Word, to apply it to one's soul so as to welcome it into our being.

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Principle:

Dynamic spiritual growth comes when we welcome what the Word has to say to us.

Application:

Receiving the Word is far more than listening to it. Many people listen to the Word but it never grabs them or changes them. When we approach the Bible with a volition that is open to God, He will effectively work in our life.

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

with meekness

"Meekness" is in-wrought grace. It's a sense of God's grace worked into our souls. Meek people have a sense of humility because they know that everything they have, they have by grace and without merit.

We direct this quality of character chiefly towards God, not man. We accept all God's dealings with us as good. We do not resent what God deals us. It is the condition of mind that believes God's will is good.

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [meekness], considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Galatians. 6:1).

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering..." (Colossians 3:12).

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear..." (1 Peter 3:15).

Jesus was meek.

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For

My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

"Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you" (2 Corinthians 10:1).

Principle:

Meekness is an attitude that we earn or deserve nothing from God but that everything we have from Him is by grace.

Application:

A meek person is someone who knows that he or she neither earns nor deserves anything from God. He understands that it is only by God's grace that God uses him.

For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

A meek person is a teachable person. The capacity to be teachable is crucial to properly absorb God's Word for it implies that this person is open to deal with his or her sins.

If we receive the Word with an attitude of letting it correct and mold our values, it will have a saving influence on our lives. The greater our capacity to welcome the principles of the Word, the more we act on those principles, the greater impact on our Christian lives.

the implanted word,

The word "implanted" comes from two words: in and to plant. The idea then is to plant in. The "implanted word" is the Word of God rooted in our souls.

If we allow the Word to take root in our hearts, we will be powerful Christians because we will carry the character it innately provides wherever we go. If the Word of God gets a welcoming attitude of reception to its principles in our souls, it will "save our souls."

"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit

and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matthew 13:23).

Principle:

When we allow the Word of God to take root in our souls, it will become part of our norms and standards for living.

Application:

The Word of God should be like a seed implanted in our soul that takes root in our character. We constantly open our will for God to speak to us about any issue any time.

"These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

"Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:11-13).

There are two things that we must do to deliver our soul from sin: 1) put off filthy garments of sin and 2) welcome the Word of God into our soul. If we do one without the other, we will fail. It is not enough to confess our sin for we must take in the Word of God to displace the vacuum created by dealing with our sins.

A vacuum will always draw something into it. That is why if we simply confess sin without taking in the Word, sin will always draw back into our souls. If we displace the Word for our sin, we will have a strong base for overcoming sin.

which is able to save your souls

The Word of God can save our souls while we apply it to our lives in time on earth. Salvation here is not eternal salvation but salvation of our

Christian lives. The Word will enable us to put aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness.

Application of the principles of the Word to our experience will save us not from damnation but damage to our walk with the Lord. The word "souls" refers to our personalities, our natural life on earth.

Principle:

God is in the business of saving saved souls.

Application:

Recognition of sin is very difficult to a subjective person. However, Christians who allow the Word of God to objectively speak to them can deal with and confess sin in their life.

God is in the business of saving a saved soul. There are three kinds of salvation: 1) initial salvation of the soul, 2) progressive salvation of the believer's Christian life and 3) ultimate salvation of the body, soul and spirit when we enter into the presence of God in Heaven.

When we allow the Word of God to take root in our souls in time, God will change us and mature us more into the likeness of Christ. He will make this happen more and more, day-by-day, if we learn His principles and apply them to our lives on a daily basis.

James 1:22

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

But be doers of the word,

A "doer" of the Word is someone who practises what she believes (1:23,25; 4:11). "Doer" carries the idea of resourceful performance. Greeks use the term "doers" for poets – creators of striking words.

The word "be" means become. "Become what you are not now – doers of the Word – rather than talk about the Word." The Greek tense conveys the idea of keep on doing, "Keep on becoming doers of the Word." Being always precedes doing.

Doing should result in completion, finishing. If we install a post, it begins to decay; if we plant a tree, it will grow. It is not enough to be; we must become.

Principle:

The person who lives out God's principles is consistent in his convictions.

Application:

We do serious damage to our spiritual life when we expose ourselves to the Bible but do nothing with what we read.

It is very easy to miscalculate our spiritual condition. We can rationalize that we walk with the Lord when we don't.

"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31-32).

When a Christian sins she acts contrary to her new nature in Christ (Romans 7). The true heart of a born-again person wants to do the will of God (Romans 8:4). Genuine Christians care about and have a desire for the things of God.

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4).

Belief is one thing and conduct is another. We know how much our beliefs grip us when we count how often we act on them.

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17).

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

A spiritual Christian willingly applies the principles of Scripture to his experience. Everything we do influences and establishes our character. Each act builds on the platform of previous acts. We create momentum by acting out our convictions. A spirituality of words will not produce much for eternity.

If we act out of habit and thoughtlessly go through motions, we are not people of conviction. A doer of the Word executes the principles of her conviction. The Word is part and parcel of her worldview and the values upon which she acts every day. This is how God characterizes her.

and not hearers only,

A "doer" is someone who listens and obeys God's Word. He acts on his convictions. However, a "hearer" is someone who passively sits under the teaching of God's Word and it has no effect on him. It goes in one ear and out the other. God characterizes him as oblivious to divine truth.

The word "hearer" is the same idea of an auditor of a class. An auditor does not have the same responsibility as a full-time student. She does not take the class as seriously as the person who has to write the exam for it.

Principle:

Doing the Word is a mark of an engaged Christian.

Application:

The Christian who audits his Christian life will never take it seriously. He lives a cultural Christianity, not a genuine spiritual life. The Christian who studies for the exam of life will benefit more from the Word than the Christian who listens to it casually. We have a responsibility to respond to the Word with concrete action when we hear it.

deceiving yourselves

The word "deceiving" means to misreckon, miscalculate. It comes from two Greek words: along side, beside and to account, reason. It conveys the idea of deceiving ourselves by false reasons and arguments. We deceive ourselves when we reckon wrongly that we live consistently with the principles of God's Word. It is possible to delude ourselves into believing that we are better than we are.

"Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (Colossians 2:4).

If we consistently neglect or disobey God's Word while purporting to walk with the Lord, we deceive ourselves. This is a sure sign of spiritual deadness. We have no sense of accountability to what we hear. We make the worst deception possible – self-deception. We convince ourselves by sophistry.

Principle:

Self-deception occurs when we come to believe there is virtue in hearing the principle of the Word without applying it to our experience.

Application:

The Christian who fools herself that she actively participates in Christianity by attending church and listening to Bible teaching just kids herself. Self-deception is one of the worst forms of deception. A Christian who puts into practice what she hears preached has fully engaged the Word of God. She puts the principles of the Word to use.

We greatly miscalculate the idea of Christianity if we constantly absorb divine truth but never live it out. The most blessed Christian is the one who knows he walks with God.

James 1:23

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror..."

For

We now see in this verse the logic of self-deceit (1:22).

if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,

The idea behind hearing the Word is to do the Word. The goal of Scripture is transformation of character.

he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror

A mirror shows us our dirty face. We can correct this by washing our face. If we look at the mirror of God's Word and do not wash our soul by confessing sin, then we are not applying the principles of the Word to our experience.

Principle:

To disassociate God's Word from our lives is to dislocate its transforming power.

Application:

If the Word of God does not cause us to see our true spiritual condition, then there is something

wrong with our understanding of its principles or its applications.

How many of us would find a black smudge on our face in the mirror and go to church without wiping it off? Yet we do that spiritually. We move about with spiritually dirty faces, with lives out of sync with God.

James 1:24

...for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was"

Verse 24 continues the thought of verse 23.

for he observes himself,

The word "observes" is an intensive word meaning to perceive clearly, to understand fully, to consider closely. This believer perceives clearly his spiritual status as he looks directly into God's Word. He thinks about the implications of God's Word and considers its principles very carefully. This person reaches the point of being able to discern God's Word, and yet he forthwith disregards what he learned.

goes away,

The idea of "goes away" carries the thought of leaving permanently. He does not want to return to the Word because it exposes him for what he is.

and immediately forgets

After coming to a clear and definite understanding of the principles of God's Word, he immediately forgets what the Word says about his experience. The word "forgets" can mean neglect, disregard. He understands the principles of the Word very clearly but he neglects them as if they have no import in his life. He disregards the message of God's principles for his life.

Principle:

Those who do not apply the principles of God's Word to their experience live in self-deception.

Application:

The Bible will reveal our sin to us when we would like to deny the reality of who and what we are. Therefore, we do not transfer the principles of

God's Word to our life. We are afraid of their implications. We do not want to let go of our sin.

The issue here is that we believe in the value of our sin over the value of God's Word so we adjust our living to our own set of values rather than God's values. We want to forget as quickly as possible how we look to God. We cannot stand the thought that we live inconsistently with God's plan so we deny it to ourselves. This is an issue of honesty with self.

what kind of man he was

The word "kind" means sort or quality. This man looked into the mirror and saw clearly he had a character flaw but he neglected the Word and moved on. He does not allow the Word to make any impact on his character. He does not want to change his character because it might affect some value he holds dearly, contrary to God's plan for his life.

Principle:

The Christian life goes beyond appearance to character.

Application:

The only way we can truly see ourselves through God's eyes is to carefully look into the mirror of God's Word. If we do not know we have cancer, we will not go for surgery. If a non-Christian does not see herself as sinful, she will see no need for a Saviour. If a Christian does not see her sin, she will not confess sin.

The spiritual Christian wants to go beyond appearances to the reality of what she is. Appearance is one thing but reality is another. Today, we live in a superficial society that concerns itself very little with reality. Appearances are everything. A spiritual Christian concerns herself more with what she is than how she appears.

James 1:25

But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does"

Now we look away from the man who turns from the principles of the Word to the man who turns to the principles of the Word.

But he who looks into

The words "looks into" primarily mean to stoop sideways, to bend over and then to stoop to look into. The idea is to stoop for the purpose of looking at. This is a very strong term for observation, stronger even than the word for "look into" in the previous verse. It means to examine something from the closest possible vantage point so that one reaches a point of concentration.

Principle:

It takes concentration to form principles from the Word.

Application:

The Christian life takes concentration. It is one thing to read the Bible but it is another to find its principles. It takes concentration to find the operating principles for our life. People of our generation do not want to concentrate so they do not find principles for living. They live by superficial tidbits that will not give them structure for their lives.

"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified" (2 Corinthians 13:5-6).

the perfect law of liberty

James characterizes the Bible as "the perfect law of liberty." If we follow the principles of the Word, we will experience personal liberty. We will be free from slavery to sin. The Bible is a book of liberation.

"Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed'" (John 8:34-36).

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:2-8).

"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

The Bible is "perfect" because it is inerrant. It contains no factual errors or misrepresentations. It perfectly reveals the will of God for man. It will not allow for any distortions of reality. It will not allow us to fool ourselves into thinking that we are better than we are.

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).

Principle:

The Bible does not allow us to fool ourselves when we respond to it with positive volition.

Application:

The principles of God's Word give us liberty to live the Christian life. They will give us freedom to love, serve and honour God. We cannot orient ourselves to God without divine principles.

It is ironic that God liberates the Christian by the "law of liberty." Law and liberty appear to be opposites to the modern mind. How can a man be free and under a law at the same time? That is because the principles of God are true to every situation.

Following the laws of marriage gives freedom within marriage. Adultery is a violation of the law of marriage. Adultery brings slavery to the violator. The more faithful we are to the principles of God's plan for our lives the greater blessing we experience. God designs all of His laws for the purpose of liberty.

Liberty and license are different. Biblical liberty is the freedom to live within the principles of God. License gives free rein to the flesh.

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:13-15).

and continues in it,

The word "continues" means to remain beside, to continue near, to stay beside or near, stand by another. The idea is someone who steadfastly looks to the Bible as a source for spiritual life.

and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work,

When it comes to the Word of God, we should not be hearers who dismiss what we hear (1:23,24). A "doer of the work" asks God to examine him with the Word. It is one thing to have an extensive knowledge of the Bible but it is another to expansively apply it to experience.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

this one will be blessed

The word "blessed" here does not mean "happy." It means having an inner prosperity of the soul

regardless of circumstance. The person who consistently lives out the principles of the Word has an inner prosperity of soul.

"Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:1-2).

in what he does

Applying the principles of the Word to our experience will bless our soul because it is consistent with God's plan for our life.

Principle:

The Christian who extensively applies the Word to her experience will possess an inner prosperity of soul.

Application:

A person who continues in the Word is someone who lives it as a pattern of life. He does not live it in fits and starts. He brings the Word into every situation he faces.

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Extensively applying the principles of God's Word to our experience will have a great impact on our daily walk with God and result in an inner prosperity of the soul.

James 1:26

If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless"

At first appearance this verse does not appear related to the context but indeed it does closely link to the previous verses. A consistent Christian life always shows up in practice. James now gives a specific example of applying truth to experience. We see this in two areas: First, the true Christian will control her mouth (v.26) and, secondly, she will reach out to those in need (v.27).

If anyone among you thinks he is religious,

The word 'religious' means someone who is careful to keep external service to God. A religious person here is a pious person, someone who is devoted to or worships God. He perceives himself as a godly person.

and does not bridle his tongue

The idea of "bridle" is control. We control a horse by a bridle. Here, it is the control of the tongue. A person who does not keep her mouth shut deceives her own heart. A person who can reign in her mouth is someone who can practise what they preach.

A clear manifestation of someone who is religious but not spiritual is someone who uses his mouth to run down others. This is because he does not apply truth to experience.

Principle:

Restraining one's mouth is one way to apply truth to experience.

Application:

Non-spiritual people, who constantly censure and detract from others, do not operate on the principle of applying truth to experience. People who run down others and find fault in others, to lessen them in the eyes of others, deceive their own hearts and engage in a useless exercise.

When we detract from others in order to make ourselves seem superior, we enter into the vanity of religion.

"I said, 'I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me'" (Psalm 39:1).

"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Matthew 12:36).

but deceives his own heart,

A person who has no control over his tongue cheats his own heart. He misleads himself. He cannot see the truth about himself.

**"The heart is deceitful above all things,
And desperately wicked; who can know
it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)**

this one's religion is useless

The word "useless" is a term of vanity. This person's religious life is void of result and force. Her religion is useless and of no purpose. It is idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless and lacking truth. She trifles in religion.

Principle:

Our Christianity is useless when we do not translate what we believe into experience.

Application:

Many people can quote the Bible by the mile but live it by the inch. They are long on talk but short on truth. They are sermon tasters, connoisseurs of spiritual things without experiencing the reality of those things.

A truly spiritual-minded person falls in love with the Word of God. When we fall in love with the Word we also fall in love with the Son of God.

We never graduate from the Bible. We never get too big for the Bible. We must constantly and continually translate the Bible into our life. The Bible is the most severe critic of our life, the plum line and measuring stick of how we live our life.

If we feed on the Word of God it will become a part of us. We are what we eat physically; we are what we believe spiritually.

James 1:27

**Pure and undefiled religion before God
and the Father is this: to visit orphans
and widows in their trouble, and to keep
oneself unspotted from the world"**

Pure

James now shows a genuine Christianity that is "pure" and "undefiled" instead of the formal religion of the previous verse.

"Pure" means something that was defiled but now cleansed. Religion that seeks to gain God's approbation is impure religion. A "pure" person is free from this impure admixture and thus is blameless.

and undefiled religion

"Undefiled" carries the further idea of a religion free from selfish do-good motives. The do-gooder's religion is for his own benefit. An "undefiled religion" is unsoiled. It is free from the deformation of selfishness and it is not debased.

before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble,

The idea of the words "to visit" is to oversee, to look after. These words come from a Greek word composed of two words: over and to see. The idea is to oversee orphans and widows in their trouble, "Take responsibility for them."

**"Blessed is he who considers the poor;
The LORD will deliver him in time of
trouble" (Psalm 41:1).**

**"A father of the fatherless, a defender of
widows, Is God in His holy habitation"
(Psalm 68:5).**

and to keep oneself unspotted from the world

The idea of "unspotted" is unstained. The Christian should be free from the censure and reproach of the world. His testimony should never be sullied. He keeps himself from compromise. The idea is not sinless perfection but freedom from reproof of those around us.

Principle:

We see genuine biblical acumen by the way we treat others in trouble.

Application:

Many people exercise religion to gain approval from others, not God. God is the goal of our service, not man.

The glory of Christ's impact on Christians is that they live with integrity. Everything we do must be pure and spotless, free from reproach.

James 2:1

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality"

My brethren,

James' appeal to his readers as "brethren" (15 times in James -- 1:2, 16, 19; 2:5, 14; 4:11; 5:7) indicates he wants them to know that they are brothers in Christ even though he is going to take them to task in the next verses.

do not hold the faith

"The faith" does not refer to the faith we put in Christ when we believed but to the entire body of Christian truth. Christian doctrine is incongruous with partiality.

of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. We place our faith in Him as a person. We direct our faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

"...testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21).

the Lord of glory,

The Lord Jesus Christ is "the Lord of glory" because He is the one who divulges the glory of God. One aspect of the glory of God is that He is not partial to rank or station. Jesus Christ is the glory of the Christian because He is the zenith of God. He is the object of our worship. He is co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Jesus possessed this glory before the creation of the world (John 17:5). He came to earth with this glory.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"...which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

with partiality

"Partiality" denotes deference of some persons over other persons. Literally, the word means to accept a face. Some people give preference to the powerful and rich over the rank and file of most people. This gives preference for the outward and circumstantial rather than the intrinsic value of a person. When we treat some people better than other people, we make distinctions that God does not make.

God is completely impartial in His dealings with us. He does not give preference to people because they are wealthy or wise. He gives no preference for place, face, grace or race. He does not rank us by anything other than His own standards.

"You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it" (Deuteronomy 1:17).

"For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10:17).

"Now therefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes" (2 Chronicles 19:7).

Principle:

The genuine Christian shows no favouritism in relationships.

Application:

The Christian who sticks his nose up at other Christians violates the nature of the glory of God. God does not judge by appearance. He gives no special favours to some over others. His judgment of others is not superficial or without thought for their true qualities.

Those who do not have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ have a materialistic outlook on life. They see everything in terms of race, place, face and even grace. These are superficial values in God's

economy. The Christian looks at everyone in relation to God.

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31).

We should not judge people by their outward appearance rather than by who they truly are. We should not assess them by their clothes, or their car or the size of their house.

"These things also belong to the wise: It is not good to show partiality in judgment" (Proverbs 24:23).

"To show partiality is not good, Because for a piece of bread a man will transgress" (Proverbs 28:21).

James 2:2

For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes..."

For

The word "for" links us to the previous verse and illustrates the prohibition against partiality.

if

The "if" makes a hypothetical case. James supposes that a very wealthy person walks into an assembly of Christians.

there should come into your assembly

James depicts the gathering of Christians as an "assembly." The Greek word is the word for "synagogue." A synagogue is a bringing together, an assembling, a gathering of people for worship. Sometimes translators translate this word "church" (5:14).

The Jews worshiped in a synagogue for formal worship every Sabbath day [Saturday]. They built synagogues not only throughout Palestine but also throughout the cities of the Roman world.

Christians worshiped in Jewish synagogues. It was their place of assembly or meeting for worship in some situations. It may be that the

"assembly" here may simply be the gathering of Christians [a congregation] rather than a building.

a man with gold rings, in fine apparel,

The person who wears "fine apparel" [gorgeous clothes] and "gold rings" advertises her riches with flash. "I have expensive threads! I am successful." If a person comes into a church congregation with pomp and flash, she should experience no greater deference than a poor person. The early church had some wealthy people (Acts 4:36,37; 8:27; 10:1,2; 16:14; 17:4; 1 Titus 6:17-19).

and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes

The word "poor" means poverty stricken. This person does not have a dime. He probably does not have a way to wash his clothes because he lives on the streets. He is a persona non grata. This person does not stand in the good graces of society.

"Filthy clothes" probably means shabby clothing. We should not avoid a poor person that comes into the assembly of Christians with shabby clothing. Most Christians were poor in the first century (Acts 2:45; 4:35-37; 6:1-6; 1 Corinthians 1:26; 2 Corinthians 8:2,14; Galatians 2:10). This was due in part to Jewish Christians dispersed throughout the Roman Empire because of persecution. They lost their source of income because of this. Some experienced famine (Acts 11:29-30). The poor Christians of Macedonia gave liberally to Christians who faced economic hardship (2 Corinthians 8:1-2).

Principle:

In God's eyes and in the eyes of fellow Christians, all Christians should be equal.

Application:

Christians do not value a person any more because he possesses wealth nor do we value him any less. Wealth is not an issue. Clothes do not make the man but character makes the man in the Christian worldview.

People who associate with wealthy people because of their status and wealth violate poor Christians. They diminish the poor because of their economic status. Giving attention to an

affluent person is an implied judgment on the poor. The poor get the shaft. The Christian church cannot assign rank based on wealth. Christians who associate with wealthy people to elevate themselves automatically diminish those of lesser wealth.

Are you the type of person who carries a revolting attitude toward people who walk into your church unkempt and unclean? There are some Christians who would love to make their church a religious country club. The Christian church should have no rank or social distinction.

James 2:3,4

and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, You sit here in a good place, and say to the poor man, You stand there, or, Sit here at my footstool have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"

James gives a hypothetical illustration in this verse whereby a church invites the wealthy person into a seat of honor. They give special attention to the rich man but no particular attention to the poor man.

The words "pay attention" come from one Greek word composed of two words: upon and to look. When the rich man walked into church, they gave him special attention – they look upon him. They looked on him with envy and deference.

and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool

A second man walks into church who is poor. There is no mention of any special "attention" given the poor man other than a couple off hand remarks about where he should sit.

These phrases are an indication of blatant prejudice. The church cannot honor or dishonor a poor man any more or less than the rich man.

have you not shown partiality among yourselves,

To show partiality means to separate oneself throughout or wholly from someone. We separate ourselves from someone because of discriminations we make about her. We think we

are superior to her because of some qualities that we imagine we have.

We make a loud statement to those around us when we shown partiality to some people over others.

and become judges with evil thoughts?

The word "thoughts" denotes inward reasoning, an opinion. This is the process whereby someone reasons with himself and consults himself for deliberation. It is an evil system of thought that makes distinctions between the rich and poor.

Principle:

It is a dislocation of values to measure people by material wealth. Showing favoritism is outside the will of God.

Application:

We show the dislocation of our values when we judge people by their material wealth. Eternal values are much more important than temporal values.

When we defer to people of wealth because we envy what they have, we show our true values. We favor wealthy people because we envy them.

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (Acts 17:26-28).

When we show partiality toward the rich we make a statement about our view of the world. We believe in materialism above spiritual values. When we give preference to some people over others, we set ourselves up as judges of evil thoughts. It is holding one standard for one group and another standard for another.

"For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed

receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Most of us would never allow these thoughts to be seen by our friends and colleagues. If these thoughts enter our minds, we must deal with them immediately by confession or they will entrench into our minds and develop into attitudes.

James 2:5

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?"

Listen, my beloved brethren:

James strongly appeals to readers he loves very much to consider God's view of the poor. To disrespect the poor is to disrespect God and His plan for the poor. James wants to grab their attention on this issue. Those who are not poor give very little attention to this area. The word "listen" emphasizes the important principle to follow.

Has God not chosen the poor of this world

The Greek expects a "yes" answer to the question, "Has God not chosen the poor...." God took the initiative in saving the poor. This was no accident but took place totally within the eternal counsel of God. The poor did not choose Him; He chose them. They are poor only in the world's estimation, not in God's opinion.

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9).

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing

the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

The "poor" in this passage are not the spiritually poor but the financially poor. God, from eternity past, chose the financially poor. The poor have an honour in this choosing. If we dishonour the poor we dishonour God's plan in choosing them.

"He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker; He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished" (Proverbs 17:5).

"They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do" (Galatians 2:10).

Principle:

Prejudice against the poor is prejudice against God's plan.

Application:

All Christians share the same regenerate nature. That makes them all in the same family and deserving of the same respect.

"Blessed is he who considers the poor; The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble" (Psalm 41:1).

"Your congregation dwelt in it; You, O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor" (Psalm 68:10).

to be rich in faith

If we discriminate against those who are rich in faith, we discriminate against the value of our own faith. The poor are only poor in financial wealth. They are truly wealthy in terms of eternal wealth. The readers of the book of James held a distorted estimation of true value. They diminished those who looked to God's provision and providence in their lives.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9).

and heirs of the kingdom

An "heir" is a lot or possession in the Greek. Jesus acquired an eternal lot or possession for the believer. The Christian owns the status quo of eternal life because of his trust in the blood of Christ to forgive him. We own a "lot" in eternity. We fall heir to the kingdom because of our association with Christ. His kingdom is our kingdom. God makes us rich in eternal things.

"...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Principle:

Every Christian without exception falls heir to God's estate.

Application:

When we leave this world without God, we possess nothing. When we leave this world with God, we inherit an eternal kingdom. Every human being likes to fall heir to some estate yet every Christian falls heir to God's estate.

"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:16-17).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5).

The Christian owns a level of riches incalculable to those who do not know God. There is great dignity in this.

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

which He promised

A promise is something God announces He is going to do for us before He does it. It is an open and emphatic statement of a commitment to us. How can we diminish those who are headed for an eternal kingdom and will fall heir to a commitment of God to give them His kingdom? The more we claim God's promises the more we can see His faithfulness.

to those who love Him?

God's promises are exclusively for "those who love Him." That is, for those who receive eternal life through His Son. God has a special disposition toward the elect poor because they are in His family.

"I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently will find me" (Proverbs 8:17).

"But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him'" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

"If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!" (1 Corinthians 16:22)

Principle:

Those who take God at His Word and claim His promises honour His Word.

Application:

Christians have the responsibility of claiming the commitment God has toward us. We can draw on God's bank account by faith. We cannot always count on man's promises but we can always count on God's promises.

"God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19)

"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

James 2:6

But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?"

But you have dishonored the poor man.

The readers of James dishonoured the poor by treating them as second-class citizens. This is the antithesis of how God views the poor (2:2-3). The poor, as well as the wealthy, deserve honor. God's view of dignity does not depend on material wealth but on spiritual wealth. There is an issue of honour when it comes to the wealthy relating to the poor.

Do not the rich oppress you

The word "oppress" means to exercise power over and comes from two words: down and to have power. The idea is to exercise harsh control over someone or dominate him by using one's power against him. The rich tend to be harsh with the poor.

and drag you into the courts?

The word "drag" implies violent dragging. The idea is that there is some resistance because one person forces another into a certain position.

"Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and

dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead" (Acts 14:19).

"But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities" (Acts 16:19).

"But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, 'These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king – Jesus'" (Acts 17:6-7).

The word "courts" is a place of judging, a tribunal, or law court where a bench of judges determines a matter. A suit will decide the thing. This is a situation whereby wealthy Christians take poor Christians into court to sue them.

"Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another" (Acts 19:38).

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself" (1 Corinthians 4:3).

Principle:

If we dishonour the poor, we dishonour what God honours.

Application:

Whenever we slight a Christian, we put him into an inferior station. By giving preferential treatment to the wealthy, we, by implication, give lesser value to the poor. God honours the poor but our culture dishonours them.

"He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he" (Proverbs 14:21).

James 2:7

Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?"

Do they not blaspheme that noble name

The "noble name" is the name of Christ. When we dishonour the poor, we cast aspersions on the name of God because the poor wear His name.

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7).

by which you are called?

God calls Christians to represent His name. We carry the identity of Christ in all we do.

Principle:

Christians represent the name of Christ in everything they do.

Application:

Christians represent Christ by carrying the name "Christian." We suffer by that name. We honor that name by what we do and dishonor it by what we do.

The name of Jesus Christ is the most honourable name in the world. It is a far greater label than "He is a player in the National Football League," or, "She plays for the Brazilian soccer team," or, "He is the President of the United States." God calls upon us to represent the name of Christ. We carry a great responsibility to stand for that name as best we can.

"Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:25-26).

"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You almost persuade me to become a Christian.'" (Acts 28:28).

"And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14).

"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17).

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:14-16).

We live in a day of few distinctions. Political correctness tries to make everyone and all convictions the same. The mission of the Christian is to be distinct. Jesus Christ is not the same as everyone else so neither should His followers be the same. Most Christians want to fit into their culture. Their culture is more important to them than their mission. God calls upon us to distinguish the things that matter when we carry the name of Christ.

A person becomes a Christian by believing on the name of Christ.

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

James 2:8

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well..."

Partiality opposes God's character (2:1), conflicts with God's choosing poor people (2:5) and now, in this verse, is contrary to the Word of God.

If you really fulfill the royal law

"Royal" means belonging to a king, kingly, regal. This law is the law of a king. The "law" here is the operating principles of Scripture itself. Scripture is sovereign over our souls so its principles are binding on our lives. There is no court of appeal beyond the Word of God.

Jesus made us "kings" when we became Christians (Revelation 1:6). We fulfil the royal law because we are in a royal family [the family of God]. We are in a royal priesthood.

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

according to the Scripture,

This is a direct quote from Leviticus 19:18. God's Word does not contradict God's principles. The writers of Scripture always appeal to Scripture for living the Christian life.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"

Love summarizes all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). We measure our love for others by how much we love ourselves. If we love others less than we love ourselves then we do not measure up to the royal law.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Our "neighbour" is anyone who comes across our path (Matthew 22:37-39; Deuteronomy 6:5). A lawyer asked Jesus "Who is my neighbour?" (Luke 10:29), Jesus said in effect that everyone is our neighbour. He wants us to love everyone, rich or poor.

"I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise" (Romans 1:14).

you do well

The word "well" carries the idea of excellence, noble. If we want to live a noble life, we will love our neighbours as ourselves. We will live a life within the will of God. We do not look at the

Word of God as a mirror and then walk away from it and do nothing. We do something: we apply truth to experience.

Principle:

The rule of life for the Christian is found in the royal law that supersedes all other principles.

Application:

The rule for our Christian walk is found in the royal law, the Word of God. This royal law comes from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. An example of this is the principle of loving our neighbours as ourselves. Loving others as we love ourselves does not mean we use narcissistic love for self as the basis for loving others.

We violate the royal law when we show partiality. When we give deference to wealthy, powerful or famous people, we violate God's operating principles. When we relate to people regardless of their fame, power or wealth, we fulfil the royal law.

Love is the ultimate tool for evaluating our Christian lives. The way we treat those closest to us at home and work is the way God looks at us.

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Galatians 5:14).

"But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14).

Biblical love is not saccharine, sentimental love. It is not a love that slobbers over people but a love that sacrifices for others. It is a practical love that serves other people. It is a one-way self-sacrificing love that freely relates to others and does not depend on being loved back.

James 2:9

...but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors"

but if you show partiality,

Partiality means to show respect to some person over others - to discriminate, to show favoritism, to be partial. This is where James started in verse

one – esteeming people from outward and not inner standards.

The "if" in the Greek means "since" here. The idea is that the readers of James had already committed the sin of partiality.

"Then Peter opened his mouth and said: 'In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality'" (Acts 10:34).

you commit sin,

James uses two words to refer to sin in this verse: 1) sin, and 2) transgressors. The word sin means to miss the mark. The mark in biblical terms is all that pertains to God's righteousness. God's goal for us is to live consistently with who He is. We glorify God the best when we live according to the standards of His character. God's character does not discriminate against people because of false, outward standards.

The word "commit" means to work, perform. When we discriminate against others, we work sin. We perform an act of favouritism based on continued effort.

and are convicted by the law

The word "convicted" means to refute, to reprove. The law will bring to light and expose our discrimination. The law becomes our judge. The Word of God tries those who discriminate against others and finds them guilty.

as transgressors

The second word for sin in this verse is "transgressors." The idea of a transgressor is different from a sinner. The word "transgressor" comes from two words: beside and to step. The idea is to step over a prescribed standard. A transgressor is a deliberate sinner. He clearly sees a line and deliberate steps across it. We step across the line of not loving our neighbour (2:8). We break the royal law.

