Week 1: Which James?
Text Reading: James 1:1; Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1-13

"But in Christ there are no dead and sapless branches;
faith is no an idle grace;
wherever it is, it fructifieth in good works."
(Thomas Manton)


Martin Luther (1483-1546)

At times it seems that the past five hundred years of exegetical comment on the Epistle of James is a running commentary on Martin Luther's famous (infamous) claim that the letter was 'an epistle of straw.' Many have interpreted this comment as indicating the German Reformer's desire to have the epistle removed from the canon of the New Testament, and this was the Roman Catholic complaint against Luther in his own day and since. Protestants – who often do not know what to make of Luther – have also struggled with this disparaging remark concerning the epistle. However, even a cursory review of what Luther actually wrote will show that the debate has been largely 'much ado about nothing.' Indeed, Luther does refer to the Epistle of James as 'strawy' in his Preface to the New Testament, published in 1522. But the context of the statement shows that his assessment of the epistle is *relative* and not absolute.

> In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that it is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it. But more of this in other prefaces.[1]

Too often the 'compared to them' is left out of the assessment of Luther's 'strawy' comment, but it cannot be. Alexander Ross notes, "It is often asserted that Luther called

[1] Luther's Preface to the New Testament (1522). WORKS OF MARTIN LUTHER - PREFACES TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (godrules.net). Accessed 09January2023.

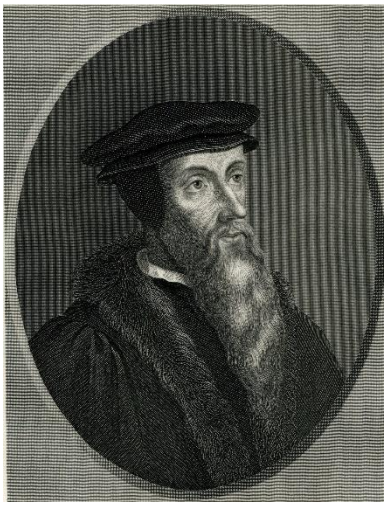
it 'an Epistle of straw,' but that seems to be a distortion of what he actually said. He did not, as a matter of fact, call it 'an Epistle of straw' outright, but, contrasting it with John, Romans, Galatians, and I Peter, he wrote in 1522 what he did not reprint later editions of his Bible."[2] One must keep in mind the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith to the whole theology of Martin Luther; he judged the worth even of biblical books on the basis of their adherence and propagation of this doctrine. James, to Luther, failed on this score when compared to the other books mentioned – especially those of Paul, and especially Romans and Galatians. What James has to say about faith and works in chapter 2 troubled Luther deeply, for it seems to run counter to the teaching of Paul. As we will see in that place, Luther got it wrong in his exegesis of the second chapter of the epistle, but this, too, was due to his laser focus on 'justification by faith.' But Luther did not intend to excise James from the Bible, and in the same document – the 1522 German New Testament – he praises the epistle in its preface, though he denies it could have been written by an apostle.

> Though this epistle of St. James was rejected by the ancients, I praise it and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God. However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle; and my reasons follow.
>
> In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works. It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac; though in Romans 4 St. Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15. Now although this epistle might be helped and an interpretation devised for this justification by works, it cannot be defended in its application to works of Moses' statement in Genesis 15. For Moses is speaking here only of Abraham's faith, and not of his works, as St. Paul demonstrates in Romans 4. This fault, therefore, proves that this epistle is not the work of any apostle.
>
> In the second place its purpose is to teach Christians, but in all this long teaching it does not once mention the Passion, the resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ. He names Christ several times; however he teaches nothing about him, but only speaks of general faith in God. Now it is the office of a true apostle to preach of the Passion and resurrection and office of Christ, and to lay the foundation for faith in him, as Christ

[2] Ross, Alexander *Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1960); 21-22.

> himself says in John 15, "You shall bear witness to me." All the genuine sacred books agree in this, that all of them preach and inculcate Christ. And that is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether or not they inculcate Christ. For all the Scriptures show us Christ, Romans 3; and St. Paul will know nothing but Christ, I Corinthians 2. Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St. Peter or St. Paul does the teaching. Again, whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it.[3]

No one ever claimed that Luther was wishy-washy in his statements. He advocated keeping James in the canon, but made no bones about his opinion that it held distinctly lower position than most of the other books of the New Testament. "The stigma of his condemnation haunts the letter to this day."[4] Fortunately few have entirely followed Luther's lead, and most Protestants down the years have adopted a view more along the line of John Calvin: "It is enough to make men to receive this Epistle, that it contains nothing unworthy of and Apostle of Christ. It is indeed full of instruction on various subjects; the benefit of which extends to every part of the Christian life."[5] Still, Luther's opinion has had a lasting impact on the study of the epistle. Not only does his 'straw' comment set the tone of approach to James' letter, his diminution of the epistle's value relative to the other books of the New Testament has tended to relegate the letter to a lower place in many believer's estimation. Too much time is spent defending the letter's place in the canon of the New Testament, and not enough listening to what the Holy Spirit has to say through James. For this reason, and in spite of the fact that the Epistles of James, along with several other New Testament books, remained somewhat in doubt as to its canonicity well into the 2nd Century, we are not going to spend time defending that canonicity. Rather it will



John Calvin (1509-64)

[3] Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude. Luther's Antilegomena (bible-researcher.com). Accessed 09January2023.
[4] Krodel, Gerhard *The General Epistles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1995); 24.
[5] Calvin, John *Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XXII* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1993); 276.

be sufficient to note that it attained such recognition in many quarters by the middle of the 2nd Century and has maintained universal acceptance in all branches of professing Christianity from the late 3rd Century on. Calvin is right to say that there is nothing in the letter to cast a shadow of doubt as to its divine inspiration and canonicity; therefore we shall cast no such shadow by rehashing old arguments against it.

There is, however, one aspect of the epistle that has engendered a healthy and important debate: the identity of its author. Leaving aside the modern views of a pseudonymous author and/or an editorial redactor (both very popular tropes in the liberal scholarly repertoire), there is still valid question concerning who 'James' was in the early Church. The answer to this question is also more than just academic, for the 'James' who wrote this letter – like the Saul of Tarsus who wrote the Pauline Epistles – stamped his heritage and character in its words. We can begin this phase of the study by acknowledging the lack of any descriptive elements in the greeting, indicating that, whoever this James was, he expected to be recognized merely at the mention of his name.

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ… (1:1a)

The name itself was quite common in 1st Century Judea, being the English derivative of the Hebrew Ya'akov by a rather circuitous route. Ya'akov was translated by the Greek *Jacobus* (□□ □□ □□□). This was then rendered by Jerome into the Latin *Iacomos*. Over time this Latin name became the French *Gemmes* and finally the English *James*.[6] This is, of course, trivia. What is germane to the study is the determination of just which James, out of the three, four, or five mentioned in the New Testament, might have written this epistle. New Testament Greek scholar Daniel Wallace comments, "The NT mentions four men bearing the name of James. It is probable, though not certain, that the writer of

Daniel B. Wallace (*b.* 1952)

[6] Freidman, David *James the Just* (Clarksville, MD: Lederer Books; 2018); 7-8.

this epistle is to be identified with one of them."[7] The logic is simple: the author of this epistle presents himself in a manner that presupposes recognition, describing himself with the common *"bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"* and no other descriptive tag. Indeed, the name Ya'akov was so common in the Second Temple Era that, unless this James was already a well-known personage in the Church, the salutation might as well be pseudonymous. J. B. Mayor, an Anglican classical scholar and clergyman from the 19th Century, writes, "As the name was very common in the first century, and as the description is one which is applicable to all Christians, it is evident that he must have been distinguished from other Jacobs by position or character, so as to justify him as addressing the 'Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion' with the tone of authority which is so marked a feature in the Epistle before us." Thus we assume, first of all, that the author of the letter is one of the James already mentioned in the New Testament. Secondly, we seek to determine which of those James was most likely to be famous enough within the first decades of the Church's history to be able to address such a letter in such a manner.

Joseph B. Mayor (1828-1916)

Two candidates are typically dismissed summarily, and with good reason. The first is James the father of Judas, mentioned in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, both simply lists of the apostles. Being the father of Judas is this James' only claim to fame, and we are somewhat at a loss to explain why Luke needed to make this distinction. Evidently there was another Judas (even than Iscariot) who was well-known – perhaps the Lord's brother (*cp*. Matthew 13:55). In any event, there is too little known of this particular James to qualify him for such a non-descript, yet recognizable, greeting as the opening verse of the Epistle of James.

[7] Wallace, Daniel B. "James: Introduction, Outline, and Argument" 20. James: Introduction, Outline, and Argument | Bible.org. Accessed 10January2023.

The second James to be disqualified is the brother of the Apostle John and the son of Zebedee. Certainly in this James we have someone who was high enough in the pecking order to qualify as a known entity in the early Church. The problem is that this James died too early, as most scholars consider, to have written the epistle. James, the son of Zebedee, was martyred by Herod Agrippa in the first general persecution of the Christian sect of Judaism.

> *Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.*
>
> (Acts 12:1-4)

As we do not know with certainty when the Epistle of James was written, we cannot with certainty say that James was killed too early to have been its author. However, it may be that the persecution launched by Herod Agrippa was the motive force that caused many Jewish believers to scatter from Judea, and thence become the recipients of the epistle, the 'twelve tribes among the Diaspora' of James 1:1. If this is the case, then the letter could not have been written by the apostle whose death inaugurated this particular round of persecution. Wallace writes, "Further, there is a good possibility that Herod's persecution of Christians, which *began* with James' execution, is in the background of, and provides part of the occasion for, this epistle; given such a presupposition, James the brother of John cannot have been the author."[8]

The third candidate is often supported within conservative and Reformed circles on account of his being one of the original apostles: James, the son of Alphaeus. His candidacy for authorship of the epistle is grounded solely on the view that, in order for a book or letter to be admitted into the canon, it must have been written either by an apostle or directly under an apostle's guidance and oversight. Thomas Manton, a 17th Century English Puritan, provides the rationale for this view, "In the general, it is certain he [*i.e.*,

[8] *Ibid.*

the author] was an apostle, no epistles but theirs being received into the rule of faith."[9] The problem with Manton's view is first, that it is not correct, as apostolicity was not so ironclad a requirement for admission into the canon of the New Testament as he indicates. Second, the apostle James, also known as James the Lessor/Minor to contrast him with the son of Zebedee, was an obscure figure in terms of New Testament reference, being mentioned only in the lists of the disciples/apostles. While this last critique does not prove definitively that this James could not have been very well known in the early Church, it does indicate that if a better-known James exists, the weight of evidence favors him. And such a better-known, even quite famous, James did, in fact, exist: James, the Lord's brother.

Thomas Manton (1620-77)

It is a diversion from the content of the Epistle of James to delve into the historical debate as to whether the 'brethren' of Jesus were the children of Mary, or of Joseph from a previous marriage, or merely cousins of Jesus. Suffice it to say both that the simple reading of the rejection of Jesus at Nazareth, in Matthew 13, is that the 'brothers and sisters' mentioned were the children of Mary, also mentioned. Indeed, the mention of 'sisters' seems decisive, as female cousins or half-siblings would probably not have warranted mention.

> *When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?* (Matthew 13:54-56)

We will accept the natural interpretation of the text as well as the track of early Church history before the 'perpetual virginity' of Mary became important, and proceed with this fourth James as the younger brother of Jesus, born of Mary by her husband

[9] Manton, Thomas *James: A Geneva Series Commentary* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1998); 12.

Joseph. Recognizing that this is by far the most famous James in the New Testament – presiding at the 'Council of Jerusalem' in Acts 15 and acknowledged as a 'pillar' of the church by Paul – those who have insisted on the apostolicity of all New Testament authors have conflated James, the Lord's brother with the apostle James, the Lesser. Manton does this, "The whole stream of antiquity carrieth it [*the authorship of the epistle*] for the brother of the Lord, who, as I said, is the same with Jacobus minor, or the son of Alphaeus."[10] This is a remarkable statement by a Puritan, a full admission that Jesus' brothers were, at most, only half- or step-brothers, since Jesus' 'father' was Joseph, not Alphaeus. Furthermore, it completely ignores John's testimony that Jesus' own family – his 'brothers' – were not believing in Him up until the point of His crucifixion (*cp.* John 7:5).[11]

As for James, the Lord's brother, we find evidence both in the New Testament and in both Christian and secular writings of the post-apostolic age to confirm that he was indeed famous enough to expect instant recognition with simply his name. It has been argued that if the Lord's brother had been the author, he would have mentioned that he was the Lord's brother. This argument is specious for several reasons. First, it would actually be very unbecoming of a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ to play upon a family relationship in order to demand recognition and authority, especially given the fact that, as a 'brother' of Jesus, James remained an unbeliever! Jesus is now risen, and, as Paul says in II Corinthians 5, "*we regard Him in the flesh no longer.*" Wallace writes, "[James'] reference to himself as a 'servant' is far more becoming. Indeed, the brother of Jesus should be the first to recognize that a physical relationship to Jesus was, in itself, worthless."[12] Mayor adds, "Surely it is only what we should have expected beforehand, that James and Jude would shrink from claiming another name than that of 'servant' to express the relation in which they stood to their risen Lord."[13]

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[10] *Idem*.
[11] There is a long and convoluted history in the literature full of various attempts to equate Alphaeus with Cleopas, and to identify another Mary as the sister of Mary, the Lord's mother. All such attempts are made to avoid the unpalatable fact that Mary bore children after having borne Jesus. All such attempts are futile.
[12] Wallace.
[13] Mayor; v.

Second, it is an argument from silence. That an author does not admit to some claim to fame is no argument against him possessing it. Again, the omission of the biological relationship is far easier to explain than its inclusion. Finally, such 'name dropping' was wholly unnecessary, as this James was already so well known – and his physical relationship to Jesus as well – that instead of mentioning it, we find the author of Jude claiming not only to be a bondservant of Jesus Christ, but also *the brother of James*. As Jude (Judas) is also mentioned in Matthew 13 as one of Jesus' siblings, this self-identification as the brother of James is further proof of the latter's standing in the early church. "We conclude, then, that James the brother of the Lord is the author of the letter. This is the natural implication of the letter's own claims, it is corroborated by New Testament and early Christian evidence, and it has no decisive argument against it."[14] Ralph Martin adds, "From the evidence of the tradition of the New Testament documents it may be safely concluded that James was a well-known person in early Christian circles, 'a very considerable figure in the tradition of early Christianity,' perhaps larger than the modern Bible reader gives credit for."[15]

James, the Lord's brother, was, in fact as famous in the decades after Jesus' resurrection as was Peter, John, or Paul, at least in Judea and especially in Jerusalem. We encounter him several times in the Book of Acts, and then again in Paul's writings, acknowledged there as a *pillar* along with Peter and John. James was not an apostle, but it is clear from the account of the meeting in Jerusalem concerning the necessity of Gentile converts to adhere to the Mosaic Law and ritual, that he was a, if not *the*, leading figure at that time in the Jerusalem church. It is James who summarizes what was said by the apostles Paul and Peter, thus concluding the debate, and it is James who presents the conclusion of the 'council' to be delivered to the Gentile churches.

[14] Carson, D. A., Douglas J. Moo, & Leon Morris *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1992); 413.
[15] Martin, Ralph P. *Word Biblical Commentary: James* (Waco, TX: Word Books; 1988); xxxix.

And after they had become silent, ***James answered****, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:*

> *After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;*
> *I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up;*
> *So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,*
> *Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the LORD who does all these things.*

Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. (Acts 15:13-21)

In his role as moderator and final adjudicator of the 'Council,' James manifests the role of the *Nasi* or Chief Rabbi of the assembly. Some legends actually place James in this role in the context of the Jewish Sanhedrin, but this is foolish speculation. It is enough to recognize his leadership position among the Jewish converts to Messiah Jesus, a role that was also recognized by unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem and Judaea, and a role that would ultimately lead to James' murder at the instigation of the High Priest. Dr. David Friedman, a Messianic Jew and former professor at King of Kings College in Jerusalem, lays out the case with convincing contemporary and early Church evidence, that James functioned very much like the Chief Rabbi of the Sanhedrin, only he did so in the Jerusalem assembly of messianic Jews, Jewish believers in Jesus Christ. Commenting on the events of Acts 15, Friedman writes, "When the testimonies had been heard, it was *the role of Ya'akov* to summarize the main points up to then. Then it was his prerogative to offer a final, halakhic solution on behalf of this entire Sanhedrin…What we have is the summary statement of the chief rabbi, which of course would come at the end of the deliberations, and represent the entire Sanhedrin in its final outcome…Ya'akov clearly spoke in the role of community chief rabbi by his summarizing, and his relaying of the

halakhic decision(s). It is also noteworthy that this Sanhedrin appears to have ended its official deliberations with Ya'akov's words, *because of* his recognized role."[16]

James' character was also legendary (as in mostly legend), as the 2nd Century Jewish-Christian writer Hegesippus (*c.* 110 – 180) notes.

> Control of the Church passed to the apostles, together with the Lord's brother James, whom everyone from the Lord's time till our own has called the Righteous, for there were many Jameses, but this one was holy from his birth; he drank no wine or intoxicating liquor and ate no animal food; no razor came near his head; he did not smear himself with oil, and too no baths. He alone was permitted to enter the Holy Place, for his garments were not of wool but of linen. He used to enter the Sanctuary alone, and was often found on his knees beseeching forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's from his continually bending them in worship of God and beseeching forgiveness for the people.[17]

It is apparent from a fair reconstruction of the early written record that James was quite influential not only within the Jerusalem Church but also in the city itself. As expected, the history is mixed with legend, but the combined result is that of a man of deep integrity and fairness, to the point that he is often referred to as James 'the Just.' James' continued influence in Jerusalem should not surprise us when we remember that Christianity was for several decades considered a sect of Judaism, and by no means a separate and distinct religion, as it is viewed today. Furthermore, as we have seen in the Apostle Paul, Jewish 'converts' to Christianity were not really converts at all, as they firmly considered their faith as the fruit of their Jewish religion and expectation: Jesus was, after all, the *Jewish* Messiah. Hence we find Jewish believers continuing to live (and write) as Jews, though Jews who now knew that Israel's God had fully and finally completed His long-awaited revisitation of His people. James – undoubtedly known in his day and place as known in his day and place as Ya'akov – was the 'chief rabbi' of the messianic sect of Nazarenes and as such, he was both a polarizing and a popular figure in the chief city of Judaism. This understanding of the *Sitz im Leben* of James goes far

[16] Friedman; 35-36.
[17] Eusebius *The History of the Church* (New York: Dorset Press; 1965); 99-100.

toward explaining why his epistle is, beyond debate, the most Jewish of the New Testament writings.

To round out this biographical sketch of the author of the Epistle of James, we have the unusual record of the circumstances surrounding his death, and not merely from post-apostolic legend. Rather, we have the testimony of Josephus, the Jewish general-turned-historian who account of the First Jewish War is invaluable to any historical study of the period. It was apparently the case that James caused the High Priest at the time, Ananus II, a great deal of consternation; so much so that the latter orchestrated the former's death in AD 62. Later writers even attributed this particular act as the cause of Vespasian's investment of Jerusalem, though the chronology simply will not let that work.

But as to Ananus II's antipathy toward James, there is sufficient written evidence to the facts to give us the most informed notice of the demise of one of the early leaders of the church, far more information than we possess for any of the apostles, despite the legends that have arisen concerning the deaths of Peter and Paul. The events of James' last days on earth run as follows: the death of the Roman governor Porcius Festus created a power vacuum within Judaea until the arrival of his successor, L. Lucceius Albinus, who upon his appointment had to travel from Egypt. During this time, the High Priest Ananus II exercised illegitimate powers to remove those whom he considered in opposition to his conservative, Sadducean views. One of these obstacles was James, the leader of the sect of the Nazarenes. "In the three- or four-month interval between the decease of the procurator of Judaea, Porcius Festus, in AD 62, and the arrival of his successor L. Lucceius Albinus in the office, sings of the reawakening power of the patriotic party in Jerusalem were seen in actions of the high priest Ananus II."[18]

Apparently, the leader of the sect of Nazarenes was a man of sufficient influence in the city that his support of Ananus' plans proved vital, but unfortunately not forthcoming. James was subjected to a mock trial reminiscent of that under which Jesus

[18] Martin; lxiii.

was condemned. Josephus relates the events that led to James' quasi-judicial murder, an act that was tremendously unpopular in the city, even among those who did not count themselves 'Christians.'

> And now Caesar, upon hearing the death of Festus, sent Albinus into Judea, as procurator. But the king deprived Joseph of the high priesthood, and bestowed the succession to that dignity on the son of Ananus, who was also himself called Ananus. Now the report goes that this eldest Ananus proved a most fortunate man; for he had five sons who had all performed the office of a high priest to God, and who had himself enjoyed that dignity a long time formerly, which had never happened to any other of our high priests. But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa], desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified; nay, some of them went also to meet Albinus, as he was upon his journey from Alexandria, and informed him that it was not lawful for Ananus to assemble a sanhedrim without his consent. Whereupon Albinus complied with what they said, and wrote in anger to Ananus, and threatened that he would bring him to punishment for what he had done; on which king Agrippa took the high priesthood from him, when he had ruled but three months, and made Jesus, the son of Damneus, high priest. (*Antiquities,* Book XX Chapter 9)[19]

The danger that James posed to Ananus II is not stated explicitly by Josephus, and no other contemporary source remains to fill in the blanks of our understanding. It is interesting to our study, twenty centuries removed from the events, to note that James' reputation among the citizens of Jerusalem was such that Ananus' deeds were repudiated, and a request was made to King Agrippa to have the High Priest removed.

[19] https://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ant-20.htm. Accessed 12January2023.

As the events of the early 60s are better documented on account of the war that resulted – the First Jewish War – we can surmise that the confrontation between Ananus and James had at least something to do with the political climate in Jerusalem and Judaea. What James' views were on the nascent Jewish nationalism of the sixth decade are unknown and impossible to determine from the one letter that we have from his pen. Ralph Martin conjectures, "It is not possible to draw any closer lines between the historical James and the political-religious movements that swirled around him and the Jerusalem *Urgemeinde* ('early Christian Church') in those tumultuous years. But certain assumptions and educated guesses may be offered. James' sympathies would certainly have lain with the peasant people and the lower priests."[20] This may be inferred from the enmity that James' presence had aroused in the Sadducean High Priest, leading to the former's extra-judicial murder.

Again, we have no cause to think that James was active in the political movements that led up to the Jewish rebellion and the eventual siege and destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. By AD 70 this leading member of the Jerusalem Church had been dead eight years. However, the revolt did catch fire in the year after James' death, so it is almost certain that his latter years were embroiled in the tumult of the times, and we may safely assume that he had something to say about it. "The most we may want to affirm is that both early Christian history and later ecclesiastical developments in reaction to other movements on the fringe of the Great Church [*i.e.,* Jerusalem] make James a person of commanding stature and leadership."[21]

One final item of note concerning James the Lord's brother is the discovery, in 2002, of an ossuary, or 'bone box,' with the amazing inscription, "Ya'akov bar Yoseph achui de Yeshua," or "James the son of Joseph the brother of Jesus." Ossuaries themselves are not an uncommon find in Palestine, as they were used to deposit the bones of a corpse in

[20] Martin; lxvi.
[21] *Ibid.*; lxvii.

order to make room for another body in the tomb.[22] Inscriptions are more rare, but not unheard of, as they were the only means to identify the bones in the box.[23] Furthermore, the three names listed on this ossuary: James, Joseph, and Jesus (or 'Joshua') are three of the most common names in 2nd Temple Judaea. Thus the *relationship* of these three – the son of one and the brother of another – is the only limiting factor as to the identity of the person contained within. "The owner said he thought the inscription was especially interesting because there was only one other inscription in Rahmani's *Catalogue* (the standard catalog of Jewish ossuaries) mentioning a brother in a similar way."[24] The coincidence to the persons of the same names in the New Testament, as expected, generated howls of 'forgery,' and a trial was convened after charges were filed by the Israeli Antiquities Authority in 2004. The trial lasted ten years and the final verdict was an acquittal of the ossuary's owner. The judge did not declare the nscription to be authentic but did determine that the prosecution had by no means proven the inscription to be a forgery. One of the leading witnesses, French epigrapher and philologist André Lemaire, supported the authenticity of the inscription at the trial and publicly since. Lemaire published his finding in the November 2002 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, stating unequivocally his belief that not only was the inscription authentic but that is most likely referred to the James, Joseph, and Jesus of the New Testament. Afterward, Lemaire wrote, "There has already been a great deal of scholarly discussion of the ossuary and its remarkable inscription,

'James' Ossuary

André Lemaire (*b.* 1942)

[22] Ossuaries, however, were only in common use between 100 BC and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.
[23] Of the over 10,000 ossuaries uncovered, only about 100 have inscriptions. No other known ossuary has inscribed reference to a brother. The James Ossuary: The Earliest Witness to Jesus and His Family? - Calvary Chapel. Accessed 12January2023.
[24] Shanks, Hershel & Ben Witherington III *The Brother of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco; 2003); xi.

and I am delighted to report that I am even more confident about my conclusions. I have found it most encouraging that the leading experts in the field corroborate in verifying the discovery's authenticity. And I do not find the arguments against, let alone rumors about, it authenticity at all serious, especially since they have been advanced by people with no experience in Aramaic epigraphy of this period."[25]

> In December 2004, the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the State of Israel brought an indictment against an antiquities dealer and owner of the James Ossuary, Oded Golan, claiming that the second part of the inscription (the portion which reads "brother of Jesus") to be a forgery. This indictment seems to have came to nothing after five years of court proceedings that concluded in March 2010 with 116 hearings, 138 witnesses, 52 expert witnesses, over 400 exhibits, and more than 12,000 pages of court transcripts! According to Golan's written summary of the trial (supported by the 474 page Hebrew language opinion handed down by Jerusalem District Court Judge Aharon Farkash on March 14, 2012), many high-level scholars with expertise in ancient epigraphy, paleography, bio-geology, and other crucial disciplines relating to examining the inscription have testified that there is no reason to doubt that the "brother of Jesus" was engraved by the same hand in the first century AD. In view of this, it is very likely that we may have a very early and important historical witness to Jesus and His family.[26]

"Jacob the son of Joseph the brother of Jesus"

Granting the ossuary's authenticity, what does this prove? In terms of the doctrines of Christianity: nothing. But in terms of the historicity of the documents and personages of Christianity: a great deal. The paucity of ossuary inscriptions indicates that the existence of such an inscription would designate the occupant as a very important person, as we have seen James to have been. Furthermore, in a patriarchal culture such

[25] *Ibid.*; xiii-xiv.
[26] The James Ossuary: The Earliest Witness to Jesus and His Family? - Calvary Chapel. Accessed 12January2023.

as 2nd Temple Judaea, adding the reference of a brother to that of a father is itself quite remarkable, and indicates that the brother was even more famous than the owner of the bones inside the box. James was not an apostle, but he was the most influential believer in the Jerusalem church, Peter notwithstanding. This notoriety is attested both in the New Testament and from impartial sources such as Josephus. James was someone famous enough to have his name inscribed on an ossuary, and famous enough to be recognized in his epistle by simply his name. From this position of pastoral oversight and love, superintending the Church at Jerusalem, the Lord's brother writes a heartfelt epistle to those who were once physically under his care but who have now been scattered by persecution and constitute in Jesus Christ the *true* twelve tribes of the Diaspora.

Week 2: To the Twelve Tribes of the Diaspora
Text Reading: James 1:1; Acts 8:1-4

"In this Epistle James is helping his Jewish readers
to transcend formalistic Judaism in practice
as they had already transcended it in belief."
(J. Gresham Machen)

The Epistle of James is as different from any of the Pauline epistles as documents can be. First, there is no destination given other than "*to the twelve tribes of the Dispersion.*" Second, there is little discernable order to the letter; it is notoriously difficult to outline. Third, there are no specific problems addressed, though there are quite a number of warnings given. Finally, there are no personal details, no greetings, and no final salutation. Even a cursory read tells us that this letter is different than Romans or Galatians or Philippians. In fact, it may be that 'epistle' is not the best rubric under which to categorize this writing, a point to be investigated in this lesson. It is true that the letter seems to jump around from topic to topic, but it is also true that there are only a handful of underlying themes that recur throughout, providing an indirect cohesion that, though difficult to outline, is nonetheless present.

The first clue to both the nature/style and the theme of the letter is in the greeting: *to the twelve tribes of the Diaspora*. That this is a clue is evident so long as one accepts, as one must, that this is a *Christian* letter and not the writings of an unbelieving Jew. This is because the phrase pertains, within Second Temple Judaism, to the Jews who had been scattered abroad (the NASB rendering of the Greek word *diaspora*) by the various conquests – the Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek, and lastly, Roman – of the land belonging to Israel. With the entrance of the Greeks and Romans, some of this dispersion was voluntary, as Jews sought their fortunes elsewhere than Palestine. But for the most part the Jewish inhabitants of lands beyond the boundaries of Abraham's legacy were considered the *Diaspora*, who true and proper home was Judaea and Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, was of the *Diaspora*. In short, the term was a *Jewish* term, and James' employment of it in his opening address signifies the nature of his

intended readers. The question then becomes whether James is using this phrase metaphorically of Christians in general, or with Jewish believers in mind. Of course, if it is the latter case this does not mean that the letter has no value to Gentile believers. But identifying the intended audience is an important hermeneutical component toward understanding the whole letter. Two features indicate that James intends the "*twelve tribes*" to indeed be ethnic Jews scattered abroad and away from the central Jerusalem Church. The first is the nature of James' ministry itself, as indicated by his first conference with Paul concerning the latter's ministry to the Gentiles. Paul records this meeting in Galatians 2,

> *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately* ***to those who were of reputation****, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But* ***from those who seemed to be something*** *– whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man – for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when* ***James****, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and* ***they to the circumcised****.* (Galatians 2:1-9)

We commonly think of Peter as the 'apostle to the circumcised,' but here Paul assigns that mission field to the 'pillars' of the Jerusalem Church: James, Cephas, and John. As it is likely that James, the son of Zebedee and John's brother, was already martyred at this point, and from subsequent narratives concerning the Jerusalem Church, it is accepted by the vast majority that this James is the Lord's brother. The fact that we find James still in Jerusalem, and in an unquestionable leadership position there, at the time of Paul's last visit to the city (*cp.* Acts 21:18), though we do not find Peter or John present, indicates that James' ministerial purview remained Jerusalem and its believing

community for his entire 'Christian' life. While both Peter and Paul were known to crossover and minister to Gentiles and Jews, respectively, the opportunities for James to do so from his base in Jerusalem would have been sparse. It is safe to say that the Lord's brother ministered the Gospel to the circumcision, just as Paul did to the uncircumcised.

A second aspect of the Epistle of James that strongly indicates an intended *Jewish* audience, though of course Jewish *believers*, is the language of the letter itself. It is written in Greek; indeed, the Greek is so good that this fact has been used to deny authorship to James, reasoning that he would not have been able to write such excellent Greek. The argument is specious, for either James could have learned Greek, as it was a very common language in Palestine, or he could have employed and amanuensis – a 'secretary' – to whom he dictated his letter, as we know the Apostle Paul did almost exclusively. The point is immaterial, however, because the excellent Greek cannot hide the deep 'Jewishness' of the letter. The Epistle of James, as it is known, actually compares quite closely to Jewish rabbinic compilations of the first century and afterward, and was considered by James Dunn to be "the most Jewish document in the New Testament."[27] The formulation of the various pericopes and the close association between James and Leviticus 19, as we will see, confirms the essential Jewishness of both thought and composition. These aspects of the letter will be the content of the remainder of this lesson, but it suffices to say here that the phrase "*to the twelve tribes*" most likely refers to James' admonitions to Jewish believers who had been scattered abroad, the 'chief rabbi' of the Jerusalem Church speaking to his scattered flock. Mayor writes, "We can therefore see good reasons why James should have sent a circular letter to Jews residing outside of Palestine; whereas to write to the Christian Church at large would have been to intrude on the sphere of the other apostles, whose mission it was to go and teach all nations."[28]

That 'dispersion' of Jewish Christians began early in the history of the Church, after only a short period of peace and growth and with the advent of the arch-persecutor,

[27] Quoted by Friedman; 13.
[28] Mayor; 31.

Saul of Tarsus, on the scene. The seminal event in the first persecution and dispersion of Jewish 'Nazarenes' was the occasion of Stephen's martyrdom.

> *Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.* (Acts 8:1-3)

Persecution of Christians – known originally as "Nazarenes" and viewed as a sect of Judaism – came not from the Roman authorities, as Judaism in all its flavors was a permitted religious sect within the empire. Rather persecution came from *within* Judaism, the efforts of the Pharisee Saul being just one, albeit extreme, example. That Saul would secure official warrants to arrest Nazarenes in Damascus probably shows us that Jewish believers had 'dispersed' that far, and perhaps farther. This is confirmed further in Acts 11:19, "*Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only.*"

Persecution was sporadic and chronic, so that after Saul's conversion we read in Acts 10, "*So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being build up; and, going out in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.*"[29] But this peaceful situation changed with the advent of Herod Agrippa I who launched a renewed effort to eradicate the sect of the Nazarenes, undoubtedly to ingratiate himself with the traditional leaders of Judaism – the High Priest and the Sadducees. James, the son of Zebedee and the brother of John, was martyred at this time, and Peter arrested. These actions would have occasioned another 'dispersion' of believing Jews, forced to leave Jerusalem and possibly even Judaea in order to find a safe place to live. These circumstances most likely provide the *Sitz im Leben* for the Epistle of James, and these scattered believing Jews most likely constitute the '*twelve tribes of the Diaspora*' to whom the letter is addressed. Thus the Epistle of James is probably a very

[29] Acts 10:31

early document in terms of the New Testament canon; it is believed by many scholars to have been the first epistle written among those accepted into the canon. Peter Davids comments on the situation of the 'Diaspora' in his commentary on the letter.

> The 'scattering' of the church must have happened very early, if the early believers represented a cross section of the group mentioned in Acts 2:9-11. The church at Jerusalem, at any rate, surely saw the *diaspeirōn* (scattering) of Acts 8:1-4 as producing a *diaspora*, despite the fact that later history makes it look limited. This forced scattering resulted from persecutions by men whom the church would have described as 'the rich.' Thus it is probable that during the pre-AD 70 period the Jerusalem church (and the Palestinian church in general) suffered sporadic persecution from rich Jews (because the rich often oppress the poor, if for no other reason). Thus, while this description could envision official persecution by Romans against a widespread church, it also fits the situation of sporadic persecution of Christians in the vicinity of Palestine by wealthy Jews.[30]

The circumstances regarding the demise of James the Lord's brother are so unusually detailed as to provide a fixed end date beyond which the epistle could not have been written; AD 62. The circumstances concerning the persecution that first scattered the Jewish believers from Jerusalem, creating a *diaspora* of Christian Jews, sets an earliest date for the epistle of AD 44. That there is no mention of the burning question facing the Jerusalem Church concerning the method of admitting Gentiles into fellowship, the question that gave rise to the 'Council' of Jerusalem, moves the likely end date for the writing of the epistle to before that council, which was held around AD 50. Thus we have a fairly accurate and attested window of between AD 45 and AD 49 for the date of the epistle, as narrow a window as for any other book of the Bible. Alexander Ross notes in his commentary,

> There is no reference in the epistle to the non-Jewish world. There is no mention whatever of the existence of men of Gentile birth in the Church; not one word of allusion to the controversies which, according to the Book of Acts, their admission led with regard to their relation to the Jewish ceremonial Law. It is often…one of the surest criteria of the date of a document to notice what were the controversial interests of the writer. In the

[30] Davids, Peter H. *Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1982); 18.

> case before us, there is not the faintest allusion to the serious dispute that led to the summoning of the Jerusalem Council in the year 50, the dispute of which echoes can be heard in the Epistles to the Romans and the Corinthians…such considerations point to a date before the year 50, so that this Epistle may be the earliest N. T. writing.[31]

James, the acknowledged leader and 'chief rabbi' of the Jerusalem Church, expresses his pastoral concern and care for these scattered brethren. "The persecutions by Saul and especially by Agrippa separated James from his audience via the diaspora.