Principle:

God does not fellowship with those who discriminate against others.

Application:

If we discount a person because they are poor or uneducated or have some physical limitation, we

violate the royal law of love. We step outside God's standards.

It was the half-breed Samaritan and not the religious Levite who stopped to help the wounded person on side of the road (Luke 10:29-37). True love does not love the loveable exclusively. True love makes no distinction between people. The royal law proves discrimination wrong and demonstrates its inconsistency with the Christian faith.

None of us likes the feeling of guilt. God, however, does not concern Himself with our feelings at the expense of truth and His righteousness. God will not fellowship with us as long as we stand guilty of discrimination. Conviction is the beginning of correction. If we confess our sin when we become convicted of that sin, we are on the road to recovery.

James 2:10

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"

For

James amplifies the idea we are guilty under the law when we commit the sin of discrimination (2:9).

whoever shall keep the whole law,

The word "whoever" indicates there is no exception to the following principle: any and every person is guilty. This is a universal principle. It applies to anyone anywhere.

A person who "keeps the whole law" yet offends on one point is guilty of all. Jesus is the only person to "keep the whole law." James uses the principle of keeping the whole law as an illustration.

The word "whole" focuses on the entire unity of Scripture. The Bible is a unity of truth not detached from the consistency of principle. The law expresses the complete character of God.

Principle:

The law expresses the complete character of God.

Application:

No one can become a Christian by keeping the law. If that were possible, there would be no need for the death of Christ to pay for our sins.

"...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2: 16-21).

If we try to keep the law for salvation or sanctification, we put ourselves under a curse. If we put our trust in the finished work of Christ, we accept the fact that God put Him under the curse. Jesus met every demand of the law yet God put Him under a curse to save our souls.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.' Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')..." (Galatians 3:10-13).

and yet stumble in one point,

The word "stumble" means to cause to stumble. The idea here is making one false step in keeping one of God's standards. We cannot break one law without breaking them all.

"Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am the Lord " (Leviticus 19:7).

he is guilty of all

The meaning of "guilty" is held in, contained in, bound by. The word comes from two Greek words: in and to have. If a person stumbles on one point of the law, he is liable to the whole law. He is answerable to God's law because it represents God's character. He is not guilty of committing every sin in the Bible but he violates the unity of truth in the Bible. The Bible hangs together as a single system of truth.

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.' But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just shall live by faith.' Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.' Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree')..." (Galatians 3:10-13).

The word "is" means become. The Christian who makes a false step on one point is guilty of breaking the whole law. Offending God's Word is not a matter of degree. Once we cross the line of disobeying God's Word, we are totally guilty of violating God.

Principle:

It is a universal principle that if we violate God on one point we violate Him on all points.

Application:

If we perceive discrimination against a Christian as not important, then we need to understand that to violate one aspect of truth is to violate it all. We

cannot select some Scripture for our convenience. God's Word is not fragmentary. If we break a window, we break the whole pane.

God's law is one as God's character is one. If we hang from a chain and the chain breaks at its weakest link, we fall. It makes no sense to say that the chain was good in every other respect. Good works do not offset evil works. We cannot go to a judge and say, "I'm sorry for robbing that bank but I have not murdered anyone!"

There are some aspects of the law some people would never violate because that is not an area of their weakness. No two people have the same strengths. Yet this verse teaches that violation of one aspect of the law is a violation of the whole. If we emphasize the commands we keep but neglect the commands we break, we kid ourselves. We cannot plead that we keep certain aspects of the Word and neglect other aspects.

When we break the one standard of the character of God we break our entire fellowship with God. This does not require that we violate God on a number of fronts but only on one front.

We cannot minimize sin for if we do, we minimize the character of God. "I am not all that bad of a person because I have violated God only at one point." This is rationalization to justify or excuse a pet sin. No matter who we are, if we violate God's Word, we step outside God's will. The only solution to this is to allow God to absolutely control our lives (Ro 12:1,2). One sin makes us sinful. If you smash my finger, you hurt my whole body. One act of stealing puts us in jail.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

The Bible does not teach that all sins are equally wrong. However, all sin bears the same judgment because they violate the Lawgiver whose character the law defines. God's character is an indivisible unity. Some sins are more serious than others. If we covet another man's wife or actually commit adultery, we equally commit adultery in principle, yet committing adultery is worse than coveting another man's wife because it has greater social implications.

James 2:11

For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder'"

James illustrates verse 10 by two instances in verse 11 of the most glaring incidents of not loving our neighbour. This verse also shows the unity of the law.

For He who said,

James quotes from Exodus 20:13,14 and Deuteronomy 5:17,18 to show the unity of the law. We cannot plead innocence based on not committing adultery if we have murdered someone. God does not buy into this kind of pleading.

A single violation of His law destroys the whole law. The law is one because God is one. If we break one of God's commands, we violate the Lawgiver.

'Do not commit adultery,'

In the Bible, the term 'adultery' applies to both sexes, obliging both partners to be faithful. (Exodus 20:13,14; Deuteronomy 5:17,18; Matthew 5:27; Matthew 19:18). Adultery carries the idea of debauchery. By having sexual intercourse with someone other than your own spouse, you corrupt that person morally.

Principle:

The stigma of one sin can put a blotch of debauchery on our character.

Application:

The purpose of the 10 commandments is to provide freedom. By commanding against adultery, God gives freedom to the married partners to relate to one another. The boundaries of the institution of marriage give freedom for a spouse to trust his or her partner.

God's view on marriage is a lifelong partnership and divorce is against God's original purpose (Matthew 19:6ff) so remarriage after divorce is adultery (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18). Marital fidelity must be maintained to protect freedom in marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

When we commit a sex act with someone other than our marriage partner, we corrupt the person

with whom we commit adultery (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Adultery and murder are destructive and catastrophic sins because of the social implications of committing these sins.

David's adultery led to denial, cover-up and ultimately to the murder of Bathsheba's husband (2 Samuel 11). Many disasters followed David's adultery: rape, murder and revolt against his kingdom by his own son (2 Samuel 13-15).

After his repentance David's response was to worship in repentance. He worshipped after the tragedies came upon him because he acknowledged his sin and his guilt. God's chastening should call for praise because we see God's capacity for forgiveness. When we do not confess our sin, we widen anger and bitterness towards God.

A thief steals when she thinks no one is looking and a husband commits adultery when he believes no one will find out. However, God knows (Hebrews 4:13).

Generally, it is advisable to confess the sin of adultery to the spouse. The two who committed adultery share a secret. That in itself is an intimacy. This keeps a barrier between the legitimate spouses. If the spouse is not informed then the possibility of relapse is very strong. Cover-up compounds the problem. The only exception to this is when a partner cannot handle the truth due to emotional problems [not merely emotional pain because of the affair].

David tried with futility to cover his sin. When Bathsheba became pregnant, David plotted to make it appear that Uriah was the father of the baby (2 Samuel 11:5-13). When that scheme failed, David plotted again to have Uriah killed (2 Samuel 11:14-17). That compounded his sin by a further system of cover-up during Bathsheba's pregnancy and following (2 Samuel 11:27). David wrote Psalm 32 as a response to his adultery and secretive systems operation.

**"When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night Your hand was heavy
upon me; My vitality was turned into the
drought of summer. Selah I
acknowledged my sin to You, And my
iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will
confess my transgressions to the LORD,"**

And You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5).

We do not "fall" into adultery. Adultery always begins with a heart prepared and shaped by a pattern of lustful or covetous thoughts. We always first incubate adultery in the mind. Some people believe they can commit adultery in the mind and it is not truly a sin. This is why the Lord Jesus said that anyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28).

Jesus sets the standard very high so that we will not accept this kind of rationalization in our minds. If we tolerate this sin our heart, we show evidence of a hardened heart. If we fantasize about adultery, it is a sin we wish to commit. Mental adultery is no trifling offence because it gives birth to sinful action. Sinful action is the offspring of our thought life (James 1:15).

We need to cry out with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10). David wrote Psalm 51 after his sin with Bathsheba.

also said, 'Do not murder.'

Murder is the taking of another human life illegally with premeditation. Murder is more than killing another person. The Bible justifies the killing of an individual by government (Romans 13:9) or by an individual in war.

Protection from being killed is another principle of freedom in the 10 commandments. If we walk about in our society with a sense of safety, we enjoy a freedom of society.

Jesus reiterates the prohibition against murder (Matthew 19:18). He indicated that hate for a person is deemed murder (Matthew 5:21-22; 1 John 3:15).

The book of Exodus justifies homicide when a thief breaks in at night (22:2-3).

Principle:

All sin first incubates in the mind.

Application:

Murder always begins with the incubation of anger and resentment in the mind. We do not arbitrarily fall into violence and murder; it always comes from a heart of hate. When we fantasize

about sins we would like to commit, we set ourselves up for a fall.

"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:18-19).

If we wish revenge on an enemy or wish them hurt, we condition ourselves for further sin. Sins of chronic behaviour show our essential character.

David committed both adultery and murder. He did not confess those sins for more than a year. He did eventually repent when Nathan confronted him (2 Samuel 12:1-23). David wrote both Psalms 32 and 51 indicating his repentance over committing those sins.

"...because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5).

God held David morally responsible for the death of Uriah although David's direct role was limited to giving the orders to do it (2 Samuel 11-12).

James 2:12

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty"

James concludes the issue of partiality in verses 12 and 13 with a plea, warning of God's judgment on those who practice prejudice towards others.

So speak and so do

The two "so" words in this phrase indicate how God wants us to apply principle to our lives. The two "so" words indicate how we are to understand and apply the first 11 verses of this chapter.

"Speak" has to do with how we use our mouth. We can use it to commit sins of the tongue or we can use it to build up other Christians.

When it comes to partiality, a Christian should speak and act on the basis of Christian principles. The Christian cannot live in prejudice and at the same time maintain a consistent Christian life. Complete consistency with God's principles is the

way to live the Christian life. Both words and actions count in God's eyes.

Principle:

God wants us to practise what we preach.

Application:

What we say and what we do must be consistent in God's economy. Every time we open our mouth, we should utter words consistent with our Christianity.

A characteristic of a growing Christian is someone who knows how to control his mouth. He can avoid sins of the tongue. Some of us can murder by our mouth. The tongue is easy to use and that makes it more impulsive. It takes the discipline of love not to use our mouth sinfully.

Not only do we need to control our mouth but also we need to control our actions by the law of liberty.

as those who will be judged by the law of liberty

The word "law" in this phrase means principle. A principle is a divine system by which a Christian operates in God's economy. The "law of liberty" gives us freedom to freely serve God. There is no absolute freedom in God's economy so license is a violation of the law of freedom. True liberty gives us freedom to make decisions of grace toward the world around us. Once we enter the family of God, we operate on an entirely different economy of principles.

This is the second use of the phrase "the law of liberty" (1:25). The "law of liberty" frees a believer from the bondage of the law. When God frees us from the restraint of doing things by pressure, we serve out of the motivation of love. We serve others without external pressure. We do what we do because we want to do it. Liberty causes us to do what we otherwise would not do.

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

God does not judge Christians on the basis of who they are but on the basis of who Jesus is. That means that there can be no prejudice against fellow Christians. To the contrary, we exercise mercy toward them (2:13). This is true to the principle of loving your neighbour as yourself \

The "law of liberty" operates under the principle of freedom since it delimits only that which is contrary to the character of God and authenticates that which is consistent with the character of God. The law of liberty liberates our relationship to others. God will judge the Christian on how she relates to others—whether on the principle of freedom or on the principle the prejudice.

The law of liberty will ultimately judge us. Each believer will have his day in God's court. We will stand there in our resurrection body for Jesus Christ to judge.

Principle:

Freedom is the basis for production in the Christian life.

Application:

Undue regard for the wealthy violates the law of liberty. The law of liberty is the freedom that God gives us to love others. The law of liberty frees us from discrimination.

God will evaluate every believer after she gets her resurrection body. Before we spend time in eternity, God will sort out how we lived our lives in time. He will evaluate our production. Jesus will judge our qualification for reward, not to determine our salvation. He will review everything we said and did. He will evaluate whether we discriminated against fellow believers or not.

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he

himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

When you stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, will Jesus look at your life as a life of love? He will judge us by what we say and by what we do.

"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36-37).

James 2:13

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment"

For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

God gives no mercy to the person who refuses to demonstrate mercy to others. God does not have mercy on those who show partiality to fellow believers. An individual who lives a life of selfishness and lack of mercy to others is the kind of person God will judge.

Principle:

God's compassion ultimately does not extend to those with no compassion.

Application:

Discrimination demonstrates lack of compassion. God will not extend His mercy indefinitely in time on earth, if we continually do not show mercy to others. If we expect mercy from God now, we must show mercy now.

Since God is wholly impartial, He expects us to be wholly impartial. A person who lives with impartiality is a selfless person. If we live by mercy, God will reward us by mercy. This is an essential function of living by grace toward others.

Mercy triumphs over judgment

Mercy has greater power than judgment. If we live as people free of discrimination and characterized by extending mercy to others, we are ready for evaluation by Jesus at the Judgment Seat of Christ. God will give us mercy in that day. The person

who exercises mercy will triumph over judgment because God will exercise no judgment on him.

"Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Principle:

The mercy that we show to others here will be manifest to us hereafter.

Application:

If we expect mercy at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we must show mercy in time. Our spirit of mercy determines how God will evaluate us at that day. If we show mercy to fellow believers, we have no concern about how Jesus will evaluate us at that day. This is a mercy of merit.

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15).

We look forward to the mercy that the Lord will extend to us in eternity. That is when mercy will finally and ultimately triumph over judgment. He will be merciful to us not because of our works but because of His work on the cross. The mercy we receive when we embrace the cross for eternal life is not a mercy that we deserve.

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20-21).

James 2:14

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?"

Throughout this book, James sets forth a chain of tests whereby we can evaluate how genuine our faith truly is. In this new section (2:14-26), he shows how genuine faith works in an individual's life. James 2:14-20 presents three characteristics of a dead faith: 1) it has a hollow profession (2:14), 2) it has a phony compassion (2:15-17) and 3) it has a

superficial conviction (2:18-20). What does it profit,

The word profit means advantage. There is no advantage in talking about doing something for someone if we do not carry it through. Talk is cheap. The true benefit is in actually helping someone.

Principle:

Talk is cheap; action requires relinquishing personal rights.

Application:

Non-Christians cannot see our faith except for what we do. We do not impress the unbeliever with profession of faith but with practice of faith. Profession is too obscure to her. We impress her with a faith she can see. We can argue principle into infinity but until she sees it in practice, she will not believe. The Christian that many non-Christians know is the religious jerk and flaky pseudo-spiritual Christian that does not appeal to them.

Because faith is invisible to non-Christians, they need to see the impact Jesus Christ makes on our lives. There is no advantage to have a faith that does not work. Fruitless faith is not operational faith. Read the great Hall of Fame chapter in Hebrews, chapter 11, that demonstrates people who live by faith act on their faith. They mixed their faith with the principles of God's Word and some profit resulted.

my brethren,

James is writing to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire (1:1).

if someone says

James establishes a hypothesis of someone who claims to have an active, dynamic faith but in reality has a dead Christian faith. He is a Christian but his Christianity has little impact on his daily life. This person claims orthodoxy but does not have an "orthopraxy." Many people have a creed but no conduct. The true fruit of faith is a person who applies truth to experience.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest

anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

he has faith but does not have works?

Someone who claims he can have faith without works dislodges the principles of Christianity from the application of Christianity. There are those who claim they love people but they show no mercy to them. They discriminate against poorer members of the congregation. This is a disjunction of faith and works. True Christianity has a consistency between what we do and who we are. What we do exposes who we are.

Principle:

True Christianity maintains a consistency between what we say and what we do.

Application:

Not just any faith can deliver a person from a dead Christian life, only a vital, dynamic trust in the principles of God's Word can. All talk and no walk is not the Christian life.

Faith without a manifestation of that faith in what we do is a dead faith. Principle and application must be in agreement if we are going to have a dynamic faith. Principle without application is incomplete. There is no profit or value in an incomplete principle. In God's Word, principle and application always walk hand in hand. A professed faith and an actual faith are two different things. We can tell what a genuine faith looks like by its resulting action.

Many Christians deny the verities of the Christian faith not with their mind but with how they live out their lives. They live as if the principles of the Word of God do not exist. This is self-deception and delusion (1:22). True faith demonstrates itself in acts of love (2:15). Faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone. Others can only see our faith by what we do.

Can faith save him?

James does not use the word "save" here for the eternal salvation of our souls but for the temporal salvation of our Christian lives. A better translation would be "Can faith deliver him?"

The idea is not that works save our eternal souls but our temporal souls. If our faith is an academic exercise with the facts of Christianity without engaging the reality of those facts, our faith cannot save our temporal souls. Genuine faith in the work of Christ on the cross saves our souls eternally. Genuine faith in the principles of the Word of God will save our souls in time. A phony faith saves no one, either in eternity or in time.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

The Greek answers the question "Can faith save him?" with a "no" answer. A faith that does not apply principle to experience cannot save the daily Christian life. Faith by itself is not able to deliver us but only a faith engaged with the principles and applications of the Christian life.

Principle:

What we do exposes who we are.

Application:

Faith is merely the trigger for connecting principle to application. If there is no principle then the gun is not loaded. The gun can fulfil its purpose if it has bullets in it. The trigger is faith. If the gun is empty when we pull the trigger, all we get is a "click, click." If we load our faith with principle and then pull the trigger of faith in the principle, then we can apply truth to experience.

The value in our faith is not faith itself but the object of faith. The principles of the Word are the object in this case. Unless we have formed principles of God's Word in our mind, we cannot apply truth to experience. Faith in itself will not deliver us because faith is simply a system of perception. Even unbelievers have faith. The problem is their object of faith - what they believe in. If they place their faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross for them, they will receive eternal life. The object of their faith in this case did the work of salvation for them.

Jesus constantly combated superficial belief during His ministry (John 2:23-25). Jesus did not entrust Himself to artificial belief because it is an illusion.

More than mere knowledge of truth is necessary for it to affect our lives. The facts of the Bible are necessary to understand the principles of the Word but unless we apply those principles to our lives, the principles will have no effect in changing our behaviour.

An unbeliever understands Christianity when she sees our faith delivering us. It is your works that she sees. If we have faith in the principles without application, the non-Christian views us as operationally dead (2:20). We are not dead eternally but dead to the unbeliever temporally.

"You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart" (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

We cannot live out our faith as an inactive principle by speculative belief. That makes no impact on the non-Christian and is no testimony for the Lord Jesus. We live out our faith by applying the principles of the Word by faith to our experience.

James 2:15

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food..."

If a brother or sister

James takes up the argument of the Christian who claims to have faith without works.

The hypothesis here is about Christians who are destitute of the necessary elements of life such as clothing and food. It is obvious that the person in the hypothesis of claiming faith without works is also a Christian because of the words "brother or sister." The terms "brother" and "sister" remind us of our relationship to one another spiritually.

is naked and destitute of daily food

The person naked and destitute is a person without adequate clothing and food.

Principle:

A Christian idealism that talks faith but does not act faith is not real faith.

Application:

Our faith is useless if it does not express itself in meeting the needs of Christians in physical need. The Christian cannot live true Christianity in isolation. True Christianity is an interdependent relationship among Christians.

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (1 John 3:17).

A Christian idealism that talks faith but does not act faith is not real faith. Talk without action is futile. We fulfill the royal law of love by giving to those in need and fulfilling our duty toward one another.

James 2:16

...and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"

and one of you says to them,

The phrase "one of you" indicates that James is challenging Christians in their callousness toward the poor. The challenge is to a faith that talks a good line but does not produce any real action.

Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,

James here depicts a heartless Christian who utterly discounts the welfare of fellow Christians by greeting them with a cavalier and indifferent attitude. The quotation "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled" points to a contemptuous attitude that puts the onus entirely on the person

in need: "What is wrong with you? Why don't you go out and get a job?"

Mere words do not help the poor. Christianity should operate in the concrete world of helping people in financial need. Nice words are not enough in some situations. If people are starving, they do not listen to the message.

but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body,

The word "needed" means the necessities of life, the things that the body needs. This was a real situation in Jerusalem at the time because of the persecution of Christians (Romans 15:25-31; 1 Corinthians 16:3).

what does it profit?

James repeats this phrase for emphasis (2:14). This question "What does it profit?" indicates that the comment "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled" is an utterly hollow answer. This faith has no "profit" or advantage to the financially poor. An abstract faith cannot clothe or feed anyone.

A true faith invigorates the Christian into concrete action. A dead faith is passive. The best way to assess the genuineness of our faith is to look at our works.

Principle:

Faith is an operative principle that always puts what it knows to experience.

Application:

A passive faith ultimately hardens the heart. A person with a hardened heart is a purveyor of words. A person starving cannot eat words. Words do not clothe the body. Lovely sentiments without actions are utterly unfruitful. A person with a dead faith is a supplier of words, not action.

James 2:17

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"

James now comes to the point of his discussion in this verse – an operative faith. An inoperative faith does not generate anything (2:16).

Thus

The word "thus" draws the conclusion to the analogy of the Christian who is heartless toward the poor by giving them empty words (2:16).

also faith by itself,

Faith unaccompanied by works is dead. James does not put faith and works in opposition but he does put in conflict a dead faith that does not evidence anything. We cannot rest in a theoretical faith.

if it does not have works, is dead

Faith unaccompanied by action is dead. It lacks vigor. It does not demonstrate a dynamic relationship with God. A genuine faith naturally generates divine production. Works prove that genuine faith exists.

This verse does not teach that a person who fails to exercise saving faith does not have genuine Christian faith. The point is that if faith does not produce anything, it is dead in its dynamic. The word "dead" does not mean that the faith is non-existent but dormant, inactive or useless.

Principle:

Faith without works is inoperative or inert.

Application:

Some Christians have a faith that is dead and not alive to the dynamics of the Word of God. God designed the Christian life to depend on His provisions. We do not have the capacity to live the Christian life apart from God making it possible.

Once we understand and believe a principle from God's Word we breathe out that belief by faith resulting in divine production. Without that process our faith is functionally dead. Active faith in God gives life while works show that life exists.

Faith assumes the absence of human merit. Faith in itself is a non-meritorious system of operation. The entire value of what we believe lies in the principles we believe. The object of eternal salvation is the finished work of Christ on the cross. The merit resides in that object. The subject who exercises faith has no merit in himself. Jesus is the only person who can satisfy [propitiate] a holy God. God treats us by His grace on the basis of the finished work of Christ. He does this

because He cannot compromise His own righteousness and justice. God's provision is always the working object of our faith. This way of life always glorifies God, not man. Jesus did the work so He gets the glory.

Faith is the means whereby we appropriate what God did for us in Christ. We trust in what God did for us. God does the working under the principle of grace. So, faith in itself has no value before God but only faith in the efficacious work of Christ. Faith must have a working object.

"And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:27-28).

"Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all..." (Romans 4:16).

"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:6).

All the believing in the world will make no impression on God at the Great White Throne [where non-Christians will stand before God]. Non-Christians have faith but the issue is not whether they have faith but what is the object of their faith. If they stand there without faith in the finished work of Christ, there is no hope for them. The reason they stand at the Great White Throne is that they rejected the person and work of Christ.

James 2:18

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"

James now takes up in verses 18-20 the subject of the evidence of genuine faith. This is further

elucidates 2:14,16. We cannot say to the financially poor, "Move on, help yourself," and at the same time maintain a dynamic faith.

But someone will say,

For the third time James uses a situation where someone claims something but does the opposite. When someone says, "It does not matter much what one believes but only how he behaves," this undermines the principle of faith. The opposite is also true, genuine Christian talk is always consistent with genuine Christian walk.

"You have faith, and I have works.

James introduces another objector to his proposal that faith without works is dead. In this diatribe, we understand that the quotations to follow are James' response to the objector. The Greek does not include quotation marks making it debatable as to when the quotation concludes. Probably the best interpretation is to include these quotations for the entire verse, that is, the objector makes the statement of the entire verse.

Show me your faith without your works,

It is difficult to prove the dynamic of one's faith without works. The word "show" means demonstrate, exhibit. How can anyone put their faith on display except by what they do? We manifest, prove and evidence faith by works. God justified us (Romans 8:33) meritoriously by Christ (Romans 3:21-25) mediated by faith in His finished work (Romans 5:1) and verified by works. Our works are not the grounds for our justification but the demonstration of our justification. The plant produces flowers but the plant existed before the flowers.

and I will show you my faith by my works."

James throws down the gauntlet by showing that faith produces works. Faith is more than an academic exercise. It is rest in God's promises and provisions.

A dynamic faith cannot exist without works but faith is at the base of works. However, works are the necessary sign of genuine faith. We know that a person has genuine faith by what comes out of his life. However, not all Christians maintain good works so Titus has to challenge them to maintain good works

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men" (Titus 3:8).

The Christian must maintain his Christian walk (Galatians 5:16-17) and can be filled or not filled based on his volition (Ephesians 5:18). Divine production is not an automatic issue for the Christian that is why Jesus commanded his disciples do what they need to do (John 13:17).

Principle:

We cannot keep a dynamic faith from producing something.

Application:

Reformed teachers after John Calvin popularized the idea that the evidence of sanctification must be present before a person can have full assurance of justification. John Calvin never held this view but it was a departure from his teachings.

Our assurance comes from the Word of God and not from the presence of good works. We know by the "testimony" of Scriptures:

"And this is the testimony [the testimony is the Word of God]: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:11-13).

We know that we are saved by the promises of God:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that

believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

Some branches of the vine do not bear fruit (John 15:2, 6) yet they are part of the vine. Carnal Christians will pamper the flesh.

James 2:19

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble!"

James continues his diatribe against a dead faith that has no dynamic to make a difference in one's life.

You believe that there is one God.

Simple belief in monotheism [one God] is not enough for a dynamic faith. Even demons hold to the orthodox view that God is a unity.

You do well.

The phrase "You do well" may carry sarcasm, or "So far, so good." The idea may simply be that those who believe in one God have done well up to that point but that point is not far enough.

Even the demons believe – and tremble!

Demons actively attack people as agents of Satan. Demons tremble at God's judgment. They are very cognizant of their looming doom so they shudder at the thought. This indicates extreme fear. Even demons are not atheists! Although they believe, they remain lost.

"When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. And suddenly they cried out, saying, 'What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?'" (Matthew 8:28-29)

Demons not only believe in God but they tremble at Him–yet they do not obey Him! Fear does not make the difference to them. They remain lost.

The context of James 2 is not eternal salvation but how we treat fellow Christians. It takes more than belief in monotheism to become a Christian. Oneness of God is foundational to our belief but

we need to go beyond that belief. Orthodoxy in itself is no assurance of a dynamic faith.

Principle:

Knowledge of true doctrine is of no avail to those who do not put their knowledge into practice by faith.

Application:

We live in a day when the majority of North Americans believe in the existence of God. This does not mean much because basic belief in one God [the unity of God] does not save a soul eternally nor deliver a Christian in time. Dead orthodoxy does not provide a dynamic faith either initially or progressively. Academic acceptance of one God does not make someone a Christian nor does it facilitate the Christian life.

There is no hint in James that a genuine Christian will always produce ongoing, consistent good works. However, this does not deny that a genuine Christian will produce some good works, for good works will inevitably rise out of genuine faith. Works are a by-product of salvation.

However, it is another issue to argue that living consistently after salvation is inevitable. Not every Christian will surrender their will to God consistently after salvation. It is possible to have a faith minus full commitment and still be a genuine believer.

The biblical ideal is that Christians should have a genuine, dynamic faith which leads to the application of the Word of God in their lives. That will produce divine consequences.

James 2:20

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

But do you want to know,

James calls for the acknowledgment of his previous point. Many people do not want to know the truth because the principles of God's Word may change their lives. This is a challenge to their will. Some people prefer to be ignorant of God's principles because they think that their ignorance will deny the reality of the Word. They are like an ostrich that sticks its head in the sand.

James proceeds to show them cases of believers in the Old Testament who lived by dynamic faith (2:21f).

O foolish man,

"Foolish" denotes unemployed, idle, with nothing to do, barren, yielding no return, unproductive. James calls his opponents "foolish" because they do not produce anything. Their lives are void of effect.

that faith without works is dead?

Faith in God without good works is useless. James explains what he means by "dead" in verses 21-23. If there is dynamic faith, works will flow from it.

Some manuscripts have the word "idle" for the word "dead." If this text is right, then the idea is that their faith has no effect on their lives. The faith that has no power over our lives is useless. A corpse does not do anything or produce anything; it just lies in the grave. We know where it is located but it does not do anything.

Principle:

An inoperative faith is dead to the purposes of God.

Application:

Inoperative faith does not have the power of God. We can talk about helping the poor but until we do, our faith is inoperative. Our faith is good for nothing.

Dynamic faith cannot remain idle; it is always on the move. It is inevitable that it will produce something. A profession of faith that does not change a person is useless.

James 2:21

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"

Beginning with 2:21, James mentions two examples of dynamic faith from the lives of believers and one example from human anatomy: 1) Abraham (vv. 21-24); Rahab (v.25); and 3) the human body and spirit (v. 26).

James directly rebuts the objection of the preceding verses in 2:21-23. He addresses the objector in verse 22 – "Do you see?"

Was not Abraham our father

Abraham was the first Jew and thus the father of all Jews. The Jews to whom James wrote venerated Abraham as the founder of Judaism. He was a Gentile that became the first Jew by faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-16). God justified him by faith alone and credited God's righteousness to him on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross.

justified by works

More than two decades after his conversion, God declared Abraham's faith vindicated in the eyes of people. God justified Abraham by grace through faith exclusively (Romans 3:20; 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6,11; Genesis 15:6 [referred to in v. 23]). God credited forensic righteousness to Abraham at his point of belief (Romans 1:17; 3:24; 4:1-25). The justification in this verse is not God's justification of Abraham but the justification of Abraham by people who watched his life. People vindicate his salvation by his works.

"What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness..." (Romans 4:1-5).

The word "justify" has two basic meanings in the New Testament: 1) acquittal, declare righteous, and 2) vindication or proof. Paul uses "justify" in the sense of declare righteous by God in Romans and Galatians:

"...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law [principle] of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is

justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:24;27-28).

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 5:1).

"...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

James uses the second idea of "justify" in this verse -- vindication. Abraham verified his faith by offering Isaac. This was justification by works in the eyes of men. Justification by faith is in the eyes of God and justification by works is in the eyes of men. The New Testament uses "justify" in this sense in the following passages:

"But wisdom is justified [vindicated] by all her children" (Luke 7:35).

"Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified [vindicated] in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged'" (Romans 3:4).

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified [vindicated – this is obviously no reference to salvation but to verification of his authenticity] in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

Not only is there a justification by faith but there is also a justification by works. Even Paul himself uses "justify" in this sense in Romans 4:2.

"For if Abraham was justified by works [vindication before men], he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Romans 4:2-3).

The word "by" indicates source rather than means. Abraham's works did not justify him but people,

the source, justified him. His works gave occasion for people to vindicate him.

Principle:

God justifies our souls eternally but men verify our testimony in time.

Application:

Men justify us by works but God does not justify us by works. Works do not gain us any legal standing before God but they do give us a testimony before men.

Only God can justify or declare our soul as righteous as He Himself is righteous (Romans 3:21-24).

"Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Galatians 3:5-9).

when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

The Greek expects a "yes" answer to the question that people justified Abraham by works when he offered Isaac on the altar. Abraham offered Isaac on the altar over two decades after his justification. God justified Abraham in Genesis 12-15. It was not until many years later that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:3,12). A dynamic faith will eventually show itself in action.

Hebrews also relates the story of how Abraham developed a dynamic faith in God's unalterable righteousness after he became a believer (15:6).

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which

he also received him in a figurative sense" (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The action of offering Isaac matured Abraham's faith. Abraham's faith moved from a conviction that God would overcome his old age to produce a child to the conviction that He could raise his son from the dead.