David Friedman (1953-2021)

The subsequent diaspora raised the need for correspondence; the reason for the diaspora shaped its contents."[32] Addressing Jewish believers, and coming from a Jewish pastor, it stands to reason that the language and style of the epistle would be Jewish. Indeed, according to the analysis of David Friedman, the Epistle of James is not an 'epistle' at all, at least not in the usual meaning of that term. "While the letter of James has a typical epistolary introduction, it lacks the usual epistolary postscript. Moreover, it does not contain any personal touches such as greetings, travel plans, or prayer requests. All this suggests that James is best viewed as what we might call a literary letter."[33] Friedman describes the letter as a *Yalkut* which he defines as "A compendium or collection of writings or teachings. These are often the highlighted Torah commentaries of a given rabbi, scholar or commentator."[34] Friedman describes several *Yalkut*, admittedly from a period much later than the Epistle of James, as containing numerous ethical and practical sayings arranged somewhat haphazardly, or at least not arranged in an easily outlined format. He points out that the word 'yalkut' in modern Hebrew is the word for 'backpack,' an allusion that seems to fit the genre to a 'T.' It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the *Yalkut* has no order or rational

[31] Ross, Alexander *Commentary on James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1960); 19-20.
[32] Wallace; *op cit.*
[33] Carson, *et. al.*; 415.
[34] Friedman; 110.

format. Rather it is the case that the *Yalkut* follows passages in the Old Testament and forms a compendium of midrashic commentary on the Scriptures, though by no means organized in the common, systematic way that Western Christians are accustomed to. The Old Testament Scripture that Friedman believes lies beneath the *Yalkut* of James, is Leviticus 19, though also mediated through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Friedman writes, "I surmise that James gave these sermon talks on Sabbaths during which the ending section of the book of Leviticus was being studied."[35]

One aspect of the *Yalkut* that commends Friedman's analysis and conclusion is the very practical nature of what James writes. It is often held against the epistle that it contains little theology – little *Christology*, little *Soteriology*, little *Ecclesiology*, etc. Friedman maintains that this is because it is a Jewish document – though thoroughly a Jewish *Christian* document – and is therefore focused far more on *halakha*, practical application of Torah, than it is on abstract theology. "This is not a Hellenistic work of philosophy or religion. It is Jewish in subject matter, tone, emphasis and in its main expressed points."[36] In comparing this work with other New Testament epistles, Donald Guthrie writes, "What marks James off from the rest is that its ethical teaching occupies the whole Epistle and is not, as in other cases, linked with doctrinal passages."[37]

Friedman locates the key connection between James' work and the 'Holiness Code' of Leviticus 19 in the correspondence between James 2:8 and Leviticus 19:18, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Around this 'law of liberty' James places a midrashic commentary on several other verses from Leviticus 19, making the letter essentially a Christian rabbinic commentary on the teaching of that Old Testament passage. "His instructions and teachings are neither ethereal nor philosophical in nature. They are meant to be instructional guides on how to live, focusing on concrete ways to apply Leviticus 19:18b in the day-to-day life of Ya'akov's community: 'you will love your fellow man as yourself.'"[38]

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[35] *Ibid.*; 1.
[36] *Ibid.*; 3.
[37] Guthrie, Donald *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1966); 767.
[38] *Ibid.*; 14.

In this perspective Friedman is joined by Luke Timothy Johnson, whose article "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James" more thoroughly draws the lines of allusion and direct quotation between James the Just and Moses. Johnson summarizes, "For James, Lev. 19:12-18 provides and accurate explication of that law of love which should obtain in the church…James regards Lev. 19:12-18 as an *accurate* exposition of the demands of love, but not, by itself, an *adequate* one…Because of certain excesses along these lines, one hesitates to use the term *midrash* in any but the clearest of cases, but this is really what James is doing by his use of Leviticus 19."[39] Typical of the rabbinic style, the references are not explicit – rarely do we find the rabbis quoting 'chapter and verse' – primarily because there were no chapter and verse divisions to quote. Knowledge of the Old Testament was assumed; allusions to Old Testament passages needed no explicit reference. Here is a brief tabular summary of passages in James and the corresponding verses in Leviticus 19.

Luke T. Johnson (*b.* 1943)

James	**Leviticus**
5:12 *'Do not swear…'*	19:12 *'Do not swear falsely by my name…'*
5:4 *'Behold, the wages you failed to pay the workman who mowed your fields are crying out against you.'*	19:13 *'Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.'*
No corresponding verse	19:14
2:1 *'Do not show partiality…'*	19:15 *'Do not show partiality…'*
2:9 *'If you show partiality…'*	
4:11 *'Do not slander one another, brethren…'*	19:16 *'Do not go around spreading slander…'*
5:20 *'Know that whoever turns a sinner back from his error will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins.'*	19:17b *'Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.'*
2:8 *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*	19:18b *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

[39] Johnson, Luke T. "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Sep. 1982, Vol. 101, No. 3; 400-401.

It should be noted that James did not exegete Leviticus in the verse-by-verse manner popular among modern conservative scholars. This is by no means an indictment against the correlation between the two books, as 'verse-by-verse' exposition was not the universal practice even of the Church through much of its history. Verse 14 from Leviticus 19 is missing in terms of allusion or reference in James, which may only mean that the treatment of deaf and bind people was not a major issue in the early Church, or that the attitude of compassion contained in Leviticus 19:14 is sufficiently inculcated in the other passages in James. Johnson concludes, "The evidence, therefore, strongly suggests that James made conscious and sustained use of Lev. 19:12-18 in his letter. The text of Leviticus did not guide the order of his exposition, nor did it, by any means, exhaustively dictate the contents of his message. But the clear thematic connections, together with the formal characteristics involving law, judgment and prohibition shared by many of these passages, point this way: that James regarded the 'Royal Law' by which Christians were to live, and the 'Law of Liberty' by which they were to be judged, as explicated concretely and specifically not only by the Decalogue (2:11), but by the immediate context of the Law of Love, the commands found in Lev 19:12-18."[40]

In utilizing Leviticus in this manner, James does no less than Paul in reconfiguring and reorienting the Old Testament Scripture, and specifically Torah, the Law, to the revelation of the divine plan through the advent of the Messiah, Jesus. James' use of Leviticus has opened him up to charges of 'legalism,' but in reality he does no more than His Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, and no more than Paul in his epistles. James, like Paul, "reshapes as well the inheritance of Torah."[41] At the heart of this reshaping is a thoroughly Jewish perspective to Torah, one that Christian pastors have tried, often in vain, to inculcate into Christian congregations: "*But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*"[42] This concept is *halakha*, the common, rabbinic

[40] *Ibid.*; 399.
[41] *Ibid.*; 401.
[42] James 1:22

perspective on the commandments and ordinances of God's Law, Torah. Friedman defines *halakha* as "Applications of the biblical commandments to a community lifestyle."[43] *Halakha* is why we do not find a systematic Jewish theology, for "there is no separation of philosophical thought between the concepts of hearing and doing."[44] This is not to say that theology is unimportant for the Christian community, but rather to say, with James, that the person who hears the word – even through deep, systematic study – and yet fails to do it, to obey it, deludes himself. Again, this is no more than Paul's emphasis on the *'obedience of faith'* in his Epistle to the Romans. For James, however, the *halakhic* perspective is dominant, though this does not mean that James was the 'legalistic Pharisee' he is often accused of being, nor that there is any inherent conflict between James' perspective and that of Paul. James' practical, *halakhic* method of approaching the precepts of Torah differ little from the ethical teaching of Jesus Himself in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, as Daniel Wallace notes, "by viewing the Law in ethical terms, James is simply emulating Jesus."[45]

Thus we are not to read James as a theological treatise, though we should also not ignore the theology that does underlay the exhortations of the epistle. In addition, we probably would do well not to read the book as we would the other epistles of the New Testament, as it does not have the same structure or, apparently, intent. Many scholars refer to James as *paraenesis*, or an exhortatory letter. Frances Taylor Gench writes, "Much of the uneasiness that attends a reading of the letter is laid to rest, however, when one important fact is understood: in terms of literary form, James is 'paraenesis,' or ethical exhortation in the guise of a letter. 'Paraenesis,' from the Greek *paraenesis* (which means 'advise' or 'counsel'), is instruction concerning how or how not to live."[46] Gench continues,

> It [*i.e.*, paraenesis] does not preach the kerygma; instead, it calls readers to live the Christian life. It is not a missionary document, and so does not undertake to present

[43] Friedman; 108.
[44] *Ibid.*; 24.
[45] Wallace, *op cit.*
[46] Krodel, Gerhard, ed. *Proclamation Commentaries: The General Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1995); 24.

> the whole of Christian truth. It is a document for use within the church, and is addressed to folk who have already embraced the gospel and who are familiar with the central tenets of Christian faith. Its purpose is to help believers see the implications of Christian faith for how they live their lives.[47]

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

J. Gresham Machen adds, "It does not lay the foundation of Christian faith. But it shows how, upon that foundation, may be built not the wood, hay and stubble of a wordy orthodoxy, but the gold and silver and precious stones of an honest Christian life."[48] The idea of James as *paraenesis* fits the peppered cadence of its contents. However, those who view the Epistle of James as *paraenesis* tend to emphasize the fact that it is written in Greek, as *paraenesis* is both a Greek word and a Greek literary form.

While there is some benefit in recognizing that the letter does not have the typical epistolary characteristics we have become familiar with in the writings of Paul, there is a danger of reducing James to little more than bullet points of exhortation and *diatribe*, another English word derived from the Greek. Too much emphasis on the *paraenesis* leaves one with the feeling that James is yelling at us throughout his letter, and some have certainly read it in that vein. It seems that Friedman's analysis of the letter as *yalkut* is very helpful here, not only in recovering the fact that James is indeed a very Jewish letter, but also in placing the rabbinic *yalkut* alongside – and perhaps in place of – the Greek *paraenesis* or *diatribe*. James is exhorting his readers; he is not yelling at them.

The rabbinic angle, if we can use that term, also helps us understand better the flow or 'outline' of the letter, a task that has proven very difficult for commentators and from which no consensus has arisen. Anyone who has read even part of the Mishnah recognizes that rabbinic 'order' is not the same as the more systematized, and indexable,

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[47] *Idem.*

[48] Machen, J. Gresham *The New Testament: An Introduction to is Literature and History* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1990); 238

arrangement of modern Western texts. Rabbinic writings seem to ramble (pardon for the acoustic alliteration there) to those who are not accustomed to the style. Luther considered the somewhat haphazard format of James to be just another demerit against the book, writing in his 1522 German Bible, "But this James does nothing more than drive to the law and its works; and he mixes the two up in such disorderly fashion that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took some sayings of the apostles' disciples and threw them thus on paper; or perhaps they were written down by someone else from his preaching."[49] But the Epistle of James is not disjointed; it is rather that the joints are not connected as we are accustomed to experiencing, even in the Pauline literature.

James is undoubtedly a difficult book to outline, but this is because we tend to want to see individual topics localized into one particular segment, or *pericope*, of the text. Actually, none of the New Testament letters follows this desired pattern and all subsequent outlines that we find in Surveys, Commentaries, and Introductions are a forced fit, and many feel that way. It was more the style of the New Testament authors, and definitely the style of rabbinic writers, to weave thematic material throughout the document, with the same theme taken up in short blocks of text multiple times in the letter. Peter Davids recognizes this pattern and even sees a poetic, chiastic structure in James whereby various themes are repeated in a set order. "The major blocks of material in the book take up the themes in reverse order, giving a chiastic effect."[50] Recognizing poetic parallelism across an entire book can be very difficult, and some of Davids' outline divisions do seem a bit tendentious. The point being, however, that the Epistle of James – a *literary* epistle rather than a personal letter – is not a haphazard conglomeration of distinct and unrelated thoughts

Peter H. Davids (*b.* 1947)

[49] Luther, Martin *Preface to 1522 German Bible*. WORKS OF MARTIN LUTHER - PREFACES TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE (godrules.net). Accessed 19January2023.
[50] Davids; 25.

(even as honorable as Luther thought some of those thoughts to be), but a (Christian) rabbinic exhortatory letter intended to establish proper living through repetitive reinforcement.

On the basis of this preliminary analysis, then, we propose to study the Epistle of James not in the usual verse-by-verse manner beginning with 1:1 and ending with 5:20. Rather we will approach the verses – and intend to exegete every passage, if not every single verse – *thematically*. In this manner we will be able to tie together James' thoughts on such issues as *favoritism in the church* along with the associated social conundrum of *wealth and poverty*. The dangers and evils of the *tongue* provide another theme for the rabbinic musings of James the Just, as does *worldliness* versus *true religion*. In the place of a systematic and linear outline of the letter, here is a thematic one, along with the approximate pericopes associated with each topic. This is not meant to be iron-clad, as there is obviously some overlap of ideas and certain pericopes are mentioned alongside of different themes.

Theme		**Passages in James**
Temptation/Trial – Endurance	A	1:2-8, 12-15; 4:7-10; 5:7-12
Anger/Division – Wisdom	B	1:19-21; 3:2-12, 13-18; 4:1-6, 11
The Tongue – Peace	C	1:22-27; 3:1-12; 5:9
Faith & Works	**D**	**1:22-27; 2:12-26; 3:13-18**
Law of Liberty/Love	C′	1:23-27; 2:8-13; 4:11-17
Rich/Poor – Humility	B′	1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6
Worldliness/True Religion	A′	1:5-11, 27; 4:4-10

Admittedly, these themes do work conveniently into the chiastic structure that Davids mentions (though this outline is not the same as he derives from the letter). But it should be apparent even to a cursory reading of James that these are recurring themes in the letter, and the association of thematic pairs as noted above helps us understand the flow of James' mind, how it moves from negative to positive. Again, the problem is that

his mind does not move this way in a *linear* manner, but rather more of a helical, recirculating fashion. At the center of this structure is the passage that lies at the center of the (unnecessary) controversy regarding the entire epistle: Faith & Works. This will be exegeted in more detail in its place, but suffice it to say at this point that Luther was entirely mistaken to think that James was somehow refuting Paul regarding the true nature of salvation, whether it be by *faith* or by *works.* Luther did not see straight on that matter, it must be admitted. There is, in fact, nothing in what James says regarding faith and works, that cannot also be found, though in different phrases, in Paul. Davids comments, "Indeed, to argue that James directly attacks Paul is to argue that James is a consummate blunderer, for he fails to meet Paul's arguments at all and instead produces a work with which Paul would have agreed!"[51]

It should rather be noted that the entire *paraenetic* structure of the letter – full of exhortations on various themes of Christian living – is really an expanded commentary by the author himself on the statement, "*faith without works is dead.*" Each of the themes found in the Epistle of James constitutes an example of a living, active faith and is frequently contrasted with one that is, without works, dead. In each theme we can see faith tested, faith failing, and faith triumphant (though not always in a direct progression). The word 'faith' is not always used, but the concept of that trust that depends on and unites with God in Christ is present throughout the epistle. A few examples of the explicit mention will show how central the concept of a *living* and *obedient* faith is to James.

> *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your* faith *produces patience.* (1:2-3)

> *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. 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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* (1:5-7)

[51] Davids; 21.

*My brethren, do not hold the **faith** of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.* (2:1)

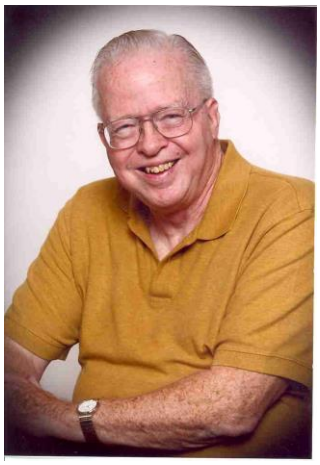
*Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in **faith** and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?* (2:5-6)

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of **faith** will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.* (5:14-15)

The premise here is that the controversial passage concerning 'faith & works' in James 2 is not a diatribe against Paul's teaching, but is rather the central core around which the whole of the Epistle of James revolves. That Luther thought James was contradicting Paul was an error of judgment both in regard to what James does say regarding 'faith' and 'works' as well as the evident timing of James' epistle relative to Paul's letters to, for instance, the Romans and the Galatians. The former of these errors we will address in the discussion on Faith & Works (Theme D above). The latter is better placed in this introductory material so that it does not cloud our exegesis of James' thoughts on the subject when we get to Chapter 2, particularly 2:12-26.

A cursory reading of the passage seems to indicate that James teaches a righteousness that comes by works rather than by faith. This would indeed contradict Paul's teaching, but there is little evidence within James' text that he was interacting at all with Pauline thought. No specific Pauline phrases are used and even James' reference is to *works* whereas Paul prefers the phrase *the works of the Law*. No mention is made by James to the flash points of the controversy: circumcision, the Sabbath, and the dietary laws. No mention is made of Gentile believers and not so much as a passing allusion is given to the 'Jerusalem Council' recorded in Acts 15. If James has a bone to pick it does not appear to be with Paul. If it is, then James is perhaps the greatest example of the passive/aggressive treatment in the entire Bible.

It is rather more likely that James is railing against a false teaching that has troubled the Church from its foundation to the present. This is that grace is so comprehensive and so wonderful there need be no outward manifestation of salvation in form of repentance or good works. This is the teaching of the contemporary Grace Evangelical Society, as noted on their website: "**Grace Evangelical Society (GES)** was founded in 1986 to promote the life-giving truth that God offers man the free gift of everlasting life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from works done before or after the new birth."[52] GES propagates the teaching that repentance has no part in a sinner's salvation and is only required afterward if the believer desires 'rewards' in heaven. GES holds that any requirement of works in conjunction with salvation – whether they are called 'fruit' or the visible manifestations of 'grace' not withstanding – is a 'works gospel' and is therefore false. Zane Hodges, a leading proponent of this error, writes in his seminal book *Absolutely Free!* that, "No other position is biblical or truly evangelical. Faith alone (not repentance *and* faith) is the sole condition for justification and eternal life."[53] Thus we do not need to see James as an adversary of Paul, as if this libertarian perversion of salvation by grace was limited to the 1st Century.



Zane Hodges (1932-2008)

Indeed, when we turn to Paul's Epistle to the Romans we find that he faced the same corrupting of the gospel which he preached (something that Peter acknowledged was not uncommon with Pauline doctrine). Throughout Romans the apostle teaches a grace and a gracious salvation, so powerful and so wonderful that someone might be tempted to respond, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* or *"And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? – as we are slanderously*

[52] Grace Evangelical Society (faithalone.org). Accessed 20January2023.
[53] Hodges, Zane *Absolutely Free! Chapter 12*. Repentance – Zane Hodges Library. Accessed 20January2023.

reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just."[54] Paul's response to such heretical teaching was unequivocal and actually no different than James'.

> *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* (Romans 6:1-4)

And in the passage often considered the *locus classicus* of 'justification by grace through faith' – Ephesians 2 – Paul speaks of 'good works' in no less definitive and certain terms than James.

> *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)

The evidence on the matter from other places where we encounter James in the New Testament is also quite strong against the conclusion that James is opposing Paul in his letter. Largely on the basis of Luther's comments, Protestants have often characterized James as a rigid, hide-bound, legalistic Pharisee of a Christian (if there can even be such a thing) who clung to the Law and resisted all efforts to dilute it. The facts do not bear out this perversion of James' character. First, in the most famous passage that actually does deal with the matter – Acts 15 - James is found siding with Paul and Peter in determining that Gentile converts were to be admitted fully into fellowship without having to be 'processed' as Jewish proselytes first. Later, when Peter was in Antioch with Paul and some disciples from Jerusalem came down, there was a contretemps between the two great apostles over Peter withdrawing from table fellowship with the Gentiles.

> *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the*

[54] Romans 6:1 and 3:8

Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. (Galatians 2:11-13)

William Hendriksen points out in his survey of the Epistle of James, that the common interpretation of this event is grounded upon a misunderstanding of the text itself. Since Luther, Protestant commentators have interpreted *"certain men…from James"* as Judaizers, carrying with them their rabbi's instructions to negate fellowship with Gentile believers. But there is no evidence in the text that the men were Judaizers; they were, no doubt, Jewish believers who still struggled with the ancient prohibition against table-fellowship with Gentiles. We learn from Acts 15 that there existed a segment of the Jerusalem church who adhered strenuously to the edicts of the Mosaic dispensation and desired that Gentile converts do the same (*cp.*Acts 15:5). This minority lost the debate andJames was the man who outlined their defeat. It is hardly creditable that James would then send Judaizers to Antioch. William Hendriksen comments at length, "To represent him [*i.e.,* James] as Paul's opponent is unfair. This unjust verdict rests partly upon an erroneous interpretation of Galatians 2:12. Though he observed the Old Testament ordinances, he was not a Judaizer: he did not try to impose these institutions upon the Gentiles. Nowhere is he pictured as Paul's opponent. On the contrary, he very clearly championed the cause of Paul (Acts 15:13-29). To the very end he remained Paul's friend (Acts 21:18-25)."[55] It may be a stretch to call Paul and James 'friends,' but they were mutually-recognized servants of the same Lord; there is no basis to manufacture a controversy between them

William Hendriksen (1900-82)

The position of this epistle in the New Testament canon provides an invaluable service to Gentile believers, even though it is apparently not addressed specifically to them. We know by its presence in the canon that the Holy Spirit did indeed intend for this letter, written to the *"twelve tribes of the Diaspora,"* to be read for edification by

[55] Hendriksen, William *Survey of the Bible* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press; 1976); 317.

countless millions of believers throughout the ages, who personally possess no Jewish heritage. James presents us with the Gospel of the *Jewish* Messiah, as Paul says, "*born of woman, born under the Law.*" As should be expected, no mention is made by James of the trifecta of Jewishness under Moses (and during the Second Temple Era): circumcision, the Sabbath, and the dietary laws. Nonetheless, James presents himself in his epistle as a Jew who continued to observe the Law, and to expect believers (at least Jewish believers) to do the same. "He appears as a Jew who kept the law (as Paul also probably did), who was dedicated to the mission to the Jewish community (a mission Paul certainly supported despite his separate calling), and who also agreed with Paul's position over against the legalists."[56] Thus the Epistle of James presents all believers with an answer to the age-old question of the relationship between Law and Grace. Neither Paul nor James saw a conflict between these two, though the Church has struggled for two millennia to find a biblical balance. Perhaps this is due, in some measure at least, to the comparative neglect of the Epistle of James.

[56] Davids; 19.

Week 3: Wisdom in Tribulation
Text Reading: James 1:2-8, 12-15

"The tempered metal is more valuable
than the raw material."
(Peter Davids)


Rudolf Stier (1800-62)

The briefest of greetings and then James jumps in with both feet: "*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials…"* One of the most counterintuitive lines in Scripture, and James uses it to open his rapid-fire volley of admonitions and warnings, peppered here and there with a few encouragements (though at times it seems painfully few). For the most part, however, there is no softening of the blows and that is the case here. Commentators have long struggled to outline James and to systematize his thoughts into a logical order. But the logic is not linear and the thoughts are presented almost stream-of-consciousness. It was submitted in the last lesson that the center point of the epistle is the brief and controversial phrase, *"faith without works is dead."* The beginning of the letter hints at what will be the overarching theme of the entire piece: *living faith endures in a hostile world.* 19th Century Lutheran pietist Rudolf Stier writes, "What is the so-called faith which yet can endure nothing, which cannot abide to be earnestly tested? What faith is that which cannot trust in dark ways, which does not create obedience in hard tasks, and patient continuance in hope towards God?...The precious work of patience is the essential and necessary *continuance*, to which alone the kingdom is appointed."[57]

James, writing to Jewish believers scattered from their homeland and dwelling in the midst of pagans, has no need to hear of specific situations of persecution, specific

[57] Stier, Rudolf *Commentary on James* (Lynchburg, VA: James Family Christian Publishing; nd); 229.

temptations or trials that his readers are undergoing. Rather he knows, as his Lord had instructed, *"In this world you will have tribulation."* James would have agreed, no doubt, with Paul when the latter wrote, *"He who would live godly in Christ will suffer persecution."* To James, as to Jesus and Paul, there is an inevitability of *'falling into various trials'* as a believer lives out his or her faith in an unbelieving world. There is, furthermore, no need to parse these trials into 'internal' and 'external' as some scholars have attempted. As we will see later in Chapter 1, James clearly teaches that the internal and the external are inextricably linked. Indeed, the external only becomes dangerous when the internal has conceived illicit desire, giving birth to sin and death. Thus James would never view separation from the world – cloisterism or monasticism – as a valid solution to the problem of *"falling into various trials"* in this life. Rather he admonishes all believers to *"consider it all joy"* when this happens. Biblically-viewed, trials are proof to the believer that his or her faith, which Peter calls *"more precious than gold even when tested by fire,"* is being proven and purified by God.

This is, in fact, a central Jewish belief that James would have learned as a child. Few biblical stories would have been repeated more often that that of the testing of Father Abraham's faith, all the way to the point of offering Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Davids writes, "Jews, of course, have a long tradition about testing, reaching back to Abraham, the prime example of one who passed the test, and to the Israelites in the wilderness, the prime example of failure. This tradition was amplified under the experience of the exile and persecution."[58] It was the standard Jewish understanding of Abraham's trials, as it continues to be the correct Christian understanding of trials in general, that these trials were never intended to cause Abraham to fail, but rather to sustain Abraham through them and to purify his faith. It is for this reason that Abraham's story will play a large role in James' epistle, for it continues to stand – as it did for Paul, though from a different perspective – for abiding faith purifies and tempered through trials. James' message echoes that of other New Testament writers:

[58] Davids; 67.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

(Hebrews 10:35-36)

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)

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

James also falls in line with contemporary Jewish thought in the Second Temple Era, as we see from the apocryphal writing of Sirach,

My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptation.
Set your heart right and be steadfast, and do not be hasty in time of calamity.
Cleave to him and do not depart, that you may be honored at the end of your life.
Accept whatever is brought upon you, and in changes that humble you be patient.
For gold is tested in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation.
Trust in him, and he will help you; make your ways straight, and hope in him.

(Sirach 2:1-6)[59]

Perseverance, endurance, steadfastness are synonyms that characterize what is most needed by the believer in the present age and James begins his letter to believers of the Diaspora with a summary statement of just what this looks like: *Joy*. Again, since there is such a powerful misunderstanding even today concerning James' relationship to Paul, hear their words together: "*Consider it all joy…and rejoice in hope of the glory of God…we also glory in tribulations…*" Jewish believers in the Diaspora were not more susceptible or exposed to tribulation and trials than other believers, but certainly their situation as

[59] Sirach 2 RSV - Duties toward God - My son, if you come - Bible Gateway. Accessed 24January2023.

outcasts from their homeland added a powerful sting to them, and perhaps made it even harder than usual to *consider it all joy.* "Joy is the proper perspective for the test of faith…this joy, however, is not the detachment of the Greek philosopher but the eschatological joy of those expecting the intervention of God in the end of the age."[60] Thus it is one of the fundamental themes of the Epistle of James that the believer – whether Jew or Gentile, at home or scattered abroad – will encounter trials and tribulation, and is to encounter them with joy.

It may be that those believer who were once under the present care of James in Jerusalem were now struggling mightily under the burden of their exile, and perhaps wondering if the grace of God had been refused to them on account of their trials. James, like Paul, seeks to reassure as well as to challenge them that trials and tribulations are the common lot of believers in an unbelieving world. "This present world is a battlefield where the powers of good and evil are embroiled in a war hastening hard to its predestined climax, the triumph of God."[61] James thus has a timely and a timeless message for believers and weaves it through his letter: trials and tribulations are not only inevitable, but profitable, and should be met not only with joy, but with steadfast patience. Thomas Manton writes, "So that the perfect work of patience is a resolute perseverance, notwithstanding the length, the sharpness, and the continual succession of sundry afflictions."[62]

In our chiastic analysis of the themes in the Epistle of James, we begin therefore with the Trials/Endurance theme because it seems to set the *Sitz im Leben* for the entire letter, as well as for the entire Christian life. Considering the table thematic outline from page 29, we consider first the Temptation/Trial – Endurance paradigm (A) and move from there to the Worldliness/True Religion paradigm (A') to illustrate both the challenge and the result of trials and tribulations for the believer.

[60] Davids; 67.
[61] Adamson, James B. *NICNT: The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1976); 52-53.
[62] Manton; 34.

Theme		Passages in James
Temptation/Trial – Endurance	**A**	**1:2-8, 12-15; 4:7-10; 5:7-12**
Anger/Division – Wisdom	B	1:19-21; 3:2-12, 13-18; 4:1-6, 11
The Tongue – Peace	C	1:22-27; 3:1-12; 5:9
Faith & Works	D	1:22-27; 2:12-26; 3:13-18
Law of Liberty/Love	C′	1:23-27; 2:8-13; 4:11-17
Rich/Poor – Humility	B′	1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6
Worldliness/True Religion	**A′**	**1:5-11, 27; 4:4-10**

The theme of Trials and Endurance is woven through the epistle, but clearest in four distinct pericopes, as noted in the table above. Before digging down into the verses themselves, it would be profitable to examine the connections between these passages so as not to lose the forest for the trees. For instance, notice both the connection and the progression, even to the eschatological *Parousia*, between 1:3-4, 1:12, and 5:7-8.

James 1:3-4	**James 1:12**	**James 5:7-8**
…knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.	*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.*	*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. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

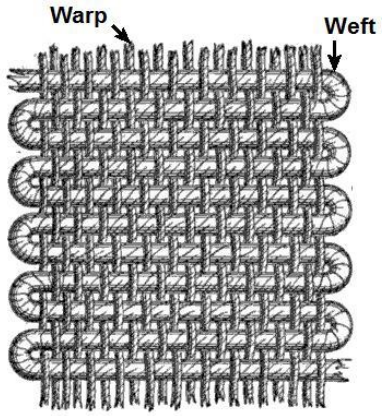
Patient endurance is clearly the connecting tie between these passages, but there is also a definite progression in both detail and timing. The patient man is *perfect and complete, lacking nothing* and the result of this development in patience is *the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*. And when will the crown be awarded? *Until the coming of the Lord* which is *at hand*. Furthermore, if we add in the third pericope

of the four we learn Who it is who is behind all of this, and gain wisdom (1:5) thereby to strengthen patient endurance.

> *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.* (4:7-8a)

Recognizing the theme of Trials and Endurance, we can then recognize the connectivity of seemingly disconnected and even random phrases and comments by James. What is the answer to the prayer for wisdom in 1:5? It is to understand that trials are directed and controlled by God, whose purpose is to draw nearer to the believer in the midst of trials as the believer draws nearer to God. What do these trials effect? They bring about patient endurance, which constantly looks forward to the promise of the Lord's Coming, knowing, as Paul puts it, "*that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*[63]

James sets before his readers both reality and a real solution. The reality is struggle: trials, temptations, even failure. But the real solution is also there: ask for wisdom, submit to God. This is not Stoic philosophy; this is not resignation to Fate; this is living faith. If we consider the Epistle of James as a tapestry, which it is in truth, then we may see the various themes – the circumstances and issues that James addresses here and there and repeatedly in the letter – as the 'woof' or 'weft' of the fabric. *Faith* is the warp that runs continuously through the fabric. The trials, the interpersonal relationships, the needs of others, these are the cross threads that we encounter now and then, not always the same thing, but something always and the same things chronically, like a pattern. The thread that holds it all together, that runs continuously through the tapestry and is consistent re-



gardless of the situation or circumstance, is *living faith*. We might say that it is the warp of living faith that is the fundamental fabric of the tapestry, whereas the trials and

[63] I Corinthians 15:58. Note there that Paul's theme is steadfastness in the faith.

circumstances and opportunities in which the believer live out his or her faith, are the pattern of that believer's life. It is the warp that gives the tapestry strength; the woof gives it is its distinctive appearance. To anticipate James' argument in Chapter 2, the warp is *living faith*, the woof is *good works*. In terms of the current theme, *living faith* is still the warp; the weft is *patient endurance in trials*. The analogy is far from perfect; for one thing, the warp is many strands and the believer's faith is singular. Nonetheless the metaphor fits the epistle and hopefully helps us see James' letter more as a tapestry than as a systematic theology.

As we investigate the epistle *thematically* rather than strictly verse-by-verse, we encounter Trials & Endurance at the beginning. Davids notes, however, that we often fail to recognize the recurrence of this theme throughout the letter. "The first major theme encountered in the Epistle of James is that of suffering or testing, *peirasmos*. One cannot miss it in the opening verses or in 1:12ff., but it is quite possible to forget its presence from then on. Yet the theme does not disappear, but in fact underlies much of the rest of the epistle."[64]

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. **(1:2-4)**

If we are correct in setting the scene for the recipients of this letter as Jewish believers who had been scattered ('dispersed') from their homes through the periodic persecutions from their unbelieving countrymen, then we can understand James' otherwise strange opening remarks. It is the consistent teaching of Scripture that believers are not to go looking for trouble, the reality being that trouble is already looking for them. The scattered believers of the Diaspora did not go militantly, but neither did they go quietly. As a result of the persecution in which Saul of Tarsus was involved, we read that *those who had been scattered went about preaching the word."*[65] We can assume that this was the general practice with each wave of persecution, and can consequently assume that

[64] Davids; 35.
[65] Acts 8:4

those who were scattered also *fell into various trials* on account of their witness. And if these trials did not come upon them on account of their witness, they certainly did on account of their faith, as James notes the connection between the *various trials* and the *testing of your faith.* Peter makes the same connection in his first epistle,

> *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.*
> (I Peter 1:6-7)

A comparison of these two passages from James and Peter is instructive, for they are saying the very same thing, though with slightly different emphases. The phrase 'various trials' in I Peter 1 is exactly the same as in James 1:2, but Peter notes that these trials have brought 'grief,' whereas James admonished his audience to consider them 'all joy.' But before we conclude that James had a masochistic streak, notice how both writers place 'various trials' in the context of joy: Peter says that believers *rejoice* in spite of the various trials; James says that believers are to *consider* these trials to be *all joy*. In common between the two passages is the *purpose* of trials which is itself the cause for joy/rejoicing and not the trials themselves. Various trials come the believer's way as a means of *testing* and *proving* his or her faith, and the believer may view these otherwise grievous circumstances as joyous on the basis of (1) the fact that there is a faith to be tested, and (2) that patient endurance of various trials will 'perfect' that faith.

Thus James is not saying that the 'various trials' are themselves joyous; they are, as Peter notes, often grievous. "The salutation might sound like a mockery to those who were suffering under various trials, but St. James proceeds to show that these very trials are a ground for joy."[66] This concept of 'joy in suffering' is a peculiarly Christian philosophy, having been exampled by the Lord Jesus Christ. "*For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through suffering.*"[67] For it was Jesus who, "*for the joy set before*

[66] Mayor; 33.
[67] Hebrews 2:10

Him endured the cross, despising its shame…"[68] The logic is simple and irrefutable: if Jesus Himself was perfected through suffering – and certainly suffering for no crime or sin on His part – then believers ought to consider the 'various trials' that they encounter nothing more (and nothing less) than following in their Master's footsteps. Thus Peter,

> *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.* (I Peter 4:12-13)

James is even clearer than Peter, though Peter is not obscure, concerning the nature of these 'various trials' with respect to the believer: the believer does not seek out trouble, but rather 'falls into' various trials. "The author assumes that this is a context for the Christian life, that testing comes in a variety of forms, and that one does not seek the situation but rather stumbles into it."[69] This perspective is diametrically opposed to the modern 'prosperity' gospel which preaches that no suffering should ever befall a believer, so long as he or she has sufficient 'faith.' How ironic! The means of perfecting the believer's faith are denied and prevented by an already-perfected faith. How does that work? James and Peter, and Jesus and Paul would all say: 'It does not work!' Sadly the modern, Western evangelical world has completely lost site of this essential message, and modern preachers are offering a pain-free perfection through 'positive confession.' This is an insidious error since it appeals to the flesh, which by no means desires suffering, and contradicts the Scriptures, in which we learn that patience through trials perfects faith.

James uses the word *perfect* often in his letter, often enough to consider it a major sub-theme. The Greek word is *teleos* and its variant forms, a word signifying *purpose attained* or *maturity*. By this means James shows that 'various trials' are no mere fate, no accidental occurrences, no misfortune that befalls all men alike. While troubles and trials are indeed the common lot of all mankind, they have *purpose* for the believer. "To the

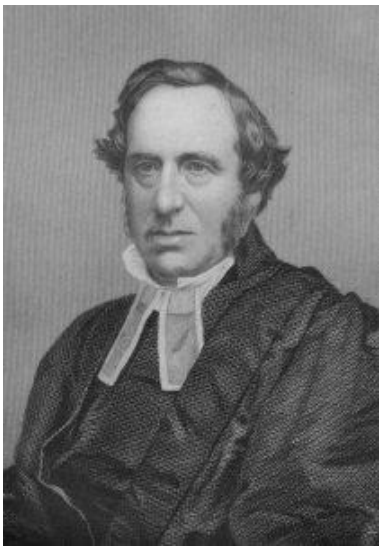
[68] Hebrews 12:2
[69] Davids: 67.

wicked every condition is a snare. They are corrupted by prosperity, and dejected by adversity; but to the godly every estate is a blessing. Their prosperity worketh thanksgiving, their adversity patience."[70] Trials, when met with steadfast patience, are the means whereby God strengthens the faith that He has graciously implanted into the heart of every believer. Patience is not itself that perfection; it is the means of attaining a perfect faith. And this perfection does not arise from particular trials – this trial for that perfection, that trial for this virtue, etc.; rather 'various trials' indicates that it is not in the nature of the trial that we find the perfecting power, but rather in the nature of the faith that endures. Manton writes, "So that the perfect work of patience is a resolute perseverance, notwithstanding the length, the sharpness, and the continual succession of sundry afflictions."[71] Therefore the believer's faith is perfected no matter the nature of the trial, so long as it is met with patient endurance. "The perfect work, is not a single virtue, but the perfect character…That is, perfection is not just a maturing of character, but a rounding out as more and more 'parts' of the righteous character are added."[72]

The idea of God testing His children is offensive to many; they consider that a good and loving father would not put stumbling blocks in the path of their children. This is to misunderstand the nature of trials and temptations, and James will clear that up later in this first chapter. But it is also to misunderstand the nature of faith that can only be perfected in situations that demand greater dependence, greater trust, in God. Stier writes, "Faith *receives* this so necessary test only in *trials*. This word has an evil sound as *temptation*; it might seem as if God were not faithful and good in applying such tests, as if He put stumbling-blocks in our way that we might fall. But that troubles should thus become temptation to us, lies *in ourselves* and in our own folly, as St. James afterward takes care to teach. God's part in our trials serves only for the purpose of salutary *testing* of faith in order that it might be *confirmed.*"[73]

[70] Manton; 28.
[71] *Ibid.*; 34.
[72] Davids; 69, 70.
[73] Stier; 227. Italics original.

It should also be stated that the *patience* of which James and Peter speak is not a mere passive resignation of the believer to trials, a 'whatever' mentality that 'goes with the flow.' Rather it is the case that patient endurance is an arduous task, wherein the believer not only accepts the providence of God in the trial (*cp.* James 4:7-10), but also prayerfully considers and meditates on the nature of the trial and its connection with faith. Andrew Ross writes, "Endurance is that *staying power* which enables a man to persevere steadfastly through the most adverse circumstances. The Greek word does not denote such a *passive* quality as the English word 'patience' often denotes; 'it is a noble word,' says Trench in his *New Testament Synonyms*; 'it does not mark merely passive endurance but the brave patience with which the Christian contends against various hindrances, persecutions and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the outward and inward world.'"[74] Trench's distinction between 'outward' and 'inward' worlds is a very important one in light of James' admonitions concerning trials and endurance. As we shall see later in James Chapter 1, the believer cannot always blame the world for his or her struggles; the real trouble lies within.


Richard Chenevix Trench (1807-86)

Already in the opening verses of James' epistle we begin to see the nature of the believer's life in the world – whether scattered from his homeland or safe within his own walls. The inevitability of trials comes from two sources: the inclination of the fallen heart within and the enmity of the world without. Trials do not come upon believers due to a lack of faith, as the 'prosperity preacher' alleges, but rather in order to strengthen and perfect the faith that is there – trials are *evidence of faith* to the believer and not the other way around. And it is the very nature of faith that requires perfection through adversity,

[74] Ross, Andrew *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1960); 27.

a truth that James will drive home throughout his epistle. Stier contemplates the nature of indwelling sin and the consequent need for adversity and patience.

> Purified through and through from all still adhering and admingled sin! But this can take place only through the opposite of that by which we fell. Pride is the ground an source of our sin – therefore God abases and brings us low! Vain and false pleasure entices and binds us long – therefore God ministers the smart of loss and suffering! Unbelief and disobedience have penetrated out souls far more thoroughly than without test we could ever comprehend – therefore God thus urgently demands faith and obedience!...In the keen chemistry of patience we are purified from all that is not faith, that is not obedience; we become strong and entire, made whole by such experience and discipline, entire men and entire Christians – *wanting nothing*.[75]

In order to properly endure trials, therefore, the believer must properly understand them – their source and their purpose. Failing this, trials will only generate resentment and bitterness and will by no means contribute to the perfecting of faith. Those trials will still come, but they will be of no profit. "This quality of endurance, however, must have its full effect, it must attain its *end*. It may be rendered incomplete by our impatience and our needless repining when things go wrong with us."[76] Thus, as with so many things pertaining to our walk in Christ, proper response starts first with proper understanding. Recognizing the salutary effects of suffering is, to say the least, counterintuitive, which is why so many modern professing Christians rejects the idea completely. But they do this to the stultifying of their faith and in direct opposition to both what the Scriptures say and what has been God's *modus operandi* throughout the ages, from Abraham to Jesus and beyond. Thus the believer who cannot see the joyful prospect in trials needs wisdom, and there is only one true source for that. The situation is that envisioned by Qoheleth,

> *If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge,*
> *Then he must use more strength; But wisdom brings success.* (Ecclesiastes 10:10)

[75] Stier; 230. Italics original.
[76] Ross; 28. Italics original.

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. 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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. **(1:5-8)**

This verse has frequently been disassociated from its context; it is a classic refrigerator magnet verse (particularly verse 5; folks would rather not be reminded of verses 6-8). While the principle inculcated in verse 5 is at all times true and necessary for the believer, the context demands that we interpret the 'wisdom' here as pertaining to trials and endurance. Manton writes of the wisdom of James 1:5, "It is to be restrained to the circumstances of the text, not taken generally: he intendeth wisdom or skill to bear afflictions; for in the original the beginning of this verse doth plainly catch hold of the heel of the former…'lacking nothing,' and presently, 'if any of you lack.'"[77] The response of God to such a request is heartening – He will give *liberally*, He will *not reprove*. This promise falls in line with Jesus' encouragement that His disciples will have all that they ask for in accordance with the will of God, and it is manifestly the will of God that their faith be perfected through the trials they encounter. Thus verse 5 echoes (though written earlier) the words of Paul in I Corinthians 10,

> *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* (I Corinthians 10:13)

James sets a caveat to this request for wisdom: that it be made in faith without doubting. The wording is brusque and many believers have shuddered at verses 6-8, realizing that even the most faith-filled prayer may yet have a mixture of unbelief. Pentecostals and Charismatics allege that any unanswered prayer is due to a lack of faith, treating faith as a currency necessary to get what one asks for from God. But the issue is not *what* one asks for as it is *who* is being asked. It is not a matter of 'You did not get that car because you doubted that God would give it to you,' but rather, 'You do not have what you ask because you doubt the God whom you are asking.' James Adamson writes,

[77] Manton; 37.

"Here and in the Synoptic Gospels it means primarily the simple act of coming to Jesus with some need in complete confidence that He can and will deal with it."[78] The believer cannot know with certainty that her request will be granted in the timing and terms intended, but she can know that she prays to a God who hears and who is a Father who will answer in the best way and in the proper timing. However, "The doubter has not such confidence that his prayer will be heeded: the picture in the middle voice of the verb here is of a mind so filled with uncertainty and indecision that it cannot make any choice between the alternatives with which it is faced, i.e., whether or not to believe that God will be moved to grant the prayer being made."[79] The attitude that every believer must have in prayer, for wisdom or for anything else that is according to the will of God, is one of trust that God will hear and give answer. James is saying nothing more than what Jesus said when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray.

> *So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!* (Luke 11:9-13)[80]

Set in the context of trials and endurance for the perfecting of one's faith, this admonition by James makes complete sense. The believer's faith can by no means be 'perfected' if he doubts the One whom he asks for wisdom in the midst of the trial that is intended to perfect his faith. Rather it is the case that if the believer doubts, he doubts that God is willing to give wisdom *liberally and without reproof*, and he is therefore as up and down as the wave of the sea: he is literally a *two-souled* man (v. 8 *diphuxos*). "He is virtually a man with two souls, which are in conflict with each other."[81] This is not an anthropological statement by James; he is not introducing a new composite man with two

[78] Adamson, James *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1976); 57.
[79] *Idem.*
[80] *Cp.* Mark 11:24 and Matthew 21:22
[81] Ross; 30.

souls. Rather, as will become more apparent as we move through his letter, his soul is as divided as if it were two. In doubt as to the trustworthiness of God, he is a man "with soul divided between faith and the world."[82] This situation is best illustrated by Peter's jaunt on the sea,

> *And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"* (Matthew 14:28-31)

Doubting in relation to trials usually takes the form of either impatience with God or attempting to find one's own way out of the situation. Of course, there is a third option: succumbing to the trial entirely, but that will be dealt with in verse 13 and following. James has stated in unequivocal terms the willingness and ability of God to grant the prayer for wisdom, so the doubting of verses 6-8 can only be the believer either doubting God's ability, or His willingness, or his own desire to have the wisdom that God will grant. The fault lies entirely with the believer and not with God. Alec Motyer writes, "Verse 5 holds before us the unquestioned sincerity of God who desires our progress to maturity and who, therefore, as far as he is concerned, will not withhold from us the wisdom we need. But verses 6-8 raise the question of our sincerity. Do we want to go forward with God? Are we whole-heartedly committed to his way of seeing things and his ambitions for our future? Or are we keeping a door open for the world? Are we trying to have a foot in each camp? God's mind is clear; but are we *double-minded*?"[83]

Alec Motyer (1924-2016)

[82] Adamson; 60.
[83] Motyer, Alec *The Message of James* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1985); 39-40. Italics original.

Interpreting the *double-minded man* as being divided between faith in the world fits the later comment by James, *"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."*[84] Clearly one should not expect anything from God when one makes himself an enemy of God by loving the world. This dichotomy is untenable. But its root lies within the fallen heart of man, even believing man, as James outlines in the next Trial & Endurance section.

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. 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. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. **(1:12-15)**

This section is tied to the former by the continuation of the 'endurance' theme (1:12) and is itself bracketed by the common 'life…death' theme found so often in Scripture. Verse 12 promises the *crown of life* to those who endure, whereas verse 15 shows that *death* is the fate of one who succumbs to temptation, who fails to endure. This section presents the reader with James' anthropology, and it differs only in words from that of Paul: the problem lies entirely within the heart of man; God is not to be blamed, all fault lies with man. This anthropology is consistent with the Jewish view of man's nature and God's holiness with which James would have been familiar from youth. No matter what the trial or temptation, the rabbis maintained along with Scripture that *God was never to blame*. Rather the problem was that *"the thoughts of man's heart are only evil always"* and *"the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."*[85] This represents the Christian doctrine of original sin, but also Jewish teaching of James' day, derived from these passages in Genesis and others, of the *yēser* or 'inclination' of the human heart. This will come to light further in our exposition of verse 13 – 15.

Verse 12 presents us with the reward of endurance, the prize of steadfast faith: the *crown of life*. This phrase is in the genitive construction, which can have various different

[84] James 4:4
[85] Genesis 6:5 and 8:27

meanings. Perhaps the best interpretation, the one that is most consistent with the rest of Scripture, is to read the phrase as *the crown which is life*, which is life eternal. "The actual reward is salvation itself, for (eternal) life is certainly the content of the crown."[86] Ross adds, "This crown has been promised by the Lord to those who love Him, who love Him through all their trials, outward and inward, and in spite of them."[87] This eternal life is the reward for steadfast faith and for brave patience in trials, as Jesus himself says in Luke 21, a passage also speaking of tribulation for the believer,

> *But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost.* ***By your patience possess your souls.*** (Luke 21:12-19)

One cannot miss James' opening word in verse 12, *Blessed*, and the clear allusion to the words of Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek word is the same – *Makarios* – and the only difference is that it is singular in James 1:12, plural in the Sermon. The formula, *'blessed is the man'* or *'blessed are they,'* is almost programmatic in Jewish writings and certainly in early Christian, that the one who submits to God's will and obeys God's law is the man who is and will be truly blessed. As such, *blessed* in verse 12 corresponds to *consider it all joy* in verse 2 and completes the first cycle of the Trial and Endurance motif.

But 'why do bad things happen to good people?' This is undoubtedly a question James would never have asked, but professing followers of Yahweh basically asked this in the wilderness, and Christians – whether Jews or Gentiles – have been grumbling this insipid question for millennia now. 'Why is God doing this to me?' is only slightly improved by 'Why is God letting this happen to me?' The underlying thought is the same

[86] Davids; 80.
[87] Ross; 32.

– difficult times are God's fault, either because He causes them or because He fails to prevent them. James will have none of it, and proceeds to explain, in one of the most powerful anthropological passages in Scripture, just where the problem lies in terms of temptation and sin.

> *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. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.* (1:13-15)

Some scholars believe James is attempting a theodicy in these verses: a defense of God against charges of being the author or originator of sin. Theodicy tries to answer the question, 'If God is good, why is there evil in the world?' It is a common philosophical practice to attempt to harmonize the concept of a good (and even loving) God with the reality of sin and evil in the world, but it is not what James is doing here. James, ever practical, is simply addressing a tendency among all men, not least believers, of blaming the gods for ill winds in life. Martin writes, "There is a persistent tradition in religious literature that attributes evil to the gods or to God or demonic forces…Especially when calamity strikes, the tendency is to look for someone to blame and thereby to avoid personal responsibility."[88] In spite of the common practice of the Israelites under the Old Covenant to grumble and murmur against God, the consistent testimony of the Law and the Prophets is completely in line with James' position here: God is not to blame for temptation, and certainly not for sin. "Tempting others to evil would require a delight in evil, of which he is himself incapable."[89] In the intertestamental period, ben Sirach denies the responsibility of God in the sins of man, attributing them entirely to the man himself.

Ralph P. Martin (1925-2013)

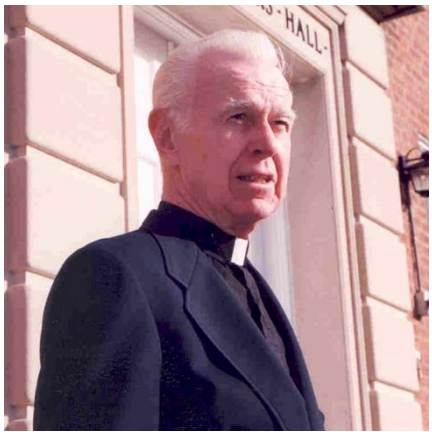
[88] Martin; 34.
[89] Adamson; 70.

Do not say, "It was the Lord's doing that I fell away"; for he does not do what he hates.
Do not say, "It was he who led me astray"; for he has no need of the sinful.
The Lord hates all abominations; such things are not loved by those who fear him.
It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice.
If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.
He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose.
Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given.
For great is the wisdom of the Lord; he is mighty in power and sees everything;
his eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every human action.
He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and he has not given anyone permission to sin. (Sirach 15:11-20)

The focus presented in James 1:13-15 is, like Sirach 15, directed to the practical inclination of man to succumb to temptation than to any philosophical ruminations regarding the reality of evil in a world created by a good God. The latter is taken for granted in both passages, undergirding the ludicrous nature of any claim that God can either be tempted or can tempt man to sin. What James give us, therefore, is the 'gestation' of sin, and this short but powerful anthropological passage rests upon a Hebrew word and a Jewish concept, called *yēser*. This is the Hebrew word (יֵצֶר) found in the two Genesis passages quoted above, translated 'thoughts' in Genesis 6:5 and 'imagination' in Genesis 8:21. *Yēser* is that inclination that resides in fallen man that prevents him (by his own willful engagement) from obeying the Lord his God. Joel Marcus, in an interesting essay titled "The Evil Inclination in the Epistle of James," comments regarding the Genesis passages, "In both, *yēser* is the 'thing formed' by man, i.e., his thought or purpose; in Gen 6:5 it is the cause of God's judgment, but in 8:21 it is the ground of his mercy. The latter text…suggests that *yēser* is not only man's fault but also his misfortune."[90]

Joel Marcus (*b.* 1951)

[90] Marcus, Joel "The Evil Inclination in the Epistle of James" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, October, 1982, Vol.



Roland Murphy (1917-2002)

As with many of the New Testament authors, James corrects an erroneous perspective on *yēser* that had developed over time and was prevalent especially among the Qumran community of Essenes in the Second Temple Era. That perspectives was of the independent and insuperable characteristic of *yēser*, as Marcus notes in reference to the word's usage in the Dead Sea Scrolls, "*Yēser* has become a technical term pointing to an entity with a life of its own."[91] Roland Murphy, a Catholic New Testament scholar, adds that Qumran, "explains *ysr* in terms of a principle of evil which dominates a man."[92] James will reject the inevitability of *yēser* in controlling a man's destiny, but that will come later, in Chapter 4. Without lessening the seriousness of this evil inclination that draws a man from temptation to sin, James nonetheless admonishes the believer to resist it and to submit to God.

> *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.* (4:7-10)

Thus James sets forth in 1:13-15 the nature of the gestation of sin. God does not lead a man to sin, he is led rather by the inclination of his heart, the 'concupiscence' as it is termed in Roman Catholic theology, that inclines a man toward giving in to temptation. In the Greek, the term James uses is *epithumia*, normally translated by the English 'lust,' but generally meaning 'strong desire.' It is, therefore, not the temptation itself that constitutes sin but rather the giving in to that temptation. "The mere fact of our being tempted does not involve in itself anything sinful. It is when the desire of man goes out to meet and embrace the forbidden thing and an unholy marriage takes place between

44 No. 4; 607.
[91] *Ibid.*; 612.
[92] Murphy, Roland "*Yēser* in the Qumran Literature" *Biblica*, 1958, Vol. 39, No. 3; 335.

the two, that sin is born."[93] Temptation itself is a lure, not a sin, but man's inclination toward sin makes temptation the seemingly efficient cause of sin. If this were true, however, we could not believe that our Lord was himself *"tempted in all ways such as we are, yet without sin."*[94]

But temptation meets with sinful inclination in the fallen heart, the *yēser* of man is only evil from his youth. James uses two powerful verbs in verse 14: *exelkein* – to drag off – and *deleeazein* – to entice – in order to graphically illustrate the role of the sinful nature exposed to temptation. Davids notes, "in the first word he pictures the person enticed to a hook and drawn out…and in the second the person attracted to a trap by delicious bait."[95] 'Lust' – *epithumia* – or 'desire' unites with the temptation in an unholy marriage. This is not God's doing, but man's entirely. "Temptation comes, not from God, but from the evil inclination, which is man's *own* inclination."[96] The child of this union is sin and sin, unrepented and unatoned, brings death. "The mere fact of our being tempted does not involve in itself anything sinful. It is when the desire of man goes out to meet and embrace the forbidden thing and an unholy marriage takes place between these two, that sin is born."[97]

Still, it is important to remember that James does not consider this gestation of sin and death to be the normal, inevitable course of life for the believer. The bulk of this epistle is focused on how the believer can resist the temptation and choose the good, showing clearly that James knew of the indwelling grace in Christ Jesus, a grace that was still unknown and foreign to the Qumran community. "The person who subdues his *yēser* is wise; he is not double-minded or unstable, being ruled alternately by the evil inclination and by 'the implanted word'…The person who endures in temptation and overcomes his *yēser* receives a glorious crown."[98] Man, to James as to Paul, is not inherently good; his inclination is still 'only evil always.' But by the grace of the

[93] Ross; 34.
[94] Hebrews 4:15
[95] Davids; 84.
[96] Marcus; 620.
[97] Ross; 34.
[98] Marcus; 620.

implanted word, the believer can resist that inclination as well as the devil, and submit to God who will then draw near to him and strengthen him. This is the fire of trials that purifies the believer's faith. This is the wisdom that is from above,

> *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. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* (3:17-18)

Week 4: Brave Patience
Text Reading: James 4:5-6, 7-10; 5:7-11

"The obedience of faith goes gladly in the way which God directs; patience makes diligent and persevering use of all that the faithful God imposes."
(Rudolf Stier)

The second half of this first couplet – Trials/Endurance – focuses more on the endurance aspect of the theme and also takes us further along the thought path to the *Parousia*, the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the 'progressive parallelism' so common in Hebrew thought: recapitulating earlier ideas but also taking them a bit further with each cycle. James is presenting a full anthropological view of man, even *redeemed* man, as one highly susceptible to temptation, one predisposed to yielding to temptation, one bent on sin (*cp.* 1:13-15 above). The diagnosis seems hopeless, yet James holds out hope and exhorts endurance. A misunderstanding here will lead to a 'works' salvation, as some have erroneously considered that James is advocating. James seems to lend support to the false teaching that God in Christ has given believers *the ability* not to sin and thereby to earn their salvation. In its least egregious form, that of Roman Catholicism, the believer works along with divine grace in order to eventually attain salvation. In its worst form, that of Pelagianism, man is viewed as capable of self-remediation without the assistance of grace. James falls into neither group, nor any other that minimizes the absolute necessity for divine grace alone.

But saying that about James is easier than proving it, for his language is unfamiliar to ears well-trained in the Pauline letters: *"We are not under Law but under grace."* And, *"By the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified."* And many, many more such passages. James seems to advocate a 'pick-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps' type of gritty Christianity, working steadfastly and earnestly to please a God who is quick to judge and condemn. This, at least, is the perspective many believers have had of James' letter over the millennia. We must remember that in the opening verses James does not exhort his readers to 'tough it out,' but rather to pray for wisdom. As with Paul, James' accurate description of what a man is and what a man is required to do does not necessarily lead

to the conclusion that the man is capable of so doing. James has already poignantly described the gestation of sin from within a man's own heart, in the third of the four Trial/Endurance passages he powerfully reinforced that point, though in a passage that has been subjected to a great deal of debate: James 4:5-6. These two verses do not fit into any one theme of the epistle but rather serve as another anthropological statement that drives home the inherent difficulty that even believers have withstanding temptations and enduring trials.

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." **(4:5-6)**

The exegetical problems with these two verses are manifold and begin with the issue of identification in verse 5, followed by the logical connection with verse 6. In verse 5 the identification problem applies not only to the Scripture passage allegedly quoted or alluded to ("*or do you think that the Scripture says in vain…"*) but also the identity of the spirit (or Spirit) who dwells in us. Then there is the tricky interpretation of the phrase, as translated by the NKJV, "*yearns jealously.*" Because of these issues, James 4:5 is the most difficult verse in the entire epistle to interpret, and certainly ranks among the most difficult in the New Testament. Luke Timothy Johnson comments, "This tangle involves questions of punctuation, the determination of grammatical subject and object, and the relation of the explicit scriptural citation in 4:6 to the ostensible citation (or allusion) in 4:5."[99]

The initial problem encountered is the fact that the phrase, "*The S(s)pirit that dwells in us yearns jealously"* is presented by James with a fairly typical introduction as canonical Scripture, "*does the Scripture say.*" But there is no such passage in the Old Testament and therefore scholars have postulated either that (1) James is not quoting a direct passage, even though he is using a typical verbal formula for doing just that, but is rather summarizing the general tenor of Scripture, or (2) James is quoting an apocryphal

[99] Johnson, Luke Timothy, "James 3:13-4:10 and the □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□" *Novum Testamentum*, Oct. 1983, Vol. 25, Fasc. 4, p. 330.

writing. The problem with the first option is that James is typically quite precise in the quotation after he has introduced it in the manner we find in verse 5. Sophie Laws writes, "Where James quotes a passage as □□□ □□□, he quotes from the LXX, and he quotes with exactness. A 'loose' quotation or a variant translation of the Hebrew would be uncharacteristic of him."[100] The problem with the second option is that no one has found such a quote in the extant apocryphal literature. A third option is that James is actually referring to the passage quoted in verse 6, which is indeed to be found in Proverbs 3:34. The problem with this solution is that the proverbial quote in verse 6 is also introduced by "*therefore He says,*" which would result in a double introduction if the one in verse 5 is also pointing to the quote in verse 6. This is unlikely.

So we must accept that James is making a summary statement concerning the teaching of the Old Testament and not referring specifically to a verse found there. Motyer writes, "Most commentators hold that James is using the formula *the scripture says* to refer to what is in fact not a direct quotation but a concise summary of the mind of Scripture on this point."[101] This is an uncomfortable conclusion, but not uncommon as biblical writers are notoriously looser with their Bible references than modern evangelicals. But having made this conclusion, the exegetical problem of verse 5 is by no means solved. This is because the words used in the verse are indeterminate by themselves. For instance, we do not know whether to capitalize the 's' in spirit (□□□□□□); in other words, is James speaking of the *Holy Spirit* or of the *human spirit*? This is a rather vital question both as to the meaning of the verse (and consequently verse 6) and James' overall attitude toward temptation and sin. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the manuscripts do not provide us with punctuation; even the question mark needs to be added by the translator/interpreter. One scholar "argues convincingly that 4:5 should be punctuated so as to form two rhetorical questions: 'Does the Scripture speak in vain?', and 'Does the spirit he made to dwell in us long enviously?"[102] This works if the

[100] Laws, Sophie S. "Does Scripture Speak in Vain? A Reconsideration of James IV.5" *New Testament Studies;* Vol. 20. 212.
[101] Motyer; 148.
[102] *Idem.*

'spirit' refers to the Holy Spirit, as many English translations assume, for the Holy Spirit does not 'envy jealously' and both rhetorical questions are answered in the negative. However, this solution fails in that it does not give us what the Scripture actually says, whether in vain or not. We are forced to the quote from Proverbs in verse 6, which we have just seen cannot work.

We can easily remove the question in verse 5 with a resounding 'No!' Scripture *does not* speak in an empty manner, which is what the word translated 'vain' means. This throws the weight of the exegetical problem on the second half of the verse, especially the identity of the 'spirit' there. This spirit is identified as one *whom He has made to dwell in us*. The options, therefore, are basically two: either the spirit or breath by which man was first animated (*cp.* Genesis 2:7) or the Holy Spirit who is given to all believers upon regeneration. This difference in identity is shown by different English translations of the same verse:

> *Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?* NKJV

> *Or do you think Scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us?* NIV

> *Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?* ESV

> *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?* KJV

The New King James version is so bold as to capitalize the 's' in 'spirit,' clearly identifying with the Holy Spirit and speaking of the Spirit-indwelt condition of the believer. The King James version is equally adamant that it is the human spirit of which James speaks, for the Holy Spirit cannot 'lusteth to envy.' Both options have a fair amount of Old Testament Scripture to back them up, as on the one hand God describes Himself as a jealous deity who abominates His creature's fickleness and adultery. But man is also described in the Old Testament as draw wickedly to envy, a fallen creature

whose every imagination of the heart is *"only evil always."* The solution to the conundrum, therefore, cannot be found in the word 'spirit' (□□□□□□) since there is no capitalization in the original, and the word 'holy' is not appended. James could be referring to either the human spirit which God caused to dwell in us at creation/birth, or the Holy Spirit which God caused to dwell in us at rebirth.

For many scholars the answer lies in another word James uses in verse 5, the word translated variously as 'long' or 'envy' or 'jealousy.' It is a strong word in the Greek: *phthonon* (□□□□□□). Davids points out that this word is never used in the New Testament in a positive manner, rarely so in secular Greek, and equally rarely in patristic Greek.[103] Adamson writes, "The root idea of *phthonos* is 'malice' or ill-will" and quotes Trench in his *Synonyms* that the word is "incapable of a good, is used always and only in an evil, signification."[104] Moo adds, "Linguistically, James' language is said to be more appropriate in a description of man's attitude than of God's. *Phthonos,* translated 'envy' in the NIV, always has a negative connotation in biblical Greek, and is naturally never used with reference to God."[105] The main objection to the conclusion that James is referring to the human spirit is the phrase he uses to describe it: *that God made to dwell within us*. Motyer objects, "Why should James call attention to the fact that our spirit, involved as it is in sinful longings, was nevertheless placed in us by the Lord?"[106] The answer to Motyer's question gets to the heart of James' anthropology and the heart of every believer's problem and every believer's need.


Douglas Moo (*b.* 1950)

The reason James feels the need to point out that the human spirit was put into man by God is to show that man's terrible inclination toward *phthonos* – wicked envy – is

[103] Davids; 163. It should be noted that Phthonos was also the Greek goddess of envy, closely associated with retribution.
[104] Adamson; 171.
[105] Moo, Douglas *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: James* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1985); 145.
[106] Motyer; 149.

not the way the human spirit was intended to be, but is that way because of indwelling sin. This interpretation is in line with what James has already taught concerning the gestation of sin in 1:13-15 and does justice to the pejorative nature of the Greek word used. Thus Laws, "To take □□□□□□□□ (ta pneuma) as meaning the human spirit would seem to do most justice to the language, and would accord with the fact that the only other use of □□□□□□ in the epistle is in precisely this connection, in ii.26, where □□□□□□ is the vivifying

Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

force of □□□□□□ (to soma), as works are of faith."[107] James has not spoken of the jealous nature of God, but he has already touched upon the wayward and wicked nature of man; it is reasonable to assume that he has continued in that vein in this verse. Matthew Henry summarizes James' though in 4:5, "The account given in the holy scriptures of the hearts of men by nature is that *their imagination is evil, only evil, and that continually*, Gen. 6:5. Natural corruption principally shows itself by envying, and there is a continual propensity to this. The spirit which naturally dwells in man is always producing one evil imagination or another, always emulating such as we see and converse with and seeking those things which are possessed and enjoyed by them."[108]

Furthermore, to speak of God's jealousy from an Old Testament perspective is to speak of His jealously for His own honor and not for the admiration and worship of His creatures, though the two concepts are closely related. But to speak of the human spirit *lusting to wicked envy*, as the phrase could be translated, is to speak again of the *desperately wicked* human heart and of the *imaginations that are evil from his youth.* It is a truly biblical anthropology that places man in his proper fallen condition before a holy God, who provided man at the first with a clean spirit. But perhaps most convincingly, this interpretation sets the proper stage for James' recovery in verse 6, "*But God gives greater*

[107] Laws; 213.
[108] Henry, Matthew *Commentary on the Whole Bible; Volume 6* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1996); 797.

grace…" Literally, it is rendered, "*But greater does He give grace.*" James has already brought to the fore the inclination of the human heart; it stands to reason that he would continue in that vein here. Thus in these two verses he continues to show the abject poverty of spirit of the fallen human heart, contrasted with the majesty (and utter necessity) of divine grace. From the perspective of the believer, however, the proper attitude is not pride, but humility – a very difficult attitude in times of trial and temptation.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. **(4:7-10)**

There is no denying that this is a tough passage. Not like the previous two verses – tough to exegete – but rather *tough to read*. The opening and closing thoughts bracket the whole, and are the easiest parts: *Submit yourselves to God…Humble yourselves before the Lord…* But the in-between part can be a bit unsettling to the average believer: *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded!* English translations do not put an exclamation point at the end of this sentence, but we all read one there. And we all read James talking to *us*; but is he? The fact that this seemingly harsh sentence is in the midst of the *Submit…Humble* inclusio does make it seem that he is writing to just one group of readers, but that assumes that the two bracket statements are exact parallels. They are not.

Although James is not a strictly linear flow, there is nonetheless some connection within the letter of passages as they move from one to the next. The immediate context of this difficult passage is the opening of what we call Chapter 4,

> *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* (4:1-4)

The question we must ask as we read through James' epistle is this: *Is he speaking to the same crowd at all times?* Or is it rather the case that there are among the *twelve tribes* those who profess to be Messianic but are not. In fact, their profession is what is causing such distress within the scattered communities of Jewish believers, for they are transferring the same oppressive attitudes and behaviors to the *Diaspora* that they practiced in Jerusalem. For instance, this passage at the opening of Chapter 4, can it be written of true believers? Or is it, in fact, parallel with other such passages in James,

> *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?* (2:5-7)

This particular reference perhaps proves the point that James is not addressing the same group in every line. First, it is clear that these rich people are among the scattered communities, for otherwise James' exhortation against showing favoritism to them would be nonsensical. Second, it is hard to see how James considers these people to be true believers, as he accuses them of *blaspheming the honorable name by which you are called.* What is happening – and what is often so difficult to see when just reading verse-by-verse through the letter – is that the weft of one theme – Rich/Poor – is weaving through another theme – Trials/Endurance. James moves in and out of these intertwining themes without prior announcement, and the reader must be alert to the tone of what he is saying in order to determine the 'to whom' of what he is writing.

In this focus passage in James 4, verses 7-10, a careful look will show the subtle distinction between the opening bracket verse and the closing, that they are not exact parallels. The result of the first exhortation: *Submit yourselves to God* is intimately tied with the theme of Trial/Endurance: *and the devil will flee from you.* This assumes, of course, that *resisting* the devil is the manner by which the believer *submits* to God in the midst of trial – but that will be developed more fully below. It is fairly clear that the intended audience of this bracket verse is the *believers* among the dispersed communities.

However, a careful consideration of the second bracket shows that it is, in fact, addressed to those whose faith is, at least to James, suspect at best: *Humble yourselves…and He will exalt you.* These are those who exalt themselves; in other words, the *rich* of whom James has so much (all bad) to say in his epistle. Thus we see that the more direct parallel between *Submit* and *Humble* is significantly modified by the immediate result of each. And as the bracket verses address different segments of the reading audience, so also do the internal verses of the pericope.

Submit yourselves, therefore, to God follows closely and intentionally on verse 6, where James writes, *But He gives the greater grace…* The believer needs to patiently endure trials and temptations, and to resist the *yeser*, the inclination, within him to succumb too readily to temptation. But James does not exhort the believer to attempt this in his own power, as if there were now something infused within his heart that renders the *yeser* impotent – no, it remains powerful, as Paul so poignantly notes in Romans 7.

> *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. 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.* (Romans 7:17-20)

The believer must endure, must resist, but must rely entirely on the '*greater grace*' that God provides. And this is exactly why trials perfect faith – not because they make us holier, but because they throw us back in complete trust upon the God who called us and who promised to carry us through. This must not be mistaken for a passive, 'Let Go and Let God' attitude; it is rather a very active, brave patience that is required of the believer, not least in resisting the temptation to try to endure on one's own power. Alexander Ross points out that the man who is in submission to God is the devil's unconquerable foe, "His power is great, but he meets his match in the humble man, the

man who is subject to God, who, strong in the 'more grace' given him and drawing ever renewed supplies from the fulness that is in Christ, takes a bold stand against him."[109]

The mention of the devil is somewhat abrupt in James, unless we see resistance to the *accuser of the brethren* as tying in with James' later reference to the *patience of Job* (5:11). James is no more willing to allow the devil to take credit for the believer's failure to endure trials than he was that God be blamed for it. Resistance to the former requires first, foremost, and only submission to the latter. Adamson quotes the early-20th Century Anglican missionary, Florence Allshorn, as saying, "for the devil's purpose a proud Christian is of much more use than an atheist or a pagan."[110]

James presents the believer's response to trials and temptations as movement in one direction or another – the one being explicit and the other implied. *Submitting to God* is essentially synonymous with *Drawing near to God* (v. 8) and this movement of faith by the believer is, at its very root, *Resisting the devil*. Resistance to the devil will cause him to flee; submission/drawing near to God will cause Him to draw nearer still. This is the perfecting process of faith and is verbally epitomized in Job's exclamation, "*Behold! I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee!*"[111] The language James uses is the prophetic language of Israel, "*Therefore say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Return to Me,' declares the Lord of hosts,' that I may return to you.'*"[112]

Again, we must not think that God's drawing near to us is contingent upon us first drawing near to Him, for we learn elsewhere that no man can come to the Father unless the Spirit draws him. God Himself does the drawing, through trials, and it to that that the believer must submit. Thus Calvin writes correctly,

> But if any one concludes from this passage, that the first part of the work belongs to us, and that afterwards the grace of God follows, the Apostle meant no such thing; for though we ought to do this, yet it does not immediately follow that we can. And the Spirit of God,

[109] Ross; 79.
[110] Adamson; 174.
[111] Job 42:5
[112] Zechariah 1:3

> in exhorting us to our duty, derogates nothing from himself, or from his own power; but the very thing he bids us to do, he himself fulfills in us.[113]

This is the 'greater grace' of which James speaks in verse 6, not that the believer initiates the movement but that God does, and then credits it to the account of the believer, just as He did with Abraham, the father of all who have faith. In thus exhorting believers to draw near to God and to submit themselves to His will in all trials, James is saying nothing more than God Himself said through the prophet Isaiah,

> *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:*
> *"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit,*
> *To revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."* (Isaiah 57:15)

But James' tone changes abruptly and immediately: *Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded!* Again, we may not find the exclamation point in our English translations, but we can hardly read James' words without one. Hands and Heart is a common Old Testament motif in regard to a person's approach to a holy God, as in the famous question the psalmist asks,

> *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?*
> *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,*
> *Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.* (Psalm 24:3-4)

James refers to those who must cleanse their hands and purify their hearts as 'sinners' and 'double-minded' men. This second description is the same 'two-souled' individuals James mentions in 1:8, a man who has no reason to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord. Can we conclude that such men are, in fact, true believers? It would not seem that James does, as what he exhorts in these passages appears to be the very initial requirements of repentance. Adamson writes, "Here *hands* and *heart* symbolize deeds and thoughts respectively…Repentance is the sinner's first step toward God; the Greek word is the usual strong word for *sinners*, and *double-minded* indicates the

[113] Calvin; 334.

fundamental defect of these professing Christians."[114] These are men who cannot resist the devil, because it appears that they have not yet partaken at all in the 'greater grace' of God. And James is not done with them yet.

"*Be miserable and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom!*" Are these words to believers? Or to *make*-believers? James seems to echo Joel in these words,

> *'Now, therefore,' says the LORD, 'Turn to Me with all your heart,*
> *With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.'*
> *So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God,*
> *For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness;*
> *And He relents from doing harm.* (Joel 2:12-13)

These double-minded, two-souled, men appear to be within the congregation of the faithful, just as the apostate Israelite appeared to be within the covenant people of God. But their proximity to salvation did not secure it for them; though they worship God through Jesus Christ *with their lips*, their *hearts are far from Him*. One can also hear the echo of Isaiah in James, especially when we take note of the emphasis James puts on the 'oppressor' within the community.