Abraham failed God miserably at times. He took Hagar—his wife's handmaiden—sexually because he did not believe God was going to give him a son through Sarah, his wife. This resulted in the birth of the first Arab [Ishmael]. He lied that Sarah was his sister (Genesis 12:19; 20:2). In these cases his works did not verify his faith in the eyes of men.

There is no justification by faith plus works in the Bible, rather, there are two kinds of justification. Justification by faith is not the only kind of eternal justification. There is a justification by "works" by men. Men see your works and verify the authenticity of your faith. Note the word "only" in James 2:24,

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Principle:

Good works are the proof of faith – not the path to salvation.

Application:

There is nothing in James 2:14-26 about lordship salvation. However, this passage expresses the need for a faith that expresses itself in practical manifestation. Genuine faith will produce certain good effect. There is a true and a false faith; a true faith will show itself in good works.

Genuine spirituality behaves according to its belief. Our works give testimony to our belief. John Calvin said, "Faith alone justifies; but the faith that justifies is never alone." We vindicate our faith before others by our good works. We enter into eternal life by faith through grace.

Our moral bankruptcy before God demands that God justify us by faith. When God justifies us, we possess an unqualified acceptance before God. This is a transaction by God seen by God alone.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We manifest that faith by doing God's will. Since faith is invisible, we can only see faith by what it does. Faith becomes evident by its actions. A spiritual life that does not produce the fruit of the Spirit is not spirituality. Spirituality always produces something (Galatians 5:22,23).

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

We know a dead faith because it fails to produce righteousness.

"They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father'" (John 8:39-41).

James 2:22

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?"

Do you see

James wants the objector to see the truth of this verse. Each of us must see this principle for ourselves. This responsibility falls on our own shoulder. No one can swim for us; we must get into the water.

that faith was working together with his works,

The words "working...with...works" are emphatic in the Greek. Faith and works are partners in labor working together at the same time. By offering Isaac on an altar, Abraham became the "friend of God" (2:23). Abraham's faith and his works were partners. They assisted each other and cooperated with each other. They engaged in activity together because they needed each other. Faith is the motivation and foundation for works. Works is the manifestation and result of faith. It is

impossible to have biblical application without faith, for works have no motivation of their own.

The joint relationship is the dynamic at the foundation of the deed. So Abraham's faith was in a God of the resurrection. He knew more than information about God; he knew God Himself personally (Romans 4:19-21).

Abraham believed that God was able to solve his sexual deadness and give him a child even at his advanced age in life. He believed that even though he sacrificed Isaac, God would raise Isaac from the dead to keep His covenant with Abraham (Hebrews 11:17-19).

and by works faith was made perfect?

Works brings faith to its goal and fullness. The purpose of a berry bush is to produce berries. The berry bush has the genetic composition for producing berries. True faith does not reach its fulfillment until it produces works of righteousness. Works are the effect of a dynamic faith. Works also make faith stronger. Maturity of faith is a result of connecting faith and works together. Without works our faith is a dead faith. With works, our faith shows its maturity to others (Ephesians 2:10).

Abraham's faith matured by works. He moved from believing that God would deal with his sexual deadness to being confident that He would raise his son Isaac from the dead. His faith grew and developed. This does not imply that his faith was faulty but simply that it was incomplete. He developed his faith by exercising it.

Principle:

Works strengthen and mature of faith.

Application:

This verse does not teach us where we should place our trust but demonstrates the effect of faith in the sight of men. The car we drive may be a symbol of financial prosperity. Likewise the application of principle to experience shows the reality of our faith. We cannot have genuine belief in the principles of the Word without living them out in our experience.

We cannot separate works from our life of faith as Christians. Production brings faith to its goal. Our faith needs to be developed. When developed, it

produces fruit. A living faith works itself out into life situations.

Our faith will not reach its goal without appropriating the promises and principles of God's Word by faith. That appropriation is an act of faith. We believe that God's principles are true for our lives. That glorifies God because God Himself is the goal of our lives. Each time we take God at His Word, we demonstrate that God is trustworthy. With each time we believe Him, our faith grows stronger. Taking action on our faith builds our faith.

James 2:23

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God"

And the Scripture

James cites Genesis 15:6 in defense of the truth that genuine faith shows itself in action. The New Testament quotes Genesis 15:6 four times [Romans 4:3,9; Galatians 3:6 and this verse]. James quotes the exact verse that Paul quotes to prove salvation by faith to show a vital faith as a Christian results in action. If works do not accompany faith, our faith is not vibrant. We operate in dead orthodoxy.

was fulfilled which says,

The word "fulfilled" indicates that justification by faith results in vindication by works. Abraham manifested his faith by the sacrifice of Isaac. The Scripture received its completion in that act. Abraham honoured God by his faith. As many as forty years after Abraham had believed God for justification, he evidenced his justification by the offering of Isaac. He proved himself righteous by his actions. Abraham did not operate with a dead orthodox faith. Faith truly changes the heart.

"Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: 'By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven

and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.' So Abraham returned to his young men, and they rose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beersheba" (Genesis 22:15-19).

At the point that Abraham was willing to offer Isaac, his faith became abundantly clear to all.

"Abraham believed God,

Abraham believed God but he also believed what God said. He believed in God's trustworthiness.

and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

The word "accounted" signifies to reckon (by calculation or imputation), to deliberate, count, conclude, compute, take into account, put to one's account. This word deals with what is true, especially in commercial accounts involving debits and credits. If I have \$1000 dollars in my chequing account, I have \$1000, not \$999.

God is the one who "accounted" Abraham righteous. God put to Abraham's account His very own righteousness. Thus, God's accounting means that He keeps a mental record of those to whom He imputes His righteousness. He keeps record of my eternal standing before Him as being right in His eyes.

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:21-26).

"Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Romans 4:4).

"...just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works..." (Romans 4:6).

"And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also..." (Romans 4:11).

God views me in eternal right relationship with Him because of His own nature. The issue of God's righteousness is that God must be consistent with His own standards. God credits to the eternal account of the believer His own righteousness because the death of Christ imputes to us that righteousness.

"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:17).

"Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:23-25).

Principle:

God imputes His very own righteousness to us at the moment of salvation.

Application:

God declares the believer as righteous as His Son the moment the believer trusts in the blood of Christ to forgive sins. This is imputed righteousness, not earned righteousness. It is a righteousness that God gives to us judicially and not by our experience. God gives it in exchange for our trust in the cross of Christ for salvation.

And he was called the friend of God

God calls Abraham the "friend of God" because decades after he believed, he was willing to offer Isaac on an altar. God loved Abraham in a special way because of this obedience. Abraham's justification evidenced itself by his willingness to offer Isaac. Obedience is the evidence of faith.

The word "friend" means someone loved, dear or friendly. A friend is someone who shares intimate concerns. It is different from associates who do not share those same things.

"Are You not our God, who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?" (2 Chronicles 20:7)

"But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend" (Isaiah 41:8).

The point is that Abraham already became a believer when God called him "friend." God declared Abraham His friend when he acted out his faith. Abraham did not count the cost. God counts us friends when we act out our faith. God does not count us worthy of His friendship but God glories in those who do not serve themselves but serve others.

Principle:

Obedience is an evidence of faith.

Application:

Jesus says that we are His friends if we do whatsoever He commands us. A friend of God is someone who walks with God. It is important what God thinks of us.

It is one thing to be a friend to God but it is another for God to be a friend to us. Does God consider you His friend? The fact that God will befriend us staggers the imagination.

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15).

True friends please and trust each other. Jesus pleased His Father and never let Him down.

"And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29).

James 2:24

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only"

You see then

The words "you see then" refer to Abraham's offering of Isaac. Abraham's justifying faith was an active faith that extended into his daily life.

that a man is justified by works,

People justified [vindicated] Abraham's faith based on his work of offering Isaac (2:21; Genesis 22) on an altar maybe as much as 40 years after his conversion (Genesis 15:6). God is not the Author of justification in this verse but men.

Remember the word "justify" has two basic meanings: 1) to declare righteous and 2) to vindicate. The first meaning carries the idea of acquittal. God judicially [forensically] declares us as right as He Himself is right eternally when we believe on His Son for eternal life.

"...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law [principle] of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:24,27-28).

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Romans 5:1).

"...knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

The second idea of "justify" is vindication or proving righteousness. This is the sense in which

James uses "justified" in this verse. Abraham, after he was saved, supremely proved his past relation to God by offering up Isaac (Genesis 22:3). Works accompany faith because genuine faith involves regeneration.

"Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: 'That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged'" (Romans 3:4).

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16).

and not by faith only.

Works verified Abraham's faith. He perfected [matured] his faith by his works [application of truth to experience]. His unabashed willingness to do God's will vindicated his unadulterated faith in God.

The word "only" qualifies justification by works. There is justification by faith and there is a vindication by works. Paul himself held to the view that works justified us before other men but not before God. We cannot sever or separate faith and works in the Christian life for works have a vital part in the spiritual life.

"For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (Romans 4:2).

Principle:

Our actions show our righteous standing before God.

Application:

There is no contradiction between Paul and James on justification. Paul looks at justification from God's viewpoint and James looks at it from man's viewpoint. From God's viewpoint, He declares us as righteous as He is righteous eternally by faith in the death of Christ for our sins (Romans 4:1-25; Galatians 3:6-9). Only Christ could do this. Nothing we can do can justify us.

An active faith declares to others that we possess saving faith. Some Christians have a dead faith that does not prove anything to those without Christ. Dynamic belief behaves by operative faith.

Works do not procure our salvation but they do declare it to others. We prove our justification by what we do.

James 2:25

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?"

Likewise,

Rahab stands in stark and remarkable contrast to Abraham because she was a prostitute but he was a patriarch of the Jews.

James adds another example of someone who lived by dynamic rather than static faith – a whore. Not only did God save her soul but He also saved her body. This example shows dead orthodoxy is not enough for God's desire; we are to live by dynamic faith rather than static faith.

was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works

Rahab believed in God almost 40 years before the spies came to her house (Joshua 2:9-13; 6:22-25). She believed the Lord of Israel was God when He delivered the Jews from the Egyptians. God saved her soul when she believed that. She believed to the point of risking her life by hiding the spies.

James uses a woman of ill repute to demonstrate the grace of God. Rahab stands in stark contrast to Abraham, the first Jew and the father of Jews. No class is without hope before God. Rahab stands as a trophy of God's grace. We even find her in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). The transforming power of the gospel completely changed her life.

"By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Hebrews 11:31).

James does not discuss justification by faith in this verse. He is talking about vindication by works. We prove our faith by our works. When we act on our faith, our faith grows; when we do not act on our faith, it atrophies. If we do not actively

function in our faith, we live in dead orthodoxy. Living application of the principles of God's Word is the essence of active orthodoxy. Our production vindicates our faith. We show this most in times of huge tests as in the case of Rahab.

when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

Rahab's house was located between the walls of Jericho that surrounded the city. The spies of Israel went to her house to spy on the city. When soldiers came to her house to find the spies, she lied about their presence there. She hid them under stacks of flax on the roof. She could have betrayed the spies but her faith would not allow her to do so. She willingly risked her life.

Rahab showed her genuine trust in Jehovah by hiding the spies and risking her life for them. The transforming power of the message of Jehovah showed itself in this concrete action.

The words "sent them out" express energetic action. Rahab sent the spies out of her house by letting them down the city wall by a scarlet cord.

Principle:

Genuine faith prompts production.

Application:

When we willingly put our values on the line, we show our true trust in the Lord. Some people sacrifice their position or career because they love the Lord more than their personal ambitions.

Faith shows itself best in the vortex of values. Belief that demonstrates itself in behaviour is active and dynamic trust. There is an openness to lean on God and trust His values over personal values. This is living faith, not dead faith.

James 2:26

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"

We now come to the conclusion and summary of James' argument on the relationship between faith and works.

For as the body without the spirit is dead,

James now introduces his last illustration of the contrast between static and dynamic faith. A body

has no life without a spirit. This is spiritual death. A dead faith can exist in the Christian life but it will produce nothing.

James uses the word "dead" in verses 17 and 26 for useless faith (vv. 14,16,20). He does not argue that a dead faith is no faith. Rather, it is useless, not active or dynamic.

so faith without works is dead also

Faith without works is like a dead body without a human psyche. That kind of faith has no practical worth. Our faith is dead when we do not apply principle to experience. This makes for a deep danger against the vitality of our day-to-day faith.

Principle:

Faith without works is spiritually like a dead body.

Application:

We know a body is alive because of its actions; we know faith is alive by its actions. The most wonderful works without faith are dead because they do not have God's principles of life. Faith with a view to God's values, finds acceptance by God. Faith is the root and production is the fruit.

The blending of faith and works is as close as the body and spirit. In both cases, the union results in life. Separation of the two is death. Both body life and spiritual life are indivisible because they are made of one life principle. Life consists of energy and movement. Thus, there is no dynamic faith without works. Death has no movement. Faith without works has no movement or energy.

Assent to words without active faith is like the dead church at Sardis.

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will

come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches'" (Revelation 3:1-6).

James 3:1

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment."

With chapter three, James shifts to a new subject – controlling the tongue. A good measure of maturity in the Christian life is how we control our speech. The mouth manifests that which is on our hearts. The first 12 verses show Christians how to control their speech. Christian work comes by words.

My brethren,

James continues to address his comments to believers. The use of "my brethren" is an indication of a new subject.

let not many of you become teachers,

A "teacher" is someone who officially teaches the Word (Ac 13:1,14,15; 1 Co 12:28; Ep. 4:11). An office carries great privilege but it also carries great responsibility. There are people who want the prestige without the responsibility of their teaching. A teaching role can hold great honor and that is why some seek the role.

Mt 23: 2 "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6

They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' 8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

The word "many" indicates that there are not many people qualified to teach God's Word. Few are fit to do this noble task because it requires: 1) a giftedness for it, 2) discipline in doing it, and 3) skills to properly understand God's Word.

knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment

Teachers will face "stricter judgment" in their present life on earth by divine discipline because God holds them to a higher standard for what they teach, than the standard to which He holds those who do not teach.

Acts 20:27 "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. 28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

Note that James includes himself in the word "we." God holds apostles and leaders to this high standard as well.

2 Ti. 2: 15 "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

1 Ti. 4: 6 "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness."

Principle:

Unauthorized teachers of God's Word set themselves up for double discipline.

Application:

Teachers of God's Word are to take very seriously the responsibility to accurately represent what the Bible teaches. Much of today's Bible teaching is the most superficial and erroneous that Christianity has faced for many generations.

Careful and thorough teaching of God's Word is foundational to all Christianity. We cannot articulate God's Word accurately without a deep sense of responsibility and careful study of what it says. So many today are so ill-equipped to teach the Word that they misrepresent the mind of God to the mind of man.

Those who use the office of Bible teacher for their own purposes step into divine discipline on their lives. Those who faithfully teach God's Word will receive special reward for doing so.

In our day, the cell group has become a phenomenon. Every breed of cat now is an authority on God's Word. Some cell leaders set themselves up as authorities and do not take due note of the authority of their pastors. They come to know a little truth and think that they know the entirety of truth [and the more is the pity]. We live in a day that denigrates recognized authority and carry this to the point of imbecility.

Rebellion against authority is an extension of liberal thinking that pervades North America. This attitude is a narcissistic idea that the ultimate authority resides in the individual regardless of what he knows. People place themselves and personal opinion above the pastor who carefully studies God's Word. No doubt this autonomy titillates their personal pride.

When a person takes on the role of teacher, he takes on great responsibility. He also takes on the

double discipline of a teacher. It is not God's design that every person be a teacher.

The church stands in dire need of systematic teaching from God's Word by gifted pastor/teachers. We cannot build up believers in the faith without this. There can be no edification without it. God will send double discipline upon these self-appointed teachers.

Lu 12: 48 "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more."

James 3:2

For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body."

James turns from the significance of works in chapter two to the magnitude of words in chapter three.

For

The significance of the word "for" is to show that teachers (v. 1) do stumble in many things. A pastor/teacher must not get the idea that he is infallible.

we all stumble in many things.

The word "stumble" means trip, fall. Every Christian makes false steps and fails somewhere along the line. No one is without moral lapse or flaw.

James includes himself in the word "all." The idea is all without exception. There is an exception in Christ but there is no exception among fallen men. No matter how good a pastor might be, he still falls short of God's standard. Sin is anything that comes short of God's absolute character.

Ro. 3:10 "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one...'"

Ro 3:23 "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

James admits to tripping not only in a few things, but in "many things." The word "many" modifies "stumble." We stumble over many things. This shows the degree of our stumbling.

Principle:

A sense of sinfulness is necessary for our spiritual health.

Application:

It is important to our spiritual health not to lose our sense of sinfulness. Neither should we drop our wonder of the cost that Jesus paid for our forgiveness.

1 Jn 1: 7 "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

Ecc 7: 20 "For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin."

Ga 3: 22 "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

The reality that Jesus forgives Christians for their sins does not allow rationalization of our sins. Some of us have the audacity to assume that sins of the tongue are not that important to God.

The more a teacher teaches, the more he will stumble. The more we attempt for Christ, the more likely we will fail. The more we say, the more we open ourselves to criticism. It takes courage and independence from people to teach and lead.

If anyone does not stumble in word,

Now James expands his point from the teacher to "anyone." He also moves to a particular sin – the sin of the tongue. This sin clearly includes everyone. Each of us at some point has said something that was not right. All of us have hurt someone.

Our speech is an indication of our maturity. Taming the tongue is a major concern to James (1:19, 26; 2:12; 3:5, 6 [twice], 8; 4:11; 5:12). Our

words matter to God. Some of us stumble "in word."

Matt. 15: 19 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. 20 These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man."

he is a perfect man,

The word "perfect" carries the idea of maturity, not sinless perfection. A person who can control his mouth is a mature man.

able also to bridle the whole body

A mature person has an ability ["able"] that resides in the inherent power of his spiritual edification. The word "able" is more forceful than the English idea, for it means strong, powerful. A mature believer powerfully reflects the glory and dynamic of Jesus Christ.

The idea of "bridle" is control. We are able to control a large beast like a horse by a bridle. We can lead him and hold him in check by a bridle. If we can hold our tongue, we can control anything because the tongue is a great power for good or evil.

The words "whole body" probably refer to his whole being. If we learn to control our tongues, we can learn to control our entire lives.

Principle:

Taming the tongue is a sign of maturity.

Application:

One sign of maturity is a tamed tongue. Conversely, a person who cannot control his mouth probably cannot control his life. The tongue reveals character in a manifest way. It is the telltale sign of the condition of the heart. As a medical doctor looks at our tongues to determine the condition of our health, God looks at our tongues to determine the condition of our spiritual health.

Ps. 34: 13 "Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit."

Ps 39: 1 "I said, 'I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain

my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."

Sins of the tongue can go to church without much danger of censorship from fellow Christians. We can see the dynamic of our faith by what we say. A mature believer speaks of edification, worship and winning the lost. A carnal Christian speaks despairingly of his fellow Christians. Some people live for gossip. They are very unstable because their tongues are strapped to their souls.

Psalm 35: 28 "And my tongue shall speak of Your righteousness And of Your praise all the day long."

None of us can live in sinless perfection but we can determine if we wag the tongue or the tongue wags us.

James 3:3

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body."

James now shows four analogies that demonstrate how the tongue has power over the whole person: 1) a bit in a horse's mouth (3:3), 2) a small rudder in a huge ship (3:4), 3) a small spark in a great forest (3:5-6), and 4) the taming of different animals (3:7,8).

Although the tongue is small, it has great power. It can affect our entire lives.

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us,

To control a horse, we put a bridle over its head and a bit into its mouth. The bit rests on the tongue of the horse. If we control its tongue, we control the horse's whole body.

Ps 39: 1 "I said, 'I will guard my ways, Lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, While the wicked are before me."

and we turn their whole body

We can direct a very large animal like a horse by a small bit and a bridle. The Christian can change the course of his life by having the right spiritual bit. When God controls our tongues, he will give us spiritual direction.

Principle:

There is great power in what we say.

Application:

The tongue is small but powerful. If we control the tongue, we can control our lives. Small words can greatly impact our lives. Although the tongue is a small part of the body, it can do great damage to the reputation and attitude of others toward us. A short sentence can take years to undo.

As a small piece of metal enables us to control a 1500-pound animal such as a horse, so discipline of the tongue allows us to control our lives. As we must bridle the horse, so must we bridle the tongue in submission to God.

In our natural state, we are like wild horses – we cannot bridle ourselves. If we do not bridle ourselves, God will put a special bit into our mouths to set us in the right direction. We control our mouths by divine direction. If we allow God to bridle our tongues, then there will be a monitor for our mouths.

Ps. 32: 9 "Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you."

James 3:4

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires."

Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds,

James challenges his readers to look at another illustration – that of a very large ship. The ship on which Paul traveled on his voyage to Rome had 276 people on board (Ac 27:37), indicating something of its size. Captains steer very large ships by very small rudders even through contrary winds.

The ship is analogous to man as was the horse in the previous verse. The best element for the ship is in the sea. We see the integrity of the ship in a fierce storm. The Christian tests his mettle best in the storm. God does not send us to Heaven the

moment we become Christians; He tests us in time by the storms of life.

they are turned by a very small rudder

The rudder is very small in comparison to the total ship yet it guides the direction of the ship. If we leave a ship to the winds, we will never reach our destination. We need a rudder to steer the ship properly. The rudder steers the ship in the storm. The winds blow us forward but we control that fierce action by a rudder. The rudder allows us to turn cursing into blessing. There can be no motion in a sailing ship without wind. The Christian uses the winds of life to move in the right direction by God's rudder for his life.

wherever the pilot desires

The pilot is the captain. The tongue can turn the direction of a life. If we watch our tongue, we determine the direction our life takes.

Principle:

When we are at the helm of our ship and in control of the rudder of our tongue, it will change our course from a hazardous approach toward life to a directed approach toward life.

Application:

Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. He guides us through the storms of life. If we allow Him to be at the helm of our lives, we will reach God's will for our lives. The storms may hit our lives but we can use the storms to move us forward. God does not exempt any of us from trouble in life.

The issue is not whether we will have trouble but how we will handle the trouble. If we handle our problems with our mouths, we put ourselves in danger of drifting off the course God set for us. Our tongues will get us into trouble unless we submit ourselves to the One who should be at the helm of our lives. If we control our tongue by God's power, He will set our course straight.

James 3:5

Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!"

Even so the tongue is a little member

Just like the size of the bit in the horse's mouth (3:3) and the smallness of the rudder in relation to the total ship (3:4), the tongue is a little member in relation to the entire body. There is a great difference between what a tongue is [small] and what it does [great damage or great benefit].

and boasts great things

The tongue can be grandiloquent and say grand things. The idea in this phrase is not of an empty boast but the very opposite. Just as the bit in the horse's mouth and the rudder of a great ship can do dexterous things, so the tongue can do agile things. The tongue can indeed do great things. Albeit a legitimate boast, the results can be outrageous.

The tongue can affect virtually every area of our lives. That same small tongue can cause great harm or great good. The difference is whether we direct our tongues by self-standards or God's standards.

2 Co 10: 17 "But 'he who glories, let him glory in the Lord.' 18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends."

1 Co 15: 10 "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

James now presents a picture of a raging, uncontrolled forest fire that burns anything in its way – houses, barns, vehicles and people. As long as there is something combustible in the path of a raging fire, it will expand and grow. Careless use of a small bonfire in a forest can cause a great fire that rages over tens of thousands of acres. The action of the tongue will expand in the same way.

Principle:

A few words can greatly damage or greatly help.

Application:

A few words can create great mischief. A small number of well-placed words can cause a raging conflict between believers. The relation between

the size of the remark and the size of the result is disproportionate. Sometimes it takes only a spark to ignite a forest fire and it takes just a few words to ignite a raging war between Christians.

Pr 16: 27 "An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire."

1 Co 5: 6 "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

Although the tongue is small, its influence is powerful in human relationships. We should not underestimate its influence and power. A few misplaced words can devastate a community of believers. The tongue can destroy a reputation or undermine a colleague.

Jas 4: 16 "But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

We can legitimately boast about some things.

2 Th 1: 4 "so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure"

The nature of man is self-centered. We love to talk about ourselves and put the focus on self. Self-centeredness leads to trouble in the home, nation and world. It draws contrasts and sparks tension. The root of it all is pride (Is 14:12-15).

1 Co 4: 7 "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

We need to learn how to manage our tongues because the use of the tongue has great influence on others. A small use of wrong words will lead to great consequences. A few words can do great mischief.

If we control our tongues, we can do great good; if we do not control our tongues, we can do great damage. The natural bent of the tongue is toward "iniquity" (next verse). That is why we must curb our words. A controlled tongue is a great benefit to man.

Pr 12: 18 "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health."

James 3:6

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell."

James now describes the far-reaching effects of what the tongue can do.

And the tongue is a fire,

The tongue will kindle or ignite anger but it also is a fire.

a world of iniquity.

The word "iniquity" means wrongdoing, unrighteousness, wickedness, injustice. Iniquity describes an unjust activity. We bring up in the bucket of speech what is in the well of the heart.

The idea of "world" of iniquity conveys the idea that the tongue involves every sort of evil. It involves the attitude sins of jealousy, bitterness, lust, wrath, anger, malice or greed. All these sins find their outlet in the tongue.

Principle:

The tongue can cause widespread damage.

Application:

The tongue is a fire that burns extensively in our attitudes. The evil tongue exists in a universe of unrighteousness and injustice. This says something about the vastness of iniquity the tongue produces. The possibilities of this sin are endless.

Ro 3:13,14 "Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body,

The words "so set" means to ordain, appoint, place, put. The carnal Christian's negative attitudes constitute his tongue so as to defile his whole body. It is the constitution of the tongue to defile by what it says.

Ecc 5: 6 "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?"

Mt 15: 10 "When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, 'Hear and understand: 11 Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.'"

and sets on fire the course of nature;

The word "course" means something that orbits like a wheel. Wherever the tongue goes, it keeps setting [present tense] the orb [wheel] of nature on fire. The tongue causes great commotion by a pattern of action and reaction to people.

Principle:

The tongue can establish a pattern of great conflagration and conflict among Christians.

Application:

Evil thoughts produce evil expressions and those evil expressions produce more evil expressions. It is a vicious cycle constantly ignited by the tongue. The tongue gives it life. The tongue starts a cycle of sin that eventually results in a conflagration of evil.

and it is set on fire by hell

The word for "hell" here is Gehenna, the word that Jesus used most often for hell. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament use of this term outside of Jesus' use of the word.

Gehenna was originally the garbage dump in the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem to the southeast. The residents dumped every kind of filth imaginable into Gehenna. They threw dead animals and unburied criminals there. They even sacrificed children there in the name of the god Moloch. The idea of "set on fire by hell" means that the devil uses the tongue to do his damage.

Pr 16: 27 "An ungodly man digs up evil, And it is on his lips like a burning fire."

Pr 26: 21 "As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife."

Principle:

An evil tongue finds its inspiration from hell.

Application:

The tongue separates people from pastor and parent from child. Just a little gossip or rumor expanded for interest grows to immense proportions. It will set the rumor mill flying like a raging forest fire.

People will pick on that sly remark, that innuendo, or that insinuation and carry it further into greater distortions. The rumor takes on a life of its own. The first thing we know, reputations are ruined and numbers of people alienated from one another.

One of the most dangerous weapons we have in our arsenal is our tongue. It all depends on what we have in our soul. If we have attitudes of bitterness and anger in there, the wrong things will come out of our mouths. It is a very destructive instrument.

When a person throws mud, he dirties his own hands in the process.

James 3:7

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind."

Verse seven gives us the third illustration of the uncontrolled tongue.

For

The word "for" explains verse six--that the tongue is wild in nature, defiling the whole body. The tongue defies human control and needs the power of God to restrain it.

every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea,

The word "kind" means nature. Men can tame the natural disposition and characteristic nature of these four kinds of species.

is tamed and has been tamed by mankind

James uses the word "tame" twice in this verse. The idea is to subdue, curb, restrain or control. Man has tamed the whole range of beasts from the wildest to the most domestic. We see this in the

circus where men train lions and elephants. It is possible to restrain every kind of creature but it is difficult to hold the tongue in check. It is inherently incorrigible.

Principle:

Without the power of God, the tongue is inherently incorrigible.

Application:

The tongue is inherently uncontrollable. Our mouth is innately undisciplined, irrepressible and irresponsible. That is the primitive nature of the tongue. The tongue meets every effort to control it with difficulty because it breaks bonds and rules. We can control animal nature but we cannot control human nature except by the power of God.

James 3:8

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."

But no man can tame the tongue.

Literally, "no man" is "any person of men." No human being in his own power can control the tongue. We cannot control our own tongues and we cannot control the tongues of others.

It is an unruly evil,

The tongue is incapable of restraint on the natural level. The word "unruly" means unsettled, unstable, disorderly. It is not subject to control. There is nothing constant about the tongue. It is unstable, vacillating at every turn.

The tongue is also an "evil." This evil is dormant and hidden within the nature of the person. Man can superficially tame his tongue but he cannot deal with it at its root; that is why the tongue is "unruly."

full of deadly poison

The word "deadly" means death-bearing. The tongue has something mortal about it, for it produces a kind of death. Its deadly poison fills its venom in relationships with slander, malice, anger and envy. Verbal malice destroys the reputation of men, leaders and churches.

James does not mean that the tongue is impossible to tame but is something extremely difficult to

control. It will take the power of God to tame the tongue.

Principle:

Only God's power can tame the tongue, but it is never at rest and is unstable.

Application:

Only God can ultimately tame the tongue. Many people think of themselves as wonderful Christians because they do not commit overt sins. Yet, this verse says that a Christian who does not control his tongue is like a snake with deadly venom.

Our mouths are like poisonous snakes. Out of the poison sack comes slander, judging and maligning of others. This is spiritual instability.

Ps. 141: 3 "Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips."

People who use unruly speech poison the thoughts of people toward friends and relatives. Sometimes we lose longstanding friends because we are not careful with our mouths. Poison is something we must carefully label and handle with care. It can ruin reputations. That is why we must submit our mouths to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

James 3:9

With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God."

With it we bless our God and Father,

We celebrate the Father with our tongue. The Father watches over all of His creatures, all of the time, saved or lost. The word "bless" means to speak well of. We speak well of God's sovereign care over His creatures.

James is clearly referring to Christians here. We know that James speaks of Christians because he uses the first person "we." Christians can express hypocrisy with their mouths at the same time they celebrate God.

and with it we curse men,

A "curse" is a wish of evil against a person. The word comes from two words: down, against and to pray. The idea is to wish something bad would happen to someone. There are times when we want to call down a curse on someone. Sometimes people call God into this game. However, the bottom line is that when we call down a curse on someone we sense that we ourselves are superior to them.

Ro 12: 14 "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

who have been made in the similitude of God

Even in the face of the fall, man retains the image of God. He carries nobility because of this. Notice that God negates more than just cursing other Christians; "men" in general are not to be cursed because all people bear the stamp of God on their being.

Ge 1: 26 "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'"

The fall of man sullied the image of God but he still carries that image with him. That is why we cannot take vengeance on anyone. We value other men because we are men ourselves. We do not put ourselves on a pedestal by looking on others with contempt. God wants us to honor "all men."

1 Pe 2: 17 "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."

Principle:

We show duality and contradiction in our speech when we worship God with our mouths and then express vengeance toward others.

Application:

We cannot celebrate the Creator and at the same time curse the creature. This is hypocritical inconsistency. This is not only a contradiction but also a violation of God's design for creation.

Some Christians can express sweetness and light one moment with the people they like, and the next moment convey deep bitterness with those they do not like. They can bless God in the spiritual realm and curse man in the social realm. They see no inconsistency in this. It is a double

standard from God's viewpoint. There is no call for this in God's economy. If we bless some, there is a consistency that we also bless others.

Mt 5: 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"

1 Pe 2: 23 "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously"

Vengeance belongs to the Lord so we should not play God. We should leave criticism of all men in the hands of God.