> *When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand,*
> *To trample My courts?*
> *Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me.*
> *The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies –*
> *I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.*
> *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates;*
> *They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.*
> *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you;*
> *Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.*
> *Your hands are full of blood.*
> *Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.*
> *Cease to do evil, learn to do good;*
> *Seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.*
> (Isaiah 1:12-17)

[114] Adamson; 174-75.

Is James a killjoy who forbids laughter and merriment for the believer? He might have been, but that is not the gist of what he is saying here. No doubt he would condemn 'course' and 'frivolous' jesting no less than Paul did, but the concern here is far deeper. Ross notes, "What James is reprobating is the hollow merriment of the friend of the world."[115] And we must remember that James has just pronounced that he who makes himself a friend of the world, makes himself an enemy of God (*cp* 4:4). The men of whom James speaks were those who were in the crosshairs of Jesus' pronouncement in the Sermon on the Mount,

> *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*
> *Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger.*
> *Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.* (Luke 6:24-25)

James will continue his diatribe against the rich in the next chapter, writing lines that could hardly be intended for believers, lines that again echo both the Old Testament prophets and the Lord Jesus Himself,

> *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 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. 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. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.* (5:1-6)

This analysis is not to diminish the need of constant repentance for the believer, or to inculcate in any way a complacency of heart or a laziness of hand as characterizing the believer's life. As Paul would say, *May it never be!* Rather it is to recognize in James' words and tone, as well as to the allusions he makes both to the Old Testament and to the teachings of Jesus, that there was a class of individuals among the believing community in the *Diaspora* who were Christian in name but quite possibly not in truth. This is just as

[115] Ross; 81.

it was in Israel, for "*not all Israel are Israel,*" says Paul. And not all professing Christians are Christians, it would seem says James.

It is to this class of *make*-believers that James utters the closing bracket in this particular segment of his epistle: "*Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*" Where there is breath, there is hope, even for the apostate Israel of Isaiah 1,

> *'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the* LORD*,*
> *'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;*
> *Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'* (Isaiah 1:18)

The implication of James' words is that the double-minded, two-souled man who is in love with this world seeks also to exalt himself. But it is an effort condemned to failure, for the Lord exalts the humble and brings low the proud. "Let that pride through which the devil fell, and through which he would cast thee down, be utterly and entirely abolished in thee; so that thou mayest know of nothing but humiliation before *the Lord*, who so deeply humbled Himself for thee. So shalt thou *through Him* be exalted, who saith not in vain more than once, 'He that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.'"[116]

To summarize the difference between the intended audience of the first part of this passage, and the intended audience of the second, we might employ a little alliteration. Brethren are admonished to *resist*; double-minded men to *repent*. Again, this is not to say that believers have no cause of repentance in their lives, but that is not the emphasis of James' letter. In the midst of trials, one's attitude and relationship to the world – the source of trials in everyone's life – will manifest whether they have the 'greater grace' to resist the devil, or whether they are themselves in need of repentance unto faith. It is evident that these two groups of people were represented in the professing Christian community of the Jewish Diaspora.

[116] Stier; 417.

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. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!
(5:7-9)

If we apply the hermeneutical principles discussed above to this final passage in the Trial/Endurance theme, we can see that James is here talking directly to believers. '*Brethren*' appears in verses 7, 10, and 12 and there is no reference to the rich, the double-minded (two-souled), or the sinner. The tone is, consequently, softer and more encouraging, holding out to the brethren the sure hope of the Lord's *Parousia*, His Second Coming. That this passage, James 5:7-12, is indeed connected with the previous Trial/Endurance passages can be seen by a comparison of the opening verses in three of the four pericopes studies. The key words that weave the diverse passage together are *endurance* and *patience*. These two word families are set as the proper response to two other word groups: *trials* and *temptations*, which James has outlined and defined in Chapter 1. In these three passages, furthermore, one can see the progression of James' though, as he moves from the *fact* and *purpose* of trials in the first passage, to the *hope* of ultimate reward in 1:12, and finally to the *Parousia*, the moment in God's chronology when that hope will be revealed. This is classic progressive parallelism: a common theme revisited in different terminology, yet moving evidently farther along the logical/chronological scheme. James deftly brings the believer's mind from his or her present trials to the reality of the *Parousia* when all such trials and temptations will be both completed and graciously rewarded.

James 1:2-4	**James 1:12**	**James 5:7-8**
My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.	*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.*	*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. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

James 5:7 provides internal evidence as to both the origination and the destination geography of the epistle, as the *early and late* rains are pertinent only to the climate of Palestine. At the very least, this allusion by James indicates that both the author and the readers would have been Palestinian Jews, very familiar with the annual growing cycle and the critical nature of both the early rains of October/November and the late rains of March/April. This analogy also helps prove an early date for the letter rather than the 2nd Century dating favored by modern, liberal scholars. By the second century the Church was predominantly Gentile, and Palestine had already been devasted by Roman legions in response to the First and Second Jewish Wars. Even if the author had been a 2nd Century Diaspora Jew, by that time the agricultural reality of *early and late rains* would have likely been forgotten, as three or four generations would have passed since the Jews were living primarily in Palestine. These little markers are available to the careful scholar to reinforce his or her confidence in the Scripture as being exactly what it presents itself to be.

James is clearly summing up his admonition to patient endurance that runs from the very beginning of the epistle: *Be patient, therefore, brethren…* All that he has said up to this point forms the basis for the 'therefore,' as well as the looking forward in hope that every believer can and must do, to the promised Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: the *Parousia*. This is, as we would expect, the exact same word that the Apostle Paul uses to describe the fundamental hope of the believer – the *coming* of the Lord.[117]

> *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.*
>
> (I Thessalonians 5:23)

Although James, and other New Testament writers with him, use these two word families – *patience* and *endurance/steadfastness* – somewhat interchangeably, there is a subtle distinction between the Greek words *makrothymeō* (patience) and *hypomenō* (endurance/steadfastness). Alec Motyer writes, "patience is the self-restraint which does

[117] Peters; 180-81.

not hastily retaliate against a wrong, and steadfastness is the temper which does not easily succumb under suffering."[118] Whereas in the first chapter James emphasized the *endurance* side of the coin, here the predominance goes to *patience*, what Martin characterizes as "expectant waiting."[119] This is the attitude of the believer at all times, even those not particularly 'trying.' Hence James' analogy with the farmer in verse 7, as the wait for the early and latter rains – essentially the wait for *the harvest* – is not always accompanied by trials. To be sure, in some years the rains are early or late, or fail to come at all – these events would be analogous to the trials that believers encounter. But *patience* is still the essential virtue of the farmer, who cannot hurry the rains or the harvest by complaining. "Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruits of the earth, and is patient; for, between seedtime and harvest the ordinance of God in nature requires its time, and the husbandman who could not wait that time would never reap and probably never sow."[120]

James maintains the underlying theme of the epistle, that trials – and especially the believer's steadfast patience under them – have the effect of perfecting faith. In verse 8 he refers to this as *establishing your heart*, which has echoes of Jesus' enigmatic words from Luke 21:19, *"By your patience possess your souls."* The focus here is not on any particular time period through which the believer must undergo trials – the only chronological reference is the end-point: the *Parousia*. Believers are not given to know the 'times and seasons appointed by the Father,' but are rather exhorted to endure patiently the fact that *there will be* a harvest, and *there will be* a waiting for it. "The whole age of the world, with the millennia of mankind on earth, is a great seedtime for the last harvest, in which the earth should give its fruit to heaven, after having from heaven received the seed. When the harvest comes, we shall understand the ways of God."[121] In the meantime, "James' point is not the length of time between the present and the coming of Christ, but

[118] Motyer; 172.
[119] Martin; 190.
[120] Stier; 443.
[121] *Ibid.*; 444.

how one deals with the interim of waiting."[122] Although Israel refused to heed the warning and advice, yet the Lord's words through Isaiah remain true for God's people of all ages.

> *In returning and rest you shall be saved;*
> *In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.* (Isaiah 30:15)

Verse 9, along with verse 12, interweave James' concern with the 'tongue' with that of patient endurance of trials, and of life itself. Here he perhaps reminisces about the behavior of the children of Israel in the wilderness, where every inconvenience resulted in the people murmuring against Moses, grumbling against God. James expands this to 'grumbling against one another,' which may mean speaking to one another *about* one's own trials, or blaming other believers *for* one's trials, or perhaps a combination of both.[123] This statement, of course, fits within the them of the Tongue which will be developed more fully in a later lesson, but James' mention of it here in the context of the endurance/patience theme shows that believers tend to commit the first and greatest infraction against patience *with their tongue*. It is far too common that difficulties in the believer's life are given vent not within the workplace (lest he lose his job) or even in the family (lest he lost his spouse), but in the church where too many professing believers feel there is little or nothing to lose.

But for James the issue is terribly serious, for he speaks of the murmurer as one who will incur condemnation, with the Judge already at the door. This idea of not attacking other believers in light of the imminent judgment that all believers will incur in that day, parallels the words of Paul in Romans 14,

> *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… 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.*
> (Romans 14:4, 10)

[122] Martin; 192.
[123] Moo; 170

My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 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.
(5:10-11)

James employs two more examples for the benefit of his earlier imperative, *Be patient.* The prophets of the Old Covenant suffered mightily for the message that they brought to God's people, people who should have been eager to hear from their God. James makes it clear that there was no merit in the suffering of the prophets apart from the fact that they *spoke in the name of the Lord*. As with Peter, James has no room for the believer suffering on account of wrongdoing or sin.

> *For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.* (I Peter 2:20)

Of course the supreme example of suffering without cause is Job, a man whose righteousness God Himself noted to Satan. James refers here to Job's *patience*, and that has caused a great deal of consternation among scholars, for it does not appear to the modern reader of the Book of Job that the protagonist exhibited what we would call 'patience.' Job was very vocal regarding the suffering he was enduring, and the seeming unjustness of it all. Modern scholars theorize that James is not quoting from the canonical book at all, but rather from the apocryphal *Testament of Job* which shows the patriarch in a more favorable light. Indeed, Ralph Martin denies that the canonical Job could possibly serve as an example of patient endurance, "On the surface, it is not clear why Job is chosen to exemplify patience in suffering. He was anything but an example of a godly person who was patient in the midst of adversity. The character Job in the canonical Scripture was no a silent party to his suffering; rather, he was one who complained bitterly to God because of his dire circumstances."[124]

This remarkable statement is based on a complete misconception of what 'godly' patience in suffering actually looks like. Martin assumes it takes the form of 'silence' whereas Job was anything but silent. But Martin overlooks important facts regarding the

[124] Martin; 194.

canonical Job – who, by the way, we have no reason to doubt is the man to whom James is referring. First, there is the fact that Job *was* silent regarding his sufferings until his 'friends' started to speak. Job's complaints were far more directed at and against them, and their puerile explanations for his calamities, than they were against the God of whom Job himself says, "*The LORD gives and the LORD takes away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*"[125] Secondly, and more seriously, Martin fails to take into account the approbation of Job spoken *by God Himself* in the closing chapter. The LORD's anger burned not against Job, but against the three men whose counsel to Job was so wrong, "*My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends, because you have not spoken of Me what is right* ***as My servant Job has****.*"[126]

It is evident from James' use of Job as an example of patient endurance that this attitude toward trials and suffering does not necessarily require absolute silence in submission, though James is also very careful regarding the danger of the tongue. Perhaps the essential point about Job in terms of being an example of patience is that, throughout his horrible suffering, Job "*did not sin nor did he blame God…In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*"[127] Moo comments, "For although Job did complain bitterly about God's treatment of him, he never abandoned his faith; in the midst of his incomprehension, he clung to God and continued to hope in him."[128] The result of Job's endurance was a far deeper knowledge of God, and this is what is promised to all believers who endure the *various trials they encounter.*

> *I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.*
> *You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?'*
> *Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'*
> *"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.*
> *Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.* (Job 42:2-6)

[125] Job 1:21
[126] Job 42:7
[127] Job 1:22; 2:10
[128] Moo; 172.

Week 5: Worldliness vs. True Religion
Text Reading: James 1:5-11, 16-27

"True piety helps the helpless,
for God is the God who secures the rights
of those who have no hope."
(Peter Davids)


Tom Holland (*b.*1968)

In his most recent work, *Dominion*, historian Tom Holland, himself an atheist, sets out to show that the fundamental thought and behavior pattern of Western civilization does not derive from Classical Greek or Roman culture, but rather from Christianity. One of the aspects of modern Western society that cannot in the least trace its roots to the ancient classical world is the care of the poor. Highlighting the stark difference between the ancient pagan attitude and the new Christian one, Holland writes, "The heroes of the *Iliad,* favourites of the gods, golden and predatory, had scorned the weak and downtrodden. So too…had philosophers. The starving deserved no sympathy. Beggars were best rounded up and deported. Pity risked undermining a wise man's self-control."[129] The charitable impact of Christianity upon Western thought, and by extension upon world thought, came as a surprise to Holland, who has dedicated his career to the literary reminiscence of the ancient classical world (an effort at which he is one of the best among contemporary historians). His discovery really only required the coming together of two thoughts: the first being that Christianity as a religion has been massively influential in developing the Western mind, and the second being an even cursory reading of James, "*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."*[130]

[129] Holland, Tom *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World* (New York: Basic Books; 2019); 139.
[130] James 1:27

We have noted the practical bent of James' epistle as opposed to the more theological tendency of Paul's letters. Again, this is not to say that James' letter is entirely un-theological, or that Paul's writings do not contain a great deal of practical material. It is simply to acknowledge the essential *halakhic* nature of James' writing, the *application* of Torah being the primary point among the rabbinic writings, very similar to the Epistle of James. It is not that James ignores *what we must believe* but rather that he emphasizes how that faith is to be *lived out* in the world. James' focus upon trials and tribulations is primarily because it is in the day-to-day struggles of this life that the believer's faith either strengthens or fails, as Alec Motyer notes,

> For it is more than likely true that, if life were all large decisions, few of us would go far wrong. Yet, faced with the world's ceaseless bombardment of our eyes, ears, thoughts and imaginations, the world's insidious erosion of values and standards, and clamour for our time, money and energy, it is easy to adopt a general way of life which, though it avoids the open pitfalls of sin, yet is not discernably different from the style of one who does not know Christ.[131]

This is the subtle apostasy that James fights against. Throughout the letter he is reminding us who we are, what God requires of us, and what the world does continually to draw us away from Him. Only once does he mention the devil, and that only in an admonition to resist him. Elsewhere James refuses to blame our situation on either God or the devil, knowing full well that every believer's greatest enemy lies within his own heart. "Were there no Satan there would still be wickedness; were every prospect pleasing, human nature would still be vile. The enemy is not only within the camp, within the heart; the enemy is the heart itself."[132]

Thus the believer is in constant need of wisdom, another theme woven through the epistle. Wisdom has often been defined as the 'right application of knowledge,' and that definition is fully adequate to what James has to say about the virtue. In exhorting his readers to be *doers of the Word and not merely hearers*, James is once again advocating

[131] Motyer; 78.
[132] *Ibid.*; 54.

wisdom. Bible study is insufficient if what is read and learned is then not applied. "But if he also knows how to *use* his Bible to understand life and the world around him, and to guide his own conduct and the conduct of others in the maze of life's problems, then knowledge has passed over into wisdom."[133]

In pressing the believer's need for wisdom so frequently throughout the epistle, James employs another common literary device from ancient Wisdom Literature, both Judaic and pagan: the *two-ways* literature. This genre is self-explanatory: the writer presents the walk of life as a series – a constant series, usually – of two choices. It is the most common device of contrast in the Proverbs, for instance. Perhaps the most common 'two-ways' tradition in biblical literature is that of Moses' challenge to the people of Israel, *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."*[134] This challenge was then echoed by Moses' lieutenant and successor, Joshua, toward the end of his life,

> *Now therefore, fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD! And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*
>
> (Joshua 24:14-15)

A significant feature of the 'two-way's literature is to present opposing paths in their extremes – showing the ultimate end of each path, or perhaps of only one of the paths. Thus 'life' and 'death' are contrasted, when in fact bad choices often do not lead to an immediate demise and good choices do not infallibly set the course of one's life in a unfailingly good direction. Daniel Bricker notes that the two-way tradition of biblical literature is an essential hermeneutic to understanding the Proverbs, and much else in Wisdom Literature as well.

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[133] *Ibid.*; 37-38.
[134] Deuteronomy 30:19

> In reading the book of Proverbs it becomes apparent that people and actions are often presented in polar extremes. Some of the prominent polarities are the wise and the foolish, the righteous and the wicked, and actions that lead to honor or shame. This may leave modern readers with the impression that individual proverbs fail to present real situations because the situations in view seem too simplistic… A reading of Israel's wisdom literature from this kind of standpoint might see the book of Proverbs as a collection of quaint sayings and admonitions whose application and practicality are no longer in effect. But a key to understanding the wisdom of the book of Proverbs is to understand the "two ways," a concept used to teach the importance of choosing wisely which path or lifestyle would be followed: the path of the wise and righteous, or the way of the foolish and wicked. A proper grasp of the purposes of Proverbs and a sensitivity to the literary and cultural background of the book will help the modern reader to appreciate the proverbial wisdom of Israel.[135]


Huub van de Sandt (*b.* 1946)

The two-ways that James presents in his letter seem to be characterized as either *endurance in faith* or *the world.* Huub van de Sandt writes, "James builds his letter around the polar opposition of two lifestyles, one led in friendship with God, the other in friendship with the world, and this antagonism can be taken as thematic for the composition of James' letter as a whole."[136] The man who is torn between the two is *two-souled*, 'diphuxos,' a word that it appears James may have coined. This is a man "with soul divided between faith and the world."[137] Ross adds, "He is virtually a man with two souls, which are in conflict with each other."[138] The vacillation of the double-minded man causes him to be *unstable in all his ways* (1:8) and consequently should not expect to receive anything from God. Nowhere is James stronger in contrasting the two-ways than in Chapter 4,

> *You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.* (4:4)

[135] Bricker, Daniel P. "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in Proverbs" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995), 501.
[136] Van de Sandt, Huub "James 4,1-4 in the Light of the Jewish Two Ways Tradition" *Biblica*, 2007, Vol. 88. No. 1; 39.
[137] Adamson; 60.
[138] Ross; 30.

Theme		Passages in James
Temptation/Trial – Endurance	A	1:2-8, 12-15; 4:7-10; 5:7-12
Anger/Division – Wisdom	B	1:19-21; 3:2-12, 13-18; 4:1-6, 11
The Tongue – Peace	C	1:22-27; 3:1-12; 5:9
Faith & Works	D	1:22-27; 2:12-26; 3:13-18
Law of Liberty/Love	C′	1:23-27; 2:8-13; 4:11-17
Rich/Poor – Humility	B′	1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6
Worldliness/True Religion	**A′**	**1:5-11, 27; 4:1-4**

Thus we move from the first thematic couplet, Trials/Endurance, to what appears to be its complement: Worldliness/True Religion. It should be noted again that James does not write in a systematic and categorical manner; we cannot easily separate passages as pericopes and say that this one is about Trials and that one is about Worldliness, etc. Rather we must retain the metaphor of the fabric, and recognize that these themes are interwoven throughout the letter. Nonetheless, scholars have recognized emphases in particular passages that focus on specific themes within the overall fabric of *Faith*, that which God desires to see perfected through the trials and vicissitudes of everyone's life. Yet due to the interwoven nature of a thematic approach to the Epistle of James, it will be unavoidable that we cover the same ground repeatedly.

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. 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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. **(1:5-8)**

This passage is included again as setting the tone for the example to follow and as establishing once again the *Sitz im Leben* for the believer in trials. The writer of Hebrews eloquently encourages all believers to "*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*"[139] But when is the believer in 'time of need' if not at all times? We recall James admonition to *consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials*, and remember that he is not limiting the nature of these 'various trials' to the strictly religious. The word itself, *peirasmois*, is not so limited and there is

[139] Hebrews 4:16

nothing in James' discussion of trials that would limit it to strictly persecution for one's faith. This interpretation is confirmed later in Chapter 1 in the passage we reviewed above regarding the gestation of sin. There we saw that the progress (regress) from trial to temptation to sin is not from without but from within. It is activated by the lusts that percolate within our own heart which do not require overt persecution to transfer temptation into sin. Van de Sandt writes that James "deepens the concept of □□□□□□□□□□(*peirasmos*) by narrowing its focus from external circumstances, for example persecutions, to internal measurement, that is the difficulties of life itself including pressures, dangers and vicissitudes in general."[140]

We look again at this passage, now from the perspective of the 'Two Ways' tradition in ancient Jewish Wisdom literature. James does not use the phrase exactly, but then none of the ancient wisdom writers called their approach 'the Two Ways.' James simply presents the path of wisdom as one way – the way in which one might find God and have his prayers answered by God – and the opposite way, which is as one *like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.* The second way characterizes the 'two-souled' man, the *double-minded*; by implication, the way of wisdom is singular and stable. It is the path of endurance and ultimate perfection and peace, as James will elaborate in the third chapter. James moves then into one of the most common earthly trials, frequently temptation, faced by the believer: poverty or riches. In discussing the connection between the pericope ending in verse 8 and that beginning in verse 9, Douglas Moo summarizes the views of commentators, "Still others suggest that James' discussion of the 'double-minded' person leads him to speak about that area of life that is most often troublesome in creating divided loyalties in our attitude towards God: the conflict between God and mammon."[141] It seems more accurate, however, to conclude that James is doing this – showing the common socio-economic stratification of life in this world – because this was a major problem among the Jewish community of believers (and professing believers) in

[140] Van de Sandt; 45.
[141] Moo; 66.

the *Diaspora*, those to whom he is writing. In other words, this is not merely an academic example; it is rather an existential problem.

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 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. **(1:9-11)**

This passage appears to follow the tradition line of 'God versus Mammon' established by Jesus Himself in the Sermon on the Mount,

> *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)

This statement by Jesus is itself a 'Two Ways' proverb, with the opposing ways set forth as God and Mammon. But James' angle is a bit different and a bit more nuanced. He is not addressing those who follow after Mammon, but rather those who already have it. Whereas Jesus teaches of the temptation of worldly wealth, James is dealing with the practical reality of socio-economic distinctions within the community – he is addressing the concrete reality of rich and poor in the church. But therein lies a significant hermeneutical problem with this passage: Does James view the rich in this pericope as saved or not saved? Scholars are divided, with perhaps a slight majority favoring the conclusion that the rich here are viewed as true believers. This conclusion is reached grammatically, with the verb *glory* applying both to the *brother in lowly circumstances* and the *rich in his humiliation.* The verb is not repeated in the second clause, which indicates the continuation of the verbal idea from the first clause. Davids summarizes this view, "In this case the wealthy Christian is instructed to take no pride in possessions, but rather to think on his self-abasement in identifying with Christ and Christ's poor people. This is how most scholars have interpreted the phrase."[142]

This is solid grammar, but still might not be the right interpretation of the text. The problem is that this interpretation takes a very un-James-like view of the rich; elsewhere

[142] Davids; 77.

his view on the rich is consistently negative, and very negative at that. For instance, James' culminates his treatment of the rich in the opening verses of Chapter 5, and it is hard to conclude that he has believers in mind.

> *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 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. 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. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.* (5:1-6)

Only slightly less polemic is James' treatment of the rich in Chapter 2, where he is dealing with evident favoritism within the *Diaspora* community.

> *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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?* (2:5-7)

The rich are those who *"blaspheme that noble name by which you are called."* This cannot be said of believers, even if these men profess to be so. There is no differentiation of words used: James uses the same *plousioi* (□□□□□□□) – literally, 'those who have much' – in 1:10, 2:6, and 5:1. Furthermore, in 1:10 it is not the wealthy man's *riches* that will fade away, but the wealthy man *himself.* Thus, in spite of the grammar, Davids concludes, "in the setting of the polemic use of □□□□□□□ in the epistle we doubt that the □□□□□□□ was considered by the writer truly Christian, for he is given no future hope."[143] If the verb *'glory'* or *'exalt'* in verse 9 does govern the person in verse 10, then it is an bitingly ironic sense only. "This rich person is called with a sharp ironic twist to understand the humiliation in which he lives, existing like the rich fool (Lk. 12:13-21) in luxury in this age

[143] *Idem.*

only to discover the true system of values in the coming age, which will be unexpectedly thrust upon him."[144]

It is possible to adopt a mediating view between the two extremes of the rich person being a believer or not. It may be that, in these early verses on the topic, the jury is still out. James is not maintaining a false dichotomy between the inherent piety of the poor versus the inevitably impiety and worldliness of the rich. The early Church in Jerusalem had wealthy members whose generosity was greatly needed by the otherwise poor congregation. There is no indication in the Book of Acts that the wealthy were held in doubt as to their salvation merely because they were wealthy, nor that they were required to divest themselves of all their wealth in order to be sure of their eternal destiny. We must remind ourselves that James is dealing with an actual situation among the professing believers in the Jewish *Diaspora*, not a theoretical opinion on the 'savability' of the rich versus the poor. He thus deals with each economic position as set against the only immovable standard, that of divine judgment against which riches offer absolutely no protection or security. Death will come to both rich and poor, a common theme in Wisdom literature, and is the great equalizer among mankind. The Roman poet Juvenal said that the grave is the real true measure of a man, and Adamson quotes the Greek poet Pindar in reference to James' admonition,

> The common fact of mortality has a quite special lesson for the rich (among other magnates of this world), for they have a special temptation to forget it, as Pindar is never tired of telling his patrons: 'If any man who has riches excels others in beauty of form and has proved his strength by victory in the Games, let him remember that he puts his raiment on mortal limbs and in the end of all is clad with earth.'[145]

Thus it is possible that here, in Chapter 1, James' attitude for the rich man is still ambivalent, though not very hopeful. "In effect this is what James is saying: 'Remember you are mortal, and wealth *per se* does nothing for your soul.'"[146] But in light of the 'Two

[144] *Idem.*
[145] Adamson; 65-66.
[146] *Ibid.*; 66.

Ways' tradition, the pendulum of interpretation swings back to the conclusion that the rich man in verse 10 is *not* a true believer, though he evidently professes to be one and to be a member of the believing community. It would be most consistent to the text to view the rich man of 1:10 as the well-dressed favorite in 2:2*ff* as well as the oppressor of the laborer in 5:1-6. His sin is not his wealth; it is his *trusting* in his wealth which is made evident by his self-presentation in the congregation as well as his treatment of his workers. He is the *arrogant* rich, not merely rich, and he is woefully self-deceived. We are reminded of the moral to the story of the rich fool, also given by Jesus Himself.

> *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 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. 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.' 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?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.* (Luke 12:16-21)

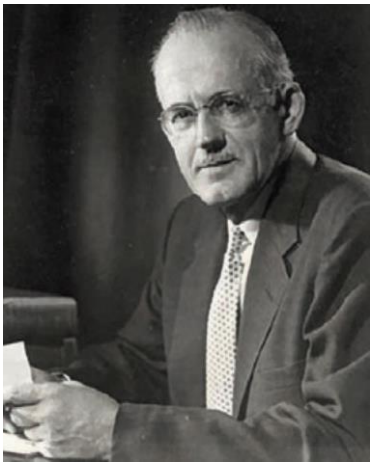
Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. **(1:16-18)**

This passage is an interlude, though a very important one, between the *yeser* passage reviewed in Lesson 3 and the 'true religion' passage to follow. The theme is still Wisdom, which is the 'perfect gift' of which James speaks here, but the overall setting is the 'Two Ways.' The immediate connection can be seen in the repeated use of the same word, *brought forth* (apokuei/apekueisen) in verses 15 and 18. In the former verse, it is sin that, fully formed, *brings forth* death; in the latter, however, it is God who, of His own will, *has brought us forth* by the word of truth. The contrast is stunning and intentional, making this passage an important transition between one 'way' – that of lust and sin – and the other 'way' – that of steadfast obedience to God and His Word. Thus the imperative "*Do not be deceived*" – more literally rendered, "*Do not err*" – is a vital admonition to the reader. It is as if James is saying, 'Pay attention!' Davids writes, "The

admonition (*mei planasthe*) refers neither to some simple intellectual non sequitur nor to a moral failure, but to a serious error which strikes at the heart of faith itself."[147]

We should note that, although James does not engage in theological matters as explicitly as Paul does in his letters, nonetheless James' Soteriology does not differ from Paul's. Both put the act of salvation, the *bringing forth,* as James refers to it, of the sinner as a passive act as far as the sinner is concerned; the active Subject is God: *He brought us forth.* Far from defending human free will or ability, "this passage teaches us, that as our election before the foundation of the world was gratuitous, so we are illuminated by the grace of God alone as to the knowledge of the truth, so that our calling corresponds with our election."[148]

Verses 16-18 balances verses 13-15. "Does God send tests? No, he actually sends all good things and, since he is unchanging, could never send evil."[149] As a good teacher James grounds his readers first and foremost in the *nature of God*. This is bedrock to the believer's faith; apostasy begins when one deviates from a true, biblical knowledge of who God is, as A. W. Tozer famously said, "The essence of idolatry is thinking thoughts of God that are unworthy of Him." James sets forth the foundational principle of God's *goodness* and confirms that with the divine attribute of *immutability* – God never changes. This knowledge for the believer is true wisdom that will anchor his or her faith in times of trial. In referring to God as the *Father of lights* and asserting that *there is no variation or shadow* in Him, James is stating the same truth as we find in John's first epistle, "*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."*[150] The importance of this fact, and of the believer's firm knowledge and retention of this fact, cannot be overstated.



A W Tozer (1897-1963)

[147] Davids; 86.
[148] Calvin; 292.
[149] Davids; 88.
[150] I John 1:5

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **(1:19-20)**

The New King James rendering of the opening of verse 19 is quite weak. The Greek word is more literally translated by an imperative: *Know this!* James uses the imperative more often than most, and here he is transitions from what God has done for us in Christ, to what the believer's response ought to be in peace and wisdom. "The cry 'Know this' summons us to a clear understanding of what God has done for us: making up his own mind to bring us to new birth, doing so by means of his word of truth and purposing that we should be his first-fruits, specially his and notably holy."[151]

In this passage James interweaves two other motifs, both very closely related both in his thought and in the Christian's life: *wisdom* and *the tongue*. These two concepts will, of course, be developed in their turn, but the connection with trials and endurance as well as the contrast of the 'Two Ways' between faith and worldliness, is very significant to James' teaching. James' thus equates the manifestation of the righteousness of God – which *does not* come about through the wrath of man – with the perfection of faith that results through steadfast patience. In terms of the relationship of the believer to the world, the operative word in James is *peace*, the opposite of wrath and the fruit of wisdom, as he will later express.

> *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 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. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* (3:13-18)

It is readily evident from even a cursory reading of this book, that James views the tongue as the chief offender among a man's 'members.' We saw in his reference to the 'patience of Job,' that in spite of his struggling and expostulations, the patriarch

[151] Motyer; 73.

manifested both his patience and his wisdom by never *'sinning against God with his lips."* Here James advocates the rare art of listening, cautioning against the precipitous resort to speech. "The great talker is rarely a great listener, and never is the ear mor firmly closed than when anger takes over."[152]

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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 he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 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. **(1:21-25)**

This passage more easily falls out along the 'Two Ways' – the way of the world manifested in *filthiness and overflow of wickedness* contrasted with the way of God's implanted Word, *which is able to save your souls*. In this latter reference to God's Word, James anticipates Paul in his second letter to Timothy,

> *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*
>
> (II Timothy 3:14-15)

Although the phrase 'filthiness and overflow of wickedness' may certainly apply to all manner of sin, it seems best to limit James' usage of the words within the context of one's thought and speech – the context established in verses 19-20 and continued from verse 22 onward. In this context, the words translated *filthiness* and *wickedness* may refer to crudeness of speech generated by malice or envy, a sense which both words often carry and which fits in with the general tenor of James' writing. Within the overall context of trials and temptations, it seems that James is admonishing believers with the very sound advice to (1) keep one's mouth shut for as long as possible; (2) spend a greater amount of time in God's Word, and (3) resist the temptation to respond to one's circumstances with verbal wrath.

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[152] *Ibid.*; 65.

But James is quick to point out that merely reading one's Bible is not sufficient to strengthen against temptation and to prevent verbal outbursts against others. Given the immediate contrast between the *able to save your souls* of verse 21 and the admonition to *be doers of the Word, and not hearers only*, we can also conclude that merely reading God's Word is insufficient both for salvation and for sanctification. James follows the biblical pattern of using the word for salvation, *sōdzo*, in the sense of past, present, and future, as Motyer notes, "It can be spoken of as past, because the work of salvation was completed by Jesus when he died for us. It can also be spoken of as future, because the full experience of salvation will not be ours till Jesus comes again. But it is also present in that day by day we can experience a greater and greater measure of what has been done for us by our Lord."[153] Thus James can speak of the fact that believers *have been brought forth* by the implanted Word, and *are being saved* by that same Word.

James analogy with the man in the mirror has often been misinterpreted as if he was speaking of something wrong with a man who, looking into the mirror and then away, forgets what he looked like. The phrasing of the sentence, however, is very straightforward: it is the nature of a man to forget what he just saw in the mirror, and that is what the man who merely reads the Word but does not do it is like. Davids is correct in noting, "The point is that the impression is only momentary: the look in the mirror while combing one's hair may be temporarily absorbing, but it normally bears no practical results when one engages in the business of the day. It is useless. The momentariness and lack of real effect is the point of the parable, not a comparison with a different type of mirror or a different way of seeing."[154] Therefore Ross' interpretation, while quaint, does miss the point – or at least falls short of it. "The mirror of the Word of God reveals man to himself; it shows him that there is something seriously wrong with the nature which he brought into the world with him."[155] While this is true, it is not what James is saying. What James is saying is that the man who fails to *do* what he reads in

[153] Motyer; 67.
[154] Davids; 98.
[155] Ross; 40

God's Word, fails *to remember* what his nature is as revealed in that Word. The solution is not to see better, or to study more the image seen in the 'mirror,' but rather *to do* what he reads there. James refers to this type of reader of God's Word using a Hebraism: he is a *hearer of forgetfulness*. Though James does not say it, it is not unreasonable to conclude that such a man – the 'hearer' but not the 'doer' – is *two-souled* and *unstable in all his ways.*

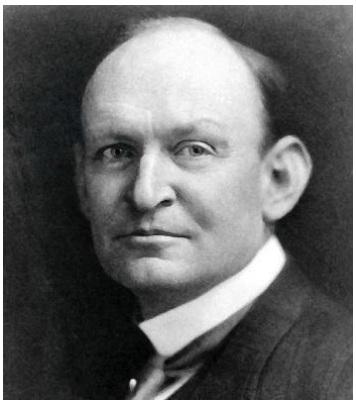
Thus James concludes this thought by acknowledging that the Word of God is the perfect mirror indeed – it is the *law of liberty* (more on that phrase later) that bring immense blessing, but only to those who *abide by it* (v. 25). Calvin, this time, expresses a truism in his comment on this verse, but also misses the point James is making: "As long as the law is preached by the external voice of man, and not inscribed by the finger and Spirit of God on the heart, it is but a dead letter, and as it were a lifeless thing."[156] But James is already speaking to those of whom he believes this perfect law has been written on their hearts: he addresses them as *beloved brethren* in verse 19. It is a common attitude among evangelicals, and perhaps even more so among Reformed, to emphasize time spent in the Word of God compared to the actual doing of that Word, perhaps for fear that it might be construed as a 'works' religion – the very charge leveled against James by Martin Luther. But, for James, the 'hearing-but-not-doing' believer deceives his own heart, as he now proceeds to announce.

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. 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. **(1:26-27)**

The word 'religion' can be a dangerous one, as it can mean many different things, some good and some bad. In modern terminology, the word is generally pejorative and signifies a cold, dead, institutionalized 'religion' that is to be rejected for a living 'relationship' with God through Jesus Christ. We can rest assured that James is not

[156] Calvin; 297.

advocating a *pure and undefiled* 'cold, dead, institutionalized' religion here. The word can also simply be a technical term for the body of beliefs and practices that characterize a 'religion,' be it Christianity, or Judaism, or Islam, etc. Again, that is not what James is referring to in this passage. A. T. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures of the New Testament,* notes that the biblical use of the word "refers to the external observances of public worship, such as church attendance, almsgiving, prayer, fasting."[157] Vincent adds that *threskos*, the adjectival form that only occurs here in the New Testament, and *thraiskeia*, the noun form, "means the *ceremonial services* of religion."[158] Thus we must consider James' usage of the word 'religious/religion' as pertaining to the outward display of inward profession, as Ross notes, "The word he uses is used by Josephus to describe the public worship of God, and it indicates the outward manifestation of religion."[159] Motyer adds, "*Religion* is thus a comprehensive word for the specific ways in which a heart-relationship to God is expressed in our lives."[160] In this James echoes his Lord, who condemned the falseness of the religion of the scribes and Pharisees on the basis of their outward show.



A. T. Robertson (1863-1934)

> *Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows' houses, and [n]for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."* (Mark 12:38-40)

> *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.* (Matthew 23:13-14)

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[157] Robertson, Archibald Thomas *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume VI* (Nashville: Broadman Press; 1933); 24.
[158] Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons; 1918); 735.
[159] Ross; 43.
[160] Motyer; 75.

That widows and orphans are the special concern of God is manifest throughout the Old Testament, in both the Law and the Prophets. That attitude cannot be considered to have changed under the New Covenant, for God does not change and the plight of the helpless has been and will always be His concern and should always be the concern of His people. "True piety helps the helpless, for God is the God who secures the rights of those who have no hope."[161] This is not to advocate a 'social gospel,' but rather to show that the true gospel has an undeniable social aspect to it. James is not attempting to define the totality of 'pure and undefiled' religion, but to show that the believer who proclaims himself 'religious' and does not take an active concern for the helpless, deceives his own heart. Nor are these things mentioned by James the sole proof that one is religious in the saving sense of the word, for the unregenerate can and often do show an active concern for the helpless. "He does not, of course, intend them as a comprehensive list of religious activities, so that if we do these things we can count ourselves religious, even if we never pray, read the Scriptures, meet in a worshipping fellowship, receive baptism and share the Lord's Supper."[162]

We may say, then, that an active concern for the helpless of our society is a necessary but not sufficient characteristic of 'true religion.' The absence of a compassionate attitude toward those who constitute 'widows and orphans' in our society and age, is contradictory to a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, though the presence of such a compassion does not take the place of faith in Jesus Christ. And one more, important, characteristic must be added: *to keep oneself unstained from the world.* This verse, therefore, represents a fundamental description of the believer in the world: not cloistered, but unspotted; not sealed away in a prayer closet, but actively compassionate to the helpless. James will immediately point out that this is especially so – or is to be especially so – among brothers and sisters in the faith (*cp.* 2:15-16). In this he once again holds the exact same perspective as Paul, who writes in Galatians,

[161] Davids; 103.
[162] Motyer; 75.

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10)

We are beginning to see James' worldview with respect to trials and temptations, the world that his readers, and all believers throughout the ages, must both live in and struggle against. "The world is, in fact, anything and everything that is at odds with the Lordship of Jesus over our lives."[163] For James, the greatest temptation that the world presents to the believer is that of Mammon, the deceitfulness of riches. "James states that piety keeps free from the evil influences in the surrounding culture; what may be in his mind is the desire to possess and gather, the service of Mammon."[164] In this he echoes his Lord, who warns all believers that they cannot serve both God and Mammon. This is not to say that other aspects of the corrupt and unbelieving world are benign, but only that the lure of worldly wealth and comfort is uniquely beguiling. Nowhere is this more powerfully and poignantly stated than in Psalm 73,

Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm.
They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men.
Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish.
They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily.
They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth.
Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them.
And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?"
Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; They increase in riches.
Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence.
For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.
If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children.
When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me –
Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end. (Psalm 73:1-17)

[163] Motyer; 77.
[164] Davids; 103-104.

Week 6: Friendship or Enmity?
Text Reading: James 4:1-4

"It is we who diminish the importance of right relationships, not the Scriptures which exaggerate the importance of quarrels."
(Alec Motyer)


Mark Dever (*b.* 1960)

Mark Dever, Reformed Baptist pastor of Capital Hills Baptist Church in Washington, DC, is famous for his ecclesiologically-focused book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* and the associated parachurch organization, 9Marks. The emphasis of the book, of course, is what Dever considers to be the marks of a healthy church and both the book and the 9Marks organization have been influential among 21st Century evangelicals in the United States. Dever emphasizes the 'biblical' nature of various aspects of a church – the gospel, evangelism, church leadership, for instance – as being a consistent characteristic of a healthy church, and the lack thereof a consistent symptom of an unhealthy one. If one were to overlay Dever's diagnostic template on the *twelve tribes of the Diaspora* to whom James is writing, the conclusion could only be that these congregations of believing (at least some) Jews dispersed from Jerusalem were not healthy at all. This is particularly, and troublingly, so in the first four verses of James 4, where James charges his readers with *fighting, envy, wars,* and even *murder* and proceeds to call them *adulteresses*. Just verse 2 might be titled *Five Marks of an Unhealthy Church*: *"You **lust** and do not have. You **murder** and **covet** and cannot obtain. You **fight** and **war**."*

This particular section of the book is just one of several that can leave the reader somewhat stunned. The litany of dysfunction is bold and harsh, and seemingly irremediable. The language is surely metaphorical, but is only slightly less alarming for that. "The words he uses are frighteningly strong: *wars, fightings, at war, kill, fight, wage war*. We know, of course, that James does not mean actual killings. He is using the language of war metaphorically, as do other New Testament writers. But at the same time

we must not allow metaphor to take away from the force of his words and the horror they are intended to strike."[165] This violent language is intended to set forth a startling juxtaposition between what was *actually* happening among the professing Christian community of the *Diaspora*, and what James has just written about true wisdom, something that these congregations apparently lacked and for which they earnestly needed to ask God.

> *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. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* (3:17-18)

All too often, and sadly, congregations live together more like verses 1 & 2 of Chapter 4 than these two verses in the previous chapter. Stier refers to these situations as "*evil* wars in miniature like those which are carried on among the nations without."[166] On the one hand, perhaps we should not be surprised that such situations so often prevail, since we know from Scripture – not least from James himself – that the human *yeser* inclines toward wickedness. Davids notes, "The source of conflict, however, is clearly the desire or *yeser* of the community members. No noble 'fighting for the truth' this, but a disguised form of the evil inclination, the person's fallen nature."[167] Still, no matter how powerful the fallen *yeser* can be, and often is, within even the believer's heart, there is a ready source of greater power available for the asking – that *wisdom* which is from above; in short, the power of the Holy Spirit both indwelling and filling the believer as well as the community.

The intensity of the language used should also inform us that these were no mere disagreements among brethren. James is not advocating an atmosphere of perfect harmony among the professing Christians of the *Diaspora*; that would be wonderful, but it is a far cry from *war, murder, fighting,* etc. that actually prevails in the community. To interpret James' charge as against any form of disagreement within the congregation is

[165] Motyer; 140-41.
[166] Stier; 399.
[167] Davids; 157.

to minimize the impact of the language used. James' frequent reference to the tongue and to speech among the professing brethren, indicates that the situation in these communities was dangerously unsettled and tumultuous. "Acrimonious speech, slanderous accusation, unrestrained anger – all depict a jealous and divided community; it speaks of a church governed by the wisdom from 'below.'"[168] The situation reminds one of Paul's terse admonition the brethren in Galatia, and in a very similar context, "*But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*"[169] Douglas Moo concludes, "The arguments and conflicts that were disrupting Christian fellowship could not be ascribes to righteous passion or justifiable zeal; it was selfish, indulgent desire that was responsible."[170]

Alec Motyer published his commentary on the Book of James in 1985, while the Cold War was still in full fury and the fall of the Soviet Union not even a dream in the most imaginative and optimistic mind of the West. He points out in commenting on this passage that James' language often fails to impact modern believers due to the fact that the spectre of nuclear war, and the almost constant evidence of horrific violence in the modern world, have desensitized Westerners. Motyer writes, "We are, in fact, of all generations, least capable of feeling a sense of personal and moral outrage at the vocabulary of war."[171] This is a good and valid point. James' language cannot be taken literally, for it would be impossible for him to write the consoling portions of his treatise to a congregation literally guilty of homicide. But the terms he does use metaphorically are intended to elicit a revulsion to the situation so described, a revulsion that we may no longer be capable of feeling in our world today. Motyer, who was also a young man during World War II and thus would have encountered – or at least seen at second hand – the carnage of that conflict, diagnoses an insensitivity prevalent in our day that may not have been present in James' day.

[168] Martin; 144.
[169] Galatians 5:15
[170] Moo; 139.
[171] Motyer; 141.

> Sadly, the world around us has hardened our senses even in respect of war. The prospect of a 'real' war between so-called superpowers has diminished our awareness of the small but heart-breaking conflicts which constitute the unfinished story of many parts of the world. The devastation and loss of life on the horrendous scale of nuclear war make us less than realistic about the thousands of deaths caused equally indiscriminately by what we comfortingly describe to ourselves as conventional weapons.[172]

We are no longer living in the Cold War, and nuclear holocaust no longer looms in the sky as it once did. But the desensitization has accomplished its purpose: we tire of hearing of wars and rumors of wars. The scale of death encountered by the average person through the media is colossal; every shooting, every natural disaster, every battle anywhere in the world is instantly streamed to our smart phones and we are aware of the 'body count' almost immediately. With the reality of such actual carnage passing unnoticed, can James' language still touch our hearts? Can we be as outraged over selfish ambition and vicious back-biting in the Christian congregation as we are (perhaps) over hundreds killed in a battle between Russian and Ukrainian armies thousands of miles away? But envy within the congregation – unholy and selfish desires for what others have and we want – constitutes the believing community as an armed camp, a divided and dangerous atmosphere in which the prayers of at least the offending members, if not the entire congregation, are blocked. This is very serious stuff.

We will investigate the individual terms that James uses in this passage and look at a few mechanisms commentators and translators have used to moderate or evade the harshness of the actual words. As an introductory comment, however, it is worth noting that in James 2:8-11 James charges that a violation of any precept of the law, however minor, is a breaking of the whole law. He who covets is as he who murders; there is no differentiation. Thus it is reasonable to see the intense terminology in passages such as 4:1-4 in the perspective of minor transgressions being essentially equivalent to major ones – a critically important biblical interpretation of the Law. Van de Sandt writes of James' methodology, "He assesses the minor sins of his addressees as being major

[172] *Idem.*

transgressions. His readers should not think they can plead innocence. If they allow themselves to be carried away by their passions, give in to desires and are jealous, it is the same as if they had waged war or committed murder."[173] This is the language of a prophet of Israel, and James certainly writes more as a prophet of the old stamp than of a modern 'Christian counselor.'

If we consider James' teaching in this passage through the paradigm of the 'Two Ways' wisdom, we can extrapolate from the closing verses of Chapter 3 and see that the two paths being set forth are *peace* and *envy*. 'Envy' – and there are various Greek words used in these verses to describe it – lies at the root of the conflict and distress within the community. James, again following the methodology of the 'Two Ways,' uses harsh words such as *murder* and *wars* not to literally describe what is happening in the community at that time, but rather to show both the essential quality of envy and where it will eventually lead. In this he may have had two very familiar narratives from the Old Testament to guide his thoughts: that of Cain & Abel, and of Ahab & Naboth. In the first narrative, envy itself is not mentioned, though it is hard to miss that negative emotion lying at the root of Cain's anger toward his brother.

> *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.* (Genesis 4:1-5)

Everyone knows how the story ends, with Cain murdering his brother. Cain's self-awareness of the divine preference for one offering over another did not motivate him to self-improvement, but rather to envy of his brother. Envy led to hatred, itself essentially the internal motive force of murder, and then inexorably to the deed itself. God may have said to Cain what James says to us, "*You have not because you ask not; and when you do ask,*

[173] Van de Sandt; 61.

you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your own lusts." The path of envy leads to murder, as explicitly illustrated in the second Old Testament narrative referenced.

> *And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel, next to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. So Ahab spoke to Naboth, saying, "Give me your vineyard, that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near, next to my house; and for it I will give you a vineyard better than it. Or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its worth in money." But Naboth said to Ahab, "The LORD forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you!" So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food? He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."* (I Kings 21:1-7)

While it may be said that Ahab was not directly involved in the murder of Naboth, it was his desire for Naboth's vineyard – apparently an ancient tract of land belonging to Naboth's heritage, and therefore forbidden to sell – that agitated the entire situation leading to the murder. The blood was on Jezebel's hands, but one cannot imagine Ahab being so naïve as to be unaware of how his wife would 'fix' the problem. The reason that the ancient boundaries were not to be moved was, in the outward sense, to protect the heritage and livelihood of individual families. Inwardly, however, it was to teach submission among God's people to the movement of divine providence. Ahab desired a vineyard on account of its beauty and convenience, and outwardly it seems he was being fair and aboveboard in his offer to trade or purchase. Underlying it all, however, was Ahab's fundamental greed that would not scruple at violating the ancient boundary markers of Naboth's clan. Though he took no active part in Naboth's consequent murder, Ahab's hands were full of blood. His envy was the path he should not have started down; Naboth's murder was the end of that path and, as Elijah soon announced, for Ahab it was the end of the road.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? **(4:1)**

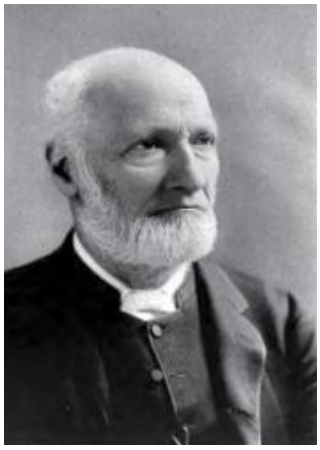
All is not well in the community of the *Diaspora*. James' terminology – *wars and fights among you* – cover the entire campaign of battle. The first, *polemoi*, signifies the "chronic state or campaign" of warfare, whereas the second, *machē*, refers to the "separate conflicts or battles in the war."[174] Together these two words depict an atmosphere of intense and seemingly irremediable conflict, and that is apparently the situation that prevailed in the churches of the Jewish *Diaspora*. There is no reason to think that James is employing a mere rhetorical device, manipulating his audience's sensibilities by portraying matters as worse than they actually were. Nor is it reasonable to interpret his words, as many commentators have done, as referring to the insurrectionist spirit that was rising in Judea and would eventually lead to open rebellion against Rome. The former is to make too little of the words James' employs; the latter too much. Matthew Henry oddly blames the root of the problem on the Jewishness of the congregations, as though the Jews were particularly susceptible to the spirit of internecine warfare. He writes, "The Jews were a very seditious people, and had therefore frequent wars with the Romans; and they were a very quarrelsome divided people, often fighting among themselves; and many of those corrupt Christians against whose errors and vices this epistle was written seem to have fallen in with the common quarrels."[175] This is a bigoted exegesis, for the Gentile portion of Christianity has by no means lacked for conflict and warfare in its midst.

The terminology James uses is metaphorical; it has to be. To take the words literally would be to create such a chaotic situation in these communities as to completely overshadow any other consideration, and wholly preclude any words of comfort or encouragement that we do find in the letter. This becomes especially evident in the next verse, where James links *waging war* with *murder*. As we have seen above, the "Two Ways" wisdom literature often speaks in extreme language in order to show the ultimate

[174] Robertson, *Word Pictures*; 49.
[175] Henry; 796.

end of a path, especially a negative path. In spite of the presence of a growing anti-Roman zealotry in Jerusalem in the decades leading up to the First Jewish Revolt in AD 63, there is no evidence in James' letter that this militant spirit was either prevalent in the scattered Jewish communities or that it formed any part of the context of James' writings. It will become evident that the root cause of the fightings and warfare and murder was *desire*, *lust* within the members. "The conflicts, then, are metaphorical and within the Christian community."[176]

In light of what James has written regarding the nefarious use of the tongue, it is perhaps best to limit the current range of these militant terms to verbal warfare within the community. "As with our English words, both words were most often used to describe physical conflicts between individuals or nations. In metaphorical sense, however, both words could describe violent verbal disputes."[177] Such verbal conflicts can and often has led to actual physical violence, and that even in the church. One of the most infamous examples of verbal conflict resulting in physical violence – all in the name of the 'true religion' – is the First Council of Ephesus in AD 431. The council itself was convened on order of the Emperor Theodosius II in another attempt to finally resolve the ongoing controversy in the Church regarding the divine and human natures of Christ Jesus. At the center of the controversy this time were the person and teachings of Nestorius. Neither the Emperor nor the Bishop of Rome were present at the council, and those bishops and priest who did attend did not arrive at the same time. Hence the council was convened by the early-arriving bishops, with a separate council convened by late-arriving ones. Historian Philip Schaff writes, "Now followed a succession of mutual criminations, invectives, arts of church diplomacy and politics, intrigues, and violence, which gave the saddest picture of



Philip Schaff (1819-93)

[176] Davids; 156.
[177] Moo; 138

the uncharitable and unspiritual Christianity of that time."[178] Tom Holland speaks of another violent outbreak in post-Reformation Leiden, "Rival factions had clashed in the streets. So violently had tempers flared that in 1617 barricades had gone up around the city hall."[179] The issue was not raising taxes or a reduction in welfare payments; the issue was a deviation by some of the faculty at the university from the Calvinistic teachings of predestination. Modern news still occasionally contains reports of violence breaking out with a congregation over seemingly trivial matters, with one report several decades ago speaking of men wrestling the pastor to the ground while the deacons 'seized the offering.' But perhaps the closest example to the situation apparent in the *Diaspora* community is to be found in Corinth, where professing believers were taking one another to court for offenses unknown.

> *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!* (I Corinthians 6:1-6)

Paul does not use the language that James uses, but the situation in Corinth would justify it no less than in the communities to which James is writing. James is not indicating by this language that the people in these Jewish-Christian churches were worse than the Gentile Christians in Corinth, but rather to show all believers how such selfishness and in-fighting ought to be viewed. "James chooses the vocabulary of war to express controversies and quarrels, animosities and bad feeling among Christians, not because there is no other way of saying it, but because there is no other way of expressing the horror of it."[180]

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[178] Schaff, Philip *History of the Christian Church: Volume III* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1995.); 725.
[179] Holland; 339.
[180] Motyer; 141.

The word *members* is variously understood in the commentaries, with interpretation ranging from individuals as 'members' of the church to the internal parts of each individual. The former has support from Paul's treatment of the Church as itself a body, with each believer a 'member' of it; the latter has support, again from Paul, in Romans 7 where he speaks of *a law at work in my members* that runs contrary to the law of God in the Spirit. From the perspective of the quarrels among the members of the body, it would seem that James is referring to those individuals and not to each one's internal struggles. "The phrase 'in your midst' probably refers to the church members themselves and not the individual Christian's body."[181] Thus the reference would be to 'warring factions' within the community, an interpretation that certainly fits the context.

But in light of what James has to say in verses 3 & 4, it may be that he is indeed referring to the lusts and unholy desires of the individual believers themselves. This view would keep the emphasis on the individual as the source of lust and sin. "It is…easier to understand the division as within the individual, himself in hos own body torn by differing desires, and this would be consistent with James's recurring theme of the divided man."[182] This latter perspective is perhaps the more comprehensive view, maintaining the ultimate source of sin as the individual believer while also showing the impact of such behavior on the life of the community. "James, then, combines two ideas…pleasure and the desire for it, create division in man, and from this internal division comes external strife."[183] Adamson notes, "James traced all sin neither to pleasure nor desire, but ultimately to the core of disordered personality."[184]

One further word in verse 1 deserves some attention, as it transliterates into a very common English word, one with negative connotations: *Hedonism* is the English word that derives from the noun used here in James 4:1, *hādonōn*. The word simply means 'desires,' but does generally carry the negative sense of illicit or unhealthy desires. "*Passions* translates the word *hēdonē*, a term that means simply 'pleasure, but which often

[181] Martin; 144.
[182] Laws, Sophie *The Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper & Row; 1980); 168.
[183] *Ibid.*; 169.
[184] Adamson; 167.

carries a negative connotation of sinful, self-indulgent pleasure…It consistently has this negative meaning in the New Testament."[185] The same word is employed by Plato in his *Phaedo*, translated 'passions' in the following:

> And the body fills us with passions and desires and fears, and all sorts of fancies and foolishness, so that, as they say, it really and truly makes it impossible for us to think at all. The body and its desires are the only cause of wars and factions and battles; for all wars arise for the sake of gaining money, and we are compelled to gain money.[186]

This citation from Plato does serve to show a general, philosophical orientation familiar to James both from his own Jewish heritage and from the prevailing Greek world of thought around him. Plato, of course, did not understand the nature of indwelling sin. But he did recognize the external impact of internal *passions*, or *hedonism*. The significance of this perspective, both in Plato and in James, is to focus the source of troubles inward rather than outward. Stier writes, "For where envy and contention, hatred and discord, are, there is confusion and every evil work; the contention or the discord is itself the evil thing which exalts itself against the order of God, and against his peace. Consequently, also, when this evil thing shows itself in the life, envy or hatred must be in the heart: whence could come the fruit, without the seed and root? Thus the fighting *among you* springs from one cause, which lies *in you*."[187]

You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.
(4:2a-b)

The original Greek manuscripts from which our English translations are derived did not have punctuation (nor, for that matter, spaces between words). This lack of original punctuation is particularly problematic in this verse, as different placements of commas or periods (or semi-colons) changes the meaning of the sentence. The problem is most acute with the association of the verb *murder* with the correct clause. Indeed, so

[185] Moo; 139.
[186] Plato *Phaedo 66c*. Plato, Phaedo, section 66c (tufts.edu). Accessed 25February2023.
[187] Stier; 401.

difficult have some commentators found this verse that, following Erasmus, they have adopted a textual variant for which there is absolutely no manuscript evidence. Not knowing how to deal with the word *murder,* which is the Greek, *phoneuete*, Erasmus invented a scribal error by which the original word was *phthoneite*, which means *envy*. Erasmus was not completely without precedent for his emendation, as I Peter 2:1 where the standard translations have *phthonos* (envy) but at least one manuscript has phonous (murder). Luther followed Erasmus in this modification of the word in James 4;2, as did Calvin: "Some copies have *phoneuete*, 'ye kill;' but I doubt not but that we ought to read, *phthoneite,* 'ye envy.'"[188] The felt need for this modification of the text is, again, the harshness of the term *murder*. But does this really help? Instead of "*You desire and do not have; you murder…*" we are left with a redundancy: "*You desire and do not have; you envy…*" Or, if we move the punctuation around a little, we get:

Erasmus (1466-1536)

You desire and do not have;
You envy and covet and cannot obtain;
So you fight and wage war.

This rendering might be termed a 'rolling redundancy,' as the theme of covetousness advances from a single verb, *you desire*, to a double verb stanza, *you envy and covet*, both lines ending in the failure to gain the object of one's desire. This would work, perhaps, if there were any manuscript support for the alleged scribal error. But even so, the last stanza remains abrupt: *So you fight and wage war.* These terms are no less harsh that *murder*, and leaving the word as we find it in the manuscripts not only flows with verse 1, it connects better with the end of the clause. Moo concludes, "However, in the light of the tradition we have cited, it is simplest to take 'murder' straightforwardly

[188] Calvin; 329.

and to regard it as that extreme to which frustrated desire, if not checked, may lead."[189] Thus verse 2 be read as follows:

> *You desire and do not have, so you murder;*
> *You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and wage war.*

Erasmus' textual 'correction' ought not to be accepted on the basis of a total lack of manuscript support. But it also need not be considered, as we have already seen that James' use of such words as *murder, wars,* and *fightings* is metaphorical (and accepting *'fight and wage war'* in the latter part of the verse, as Erasmus does, largely negates his emendation of *'murder'* at the beginning of the verse). But Laws summarizes the situation well, "the object of James's attack is not war, battles and murder, but the desire for and pursuit of pleasure which he sees to be the source of them."[190] James is expanding on the thought structure of verse 1, *"Whence wars? Whence fightings?"* by describing in greater detail the *"passions that are at war in your members."* Envy and jealousy are at the root of the matter, as we saw in a previous lesson regarding the summary verse of this particular section, James 4:5. Yet it is important to note that James is not engaging in some form of introspection here; the problems may arise from within individual members of the community, but they are impacting the community as a whole. "James, however, is not examining our inner conflicts, but the wars we wage against each other. All our desires and passions are like an armed camp within us, ready at a moment's notice to declare war against anyone who stands in the way of some personal gratification on which we have set our hearts."[191] In this James is saying the same thing as John,

> *For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* (I John 3:11-15)

[189] Moo; 141.
[190] Laws; 171.
[191] Motyer; 142.

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. **(4:2c-3)**

Prayer has always been a mystery to believers. Can man change the mind of a sovereign God? Will prayers be answered if the person praying is not a believer? If a believer, must some level of confession or penance be attained before God will even hear one's prayer? A myriad of books have been written to set people on the right track, but prayer remains both a theological and a practical challenge for many. In the modern church, there are many who coach 'have enough faith' and all your prayers will be answered. And these 'experts' can quote Jesus on the matter,

> *So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."* (Matthew 21:21-22)

James, as well, has advocated faith as the key component to successful prayer in Chapter 1,

> *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. 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. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* (1:5-8)

Yet there is an equal, though negative, teaching tradition in Scripture concerning prayer, and one the comes out in this verse in James 4. Prayer is never automatic; God is never obliged to answer by some formulaic practice of His adherents. Jesus admonishes that prayers in His Name must also be according to the will of the Father in order to be answered, and "evilly motivated prayers will receive no hearing by God. God is no magic charm which must help if the proper words are uttered."[192] Modern prosperity preachers might point to their mansions, expensive cars, personal jets, and yachts to validate their

[192] Davids; 159.

false teaching on prayer, but James is on the mark, "*you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your own pleasures.*"

The example of the prosperity preacher is perhaps too obvious. What of the preacher who prays for a successful ministry and a powerful pulpit? Though such objects of prayer sound as if they are according to God's will, they can also be stepping-stones to a larger, wealthier church, a lucrative speaking tour, or book publication. "The point is that the good gift is not desired for sharing with others or godly ends, but simply to gratify desire, the evil *yeser*."[193] Thus in a short phrase James encompasses two types of 'make-believers,' those whose avaricious desire and self-centeredness seemingly prevents them even from praying, and those who go through the motions of prayer, but only to satisfy their own *hedonism*. It is hard to determine which is worse, but perhaps the latter is slightly more contemptible than the former, at least among professing Christians. "And doubtless there appears to be in us no reverence for God, no fear of him, in short, no regard for him, when we dare to ask of him what even our own conscience does not approve."[194] James echoes the prophetic word to Israel,

> *Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom;*
> *Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah:*
> *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD.*
> *"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle.*
> *I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.*
> *When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand,*
> *To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me.*
> *The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies –*
> *I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.*
> *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates;*
> *They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.*
> *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you;*
> *Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.*
> *Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes.*
> *Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.* (Isaiah 1:10-17)

[193] *Ibid.*; 160.
[194] Calvin; 330.

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.
(4:4)

The New King James version follows a minor textual variation by adding *'adulterers'* to the opening exclamation of verse 4. The manuscript evidence for this addition is quite weak, whereas the rationale for such an emendation is fairly obvious: the feminine *adulteresses* would seem to limit the scope of James' condemnation and even narrow it down to marital infidelity, a topic not even mentioned by the author. There is no need to add the masculine here, for the tradition of the prophetic voice referring to God's people in the feminine (especially in regard to their apostasy) is well established. Davids writes, "Rather, the feminine vocative clearly calls one back to the whole OT tradition of Israel as God's unfaithful wife denounced in prophetic books."[195] Moo adds,

> The difficulty of the feminine form is erased in some manuscripts that add the masculine 'adulterers,' but this is clearly a secondary attempt to get around the problem. Why then the feminine form? Some have thought that James intends it literally, that he is now turning his attention to women in the church who are unfaithful to their marital vows. Bu the context gives no indication of this. It is the Old Testament that provides the explanation for the address. As stressed especially in the prophets, God has joined himself with the people of Israel by graciously electing them and bringing them into covenant relationship with himself. This relationship is frequently portrayed with marital imagery. Thus, when that relationship is jeopardized by Israel's dalliance with other gods, the situation can be labeled 'adultery.'[196]

This is a far better fit to the immediate context than any shift in James' focus to literal marriages and adulteries in the churches of the *Diaspora*, especially as there is no indication elsewhere in the letter of a particular problem in this area. And the immediate context of verse 4 itself deals directly with the allure of the world versus a steadfast trust in God. Perhaps James is even considering the words of Jesus, recorded in Mark 8:38

> *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*

[195] Davids; 160.
[196] Moo; 143.

Verse 4 is perhaps the clearest 'Two Ways' statement in the entire book, setting friendship and enmity against each other with respect to the world and God. "Two diametrically opposed pairs are presented: friendship and enmity are used to underline the polar opposition between God and the world."[197] Laws points out that what James says here is both connected to, and expansive of, what he had written earlier about *'pure and undefiled religion.'* "In i.27 true religion before God involved an avoidance of the world: here the opposition of the two is unambiguously stated."[198] The believer must understand that his or her relation to the world is not merely one of avoidance, but of resistance, for not only will the world stain and defile the believer, the enticement of the world will set the believer on a course of enmity toward the God who has redeemed him. This concept, of course, naturally leads to the debate as to whether a believer can lose his salvation, and James does not go into the matter at all here (or elsewhere). What is critical to his argument is that believers understand there can be no synthesis between the world and God in their minds and hearts. "There is no middle point, no compromise. One is either God's friend or his enemy."[199]

The language is that of the 'Two Ways' wisdom; it is a language of extremes, of the destinations that each path reach. James speaks of an overall direction and attitude of life – either *friendship with the world* or *friendship with God* – in order to encourage believers to maintain their step on the path of faithfulness and to be on constant guard against the allurement of the world. "There are two rivals for the love and the allegiance of the human heart, God and the world. Whoever, then, chooses to be a friend of the world, comes forward as an enemy of God."[200] Such an admonition as this can cause deep consternation for the believer, even to the point of determining to go out of the world into a monastery or cloister. Paul speaks to this temptation in I Corinthians 5, and shows that

[197] Davids; 161.
[198] Laws; 173
[199] Davids; 161.
[200] Ross; 77.

it is not the will of God that believers attempt to short circuit the furnace of their affliction by isolation,

> *I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.* (I Corinthians 5:9-11)

The trials and temptations that the believer encounters, intended as they are for the purification and strengthening of his or her faith, are encountered in the world. Indeed, one major trial *is* the world itself. "'The world' for James denotes in general the values of human society as against those of God, and hence the man who pursues pleasure aligns himself with the world and compromises or actually denies his relationship with God, he **appoints himself an enemy of God**."[201] Avoidance of or isolation from the world will not solve the problem, for the believer simply takes his own corrupt nature, his *yeser,* with him into the monastery. No, the arena of the perfection of one's faith remains *in* the world, and a great part of the battle is refusing to be *of* the world. As Israel was in the midst of the nations, so God's people are to be His faithful bride, witness to His grace and mercy in *this present darkness*.[202]

[201] Laws; 174. Emphasis original.
[202] Ephesians 6:12

Week 7: Anger Management
Text Reading: James 1:19-20; 3:8-12; 4:11; 5:9

"A great talker is rarely a great listener,
and never is the ear more firmly closed than when anger takes over."
(Alec Motyer)

Is it always a sin when a believer gets angry? Many believe that it is and, in fact, that believers should be without any emotions other than peace and joy. While it is to be readily acknowledged that anger is seldom 'righteous,' it must also be recognized that *all* human emotions have been impacted by sin's corruption; this is part of what the biblical doctrine of Total Depravity means. We are corrupt in all our parts. Even feelings of joy are marred by sin – often they are merely circumstantial and ephemeral. What believers call 'peace' is often nothing more than the absence of current struggles and difficulties, not the *"peace that passes understanding."* Indeed, so untrustworthy are emotions that scholars over the millennia have determined to promote an emotionless Christian religion, which is essentially not Christianity at all, but Stoicism in Christian garb. What does the Bible say about anger? Unfortunately, not much. Yet we know from Scripture that anger is an emotion exhibited by both the Father and the Incarnate Son, so there is at least a divine blueprint at which to look, and hopefully to guide and correct and control our own anger.

James' own comments in 1:19 are significant, in that he admonishes believers to be *slow* to anger, but does not exhort them *never* to be angry. Paul adds another data point in his letter to the Ephesians where, quoting the Psalms, he tells his readers to *"be angry, yet sin not; do not let the sun go down on your anger."*[203] But what does this mean in practice? Alec Motyer admits that James (and Paul) are somewhat opaque on the issue of anger for the believer: "There is some ambivalence in James' teaching about *anger*. On the one hand, just as *slow to speak* is not the same as 'never speak,' but 'speak with due thought and care,' so *slow to anger* is not the same as 'never be angry.' On the other hand, to say that

[203] Ephesians 4:26; quoting, though with definite Pauline nuance, from Psalm 4:4

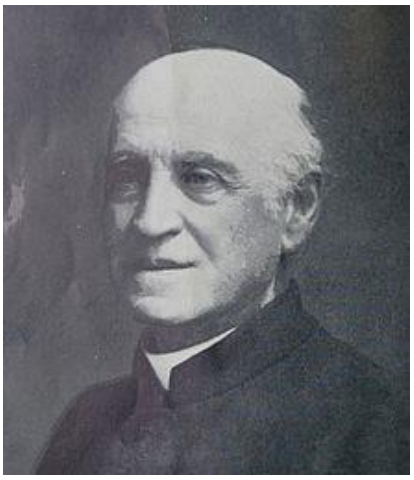
human anger does not forward God's righteous purposes is pretty unequivocal."[204] There is enough room here in James 1, and elsewhere in Ephesians 4, to conclude that anger is *not necessarily* sinful but that it is a very dangerous emotion in the believer's breast.

There is little guidance in the Bible with regard to the proper place for anger beyond the example of God himself, both from heaven and in the Person of Jesus Christ. Apart from divine examples of anger – which are all, of course, righteous and without the least trace of sin – biblical examples of *human* anger are largely restricted to those in authority over others. "In fact, out of the twenty-six named individuals who become angry in the Bible, twenty-one are kings, leaders, masters or high ranking family members."[205] In this interesting article, Grant outlines a number of difficult 'anger' passages in the Old Testament, such as the revenge taken by Levi and Simeon on the men of Shechem because of the rape of their sister Dinah. Readers of the narrative of this story have perennially been torn as to whether the two sons were correct in avenging this "*outrage in Israel,*" or whether their father Jacob was correct in rebuking them, though he seemed more concerned of a counterstroke by the Shechemites or their neighbors. Grant notes that, in summarizing the biblical examples of human anger, it appears that retribution was usually only exacted against *non-familial* offenders, while those within a family unit – such as Amnon and his violation of his half-sister Tamar – are let off lightly by their authority (in this case, their father David). Yet she shows that even in these cases, the offense left unpunished destroys the authority of the leader/father, and sows seeds of destruction within the family unit. In these two examples, we see the brother(s) are the ones who take punitive action while the fathers are willing to let the offense pass unpunished.

> Absalom's assault against Amnon is similar to Dinah's brothers' attack against Shechem. Tamar describes Amnon's act as an 'outrage that should not be committed in Israel,' the same phrase the brothers use to describe Shechem's violation of Dinah. In both cases, the

[204] Motyer; 65.
[205] Grant, Deena "Human Anger in Biblical Literature" *Revue Biblique*, Juillet 2011, Vol. 118, No. 3; p. 341.

'outrage' provokes anger and murder and, in both cases, brothers act, in place of their fathers, to punish violations against their families.[206]


Matthew Russell, SJ (1834-1912)

Grant offers no summary conclusion as to the proper, biblical application of anger in her essay; she merely sets forth in one place the biblical examples of human anger and the manner in which each case was dealt. A more direct approach was taken by the Irish Jesuit Matthew Russell in his article "On Being Angry Without Sin," published in *The Irish Monthly* in March, 1901. Consonant with his own monastic perspective, Russel interprets Paul's *"be angry"* as anger directed against one's own sin. He writes early in the essay, "In the first case the Holy Ghost exhorts us to be inflamed with a silent, holy indignation against ourselves, to resist our evil desires, and thus to avoid sin."[207] Russell's approach is not uncommon even among Protestant commentators, as many seek to avoid the difficult concept of 'Christian anger' by applying it inward. Yet even Russell cannot escape both the context of Paul's quotation and the nature of *orgē* – anger – as being directed toward others. Not letting the sun set on one's anger can hardly apply to the 'silent, holy indignation against ourselves,' but rather most clearly applies to anger directed toward others – an admonition, in the modern vernacular, to 'keep short accounts.' Thus Russell cautions, "Do not let anger congeal into hatred, which (as some has said) is anger driven in to clot and fester in the heart, a moral blood-poison of the worst kind. Do not sin thus, but on the contrary as quickly as possible break off from the feeling of anger, quell it, subdue it, by the dominion of reason, and through the fear and love of God."[208]

Russell betrays not only his Jesuit self-abnegation in this article, but also the 19th Century Rationalism of which he was an adherent. "By the dominion of reason," implies

[206] *Ibid*.; 355.
[207] Russell, Matthew "On Being Angry Without Sin" *The Irish Monthly*, Mar. 1901, Vol. 29, No. 333; 129.
[208] *Ibid*.; 130-31.

that anger is essentially irrational – a conclusion that Russell has not proven. Still, his distinction between anger and hatred bears note and may assist us in our biblical analysis of 'anger.' Later, Russell admits the difficulty that he does not adequately solve in his essay, the difficulty all believers face in the presence of 'anger.'