Ro 12: 19 "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

Sins of the tongue produce divine discipline. Sins of the tongue also are an indication of being out of fellowship with God. Conversely, control of the tongue is an indication of fellowship with God.

Ps 64: 8 "So He will make them stumble over their own tongue; All who see them shall flee away."

Mt 7: 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

We must make the distinction between speaking against sin and attacking the sinner. God does not expect us to condone standards that hurt people.

James 3:10

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so."

It is incongruous that both blessing and cursing should come from the same mouth. It is an absurd contradiction to bless God on one side of our mouths and curse men on the other side.

My brethren,

James is clearly speaking to Christians by appealing to their place in the family of Christ; thus the words "my brethren" convey unusual force.

these things ought not to be so

The words "ought not" are very emphatic, indicating moral responsibility. There is no place for two-faced or hypocritical speech in the Christian life. This is intolerable in God's economy of things. It is moral incongruity for both blessing and cursing to come out of the same mouth. This is utterly inconsistent to Christianity because when we curse a man, we damn the God who made the man.

Principle:

One of God's great values is consistency and so He dislikes inconsistency.

Application:

There is great incongruity in pronouncing two opposite standards of things. At one time, we blow sweet and saccharine thoughts, and the next time, we flame harsh and hurtful words.

Aesop said that the tongue is at once the best and worst of things.

Ps 62: 4 "They only consult to cast him down from his high position; They delight in lies; They bless with their mouth, But they curse inwardly."

The more we walk with the Lord, the more people watch our talk. That is why "these things ought not so to be." We cannot take it upon ourselves to censure others when we do not live up to the light that we have.

The prerogative of censorship belongs to God alone because He alone is totally objective. We cannot trust the role of God to our personal judgments. We cannot portray the idea that we are better than others are.

James 3:11

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening?"

In verse eleven, James continues his argument about the incongruity of blessing and cursing

coming out of the same mouth. He gives three illustrations in verses 11 and 12 toward this end.

Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter

James draws an illogical analogy from nature. The "spring" of water is analogous to our hearts. The heart is the aperture of our attitudes.

from the same opening?

Both fresh and bitter water do not flow from the same aperture. Water can be fresh and other water can be brackish, contaminated with sulphur or salt. If both fresh and brackish water would flow from the same source, this would be an incongruity.

Our words divulge the true condition of our hearts. How can we celebrate God at one moment and then turn around and curse men the next? This is just as incongruous as the spring that sends out salty and fresh water from the same source.

Principle:

If we deal with our hearts, that will automatically sort out our mouths.

Application:

The believer must be consistent in both what he says and how he says it. How can we speak loving words to our wives and then a short time later speak harsh words? Why do we hurt those we love with words? We speak from both sides of our mouth. We can both bless and curse from the same mouth.

If we allow God to judge our hearts, He will change our mouths. Our mouths reveal the contents of our hearts. Pressure and duress brings out the worst in us. When conflict comes, we can say some of the most amazing things. We say things that even surprise ourselves. Therefore, if we want to contend with the tongue, we must start with the heart.

Spiritual and carnal Christians are always consistent. A spiritual Christian has his heart right with God and demonstrates that by both what he says and how he says it. A carnal Christian will always speak what is consistent with his carnal heart.

Pr 15: 23 "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth,

And a word spoken in due season, how good it is!"

Pr 16: 24 "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones."

Pr 25: 11 "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver."

Words of complaint, discontent, anger and grumbling do not honor the Lord. How can we share Christ at work if our fellow employees view us as complainers?

James 3:12

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh."

James transitions from the mouth in verse 11 to the heart in this verse. This is the second illustration of blessing and cursing coming from the same mouth.

Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?

It is impossible for a fig tree to bear olives. This is completely inconsistent with the nature of a fig tree. The fruit of a tree must correspond to the nature of the tree.

Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh

As a fig tree can produce only figs and not olives, so one water source can yield only one kind of water. James is dealing with the origins of the believer's behavior. One cause yields one kind of effect.

Principle:

True spiritual production comes from God.

Application:

True spirituality does not admit contradictions of standard. God wants us to keep our tongue in tow to keep consistency with our heart. A heart of hate does not produce genuine love. The Christian's mouth should produce that which is consistent with the nature of the Christian life. Fruits of the Christian life never violate the nature of the Christian life.

Spiritual fruit is important because it shows the practical impact of the Christian life. Fruit cannot exist without the tree. It does not produce itself; fruit comes from another source. The fruit of the Christian life does not have an independent source; it comes from God. There are fruits that come from faith. We can see what is inside by what is on the outside.

Mt 12: 33 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. 34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. 36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

A Christian who curses fellow Christians has an evil heart in face of the fact that he on occasion celebrates who and what God is. God does not accept duality of worship.

James 3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom."

With this verse, James transitions into dealing with the relationship between wisdom and personal conduct (3:13-18). If we are to control our tongues, we need wisdom. Divine wisdom produces right words and right actions.

Who is wise and understanding among you?

Wisdom is the ability to look at things from God's viewpoint. The New Testament uses "wise" to mean proficient application of principle to experience. It is not only knowing facts about the Bible but correctly using those facts. Wisdom is something God gives from understanding the principles of Scripture; it does not come from self.

1 Co 2: 6 "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the

wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, 8 which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

This is the only time the New Testament uses the Greek word for "understanding." A person with "understanding" is someone who is prudent, skilled, intelligent, experienced, having expertise. This is a term of special mental perception or comprehension of God's Word. It is someone who can apply his experience to the art of living a God-oriented life.

Principle:

A wise and understanding person is someone who can apply principle to experience.

Application:

True wisdom and understanding biblically come from obedience to what we know. It is not a matter of accumulation of information.

There is a great difference between God's wisdom and the wisdom of men. Those who walk in God's wisdom walk differently from those who walk in the wisdom of men. The wisdom of God is a spiritual wisdom. Biblical wisdom is not the accumulation of knowledge but the correct use of knowledge. This kind of wisdom shows itself in our conduct. We see it in what we do because wisdom shows us how to allow God to generate divine production in our lives.

The indication of a person possessing biblical wisdom is submission to the Holy Spirit. God is interested in those who are truly skilled in righteous behavior. We do not measure our wisdom by how much we know but by how much we apply.

Ac 6: 3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business\'. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke."

Let him show by good conduct that his works are done

We give evidence of our wisdom and understanding by "good conduct." The word "conduct" means something turned upside down, a turning back. The idea is manner or way of life, conduct, behavior, deportment. The focus is on overt daily behavior.

The word "show" means expose to the eyes so that we can see the evidence or proof of a claim. Thus, the idea is to bring to light, display, exhibit. We demonstrate the reality and nature of what we have by our conduct and overt daily behavior.

Principle:

We find the expression of wisdom in the behavior of the believer.

Application:

We show our works by good conduct. The source of our works is our good conduct, a good mode of life. We manifest that mode of life by what we do. That way of life comes from God's wisdom and understanding. People will notice our unique way of life that is different and is from God.

in the meekness of wisdom

The word "meekness" is a term for humility. The kind of wisdom James values is the wisdom that operates in the sphere of "meekness." Meekness is not weakness but strength under God's control. Trench, in his book on Greek synonyms, says that meekness is inwrought grace and that the exercise of meekness is chiefly towards God. It is the attitude that accepts all God's dealings with us as good.

Ga 5: 22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

Principle:

A meek attitude accepts all God's dealings with us as good.

Application:

Meekness is not gentleness as if a gentle person is a prissy person. A meek person is a powerful

person who knows the power of God in his life. His occupation is with the Lord and not himself. It is power under control, the power of God controlling our lives.

A meek person does not look down on others with a sense of contempt. He understands only too well that he is what he is but by the grace of God. God's grace humbles him. He knows that everything he has comes from the hand of God.

2 Co 10: 1 "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ— who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you."

Ga 6: 1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

Co 3: 12 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering"

1 Pe 3: 15 "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"

James 3:14

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth."

But if you have bitter envy

We should translate the word "envy" as zeal. A zealous person is an enthusiastic person (Ro 10:2). In this context, zeal is destructive because it is a "bitter" zeal.

The word "bitter" means to cut, prick, hence, it is something sharp and pungent. The idea is "harsh envy." This is a person in an embittered state, a state of animosity. Eventually an embittered person becomes malignant and cruel. Harsh jealousy is a passion that will poison our relationships.

He 12: 14 "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled..."

Principle:

Misdirected zeal has a harsh effect on our relationships.

Application:

Pettiness and jealousy expose a weak underside. This not only makes us insensitive to others but it makes us insensitive to ourselves. The more insensitive we become to others, the more insensitive we become to ourselves. Envy keeps the cycle moving.

Ep 4: 31 "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

Some zeal triggers quarreling and strife among fellow believers. If we keep zeal under control like explosions in a motor, zeal is good. If we allow zeal to explode uncontrolled, then it is not good. Many Christians operate without "wisdom and understanding" (3:13). Zeal without knowledge is dangerous.

and self-seeking

"Self-seeking" means strife or contentiousness. A "self-seeking" person is someone who is always in the business of electioneers involved in intrigues for office. He puts himself forward and by doing so he is a partisan, and fractious. He uses any means to gain his ends. The ends justify the means. Above all, he is self-seeking. He does everything for personal gain and ambition.

The secular Greek used "self-seeking" for a person who pursued political office by unfair means. It means selfish ambition and rivalry. This person is jealous of people around him, so he resents them. He wants to be better than everyone else is.

in your hearts,

The "heart" is the basis for our motivation. This is where we believe or disbelieve and where our

speech originates. The issue is not external but internal.

Pr. 4: 23 "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life."

Matt. 15: 19 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

Luke 24: 25 "Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!'"

Acts 8: 37 "Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.'"

Rom. 10: 8 "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Principle:

Self-centered people have a problem with approbation lust.

Application:

Human wisdom always produces self-centeredness. Self-centered people cannot tolerate anything but their own ideas and desires. They deem themselves the measure of everything.

The more insensitive we are to ourselves the more likely we are to be insensitive toward others. We become hypersensitive about self and insensitive to others. A callousness of soul settles into our hearts. When this happens, our Christian lives goes into reversion. Once the ball starts rolling down this steep hill, it is hard to stop.

This person wants everyone to think he is better than everyone else is so he tries to influence everyone around him to think that he is great. His motivation is vainglorious. This creates confusion among those who connect with him. The triumph of his personal party is more crucial than the

triumph of the gospel. He gets his friends to band together to support his personal cause.

2 Co 12: 20 "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults"

Ga 5: 20 "idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies"

Ph 1: 15 "Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill."

When people have attitudes of "bitter envy" and "self-seeking" in their hearts, they will boast and will lie against the truth.

do not boast

The person who boasts is someone who wants to triumph over others. This is evil exultation over other people. He likes to downgrade others to exalt himself and clearly regards himself as superior, or would like to regard himself as superior, to others. We demand attention from others.

Principle:

Personal pride violates God's glory and diminishes people around us.

Application:

Some people glory in the fact that they can win an argument. They want to win at all costs. When this invades the church, God will not use that church for His glory because this attitude diminishes others.

The focus of our glory should be in the Lord.

1 Co 1: 31 "that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'"

and lie against the truth

To "lie" is to tell a falsehood, speak falsely, play falsely, to say that which is untrue. The main purpose of a lie is to mislead. This word involves

more than telling what is not true; it also involves the intent to deceive.

Bitter and boastful people lie to themselves and others. They try to make themselves out to be honorable. To boast is to lie. A boaster tries to whitewash a lie and make it a truth. This is to lie against the truth. Lying has its origins from the pit.

Jn 8: 44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

1 Jn 1: 6 "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."

Truth here means more than telling the truth; it means truth itself. Jesus said that He was the truth (Jn 14:6). Jesus was truth in His thinking, acting and speaking. He was truth incarnate. When Christians distort truth, they distort the true picture of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Principle:

To boast is to lie.

Application:

Boasting exaggerates the truth. A boaster cannot deal with truth because it makes him look bad. He must twist and distort reality to make himself look good. Facts do not interest him. His hypersensitivity demands attention. He gets attention by making people feel sorry for him. He portrays the idea that he is a victim abused or persecuted. No one cares for him. In this dishonorable way he weasels himself into the affections of others. He feels alienated from others so he must manipulate others into his realm.

There is a very great propensity to push others down in order to exalt ourselves. We make them look bad in order to make ourselves look good. This is lying against the truth. When we brag we distort the truth about ourselves and the truth about the Lord Jesus.

James 3:15

This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic."

This verse distinguishes divine viewpoint from the human viewpoint of the previous two verses. The Bible is God's message from Himself to us. There is where we find divine viewpoint.

This wisdom does not descend from above,

The readers of this epistle gloried in self-centered wisdom (3:13,14). This wisdom does not descend from above [heaven] but from below [earth and the forces on it]. Human wisdom is not divine viewpoint but simply human viewpoint.

Principle:

The mature Christian operates on divine viewpoint, not human viewpoint.

Application:

There is a tendency in our day for Christians to use human viewpoint to direct their Christian lives. This is a terrible mistake. Without divine viewpoint [knowing the principles of God's Word and how He thinks as over against how man thinks], we cannot live the Christian life.

1 Co 1: 20 "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world [human viewpoint]? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God [divine viewpoint], the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe."

1 Co 3: 18 "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; 20 and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.' 21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours.

23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

But is earthly,

James now gives three descriptions of human viewpoint. Human viewpoint is a far more limited viewpoint than divine viewpoint.

"Earthly" means terrestrial, existing upon the earth. Those who live in "bitter envy" and "self-seeking" operate on wisdom limited to this earth, not to God's wisdom from heaven. It is a wisdom purely produced by man.

Principle:

Human wisdom restricts us to the boundaries of finite man; divine wisdom enables us to enter into the domain of divine viewpoint.

Application:

This wisdom confines itself to the restrictions of finite man. Man is the end of man. This person has no practical place for the Word of God or even for God Himself. His self-centeredness pushes for self-interest – "I have to look out for number one." This is the centerpiece of life in North America in the twenty-first century.

Ph 3: 19 "whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things."

Sensual,

"Sensual" means belonging to the soul and refers to the natural mind and physical aspects of man. This has to do with our appetites and passions – life in the natural world, the fallen world. There is nothing higher in man. The wisdom of the previous verse is wisdom typical of human nature, not divine nature. That is soulish wisdom, not spiritual wisdom.

1 Co 2: 14 "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. 16 For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ."

Ju 19 "These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit."

Principle:

The combination of "bitter envy" and "self-seeking" produces a calloused attitude to God and to others.

Application:

Wisdom that gives rise to strife does not come from God. Do you find yourself full of bitter envy and self-interest? "Yes, I have alienated myself from family and friends. I have developed a calloused attitude toward people and life as a whole." The combination of "bitter envy" and "self-seeking" will do this every time. This is a difficult position to shed.

Demonic

"Demonic" signifies proceeding from or resembling demonic activity – demonic [not devilish]. The Bible always distinguishes between the function of the devil and those of his demons. Those who operate on bitter envy and self-centeredness act like demons, fallen angels. Those who think that they can function by operation bootstraps fall into the fallacy of satanic deception.

2 Co 11: 3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

1 Ti 4: 1 "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons"

Principle:

Those who function by operation bootstraps fall into the fallacy of satanic deception.

Application:

The devil cannot possess a believer because the Holy Spirit indwells him on a permanent basis. The Christian is the "temple of the Holy Spirit." This is not to say that the devil cannot influence a Christian.

The devil can influence the Christian by his "doctrine of demons" (1 Ti 4:1). First, the Christian neglects the Word of God. He is not hostile to the Bible, just indifferent. Then a vacuum opens up in his soul. In this condition, he is vulnerable to the teaching of Satan over a gradual process. This eventually leads to calloused rejection of the influence of the Word of God on his life.

This decline puts the believer under the influence of demons -- he has a "demonic" orientation toward life. The doctrine of demons then controls his thinking and choices. This is because he went an extended period with blackout of the soul toward the Word of God. He does not want to go to church; he does not want to listen to the Bible because he is under a different influence. He sublimates his spiritual vacuum with the doctrine of demons in a frantic attempt to fulfill his soul.

Some Christians have a propensity to get into religious activities that run counter to divine truth. Others go into wild living. All of this momentum builds further callousness on the soul toward God. When we allow a great amount of callousness to build up on our soul, we will enter into a stage of blackout toward divine things. Many Christians go into very kooky things because they do not want to deal with the principles of the Word on their lives.

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want to deal with the principles of the Word on their lives.

James 3:16

For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."

This verse gives the outcome of operating by the human wisdom of envy and strife.

For where envy

James takes up the ideas of "envy" and "self-seeking" again (3:14). These sins are the source of "confusion" and conceit. Envy is a selfish motivational sin.

2 Co 12: 20 "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumult"

and self-seeking exist,

Self-seeking is a partisan sin, a sin which divides people. It is the spirit of rivalry.

confusion

The word "confusion" means instability. This word comes from 3 Greek words: no, down, standing and means a state of disorder, disarray, disturbance, rebellion and tumult. "Envy" and "self-seeking" create unruliness and insurrection. These people rise up to openly defy authority. They violently oppose authority in the church. This disorder comes from the man-centered values of "envy" and "self-seeking."

Lu 21: 9 "But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately."

Ac 19: 40 "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering."

Ac 24: 12 "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor

inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city."

and every evil thing are there

The word "evil" here connotes the ideas of slight, trivial, blown about by every wind. It came to mean unworthy, paltry and contemptible carrying the idea of a lower order of things – of no account, trivial, petty, sorry, worthless, ordinary. The idea is not of moral evil but of practical worthlessness.

The word "thing" denotes something done – a matter, an event, a deed, something accomplished. We get the English word "pragmatic" from the Greek word. The use of the word "thing" involves the broadest category of the paltry pragmatics of envy and self-seeking.

Principle:

It is possible to be a religious zealot but also be a troublemaker and a good-for-nothing.

Application:

Tumultuous Christianity takes place when there is envy and self-seeking in the camp; biblical wisdom brings us to love, peace and joy. Envy and self-seeking are polar opposites of inwrought grace [meekness] in the soul.

Envy motivates self-seeking. Strife excuses itself by distorting the truth. It lives in malice, confusion and contention. This makes it vulnerable to conflict and broken relationships.

God's evaluation of wisdom is vastly different from man's standards of conduct. If we judge ourselves by man's standards, we look good. If we judge ourselves by God's standards, we see ourselves for what we truly are. God's norms for life defuse self-seeking and rivalry among Christians.

When churches enter into conflict, they reveal to everyone that they operate on human wisdom. They become a conglomeration of people who put themselves first. They cause great tumult to fellow Christians around them. They could care less if they ruin the testimony of their church. Their desire to be right takes precedence over the testimony of Jesus Christ to the community. After their church splits, they leave missionaries to languish on a foreign field without support.

1 Co. 14: 33 "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

James 3:17

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

In this verse, James contrasts the human wisdom of envy and self-seeking with the divine viewpoint on life. He begins to list eight qualities of divine viewpoint.

But

The word "but" contrasts human wisdom as over against God's wisdom. Having warned of the folly of human wisdom, James in this verse goes on to the benefits of God's wisdom that comes from above (1:17).

the wisdom that is from above

Wisdom that comes down from above is God's viewpoint. It is the ability to apply God's principles to experience. God confers this wisdom especially on believers who walk with Him. When a person applies God's viewpoint to his experience, he operates with God's wisdom. He has integrity with God.

1 Co. 1: 24 "but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Co. 2: 3 "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

Principle:

God's wisdom is a divine endowment and not acquired by human attainment.

Application:

God's wisdom comes to us by divine endowment and not my human attainment. As we study the Word of God, it will give us a different outlook on life – divine viewpoint.

Pr. 2: 6 "For the Lord gives wisdom;

From His mouth come knowledge and understanding"

Pr 9: 10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,

And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."

is first pure,

James lists eight characteristics of divine viewpoint in verses 17 and 18. The first is "pure." It is first logically. This is the starting point of this list because of its importance to the rest of the list. If we do not have "pure" wisdom, we distort everything. Only the pure in heart can see God and fellowship with Him.

The word "pure" carries the idea of immaculate, free from fault, free from defilement. "Pure" is something not contaminated with something else and thus is free from blemish. This word does not mean pure in the sense of morality but in the sense of a capacity to receive divine truth and apply it to experience without mixing it with human viewpoint. This person can utilize a maximum of God's grace in his soul. This is purity in the sense of maximum capacity to relate to the principles of God's Word and apply them to experience.

The Bible calls God Himself "pure" so His wisdom is pure. It does not distort divine viewpoint. Therefore, if we have God's wisdom, we have pure viewpoint.

1 John 3: 3 "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

When the Christian operates on God's wisdom or divine viewpoint, his heart is pure in his judgments.

2 Co. 7: 11 "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter."

1 Tim. 5: 22 "Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure."

The first characteristic of wisdom, leading the seven which follow, is "pure." It is "first" because

there are many fake kinds of peace, mercy, etc. Purity comes before peace because it guides all successive virtues. It is first in time and rank.

Principle:

There is no coexistence between divine viewpoint and human viewpoint because they are mutually exclusive.

Application:

God's holiness and human sin cannot coexist. When we allow divine viewpoint to take hold of our hearts, it cannot do anything but issue actions that please God. There is an integral relationship between divine viewpoint and the action of a believer. That is why God concerns Himself most with "pure" wisdom. The redeemed heart has the potential to be a wise heart with a wise viewpoint on life.

then

The word "then" means thereafter. After God gives purity of wisdom, He then adds further qualities of divine wisdom. The qualities that follow "pure" show what wisdom free from contamination does to the Christian.

peaceable,

A characteristic of divine wisdom is that it is salutary. It is free from turmoil. A peaceable person willingly and selflessly does not affirm himself because he has a sense of inner peace.

Mt 5: 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers,

For they shall be called sons of God."

Principle:

God gives us a spirit of tranquility both with ourselves and with others when we engage His wisdom.

Application:

Peace is an outcome of pure wisdom. Peaceableness stands in contrast to bitter envy and self-seeking. A believer with divine viewpoint is a peacemaker. If a man has peace with God, he has a much greater possibility of having peace with his fellow man.

He 12: 14 "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord"

If the other person in a quarrel is irreconcilable, then there is nothing the believer with divine wisdom can do. He cannot control whether people hate him. A believer with divine viewpoint creates the best possible environment for peace. He can control whether he hates back.

Ro 12: 18 "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

gentle,

"Gentle" means forbearance, moderation, reasonable. It comes from two words: unto and fitting or seemly. This person is equitable, fair or moderate. He forebears other people and does not insist on his own way. He can yield to others because he possesses a forbearing spirit. He willingly puts up with dishonor and mistreatment. He has his rights but he is willing to forgo them.

The word "gentle" occurs four times in the New Testament (1 Ti 3:3; Ti 3:2; 1 Pe 2:18). Paul uses another word for the same idea in Philippians where a conflict between two women threatened to split the church.

Phil. 4: 5 "Let your gentleness [pliability, flexibility] be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

Principle:

Divine viewpoint produces a grace-giving believer.

Application:

The "gentle" believer is not rigid and does not stand on strict justice. It is possible to be judicially right but not do the right thing. It is one thing to be right according to the norm of the letter but wrong in terms of the spirit of the thing.

We need to redress the injustice of legalistic justice. We do this by understanding the principle of grace, "I have not earned anything and do not deserve anything from God. He gives to me out of His unadulterated grace even though I do not

deserve it." We should deal with fellow believers in the same way.

A person of grace deals with others from the place of strength. There is strength in God's grace. This is the grace of divine viewpoint. All we have to do is remember how much the Lord forgives us, in order to give us the right perspective on forgiving others.

Ep 4: 31 "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

Divine viewpoint produces a forbearing and considerate attitude. This believer is quick to forgive. He is not quick to condemn.

willing to yield,

The only time the New Testament uses the Greek word for "willing to yield" is here. This one Greek word is made up of two Greek words: good, easily and to prevail upon, persuaded. The idea of "willing to yield" is compliant. A "willing to yield" believer will easily obey. He allows himself to be persuaded; he is approachable. He is open to reason and willing to listen to others without acrimony.

Principle:

Divine viewpoint understands the importance of pliability and the capacity to be persuaded.

Application:

The person "willing to yield" is open to reason and persuasion; he is not a stubborn person. The person with divine viewpoint does not stand on his rights but forgoes those rights for others. He does not hold a grudge.

Divine wisdom yields not because of necessity but by conviction. The believer responds because he believes it is the right thing to do; he has been persuaded to do it.

A compliant believer is not someone without a backbone but someone with whom others can reason. A spineless person has a weak willingness to yield. On the other hand, a mature believer willingly yields to God's Word and accepts His

counsel. He freely makes allowances for others. He is lenient toward their violations of him. This person is not rigid and exacting. He is not implacable.

Mt 5: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Christians are not perfect and require process to come to conclusions about an issue. There are the absolutes of the Word of God and there are the non-absolutes of man. By employing the latter, we open ourselves to persuasion.

full of mercy

"Mercy" is the outward manifestation of compassion. A merciful person is someone who shows compassion, pity, or clemency. A person who exercises mercy empathizes with the person who receives his mercy. He also has the resources to give mercy. Mercy is the willingness to reach out and touch someone in need - the willingness to help someone. This person learned grace and gives grace to others.

Luke 1: 50 "And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation."

Heb. 4: 16 "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Gal. 6: 16 "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God."

Mt 5: 7 "Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy."

An evidence of divine wisdom is seen in someone who is full of mercy. This shows his understanding of applying principles of Scripture to experience. He is able to forgive and expresses a heart of kindness to those around him.

The word "full" indicates the extent of mercy. Divine viewpoint does not hold back with paltry mercy but extends mercy fully. It is one thing to be merciful but it is yet something more to be "full of mercy."

Principle:

Divine viewpoint produces a mercy full of grace in action.

Application:

Mercy extends a hand to miserable people. The merciful believer has the capacity to see another Christian in need and tries to help any way he can. Mercy is grace in action.

Grace always precedes mercy. God favored us first; we favor others secondly. We freely give favor to others because God freely gave favor to us. We do not require that others merit favor before we relate to them. We give to them freely, without charge. We expect nothing in return. Grace paves the way for mercy.

Ep 2: 4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us"

Ti 3: 5 "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"

Jude 21 "keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

The Christian goes beyond grace in that he willingly gives mercy to those in need. The Christian does not despair in his grief toward others, because he seeks a solution for their need. He takes a constructive position toward pain. He addresses misery with grace.

How many times have we vilified Christians for their misdeeds? Yet, mercy does not require that they deal with their guilt before we extend our mercy. We delight in assuaging pain in others regardless of who they are.

Ga 6: 1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

and good fruits,

"Fruit" is something produced by inherent energy of a living organism. In biblical terms, fruit is the

visible expression of God's power that works in us and visibly shows itself. It is the supernatural result of God's working in our lives. This is something that God produces, not man.

Gal. 5: 22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control."

Phil. 1: 11 "being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Eph. 5: 8 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord."

The word "good" means good of intrinsic value. It is something good in its character or constitution so it will produce something beneficial in effect. It carries a sense of honor; it is beneficial. Fruit is one thing but "good" fruit is another.

Rom. 12: 21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Gal. 6: 10 "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Eph. 4: 28 "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

1 Th. 5: 15 "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all."

1 Pet. 3: 13 "And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?"

3 John 11 "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God."

Principle:

Fruit is the manifest production of divine viewpoint.

Application:

It is one thing to verbally extend mercy toward others but it is another to extend acts of mercy. Words of mercy are one thing but acts of mercy are something more. The purpose of planting wheat is to produce wheat. It is not enough to plant; we must produce. It is not enough to talk about mercy; we must do mercy.

without partiality

"Without partiality" denotes not to be parted, not prejudiced, impartial. The word consists of a negative plus the word partiality. This is a person without partiality who does not distinguish between people; he does not decide before he knows the facts. He does not make judgments without facts. He is not in the business of censuring others.

Principle:

Divine viewpoint produces a believer who has fixed principles in how he relates to other people.

Application:

The Christian "without partiality" is unshakable and is sound in his faith. He does not always deal with doubt.

A believer with divine viewpoint does not seek to distinguish himself but he distinguishes others. Moreover, he does not distinguish some above others. Wisdom does not divide people. This believer will not allow differences to divide.

This Christian will not use the double standard of judging others when there is something wrong in his own camp. He will not use one standard for judging a friend and another standard for judging an enemy. He does not vacillate between standards but is consistent with everyone.

A person "without partiality" does not allow expediency to determine how he relates to others. He is a man of fixed principles. He does not relate to one person one way and to another person another way. He does not play politics. Status or privilege does not impress him.

Lu 15: 2 "And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

and without hypocrisy

The words "without hypocrisy" comprise a negative and the word to judge; this person does not judge.

Greek theater used this word for judging behind a mask – to act behind a mask. The mask itself is not the actor, nor even a projection of the actor. The actor falsely projects someone whom the actor is not. He "acts" differently than what he truly is.

A person "without hypocrisy" does not fake it. He does not disguise himself behind pretense or show; he is genuine. He is consistent with what he believes. He wears no disguise and is no phony. A person free from hypocrisy is free. Hypocrisy is a powerful form of slavery.

Ro 12: 9 "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."

2 Co 6: 6 "by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love"

1 Pt 1: 22 "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart"

1 Ti 1: 5 "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith"

2 Ti 1: 5 "when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also."

Principle:

Divine viewpoint produces a genuine believer.

Application:

The believer with wisdom does not act with "hypocrisy." He is someone without pretense. He presents himself for who he truly is. He gives no Judas kiss. He does not portray himself as

something better than he is. We can depend on this person. We trust his word because we believe in his character. He is no faker.

Mt. 6: 2 "Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward 5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward 16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward."

Mt 7: 5 "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

James 3:18

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

We best understand this difficult verse in the light of verse sixteen that sets forth the thesis that envy and self-seeking bring confusion and every evil work. Bad seed produces bad fruit. Verse 17 shows the value of divine wisdom. In verse 18, good seed produces good fruit.

Now the fruit of righteousness

The "fruit of righteousness" is the fruit that comes from people who walk in God's wisdom and under divine viewpoint. This is the fruit described in verse seventeen. "Fruit" then, in this verse, is a term for spiritual maturity.

"Fruit" carries the idea of harvest. The harvest is spiritual maturity that comes by divine viewpoint. Maturity always bears a sense of justice and truth. Wisdom from above makes us think and act righteously.

Ga 5: 22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness,

self-control. Against such there is no law."

Principle:

Divine viewpoint produces maturity.

Application:

In the sowing of seed there is a hope of a harvest. The farmer labors for the harvest. As there is an inescapable relation between seed and harvest, so there is an inevitable correlation between wisdom, peace and maturity. Divine viewpoint produces a peace that results in maturity.

2 Co. 9: 10 "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness\""

Ph. 1: 11 "\being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

There is wisdom in knowing what is right and then doing what is right from God's viewpoint. Human wisdom will fail us if we depend on it.

Ep 5: 15 "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

"Righteousness" is a characteristic of God's wisdom. All God's wisdom is inherently right because He is absolute in His nature. He never falters or fails in His judgments. God never learned anything because He always knew everything. He knows everything exhaustively, completely, thoroughly and with infinite perspicacity. When Christians apply the principles of Scripture to their experience, they acquire a divine viewpoint on their lives.

The Lord is so determined to produce this righteous maturity [wisdom] in us that He will chasten us to achieve it. If we are on the receiving end of divine discipline, we should not be anxious about it but realize God's purpose in it. The quicker we learn the lesson from it, the sooner He will take the heat off.

He 12: 11 "Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the

peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

is sown in peace

The farmer that sows seed is the farmer that reaps a harvest. The seed is divine viewpoint [God's wisdom]. It is not the fruit we sow but the seed of the wisdom of God's peace we sow that produces fruit.

The fruit of righteousness demands climate and conditions of peace. The climate of bitterness and self-seeking is not good for producing spiritual fruit. Peace is the spiritual process for arriving at righteousness.

by those who make peace

Peace comes from peacemakers. Peacemakers are those who function on divine viewpoint. They cultivate peace by holding a tension between a tolerant process and a presentation of righteousness. Peacemakers do not diminish the seriousness of sin in this process but they communicate truth in love. Peace is the process of achieving righteousness.

Principle:

If we sow righteousness, we make peace because unrighteousness is the source of self-seeking and envy.

Application:

There is no conflict between righteousness and peace. Both can and should exist together. It is not necessary to forgo justice because of political sensitivity. Jesus harmonized righteousness and peace on the cross. He both met the absolute righteousness of God and He also made provision for salvation.

Ps 85: 10 "Mercy and truth have met together;

Righteousness and peace have kissed."

There is a tendency for those who stand for righteousness to forsake a peaceful process in reaching their goal. It is not necessary to be nasty to achieve righteousness. Righteousness does not come by strife.

Using the right process to achieve righteousness does not necessitate that a mature believer gloss

over sin. A medical doctor must objectively diagnose the disease, "I am afraid that I have bad news for you, you have cancer." He owes honesty to his patient and anything less would violate his patient's health. On the other hand, he does not callously blurt out the bad news but prepares his patient properly. Surgery may hurt the patient but it is for his own good.

James 4:1

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?"

James launches chapter four with three forms of desire that cause conflict: 1) an orientation to pleasure (4:1), 2) the emptiness of coveting (4:2), and 3) self-centered craving (4:2b-3).

The first 12 verses show the cause of conflict.

Where do wars

The word "where" indicates the source of wars among Christians.

The word "wars" literally means armed conflict but figuratively it means strife, conflict, quarrel. We get the English word "polemic" from this Greek word. Some Christians levy war against other Christians in a prolonged and strategic way. Sometimes this involves a series of attacks. This is course of conflict as a way of life. They love to make open war and engage in protracted conflict with each other; they love this life.

and fights come from

The word "fights" means strife, combat, battle. This is someone who takes up arms in a specific battle. Figuratively, the word "fights" alludes to persons at variance, disputants, contention. This is the tactical aspect of war. Christians sometimes enter into open quarreling and violent wrangling. Their weapon is the tongue. They use it intensively in a bitter way; they clash in a fierce way.

among you?

"Wars" and "fights" on occasion take place between Christians. They engage in flat out verbal brawls in church. People take sides with one

group or another. Some churches enter into real donnybrooks.

1 Co 1: 12 "Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.' 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"

Principle:

Both strategic and tactical conflict among believers is against divine viewpoint.

Application:

The source of conflict among Christians is the human viewpoint of self-seeking. Some Christians strategically enter into conflict with fellow believers. They do it with forethought. Their purpose in life is to levy war against Christians! Conflict is a way of life for them. They love a good fight.

Other Christians like to fight tactical wars. They use the hit and run method of the tongue. They dispute anything anyone in authority has to say.

2 Ti 2: 23 "But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife."

Do they not come from

The word "from" means out of. James deals with the source of conflict among Christians. By asking this in question form, James appeals to the conscience of the Christians to whom he writes dispersed across the Roman Empire.

your desires for pleasure

"Pleasure" in this verse has the idea of "sinful desire" or the gratification of natural desire. It is the delight of desire, a pleasant lust. The Greek uses this word for physical pleasure and at times for sexual pleasure. We get our English word "hedonism" from this Greek word. Hedonism is the uninhibited desire to fill every pleasure available. The New Testament always uses this word in the sinful sense. It means satisfied pleasure.

Ja 4:3 "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Principle:

Personal gratification is the reason for conflict in the Christian community.

Application:

Many people superficially think that strife among Christians begins with external situations. This is not true; conflict comes from an entirely different source – a pleasure orientation to life.

Lu 8: 14 "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity."

Differences among Christians make us unhappy people. They rob our peace and usefulness as servants of Christ. All this begins within. If we allow pleasure to run rampant, we will enter into a danger to the structure of our spirituality. If pleasure gains the predominance in our souls, spiritual defeat is at hand.

Some Christians live for personal gratification of sensual and natural desire. They let their pleasure tyrannize them by allowing pleasure to become their primary orientation to life (1 Th 4:3-5). When these Christians give themselves over to these sins, they lose their spiritual freedom. They think that they gain freedom but they lose freedom because they become slaves to sin. Their pleasure is their master. They enter a frantic search for happiness through pleasure.

Jude 16 "These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. 17 But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: 18 how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. 19 These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit."

Hedonism is the philosophy of Playboy magazine, the philosophy that pleasure is the chief end of man. Aristippus the Cyrene (435-355 B.C.) formalized the philosophy of hedonism and

taught that we are to avert pain and seek pleasure as a way of life. Christianity is not pleasure oriented but God oriented. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

that war in your members?

The word "members" here refers to fallen sinful dynamics within our mind and body. This does not refer to church members. Every Christian has the potential for an army of lusts to encamp within his soul.

Ro 7: 23 "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

"War" means to serve as a soldier, a soldier in service, to make war, do military service, serve in the army. The figurative idea here is spiritual warfare. Pleasure makes spiritual military expeditions in the soul; it makes incursions in the soul. Passion constantly fights to have its way with our soul. It does more than prowl in our souls; it wars against the will of God. Pleasure takes to the field of our hearts but it breaks out in open warfare in the church. That is why we must go to spiritual war against it.

1 Tim. 1: 18 "This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19 having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, 20 of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."

1 Pet. 2: 11 "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Principle:

Interpersonal tensions come from inner personal tension.

Application:

Strife in Christian community occurs from within ourselves – from carnality, from satisfying self. Every Christian engages in the war of allowing his sin capacity to dominate him versus allowing the power of the Holy Spirit to control him.

2 Co 10: 3 "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled."

Power lust, lusts of dominion, lust for pleasure, materialism lust all broil in the community of believers. All this comes from the corruption of carnality and from lack of spirituality. We need to lay the axe to these sins by confession and yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit.

2 Tim. 2: 18 "3 You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

James 4:2

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask."

You lust

Almost all evils in life come from our system of coveting. The verb for "lust" means to turn upon a thing, to covet, to fix desire upon, to long for. In the present tense, it means to keep on coveting after something. Lust here has to do with seeking place and special honor.

This word for "lust" is a different word than the word in verse one. The word in this verse comes from two words: upon and desire, passion. The idea here is inward impulse manifesting itself in such things as approbation lust, power lust and

lascivious lust. This person sets his soul on these things.

Mt 5: 27 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Ga 5: 16 "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

2 Tm 2: 22 "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

and do not have.

The verb for "do not have" means to light upon, obtain, hit upon any person or thing, to hit the mark. We do not gain answer to prayer because covetousness distorts our spiritual life.

He 6: 15 "And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise."

Ro 11: 7 "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

Principle:

Lust does not give us what we desire.

Application:

A craving for something does not complete the thing. Lust does not bring us the desired end we seek. The method does not produce the end result. We can set our hearts on something but it does not necessary bring us our desire. If we make financial success our goal, we will find no ultimate fulfillment in that.

Ac 20: 33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel."

You murder

"Murder" is the final consequence of frustrated desire. The idea has the possibility of lethal hatred rather than literal murder. In any case, the idea is that covetousness results in destructive behavior. Absalom offers a good example of this (2 Sa 15-17) in his attempt to kill his father, David. In his turn,

David had killed Uriah because he lusted after Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. It is clearly believers whom James addresses when he says "you murder."

1 Pe 4: 15 "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters."

and covet

This is not the same word for "covet" as in 3:14. The idea in this verse is to boil with desire toward something that belongs to someone else. The person does this because he deems himself to be or have less than someone else and wants the same for himself. He takes the next step and tries to tear down what is in the other person.

and cannot obtain.

The word "obtain" means to attain to, to reach, to hit the mark, to gain one's end, to be successful. Coveting never reaches its goal. A bad feeling about someone else does not improve our place in any way.

Principle:

We cannot attain a high place by putting others down.

Application:

Some people are never satisfied. God can give them the moon but they will be frustrated. If we do not get what we want, we manipulate our way to get it. Some people lust for money to such a degree that they will kill for it. A man falls for another man's wife and that drives him to murder his own wife.

We think that we can build ourselves up by tearing someone else down. We believe that someone else's failure brings our success. If someone has an accomplishment, we diminish it by some negative comment about him. Our jealousy drives our judgment because we feel diminished by his success. Coveting seeks to hide one's own inadequacy by detracting from others.

You fight and war.

All conflict originates in self. An attitude of murder and coveting always produces difference and discord among believers.

Principle:

Lust for place brings rivalry among believers.

Application:

Lust for place and privilege brings rivalry among believers. All conflict comes from covetousness. We cannot gain recognition by a negative. We find no place by downing others. Lust for recognition is the root of wars among believers.

Yet you do not have because you do not ask

The addressees of the book of James did not pray about their needs, so they did not get answers to the prayers that they did not ask! They deemed themselves sufficient in themselves so they did not pray about their needs.

"Ask" conveys the idea of imploring (1:5-6). God wants us to ask things from Him because asking is an act of dependence. Christians are powerless in their spiritual lives because they simply do not ask God for things because of unbelief. Yet, prayer has as much power today as in any period of church history.

The root of all carnality is the same - internal lusts contrary to God's plan. The reason we do not pray is that we approach life from an autonomous viewpoint.

Principle:

The remedy for a lust orientation to life lies in prayer.

Application:

The sure bet solution to rivalry is prayer. Ask God for something beyond your normal ability. It is better to deal with God than to manipulate men.

Jn 16: 24 "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Carnal Christians meet all their needs by operation bootstraps, "I have enough education, enough brains. Why should I depend on God?" God wants us to ask.

Mt 7: 7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be

opened. 9 Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

James 4:3

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

You ask

The word "ask" conveys the idea of imploring. There is an element of deference proper in prayer. Jesus Himself did not "ask" with this sense of deference proper for us; He asks on equal status with the Father. However, we come to the Father as finite beings asking something from the infinite One.

and do not receive,

God does not answer every prayer, because there are conditions to answered prayer. We find some of these conditions in 1:5-7,

Ja 1:5 "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

because you ask amiss,

The word "amiss" means improperly, badly, incorrectly. The improper request in this case is praying with motivation of personal pleasure.

that you may spend it

The word "spend" connotes to consume, squander, waste. Some people excessively spend money on pleasure. This is what the prodigal son did with his inheritance (Lu 15:13). Paul, on the other hand, did another kind of spending,

2 Co 12: 15 "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved."

on your pleasures.

"Pleasures" is the same term as in verse one. It is from the root for hedonism, the philosophy of pleasure. If it feels good, do it.

Principle:

God answers prayer when we pray legitimately.

Application:

There is a legitimate asking and a non-legitimate asking. God established prayer on certain conditions but we can misuse it. God does not hear the prayer that seeks personal pleasure. The thesis of prayer is to give deference to the will of God, who sovereignly provides for us, for He does not always give us what we want but He always gives us what we need.

Some of us pray and God does not answer our prayers. We say, "Why does God not answer my prayers? Does He hear me? It appears that the heavens are silent." The problem lies within us.

1 Jn 5: 14 "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

If our motivation in prayer is to gain place, pleasure, power and prestige, then we ask amiss, improperly. This kind of prayer disgraces God. God honors prayer motivated by His purposes.

Mt 6: 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

James 4:4

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

Adulterers and adulteresses!

James uses "adulterers and adulteresses" in the figurative sense, not the literal sense here. The word "adulterers" does not occur in some manuscripts but the word "adulteresses" is always present. James intends shock value with this term. Believers throughout the Roman Empire were no longer faithful to God so James shocks them by calling them "adulteresses." We violate intimacy with God by loving the world because the world is the Devil's kingdom and system of values. God will alarm us with that truth occasionally.

1 Jn 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. 17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

Do you not know

The words "do you not know" are a challenge to carnal Christians to break out of their carnality. They need to discern a fundamental principle to do this, which James expresses in the next phrases.

that friendship with the world

The word "that" introduces the principle by which the believer breaks out of carnality. If he understands the havoc that worldliness does to his fellowship with God, then he might break out.

The readers of the book of James had fallen in love with the world. The word "friend" means affection. Carnal Christians gave their deepest emotional affection to the world. The world is a system of belief about what is best for one's life. The Devil runs this system. They were, in effect, in love with the Devil's ideas.

Jn 11: 1 "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."

Jn 14:29 "And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. 30 I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this

world [the Devil] is coming, and he has nothing in Me."

2 Co 4: 3 "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."

1 Jn 5: 19 "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one."

is enmity with God?

Note the contrasting words "friend" and "enmity." If a Christian loves the world, he is the enemy of God. Whenever he becomes a friend to the world, he will hate God. The carnal Christian revolts against who and what God is by cuddling up to the world system. The word "enmity" means alienation.

Rom. 8: 7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

Principle:

Worldliness is a condition of the heart and attitude that changes our orientation of life away from God's values.

Application:

A carnal Christian is someone who divides his affections between the world-system and God's viewpoint.

We cannot love the world and God at the same time. It is either/or, not both/and. God demands that our love for Him be mutually exclusive. He does not want the bride of Christ [the church] to get into bed with anyone else.

Jesus reconciled us to God when we accepted His unadulterated grace. We are no longer God's enemies.

Ro 5: 10 "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having

been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Eph. 2: 14 "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity."

Whoever therefore There are no exceptions to the following principle. wants to be a friend of the world The word "wants" conveys more than desire or a wish but the more forceful idea of resolving to hold one value over another. It is a volitional decision after careful deliberation. This is the process whereby a carnal Christian arrives at his carnality. 2 Ti 4: 10 "...for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica – Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia."

Principle:

Friendship with the world constitutes the carnal Christian as an adulteress.

Application:

Some Christian chose the world system over God's system. The world-system is all that is contrary to God's viewpoint. There is a difference between the world-system and the natural world. We live in the natural world, therefore, we do not from the physical world but we do separate ourselves from the world-system. We believe in separation from the world but isolation from it. We are in the world but not of it. We are what the soul is to the body. 2 Co 6: 17 "Therefore 'Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.' 18 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.'" We cannot love God halfheartedly. He wants all of us or none of us. To embrace one is to forsake the other. When we lose heart for God something else has displaced our love for God.

makes himself an enemy of God

The word "makes" means to assign, to establish, to institute, to bring into a certain state, to exhibit one's self. Once we become a friend of the world, we assign ourselves to the position of an enemy of God. We appoint ourselves to this position of an enemy of God by using the world-system for our essential values.

Principle:

Friendship with the world and friendship with God are mutually exclusive.

Application:

We commit spiritual infidelity when we love the world. Friendship with the world and friendship with God are mutually exclusive. A person who attempts to love God and the world simultaneously is a double-minded man. He wants his cake and eat it too. This is spiritual adultery. Mt. 6: 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." 2 Co 6: 14 "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.'" 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty." God is a jealous God and will not tolerate unfaithfulness. He does not share Himself with anyone or anything. The person who falls in love with the world constitutes himself against God. He is not just indifferent to God but he is the enemy of God. He deems that God is not sufficient for his needs so he runs off to his mistress, the world. In adopting this system of values, he cuts off God's blessing from his life. When the carnal Christian fully buys into the Satan's system, he completely shuts down to the Word of God. His orientation of

values changes from God's viewpoint to Satan's viewpoint. Satan's viewpoint might not be overt evil but a philosophy or a religious belief contrary to the principles of the Bible. His heart hardens toward the principles of the Word. He eventually shuts down his volition toward God wholly. The longer the carnal believer stays in this orientation away from God the deeper he gets into Satan's system. Conversely, the greater momentum he has in the Word of God the stronger he gets in his orientation to God's system of values. It takes many decisions to get to either belief system. Ro 12: 1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Col. 3: 2 "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

James 4:5

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, 'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?"

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain,

For the third time, James uses the word "Scripture" (2:8,23). The mention of Scripture here does not refer to a specific passage but to the general gist of teaching on God's jealousy (Ex 20:5; 34:14; Ps. 42:1; 84:2; Zech. 8:2).

The Bible never speaks in "vain" in its pronouncements. The declarations of James in the previous verses are not arbitrary. Some of his readers might have thought that he was too categorical and absolute; "James should be more moderate in his writing. He should be more qualifying and relative in his message." James argues strongly that he takes his points from the Scripture and not from the mere dead words of man.

'The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously'?

This sentence is one of the most difficult to interpret in James so we cannot come to a definitive meaning.

The first possibility may be the idea that the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer does not create the sin of jealousy in him. In this case, we should not capitalize the word "Spirit" because this term would refer to the human spirit [the Greek does not use capitals]. The idea of this sentence would be that the friendship of the world breeds envy.

The body cannot sin by itself; it requires a "spirit" within it to commit acts of sin. Jealousy is the sadness that grieves over the success of others. This is a selfish sin. Jealousy murdered Able. Jealousy put Joseph on a course of bondage to Egypt. Jealousy put the Lord to death.

The second possibility may be that we can make the Holy Spirit jealous by our sin. The idea behind "jealously" in this interpretation is the feeling of displeasure about hearing of something grievous. The Holy Spirit is jealous that we might be wholly devoted to God.

The word "yearns" is a strong term meaning to long after or desire something greatly. This is a term of huge passion. The human spirit wholly lusts after things contrary to the will of God.

Ro 7: 17 "But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me."

1 Co 2: 12 "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God."

The word "dwells" means to cause to dwell, to put within. The Holy Spirit's jealousy longs for fellowship with the spirit that dwells in us. He is jealous for our love. Some believers committed spiritual adultery (4:4) so they needed to understand something about how God longs for His people.

1 Co 6: 19 "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"

Principle:

We immobilize God's Word in our hearts when we rationalize it for our own ends.

Application:

Our propensity to sin (Ps 51:5) does not reduce the responsibility for our sin. If we rationalize sin away, we put ourselves in serious spiritual jeopardy. We need to grasp how God the Holy Spirit longs to fellowship with us.

James 4:6

But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'."

In contrast to the envious person of verse 5, James now deals with how God views the humble believer. This verse shows that there is a great difference between pride and humility. James contrasts the envy of man with the grace of God.

But He gives more grace.

The words "more grace" is literally "greater grace." God's grace always surpasses His previous grace. God's always has more grace available for those who sin. God gives grace but He gives more grace. "More grace" indicates the complete sufficiency of God's grace. There is an endless source of God's grace in God's capacity. God will never run out of grace for there is always more to come.

Rom. 5: 20 "Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more..."

"Grace" is far more than unmerited favor. Grace is all that God is free to do for us based on the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. God does not limit His grace to our salvation. We need daily forgiveness of sin. We need daily strength. God will meet our every need. God will give grace for every need.

He 4: 16 "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The word "gives" conveys the idea that God continually gives freely. The meaning of the verb carries the idea of to give freely. Nothing inhibits God's grace. He gives fully and freely to any believer who wants to avail himself of it.

Principle:

We can never exhaust God's grace because He gives it in abundance.

Application:

We can never exhaust God's grace for there is always more to follow. It is His nature to give. God is a great giver. When we are weak, that is God's opportunity to give us grace -- the greater our sin, the greater the grace of God. Conversely, the more we depend on self, the less availability there is to the grace of God.

2 Co 12: 9 "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God's job stops at the absolute promise of His grace. He makes the application of His promises conditional on our faith. We must apply His promises by faith if they are to take effect in our lives. What good is the grace of God to us if we do not apply it to our experience? God's grace will produce a godly life. Grace produces grace in us toward others. If God gives to us, we willing give to others.

Ti 2: 11 "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

Therefore

The "therefore" indicates the reason God makes His grace available to us. We engage God's promises and His grace through humility. That is the one condition for receiving God's grace. James

quotes Proverbs 3:34 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament [the Septuagint]. Peter also quotes this verse in 1 Peter 5:5.

1 Pet. 5: 5 "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'."

A "proud" person is someone who shows himself to be above others. The Greek word comes from two words: over and to appear. Thus, a proud person is someone who appears to be over others. He distains and despises other believers. The New Testament always uses this term for the sinful ideas of arrogant, disdainful, haughty. This is someone who loves to have the preeminence. He has a pompous estimate of his merit or means and carries an ostentatious pride. He wants to show himself above other people. He carries contempt for others because he is so full of himself.

The word "resist" has the meaning of to set oneself against, to oppose oneself to. It comes from two Greek words: against and to arrange. "Resist" was a military term carrying the idea of to arrange in battle against. God sets Himself in full battle dress against proud people. Pride is the foundation sin from which all sin flows.

Principle:

God goes to battle against the proud.

Application:

The proud believer sets himself above other believers. God then sets Himself above this believer and goes to battle against him. We must not confuse pride with genuine greatness. There are great believers who stand head and shoulders above the rest of us.

Pride believes that we are greater than we are. This is a figment of our imagination. God will set Himself against us to do battle with us if we depend on ourselves. This is not passive resistance but active opposition. He will actively battle against us if we operate on pride. No sin provokes God's resistance more than pride.

This sin will preempt us from engaging God's grace because no other sin sets itself against God

more than the sin of pride. It is a declaration of independence from God. We can find pride in every sin because pride is independence from God and the foundation to all sin. Pride deems itself sufficient and God's grace insufficient for our needs.

Pr 16: 5 "Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished."

Spiritual pride is deadly because it deceives us into believing that we are spiritually above others. Pride hinders God's grace offered to those without Christ and pride hinders "more grace" to those who know Him. Envy, self-seeking and ambition have pride as their root. Humility does not seek preeminence. A humble believer is not self-seeking. He does not feel that he has rights but knows that everything he has comes from the Lord. He knows that all that he has is from God. God will give him more grace because he values grace in the first place.

1 Co 4: "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

But gives grace to the humble'

The word "humble" signifies low-lying. The idea is humble in spirit but not servility in attitude. The idea here is not a discouraged person who lacks hope, a dejected, downhearted and downcast person. However, this term does convey someone who is unpretentious.

Mt 11: 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

2 Co 10: 1 "Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ— who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you."

1 Pe 5: 5 "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God

resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble'."

Principle:

Humility is the cause of righteousness.

Application:

If pride is the source of all sin, humility is at the core of all righteousness. The one characteristic of a humble person is dependence on God.

Matt. 23: 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Humility always confesses its true condition before God and rests on the grace of God. A humble believer depends on God daily. He knows that he is not sufficient of himself to live a spiritual life.

Rom. 12: 16 "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion."

God's grace will deliver the humble but not the arrogant believer. God's grace cannot help the proud person because he does not know his own needs. He is self-sufficient. His pride cherishes independence from God. He is beholden to no man. He is not open to help from others and has difficulty in asking help from others. This kind of person puts himself outside God's grace because he cannot depend on God. Grace is God's provision for us.

James 4:7

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

Beginning with verse seven, James reels off 10 commands in machine gun like fashion.

This verse gives us the two polar opposite attitudes we are to have to two opposing persons. There is a double relation in these attitudes – first, "I submit"; then, "I resist".

Therefore

Every time we see a "therefore," we look to see what it is "there for." The "therefore" here draws an inference from the previous verse where James

challenges us to humble ourselves before God. James now gives a series of ten commands based on how we humble ourselves (4:6).

submit to God.

Since God is a God of "more grace" (4:6), we submit to Him. The heart of pride is self-sufficiency. A phenomenal pride thinks that we can get along without God. Humility, on the other hand, recognizes the need to depend on God. Humility empties self of self-sufficient independence from God. Humility places self under God so that He can dispose of us as He pleases.

"Submit to God" is the first of ten commands. "Submit" comes from two words: under and to arrange. A humble person always arranges himself under God's authority. The word "submit" was a military term. James puts his language in terms of warfare. We are at war with the devil. A humble person submits to his Commander-in-Chief. By giving allegiance to the Lord, the devil will flee from us.

Principle:

We must submit to God before we can resist the devil.

Application:

We cannot prevail over a supernatural person in our own strength and by our own sufficiency. We must submit to God because we need His resources. Great arrogance believes that we can obtain spiritual victory without God. Submission to God is an emptying of self-sufficiency. Humility offends the devil because it betrays his original sin – pride.

The foundation of victory in the Christian life lies at submitting to the ultimate authority of God over our lives. There is no Christian liberty without that premise. Capacity to live the Christian life means that we have capacity for God. It rests on a volition that submits to God's system of values as ultimate.

If we reject the ultimate values of God, we will enter into misery. There is no victory in the Christian life without the discipline of submitting to God. This submission to God's authority is no vague, unreal submission. Only when we fully

submit to God in our values do we submit to God in actuality. It is one thing to know the principle; it is another thing to apply the principle to our experience. To the degree that we live with the principles of God's Word and apply them to our lives, to that degree we "submit to God."

May God help us to take a position in the rank and file of those who accept His authority over our lives. This means accepting God's will as His sovereign plan for us. We accept His superiority as God and our inferiority as creatures in doing this. We obey God Almighty because His providence is best for us, for God knows everything from beginning to end.

1 Pe 5: 6 "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."

Our walk with the Lord always begins with submission to the authority of God over our lives. When we realize how the greatness of God towers over our finiteness, we draw on God's power rather than our own (4:8). Without God's grace, there is no hope for living the Christian life. We need that grace when we come under attack from Satan.

Resist the devil

The believer is to "resist" the devil. The word "resist" means to set against, to oppose, to stand against. The best way to resist the devil is to actively resist him by submitting to God. There is no compromise with the enemy. The corollary of submitting to God is resisting the devil.

Mt 4: 8 "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

Ep 6: 11 "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not

wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

The name "devil" means slanderer, accuser and is a common name for Satan. One of the devil's main roles is to accuse us before God. He did this to Job in the Old Testament (Job 1). Yet, the Lord Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us by defending us against the charges of the devil.

He 7: 25 "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

Principle:

Submission to God puts the devil to flight.

Application:

We need not fear the devil for the Bible says that we can "resist" him. He has no power over me without my consent. We can take a firm stand against him. God requires active volition on our part when dealing with the devil. We must take the spiritual high ground.

The Christian life is a battle, not a rosy bed of ease. The dynamic believer must take a stand against the devil in a war of spiritual survival with combat readiness. We must be ready to fight at the first crack of a shot.

2 Ti 2:3 "You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier."

We cannot give place to the devil or he will gain a foothold of warfare on our soul. Once he has that foothold, we will head for defeat.

and he will flee from you

"Flee" means to take flight, run away, escape, shun. We get our English word "fugitive" from the

Greek word. The idea here is that the devil will avoid us when we resist him by submitting to God. God puts this in the frame of a promise.

Principle:

A great principle of spiritual victory is to plead the promises of God.

Application:

When we obey the two-sided commands of "submit" and "resist," we can claim the promise of God for victory over the devil. God guarantees that he will flee from us. There is cowardice in the devil when he sees us actively applying God's principles to experience.

1 Pe 5: 8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world."

Christians are under attack from the devil. We must resist him, otherwise, we leave ourselves exposed to defeat. Active resistance to Satan's assaults is a divine duty under our Commander-in-Chief.

Humility is not weakness; it puts the devil to flight.

James 4:8

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

Verse 8 continues ten commands to believers. The first two commands are related to God and the devil: 1) submit to God and 2) resist the devil. We hold to both commands simultaneously.

The two belief systems of God and the devil are mutually exclusive. Draw near to God The third command is "draw near to God." The words "draw near" mean to approach. James challenges his readers to pursue fellowship with the Lord. The Levitical priests drew near the altar with humility (Ex. 19:22; 24:2; Lev. 10:3).

If we come to God in prayer with humility, He will answer our prayers. However, there are two

qualifications in this verse - 1) cleanse your hands and 2) purify your hearts.

Ps. 73: 28 "But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, That I may declare all Your works."

He 7:19 "for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." and He will draw near to you. When we draw near to God, God will draw near to us. God requires that we exercise our volition toward Him first. God will embrace any believer no matter how long or to what extent he went away from Him. God stands ready to accept us with open arms.

Ps. 145: 18 "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth."

Principle:

God grants us the privilege of entering into the majesty of His presence.

Application:

It is not enough to resist the devil (4:7); we must draw near to God in prayer and fellowship. We draw near to God by faith. We believe He is accessible and available to us. The reason for this is that Jesus made it possible. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse us from sin and allow for a fellowship with God.

1 Pe 3: 18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit"

It is amazing that God who transcends the universe allows us to enter into fellowship with Him through prayer and fellowship. We neither earn nor deserve this yet the Father delights in fellowship with us. He welcomes our voice and takes pleasure in answering our prayers.

He. 4: 16 "Let us therefore come boldly [confidently] to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

He 10: 19 "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the

blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

God does not answer the prayer of those out of fellowship.

Ps 66: 18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

Mt. 15: 8 "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me."

God promises us that He will answer prayer if we draw near to Him. We have God's guarantee of that - "and He will draw near to us."

Cleanse your hands

James' fourth imperative is "cleanse your hands." The word "cleanse" means to make free from admixture, to purify. The idea is to remove something for the purpose of purification. Old Testament priests washed their hands before approaching the presence of God in the Tabernacle (Ex 30:19-21). James wants believers to wash their dirty "hands." Spiritually, we wash our hands in the blood of Christ when we confess our sins, His finished work of paying for our sins.

2 Co 7: 1 "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

you sinners;

Believers who are "sinners" must cleanse themselves before they can have fellowship with God. We cannot fellowship with God [draw near] without confession of sin.

Principle:

Consistency with God's character is the ground of concord with Him.

Application:

Those who continually confess their sin may walk with the Lord. If we do not confess our sins, it may be because of guilt. We do not feel worthy to fellowship with the Lord. Sin cannot stand in the presence of God. We must not allow guilt get in the way of trust in the blood of Christ to forgive us.

Mt 5: 8 "Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God."

1 Jn 3: 3 "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

It is not enough to "cleanse" our hands; we must "purify" our "hearts."

and purify your hearts,

"Purify" is a different word than "cleanse" of the previous clause. The idea is to cleanse from defilement, to make pure. Both "cleanse" and "purify" are terms that allude to ceremonial cleansing. The word "purify" here refers to sanctification. Sanctification has to do with wholehearted separation unto God. We must keep our heart separate for God.

you double-minded

"Double-minded" means two-souled coming from two words: twice and soul. A two-souled person wavers in his convictions and conduct. He doubts God's principles and is uncertain about his own values. He divides his values between the world's values and God's values. This believer is uncertain about where he wants to go spiritually. A double-souled person has a problem with integrity, unity and harmony of soul because he wants to have a soul devoted to God and a soul devoted to the devil at the same time.

Ja 1: 6 "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Principle:

God demands our mutually exclusive devotion.

Application:

It is one thing to resist the devil (4:7) but we need to go a step further -- draw near to God in fellowship. To do this, we must deal with any sin in our lives by recognition and confession of those sins.

1 Jn 1: 9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

God demands mutually exclusive devotion. He will not accept half-hearted love. He wants a whole soul for those who wish to walk with Him day-by-day.

James 4:9

Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom."

This verse contains five of 10 commands in a series. This verse calls us to repentance and hits a very sober note.

Lament

We now come to the 6th of 10 commands -- "lament." The word "lament" means to suffer hardship, distress, to go through hard labor. This word comes from two words: to bear, to undergo and hard, callous. The idea is to undergo hardship, carry a sense of brokenness.

Principle:

A spiritual believer does not rationalize sin but admits it and grieves over it.

Application:

The brokenness here is conviction of sin in the life of the believer. There is a clear connection between dissonance and proper terminal values. We will not change our terminal values until God shakes us to our roots.

There is an appropriate time to have a sense of misery because of our sin. Our culture condemns misery of any kind but God doesn't; He wants us to feel misery over our sin. He does not want us to subjectively pay for our sin but He wants conviction of sin. Subjective guilt robs the finished

work of Christ on the cross. Objective guilt enables us to face the truth about our sin.

2 Co 7: 10 "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Jesus bore the penalty for our eternal punishment -- that is done and finished. However, we have a responsibility for our sin -- admission, recognition and confession. Jesus' responsibility is to pay for the sin; it is our responsibility to recognize and confess our sin. In order to get rid of the burden of our sin, we must deal with it, not neglect it. Full conviction always brings grief over sin.