> Is not anger itself a sin? No. Of course, a definition could be given of anger which would make it out sinful; but there is a rational and lawful rising of the mind against evil inflicted on ourselves or other which is properly called anger. God Himself can feel anger, but never without a cause or beyond the bounds of justice and mercy. In our Incarnate Lord, who made Himself like us in all things, except sin, there were all the susceptibilities of our human nature; but they were perfectly under the dominion of His own will, and there was in them neither turbulence, nor inordinateness, nor disorder. But in His poor creatures there is always danger of even a reasonable and righteous indignation overstepping its proper limits, and becoming a sinful anger, leading on to hatred and revenge.[209]

There is generally a recognition among Protestant commentators as well, that anger is not itself sinful though it can quickly and all-too-easily descend into it. Matthew Henry writes in regard to Ephesians 4:26, "Observe, Though anger in itself is not sinful, yet there is the upmost danger of its becoming so if it be not carefully watched and speedily suppressed."[210] Henry also, in his inimitable way, marks the distinction between momentary, justified anger and an angry disposition (which Russell would term 'hatred'), "And therefore, though anger may come into the bosom of a wise man, *it rests* only *in the bosom of fools.*"[211] Motyer summarizes both James and Paul, "Both writers imply the possibility of a righteous anger; both give a straight warning that anger and sin are never far apart; both counsel great watchfulness."[212] With the dangers associated with anger, it is understandable that many Christian scholars, commentators, and preachers have advocated complete avoidance of it, labeling it essentially as a non-Christian emotion.

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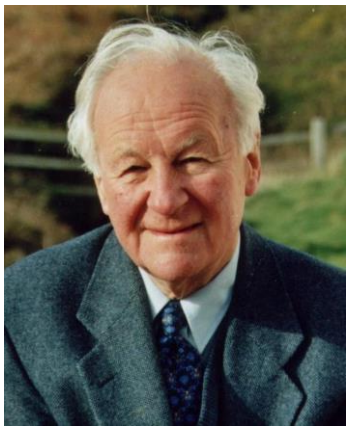
[209] *Ibid.*; 132.
[210] Henry, Matthew *Commentary on the Whole Bible*; Ephesians 4 Commentary - Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete) (biblestudytools.com). Accessed 13March2023.
[211] *Idem.*; italics original.
[212] Motyer; 65-66.

But this is to go beyond that which is written. Indeed, Paul's admonition to *be angry* is in the imperative, though no one takes this as a blanket command for the believer to go around in a bad temper all the time. Still, the imperative voice does indicate a place for anger in the Christian life, as John Stott writes, "this form of words is a Hebrew idiom which permits and then restricts anger, rather than actually commanding it…Nevertheless, the verse recognizes that there is such a thing as Christian anger, and too few Christians either feel or express it. Indeed, when we fail to do so, we deny God, damage ourselves and encourage the spread of evil."[213] Stott reasonably moves from the premise that God displays anger to the conclusion that the emotion itself cannot be sinful and is only made so when enacted falsely by fallen man – including believers. He writes,



John Stott (1921-2011)

> [W]e are told of the anger of God which will fall on the disobedient, and we know that God's anger is righteous. So was the anger of Jesus. There must therefore be a good and true anger which God's people can learn from him and from their Lord Jesus… At the same time, we need to remember our fallenness, and our constant proneness to intemperance and vanity. Consequently, we always have to be on our guard and act as sensors of our own anger.[214]

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, an older contemporary of Stott, is even more proactive toward righteous Christian anger. In his commentary on Ephesians 4:26-27, Lloyd-Jones takes the imperative voice more directly than does Stott, "Clearly and obviously this is a positive command. It is not some concession that is made to a weakness. He says that it is our duty to be angry in certain respects, but that we must never be angry in a sinful manner, never in a temper."[215] Lloyd-Jones accepts that anger itself is not sinful, and cannot be, as it is both an emotion displayed by God and one that He has put within man,

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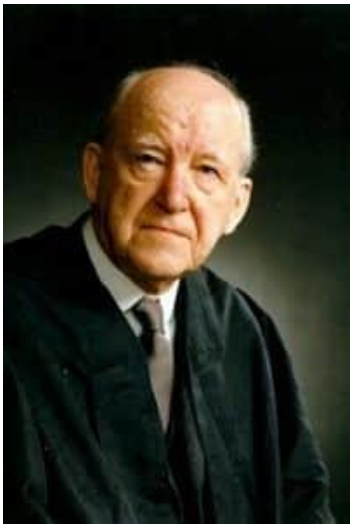
[213] Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press; 1979); 185.
[214] *Ibid*.; 185-86.
[215] Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn *Darkness and Light: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:15-5:17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1982); 226.



Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

created in His image. "In and of itself anger is not sinful. It is a capacity which is innate in every one of us, and clearly put into us by God. We can really call it one of the natural instincts. The capacity for anger against that which is evil and wrong is something which is essentially right and good; and it is because the non-Christian moralists so frequently forget this, that those who follow them find themselves in a false position."[216] Where both Stott and Lloyd-Jones agree is that Christian anger is essential to the health of both the Christian and the Church, as otherwise the proper response to evil and falsehood is lacking, the defenses are down.

We can point to the situation in Corinth as recounted in Paul's first letter to that church. Grave sin was rampant, but the believers were complacent. Although the Apostle does not use the word 'anger' in this context, it is evident that he lamented not merely the sin, but even more so the complacency of the church.

> *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*
>
> (I Corinthians 5:1-5)

Another example of Paul's vivid and vocal response to a dangerous sin is recorded in Galatians 2, where the Apostle to the Gentiles rebukes the Apostle to the Circumcision on a matter that, in Paul's inspired view, touched the very heart of the gospel. Again, the word 'anger' is not used, though Paul does oppose Peter publicly for the latter's sinful

[216] *Idem.*

and divisive behavior, and one cannot imagine the exchange being made in calm and quiet tones.

> *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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 2:11-16)

These are examples of a redeemed sinner, Paul, exercising anger – or at least a very close facsimile to anger – in a true and righteous manner. One can assume that this emotion did not lead to hatred between Paul and Peter – as Peter later refers to Paul as "*our beloved brother*" and, theoretically, the intensity of Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians led not only to the discipline of the offending member, but perhaps even to his reclamation (*cp.* II Cor. 2:1-9). Lloyd-Jones, again commenting on Ephesians 4, speaks as well to these events in Paul's ministry, "An absence of a sense of shame and of anger and of righteous indignation is always the hallmark of deep degradation and sinfulness, and a loss of the sense of God."[217] Stott concurs, noting that avoidance of anger may not only be unrighteous, but may be a dangerous form of appeasement that will foster the spread of sin in the congregation. He notes that "true peace is not identical with appeasement. 'In such a world as this,' comments E. K. Simpson, 'the truest peace-maker may have to assume the role of a peace-breaker as a sacred obligation.'"[218] Yet in the midst of these biblical examples and reasonable comments, Motyer is correct to state, "Most of us would

[217] *Ibid.*; 230-31.
[218] Stott; 186.

have to confess that holy anger belongs in a state of sanctification to which we have not attained."[219]

So how are believers to *be angry* yet without sinning? One way is to make a proper distinction between 'anger' and 'wrath,' as well as between 'rebuke' and 'vengeance.' The first two words in each pair are associated, as are the last two: anger will often lead to a rebuke, and this is often both right and necessary; wrath will lead to vengeance, and this is in all cases sin. Paul writes in Romans 12,

> *Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*
> (Romans 12:17-19)

Anger that festers leads to hatred, the 'blood-poison' that Russell mentions above. A word spoken in anger as a rebuke should lead to repentance and the restoration of fellowship: we can only assume that Paul's rebuke of Peter was successful, and Peter ceased from his hypocritical and fearful behavior. A rebuke does not indicate a loss of temper – one cannot imagine Paul having 'lost' his temper with Peter – but rather it is the proper application of anger toward a situation that is both wrong and dangerous to the health of the believer or the church, or both.

Another caution with regard to anger, and one that brings us full-circle back to James' teaching, is to avoid the *ad hominem* aspect of anger – that anger directed at a person *personally* rather than on account of sinful and dangerous behavior. Perhaps this falls under that overworked rubric, 'Hate the sin but love the sinner.' Be that as it may, righteous anger may call the Pharisee a legalist and a hypocrite, but only on account of his manifest legalism and hypocrisy. In this we see that righteous anger is both truthful and reasonable – the offending action justifies the rebuke, though the rebuke should not exceed the offense. In order to avoid the *ad hominem*, it is imperative that personal feeling and vanity/pride be as far removed from the equation as possible. Paul was not seeking

[219] Motyer; 66.

to elevate his own standing vis-à-vis Peter when he *'withstood him to his face,'* rather he was seeking to quickly and firmly counter and correct a serious problem within the community, a problem that, if left undealt with, would create a cancer of sin that would eventually destroy the peace, health, and harmony of the community. 'Paul' was not in the equation, truth was.

Finally, though by no means exhaustively, the proper exercise of anger must be filled with a great amount of self-distrust. Just as no one who receives a rebuke is likely (initially, at least) to consider it as deserved, so also the one who delivers the rebuke is likely to consider it fully justified. Yet the solution, again, is not silence and appeasement. Rather it is self-searching and self-distrusting: "*Search my heart, O Lord, and see if there be any wicked way in me.*"[220] This attitude of self-searching and self-distrusting will delay anger – it will result in the believer being *slow to anger*, as James admonishes, while avoiding sinful complacency and appeasement. Anger Management is perhaps the most difficult personal and interpersonal task for the believer (or for anyone) and thus it forms an integral part of the tapestry that is James' letter.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **(1:19-20)**

We are assured here that James is speaking to believers, as he addresses them as *'my beloved brethren.'* This is the most intimate of his addresses and indicates that he is speaking about something he considers to be absolutely vital to their well-being. Of the three times James refers to his audience as 'beloved,' two are within the immediate context of verse 19, the first being in verse 16. These two verses form a parallel thought, an antithesis, as James opens each with a reference to the reader's knowledge or awareness of the truth.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren… (1:16)
This you know, my beloved brethren… (1:19)

[220] Psalm 139:23-24

The theme that ties these two parallel stanzas together is trust in a good and wise God, whose providence is never anything but good. This is James' advice both for enduring trials and for managing one's anger. The methodology of this management, we have seen, is meditation on the Word of God, the *"law of liberty"* (1:21-26). Meditation on the Word and trust in divine providence should prevent rash outbursts of anger and help the believer maintain an even keel during both trials and frustrations. Again, this does not mean that anger will *never* be either felt or expressed, as Douglas Moo notes, "While James does not forbid all anger (there is a place for 'righteous indignation'), he does prohibit the thoughtless, unrestrained temper that often leads to rash, harmful and irretrievable words."[221] With this admonition to be *"quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger,"* James is aligning himself with traditional Wisdom teaching.

> *The end of a thing is better than its beginning;*
> *The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*
> *Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,*
> *For anger rests in the bosom of fools.* (Ecclesiastes 7:8-9)

> *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)

Again, we are reminded that a monastic 'vow of silence' is by no means what James is advocating here. This line of Wisdom teaching is consistent in advocating *control* of speech, not the absence of it entirely. Proverbs 10:19 is to the point: *In the multitude of words sin is not lacking*. "Ceaseless talkers may indulge in wild denunciations of those who oppose them, denunciations in which they may sometimes fancy they are doing God service, but which really do more harm than good."[222] This reminds us of the control

[221] Moo; 78.
[222] Ross; 38.

mechanisms of self-examination and self-distrust mentioned above. It is all too easy to think our anger to be in God's service, that we are 'righteously indignant' when in fact we are simply peevish and even vengeful. There is sometimes a very fine line between righteous anger and sinful wrath.

James' comment in verse 20 is hyperbolic, for it cannot be said that all anger is opposed to the righteousness of God. Certainly God's own anger is not, nor the displays of anger exhibited by the Lord Jesus Christ during His time here on earth. Perhaps either Barnabas or Paul (or both) were excessive in heat during their controversy over John Mark, but no one would say that Paul was rash in his rebuke of Peter at Antioch. Again, we note that the term 'anger' is not used in that narrative, but conclude that *'opposing him to his face'* was a bit warmer than gentle. Still, if the phrase *"the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God"* is hyperbolic, it is not far so. Commentators, of course, debate what James means by 'righteousness of God' in verse 20, but the intent seems fairly obvious: human anger rarely advances the will or attitude of God in any situation. "Hasty, uncontrolled anger is sin, because it violates the standard of conduct that God demands of his people."[223] Moo qualifies anger in this statement, due to the fact that the biblical record establishes that not all anger is sinful. Ross concurs, "There is such a thing as righteous wrath, but there is also a wild and uncontrolled wrath which works much mischief. It does not really advance the best interests of the cause of God."[224]

How can a believer know when he or she has crossed the line between righteous anger and sinful wrath? It would appear that James provides at least a large part of the answer in his later statements regarding anger toward one's brother. What is particularly to be avoided is the *ad hominem* attack on the brother or sister, the *cursing* that pronounces judgment on one who belongs to the Lord. This would echo Paul's own admonition from Romans 14, *"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.*

[223] Moo; 79.
[224] Ross; 38.

Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."[225] This will prove to be a safe guide for the believer's Anger Management.

But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

(3:8-12)

This passage will come up again in our discussion of what appears to be one of James' favorite themes: *the tongue*. But here we focus on the inner drive that moves the tongue to do its worst. That is James' focus here, as shown by his homely examples: the fig tree, the grapevine, and the spring – all indicating the inner, essential nature of that which produces either good fruit or bad, sweet water or bitter. But to start, and in light of the concluding comments above, note that James' attention is on *cursing men* – the attack of our tongue against a fellow human being. "The word of the curse, which is the opposite of blessing, was seen to have great power in the ancient world. For to curse someone is not just to swear at them; it is to desire that they be cut off from God and experience eternal punishment."[226] James shows the inner inconsistency of praising God and cursing men, since we are taught by God's Word that all men are made in the divine image, even fallen and unregenerate men. This is similar to what John writes in his first epistle,

> *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?* (I John 4:20)

James does not limit his prohibition against cursing to fellow believers, but uses the generic *anthropos* to indicate that the believer ought to know better than to utter a curse against any man. Still, with James' overall emphasis on the community, it stands to reason that his greatest concern is with cursing *within* the congregation and *against*

[225] Romans 14:4
[226] Moo; 128.

brethren. "We look around at our brothers and sisters, whether in the human family or in the family of God, and think nothing of defaming, denigrating, criticizing, make the sly innuendo; yet they bear the image of God."[227] James is saying that such behavior, such speech, is nothing less than doing the very same thing to God Himself: to curse the image is to curse the Original.

James' metaphors are short and pithy, and very effective for that. He uses a word in verse 10 that is a *hapax legoumena*, a word used only one place in the New Testament. It is the word translated *ought not to be*, indicating a complete incongruence between the two behaviors – blessing God and cursing men. Again, the metaphors show how wrong this is from the very nature of the case: the one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and in whom the Word of God dwells, should be the spring that produces only sweet water and not bitter. Ross comments, "This phrase occurs only here in the N. T., and it denotes something that is utterly incongruous, something that is quite out of harmony with the nature of things."[228] Without overworking the metaphor, it may yet be helpful to note that between sweet and brackish water, the latter is the stronger and will taint the taste of any fresh water it encounters. Thus Motyer writes, "Suppose two separate sources of water flowed together into the same outlet, one sweet water, the other brackish and unpalatable, we would never know of the double source because the bitter flavour would prevail. That is what would prove to be the stronger element; that is what would leave its mark."[229] Words worth considering.

But this metaphor, once again, cannot be interpreted to mean that everything a believer says will be 'sweet' and pleasant to hear – that would violate the fundamental position held by Truth in all our speech. Rather, sweet speech must here mean speech that is without personal hatred, bitterness, or cursing. Though they parted ways, neither Barnabas nor Paul cursed the other; and though he reproved Peter publicly, Paul did not curse his fellow Apostle.

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[227] Motyer; 126.
[228] Ross; 64.
[229] Motyer; 127.

The horticultural metaphor is a bit more nuanced: *the fig tree ought to produce figs, and the vine grapes.* The purpose of these metaphors is to show that the believer's speech ought to be in keeping with the believer's nature, his or her *new* nature in Jesus Christ. Motyer comments, "the fruit borne bears witness to the nature of the plant."[230] But here the antithesis is not between something good and something bad – *sweet* water versus *bitter* – but rather fruit that is consonant with the nature of the plant: *figs* are good, but only to be expected from fig trees; *grapes* are also good, and to be expected from vines. While it is hermeneutically dangerous to read too much into metaphors, it does not seem a stretch to conclude that James is not only teaching that the believer's words must flow from a sincere heart (sweet water rather than bitter) but ought to be appropriate to the occasion or issue. But ultimately, James' point is that the tenor of the speech will indicate the nature of the heart, which echoes the Lord Jesus Himself, "*For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.*"[231]

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. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? **(4:11-12)**

As with other themes, James gets even more specific on the theme of anger and cursing as the letter progresses. Without granting permission for a believer to speak evil of any man – again, knowing that all men bear the image of God – he focuses once more on the community of faith, the congregation of believers: *he who speaks evil of a brother*. James is addressing the inner attitude of each and every believer toward the brethren. "It concerns the way we speak inwardly about a brother or sister, the way we speak to somebody else about a brother or sister, the way we speak to a brother or sister."[232] James is not really introducing a new concept here, but rather providing a different vantage point. In Chapter 3, the common denominator among all men is the reality that all men bear the image of God. Here in Chapter 4, emphasizing the relationship between

[230] Motyer; 127.
[231] Matthew 12:34 (NASB)
[232] Motyer; 126.

believers, he follows the logical progression from *cursing* to *judging*, for the former is definitely the same as the latter. And judgment, along with vengeance, belongs to the Lord alone. James make the case clear: to judge one's brother is to judge the Law, to put oneself in the judgment seat according to the Law and to usurp the rightful place of the Lord. "If one can judge with respect to the law…one is no longer under the law…but a judge."[233] James again echoes the Lord in this,

> *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 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? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.* (Matthew 7:1-5)

This famous passage from the Sermon on the Mount is often preached and taught with the caveat that Jesus is not comprehensively forbidding judgment, but rather showing the proper attitude (self-examination) that must precede and accompany judgment. In the same manner, as already noted throughout this lesson, James is not comprehensively forbidding anger, but rather teaching the proper attitude and demeanor that must accompany anger for it not to be sinful. Judgment is an integral part of every man's life, and especially that of a believer, so that anyone indwelt by the Holy Spirit should strive to "*judge with righteous judgment*" as Jesus Himself exhorts.[234] With this series of admonitions concerning the believer's relationship with his brethren in difficult times, James ties his thinking in with the Holiness Code of Leviticus.

> *You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. 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.*
> (Leviticus 19:15-16)

[233] Davids; 169-170.
[234] John 7:24

James does not use the word with respect to interpersonal relationships among believers, but the overarching personal quality that must govern the proper communications within the community is *humility*. This is the attitude that will motivate both self-examination and self-distrustfulness in the matter of anger and its proper management and use. It will also prohibit each believer from spreading negative press about a brother or sister (even if that press is true), from a desire to involve as few people as possible in the correction of an erring brother. It is the awareness that we are all prone to fall, prone to self-justification, prone to unrighteous judgment and sinful wrath. "The spirit of humility cannot exist alongside the spirit which speaks against the brethren; such censoriousness in speech leads to one of the worst forms of pride; the man who is guilty of it does not merely criticize his brother but really criticizes the Law of God."[235]

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! **(5:9)**

While the narrative may not have been in the forefront of James' mind when he penned this verse, the Israelites murmuring against Moses in the wilderness was such a common motif in Old Testament prophetic writings that it must certainly have served as a subliminal backdrop to his thoughts.

> *And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.* (Numbers 21:5-6)

There will be times when anger is justified, though probably never times when wrath is called for, and certainly never hatred. However, if the community bears in mind the mutual respect and honor due both to God and to His image, Man, it is less likely that even anger will be called for often, and perhaps, by God's grace, never.

[235] Ross; 82.

Week 8: Wisdom 'From Above'

Text Reading: James 1:5; 3:13-18

"Wisdom literature expresses the writers' concern
that we order our lives according to God's own order in the world."
(Walter Kaiser)

Roughly halfway through the study of the Book of James, it is perhaps a good place to revisit just what type of book it is. As we saw in the introductory section, James is often viewed as an epistle, a letter, primarily because it does have the standard salutation at the beginning: the name of the author and those to whom the letter is addressed. But the similarity with other New Testament (and other ancient) letters ends there with James. "What is the literary genre of James? James is a letter in form: it has a greeting, refers to its readers often as 'brothers,' and identifies its author by name. However, it is a letter in form only. There are no greetings to persons by name, and there is no mention of the circumstances of the author or readers."[236] Thus although the format of James might classify it within the genre of 'epistle,' its content places it elsewhere. Indeed, it constitutes perhaps the clearest, if not the only, example of Wisdom Literature in the New Testament. "James is a letter in form, but in essence it is another type of literature: *paraenesis*, or ethical instruction."[237] Laws concurs, "The epistle of James is the most consistently ethical document in the New Testament."[238]

What is Wisdom Literature and how should it be read? It is a fundamental tenet of hermeneutics that a book should be read and interpreted in accordance with its overarching genre: poetry ought not be read or interpreted as prose, Shakespeare's sonnets should not be read as if they were tragedies, and wisdom/ethical literature has a different structure and intent than narrative or didactic pieces. Even the epistles of Paul are of a different kind than this book of James. Undoubtedly containing much ethical matter, the Pauline Epistles are, however, rooted more clearly in the theology that Paul

[236] Holloway, Gary (2000) "James as New Testament Wisdom Literature" *Leaven:* Vol. 8, Iss. 2, Article 9; 89.
[237] *Idem.*
[238] Laws; 27.

develops throughout. James is not without theology, as we have seen and will see, but his theological underpinning to his ethical admonitions is much more subtle. Speaking of the letter, Laws writes, "its various warnings, precepts and words of encouragement are not based on a theological principle in any way remotely comparable to, for instance, Paul's drawing of ethical conclusions from his proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ in Rom. vi."[239] One of the major difficulties that commentators have when approaching James is the modern need to 'outline' the work to show its logical development and progression. This just does not work with James. Holloway writes,

> …the book of James is loosely organized, tying together related ethical teachings by use of repeated terms and familiar proverbs. As in the book of Proverbs, it is difficult to find an overarching theme in James or to divide the book into major sections. Instead, James repeatedly comes back to a few important subjects. Although most studies proceed verse by verse through James, another profitable way of understanding the book is to look at it topically.[240]

This is an encouraging endorsement of a thematic approach to the book, as we have been taking in this study. Yet such an approach does require an occasional reminder that this is the method selected, and why. The primary answer to the latter question is that we are considering James more under the rubric of Wisdom than of Epistle, and therefore attempting to follow the threads of ethical teaching that James has woven into this book. Holloway suggests seven major topics (one wonders if the number seven was subliminally chosen): patience, wisdom, the rich and poor, the tongue, prayer, sickness and sin, faith and works.[241] These do not differ materially from the themes we are following in this study, the current one being 'wisdom.' Thus, in reminding ourselves of the methodology of this study, it is also pertinent to remind ourselves of the purpose of Wisdom Literature as a biblical genre. Andreas Köstenberger offers this insight into the purpose of biblical Wisdom literature, "Biblical wisdom sought in the first place, to provide guidance for living by propounding rules of moral order and, in the second

[239] *Idem.*
[240] Holloway; 90.
[241] *Idem.*

place, to explore the meaning of life through reflection, speculation, and debate…It includes not only the accumulation of knowledge but above all the skill to discern how to apply the principles of godly wisdom to specific situations."[242] Wisdom literature, therefore, is more purely 'applicational' than other forms of biblical literature; it is intended to make use of the solid theological and historical foundation laid through the rest of the Bible and often sees no reason to relay those foundations. This is why it is so futile to seek the same, deep theological formulations in James as we find in Paul, or in Job as we find in Leviticus. In the New Testament we find such 'wisdom' writings in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus does not re-investigate the Torah, nor does He elaborate upon it as Paul does in his letters. Rather Jesus *applies* it in a more thorough and authoritative way than His hearers had ever heard before. Holloway comments, "The closest parallel to James in the New Testament is the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6 and 11. The similarities are so numerous that James can best be thought of as a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. If the Sermon on the Mount is the wisdom of Jesus, then James takes that wisdom and applies it to a new generation."[243] Holloway provides a helpful comparison table between passages in Jesus' sermon and their parallels in James. Here is just a sampling:

Andreas Köstenberger (*b.* 1957)

Topic in James	**Sermon on the Mount**
Trials (1:2-4)	Matt. 5:10-12, 48; Luke 6:23
Riches (1:9-11)	Matt. 6:19-21
Judging (2;1-13)	Matt. 5:3, 5, 7, 19-22; 7:1-5; Luke 6:20
Wisdom (3:13-18)	Matt. 5:5-9
Slander (4:11-12)	Matt. 5:21-22; 7:1; Luke 6:37
The Rich (5:1-6)	Matt. 6:19-21; Luke 6:24-25; 12:33
Patience (5:7-11)	Matt. 5:11-12; 7:1; Luke 6:22-23

[242] Köstenberger, Andreas J. *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic; 2011); 291-92.
[243] Holloway; 90.

Wisdom literature is a common genre in the Ancient Near East and it shares a common feature of advocating a 'wise' life that is in accordance with the will of the gods. "All wisdom literature is basically instructional in nature, with the author attempting to impart wise observations on the meaning of life and the proper conduct necessary to enjoy life to the fullest."[244]

Walter Kaiser (*b.* 1933)

As we will see in this lesson, however, this similarity is also the greatest difference between biblical and non-biblical wisdom writings of the ancient world – what was pleasing and 'wise' in the sight of the pagan gods was categorically different than the type of life that pleased Jehovah. Biblical wisdom writings, therefore, admonish and encourage the member of God's People, the community of Israel or of the Church, to align the various contours of their lives with the will of God disclosed in Scripture. "Wisdom literature expresses the writers' concern that we order our lives according to God's own order in the world."[245] Holloway adds, "Biblical wisdom is never intellectual attainment alone; it is a way of living in harmony with God and others."[246] Thus we read in several places that "*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*"[247]

Two important aspects of biblical wisdom must be noted, as they are present in James no less than in Old Testament Wisdom literature such as Proverbs. The first is that wisdom is something that the individual is to choose and to strive after with all his or her might. In a passage undergirding James' own admonition that his readers ask God for wisdom (1:5), Solomon writes,

> *My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you,*
> *So that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;*
> *Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding,*

[244] Köstenberger; 292.
[245] Kaiser, Walter C. & Moisés Silva *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1994); 99.
[246] Holloway; 92.
[247] Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 111:10

If you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures;
Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

(Proverbs 2:1-5)

Wisdom is often presented in Proverbs as a woman, a virtuous woman who is opposed to another woman – Folly. The constant admonition of the Proverbs is for the man to choose the virtuous woman and to avoid the harlot, Folly. Yet as energetic as one's pursuit of wisdom may be, there is the other, crucial aspect of biblical wisdom yet to consider: that it only comes as a gift from God. Indeed, it is unattainable unless the LORD puts it in one's heart.

For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding;
He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly;
He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.
Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

(Proverbs 2:6-9)

The constant admonition of Scripture to choose the wisdom that comes from God – the wisdom 'from above' as James puts it – is necessary simply because the world offers its own version of 'wisdom,' one that is *"earthly, sensual, demonic."*[248] Paul refers to this as the wisdom of the 'natural' person.

*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. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory…These things we also speak, not in words which **man's wisdom** teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 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.* (I Corinthians 2:6-8, 13-14)

Thus the pursuit of wisdom also includes the ability to discern between the wisdom that is 'from above' and that which is of the earth; from God versus of Man. "Wisdom is never viewed as a neutral attribute. It is either, as in the third chapter of

[248] James 3:15

James, a God-given gift, or it arises from the natural man in opposition to God, the Wisdom of this world."[249] Indeed, it is the gift of divine wisdom that is necessary for this discernment, for man himself is incapable of telling the world's wisdom from God's wisdom and often confuses the former for the latter. This is why James begins his letter, and the theme of wisdom in his letter, with the admonition for his readers to *ask* for wisdom. *"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."* (1:5) This is where it begins - after the *fear of the LORD*, of course – with the prayer for wisdom. And this is how the attainment of biblical wisdom continues: continued asking. "Yet all believers lack one thing: wisdom. No matter how much wisdom they have, they can always use more."[250]

How does God give this wisdom? In answering this question, one must first notice that James does not mention the Holy Spirit explicitly anywhere in his letter. Some might see in this a deficiency in his theology – a truncated Trinity, perhaps. But such a conclusion would be mistaken on two accounts. First, it would fail to recognize the unique terminology often used in Wisdom writings – the use of the parable, the proverb, the implicit rather than the explicit. Second, it would also fail to recognize the biblical pattern of equating the Holy Spirit with Wisdom, both in the Old Testament and the New. James speaks of Wisdom as being the gift of God to those who ask in faith. In Chapter 1 he speaks of "*every good and perfect gift*" as "*coming down from above.*" (1:17). The same Greek word 'from above' – *anothen* – is used in Chapter 3 to refer to the right kind of wisdom, that which is "*from above.*" 'From above' means 'from God,' and a comparison of New Testament writings on the Holy Spirit, 'from God,' and Wisdom, also 'from God' will show how the word *sophia* – wisdom – is used somewhat interchangeably with the Person of the Holy Spirit, so long as that wisdom is the Wisdom *from above*. It is, of course, the indwelling and continual filling of the Holy Spirit that alone gives the believer the divine, peaceable wisdom *from above* and enables him or her to discern and avoid that form of wisdom that is from the world. Below we will compare what James says about

[249] Kirk, J. A. "The Meaning of Wisdom in James: Examination of a Hypothesis" *New Testament Studies*, 16; 28.
[250] Holloway; 91.

the 'fruit' of this divine wisdom and what Paul and other says about the 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit, seeing the remarkable parallels between the two. When the believer asks his Father for wisdom, what the Father gives is more of His Holy Spirit, which is, in fact, more of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God. Thus when James admonishes his readers to ask God for the wisdom needed both to properly consider trials to be *all joy* and to endure in faith through those trials, he is not advocating some esoteric 'deeper knowledge' for the believer, but simply that which God has promised to give to every believer to guide him or her into all truth: the Holy Spirit. "Indeed, in James wisdom functions as the Holy Spirit does in the rest of the New Testament. It is the gift of God that produces fruit, the 'harvest of righteousness.'"[251] J. A. Kirk, in his article testing the hypothesis that James uses 'Wisdom' in the same way that Paul uses the 'Holy Spirit,' writes,

> The trials and the Wisdom are both things that come to the brethren from the outside. The trials comes as a natural result of living in the world. They give the matrix out of which faith may be perfected. The Wisdom comes as a result of asking, asking in the spirit of that faith which is already being tested in the furnace of trials. It will be fairly obvious from this that in order to meet the trials, and especially to meet them with joy, a man needs more than faith, he needs a power from outside himself, usually referred to in the New Testament in terms of the Spirit but here referred to as Wisdom.[252]

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. **(3:13)**

It may be that this verse hearkens back to the first of this chapter, "*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*" A number of commentators think so, but there is no direct evidence of the connection beyond the interwoven methodology of James' writing. Certainly those who put themselves forward as teachers in the congregation must also think themselves to possess a degree of wisdom that would qualify them for the post. If so, then verse 13 continues the warning of verse 1, though from a different angle. Let it be said, however, that even if James is considering

[251] Holloway; 93.
[252] Kirk; 31.

the 'teacher' in particular, what he says in these verses, 13-18, applies to all believers without distinction. Yet it stands to reason that those who teach ought to possess greater than the average wisdom among the congregation.

Thus, if we do consider these verses as directed uniquely at those who would teach in the congregation, we see James moving from a consideration of the stricter judgment that the teacher will incur, to the manner of life that teacher must display in order to validate his claim to wisdom. In this regard, James' words differ little from what Paul writes in his Pastoral Letters concerning the character of one who would be an elder in the assembly. Though Paul writes this concerning the deacon – *let him be tested* – the criteria by which the deacon is assessed is essentially the same as that for the elder, with the notable difference that the elder is to be *apt to teach*. So a man claims to have wisdom? What does his life say? Laws writes, "The argument will be that a man's whole manner of life should demonstrate that his works are guided by wisdom, and will therefore in effect demonstrate his wisdom."[253]

James describes this life as one with manifest *good works*. The New King James renders *works* as *conduct*, but the noun is the standard *erga* which is elsewhere uniformly translated 'works.' In light of what James has to say throughout his letter regarding 'works,' it is best to keep the translation consistent. The self-professed wise man will only be validated in the eyes of the community if his life bears witness to that profession; biblical knowledge, great oratorical skill, or well-educated erudition will not qualify if the man's life is not filled with *good works*. James uses a particular Greek word here for 'good,' and not the most common in the Greek lexicon. He uses *kalos*, which has a somewhat more aesthetic flavor to it than the more common *agathos*. The latter word deals more with the intrinsic quality of a thing; the former with its outward aspect. That fits what James is saying here: wisdom is an inward quality, and a good one, to be sure; but it cannot be validated unless outward goodness accompanies it. "The word James uses, however, is *kalos*, 'lovely,' and what he speaks of is the loveliness of goodness, the

[253] Laws; 159.

attractiveness of the good life, it wholesomeness and helpfulness, as seen in the Lord's people: a way of life whose goodness is plain to all who see."[254]

James describes this 'good life' as being filled with the *meekness of wisdom*. The word *meekness* is the same root as in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:5, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" With this word James, and the entire teaching of Jesus and the Apostles, departs dramatically from the conventional wisdom of both the 1st Century and all preceding and succeeding centuries. *Meekness* has rarely been considered a component part of *wisdom*, let alone an essential part as it is in Scripture. Laws points out that "There was some place for humility in Hebrew thought, in Plato, and in the Greek distaste for hybris (*hubris*); but the dominant morality of the day associated it with meanness and grovelling [*sic*]. It is linked with adjectives like ignoble, abject, servile, slavish, downcast and low. Epictetus names it first in a list of moral faults."[255]

James thus points to the outward works of a man to validate his inward wisdom, yet he does not say that such wisdom consists or is derived from such works. It is clear, as it will hopefully become concerning the more (in)famous passage on faith and works in Chapter 2, that the loveliness and meekness of these works are not the cause, but the effect, of true wisdom. Adamson writes, "The doctrine here is: 'If anyone of you is, or claims to be, a man of wisdom and knowledge, let him see that he makes his virtuous life show the peaceable temper of wisdom…There is no question of his 'pointing to good works,' but of his behavior, by its quality pointing to his wisdom…R. Eleazar ben Azarya asked: 'He whose wisdom is greater than his works, to what is he compared? To a tree the branches of which are many, but its roots are few.'"[256] Jesus, as always, put the matter much more succinctly and hence more powerfully, "*A tree is known by its fruit.*"[257]

In applying this principle to those who would occupy the teaching office of elder in the congregation, the requirement that their lives manifest their alleged wisdom leaves

[254] Motyer; 128.
[255] Laws; 159-60.
[256] Adamson; 150.
[257] Matthew 12:33

significant doubt as to the common, modern method of 'pastoral searches.' Congregations interview and hire ('call') pastors from outside the congregation, without having any real opportunity to judge their 'wisdom and understanding' by their 'good works.' This practice has done great harm to the churches, as men with excellent outward qualifications on a resumé are given a position of great responsibility, requiring great stores of 'wisdom and understanding,' of which they actually possess very little.

But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. **(3:14)**

James now presents the good and the bad sides of alleged 'wisdom,' with the bad coming before the good. James is under no illusions regarding the residual sin that is present in every believer, nor to the possibility of false shepherds arising in the flock. He knows, as Paul did, that *godliness can be a means of great gain* – that religion has perennially and always been a means of manipulation and personal aggrandizement. The 'call' to the ministry must be tested, both by the one 'called' and by those who are to be fed by the would-be shepherd/teacher, and claims to wisdom and understanding that are not backed up by a converted life are both false and dangerous. The words James uses here, especially *self-seeking*, are frequently used in extra-biblical Greek to denote political intriguing, the manipulation of language to attain the perquisites of political office. Laws comments, "The latter word [*i.e.,* selfish ambition] is uncommon, confined to James and Paul in the NT, and its meaning is uncertain. Aristotle uses it of intriguing for political office; used generally it probably denotes an unscrupulous determination to gain one's own ends."[258] Religion has always offered men the opportunity to do this. But *"do not be deceived; God is not mocked."*[259]

This intriguing nature is not immediately visible either in politicians or religious men who are good at their trade. Charlatans do not wear a self-identifying name tag. Therefore James warns the community as much as he warns the would-be teacher, of the

[258] Laws; 160. *Cp.* Phil. 2:3, *"Do nothing from* ***selfishness*** *or conceit, but in all humility count others better than yourselves."*
[259] Galatians 6:7

signs that indicate such a false spirit and false wisdom. *Envy* and *self-seeking* will manifest themselves in a 'party spirit' and in factionalism rather than in peace and harmony within the congregation. The difficulty lies in the fact that the intriguer is subtle and often convincing, cloaking their 'zeal' with religious speech and high-sounding rhetoric. We are not to be docile, and in imitation of our Lord we are to be zealous for the Truth, "*Zeal for Your house has consumed Me.*" But, "The problem is that zeal can easily become fanaticism, bitter strife, or a disguised form of rivalry and thus jealousy; the person sees himself as jealous for the truth, but God and others se the bitterness, rigidity, and personal pride which are far from the truth."[260] Motyer adds, "Over and over gain the formation of a party, the growth of a clique, the promotion of a split have been justified as standing for the truth. It is said that, unless we divide, the truth cannot be safeguarded; the body from which we are dividing has rejected all truth, or this truth or that…we have lost James' realization that in Christian division, as in time of war, truth is the first casualty."[261] Adamson notes, "Both in politics and religion zeal can degenerate into mere partisanship: men are prone to transfer to the party the zeal that should be devoted to society."[262]

To *lie against the truth* here is a difficult phrase in the original, and possibly means that those who claim to possess *wisdom and understanding* but also possess a divisive and self-aggrandizing spirit, are boasting of a wisdom they do not possess, and thus are damaging the truth rather than promoting and defending it. "James' thought may be that **the truth** in this context consists in the fact that humility is characteristic of wisdom; jealousy and self-seeking will issue in boasting and lying which are both *against* that truth."[263] In the context, as we will see, the corporate evidence of wise and understanding teachers (and believers) is a peaceful and harmonious community, without factions and without hypocrisy. Teachers and leaders who work against this are not *wise and understanding* but rather *lie against the truth.*

[260] Davids; 151.
[261] Motyer; 133.
[262] Adamson; 151
[263] Laws; 160

This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. **(3:15-16)**

Advancing one's cause in any manner 'necessary' – the 'ends justify the means' – is perhaps one of the chief characteristics of a false wisdom, certainly of the wisdom of this world. James minces no words here, calling out such wisdom with a regressive concatenation of adjectives: *worldly*, not of heaven but of this world; *sensual*, literally 'soulish' or natural, having nothing to do with the regenerate heart; and *demonic*, "wisdom that is like the demon's." Holloway writes, "This wisdom is also unspiritual. In Greek, it is *psychikos* (literally, 'of the soul'). It is a wisdom of the natural person, not the spiritual person."[264] Paul has much to say regarding this wisdom, a wisdom that is not from God nor of His Spirit, in I Corinthians. In a passage very similar to the one here in James, Paul writes,

> *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? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* (I Corinthians 1:20-25)

Paul proceeds to show that the gospel comes with a wisdom categorically different than the wisdom of the world, a divine wisdom that the natural man (literally, the *soulish* man, same word *phychikos* used as in James 3:15) is wholly incapable of receiving or understanding.

> *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. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory… These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 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.*
>
> (I Corinthians 2:6-8; 13-14)

[264] Holloway; 92.

The wisdom of this world, the *soulish* wisdom that sees gain in factionalism and strife, is *demonic*. It is the wisdom of Satan who, through Peter, advised the Lord that going to the cross was an unwise thing to do (*cp.* Matt. 16:23). Holloway remarks, "Demons have a type of faith (Jas. 2:19); they also have a type of wisdom."[265] We must let these words of James – particularly the adjective *demonic* – have full force in our interpretation of the passage, as Peter Davids writes, "'You claim,' says James, 'to have the Holy Spirit. Impossible! You are inspired all right – you are inspired by the devil!'"[266] Such uncompromising language is of the essence of James' message here, another indication of the 'Two Paths' wisdom genre that he is employing. "Now he is ready to put the vital choice to us: is the wisdom of earth or of heave to rule our lives? No compromise is allowed, for they are true alternatives, standing in contrast to each other in origin, characteristics and results."[267]

James is as concerned with the peace of the believing community of the *diaspora* as he is with the doctrine, for the one does not exist without the other in either direction. Party spirit and factionalism, to both James and Paul, are destructive of the unity and harmony of the congregation and are, therefore, what we might today call 'cardinal' sins. James goes so far as to say that where these attitudes prevail, there exists *every evil thing*. Certainly this is something that every congregation should be wary of and avoid. Davids writes, "The accusation is self-evident, for how could party spirit do less than disturb the peace of the community? And who does not recognize the connection between jealousy and the justification of all types of evil deeds?...One knows from observation that James has a burden of communal unity, so he would expect communal unrest to be a chief vice."[268] In James one reads an anticipation of Paul's beautiful admonition to the Philippian church,

[265] Holloway; 93.
[266] Davids; 153.
[267] Motyer; 133.
[268] Davids; 153.

Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-4)

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. **(3:17)**

While it is not evident in the English translation, James utilizes a double alliteration here, probably as a pneumonic aid so that his readers can more easily recall the virtues of divine wisdom. The pattern is a 4:3 one that is common in Hebrew wisdom literature and poetry: four attributes, each starting with an *epsilon*, followed by three attributes, each starting with an *alpha*.

Epeita, Eireinikei, Eupeikeis, Eupeitheis	*Pure, Peaceable, Gentle, Willing to yield*
Agathōn, Adiakritos, Anupokritos	*Good, Steadfast, Sincere*

Commentators note the similarity of James' virtue list with the 'fruit of the Spirit' list in Galatians, and the two passages do bear comparison.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering,
kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

James' discussion of the 'fruit' of divine, heavenly wisdom and the 'fruit' of the Holy Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians shows the interchangeability of the terms 'wisdom' in the true sense, and the Holy Spirit. This is simply because the only true wisdom that the believer receives is in the Person of the Holy Spirit who indwells and fills him or her. Thus James uses the term *anōthen* – 'from above' – not only to denote this pure wisdom (3:17) but also to characterize *every good and perfect gift* (1:17). And the best and most perfect gift given by the *Father of lights* is that of the Holy Spirit, in whom alone is true wisdom. Kirk writes, therefore, of James 3:17, "In this context Wisdom plays

exactly the same part as Paul's 'fruit of the Spirit', Gal. v.22, in opposition to the 'works of the flesh', Gal. v.19-21."[269]

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. **(3:18)**

In a way, this is the crux of the entire epistle: *peace* within the community of the believing *diaspora*. Not a false peace, not the peace of oppression or the silencing of discussion, nor the 'Pax Romana' enforced everywhere by the presence of the Roman legions. Rather, the *fruit of righteousness* that only grows in the soil of true, Spirit-filled peace within the congregation.

> The biblical idea of peace is more than the absence of war or conflict. It describes a state of harmony within an individual and between members of a society. In Hebrew, 'peace' (*shalom*) is used as a greeting and also as a way of inquiring after someone's state of being. To be at peace is to be happy, to be whole, to be right with God, fellow humans, and creation. Peace is the opposite of the rivalry, instability, and division brought by envy and ambition.[270]

Karpos, 'fruit,' is the same word here as it is in Galatians 5, which fact further solidifies the tie between James' use of 'Wisdom' and other writers' use of the 'Holy Spirit.' They are largely interchangeable in such contexts. "The 'fruit of the Spirit' is the fruit which the Holy Spirit produces; the fruit of repentance is the evidence in our lives that we have truly repented. In the same way, the fruit of righteousness is the fruit righteousness bears."[271] And that fruit in the Christian community will be *peace*, not merely the absence of conflict but the active pursuit and realization of harmony. "How every important Christian fellowship is! A harmonious fellowship of believers is the soil out of which grows the whole life that is pleasing to God."[272]

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[269] Kirk; 27.
[270] Holloway; 93.
[271] Motyer; 137.
[272] *Ibid.*; 138.

Week 9: For Richer, For Poorer
Text Reading: James 1:9-11; 2:1-7

"Be pleased to reform the abuses of all professions:
and if there be anyone that makes many poor to make a few rich,
that suits not a Commonwealth."
(Oliver Cromwell)

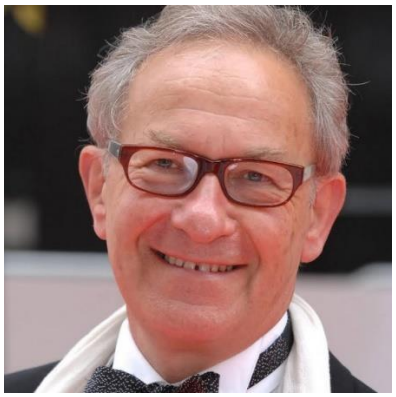
There are a number of contextual settings in which we find Scriptural teachings that are so far different from our own, that the teachings themselves are sometimes difficult to comprehend. For instance, it is difficult for a Western believer to understand the *Sitz im Leben* of an absolute monarchy – a form of government in which one man's word is law, and all the inhabitants of the realm essentially belong to the king. Thus the biblical notion of the 'kingdom of God' and His sovereign reign over His people is very hard to incorporate into our 21st Century, republican venue. This is by no means to say that Scripture is culturally conditioned, but rather that our understanding of Scripture may be culturally conditioned in a negative way. History, and historical writings contemporary with the Bible, are great aids in helping us to understand the cultural setting of the biblical teaching, and consequently to interpret the passages in light their own context so that we might properly apply their meaning and message to ours. The truth of Scripture is unchanging and eternal, but the context of its interpretation and application changes with each new generation.

Another example of this phenomenon is involved in our thematic topic for this lesson: Riches and Poverty. Much, if not all, of the historical setting in which we find the biblical teaching on wealth and poverty is vastly different in the Western world of our day than what it was in, for instance, James' day. Although 'day laborers' still exist, they occupy a miniscule portion of a modern economy, where most employees are either salaried or hourly wage earners under a form of contractual association with their employers, protected by government regulations and labor laws that prevent most of the forms of economic oppression that were commonplace in the ancient world. To be sure, where the *Sitz im Leben* of the modern world – for instance, migrant workers performing

seasonal agricultural labor – the application of such passages as James 5:1-6 is clearer and more immediate. So also the concept of "*Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit*" (4:13) still bears upon the modern, capitalistic economic ideas of planning and commerce.

Yet because our modern Western world is far more affluent, and at a far greater depth within society, than was imaginable in the ancient world, it is hard to read such passages in the same contextual light as when the words were written. Poverty in the ancient world, as it is in the undeveloped world today, was abject and typically on the verge of literal starvation. Riches in the ancient world, as in the undeveloped world today, were held exclusively in the hands of a few landowners. Those riches set the course of life not only for the rich men, but also for the poor, a course that typically consisted of economic oppression, abuse, and destruction for the poor. We can envision such circumstances, and even witness them if we travel to the Third World, and we can also see application of James' admonitions and condemnations to such circumstances. But can we do so in our own situation? Or has our relative affluence dulled our biblical senses?

How Christianity has related to economic prosperity has been a matter of discussion, debate, and literature for two millennia. Riches were for the longest time held in great distrust, and those who swore vows of poverty and relinquished inherited wealth were held in great esteem by the rest of the church. There was, of course, a recognized irony in the fact that both the Catholic hierarchy as well as many large monasteries and abbeys accumulated tremendous amounts of wealth, and many prelates and priors lived in unheard-of luxury, but this did not go without serious critique. Wealth sat uneasily on the Christian conscience. That collective conscience railed against the wealth of bish-



Simon Schama (*b.* 1945)

ops and the hedonism of popes during the late Middle Ages, and also reappeared within Protestant circles when prosperity came their way. In his survey of the Golden Age of Holland, under the Dutch Reformed influence, Simon Schama discusses the difficulty the newly wealthy Dutch Protestants had in 'accepting' their wealth as a legitimate blessing of God. They got over their scruples, of course, as men always do. But the struggle of conscience was severe enough, and documented enough in the Dutch Reformed literature of the era, that Schama entitled his book *The Embarrassment of Riches*. On the cover page of the chapter bearing the same title as the book, Schama quotes Calvin's *Commentary on Isaiah* with respect to the danger of riches, reflecting as it does the common Protestant and Reformed consciousness on the matter. Calvin's words also echo James' own consideration of wealth in James 4.

> For it too often happens that riches bring self-indulgence, and superfluity of pleasures produces flabbiness as we can see in wealthy regions and cities (where there are merchants). Now those who sail to distant places are no longer content with home comforts but bring back with them unknown luxuries. Therefore because wealth is generally the mother of extravagance, the prophet mentions here [*i.e.*, Isa. 2:12, 16] expensive household furnishings, by which he means the Jews brought God's judgment upon themselves by the lavish way they decorated their houses. For with pictures he includes expensive tapestries like Phrygian embroidery and vases molded with exquisite art.[273]


Max Weber (1864-1920)

The premise of Schama's book is intriguing and follows along the line of an earlier and important work by the German sociologist Max Weber, entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber's basic thesis is that the sense of duty, piety, thrift, etc., that characterized the Protestant work ethic – and especially that of Calvinist Protestantism – was uniquely conducive to economic success and the accumulation of wealth. This thesis is summarized

[273] Schama, Simon *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage Books; 1987); 289.

early in the book, "So far from there being an inevitable conflict between money-making and piety, they are natural allies, for the virtues incumbent on the elect – diligence, thrift, sobriety, prudence – are the most reliable passport to commercial prosperity."[274] It was of the essence of Protestant social life that piety was required of all believers and not just those who isolated themselves in monasteries and convents. Furthermore, this piety was to be a matter of day-to-day life, even in one's vocation, as taught by Martin Luther in his universalizing 'calling' to include all legitimate forms of labor and occupation. This led to an asceticism that moved out from the monastery to the market, and brought a religious hue to all that the believer did in his or her life. Weber writes,

> From that followed for the individual an incentive methodically to supervise his own state of grace in his own conduct, and thus to penetrate it with asceticism...this ascetic conduct meant a rational planning of the whole of one's life in accordance with God's will. And this asceticism was no longer an *opus supererogationis*, but something which could be required of everyone who would be certain of salvation. The religious life of the saints, as distinguished from the natural life, was – the most important point – no longer lived outside the world in monastic communities, but within the world and its institutions. This rationalization of conduct within this world, but for the sake of the world beyond, was the consequence of the concept of calling of ascetic Protestantism.[275]

As with the obedience of the Israelites under the Old Covenant, the new asceticism of Reformed Protestants in Northern Europe – Holland, Northern Germany, Huguenot France, and England – resulted in economic prosperity and the increase in personal wealth. Given the circumstances of newfound wealth, it was not difficult for these Protestants to find biblical rationale for the prosperity, along with biblical admonition and warnings concerning the use of it. God's predisposition to materially bless His people upon the condition of covenant obedience and faithfulness is a common theme in the Torah, especially the famous Blessings & Curses of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Obedience to the Lord's commandments and statutes would be met with an outpouring of divine blessing that would mark Israel off as uniquely the people of God.

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[274] Weber, Max *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications; 2003); 3.
[275] *Ibid.*; 154. 'Supererogation' refers to a work that is in excess of one's duty to the Lord.

The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. (Deuteronomy 28:9-12)

Deuteronomy 15 provides an enigmatic description of the community of God's people, a community in which there would be no poor, but also one in which some people might be poor, and in fact a community in which the poor would always be among them. The purpose of this passage is to show that God would bless obedience with prosperity, but would also not entirely remove poverty from the land so that the rich would continually have a compassionate outlet for their wealth in relieving the burden of the poor. Indeed, not only was prosperity anticipated as the result of obedience, God informs His people that it is He who gives the power to make wealth in the first place (*cp.* Deut. 8:18). "Although the Wisdom literature has a fairly strong theology of poverty, it also, in places, views prosperity as a result of God's blessing, even as a reward. Wealth, if properly used, retains a positive connotation."[276]

The Wisdom writings take the concept of prosperity as a reward of covenant faithfulness a bit further, adding *diligence* to covenant obedience.

He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread,
But he who follows frivolity is devoid of understanding. (Proverbs 12:11)

Where no oxen are, the trough is clean;
But much increase comes by the strength of an ox. (Proverbs 14:4)

The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty,
But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty. (Proverbs 21:5)

[276] Gotsis, George N. & Sarah Drakopoulou-Dodd, "Economic Ideas in the Epistle of James" *History of Economic Ideas*, 2004, Vol. 12, No. 1; 21.

Yet Scripture s not silent on the temptation and dangers of wealth, God even prophesying that Israel would turn away from Him when she, on account of His blessings, became prosperous.

> *But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese!*
> *Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.*
> Deuteronomy 32:15)

Wealth brings with it the danger of abandoning God, and it is the consistent testimony of Scripture that the poor are generally more sensitive and closer to God, and vice versa, than the rich. Agur thus asks the Lord to lead him in a middle way between wealth and poverty,

> *Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die):*
> *Remove falsehood and lies far from me;*
> *Give me neither poverty nor riches – Feed me with the food allotted to me;*
> *Lest I be full and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?"*
> *Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.* (Proverbs 30:7-9)

This passage underscores the uneasy relationship between the believer and wealth. On the one hand, obedience and faithfulness, which also includes diligence in one's occupation *as unto the Lord*, will often lead to economic success and financial prosperity. On the other hand, such prosperity carries with it a serious temptation and risk of apostasy, as the believer places more and more of his trust in accumulated material possessions. Wealth, never distributed evenly in any society, can and usually does also lead to exploitive and oppressive behavior from the wealthy toward those less well off, especially those who are economically dependent upon the wealthy. Thus wealth that may have been the divine blessing upon obedience and faithfulness, becomes the cause of divine condemnation. Craig Blomberg, in his book *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, writes, "The dominant thrust of the Prophets…is that God will


Craig Blomberg (*b.* 1955)

judge the exploitive rich as part of his eschatological plan to create a perfectly just society and redeemed material world."[277]

Perhaps the only example of a believer who managed to both accumulate great wealth and preserve his integrity before God and man is Boaz, one of the few (if not the only) men in the Bible about whom nothing negative is said. Boaz' treatment of his workers, who rejoiced at his appearing, and his management of his lands to the benefit of the poor is the only living example of the principles of the Holiness Code – Leviticus 19 – being enacted in the life of a child of God. Yet the example of Boaz does mean that such a life can be lived, and the admonition of Wisdom Literature, Prophetic Writings, and the Book of James all combine not to condemn wealth, nor to unreasonably exalt poverty, but to advocate a continued dependence on the Lord who *gives the power to make wealth.* And with that power, He also gives the responsibility to use that wealth properly. This, too, requires wisdom; another occasion for the believer to *ask of God* (James 1:5).

In analyzing what James has to say about Riches and Poverty, it is necessary, as noted above, to attempt to reconstruct the *Sitz im Leben* of his letter and his age. First Century Palestine did not differ greatly from the rest of the Mediterranean world, but the distribution of wealth and the nature of 'occupations' in that era differs massively from the modern, Western world. One important feature of the Roman economy in James' day was the *latifundia* – the great land estates that overspread the Roman Empire. The term is a combination of Latin words meaning 'large farm,' and constituted the ultimate result of generations of oppressive land acquisition, usurious loans to tenant farmers, and eventual slavery or serfdom of the peasant population. The process of land consolidation can be seen in the denunciations of the wealthy by the Prophets, as wealthy men would 'move the boundary markers' denoting an Israelite's ancestral heritage, in order to 'add field to field' in an avaricious land grab. This practice was in violation of the statutes that Jehovah had laid down for Israel, but was common throughout the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean worlds. Sometimes large tracts of land were awarded to a royal or

[277] Blomberg, Craig L. *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1999); 82.

imperial favorite, an absentee landlord who would then hire a local 'foreman' to oversee the production of this farm. The previous, and usually poor, owner of the land was often kept on as a tenant farmer, continuing to sow and reap on the land but usually having to borrow money from the landlord in order to finance the next year's planting. A bad harvest would put the tenant in arrears, resulting in his enslavement either to the land (serf) or to the landowner (slave). By the 1st Century this practice had produced vast *latifundia*, reducing the mostly agricultural economy of the Mediterranean world to a two-tiered socio-economic hierarchy: the landowners (incredible wealth) and the serfs/slaves (extreme poverty). The *latifundia* lies behind James' denunciations in James 5:1-6.

Although the economy of the Roman world was predominantly agricultural, it was not entirely so. In addition to the great landowners and the peasant/slave tenant farmers, there was a merchant class, roughly equivalent to the rising middle class in later Europe. These were the buyers and sellers of goods not merely within a town or village, but between cities and regions. These were the men of whom James speaks in Chapter 4, "*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*" (4:13). This role is typified in literature and film by Simonides, the agent for the Judean prince Judah Ben Hur. Simonides spends the greater part of the year traveling around the Mediterranean world, buying and selling and increasing the wealth of his master's estate. In the 1959 movie, Ben Hur praises his steward for making him ever richer as each year passes by. Though the characters are entirely fictional, trade was indeed a source of great wealth to the men willing to risk financing the travel as well as for the men who travelled.

Sam Jaffe as Simonides

There is one additional 'economic actor' in the drama: the tax-gatherer, the ubiquitous tax-gatherer. Often Jews, and hated for that by their fellow Jews, at times these officers were Roman citizens with equestrian rank, the second highest social rank in Roman society. Historical records indicate that the equestrian station was marked by the

right to wear a gold ring or rings, not unlike what James mentions in Chapter 2 regarding the wealthy man to whom favoritism is shown in the assembly. Laws comments, "James's coining of the adjective *chrusodaktulios* may be to indicate his social status, for the gold ring was part of the insignia of the equestrian order, the second rank of Roman aristocracy."[278] This is conjecture, but the description of the favored man does seem to fit that of a member of the higher class in the Romanized society of that day, though he may also have been a Jew. Be that as it may, James would have been very familiar with the upper echelons of the economic ranks, though he himself did not participate in any of them. "This letter has as its background a community that was socially stratified. The author must therefore address the issue of how the poor members would react to the presence of wealthy and influential forces, whether inside or exerted from outside on that community."[279] The great landowners, the wealthy traders, and the ever-present tax-gatherers and Roman financial officials were the gears of the 1st Century Mediterranean economy, the wheels of economic progress and wealth, grinding the rest of society as they rolled.

Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 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. **(1:9-11)**

It is by way of review that we consider these verses, as we have already done so above in Week 5. In that place some time was given to attempting to answer the primary question that commentators have regarding this passage: Does James consider the rich here to be fellow believer? There is no definitive answer within the pericope itself, and both positive and negative conclusions can be supported by the words and the grammar. Arguments in favor of a negative answer depend largely on what James has to say concerning the rich in subsequent passages, none of it good. Ralph Martin, however, does guide us to the more important point of the passage: the transient nature of life even for

[278] Laws; 98.
[279] Martin; 28.

the rich man. "Regardless of whether the rich man is a Christian or not, the meaning of vv 10b-11 is fairly clear: riches are worthless in the face of death and judgment."[280] It is all too easy to misread James' metaphor of the flower in the hot wind as referring to the ephemeral nature of wealth itself, more easily lost than gained. But the syntax is clear: it is the *rich man* who is compared to the fading flower, not his riches. "James relentlessly connects the fate of the flower to the fate of the rich person. Both can be flourishing one day and gone the next."[281] Of course this brings to mind the story of the Rich Fool in Luke 12,

> *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 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. 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." 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?'*
> (Luke 12:16-20)

This first pericope dealing with the issue of poverty and wealth treads rather gently on the matter, showing the foolishness of trusting to riches as well as the true hope that anchors the poor soul who has little of this world's comforts. James' treatment of the contrast between rich and poor grows steadily more intense as the letter progresses.

***My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.* (2:1)**

This is one of only two places in the book where Jesus is mentioned explicitly and this fact has led many liberal scholars to consider this verse (and the other, James 1:1, being the greeting) as later Christian interpolations to an otherwise Jewish text. Beside the fact that modern liberal scholars never meet an interpolation they do not like, there is no textual variants for either verses to support the interpolation theory. We cannot judge the writing of another on the basis of how we would have written the work. Yet even

[280] *Ibid.*; 26.
[281] *Ibid.*; 27.

accepting the integrity of the words, and the reference to Jesus, we still are faced with a rather difficult verse syntactically. The main question surrounds the meaning of the word *faith* in this context and the manner in which it is modified by *of the Lord Jesus Christ.* We tend to consider the word 'faith' as it refers to our personal belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, but that would not work here. The context is the assembly, literally the *synagogue*, where partiality and discrimination is being shown based on a visitor's socio-economic status. Since it in the assembly that the partiality is (potentially) being shown, the 'faith of our Lord Jesus Christ' must refer to that same assembly. In other words, and in a manner not uncommon in the New Testament, 'faith' is being used with reference to the 'religion' of Christianity, that which draws these people together in the first place.

It is in this setting that partiality is not only forbidden, it is blasphemous. Paul makes it very clear in his letter to the Romans that there is no partiality with God.

> *But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.*
>
> (Romans 2:5-11)

The argument that James lays out in these opening verses of Chapter 2 runs along the same lines as does Paul's in Romans. If God, who is the Righteous Judge, does not discriminate between Jew or Gentile in His judgments, how can we who have benefited from this exercise false judgment by showing partiality among the brethren? Indeed, in the case of God we are dealing with the weighty matter of our sin; between the rich and the poor we have the ephemeral matter of relative material possessions, all of which will remain here on earth when the owner passes away. The salvation that has come indiscriminately to *all tongues, tribes, and nations* cannot then be held within the church in a falsely discriminating manner. "A favouritism based on external considerations is inconsistent with faith in the One who came to break down the barriers of nationality,

race, class, gender and religion."[282] Laws adds, "The profession of Christian faith is inconsistent, indeed incompatible, with an attitude towards other men that discriminates against some and in favour of others."[283] James touches here on a very sensitive issue; we are all prejudiced in some degree and manner, and our initial reactions to strangers is more often colored by these deep-seated prejudices than by righteous judgment. Blomberg quotes Southern Baptist commentator John Polhill, "the problem of discrimination is a perennial one for Christians because it is a tendency of basic human nature to favour those we serve to profit from the most."[284] But James will point out that those from whom we may think we shall benefit the most are often those who do us the greatest harm, largely because they can, whereas the poor cannot. Indeed, if we consider the uniform testimony of Scripture, we find God to be, though thoroughly impartial in His own judgment, an Advocate and Defender of the very same people we would tend to discriminate against in favor of the rich and powerful in this world.

> *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. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.* (Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

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, 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? **(2:2-4)**

There is no need to attempt to conclude definitively that the rich man in this example was indeed of the equestrian class. It is sufficient that James is drawing a sharp contrast between two sorts of men who might visit the assembly, the *synagogue*. It is assumed that they are both visitors, in need of being ushered to their seats, their personal characters as yet unknown. Indeed, all that is known of them is their outward appearance.

[282] Moo; 88.
[283] Laws, 93.
[284] Blomberg; 153.

We have already considered the possibility that James' wording conjures the image of an equestrian; in contrast his description of the poor man is about as far from the equestrian on the social ladder as possible to conceive. "The noun *ptōchos* in classical usage denotes a beggar or utterly destitute person, as distinct from *penēs,* a man who had not property and therefore had to earn his own living. This distinction is not strictly maintained in the LXX and NT where the words are virtually interchangeable, but the full force of *ptōchos* is no doubt intended by James in this context."[285]

To show partiality toward the wealthy man, and to disparage and insult the poor man, is to *become judges with evil thoughts*. The only reason for such partiality must be the thought of the benefit the rich man might bring to the congregation or to the leadership, while the poor man has nothing to offer and is therefore despised. To show such an attitude (indeed, to *have* such an attitude) is in violation of the Holiness Code and is therefore a sin against God's Law.

> *You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.* (Leviticus 19:15)

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? But you have dishonored the poor man. **(2:5-6a)**

James has the same view of the early Church and those whom God has called by His grace as Paul does,

> *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.* (I Corinthians 1:26-29)

[285] Laws; 99.

It is the uniform testimony of history from the early Church that the vast majority of its members were from the lower classes of society, with a large portion from the slave class. Modern Liberation theologians have concluded from passages such as these that God favors the poor *because* they are poor and hence the Church should orient the gospel toward alleviating poverty. But it is clear that God does not favor the poor simply because they are poor, He defends the poor because they are defenseless. There is no peculiar sanctity to poverty just as there is no indicative blessing from riches. It is the nature of God to defend those who are without intrinsic social defensive structures: the poor, the widow, the orphan, the alien. Both Paul and James are strongly teaching that the attitude of the church ought to be that of God with respect to the defenseless in our midst.

It has been surmised that the large percentage of poor people in the church - in all generations, frankly – derives, humanly-speaking from this very defenselessness of those in the lower classes of society. Religion is typically strongest among these socio-economic layers of every society, perhaps largely due to the tendency of the rich to place their 'faith' in their riches, the powerful in their power. The poor have nothing in this world upon which to ground their hope; they are – again, humanly-speaking – consequently more likely to ground that hope in God, and to respond more favorably to the freeing message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet again we run up against the interpretive and applicational difficulties of diverse cultures. Where in the Western world to we encounter abject poverty as a matter of daily life? Certainly there are pockets of such destitution, but often in the West this is due to the effects of destructive, sinful tendencies such as drug abuse. Governmental programs have almost completely taken over the 'benevolence' ministry of the Church, and the poor among us are rarely facing imminent starvation as they were in James' day. Our economy is no longer dependent on the early and late rains, the harvest each year passes with little notice and if there is a poor harvest, the government steps in to subsidize the farmers and artificially elevate the grain prices. Still, there are social strata in our world that are no less visible than those of the 1st Century, and believers are still tempted to condition their response to others on the basis of perceived social status. Indeed,

though socio-economic strata are not so pronounced in our day as in James', racial prejudices are perhaps far stronger. To favor a person on account of skin color or ethnicity is as damnable as to do so on the basis of socio-economic status. It is to judge with evil thoughts, to pass judgment on a person on the unrighteous basis of skin color, heritage, or bank account instead of the solid foundation of grace. "To love the neighbour is, then, to treat him without discrimination; to discriminate is to break that law of love."[286]

Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? **(2:6b-7)**

There is a sad irony in this behavior of discrimination and prejudice in favor of the rich over the poor: it is the rich who invariably oppress believers, who are more likely than not to also be poor. It is the rich who hold the reins of power, whose gold greases the wheels of the courts to deliver 'justice' smoothly into their hands and to deny it to those who cannot wield such influence. So it has always been; so it will always be. The world's version of the Golden Rule is 'He who has the gold, makes the rules.' In showing favor to that socio-economic class that comprises the oppressors, the church is not only acting without sound judgment, and with evil thoughts, but also stupidly. "Far from returning kindness for kindness, the Christians are heaping honour precisely on those who are actively engaged in oppressing and persecuting the small community of believers."[287] Laws comments, "Rich and poor alike may come as visitors to a Christian meeting, but what sort of potential members are they? The readers have little cause to be optimistic about the prospects of the rich man, but they are well aware of God's promise to the poor. To give an enthusiastic welcome to the former and effectively to insult the latter is ridiculous."[288] Martin adds simply, "In this regard the actions of the church have reached the nadir of absurdity."[289]

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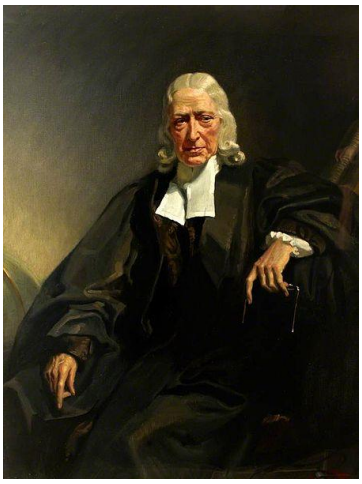
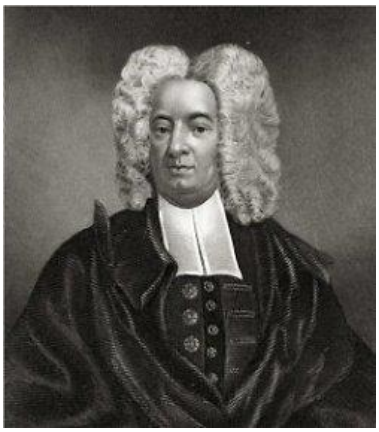
[286] Laws; 102.
[287] Moo; 92.
[288] Laws; 107.
[289] Martin; 66.

Pausing here in the middle of James' treatment of the issue of Poverty and Wealth – leaving his more emphatic statements in 4:13-16 and 5:1-6 for the next lesson – we can see how uneasily wealth sits upon both the conscience and behavior of the church. Wealth is not in and of itself sinful, but it can cause all sorts of problems in the church. John Wesley arrives at an amazing bipolar conclusion with regard to the phenomenon he was witnessing among the Methodists of his day, the same phenomenon we spoke of earlier in 17th Century Holland – that piety brought prosperity. Weber quotes Wesley at length, "I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches. How then it is possible that Methodism, that is, a religion of the heart, though it flourishes now as a green bay tree, should continue in this state? For the Methodists in every place grow diligent and frugal; consequently they increase in goods. Hence they proportionately increase in pride, in anger, in the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life. So, although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away. Is there no way to prevent this – this continual decay of pure religion? We ought not to prevent people from being diligent and frugal; we must exhort all Christians to gain all they can, and to save all they can; that is, in effect, to grow rich."[290] Cotton Mather put the whole matter more succinctly: "Religion begat Prosperity, and the Daughter consumed the Mother."



John Wesley (1703-91)



Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

[290] Quoted by Weber; 175.

Week 10: ***Homo Economicus***
Text Reading: James 4:13-16; 5:1-6

"Asceticism looked upon the pursuit of wealth as an end in itself
as highly reprehensible;
but the attainment of it as a fruit of labor in a calling
was a sign of God's blessing."
(Max Weber)

The 'Great Recession' of 2008 brought into the forefront a whole slew of 'problems' with capitalism, not least of which is greed. The recession itself followed years of sub-prime mortgage lending, bundled junk bond mortgage packaging, and falsified corporate financial statements that hid deep, systemic problems within large multi-national corporations. It was the era of the Enron debacle; it was the era of the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme. The whole mess appeared to many economists as not only tragic, but ironic, "that just when the world has given up on communism, it has become clear that capitalism in its current form, based on theories of pure rationality, is also in trouble."[291] In 2002, after the Enron failure, then-Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, apparently exhibited an unusual degree of emotion for him, slapping a table and exclaiming, "there's been too much gaming of the system. Capitalism is not working! There's been a corrupting of the system of capitalism."[292] One wonders when the system was ever pure.


Alan Greenspan (*b.* 1926)

Recessions are cyclical - though the one in 2008 was especially bad – and whenever the market turns down there is hand-wringing and moaning about how a 'few bad apples' are making things worse for everyone, as if the majority of bankers, venture capitalists, stock brokers, etc. are morally pure as the driven snow. In reality, the whole field is corrupt because Man is corrupt. "One study found that graduate business

[291] Friedman, Hershey H. and William D. Adler "Moral Capitalism: A Biblical Perspective *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, October, 2011, Vol. 70, No. 4; 1014.
[292] *Ibid.*; 1015.

students are most likely to cheat; 56 percent of them admitted to cheating."[293] Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the evident failure of communism, many have tried to find the 'kinder and gentler' side of capitalism, to argue that the basic motivation behind capitalism can be, at least, altruistic. Pope Benedict XVI gave it a try, in his encyclical 'Charity in Truth,' (*Caritas in Veritate*) in 2009. Benedict calls for 'greater social responsibility' from business leaders, noting that government oversight has proven insufficient to control, let alone reverse, the destructive tendencies of unfettered corporate greed. He writes, "In the list of areas where the pernicious effects of sin are evident, the economy has been included for some time now. We have a clear proof of this at the present time. The conviction that man is self-sufficient and can successfully eliminate the evil present in history by his own action alone has led him to confuse happiness and salvation with immanent forms of material prosperity and social action. Then, the conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from "influences" of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way. In the long term, these convictions have led to economic, social and political systems that trample upon personal and social freedom, and are therefore unable to deliver the justice that they promise."[294] However, the financial powers-that-be have rarely taken their cue from the Vatican.

Benedict XVI (1927-2022)

Can capitalism be moral? Economics professors Hershey Friedman and William Adler believe that it can be, and that the Old Testament is especially useful in directing the path forward. Their article, "Moral Capitalism: A Biblical Perspective," offers a summary of what the authors believe are biblical insights from the Old Testament (not the 'Old' Testament to them as they are both Jewish) and the Talmud. The article begins,

[293] *Ibid*.; 1015-16. If 56% *admit* to cheating, one can reasonably surmise that a greater percentage actually do cheat.
[294] Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), 3.35; Caritas in veritate (June 29, 2009) | BENEDICT XVI (vatican.va) Accessed 04April2023.

"We argue that laissez-faire capitalism in its current form is unsustainable, and that if it is to survive, we need to develop a new moral capitalism. An unexplored source on the subject that may provide insight into current difficulties is the Hebrew Bible."[295] The authors go on to note the evident *economic* thrust of the Scriptures, especially the Pentateuch, "The Hebrew Bible is replete with precepts that deal with business ethics and can therefore be used as a starting point for those interested in developing a more moral capitalistic system. Considerably more than 100 of the 613 precepts in the Pentateuch deal with economic life and business."[296] Friedman and Adler offer four principles that they believe flow out of the Old Testament and will help guide modern capitalists toward a more 'sustainable,' moral capitalism.