This command to hardship has nothing to do with depression about personal problems. Neither does it refer to becoming a religious monk. "Sadness" pertains to the idea of holding values contrary to God's will -- we cause sadness in ourselves by holding values outside God's will. This is the polar opposite of indifference by those who commit grievous sin. This is brokenness over the indifference toward sin in self and others.

Col. 2: 23 "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

There is a time to undergo misery because of the spiritual state of the church or ourselves. If we do not get serious about sin then we will persist in an apathy and indifference towards the seriousness of sin.

Christians who live in unconfessed sin live in misery. When we become slaves to sin, we lose our liberty. Loss of liberty means misery. In this case, no matter what we do, we will always end up in spiritual misery.

and mourn

The 7th command is "mourn." "Mourn" means to be sad, grieve. The idea is to suffer sadness or grief as the result of depressing circumstances. "Mourning" implies deep contrition, deep remorse. The idea is that we feel towards someone who falls into sin like we feel when someone close to us dies.

Mt 5:4 "Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted."

2 Co 12: 21 "Lest, when I come again, my
God will humble me among you, and I
shall mourn for many who have sinned
before and have not repented of the
uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness
which they have practiced."

Principle:

Sensitiveness to sin is important to a healthy
spiritual life.

Application:

Genuine repentance involves grief over sin; it does
not take sin lightly. There is a tendency for us to
cushion our personal sin, to rationalize it.

2 Co. 7: 9 "Now I rejoice, not that you
were made sorry, but that your sorrow
led to repentance. For you were made
sorry in a godly manner, that you might
suffer loss from us in nothing. 10 For
godly sorrow produces repentance
leading to salvation [salvation from a
ruined Christian life], not to be
regretted; but the sorrow of the world
produces death. 11 For observe this very
thing, that you sorrowed in a godly
manner: What diligence it produced in
you, what clearing of yourselves, what
indignation, what fear, what vehement
desire, what zeal, what vindication! In
all things you proved yourselves to be
clear in this matter. 12 Therefore,
although I wrote to you, I did not do it
for the sake of him who had done the
wrong, nor for the sake of him who
suffered wrong, but that our care for you
in the sight of God might appear to you."

There are times when it is necessary to impose
upon self a sorrow over our sin.

Ro 7: 24 "O wretched man that I am! Who
will deliver me from this body of death?
25 I thank God – through Jesus Christ
our Lord! So then, with the mind I
myself serve the law of God, but with
the flesh the law of sin."

and weep!

The 8th command is to "weep." "Weep" means to
wail, to bewail. The emphasis on this word is
upon noise. Weeping is the outward expression of
sorrow.

Ac 20: 37 "Then they all wept freely, and
fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, 38
sorrowing most of all for the words
which he spoke, that they would see his
face no more. And they accompanied
him to the ship."

Principle:

Outward weeping is a sign of inner grief.

Application:

Weeping is an external sign of inner grief. There
may be times when we cry aloud because of our
sin.

Mt 26: " 74 "Then he began to curse and
swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!'
Immediately a rooster crowed. 75 And
Peter remembered the word of Jesus who
had said to him, 'Before the rooster
crows, you will deny Me three times.' So
he went out and wept bitterly."

Let your laughter be turned to mourning

The 9th command has to do with change. The
Greek word "be turned" means to turn around,
return, to change the form. The idea of this word
is to change our lives 180 degrees, a complete
turnaround. God sends dissonance in our lives to
get our attention so that we will head in an
entirely different direction.

The Greek grammar indicates that we cannot do
this turning by ourselves [passive voice]. We are
to let God turn our laughter into mourning.

"Laughter" is usually a normal, healthy thing.

There are times when it is not. Laughter and
gaiety can mask sin. In this case, laughter
trivializes sin. We do not laugh at sin; rather, we
mourn over it.

When we develop callous attitudes toward sin,
God injects discord into our lives so that we might
reconsider the path of our sin. He wants us to
change the form of our standards for life.

"Mourning" carries the idea of downcast,

dejection, heaviness. The idea is mental gloominess and dejection. A downcast attitude is an indication of repentance.

Principle:

At a time for spiritual decay, there is no place for triviality.

Application:

It is easy to develop an attitude that treats sin in a trivial way. A frivolous, fun approach to life can blunt our spiritual lives. There is a time for mourning.

Ecc 2: 2 "I said of laughter – 'Madness!'; and of mirth, 'What does it accomplish?' 3 I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives."

Ecc 3: 4 "A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance."

Luke 6: 21 "Blessed are you who hunger now, For you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, For you shall laugh. 25 Woe to you who are full, For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now, For you shall mourn and weep."

At a time of spiritual decay, there is no place for triviality. It is a time for lamenting, mourning, wailing. In other words, it is a time to get serious about the dreadfulness of sin. When Christians have no concern about sin, the future of dynamic Christianity is at stake. When afflictions come our way, we need to tune our antennas to God's wavelength to determine whether these difficulties are God's sovereign injection into our lives. We cannot deal with sin in a trivial way; we must take sin seriously. Many Christians go blithely along their Christian lives without dealing with issues from God's viewpoint.

Re 3: 17 "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked – "

and your joy to gloom

James does not condemn legitimate joy but flippant joy in a time when we should seriously come under conviction for our sin. It is evident from 1:2 and 5:13 that God desires that we experience joy." True joy comes from fellowship with the Lord.

Ja 1: 2 "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials."

The word "gloom" means dejection, shame, downcast. The presence of sin should cause displeasure and dejection in a spiritual believer.

Principle:

The source of our joy betrays our true heart.

Application:

The believer's joy is the result of the work of Christ on his behalf. We must weep over our sin. This weeping is not to gain God's favor; we have that. The weeping is a sorrow that we violated the One who did so much for us. We need to regain our sense of sorrow over our sin. What we joy over and what we sorrow over reveal our true heart. No spiritual Christian takes joy in a two-souled heart, because it divides his allegiances. We cannot sustain a sense of joy by following the Lord and the devil at the same time. Spiritual health brings dejection at personal sin.

Lam. 5: 15 "The joy of our heart has ceased; Our dance has turned into mourning. 16 The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!"

James 4:10

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

We now come to the 10th divine directive –

"humble yourselves."

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, James again takes up the subject of humility (4:6). The word "humble" means to make low, bring low. We make ourselves low when we see the greatness and majesty of God. Humility is primarily vertical towards God, not horizontal towards others.

The words "in the sight of" come from a Greek term combined of two words: in and eye. A humble person lives his life knowing that God watches everything he does. He lives in the eye of God. Humility always relates to the Almighty majesty of God. This is humility in the sight of God, not men.

Is 6: 5 "So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts'."

Humility is the surefire cure for carnality.

Ph 2: 3 "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

and He will lift you up

This phrase is a promise that God will elevate us to new spiritual heights if we humble ourselves before Him. We will find ourselves in a new sphere of spirituality through humility. This is the result, not the cause, of God's lifting us to new spiritual heights.

Mt 23: 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

God will raise us to the summit of spiritual prosperity when we recognize that everything we have, we have because of His grace.

Ro 12: 3 "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."

1 Co 4: 7 "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Principle:

The way down is the way up spiritually.

Application:

Pride is our biggest spiritual problem. We carry pride of face, place and race. If we humble ourselves, God will not have to do it for us.

2 Co 12: 21 "Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced."

Revival comes when we humble ourselves before the majesty of God. Humility allows God to do His work of grace in us.

2 Chr. 7: 14 "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

James 4:11

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge."

James now turns from personal and interpersonal conflict to the subject of putting self above others in 4:11-12. Verse 11 begins with a command followed by a reason for the command. It is one thing to humble ourselves before God (4:10) and it is another to put ourselves above fellow Christians.

Do not speak evil of one another, brethren.

James now returns to the sin of the tongue. We "speak evil of one another" when we disparage or down other Christians. The words "speak evil" mean to defame, to denigrate, to slander. Slander is a division of malice, a desire to hurt someone. In this case, we hurt others with our mouth. The Greek word for "speak evil" comes from two words: down and to speak. Speaking evil means to speak down about someone, to speak derogatory about him. The New Testament uses this word only here and in 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16.

Principle:

Denigration of fellow believers assumes a superior position over them.

Application:

When we denigrate others, we assume a superior position over them. We view ourselves higher than they are and protract a low estimate of them. We camouflage this attitude with self-righteousness making it difficult to detect at times, "I will pray for them in their awful state." In the final analysis, criticizing others elevates us over others. It makes us feel good that we are better than they are.

Finding fault with other Christians is a sin that goes to church because many Christians tolerate it. They do not view it with the insidiousness it that it is. We slander others in a number of ways:

- 1) We slander by blatant false accusation. Diotrophes maligned the apostle John. Religious leaders spoke evil of Jesus. The devil is the accuser of Christians (Re 12:10).
- 2) We slander others by exaggerations of faults that are true of them. We make people worse than they are by these distortions.
- 3) We can also slander others by needless repetition of true faults. True love covers the faults of others. As the old adage goes, "if we cannot say something good about someone - say nothing."

1 Pe 4: 8 "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'."

We should not elevate ourselves by putting others down because no one has a high opinion of a negative, faultfinding, critical person. This kind of person not only hurts the one spoken about, but also the person spoken to, as well as him (her) self.

Pr 18: 8 "The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body."

Ep 4:30 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice."

To correct the problem of derogatory speech about others, James asks us to examine four categories: 1) others, 2) the law, 3) God and 4) ourselves. He who speaks evil of a brother Note the threefold emphasis on the word "brother." James tries to draw the attention of Jewish Christians spread throughout the Roman Empire to their family relationship in Christ. Slander from fellow members of the family is particularly devastating.

Principle:

A proper view of our family relationship in Christ should inhibit us from maligning fellow Christians.

Application:

It is one thing to meet with smears from outside the body of Christ but it is an entirely different matter to hear it from within the church.

Gal. 5: 15 "But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

and judges his brother

Slander and judgment go hand-in-hand. These sins are cousins; where we find one, we find the other. Judgment has nothing to do with assessing others objectively but passing subjective judgment on them. We cannot be fully sure of our own motives much less the personal motives of someone else. Objective judgment bases its assessment of the issue on facts. We base our judgment on actions, not motives.

Mt 7: 1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3 And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? 5 Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

1 Sa 16: 7 "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused

him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart’.”

1 Ch 28: 9 “...for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts.”

Principle:

Unbiblical judgment is an arbitrary assumption about someone else.

Application:

God is the only One who has complete and full knowledge of people, therefore, only He has the capacity to judge others fully. That is why judgment is His sole prerogative. God is the only One who can rend just judgment. His judgment is not arbitrary but our judgment is arbitrary unless we have all the facts about a situation. God would give us the privilege of judgment if we were faultless but none of us is faultless. People with fault should not become faultfinders.

1 Kg 8: 39 “...for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men...”

Slander of fellow Christians flows from that same spirit of putting ourselves above others. If we hold high opinion of self, we are much more likely to be free with faultfinding.

Ro 2: 1 “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.”

speaks evil of the law and judges the law.

God is the Giver of the law; the One who enacts the Word of God. When we judge fellow Christians, we “speak evil of the law” and judge God’s law. When we criticize the Word of God [the Law], we criticize God Himself. We assume the place of God in doing so. We love to play God. We need to qualify the type of judgment here; this is not a prohibition against correcting Christians who go astray (Mt 18:15-17; 1 Co 5:1-5). The issue here is not correction but slanderous judgment and censorship. The essence of the law is love (Ro 13:8; Ja 2:8). Slander disregards love and so

violates the law. Love seeks the well-being of others.

Principle:

Slander is a violation of the Word of God and the law of love.

Application:

Since slander breaches the law of love, it infringes on God’s law [Word]. In doing so, we put ourselves above God’s Word. This is arrogance of the highest order because we take the Word of God out of the equation. Not only do we speak disparagingly of fellow Christians but also we disregard the Word of God. Censure of fellow Christians is censure of the Word of God because the essence of the Word of God is to love God and love our neighbor.

But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge

When we assume the place of a judge, we assume far-reaching consequences of taking God’s place as Judge. By slandering fellow Christians, we judge the Word of God. The Bible is ultimate authority for the Christian. When the Christian judges the Bible, he makes himself ultimate authority. This is blasphemy.

Principle:

It is one thing to judge the actors but it is another to judge the acts.

Application:

It is one thing to judge the actors but it is another to judge the acts. Judging the motives and judging the acts of a person are two different things. We become purveyors of the law rather than doers of the law when we subjectively judge others. Derogatory and critical speech against other Christians puts us in the place of God. When we take the position of disparaging other people, we take a position of priggish self-righteousness. We are not always right on issues but we take that position anyway. When we do this, we pass judgment on others as someone who is superior.

Gal. 5: 13 “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For

all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!"

Phil. 2: 3 "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

We usurp the place of God by judging others. When we set ourselves up as a judge of God's Word, we no longer submit to its precepts but judge its principles. We become the final authority for life. We put ourselves in the place of determining what is right and wrong. Our standard for right and wrong is our own opinion and that opinion is greater than God's opinion. Yet, God will not relinquish His authority. If we judge others, we invade God's prerogative. This exalted sense of self and low estimate of others is without objective justification. It is someone who is so wise in his own conceit that he cannot think objectively about others. He injects his judgment about them without facts. If we judge the entire person because of one act, we make an unjust extrapolation about them.

This is an unfair generalization. We can brand people by a small set of facts or by no facts at all. Someone fails to invite us to a party so we brand him as "unfriendly." "People who live in glass houses should not throw stones."

James 4:12

There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?"

A self-assertive attitude causes criticism of others (v.11). Self-righteousness always causes contempt of others. This was the attitude of the Pharisees of Jesus' day. James now gives a powerful argument against judging fellow believers.

There is one Lawgiver,

All the law can be summed up on one sentence - "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Criticism of others places self above the law. When we place ourselves above the law, we place

ourselves above the Lawgiver, the true originator and Judge of the law. Criticism of others is criticism of the law. We sit in judgment on the law when we judge others.

The word "one" emphasizes the fact that God has ultimate authority over the law in a mutual exclusive sense. God is the ultimate being that brought the law into existence. There is one Lawgiver who at once both gives the law and judges the law. We did not help God institute His laws so why do we act as if we can autonomously judge others?

Principle:

All law comes from God because God is ultimate law.

Application:

All human laws take their origin from God's laws whether biblical law, natural law or civil law. All good laws of men stem from God's law. We cannot climb upon the throne of God and make the same kind of judgments He makes because He is infinite and we are finite. God's laws always benefit man for man's good. His laws do not favor some over others. We cannot manipulate His law for subjective purposes because His law is always true to His character. God never demands anything of us that is not consistent with Himself and His own acts. He is always true to Himself.

who is able to save

The word "save" here does not refer to eternal salvation but to a more general idea of deliverance. Only God can maneuver the events of creation.

and to destroy.

The word "destroy" does not mean to annihilate into extinction of consciousness but to place people in a place of complete estrangement from God.

God alone is able to make the ultimate judgment to save or destroy people. He alone can execute His judgments. God's judgment here has to do with "the sin unto death" for a believer. God puts to "death" some believers because they develop a hardness of heart in their sin.

1 Jn 5: 16 "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. 17 All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death."

Principle:

Only God can properly execute His judgments; He needs no help from believers.

Application:

God never breaks His own standards [laws]. He is always consistent with Himself. If He were otherwise, He could not be an absolute God. However, God can do some things to meet the demands of His laws when broken. Jesus fulfilled all the demands of the law by dying on the cross for our sins. He did all of the dying that needed to be died. His death was sufficient to meet the perfect and absolute demands of God's character.

Ro 8: 2 "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

The purpose of the law is to bring us to Christ.

Ga 3: 19 "What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one. 21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ

might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."

Only God has the powers to save and destroy. We cannot usurp that authority and power. None of us is the author of any spiritual standards or laws that have the authority to save or destroy. The law knows no leniency. The law can only condemn. God's laws demand that He fully executes the penalty for their violation because He cannot violate His own righteousness. However, God can both be "just" and the "justifier" (Ro 3:26). Jesus died on the cross as our justifier of our sins. That is why He can be "just." He does this without violating His own righteousness.

Ro 8: 32 "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

God saves and destroys based on His absolute character. As God saves based on His character, He destroys on that basis as well.

Ro 2: 3 "And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"

1 Co 4: 3 "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

No one is free from sin. Who can say that our motives are free from lust? That is why we do not have the competence to judge others. We are of the same ilk. Since we are not sinless, we cannot

judge the motives of others with impartiality. Therefore, we have no right to inflict judgment on others. Only God has the right to save and destroy. There is a time for judging but it is at the Judgment Seat of Christ and Christ will do the judging. Not all the facts are in yet.

No creature has enough information to make adequate judgment. Only the Lord has complete access to all the facts. However, there is legitimate judgment that we can perform. If we see a fallen Christian, we should go to that Christian and restore him to fellowship. This fulfills the law of Christ because it does not judge motive but the overt sinful acts and behavior of the fallen believer.

Jn 7: 24 "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

Ga 6: 1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

Who are you to judge another?

"Who are you" in rhetorical form emphasizes the enormity of how James sees the sin of judging. This phrase is emphatic in the Greek making judgment of fellow creatures rash and arrogant because it usurps the place of God, "Who do you think you are, God?" We think we have better criteria than God does when we judge others on any other standard than the perfect standard of God's judgment.

Le 19: 16 "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD."

Ro 14: 4 "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand... 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

Principle:

We put ourselves in the place of God when we judge the motives of fellow Christians.

Application:

Judging fellow Christians is a favorite indoor sport for many Christians. True humility does not superciliously judge others for at the heart of judging is pride. Judgmental pride usurps the place of God (Ro 14:1-13). This sin assumes a prerogative that belongs solely to God because it presumes to know the motives and intents of the person judged. The Lord summed up the entire law in one statement: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If we sit in judgment on others, we sit in judgment on the law. God says to love our neighbor but if we judge him, we usurp the place of God. When we do this, we make ourselves vulnerable to greater lawlessness and rebellion.

James 4:13

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit..."

If playing God with others entails picturing ourselves better than others and putting them down (4:11-12), then playing God with ourselves is behaving as if we are the final authority in life.

Come now,

Literally, the words "come now" are go now in the original. James goads his readers into listening to him. He confronts critics who attempt to take the place of God, occupying the space only God can inhabit.

you who say,

James addresses businesspeople who make business plans independent from God. They operate with disregard for God's will in their business plans (4:13-17).

"Today or tomorrow ..."

James speaks of shrewd businessmen who laid out their business plans well in advance. They do not anticipate hard times. They feel that they have the

world by the tail, "What can stand in my way? I understand the market."

Principle:

All we have is today so we need to make most of the moment.

Application:

All we have is today. Yesterday is gone; we cannot bring it back. We cannot alter it. We cannot undo yesterday. We need to make most of the moment for we cannot be sure of tomorrow. Unexpected situations may make us change our plans totally. Procrastination or delay may lose opportunity. You may not be ready to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior but you have no guarantee of tomorrow. The Christian may delay writing that letter of forgiveness but he does not have any guarantee of tomorrow. Procrastination is the thief of time and opportunity. Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

The word "go" in the Greek carries the idea of not finding a permanent home. There is instability in this. He always hops from one place to another. Ancient Greeks used this word for a dog scratching for fleas. First, he scratches his tummy then behind his ear then behind his leg. The flea never finds a permanent home.

Principle:

Covetousness never arrives at a goal because it is insatiable in desire.

Application:

The sin of covetousness never finds a landing. There is always something more to lust after. There is always another bundle of money to make. There is no final goal for acquiring money. That is why covetousness is idolatry.

Co 3: 5 "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

to such and such a city, spend a year there,

James' businessman has everything laid out. He knows where he is going and how long he will spend there. This is a self-reliant, self-sustaining

businessman. He travels all over the Roman Empire doing business in the major cities of the day. His contacts make him a major player. The sin James refers to here is not the making of business plans; no business can survive without planning. Rather, their sin was not acknowledging the providence of God in their plans. They did not put their business in the hands of God.

Business people of this verse do not procrastinate nor are they slothful, but they are great planners. They follow a set plan yet they forget that God may intervene into their plans. They act as if they were makers of their own destiny. Tomorrow may never come; they may encounter a shipwreck.

Principle:

Business plans without trust in the providence of God may produce financial shipwreck.

Application:

Plans without God will produce distress. People who set their hearts on economic prosperity will not enjoy their wealth. They do not live their lives for eternity but for time.

Ps 49: 11 "Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names."

It is one thing to be rich toward the world and it is another to be rich toward God.

Lu 12: 16 "Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: 'The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

buy and sell,

We get the English word “emporium” from the Greek word for “buy”. We can also translate this word merchant. Jewish merchants traveled throughout the Roman Empire in the Hellenistic period [times of the New Testament]. James does not condemn free enterprise here but the entrepreneur who does business without dependence on God. The sin here is not making profit in business but making it the ultimate purpose for business. Every businessperson should design their business to glorify God and win people to Christ. If profit is our vital passion, then we violate God’s purpose for creation.

Principle:

Presumption on the providence of God is to play God.

Application:

There is a proclivity in man to play God. We think we can operate independent from Him and lean solely on ourselves, “I am in control of my destiny”. We overrate our limitations. Our pride does not acknowledge that we cannot do it our way. We need to come to the point where we depend on God in everything. We should acknowledge God’s providence in everything we do.

Believers in tune with God always ask direction and go-ahead from Him. God takes an interest in all that we plan and do. He wants a place in our planning. “Many people aspire to everything and it becomes all consuming”. They always go forward but never arrive anywhere. This is because they leave the perpendicular out of their business. Shrewd business cannot figure every contingency. This is obvious in the stock market.

Note the mistakes of the business people in this passage: · Time mistake – takes the time God gives him and distorts it into selfish ends · Geographical mistake – goes where he can make money rather than where he can grow in his faith; his orientation is toward business enterprise rather than personal growth · Planning mistake – he has no regard for God’s providence · Operational mistake – he becomes so occupied with making money that he distorts his soul and fails to grow in grace ·

Motivational mistake – his objective is wealth rather than growth in grace

and make a profit

There is nothing wrong in making a profit (far from it) but there is something wrong in living for profit. If profit interferes with service to the Lord, then it is wrong. If chasing wealth preempts our relations with or service to God, then it is wrong. Some of us are just too busy living for ourselves. “Profit” not only means monetary gain but the “desire for gain.” When materialism lust overtakes our business plans then we step out of the will of God.

Principle:

There is no sin in making profit but there is a sin in living for profit.

Application:

God designed making money as a part of the establishment of creation. There is nothing wrong with working for money. It is a legitimate and necessary part of God’s plan. Some Christians are suspicious of anyone who has a lot of money; this is wrong. However, inordinate desire for money is materialism or money-lust. This always gets us into trouble spiritually because we become a slave to the things of life. We become so occupied with money to the exclusion of everything else, that money becomes our god. When money becomes our god, it becomes all consuming. We face each new day, not to glorify God, but we see it as another day to make a bundle. It is just another day of slavery.

The mature believer does not depend on wealth for his sense of well-being or security. His foundation for his well-being rests on the Word of God.

1 Ti 6: 6 “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for

which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

The fundamental purpose of a Christian businessman should not be profit but the glory of God. Therefore, he does not make profit by hook or crook but rather by God-honoring means. By putting God first in business, he glorifies God. Profit is a means to an end, not the end itself. Great wealth will not make us happy for the means will never give us the end. God will bless businessmen who live for the glory of God rather than the accumulation of assets. God is interested in our business. He wants to be a partner with us in it. A businessman who lives for the glory of God will not rationalize cheating on his income tax because the accumulation of assets is not his aim. His aim is to interact with the grace of God in his life.

James 4:14

whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

The previous verse spoke of business people who make plans without seeking God's direction. They think they know the future so they play God. When we play God, we make 3 presumptions: 1) we think we can predict the future (4:14a), 2) we assume we will last forever (4:14b) and 3) we presume that our plans are permanent.

whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.

The word "know" means to know well, to understand. The idea is to fix our attention on something, to understand the significance of something with certainty. No one is versed in knowing what will happen tomorrow.

Pr 27: 1 "Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth." Only God knows the future. Man's plans are always tentative. When we make plans without deference to God, we then operate on presumption toward God.

Is 46: 9 "Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,...'"

Principle:

Presumptuous planning without taking God's providence into view is a recipe for disaster.

Application:

God is not against making business plans but He is down on presumptuous planning, planning that excludes His will. If man could anticipate the future so that he could figure out every contingency, then he would be a proud creature indeed. Man would not need God for he would be truly autonomous. However, man cannot leave God out of his calculations of the future for he is finite and God is infinite. He ought to humbly accept the hope of the providence of God on his life. Life is full of surprises whether in politics, business, international affairs or our personal lives. Something might change our plans for life quickly.

None of us can guarantee what will happen to us tomorrow. God does not reveal the future to us. If He did, we would not be able to bear the full load. We could not deal with a lifetime of troubles all at once. By dealing with one disappointment at a time, we can manage them. We can trust God for each situation we face. We trust Him for what the future holds. That is why our Lord told us not to worry about tomorrow.

Mt 6: 34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

The opportunities of today may not be available tomorrow. We should not defer the opportunity of today to tomorrow if we want to take full advantage of that opportunity.

For what is your life?

The word "what" means of what quality. What is the nature of your life? The idea here is that the

nature of our lives has a transitory factor about it. We do not live on this earth for very long.

It is even a vapor

Our life is like a mist, smoky vapor, hot steamy vapor trail. A vapor appears for a short time and then disappears. The idea is that our life is temporary. Our time on this earth flees from us quickly. Our life is transitory because there are so many contingencies that might happen to us, much of which we have little control over. None of us can guarantee the future. We have no assurance that we will grow old.

that appears for a little time

God's providence injects itself into our plans. We appear on the scene for a short time with a great deal of fanfare then we disappear off the face of the earth.

and then vanishes away

The plans of man are never absolute. God intervenes into the plans of business. He introduces dissonance into those plans. No businessman can guarantee his future. Just look at the stock market. It is presumption if we think otherwise. All human life is transitory. The only difference is that we do not know the termination point.

Ps 90: 10 "The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away... 12 So teach us to number our days, That we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Ps 102: 11 "My days are like a shadow that lengthens, And I wither away like grass."

Life is like a fleeting wisp of smoke from a fire. If our life is so transitory, it is foolish to live our lives without giving attention to God's will.

Job 7: 6 "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, And are spent without hope. 7 Oh, remember that my life is a breath! My eye will never again see good."

Job 14: 1 "Man who is born of woman Is of few days and full of trouble."

Principle:

Spiritual Christians look for the concurrence of God's providence when making plans for the future.

Application:

We do not "do it my way" because God is in charge providentially. The sovereign God of the universe controls every event and each situation. He providentially concurs with everything that comes into our lives.

Ps 37: 3 "Trust in the LORD, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. 4 Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart."

Once we understand that God gives us but a brief moment in the scheme of things here on earth, we then should live our lives as unto the Lord. Why waste time with our lives if they are so short? We ought to focus and put priority on the things of greatest value. The true purpose of God is to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Life is independent of circumstance. We might be wealthy but miserable and we might be poor but blessed. The purpose of life transcends circumstance.

Paul and Silas sang while in prison (Acts 16). There is glamour in financial wealth but it does not continue in that status for long. It will vanish away. Our generation places great value and shines on personal wealth but it becomes dull in old age. "What was the purpose of accumulation of money all my life?" The point -- great prosperity here but a pauper there. There is great folly in putting too much value on temporal values.

James 4:15

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

Instead you ought to say,

Instead of self-sufficient bluster about future business dealings (4:13), we need to tune ourselves to God's will.

"If the Lord wills,

The idea is "If the Lord permits". The spiritual Christian submits himself to the will of God. He keeps God's viewpoint on his whole life. We say, "The Lord willing, I will do this or that." This attitude demonstrates submission to God's will. It should be more than a jingle, it should be an orientation of life that accepts God's providence for my life, "I accept what God chooses to do with me". This is far from a magic formula for one's life.

Acts 18: 21 " ...but took leave of them, saying, 'I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.' And he sailed from Ephesus."

Ac 21: 14 "So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'"

Ro 1: 10 " ...making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."

Ro 15: 32 " ...that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you."

1 Co 4: 19 "But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills, and I will know, not the word of those who are puffed up, but the power."

1 Co 16: 7 "For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits."

we shall live and do this or that."

A spiritual Christian preserves a godly viewpoint on life by dependence on God's will in his choices. He/she always conditions his/her plans keeping an eye on the will of God. Our times are not in our hands but in the providential care of God. There is always a condition to our plans.

Ph 2: 19 "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state... 24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly."

The words "this or that" indicate that dependence on God's will should apply to any situation. God's

eternal counsel in His eternal decree shows that He is not capricious in His acts but concurs with exact details all the events of the universe.

Principle:

A presumptuous person lives as if there is no will of God in our lives but a spiritual person depends on God's plan for his/her life.

Application:

Some people use the shortness of life to pursue pleasure; others use it as an excuse for laziness. However, we should see our transient life situation with a sense of humility. We depend on the Lord with a sense of our frailty and shortness of life. The mature Christian keeps a constant dependence on the will of God for his life. He understands that God's providence upsets all our schemes and throws us into confusion. He knows God always has the last word. The will of God may be completely different from our plan, which is why we say, "The Lord willing." The words "The Lord willing" should be on our hearts as well as on our lips.

Ro 12: 1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

If an architect of a building had one plan and the builder had another, the result would be a mess. God is the Architect of our lives and we build our lives around God's plan, not our plan. God's plan for us is perfect because He planned it from eternity.

Ac 17: 28 " ...for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

Nothing can happen to us apart from God's will. If we fall ill, we know that it is in God's plan. If we fall short of some goal, God has a design in this. There is great solace in the providence of God

because we know that God works all things together for our good.

Ro 8: 28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

James 4:16

But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."

But now

As it is, James' readers are out of fellowship with God and with each other because of their pride.

you boast

The word "boast" means to speak loudly, to vaunt oneself. The idea is to make oneself appear better than others. His bragging is at the expense of others. This businessman thinks that his business success makes him better than other people.

in your arrogance.

The word "arrogance" carries the idea of someone who pretends to have more than he possesses. The Greek word originally came from the idea of a vagabond. Literally, "arrogance" means to wander about. A vagabond moved from place to place making quack claims. An arrogant person then is a charlatan, a quack. This imposter makes claims about himself that he cannot support. His accomplishments are by deceit. He is not as much as he claims so he is a successful bum!

The readers of James thought that they could control their own destiny, "I am a self-made man. I know how to do business. I know the future of the markets". They do not give credit to God for their business ability (4:13). They act as if God stepped down from His sovereign throne and put them in His place. Obviously, they do not do this explicitly but implicitly by their attitudes and actions. Therefore, they brag about their arrogant accomplishments to those around them.

All such boasting is evil

This reasoning is evil because it usurps the place of God, "What relevance does God have in my life? I can get along without Him. I can make my own plans". This boasting is not only

presumptuous but it is also evil. Our times and our destinies are in God's hands.

Autonomy from God is evil because it disregards the providence of God. Arrogance does not submit oneself to the sovereign will of God. When we brag about our arrogance, this flies in the face of God more than simple arrogance. It is a double arrogance, pride upon pride making it "evil" boasting.

Principle:

When we brag about our accomplishments, it is always at the expense of others.

Application:

It is one thing to forget to involve God in business plans but it is another to act as if God does not exist in making those plans. It is one thing to take God off the throne and it is another to put self on the throne. A braggart is someone who thinks highly of himself and wants others to think of him in the same way. He is self-centered rather than God-centered. He forgets that every capability he has, he has from God.

1 Co 4: 6 "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

A braggart loves to talk about himself. He may even boast of humility! All he can talk about is his successes and pretentious plans for the future. He has an apparent decisive confidence in himself. All this grieves the heart of God.

James 4:17

Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin."

Therefore,

James ends his exhortation by drawing the inference that businessmen cannot plead ignorance once they understand divine viewpoint.

They knew they must depend on God's will in their business but they chose not to do so.

to him who knows to do good

The businessmen of James cannot plea ignorance of God's sovereign plan for their businesses for God previously exposed them to the principle of dependence on God in all things. The word "knows" means to have a settled knowledge of something, not knowledge in the process of learning. The word "good" portrays what is qualitatively good, worthy of honor, upright, morally excellent. "Good" connotes the intrinsically good -- goodly, fair, beautiful, excellent, surpassing, suitable, honorable, praiseworthy. It can adapt to circumstances and purposes. The "good" circumstance here is the good of operating in the will of God.

2 Co. 8: 21 "...providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."

Ga. 6: 9 "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

and does not do it,

They knew God's will (4:14-16) but they refused to do His will. They knew dependence on the will of God in all business plans is a major operating principle of God but they declined to depend on Him.

to him it is sin

Once we admit to knowing that we must depend on God in everything we do and then not do it -- that is sin.

Jn 15: 22 "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin."

We cannot plead ignorance of God's will if we do not do it. It is sin pure and simple. We know that we must submit all our business plans to God's sovereign will. Not to do this is sin for it is a sin to fail to acknowledge God's place in our lives. We cannot take sanctuary in ignorance of this

principle. This sin of omission is as wrong as a sin of commission. This is a sin of omission, not a sin of commission. However, sins of omission initiate some sins of commission. Neglect of God's will is sin because it discounts His sovereign right over everything. When we acknowledge God's right over our lives, we affirm His sovereignty over all creation.

Principle:

Knowledge of God's principles implies responsibility to apply truth to experience.

Application:

The sin of pretension of knowing God's will and not doing it is presumptuous sin. Knowledge of God's Word without the application of it to experience will eventually distort even our knowledge of it. It is possible to cauterize our soul by dabbling in divine truth. Knowledge of divine viewpoint will not benefit us unless we answer it with practice.

Jn 13: 17 "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

James 5:1

The first six verses of chapter five are warnings to the wealthy. James does not condemn wealth itself but the misuse of wealth. He targets people who use their wealth for self-indulgence, who hoard it and who have gained it by unlawful and ruthless means.

Come now,

James continues to assail the self-sufficient businessmen of chapter five. He asks for their immediate attention.

you rich,

The rich James implores here are the rich who misuse their riches and those who do not use their riches for eternal purposes. It is not the use but the abuse of wealth at stake here. There is vulnerability among the rich in that they do not depend on God but upon themselves.

Matt. 6: 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."

weep and howl

People who put their trust in riches have no stability or security. They may lose their wealth under any array of conditions. That is why wealth is a dangerous basis for security. When the wealthy lose their wealth, they lament their state of affairs

"Howl" goes a step beyond weeping. The idea is to shriek or scream out loud. These rich men shriek because they are under God's discipline because they do not depend on God's grace but upon their own strength for their business. They neutralize their enjoyment of wealth due to their lack of capacity of soul to appreciate money as lesser goal of life.

Pr 23: 5 "Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven."

Principle:

It is not wrong to be wealthy but it is perilous.

Application:

Riches can be a blessing or a curse. It depends on whether wealth is our supreme goal or whether the glory of God is that goal. A mature believer can hold his riches loosely. The loss of riches does not spoil a mature believer's life when he lives for the glory of God. Lu 12: 19 "And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

for your miseries that are coming upon you!

The word "miseries" occurs only in Romans 3:16. This word comes from two words: 1) to undergo, endure and 2) a callus or hardened concretion. The idea is hardship and distress. If a person is out of fellowship, the more money he has the greater his misery. If a person is in

fellowship, money is a detail of life, not the purpose of life.

1 Ti 6: 6 "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Money in itself never ultimately satisfies us. If we lean on wealth to give us happiness, it will always disappoint us. The Bible nowhere condemns the rich for being rich. Money is not evil in itself but the love of money is evil. Many rich Jews lost all their possessions in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. James wrote in A.D. 49. Many lost their families and their lives. Many wept and howled. Riches offer no permanent security.

Principle:

Abuse of wealth will cause misery to our souls.

Application:

"Eat, drink and be merry" does not last forever for "miseries" will ultimately come upon those who misuse their riches. The true capital of the soul is God's grace. Grace is God's operating asset for the believer to live each day unto Him. We utilize this capital to live in God's economy day to day. Each day we live is by God's mercy. We cannot evoke our own spiritual strength to utilize His grace; only God can do that.

When we lean on our own strength, we end in misery. "I will find a beautiful woman. I will make a million." Sex-lust and power-lust cannot put us into a state of inviolability of soul. How many times have we acquired something new only to find that the new thing did not give us happiness? No, we are still that same miserable person. When we lean on God's strength, we end in blessedness. God conveys His capital to us through the Word of God (1:15,16,21). God gives His grace provision to those who embrace His

Word on their own volition. The mature believer utilizes God's grace on a regular basis.

2 Co 12: 9 "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

God is free to give to us in grace because He is satisfied with the death of Jesus Christ for our sins [propitiation]. Jesus suffered all that needed to be suffered. He took all of the pain that needed to be endured. God is now free to bless us because of that. However, He will not give His daily operating grace to those who, of their own volition, refuse to accept His Word. He cannot give to those who do not have a capacity to receive it.

James 5:2

Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten."

James in this verse and next delineates three types of wealth that undermine our souls.

Your riches are corrupted,

James makes it clear that he is denouncing a special group of wealthy people and not all rich people. "Your riches" as over against other peoples' riches is the idea. Some wealthy people do not allow wealth to corrupt them.

The very sphere of self-confidence of the wealthy places them in a vulnerable position.

Riches as an ultimate value corrode because they do not have lasting intrinsic value. The word "corrupted" means destroyed. Wealth tends to corrode one's life by rotting of values. The Greek tense indicates that this believer with distorted values entered into a state of corruption and destruction.

Principle:

If a believer adopts the political and economic belief systems of this world, his soul will rot.

Application:

The Christian must stand independent from all political and economic world-views. His belief system must transcend these human worldviews. The free enterprise system is the goose that lays the golden egg for material benefits for those who live under it. The Bible does not assail the system of free enterprise, it does warn of materialistic attitude toward riches. Free enterprise is not God's ultimate view for values in society but a God-centered hope.

There is a great danger among evangelicals to put all their eggs in the basket of free enterprise, "If the United States or Canada would just reduce the size of government or adopt free enterprise principles then everything will be fine." No, ultimate value for the Christian does not rest in any human economic system but in God Himself. Both of these economic views result in soul-rot if the believer does not operate on the transcendent values of God. Those who make big intrusive government as a panacea make its citizens parasites of society, a belief system that puts its trust in big government. That is just as bad as the free enterpriser who puts his trust in material wealth. Both systems are wrong as ultimate answers for man from God's standpoint. The Bible does not present a political world-view for man primarily but a theocentric world-view.

and your garments are moth-eaten

James brings up "garments" here because people of the first century viewed special clothing as inheritance heirlooms. They considered these heirlooms as part of their affluence because they associated heirlooms with wealth and influence. Just as heirlooms can become prey to moths so hoarding wealth can become prey to circumstances. To put priority on the temporal over the eternal is a serious mistake. What men value in time is nothing compared to eternal intrinsic values. Hoarding riches and garments is vulnerable to devaluation. Materialism-lust will damage you like heirloom garments damaged by larvae of moths.

Mt 6: 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."

Principle:

A person's riches should not be greater than their capacity of the soul.

Application:

If our soul is not greater than our love for riches then we have a rotten soul, a corrupt soul. Materialism-lust corrupts our soul if we allow it to operate as a greater value than eternal values. If money is more important than fellowship with God then we have a corrupt soul, an odious soul. However, a believer of great wealth whose greatest value is to glorify God has a sweet smelling soul. Wealth is an instrumental value but richness of soul is an intrinsic value.

An intrinsic value is something valued for its own sake. An instrumental value is useful only as it does something for something else. The instrumental value of money is of little worth to someone who is about to die in a few hours. An instrumental value exists for something else, not for itself. In God's economy, we employ material wealth as an instrumental value to use for a higher eternal value. Money is not the important value to us. Justice, love and truth are intrinsic values that never change.

Materialism-lust is susceptible to devaluation in time and complete devaluation in eternity. Believers need to take warning of the vulnerability of the self-confidence of the self-made man. People who put their trust in wealth put their personal well being at risk. Our lives under that premise ebb and flow with our riches. Hoarding material things will bring us "from riches to rags."

2 Co 4: 16 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but

the things which are not seen are eternal."

There is a corrosive effect of wealth. Temporary, instrumental values will not stand against eternal values. Placing our trust in temporal values will ultimately lead us to ruin. We assume that we are amassing material wealth but in reality, we are amassing something that decomposes.

James 5:3

Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days."

James continues to argue against the believer who does not use his assets for God's glory but for himself. This argument began in 4:13. James discusses the second and third categories of wealth in this verse [garments, gold and silver].

Your gold and silver are corroded,

Neither gold nor silver can rust but they can corrode. Rust is the result of slow oxidation of metals. Oxidation of pure gold in our day does not corrode that gold significantly but the gold of the first century for the most part was not pure. Metaphorically, the idea is that gold and silver will end in ruin.

The process is the same for greed as it is for metals. As corrosion destroys the value of metal, so hoarding tarnishes God's purpose for wealth. Both gold and silver can corrode in God's economy.

and their corrosion will be a witness against you

The temporal, instrumental value of wealth will witness against people who place their terminal values into hoarding money. The soul that operates on temporal values is a soul in the state of corrosion. God will use this corroded state of the soul as evidence against the believer who uses wealth as a terminal value for life at the Judgment Seat of Christ. This evidence of blunting of the soul puts the believer under divine discipline. God will use this evidence to convict our souls for being out of fellowship with God. God will discipline us with the very thing that corroded our

soul. "The mills of God's justice may grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine."

Principle:

Hoarding transitory things is foolish because they are indeed transitory.

Application:

The failure of wealth to satisfy us in time and in eternity is a witness against the attitude that if we gain great possessions, we will be happy. This witnesses to the fact that our wealth will perish as an intrinsic value. What is in a man's soul makes him rich, not what he has in the bank. He is rich according to what he is, not according to what he has.

Spiritual Christians cannot walk in a transitory value system and an eternal value system at the same time. If we have all the beautiful gold and silver objects that we can imagine but we have not grown in the Lord, then we do not have the capacity to put these things in perspective. It is not what you have that counts in God's eyes but what is in your soul. Material things are temporary; spiritual things are eternal.

Pr. 23: 4 "Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! 5 Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven."

We cannot solve our problems with material objects such as silver or gold or the stock market. Acquiring women, success, drugs or wealth cannot expand our soul. Development of the soul must operate as a transcending value over any earthly object. We never meet our ultimate needs with sex, money or power. The acquisition of things will not help us at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

and will eat your flesh

This evidence of the corrosion of hoarding materialism-lust in the soul will consume the person captured by it.

like fire.

These words go with the next sentence – "Like fire, you have heaped up treasure in the last

days." The idea is that their burning passion was materialism-lust. That burning passion heaps up treasure in the last days, "You are a walking fire of self-destruction." As a fire destroys everything in its path, so materialism-lust destroys everything in its path.

You have heaped up treasure in the last days

The word "treasure" means to lay up, store up a treasury. The idea is to keep safe valuables or something of great worth. This treasure in the last days is a pile of greed we present to the Lord at the Judgment Seat of Christ. What a gift to the Lord Jesus!

Mt 6: 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."

The words "heaped up" means accumulation of material things. This accumulation of materialism-lust produces a reaction in the soul; it produces its own destruction. We undermine our own soul by the belief that if we accumulate things, we will be happy. The "last days" here may be the last days of retirement. They own a pile of greed for their old age. However, this may refer to both the last days of retirement and the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Principle:

There is a great danger in thinking of God simply as a God of love and mercy; He is also a God of justice.

Application:

God owns everything. God wants us to be stewards of our possessions, not owners. He is the Owner of everything and everyone in the universe. Hoarding is foolish – why feed moths for a living!?! Everything we do on earth has eternal significance. God will reward us at the Judgment Seat of Christ if we use everything that we are and have to His glory.

1 Tm 6: 18 "Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for

themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

What would be the state of your soul if you lost all your material wealth?

James 5:4

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

In this verse, we see that the sinfully wealthy not only hoarded their wealth but they acquired their wealth by illegal means.

Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields,

Wealthy owners of numerous fields exploited their harvest workers by cheating them out of their legitimate wages. Although these owners had extensive land holdings, they cheated their employees out of what was rightfully due them.

which you kept back by fraud,

The issue here is not the acquisition of wealth but the manner in which they obtained their wealth. The word "fraud" means to deprive by deception. These owners of fields defrauded their workers out of fair wages. The concern is not that the landowner made capital gain but that he greedily defrauded his employees.

cry out;

These defrauded workers cry out for redress from God. The words "cry out" mean to croak, to vociferate. The Greek uses this term for the cry of a raven giving the idea of shriek as in a loud cry or scream. The image is that they are in a desperate situation.

and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth

The word "reached" means to enter into. The prayers of the reapers go into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. God hears and answers prayer. Cries for justice from the reapers reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth [Hosts, Armies]. God, as the Commander-in-chief, will go to war against those who defraud their workers. The sovereign God

Almighty sees this kind of thing. The oppressed on earth have an Ally in heaven. The wealthy should think twice about defrauding the poor because the God of Armies watches their actions.

Lev. 19: 13 "You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning."

Principle:

God hears the prayer of the financially oppressed.

Application:

God hears the cry of the financially oppressed. He will not allow exploitation of the poor to continue without end. As the Lord of Armies, He will muster His forces against those who defraud His people. God has the sovereign power to do this. No matter how powerful your employer, God can intervene into your situation. There is nothing lower in free enterprise than a businessperson who does well and yet cheats his workers out of their legitimate wages. His materialism-lust is to accumulate more and more wealth. He does not need this abundance but he acquires it in a frenzied search for happiness.

God ultimately deals with this type by taking the means of making money away. He did this with the Soviet Union and other countries that violate their people. He will marshal His forces against business that cheats its workers. In God's laws of business, the worker has rights for wages. The employer who selfishly abuses his employees goes against God's laws of establishment. Just as military protects our freedom, so business should provide means for all. Isolation of prosperity for some destroys God's system of prosperity for all. Under God's economy, prosperity is the sphere of business, not government. Business has responsibility to its workers in His economy.

James 5:5

You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter."

The scene now changes from the wages for working in the harvest fields to the social life of wealthy landowners. These business people lived lives of luxury and self-indulgence.

You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury;

Two words explain the motives of the wealth landowners of verse four: 1) pleasure and luxury. "Pleasure" carries the idea of wanton pleasure. Instead of giving the harvest workers their due wage, these landowners lavishly spent the money on themselves. This is the sin of extravagance at the expense of others. These people have little discipline in their spending habits. They would rather spend their money on a high style of life for themselves than justly paying their employees. They live to indulge themselves.

The word "luxury" means to lead a soft life. The New Testament uses this word only here and 1 Timothy 5:6. The perception is a voluptuous and wanton life style. The idea is the pursuit of pleasure and debauchery and involves carousing and 'painting the town red'. Satisfying insatiable desire is unadulterated greed. Spirituality requires self-denial for the needs of others.

Their pleasure and luxury was at the expense of their workers. They lived as if there was no eternity; they lived only for time. They thought that luxury and self-indulgence would give them happiness.

you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter

Animals fattened for the slaughter was a common image to the Jew. A greedy heart that cares only for acquisitions prepares itself for the day of God's reckoning as sacrificial animals are prepared for sacrifice. Self-indulgence is a subject of God's quick justice. Pleasure is one thing but self-indulgence is another. Self-indulgent people live for time, not eternity. A cow fattened for slaughter eats to her heart's content oblivious that she will be slaughtered in the end. Greedy people fatten themselves with wealth not knowing that they are like an animal fattened for the kill.

Principle:

Those who live in self-indulgence lose their perspective on eternal values.

Application:

If we choose to live a life of self-indulgence, we lose our perspective on eternal values. Some of us

are so pleasure mad that we rarely think of eternity.

Ecclesiastes 2: 4 "I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. 7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. 9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. 10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun."

The love of money and self-indulgence operate as a tandem. We can enjoy our possessions if we understand the purpose of our possessions.

2 Ti 3: 1 "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"

James 5:6

You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you."

We come to the fourth indictment against the sinfully wealthy. These wealthy men 1) hoarded riches, 2) acquired their wealth by fraud, 3) used their wealth wrongfully and finally 4) they legally oppress and even killed poor workers through the "judicial" system.

You have condemned, you have murdered the just;

The "just" person here is the worker who deserves corresponding pay for equal work. The sinfully wealthy condemn and murder the "just" through corrupt courts of law.

What began as a sin of greed ends with murder. Opulent attitudes lead to murder because the scandalously wealthy do not want anyone standing in the way of their personal pleasure, so they take the just to court.

he does not resist you

The small employee does not resist the mighty employer because he has no power. These employers do what they do with impunity.

Principle:

God designed laws of national establishment to protect the freedom of the just.

Application:

A nation must have just laws to protect its citizens. Citizens need guarantees of basic freedoms. This is why God ordained national entities. A nation cannot provide freedom for its citizens without laws of establishment. God designed the national entities of the world to provide laws of protection and freedom. Some wealthy people destroy the laws of a national entity by bribing judges. They will not stop at anything to gain more power. That is why good law requires objective judges blind to prejudice. When the wealthy destroy laws of establishment by bribes, they pull the rug out from under the whole system.

James 5:7

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain."

James now transitions from the subject of judgment to consolation. His readers were under severe duress from financial abuse so he appeals to the comfort of the coming of Christ.

Therefore

The "therefore" here is an inference, "Because of the injustice done against you by your employers, take heed to the following commands. Don't take things into your own hands. Operate on God's principles for addressing injustice."

be patient,

We now come to the first of four commands addressed to those oppressed by financial circumstances:

- 1) Be patient because the Lord will ultimately deal with your circumstances (5:7),
- 2) Strengthen your hearts because of the Lord's imminent coming (5:8),
- 3) Do not complain but look to true justice from the true Judge (5:9-11),
- 4) Guard your integrity by what you say (5:12).

James also gives three examples of people with patience: 1) Patience of the farmer who waits for his crop to mature (5:7), 2) Patience of the prophets under persecution (5:10) and 3) Patience of Job in trial (5:11).

The proper attitude in persecution is a "patient" orientation to those who wrong us. The word "patient" comes from a Greek word composed of two words: long and temper or anger. A person of "patience" is long-tempered, long-angered. He can bear with others in their foibles.

"Patience" is a quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation. A person with this characteristic will not retaliate; he will not punish others for wrongs done to him. It is the opposite of anger. He also carries a component of mercy (Ex 34:6; 1 Pe 3:20). Even God allows men to resist Him (Ro 2:4).

1 Co 13: 4 "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up..."

Another Greek word for "patient" occurs in 1:3-4 where the idea is to endure difficult circumstances. We need both patience with circumstances and patience with people. No matter how difficult their situation, James exhorts his readers to hang in there with people and circumstances.

Principle:

Our incentive to be patient with people is the knowledge that a just Judge is coming.

Application:

We need patience with people, patience with our family and friends and finally, patience at work. We should be careful about taking negative situations into our own hands. There is a place where we leave it in the hands of the Lord.

Ps 37: 7 "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass."

Many of us are short-tempered, not long-tempered. God expects us to practice self-restraint against people who do us wrong. We will not hastily retaliate when others violate our space. Chrysostom defined patience as the spirit that has the ability to take revenge but utterly refuses to do so.

brethren,

Again, James uses the term "brethren." He obviously is talking to members of the family of God throughout this section.

until the coming of the Lord.

The word "until" marks the limit of their patience. It also indicates a rationale for their patience. It is the time of consolation in God's justice.

1 Th 4: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together

with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words."

The "coming of the Lord" in this verse is the rapture, not the 2nd coming. James refers to the rapture three times in this section (vv. 7, 8, 9). The rapture is the point when suffering will cease because we will experience the presence of Christ. We will receive relief from suffering then.

The word "coming" means appearing, presence. The rapture is the time when we will see the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. By the time of the writing of the book of James, Jesus has been resurrected for thirty years. James looks forward to the time when Jesus will appear and they will see Him in His humanity. At this time He will take them to be with Himself. This is their blessed hope.

Principle:

By looking for our Lord on the tiptoe of expectancy, we orient our values to eternity and to fellowship with the Lord Himself.

Application:

When the Lord Jesus comes in the rapture, it will be a time of consolation. Oppression will end forever. That is why it is our "blessed hope."

Ti 2: 13 "...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..."

None of us knows when the Lord Jesus will come back. We welcome that time because it will be the end of suffering and pain. It is a good thing that we do not know when He will return because in time we might become slack in our responsibilities. All of us should anticipate His coming because it will keep us pure. His imminent coming means that we need to be ready at any time. By looking for our Lord on the tiptoe of expectancy, we orient our values to eternity and to fellowship with the Lord Himself.

1 Jn 3: 2 "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3

And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth,

James now uses an illustration from free enterprise, a farmer who invests in seed to gain an eventual harvest (his capital gain). The farmer waits patiently through the winter months, the rainy season for his harvest. Just as the farmer waits patiently for the latter rain, so the Christian waits for the coming of Christ (Ga 6:9; 2 Ti 4:8; Ti 2:13).

waiting patiently for it

The word "patiently" here has to do with patience with people, not patience with circumstances. James challenges his readers not to let the repressive rich landowners get them down.

The word "waiting" primarily means to take or receive from, thus to await, expect. The idea is to reach out in readiness to receive something – to expect. This farmer continues to remain in an expectant state until an anticipated event. It is a long time before his crop comes in. He must be patient about the harvest. The application for the believer is that he must rise above the circumstances and not lose heart. He needs to move along without letting situations stumble him.

1 Th 1: 10 "...and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

until it receives the early and latter rain

The "early" rains came in late October and early November. The "latter" rains came as the crops matured in late March and early April just before the harvest. In Palestine, rains occur primarily in November through March. The summer months are often without rain. The farmer works toward the harvest; he does not simply indulge the present. The Christian anticipates the return of the Lord, the rapture of the church.

Ro. 8: 18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the

earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God."

The farmer waits until he "receives" the early and latter rain. Those rains are the necessary groundwork before the harvest. The early rains fell at the time of sowing; the latter rain matured the grain for harvest. In the meantime, the farmer waits through the winter rainy season. The slow germination and ripening of crops is a good example for patience in waiting for the rapture.

Principle:

The attitude of expectancy toward the rapture shapes our values and decisions in time.

Application:

The farmer waits patiently in anticipation of the harvest. If we do not accept that the purpose of the first coming of Christ was to save us, there is no reason to anticipate His coming again. Christians, however, anticipate His coming because they previously believed His first coming. They believe that is their true harvest.

2 Ti. 4: 8 "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Anticipation of something "precious" eases the anxiety of waiting. The coming of Christ makes the present manageable. "It may be today – glad day." That is how the believer rises above the circumstances and does not lose heart. He moves along without letting situations stumble him.

2 Co. 4: 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

James 5:8

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

You also

Just as the farmers of verse 7 were patient in waiting for the harvest, so believers are to be "patient" in waiting for God's justice. Wealthy landowners defrauded poor believers while they themselves lived in luxury. Christians need divine perspective to address their anguish.

be patient.

James' point is that we are to be patient with those who abuse us until the Lord comes. We are to develop the attitude of long-suffering toward our adversaries, "Bear your trials without retaliation and resentment. Wait on the Lord's coming because we will find justice there." This does not mean that we cannot stand up for ourselves but it does mean that we should acquiesce to the plan of God and His timing. This is why we can maintain perspective with people. We accept inconvenience and allow others to take advantage of us by keeping God's will in view.

Establish your hearts,

James calls attention to the need of our "hearts." Believers need to strengthen their souls. Discouragement and even despair can grip their hearts.

The word "establish" means to make fast, to confirm. The idea is to stabilize something by making a resolution to do something. This word also carries the idea of the stability of courage. Those who are about to cave into their problems need to orient their hearts to the spiritual strength of the blessed hope. They need to develop a constancy that comes from a confirmation of the Word of God. They need to make decisions with a finality of belief about where their true hope lies.

1 Th. 3: 12 "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints."

2 Th 2: 16 "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

1 Pet. 5: 10 "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

Principle:

Mature believers can have stability in times of trouble because their trouble is only temporary.

Application:

The long-term perspective of the believer is that trouble is only temporary. God has a plan and He will execute that plan right on time and in His perfect will. Christians take confidence in this. This is the basis of their stability. They will not shirk the will of God if they keep the long view of God's plan. A Christian cannot move forward in the Christian life without a firm faith. If he wavers by letting antagonists intimidate him, then he will falter in faith.

1 Th. 3: 2 "...and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith..."

Believers can have stability in trouble because their trouble is only temporary. Our troubles will end at the rapture. That is why we anticipate that day. We live in the light that His coming could be at any moment. God calls us to resolute, firm courage about the certainty of the rapture. That is why we should not overly concern ourselves about those who financially abuse others.

Ps. 73: 2 "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

There is no place for double-minded, unstable believers (1:6). They are people who are like the

wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. God does not bless this kind of Christian (1:7-8). This is especially true when it comes to the imminent return of Christ. We hear much today about how unimportant the doctrine of future things is but the Bible says that it is the basis for our stability! A Christian with the long view of things will have a long temper, a long fuse. He will not retaliate at the first violation of his rights because he knows that God is in control and that His timing is always right. This was Joseph's attitude toward his brothers who wronged him (Ge 50:20).

Ep 4: 14 "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man..."

Moses understood the importance of perspective. He kept eternal values in view regardless of his adverse circumstances. This perspective on life will keep us from discouragement.

He 11: 24 "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

for the coming of the Lord is

The reason we remain faithful is that the Lord's coming is imminent. It is the motive for what we do as Christians. Phil 4: 5 "Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand."

at hand

How could the coming of Christ be "at hand" to the readers of James if He still has not come in 2000 years? The answer lies in the meaning of the words "at hand." The phrase "at hand" is a technical phrase for the imminent return of Christ. The word in the Greek means to draw near, to approach, to come close. This word carries the idea of imminent or to move nearer to a reference point. The coming of the Lord is approaching to a

current point of time as harvest time approaches. The rapture is the next event on God's prophetic calendar. It could happen at any moment. There is no prophecy that needs fulfillment before the rapture occurs.

Heb 10: 25 "...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching..."

1 Pet. 4: 7 "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

Principle:

The Lord's coming should encourage every believer to live godly lives.

Application:

The next event on God's prophetic calendar is the rapture. There is no prophecy that needs fulfillment before Christ comes back. It could happen at any moment. The rapture has been imminent since the church began. God expects the believer to always be on alert to His coming. Trial is only temporary for the believer. It will stop when the Lord returns. The believer is to fix his heart on the imminent return of Christ. We do this because Christ's coming is certain, "The judge is standing at the door" (5:9).

Ro 13: 12 "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts."

God is not negligent in keeping His promise of the imminent return of Christ. We can have confidence in that so we can have a stable attitude about the future. God will send Jesus back but He will do it on His own time scale.

Rom. 16: 25 "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the

mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”

James 5:9

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!”

Do not grumble against

The readers of James tended to complain about each other under their financial duress. The word “grumble” means to sigh often, sigh deeply, to moan, to groan. A “grumble” is a half murmur of impatience and half harsh judgment not uttered fully aloud. It is a resentment not fully expressed.

James appeals to his readers not to bemoan each other’s state of affairs. They were complaining in an intense and excessive way about each other. Some people are chronic complainers.

The word “against” means down. The idea is to put others down. We put others down when we diminish them. Impatience with our own lot makes us impatient with other people. one another, “One another” here means one another of the same kind. James’ concern is sin against the family of God.

brethren,

James appeals to the family of God to act like the family of God.

lest you be condemned.

Jesus will judge our resentful attitudes toward fellow believers at the judgment seat of Christ.

Ro 14: 10 “But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

2 Co 5: 10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the

body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Principle:

God expects us to forbear others in light of eternal values.

Application:

It is easy to blame our troubles on other people. A tendency of people under pressure is to gripe and complain. We want to take out our frustrations on others. We would like to issue recriminations against those that we deem to have it easier than we do. There is no parity in this life so why should we act as if it is possible? Someone content with his own lot in life does not envy others or hold grudges against them. He does not complain, criticize, malign or slander them. These are sins of the tongue. People who put others down put down the family of God.

Ph 2:14 “Do all things without complaining and disputing, 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”

God wants us to bear and to forbear. Are you able to take as well as give? Is there any give and take in you? We can forbear others if we keep the judgment seat of Christ in view.

Behold,

The word “behold” is a call to attention and an appeal to show patience towards people when we face trying circumstances. Impatience has a tendency to judge others subjectively and harshly.

the Judge is standing at the door!

James sets forth Jesus as a Judge ready to enter the court of judgment. Jesus is ready to begin the Judgment Seat of Christ. This event begins immediately after the rapture of the church.

2 Ti 4: 7 “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me

the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing."

The words "is standing" is another statement of the imminent return of Christ. The idea is that Jesus' return has proximity. "In view of His imminent return, why let yourself fall prey to petty attitudes? Think about eternal values rather than your difference with that person who bothers you."

Principle:

Jesus will judge a resentful spirit at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Application:

Bearing grudges against fellow Christians opens us to appraisal at the Judgment Seat of Christ. A believer who practices patience toward fellow Christians is someone oriented to the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus is the One who can best evaluate others. He has an omniscient viewpoint of people; we have a finite viewpoint of them. He can judge motives; we cannot judge motives. When we take out our frustrations on our family members or fellow Christians, we open ourselves to Jesus' judgment. It is either our judgment or Jesus' judgment - one or the other, which will it be?

1 Co 3: 12 "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

People with an eternal perspective do not allow personal animosities to blunt their spirituality. They see Jesus poised with His hand on the door ready to take the church back to heaven momentarily. Jesus will set everything right at that time.

1 Co 4: 5 "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God."

James 5:10

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience."

My brethren,

James owns his readers as his own family, the family of God.

take the prophets,

The prophets suffered even though they had a high calling. James mentions the prophets because they were men of the Word. It was their understanding of the principles of the Word that sustained them in trial.

who spoke in the name of the Lord,

The prophets represented the Lord in what they said. People rejected them as they represented the Lord while preaching the Word. The prophets told them things they did not want to hear so the people persecuted them. Elijah fled from Jezebel. They put Daniel into prison. Micaiah refused to speak anything but the Word of God to Ahab so Ahab put him into prison.

as an example

An "example" is a sign suggestive of something, a figure, form, copy. The Greek word is composed of two words: under and to show. An example is something that is shown under, hence, a sign suggestive of something, a representation. An example is something that we should imitate, a model, pattern. The example of the prophets is something to which we can point our finger. Jesus is an example as well.

Jn 13: 15 "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

of suffering and patience

The prophets were examples of how to handle suffering and express patience under duress. The

word “suffering” comes from two words: evil and to suffer. A person who suffers undergoes evil, trouble, distress. This is an afflicted person. The prophets were afflicted people. They were men of God and spoke in the name of the Lord yet they suffered from the hands of men. They endured poor treatment from those who rejected their message.

2 Ch 36: 15 “And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.”

“Patience” is the long holding out of mind before it caves into its passions. The prophets did not give into resentments because of their persecutions. The higher ideal of the will of God gave them self-restraint.

Principle:

God’s standard is that we hold out long under suffering before we cave into our passions by accepting the will of God for our lives.

Application:

Affliction is part of the Christian life. We will not be free from trouble until we go to be with the Lord. If we try to live a trouble free life, we head for frustration. There is no such ethereal state before we get to eternity. God does not promise us freedom from affliction until we go to be with Him.

2 Ti 2: 8 “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained. 10 Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.”

God wants us to imitate the virtue of the prophets -- patience with people under suffering. Our reactions are more telling sometimes than our

actions. God wants us to react to suffering with patience. He wants us to do it with loooongsuffering. God’s standard is that we hold out for a long time before we give into our passions or anger. We do not allow resentment to grab hold of us.

2 Ti 4: 5 “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Longsuffering under trial produces tenacity of soul.

Ro 5: 3 “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

James 5:11

Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord – that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”

Indeed we count them blessed who endure.

The word “blessed” does not mean happy but a well-ordered soul, a person who is fortunate. Jesus used this same term in the beatitudes. Mt 5: 10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The word “count” gives perspective on those who undergo trials in God’s will – they are blessed.

There are two basic words for endurance. The first one used earlier in the chapter means to endure people. The word for endurance in this verse means to endure circumstances (“endure” and “perseverance”). The word here for “endure” means to carry a load. Sometimes the Lord lays heavy burdens on us.

You have heard of the perseverance of Job

Job is the classic example of “perseverance.” The word “perseverance” means to abide under, to remain under instead of giving up. This person does not flee from his problems but has the fortitude to hang in there. He stands his ground; he stands firm. He continues to bear up under

difficulties, resistance and opposition. He can put up with a lot. Job put up with a lot. He lost his wealth, his health, his children, his reputation and the support of his wife (Job 2:9). Even his three friends abandon him (Job 16:1). It is of note that James does not say that Job had "patience" (5:8-10) but that he had the fortitude to hang in there.

1 Co 9: 12 "If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ."

2 Ti 2: 10 "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

Ja 1: 12 "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Principle:

High character will maintain fortitude in the Lord during times of duress.

Application:

It pays to be persistent through trials in our walk with the Lord. Our reaction to trouble is the measure of our character. Should we face reversals such as loss of a family member, loss of possessions, loss of business, how would we react? A believer of high character maintains faithfulness to the Lord and His Word.

Job 13: 15 "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him."

Job 19: 25 "For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!..."

and seen the end intended by the Lord

The "end" is the outcome of the Lord's dealings with Job. This is the purpose that God had in store

for Job. God always looks at the ultimate end of our suffering. God seemed far away to Job but His compassion was there all the time.

Principle:

God never wastes any adversity that comes our way for He has a purpose in everything that happens to us.

Application:

When we take confidence in God's purpose for suffering, we develop tenacity of soul. It is worth waiting for God's purpose for our life. He never wastes any event in our life. Each thing that comes into our lives is under His eternal design. He concurs with each event in our life. He may not approve of some things we choose to do but he allows us to do it. God does everything according to a plan. Nothing is random in that plan. God can see the end from the beginning so His plan is perfect.

Job 42: 10 "And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. 11 Then all his brothers, all his sisters, and all those who had been his acquaintances before, came to him and ate food with him in his house; and they consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity that the LORD had brought upon him. Each one gave him a piece of silver and each a ring of gold. 12 Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. 13 He also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 And he called the name of the first Jemimah, the name of the second Keziah, and the name of the third Keren-Happuch. 15 In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. 16 After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and grandchildren for four generations. 17 So Job died, old and full of days."

that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful

The only time this word "compassionate" occurs in the New Testament is in this verse.

"Compassionate" means many boweled, full of pity, very kind. It comes from two words: much and heart.

Ex. 34: 6 "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth...'"

Num. 14: 18 'The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.'

Ps 86:5 "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You."

Principle:

We know God's compassion by His promises.

Application:

The compassion and mercy of God do not seem real to us when we go through deep trial. We know that God has compassion toward us because the Word of God says that He does. We claim God's compassion on our lives by faith in the promises.

Rom. 8: 28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Eph. 2: 4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Lam. 3: 22 "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His

compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."

James 5:12

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment."

But

Impatience and grumbling can lead to rash speech and false oaths.

above all,

Our speech represents our spiritual condition so we should be careful that we make sure that we put priority on communication with integrity.

my brethren,

James addresses his concerns about making false oaths to members of the family of God. These believers use oaths as a cover for their false claims.

do not swear, either by heaven or by earth

The word "swear" here does not mean profanity, blasphemy or dirty talk. The New Testament uses the word "swear" for affirming or denying by a solemn oath. The word means to affirm, promise, threaten, with a religious oath. This gives a religious guarantee to validate their statement.

Principle:

It violates Christian principle to affirm the truth of a statement by calling on a divine being to execute sanctions against a person if the statement in question is not true.

Application:

When we swear by anything in God's province, we bring God into the deal. Some people use God as a front for their falsehood. This makes our lie more impressive to the unwary. When we make an opinion and portray it as truth, we lie.

or with any other oath.

An "oath" is something that restrains a person, an enclosure. It is something pledged or promised with an oath. The idea is that this person makes a

promise to cover a lie. The promise is a front for a lie, "As God is my witness, I will..." Jesus condemned the minute and arbitrary restrictions imposed by the scribes and Pharisees in the matter of adjurations, by which they profaned God's name. Paul's language in Galatians 1:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27 is consistent with Jesus' prohibition if we consider the context.

Jews of the first century swore by oaths other than the name of God when they wanted to lie about something.

Mt. 5: 33 "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' 34 But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; 35 nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. 36 Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.'

For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." Oaths in the Old Testament served to bind legal contracts in a time when very few written agreements existed. The oath verbally attested something as true. The Word of God does not prohibit taking oaths in court or an oath in marriage. Oaths are wrong when they deceive others. God Himself took oaths in the Bible (He 6:13-17). God's unconditional covenants [contracts] are an example of this (e.g., the Abrahamic Covenant, Ge 12-18). God made it compulsive that people take oaths in the Old Testament (Ex 22:10-11; Nu 5:19-22; 6:2f; 30:2f; Ps. 15:1-4). Paul took oaths (Ac 18:18; Ro 1:9; 2 Co 1:23; 11:31).

Principle:

God expects the believer to be open and frank in his communications.

Application:

Here is the way we make false oaths today: "I swear on my mother's grave. I swear on a stack of Bibles. I cross my heart and hope to die." All these attempts at persuasion are fabrications and dishonesty.

Mt 23: 16 "Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.' 17 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? 18 And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.' 19 Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift? 20 Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. 21 He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. 22 And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it."

A spiritual believer should be candid, frank and open in his communications. A carnal believer makes patsies of people by pseudo oaths. They love to blame other people for their mistakes.

But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No,"

Anything other than straightforward speech is outside the will of God. Lies are chronic to men. They get this habit from their father, the father of lies.

Jn 8: 44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."

The reason we need oaths in courts of laws is to compel people to declare where they stand based on their word legally set forth. On the other hand, Christians do not need an oath process to verify their word. lest you fall into judgment We invite God's judgment to ourselves if we behave contrary to straightforward speech. The believer will fall into divine chastening if he brings God into a false oath.

Ex. 20: 7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

The following passage shows how the believer falls into divine discipline: · Death, 5:14-15 · Loss of health, 5:16

Principle:

We need to guard our speech to maintain integrity.

Application:

The Christian should not go to the extent of imploring a divine being to sanction the truthfulness of what he says. His word should be honest and straightforward. This is why James commands his readers to stop swearing by oaths. People with integrity do not need to swear by an oath because, having kept their word in the past, people believe what they say. God's concern is how we communicate in our ordinary conversations. In times of duress and stress, it is easy to make a false pledge. God desires that we be genuine in what we say rather than attaching a rash promise to our statement. Integrity should always guard our speech.

James 5:13

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

James now turns from improper actions when a person is under duress and takes up two proper ways to deal with life: prayer and praise - two neglected areas of the Christian life (5:13-18).

Is anyone among you suffering?

The word "suffering" signifies to suffer hardship. James now addresses his comments to those enduring hardship, misfortune and trouble. Many of his readers fled from Palestine under the persecution of Acts 8:1-4 and dispersed through the Roman Empire (1:1). The context of healing from this verse forward is not physical healing but the healing of hurts from people through prayer.

2 Ti 2: 8 "Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained."

2 Ti 4: 5 "But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Let him pray. The New Testament always uses the word "pray" for prayer to God. The antidote to hardship is to pray. When a Christian endures hardships, he must commit himself to intense prayer. The Greek indicates that we are to keep on praying when we engage trouble.

Ep 6: 18 "...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints..."

Principle:

Prayer is the believer's great weapon in times of adversity.

Application:

Nothing is more important during trial than prayer. We need to pray as individuals and we need to pray with others. If we do not pray, we will grumble, fret and complain about everything. We find relief from affliction in prayer. Paul prayed three times about a physical problem he endured.

2 Co 12: 7 "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Times of affliction are times for prayer in God's economy. We can become upset, perplexed, unhappy, provoked, irritated or resentful in times of stress or we can put our tensions in the hands of God by prayer. We keep praying until we get

an answer – “Yes” or “No.” We may not get an answer right away. God will answer in His timing. “Don’t get discouraged in prayer. Keep it up.” Prayer is the believer’s great weapon in times of adversity.

Ph 4: 6 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Prayer will keep us from capitulating to outside pressure.

Ps. 27: 13 “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. 14 Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart;

Wait, I say, on the LORD!”

Is anyone cheerful?

“Cheerful” means to put in good spirits. This word comes from two words: good and soul. A “cheerful” person is someone who has a healthy soul, a joyful attitude. He is a person with prosperity in his soul, therefore, he has spiritual vitality.

Ps 5: 11 “But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You.”

Ps 16: 11 “You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

1 Pe 1: 8 “...whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...”

1 Jn 1: 4 “And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.”

Let him sing psalms

The word “sing psalms” primarily means to twitch, twang [as with a bow string], then to play

a stringed instrument with the fingers. The New Testament usage carries the idea to sing a hymn, sing praise [accompanied by musical instruments]. The innate answer of a cheerful heart is to sing praise to God. There is a time for prayer and then there is a time of joy.

Ac 16: 25 “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”

The filling of the Spirit produces a song in the heart.

Ep 5: 18 “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Principle:

Spiritual singing is an expression of spiritual joy.

Application:

There is a time for prayer and then there is a time of joy. A gal says “yes” to a date so the guy sings in the shower. Singing is an expression of joy. Spiritual singing is an expression of spiritual joy. This is the ecstasy of spirituality. This is a healthy soul.

Col. 3: 16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

1 Co 14: 15 “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”

There is a right time for everything. There is a time to pray and there is a time to sing. In all, God is sufficient. We relate everything we are and have to God. God’s will is right in every situation.

James 5:14

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."

James now turns to a special case of a believer who fell sick due to protracted sin in his life. He was on the verge of committing the sin unto death (5:20).

Is anyone among you sick?

The word "sick" means to lack strength, to be weak. The idea may be weak from spiritual sickness, a state of incapacity. The New Testament uses "sick" fourteen times to refer to emotional or spiritual powerlessness (Acts 20:35; Ro. 4:19; 8:3; 14:1-2; 1 Co. 8:11-12; 2 Co. 11:21, 29; 12:10; 13:3-4, 9).

Rom. 6:19 "I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness."

The New Testament uses this word of physical sickness only three times (Ph. 2:26-27; 2 Ti. 4:20). The word "sick" in the next verse means faint (5:15). Therefore, the term here means weak due to spiritual failure. The people James addresses are those defeated in spiritual battle and are under God's discipline of physical sickness. Sin is clearly in view in the next verse (5:15). James presents the idea that unless a Christian confesses and deals with his sin, God will set him on a course of physical sickness or even death (1:15, 21; 5:20). Physical sickness sometimes comes from long-lasting sinful behavior.

Let him call for the elders of the church,

James encourages the sick to urgently request the elders to help him spiritually. The word "elders" is another term for leader. A leader in the local church was someone spiritually qualified and with the maturity to lead others in spiritual restoration (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Ph. 1:1; 1 Ti. 5:17; Ti. 1:5).

and let them pray over him,

We find help in our spiritual defeat in spiritually mature leadership.

Principle:

God delights in restoring fallen believers.

Application:

God is in the business of encouraging the discouraged and distressed believer. He does this by spiritual restoration. If a Christian sins, God will forgive him. Sometimes believers need mature Christian leadership to help them with their restoration. If you are morally defeated and disheartened, God will give you sustaining grace to lift you out of your spiritual quagmire.

Ga 6:1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

God sometimes puts a believer to death because of protracted, unconfessed sin (De 28:22,27; Jn 5:14; 1 Co 11:30).

anointing him with oil

The question about "anointing" here is whether this is ceremonial anointing or simply an application of oil medicinally. It first appears that this passage is teaching that the elders can physically heal sick believers but this is out of agreement with the context. The context deals with believers under persecution. This person is physically sick because of his sin.

James here uses the more basic term rub with oil not the term for ceremonially anoint. Our word in this verse is the ordinary word, not the ceremonial word for anointing. It was usual that people of the first century applied oil to sick people. However, it is not anointing but prayer that heals the sick.

in the name of the Lord

Spiritual leadership is to minister "in the name of the Lord." The word "name" refers to God's essence. All spiritual ministries must be consistent with the essence of God's character. Later James says that if one of the spiritually weak commits

sins, God would forgive his sins indicating that this is a spiritual problem not a physical problem. The Bible does not teach that all sickness is the direct result of sin but the Bible does teach that some physical illnesses are due to extensive unconfessed sin. The answer for spiritual failure is "confession" (5:16).

Ps. 32: 5 "I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Pr. 28: 13 "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

1 Jn 1: 9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Principle:

God guarantees the healing of spiritually sick people.

Application:

Some take the false doctrine of "extreme unction" from this passage. The idea of extreme unction is to gain grace by the anointing of oil administered at death in order to gain God's approbation or favor. There is nothing in this passage that supports that idea. Again, neither does this verse teach that elders can heal physically sick people. It teaches that they can heal spiritually sick people. Confession of sin will deliver us from the power of sin.

If we allow sin to control us over long periods of time then God may use divine discipline on us. Some sickness is due to our sin and some God designs to glorify Himself. Not everyone who gets sick has a spiritual problem. There are some things better than physical healing. God does not always heal the sick. If that were so, then there would be no deaths. God designed that Paul have an eye disease (2 Co 12:9f). He allowed Timothy to have stomach problems. We all wait for the redemption of our bodies.

Ro 8: 23 "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves,

eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

The context of this verse is the sin unto death (5:20). This verse is the last call of the Lord before committing the sin unto death. We can shun the sin unto death by confession of sin. We can address only certain physical illnesses by dealing with spiritual issues. Prayer can only heal a sick believer in deep rebellion against God.

James 5:15

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."

And the prayer of faith

The Greek has a definite article before the word "faith" making it refer to a structure of belief. The prayer based on biblical faith will save the spiritually sick. That is why it is necessary to call "elders" [spiritually mature] to pray for the spiritually and physically sick believer. Prayer should always depend on good doctrine. The "prayer of faith" is always "in the name of the Lord" (5:14). That is a clear-cut limit to the prayer of faith. God has no obligation to heal except within His will. There are two qualifications to this prayer: 1) ask in faith and 2) in the name of the Lord.

will save the sick,

The prayer of faith by the elders will restore the sick. The word "sick" does not refer to physical illness but spiritual sickness – to waste away, to suffer, be distressed, fatigued or afflicted. It is an unusual Greek word. The idea is to gradually lose one's motivation to accomplish some goal – to become discouraged, tired or give up. The only other occurrence of this word is in Hebrews 12:3 and does not refer to physical illness but to divine discipline due to sin in one's life. This person wastes away due to his sin.

He 12: 3 "For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls."

The restoration here is spiritual restoration of defeated Christians. The word "save" means

restore [to spiritual wholeness]. The phrase “has committed sins” is more substantiation that the subject of this verse is spiritual restoration. The Word of God does not teach that all physical illness is the direct consequence of personal sin. On the other hand, spiritual defeat is the direct result of protracted personal sin.

Principle:

There is no obligation on God to answer every prayer.

Application:

There is no obligation on God to answer prayer in every instance of sickness. Do we give our children everything they ask? We do not try to meet all of their demands for that would not be healthy for them. We give them what is good for them. Paul could not heal Epaphroditus (Ph 2:27) and he left Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Ti 4:20). Neither could he find healing for his own physical illness [some think that it was an ophthalmic illness].

2 Co 12: 9 “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Christian leaders do not have limitless ability to heal sick believers. If they did, why would they not heal everyone in sight?

and the Lord will raise him up.

The context appears to teach that James has both spiritual and physical healing in view. The “Lord” raised him up; the person who prayed did not raise him up. God does something here – He respects the biblically based prayer by bringing the believer back from a desperate situation.

And if he has committed sins,

The “if” indicates that this believer of his own will went into rebellion. He sinned without confession over time. He accumulated the sin unto death by

this unconfessed sin. The tense of the word “committed” in the Greek means this believer committed this sin in the past with the result that he remains unrepentant of that sin. We can translate this phrase in this way, “And if he has been committing sins.” This is persistent rebellion against God’s Word. He is a person who refuses to confess and repent of his sin. He is in a state of rebellion against God.

Ps. 32: 5 “I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.”

Pr. 28: 13 “He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.”

1 Jn 1: 9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

The “sins” of this phrase are special sins – sins that caused this believer to go into protracted spiritual decline. he will be forgiven. Forgiveness goes with spiritual recovery. We can start over with God’s blessing. God holds no grudge against us. The word “forgive” means to send away. God sends our sin away.

Principle:

Sin can cause physical sickness.

Application:

A number of passages in the Word of God show that sin causes sickness (De 28:22,27; Jn 5:14; 1 Co 11:30). This only occurs when a believer in rebellion to the Word of God refuses to confess his sin over a protracted period. Rebellion against God can produce sickness and even premature death. It is important that we acknowledge our sins and not to use other people as patsies for our sin. We sin from our own free will; therefore, we do not blame others for our sin. If we do, we may draw the sin unto death unto ourselves.”

Ps 51: 2 “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. 4

**Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight – That
You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.”**

Personal sin does not necessarily result in physical illness but it can cause physical illness under special circumstances. We cannot say that a physically healthy Christian is so because he is free from sin. We can say that there are times when Christians enter into flagrant rebellion against God, that God puts that believer under physical divine discipline. That is the “if” in the phrase “if he has committed sins.”

1 Co 11: 30 “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [died]. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

God killed Ananias and Sapphira because they lied to the Holy Spirit. They dropped dead instantly. We cannot conclude that if God does not heal a sick person that it is because of sin in his life. Jesus healed sinful people. He said, “Go and sin no more.” Healing does not depend necessarily on the absence of sin. Sin can lead to sickness.

James 5:16

**Confess your trespasses to one another,
and pray for one another, that you may
be healed. The effective, fervent prayer
of a righteous man avails much.”**

Verse sixteen springs from verse fifteen.

Confess

The word “confess” means to confess or admit openly or fully. “Confess” comes from three Greek words: to say, same, and out. The idea is to speak out about something you agree is wrong. The readers of James needed to confess their sins of rebellion (5:15) openly to one another; otherwise, they would draw divine discipline.

your trespasses

A “trespass” is not the same as a sin. A trespass is a violation of the rights of someone else. It means to cross the rights of someone else. Hatred will

root in the souls of others if we do not deal with wrongs we did against them. There is danger of people developing irreconcilable attitudes in this. This believer committed the sin unto death (5:20). to one another, We do not need to confess our sins to an intermediary or priest. We do, however, have the right to confess sins to mature Christian leaders [“elders:].

Principle:

Confession of sin keeps spirit, soul and body healthy.

Application:

Protracted, unconfessed sin will eventually undermine the soul and even cause physical illness. We need mature leaders to help us get out of this spiral. Sometimes confession of sin will heal physical illness, especially sickness that is directly related to sin.

In this case, the issue is primarily spiritual, not physical. Confession of sin can keep spirit, soul and body healthy. This is no absolute guarantee for physical healing because sin can cause permanent ravaging of the body. Sometimes God chooses not to heal physical illnesses.

Acknowledging our sin is the first step in spiritual restoration. Confession is not penance. Jesus did the penance for us on the cross (1 Jn 1:7). His blood keeps on cleansing us from sin, not our self-punishment. It is Christ-punishment, not self-punishment that sets us right with God. Our part is simply to acknowledge our part in what took Jesus to the cross. We cannot have forgiveness without the shedding of the blood of Christ (He 9:22). “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.”

and pray for one another,

Not only should Christians confess sin against each other but they should pray for one another so that God would heal them. We can come to the place where we cannot pray for ourselves and need the prayer of mature leaders who walk in fellowship with God. When a believer in need admits that need and accepts the help of a Spirit-filled leader, he is on the road to recovery. The leader extends grace to the believer in decline; he does not put a proposal of penitence on him.

Ga 6: 1 "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness [inwrought grace - I receive grace so I should extend grace], considering yourself lest you also be tempted."

that you may be healed.

The word "that" introduces a purpose clause. The purpose of praying for each other is that there would be spiritual healing. The word "healed" does not always necessarily imply physical healing. Here it refers to restoration to spiritual wholeness as well as physical healing, the sin unto death. Hebrews uses "healed" of spiritual restoration (He 12:12-13). Peter uses this word for healing from sin (1 Pe 2:24). The usage in this verse probably refers to forgiveness. God can heal the sin of unrighteous behavior. Matthew uses "healed" for spiritual healing.

Matthew 13: 15 "For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them."

Principle:

Transparency and acceptance go hand in hand.

Application:

Confession of sin should stay within the sphere of the sin. Private sin requires private confession and public sin requires public confession. Public sin is anything that brings reproach on the body of Christ [the church]. We confess private sin privately and public sin publicly. It does not profit the Christian community to hang dirty wash in public. We should confess private sins privately. Transparency and acceptance go hand in hand.

Confession of sin should not go beyond the sphere of the sin. Openness toward sin creates a cleansing in the soul. An open, caring, mature church is a healthy community. It is a place where Christians should be able to take their masks off and let others know their true needs.

Pr 28: 13 "He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

True fellowship depends on openness and trust. Isolation creates its own danger. It is much easier to compartmentalize sin if we do not share it. Sharing creates accountability to us as well as others. Secret sin is difficult to cure. Confession is not an absolute but an offer to bless those who are out of orbit with the Lord.

The effective,

Prayer for defeated believers is "effective" prayer. "Effective" means to have power, to put something into operation. We get our English word "energy" from the Greek word for "effective." The idea is operational prayer energized by the Spirit. These prayers are efficacious or operational. Prayer is ineffective unless God energizes it. The effect produced in the praying person such as in the case of Elijah (5:17), is a power operating in the will of God.

fervent prayer

There is no word for "fervent" here. We do not impress God with fervency, "Oh God, Oh God, Oh God, please do this." Translators get the word "fervent" from the word "much" in the Greek. The "much power" of a righteous man [a leader walking in fellowship with God] gets his prayers answered because he is in the will of God. of a righteous man The spiritually strong have strong prayers. They can intervene for others who cannot intervene for themselves. The "righteous man" here is the Spirit-filled and mature leader, an "elder" or leader of the local congregation (5:14).

It is the prayer of a leader in the will of God that gets answers to prayer for a believer in deep decline. avails much Certain prayers have power but other prayers do not.

"Avails" means accomplishes "much." It avails much because it is effective. Prayers of righteous leaders are operational. Weak prayers from weak people do not produce much but strong prayers from spiritually strong people accomplish much. Prayer is a powerful force. A congregation is never more threatened than by sin within.

Nu 11: 2 "Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the LORD, the fire was quenched."

God will not void the prayers of a righteous man. The "effective," "fervent" prayer is powerful prayer. There is effectiveness in the power of prayer.

Principle:

Prayers of leaders who walk with God are operational toward God because those prayers are in the will of God.

Application:

The prayer of a leader in a local church who walks with God has much power and is operational in God's eyes. This leader can save a believer from the sin unto death (5:20). The believer with the sin unto death is more than a carnal Christian; he is a rebellious believer in deep spiritual decline, opposing the authority of God for his life.

Ja 5: 20 "...let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."

In order for a believer to be saved from the sin unto death, he must repent of his deep spiritual decline by accepting the authority of the prayer of the leader. By changing his mind toward his rebellion, he opens himself to freedom from the sin unto death. The effective prayer of a mature leader brings this believer back in line with the will of God. There is a need for interdependence between followers and leaders of a local church. Mutual care for one another is the way we combat spiritual discouragement and downfall. Weak prayer comes from the spiritually weak; strong prayer comes from the spiritually strong. We need mature leaders to help us through sinful obsessions. Confession of sin to mature leaders will deliver us from the grip of sin.

James 5:17

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months."

James now illustrates the power of prayer from an incident in the life of Elijah (5:17-18). Elijah was a

man with a nature like ours, God answered the prayer of a man just like us. We do not need to be special spiritual people for God to answer prayer. Elijah had all the frailties we do.

Principle:

God hears and answers our prayers in spite of our human frailty.

Application:

God hears and answers our prayers in spite of our human frailty. Many of us think that we cannot be great prayer warriors like some about whom we hear, but this passage says that answered prayer is the privilege of every Christian. Abraham, Moses, Daniel and Mary were people just like us. We will have our moments but so did Elijah and any other person who engages in the great task of prayer.

Ac 10: 26 "But Peter lifted him up, saying, 'Stand up; I myself am also a man.'"

Ac 14: 15 "...and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them...'"

and he prayed earnestly

Literally, "he prayed earnestly" is "he prayed with prayer." The redundancy of "prayer" makes this an emphatic prayer. Elijah sought the audience of God, not man.

that it would not rain;

The purpose of Elijah's prayer was to bring back the rebellious people of God into fellowship with their God. Drastic problems require drastic actions. Israel was deep into idolatry. God destroyed the 450 prophets of Baal in the end. They had to admit that God was God (1 Kg 18:39).

and it did not rain on the land

God answered Elijah's prayer. God does not answer the prayer motivated by sinful desire or twisted purposes. Ps. 66: 18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

for three years and six months

Elijah's prayer ended a 3 and ½ year drought (1 Kg 17:1; 18:1, 41-46; Lu 4:25). By knowing the will of God, he understood the purpose of his prayer.

Principle:

Effective prayer revolves around God's purposes and promises.

Application:

God is in the business of enlisting us in His will. We share with God's purposes by prayer. We should pray about God's purposes in the world such as evangelism. God uses prayer to move in us as well as through us. Prayer changes us, not God. Prayer does not persuade God to do something He is not willing to do. Jesus prayed, "Not my will be done, but your will be done."

Elijah prayed in God's will so God answered him. He did not spend extended time in prayer but simply prayed within God's plan. This involves finding God's will. Finding God's will depend on knowing the principles of the Word. That is why the Word of God commands us to pray "in the Spirit" and "according to the Spirit." There is a correlation between sin and sickness. Those who enter into protracted sin may come down with some illness or suffer an accident. When we acknowledge our sin and confess that our sin took Jesus to the cross, God engages His forgiveness that is already possible by the death on the cross. Sometimes God even heals the person who confesses his sin and yields himself to the Lord.

James 5:18

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit."

And he prayed again,

Elijah has based his second prayer on God's promise (1 Kg 18:1). He prayed the second time 3 and ½ years later. This is the story of the prophets of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Elijah boldly prayed because He unwaveringly put his confidence in God's ability to respond to his prayer (1 Ki 18:2,42-45).

and the heaven gave rain,

Elijah's prayer ended a three year, six month drought (Lu 4:25). The duration of this drought is more precise than the 1 Kings 18:1 account.

and the earth produced its fruit.

God concurred with Elijah's prayer. Prayer is part of God's plan for accomplishing His desires in time and space. Prayer can open the gates of heaven.

Principle:

People of prayer are bold before men and humble before God.

Application:

God wants us to take Him into our confidence so that He can sovereignly respond to our needs. He so designed this world that we need Him and need to lean on Him. Bold believers are people of prayer who put confidence in a God who answers prayer.

1 Jn 5: 14 "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him."

James 5:19

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back..."

Brethren,

The wanderer from the truth here is clearly a Christian. This reveals something of the meaning of the previous verses showing that James deals with a Christian out of fellowship and out of phase with God.

James extends a word of encouragement to mature believers who bring fellow Christians back from the brink of spiritual defeat. The word "brethren" connotes a touch of tenderness.

if anyone among you

The word "if" indicates that the possibility of a fellow believer straying from the truth, is likely to

happen. It is very possible for Christians to develop protracted rebellion against God so that he becomes susceptible to divine discipline that might include physical death.

Note that the words “among you” refer to the believing community. James has already made the point that Christians develop physical problems due to sin. The person wandering from the truth here is then a Christian.

wanders from the truth,

The wanderer here is someone who defects in some sense from the Word of God and goes into a state of rebellion against it. The context refers to reclaiming a believer in a state of deep spiritual decline by prayer (5:16-18). This believer wanders from a living faith. It is possible to form a “dead faith” (Ja 2:18-26).

The word “wanders” means to go astray. We get our English word “planet” from the root of the word “wanders.” A planet wanders around the sun in the sky. James’ concern is for a believer who does not follow a prescribe course of action for the Christian. He goes astray from the Word of God. This believer wanders from Christian truth, truth for the Christian.

and someone turns him back

James asks his readers to confront those who wander from the truth and attempt to bring them back to the truth. James argued throughout the epistle that there is a danger in forming a dead faith. If a mature believer brings a rebellious believer back to a living faith, he will save his soul from a dead faith. The word “turns him back” means to turn about, turn towards. The idea is to return to a point or area where one has been before, with probable emphasis on turning about. A believer in fellowship who turns another believer back to fellowship will save his spirituality from destruction.

Principle:

Flaws in judgment and in life generally go together.

Application:

Love will take the risk of confronting a fellow Christian who gets off track. We need to bring back backslidden believers to fellowship.

Ga 6: 1 “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Deflection from truth will cause deflection in behavior. Flaws in judgment and life generally go together. At the root of every practical failure, there is some biblical distortion. Bad habits build on bad principle. We rescue those who fail in the Christian life by redirecting them to the principles of the Word. True conversion for the Christian rests on truth. The longer we stay out of fellowship the further we get from truth.

James 5:20

...let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.”

James concludes his epistle with the subject of divine discipline because his main idea throughout the book is to bring the believer back into a living faith [into dynamic fellowship with God].

let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way

The word “turns” here does not mean to convert a lost person. The word “turns” comes from two words: back and to turn. The business of the believer is to turn backslidden believers back to God. It is the responsibility of a believer in fellowship to bring a believer in a state of deflection from the truth back to a walk with God.

will save a soul from death

James refers to physical death here. This believer is susceptible to physical death because of his protracted rebellion against God. The word “save” does not refer to eternal salvation of the soul here but to the saving of a believer under severe divine discipline. “Soul” here refers to the whole person. “Death” here is temporal death and not eternal death (1 Jn 5:16). James refers here to saving a soul from physical death, not eternal death. If this suggests eternal death then returning to truth makes no sense. There

is no suggestion of mortal sin here. James suggests the possibility of recovery.

1 Co 11:30 "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep [die]. **31** For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."

1 Jn 5:16 "If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. **17** All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death."

and cover a multitude of sins

If a believer stays out of fellowship, his sins begin to pile up. The word "cover" means to blot out, cancel, forgive. This phrase "cover a multitude of sins" may allude to Proverbs 10:12.

"Cover" is a Hebraism for meaning overlook, forgive. God's purpose is to reclaim fallen believers out of fellowship. God will not look at the sins of a forgiven believer anymore. God does away with any number of sins for there is no limit to His forgiveness. He will not continue to put him under the sin unto death.

Mi 7: 19 "He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea."

The epistle of James comes to an abrupt conclusion. Both Paul and Peter give salutations and conclusions to their epistles but not James.

Principle:

God calls us to the task of restoring fallen fellow believers.

Application:

There is such a thing as saving a sinner and there is such a thing as saving a saint. Jesus continuously saves saints (He 7:25). God gives this task of restoring fallen believers to the believer in good standing. God does not call upon us to censor other Christians but He does challenge us to restore fallen believers. There is no place for a priggish, self-righteous believer imposing his opinions on struggling Christians. Instead of condemning fallen Christians, we should try to lift them up.

1 Pe 4: 8 "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover [forgive] a multitude of sins.'"

Turning back to God can free us from the sin unto death.