> **Principle One:** ***Material Wealth, Not Greed*** **–** Noting that the Bible is by no means negative toward wealth, the authors point out that it is the *use* of wealth, as indicative of the *heart* of the wealthy man, that matters. "The Bible recognizes that there will be poor as well as wealthy individuals. What matters is how the wealth is used and whether or not one is grateful to God for it. Wealth, peace, and/or long life should be seen as rewards from God for obeying His laws."[297] The authors then try to parse the human mind and heart, distinguishing *greed* from *acquisitiveness*, condemning the former but accepting the latter as integral to Man's created nature: "greed is always bad. The acquisitive motive implanted in us at Creation is not bad; it represents a divine, providential motive for work and expenditure of energy for our own good."[298]
>
> **Principle Two:** ***Industriousness*** **–** Similar to Weber's analysis, Friedman and Adler note that hard work is part and parcel of Man's created design. "According to the Bible, working hard is an integral component of a moral life."[299] Drawing on the fact and meaning of the Sabbath as a day of rest, imitating the Creator Himself who rested from the six days of Creation labor, the authors quote passages like Psalm 128:2, *"When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you."*
>
> **Principle Three:** ***Social Responsibility*** **–** Here the authors echo the Pope's encyclical, noting the social nature of all human activity, "The Bible demands that our entire economic system be built on a foundation of social responsibility."[300] The divine analysis

[295] Friedman & Adler; 1014.
[296] *Ibid.*; 1016.
[297] *Ibid.*; 1017.
[298] *Ibid.*; 1018.
[299] *Ibid.*; 1019.
[300] *Ibid.*; 1020.

of a business man's life will have nothing to do with his balance sheet, and everything to do with the use to which he put his wealth. Quoting the Babylonian Talmud, the author's note, "The Talmudic sages thought business ethics were so important that they say the first question an individual is asked in the next world at the final judgment is, 'were you honest in your business dealings?'"[301]

Principle Four: ***Human Dignity*** **–** Unusual for an article in an industry trade journal, "Moral Capitalism" addresses the need for Man to be holy. Betraying both their liberal Judaism and their modern business lingo, Friedman and Adler write, "Another core value of the Bible is the idea of being holy, which is closely tied to the concept of social responsibility and spirituality."[302] In their analysis, the ultimate outcome of moral holiness will be a respect and defense of human dignity against the forces of immoral, greed-driven capitalism. "Predatory capitalism that is focused on maximizing profit and exploiting labor robs individuals of their dignity; moral capitalism should enhance it. Economic freedom and democracy are necessary but not sufficient conditions to help ensure human dignity."[303]

Friedman and Adler do not offer specifics on how such a 'moral capitalism' might be implemented in the world. They do not advocate legislative action to create a moral regulatory field in which businesses would be required to follow the four principles outlined in their article. Indeed, "Moral Capitalism" is not very different from *Caritas in Veritate*, an appeal to the businessman (or woman, of course) to set his own house in order. Admitting that it is unlikely that 'ordinary people' (whatever that term might mean) will adopt the uniformly selfless though aggressively businesslike attitude advocated by their principles, the authors conclude, "Nevertheless, a moral capitalism that encourages creativity and profit without losing sight of the importance of helping others is certainly achievable. A simple rule of business ethics can be derived from the sage Hillel's philosophy in *Ethics of the Fathers*: 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I only care for myself, what am I?'"[304]

[301] *Ibid.*; 1021.
[302] *Ibid.*; 1025.
[303] *Idem*.
[304] *Ibid.*; 1026.

So much of the 'corrective' literature concerning out-of-control capitalism is just so much wishful thinking. Man being what man is – *fallen* – will at all times prevent any such utopian conduct in the economic realm. Because of this, and throughout the history of the Church, there have been advocates of voluntary poverty as well as socialism (aka *enforced* poverty). Taking from the rich and giving to the poor, income and wealth redistribution through the tax code, and outright communism have all been touted as solutions to the evil inequity of life that capitalism inevitably brings. Of course, every attempt to force economic equality has had the effect of destroying incentive, encouraging graft and corruption, and enriching only those who have the power to enforce the leveling. The conclusion of the matter appears to be that believer must recognize (1) that the market economy is the most effective and efficient way to fulfill the Creation Mandate to "*subdue the earth,*" and (2) that the corrupt nature of the fallen human heart will result not only in an unequal, but also an unjust, distribution of wealth in the world. James progresses in his treatment of the rich in a more and more negative vein as we read through Chapters 4 and 5, though it is important to note that he nowhere condemns wealth in and of itself. Benedict XVI and Friedman & Adler hold out empty hope that mankind will change from greed to compassion on the basis of an encyclical here and an economics article there. James has greater expectations, and well-founded, for those who are born again by the Spirit of God.

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"; 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.
(4:13-14)

Presumption is the sin addressed in these verses, the presumption of the merchant who lays out both his travel schedule and his profit margin for the coming year. These merchants are not chastised for being merchants, but for presuming on the future, infallible knowledge of which belongs solely to the Lord. "The problem James has with such an attitude does not stem from the fact that these business people are following a 'secular' vocation, since he would not refuse approbation to those who work in the

everyday world. What galls our author is that such an attitude reflects a proud complacency that suggests a 'this-worldly planning' and a blatant desire to become rich. In other words, James was chastising the merchants because their lifestyle and their thinking had become secular. To approach the Christian vocation in this way was to walk in friendship with the world, an association already reprobated."[305] Adamson refers to the merchant's attitude as 'calculated arrogance,' writing, "They would go where they liked, and for as long as they liked. Their resolve, together with the refusal to reckon with death, has a modern ring."[306]

We may assume, on the basis of the subsequent verses, that those to whom this chastisement is addressed are at least professing believers; they are, at any rate, within the community of the *diaspora*. In other words, James is not issuing a rhetorical diatribe against the arrogant rich of the world. Rather he is addressing, as he has been all along, the community of faith, the 'synagogue,' as it were. "So it is likely that there are at least a handful of relatively prosperous Christians in James's communities to whom these verses are addressed. Their attitudes, however, do not fit their ultimate commitments, as they live out a 'practical atheism.'"[307] Indeed, the attitude of the merchants concerning their economic planning lacks even the wisdom possessed by an unbeliever, who is yet aware of the transient nature of human life. For the believer, especially a *Jewish* believer, to be so cavalier regarding 'tomorrow' is the exact opposite of wisdom. "'Tomorrow' includes all that was planned by the merchants, but such planning is the 'height of foolishness' because they have overlooked a fundamental factor to be considered, namely, the transitory nature and the brevity of life."[308]

Does James therefore condemn planning altogether? Does he oppose the 'rationalization' of economic activity that is so central to a capitalist economy and to economic success? Socialist and Liberation theologians have interpreted James this way, but that can only be done by ignoring the latter part of the pericope. Mercantile planning

[305] Martin; 165.
[306] Adamson; 179.
[307] Blomberg; 156.
[308] Martin; 165-66.

is not under condemnation here; arrogance and presumption are. Martin notes, "Rather the question is, how does one approach life in the light of not knowing the outcome? The incorrect, i.e., foolish, way is to assume that all will transpire as planned."[309] Again, this is a wisdom that even the world possesses, which is why insurance policies were developed. What differentiates the believer from the worldling is that the former knows personally the One who holds the future in His hand; the latter is exposed, as far as he can tell, to blind fate. "To live in the recognition that God – not the human being – is in control is to choose a Christian life of humility before God; to live as though we ourselves – not God – have the final say is to adopt a proud and haughty attitude."[310]

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. **(4:15-16)**

"Lord Willing" or *Deo Volente* – the D.V. in many old Christian writings – has become somewhat of a postscript to many believers' statement of intent in any matter. "We will see you next week, Lord willing" can be a humble acknowledgement of what James is saying in these verses: we really do not know if we will be alive or not, next week or, as James limits us, even *tomorrow*. Certainly this phrase can become as rote and meaningless as saying 'in Jesus' Name' at the end of every prayer, though this is no reason not to say either phrase. Martin comments, "The verbalization of a catchphrase like 'If the Lord wills' is not the intent here. Just as with any Christian teaching, this phrase can become no more than a vain, thoughtless repetition, a kind of fetish. What James is urging here is a conviction (worked out in a congruent lifestyle) that leads one to acknowledge that indeed God is in control of life's decisions."[311] Calvin both approves the phrase and refrains from requiring it, "It is indeed right and proper, when we promise anything as to future time, to accustom ourselves to such words as these, 'If it shall please the Lord,' 'If the Lord will permit.' But no scruple ought to be entertained, as though it were a sin

[309] *Ibid.*; 166.
[310] *Idem.*
[311] *Ibid.*; 167.

to omit them."[312] The crux of the matter is that the believer ought at all times to contemplate the uncertainty of all our plans, the transience of our life, and the fact that the days of our existence here on this earth are already enumerated by our Creator, as the psalmist so eloquently informs us.

> *Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written,*
> *The days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.* (Psalm 139:16)

In a similar vein is the admonition from the only psalm written by Moses, Psalm 90,

> *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.*
> *Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.*
> *So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*
>
> (Psalm 90:10-12)

This last reference is particularly germane, as Moses equates the numbering our days with a heart of wisdom. Of course, Moses is not expecting that anyone can compute the number of his or her days. Rather it is the recognition that the days of our life *are numbered* that constitutes the heart of wisdom, and this must preclude any such presumption and arrogance as exhibited by the careless merchant in verse 13. Thus again it is not the pursuit of profit (though their arrogance probably means the profit motive is far out of balance) that is condemned here, nor the mercantile economy that these businessmen pursue as their livelihood, nor even the practice of economic planning. They are permitted, says James, to "*do this or that,*" presumably traveling, buying & selling, and even making a profit, so long as their hearts are in humble submission to the providence of God in all things. Thus Laws correctly notes, "The merchants are not attacked for their pursuit of gain, nor for the wealth they already possess (which, if they are 'international men' suggested, would be considerable). It is not because they travel to *trade and profit*

[312] Calvin; 340.

that they are in the wrong…but because they plan to do so without reference to God."[313] Thomas More Garrett adds, "James rejects this 'blithe self-confidence with which businessmen make their complex plans and count anticipated profits, as though times and places and events were subject to their calculations."[314]

Such arrogant boasting against providence would be wrong in any of life's pursuits, but manifests itself most often and most openly in the pursuit of wealth. James' approach echoes the many admonitions of Jesus Himself concerning the dichotomy between God and Mammon, and the vanity of a life spent pursuing riches without regard to God. "Love of the world, rather than of God, leads to mistrust in divine providence – and hence a belief in the need for economic activities to solve the problem of material need."[315] Each of the Synoptic writers records Jesus' rhetorical question, "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?*"[316] Matthew Henry concludes,

> If we rejoice in God that our times are in his hand, that all events are at his disposal, and that he is our God in covenant, this rejoicing is good; the wisdom, power, and providence of God, are then concerned to make all things work together for our good: but, if we rejoice in our own vain confidences and presumptuous boasts, this is evil; it is an evil carefully to be avoided by all wise and good men.[317]

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. 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. **(5:1-3)**

It is evident from this section that some, at least, among the rich addressed by James in previous passages have not and will not heed the warning. Some, it seems, were already beyond hope, their business practices having gone before them to the Judgment. This is not to say that repentance was impossible, but perhaps to say that those whom

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[313] Laws; 193.
[314] Garrett, Thomas More, OP "The Message to the Merchants in James 4:13-17 and Its Relevance for Today" *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10.2 (2016); 299.
[315] Gotsis & Drakopoulou; 30.
[316] Luke 9:25, *cf.* Matthew 16:26 and Mark 8:36
[317] Henry; 800.

James addresses in this passage have sunk so deep into greed and avarice that they might well despair of recovery. The allusion here is quite clearly to the words of Jesus concerning 'treasures in heaven,'

> *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)

James is in full-on prophetic mode here, and uses the perfect tense of the verbs to indicate the assurance of the situation he calls out: *your riches* ***are corrupted****, your garments* ***are moth-eaten****, your gold and silver* ***are corroded***. "The use of the three verbs in the perfect tense can be interpreted as a 'prophetic anticipation' rather than something that has already happened. To the prophet's eye the reality is as good as though it had already happened."[318] This image of the corruption of worldly emblems of wealth need not be taken literally – that gold will corrode – but speaks rather of the utter worthlessness of such materials both in comparison to God ('treasures above') and as defense in the day of judgment. James has already warned the rich man in Chapter 1 concerning the fact that his life is but a vapor, a reality mentioned again in Chapter 4 just discussed. Here he addresses the symbols of wealth themselves, and speaks of them in exact opposite terms to the aspect they present to the worldling, so bewitched by their luster. Shiny gold and silver lie corroded; luxurious and colorful garments are full of holes – each a graphic image of the true nature of material wealth. Another prophet, Ezekiel, speaks to the same effect. The day of reckoning has come upon Israel (Ezek. 7:10), and the rich will find that their wealth will bring them neither succor nor defense; indeed, they will come to know that these very props of a comfortable worldly life were the instruments of their downfall.

> *They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be like refuse;*
> *Their silver and their gold will not be able to deliver them*
> *In the day of the wrath of the LORD;*

[318] Martin; 177.

They will not satisfy their souls, nor fill their stomachs,
Because it became their stumbling block of iniquity. (Ezekiel 7:19)

James' comment in verse 3 is somewhat odd, perhaps ironic: *you have heaped up treasure in the last days.* Having just proclaimed both the worthlessness and the positive evil of their worldly possessions, what does he mean by 'treasure' here? The irony that James seems to apply here is that what these godless rich men should anticipate is not an eternity of ease but of utter misery. "The treasure in mind is not their vaunted riches but the misery that awaits them. While they think that the wealth accumulated is held as a perpetual possession, they are vulnerable to severe judgment because not only is such wealth temporary, but it is the witness whose testimony condemns the rich."[319] The ungodly and uncaring rich man looks forward to an afterlife in which the wealth and comforts he accumulated during his life will stand as constant witness against him, tormenting him in hell because of their impotence now to save, and the constant reminder of what good use he might have put that wealth to in life. One thinks of Jacob Marley's exclamation when his former business partner, Ebenezer Scrooge, comments that Marley was a good man of business, "Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"[320] Of course, James' warning is no fiction, nor probably is the biblical example of the plight of the godless rich,


Frank Finlay as Jacob Marley

There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he

[319] Martin; 178.
[320] Dickens, Charles *A Christmas Carol* (Toronto: Dover Publications; 1991); 14.

lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'
(Luke 16:19-26)

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. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your heart as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you. **(5:4-6)**

Again, it is not wealth *per se* that is condemned by James or by the rest of Scripture. It is the illegitimate pursuit (4:13-16) or use (5:4-6) of wealth that brings condemnation. Both demonstrate a hardness of heart toward God: the arrogant and presumptuous pursuit of wealth discussed in Chapter 4 speaks to the carelessness of the rich man regarding both his own future and the One who controls it. The oppressive manner by which such wealth is often accumulated (here in Chapter 5) speaks to the hardness of the rich man's heart both toward God and toward those who are especially the object of the divine compassion. The situation is even worse than simply a lack of compassion toward the needy (which alone is sufficient to disprove any claim to 'true religion,' *cp.* 1:27), here we read of those who earned wages through labor being denied pay, and thereby being thrust into starvation. The mowers and the reapers, most likely day laborers (*cp*. Parable of the Vineyard Workers, Matt. 20), were refused payment at the end of the day, meaning they would not be able to feed themselves or their families. The motive here is not that the work was substandard; rather it is the greed and avarice (the exact opposite of the landowner in the parable) of the landlord, to accumulate all possible profit or reduction of costs to himself. "The two 'cries' unmistakably condemn the rich, for the cry of the unpaid wage is a reminder that the wealthy people hoard their goods and so receive to themselves not only what could be given to the poor but what is actually due the poor."[321]

[321] Martin; 179.

Withholding the laborer's wage is in direct contradiction to the Holiness Code of Leviticus 19, the precepts of which are consistently echoed in James' letter. *"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."*[322]

All too often in this world economic gain for one means economic loss for many. "In a zero-sum, limited good economy, the wealthy can only become and remain so by exploitation of the poor, through abusing power relations, misuse of the legal system, and withholding wages. Increasing levels of poverty are the result of such activities."[323] In the modern, Western economy there is a greater 'amount' of wealth, at least on paper, and therefore the income of the lowest levels of society is lifted relative to the highest levels, and certainly relative to the impoverished Third World. In addition, federal and state legislation exists in all modern economies protecting the laborer and setting minimum wages. Day-labor is far less a feature of the modern, capitalist economies as most employees are registered under non-exempt or exempt wage structures. Labor now has legal recourse against the withholding of wages. One may argue with good foundation that these improvements in the economic life of the labor class are themselves the result of Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity. But legislation cannot eradicate greed and avarice, and the wealthy still scheme and connive to retain the maximum amount of wealth in their own accounts. Indeed, even with the relative rise of low-income wealth, the gap between the wealthiest and those who work in their factories or warehouses has also steadily increased.

James' final word to the rich is both harsh and graphic. He speaks of *'a day of slaughter'* and of the godless and oppressive rich as fattening themselves for that day. "The wealth of the rich becomes like a wasting disease. In a sense, they have 'fattened themselves up,' but not for the end they desire. They are fattened for 'the slaughter,' the time when God will enact the Day of Judgment."[324] The fact that laborers in the modern,

[322] Leviticus 19:13
[323] Gotsis & Drakopoulou; 30.
[324] Martin; 180.

Western economy now have legal recourse that their ancient forebears did not, does not change the underlying issue that James touches upon in this passage. The business owner who refuses to pay a proper wage for the work he demands, or refuses to pay his suppliers for materials delivered and used, or delays payment of either or both in order to squeeze a little more interest income on his payroll capital, is of the same cloth as those condemned by James in this passage. Sin is not merely a matter of action; it is supremely a matter of heart. Again, we have the wonderful example of Boaz, a wealthy man who followed the precepts of God's Law, especially the Holiness Code, in the management of his estates and the treatment of both his employees and the community's poor. His compassion to Ruth was merely an extension of his usual practice of leaving the gleanings of his field for the poor.

> *Then Boaz said to Ruth, "You will listen, my daughter, will you not? Do not go to glean in another field, nor go from here, but stay close by my young women. Let your eyes be on the field which they reap, and go after them. Have I not commanded the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn."*
>
> (Ruth 2:8-9)

Boaz stands as an example that God does not forbid nor condemn wealth, but rather requires that with the wealth that He gives, comes the challenge to walk as His friend and not that of the world. To continue to trust in God when one is wealthy is far more difficult than to trust in God when one is destitute. According to James, as we will continue to see, the way in which the rich man can maintain his dependence on God is to use his wealth to alleviate the suffering of the destitute. Such a man was Boaz; such a man also was Job.

> *If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together;*
> *If I have eaten its fruit without money, or caused its owners to lose their lives;*
> *Then let thistles grow instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley.* (Job 31:38-40)

Those who mistreat, rob, or otherwise oppress their workers are as those who murder them, verse 6, for the laborers are defenseless against the power of the wealthy

landowner. This may be hyperbole, especially in today's economy with its legal protection of the wage earner, but if so it is of the same sort as Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred is tantamount to murder. Again, we must not look merely upon the act but upon the heart that motivates the act (even if the act is not committed). God is the defender of the defenseless, and the rich man is too often the oppressor of the same. "The poor do not resist because they *cannot*. They are helpless. If they cannot even hold their own when it comes to securing the wages due to them, then it should come as no surprise that they are victims to the point of having their blood shed."[325]

In these passages in James 4 and 5, we see contrasted worldly versus divine and peaceable wisdom. The merchant who plans out his year of buying and selling and making profit, apart from the firm recognition that his life is in the hand of God, is betraying a wisdom that is from below, *earthly, soulish, demonic*. The landowner who withholds wages from his workers in order to further maximize his profits operates in the same, worldly and demonic manner. "Whilst travelling merchants have been criticized for the worldly orientation of their economic planning, wealthy landowners are strictly condemned for their explicit greed, and their complete indifference toward social justice."[326] This dichotomy between worldly wisdom, so-called, and that wisdom that is from above persists in our world today in spite of the massive changes in economic systems. The pursuit of wealth, the love of money, is still the root of all sorts of evil, and the judgment coming upon the rich man will still center on the use of his wealth rather than the possession of it. The modern view in the capitalist West would not sit well with James, including the view of most modern Christians. "Whilst classical and modern economists are at ease with the individual pursuit of economic self-interest – indeed, this view of *homo economicus* is a foundation stone of economic theory – such a stance would have been anathema to many ancient writers, James included."[327]

[325] Martin; 181.
[326] Gotsis & Drakopoulou; 23.
[327] *Ibid.*; 24.

Garrett references one of the most influential modern, capitalist economists – Milton Friedman – from the latter's seminal book *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), advocating the basic principle that 'the business of business is business.' This is, of course, the rubric by which Jacob Marley governed his life, to his own destruction. Friedman writes, "there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engage in open and free competition without deception or fraud."[328] Friedman has no concept of the sin nature, nor of the history of business in which very, very few have 'stayed within the rules of the game.' His view is the epitome of worldly wisdom, separating 'business' from moral and social responsibility beyond that of merely maximizing profit. It is apparent that Friedman never read *A Christmas Carol*; nor, is it likely, had he ever read the Book of James. "James' message insists that 'all of life's activities have an ethical component,' and that friendship with God implies that one seek to incorporate faith into all of one's plans…Friendship with God encompasses the totality of one's life."[329]

Milton Friedman (1912-2006)

[328] Quoted by Garrett; 299-300.
[329] *Ibid.*; 305.

Week 11: A World of Wickedness: The Tongue
Text Reading: James 1:19-20, 26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9, 12

"Man can bridle and break a horse,
but he cannot reduce the tongue to discipline."
(James Adamson)

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Really? Has this ever been so? Broken bones heal, and rarely have any lasting effects on one's health or mobility. Words, on the other hand, are forever, and the pain they cause is often incurable. Words are, so to speak, immortal. And they will be judged by the Lord, who warns, "*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.*"[330] Indeed, even as children when we would quote the phrase, we felt the deep sting of the words just spoken against us, trying to salve the hurt with an empty phrase. It would have been better to have been physically struck, rather than pummeled with hurtful words. "Wounds caused by sticks and stones heal; the wounds caused by words sometimes never heal."[331]

We can be assured that the author of the phrase was not James, who sees the tongue for what it is in the mouth of fallen man, *"a world of wickedness…set on fire by hell itself"* (3:6). Again fitting in with biblical Wisdom literature, James weaves the thread of the negative force that is the human tongue through the fabric of his entire letter. He paints the picture in emphatic colors, drawing from familiar modes of transportation in his day – the horse and the ship – as well as the multitude of domesticated animals, in order to show just how unruly and dangerous the tongue is. "Bit and rudder are useful inventions; the tongue is by nature pregnant with evil."[332] Calvin eloquently writes in summary of James' diagnosis, "A slender portion of flesh contains in it the whole world of iniquity."[333] Proverbs is replete with warnings concerning the tongue.

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[330] Matthew 12:36-37
[331] Moo; 126.
[332] Adamson; 143.
[333] Calvin; 320.

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

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise promotes health. (Proverbs 12:18)

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly,
But the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. (Proverbs 15:1-2)

A fool has no delight in understanding,
But in expressing his own heart. (Proverbs 18:2)

The difference between James and these proverbs is that James finds little positive to say about the tongue whereas the writer of some of the proverbs notes the healing effects of the tongue of the wise man. It may be that James has not encountered many wise men, at least not among the *diaspora* community to which he is writing. His assessment is more general, and broadly more accurate, than that of the proverbs, bringing James closer to Paul's assessment of human nature,

Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit;
The poison of asps is under their lips. (Romans 3:13)

The key passage in James concerning the tongue is 3:1-12, which will be the primary focus passage in this lesson. In this pericope James expands on the brief notice regarding the tongue in verses 20 and 26 of Chapter 1, and anticipates two particular examples of the negative use of the tongue within the Christian community in 4:11-12 and 5:9. Finally, he speaks of the swearing of oaths in 5:12, perhaps the most dangerous use of the tongue in that it incorporates a pledge before God. These shorter passages, both before and after Chapter 3, are predicated on what James has to say in 3:1-12, which itself constitutes perhaps the most expansive anthropological diagnosis of the fallen human tongue in any ancient literature. "James's imagery is severe and exaggerated to be sure –

the better to impress upon the reader the dangerous potential of uncontrolled speech."[334] James in in good company in the ancient world, both biblical and pagan, as the notoriety of speech and the damage possible from an uncontrolled tongue, was well known to the ancient philosophers as well as the biblical sages.

A brief statement should be made concerning the central passage from Chapter 3, as to whom it is addressed. The opening verse emphasizes the 'teacher'; James warns against uncontrolled and ill-considered ambition to occupy this position within the congregation: "*Let not many of you become teachers, brethren…"* He includes himself in the number, using the first person plural throughout the passage. Thus his comments regarding the higher responsibility – and the greater judgment – of the teacher are general in nature, though the problem of having both too many and unqualified (intellectually as well as in character) teachers may have been a present problem among the *diaspora* communities. The syntax of the verse does seem to command a reduction of the number of teachers rather than attempting to prevent that number from growing too fast and too high. This emphasis on the 'teacher,' however, has led many commentators to view the entire pericope as pertaining to those whose office it was to teach the congregation. Hansie Wolmarans, Greek and Latin professor at the University of South Africa, centers his entire analysis of the passage (3:1-12) on the role and responsibility of the teacher.

> The situation presupposed by this passage is a community torn apart by strife and dissension (3:14, 16; 4:1) because of too many people vying for the office of teacher…Prospective teachers, in an attempt to acquire a following, probably entered into bitter debates with one another (similar to those between Jesus and the Pharisees and the Sadducees, as described, for example, in Luke 20:27-40). Opponents were cursed (3:9), similar to the curses uttered by Paul against the so-called Judaists of Philippi (Phlp 3:2) and Galatia (Gl 1:8,9). James contends that only people in control of their tongues are qualified to teach.[335]

[334] Krodel; 37.
[335] Wolmarans, J. L. P. "The Tongue Guiding the Body: The Anthropological Presuppositions of James 3:1-12" *Neotestamentica*, 1992, Vol. 26, No. 2; 524.

James Adamson takes a similar approach in his reading of the passage, "In the Jewish Diaspora congregations there was an order of 'teachers,' which this passage suggests was in danger of being overrun by unworthy members and candidates."[336] Martin focuses on the impact of an unrighteous, loose-lipped teacher upon the congregation, "A ship in the hands of a pilot who is undisciplined is liable to shipwreck. Likewise the congregation that is steered by one who cannot control the tongue is doomed to catastrophe."[337] The problem with this exegetical approach, besides assigning too much weight to one verse, it to direct the reader away from the general nature and danger of the human tongue and toward a particular application of that danger. For instance, Adamson goes on to discuss in detail not found in the passage itself, two 'types' of negative candidates and occupants of the office of 'teacher,'

> We must distinguish the two sets of unfit candidates – here as always – in James' circle: first, the sincere who nevertheless are not likely to be able to approach the high standards required of the teacher; and second, the insincere who are pretenders not fit to be counted as Christians, much less teachers. Milton castigates these pretenders as 'blind mouths' in his famous poem *Lycidas*.[338]

True as this comment may be, it is an example of *eisegesis* and not *exegesis* – Adamson is reading into the text things that the passage itself does not say. The passages is about the *tongue*, not about *teachers*, though these are certainly the men who make most use of their tongues and therefore are most prone to verbal sin. Laws is correct in seeing a broader application of the whole passage than just to the class of 'teachers.' "The first verse should not however be treated as a separate saying, but seen as introducing the general topic by reference to a particular instance. Teachers being men of words *par excellence* are particularly exposed to the danger of sins of speech."[339]

It should be evident as one reads through the passage, James 3:1-12, that the language addresses the *brethren* generally, and indicts all under the charge of committing

[336] Adamson; 140.
[337] Martin; 112.
[338] Adamson; 140.
[339] Laws; 140

sin with the tongue. Moo concludes, "Since James continues to include himself in his strictures (*'we*, all make many mistakes') he may also be continuing to think specifically of teachers in this verse [*i.e.,* 3:2]. Bu the rest of the passage makes no reference to teachers, and James' warning about the tongue certainly has general application. Probably, then, James intends to include *all* his readers in the first person plural of verse 2."[340] Therefore, even though what James has to say in this pericope applies critically in the case of those who would be, or are, teachers, those who are not cannot use this emphasis on teachers as license to give free rein to their tongues.

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **(1:19-20)**

As noted in an earlier lesson, this passage focuses primarily on the wrath of man and the damage that can be done if human anger burns without control and without cause.[341] The consideration of speech in this pericope is secondary, as hasty speech is generally accompanied by harsh or even wicked speech. James' exhortation to be *slow to speak* is to be viewed, not under the rubric of the tongue as the font of all evil (3:1-12) but rather as the vent to uncontrolled and rash anger. James, in Chapter 1, is slowly accelerating his emphasis on the need of every believer for wisdom and, early on, he simply adopts the timeless wisdom that a closed mouth is unlikely to commit a sin of speech. This is as Proverbs 10:19, quoted above, says. Indeed, James will go on in the same section to link the tongue – his first mention of that member of our body – to the validation, or rather *in*validation, of true religion.

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. **(1:26)**

This verse was also dealt with earlier in the context of the contrast in James between worldliness and true religion, enmity versus friendship with God.[342] He does mention the tongue here for the first time, and his application of it – *if anyone among you*

[340] Moo; 121
[341] See Week 7 above.
[342] See Week 5 above.

– helps to confirm our conclusion that the more emphatic diatribe in 3:1-12 must be applied generally to the congregation and not be limited to a single class, 'teachers.' This verse in Chapter 1 echoes the Lord's own words, that "*out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks,*"[343] and thus shows that a complete lack of control of the tongue is a sure invalidation of one's profession of faith. This does not mean that a person who is able to keep hold of his tongue, perhaps by temperament or by sheer dominance of the will, is a true believer. Nor does it mean that a true believer will never speak unkindly, rashly, or even wickedly. Rather it is to say that the validity of one's profession of faith cannot be seen by others until the mouth does open in speech, and the man who is consistently rash and harsh in his words invalidates, as far as his witness is concerned, his profession of faith. Only God knows the heart, but the mouth gives everyone else a pretty strong idea of what is there.

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. **(3:1)**

There is ample evidence that the 'rabbi' was a well-respected figure in Second Temple Judaism, both in Judea and within the *diaspora*. The term itself, which basically means 'teacher' or 'my teacher,' is one of tacit subservience – it is a title spoken to one of greater knowledge of Torah, and hence one who is closer to God. The Mishnah speaks of the honor owed to the teacher in *Aboth 4:12*, "Rabbi Eliezer b. Shammua said: 'Let the honour of thy disciple be as dear to thee as thine own and as the honour of thy companion, and the honour of thy companion as the fear of thy teacher, **and the fear of thy teacher as the fear of Heaven**.'"[344] Many false teachers had arisen in the Church at a very early date, due perhaps (and probably) to the honor that was given that role, an honor that usually included financial remuneration.[345] Other New Testament writers took on the same task of admonishing teachers, and condemning those who were false, as Paul does in his letter to Timothy,

[343] Matthew 12:34
[344] Mishnah, *Aboth* 1:12, emphasis added.
[345] *Cp.* I Timothy 5:17

> *If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.* (I Timothy 6:3-5)

The multitude of teachers in the church is something that Paul predicts, blaming it largely on the congregations themselves, who accumulate teachers – *heap up*, as he puts it - who will tell them what they want to hear.

> *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.* (II Timothy 4:3-4)

Thus we see that the number of teachers in any congregation was liable to grow uncontrollably, as more and more men sought the honor and the compensation that accompanied the teaching office. Added to this was the desire of the members of the congregation to have teachers *after their own hearts*, as it were, becoming 'of Paul' and 'of Apollos' like the congregation at Corinth. This could, and usually did, lead to competition among those teachers as each vied for the greater share of the congregational honor (and, one assumes, of the congregational monies). "This is no doubt a perennial temptation in a community where teaching and hence the teacher is given an important place, enough for it to be the object of ambition."[346]

The teaching occupation, both in the church and in society at large, has lost much of its luster in the modern world – the pay in most cases is hardly an inducement to ambition, and the respect once accorded to teachers has been replaced by 'independent knowledge' that everyone seems to possess now. In the church, sadly, the role of the pastoral staff has become more administrative than didactic, and most professing Christians consider themselves sufficiently knowledgeable without the assistance of a 'teacher.' Certainly, the situation Paul predicts in II Timothy 4 has prevailed in large segments of professing Christianity, as people continue to attend the teaching of this or

[346] Laws; 141.

that church only so long as the teachers say what they want them to say. It may be that James' admonition here is no longer needed, or at least not as critical in our day as it was in his. But it might also be the case that it was the failure to heed James' warning that led to underqualified and overly-ambitious teachers, leading consequently to the situation we have in the church today. One of the reasons members of a congregation will be successful in 'heaping up' teachers who tickle their ears is that there has always been a ready supply of men willing to do just that.

But it will be for them as Jesus said, "*To whom much is given, much is required.*" James gives his reason for cautioning against many teachers, *"for we will receive a stricter judgment."* He includes himself, as he is also a teacher. The unqualified teacher may enjoy the praise and the compensation, but he will not enjoy the judgment that is surely to come. "In this passage, then, the author deals with people wishing to put themselves forward as teachers because of the status and other rewards of the position…such a role means not simply honor and a following, but responsibility, for 'to whom much is given from him much is required.'"[347]

What sort of 'stricter judgment' is James speaking of here? The adjective is implied, as James actually only says that the teacher will receive a *'greater judgment'* (*meizon krima).* Douglas Moo has an odd take on the passage, basically denying the force of what James says. "Clearly, James cannot mean that Christian teachers will receive a more severe penalty than other Christians – few, indeed, would become teachers in that case!"[348] What is odd about this statement, apart from the fact that it dilutes James' word in an unwarranted fashion, is that *few teachers* is exactly what James is encouraging, and that *because of* the stricter judgment. There is no use downplaying the severity of James' statement, for the author of Hebrews says essentially the same thing concerning the 'leaders' of the congregation, a title that must surely apply to the 'teachers.' He writes, *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who*

[347] Peters; 136.
[348] Moo; 119.

must give account."[349] Rulers, of which group teachers have always been included, will 'give an account, ' which can only mean in the judgment. Paul informs us that all believers will appear before Christ Jesus in order to *'give an account,'* and it stands both to Scripture and to reason that the teacher will have the character and content of his teaching to 'account for.'

> *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.*
>
> (II Corinthians 5:10)

Indeed, the same Apostle even describes, though in figurative terms, the 'account' to be given by the teacher. Speaking of himself, and Apollos, and Cephas, and all other teachers in the church, Paul writes,

> *For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 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.*
>
> (I Corinthians 3:9-15)

Can anyone deny that, whatever else this may be, it describes the '*stricter*' or '*greater*' judgment that the teacher will receive? Interestingly, Moo himself seems to immediately retract his diminution of the intensity of James' words by saying, in the very same paragraph as quoted above, "Probably we should understand him to be saying that the importance of the teaching ministry renders it liable to a closer scrutiny and that failure to discharge the ministry faithfully will bring a correspondingly more severe penalty. Jesus warned that 'to whom much is given, of him will much be required.' Those

[349] Hebrews 13:17a

who have been given the teaching 'gift' bear an awesome responsibility for their exercise of that gift in nurturing people in the faith."[350]

There is no use trying to water down what James is saying: those who aspire to be teachers ought to look past the honor, look past the title of 'reverend' or 'rabbi,' even look past the financial compensation, and realize that at the end of the road there will be a *greater judgment* than other believers who are not teachers. It may be that James is being proactive here, trying to prevent unqualified and avaricious men from assuming the mantel of 'teacher,' or that the negative situation had already prevailed in the *diaspora* congregations. In either event, the warning is pertinent to those men. "The imperative is directed at the immediate situation in the church. If one is presently desirous of a teaching position then it is best that such a notion be seriously reconsidered. Or it may be a command for some to step down as teachers."[351]

But what is it that a teacher is to do? How can a man discharge the office without incurring the negative judgment described by Paul in I Corinthians 3:15? Laws points out that the message incumbent upon Christian teachers is nothing less than the content of the lives of those teachers, themselves Christians. "The teacher would, then, be responsible for passing on the various traditions accurately and thoroughly, for their legitimate re-interpretation and application, and hence to a large degree for the guidance of the community in many aspects of life (intellectual, spiritual and liturgical as well as moral). It is important that aspirants to that position should be fit for it."[352] This is a verbose way of reiterating what Paul exhorted Timothy, "*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*"[353] But again, James' main point is not what a teacher is supposed to teach, but with what instrument he does that teaching – the very dangerous implement of the tongue. Although he is probably wrong to limit the application of the passage to teachers, Adamson is surely correct in noting the emphasis of James' parenesis: "The main thought

[350] Moo; 119
[351] Martin; 107.
[352] Laws; 143-44.
[353] II Timothy 2:2

in vv. 1-12 is the greater responsibility of teachers and the extremely character of the instrument which they have to use."[354]

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. **(3:2)**

James continues to include himself in the picture: *we* all stumble in many things. In other words, we all stumble in various ways, though not all in the same ways. However, there is one way in which we *all* stumble – except for the 'perfect' man – and that is *in word* or, *with the tongue*. Martin comments, "Although not all sins laid to the account of one person are necessarily the same as those shared by others, all person have at least one sin in common, namely, the sin of the tongue."[355] The statement James makes is proverbial, a truism that governs the behavior of all fallen men, all imperfect men. The variety of their sins is multitudinous, but they share a common sin, that of speech, which happens to be James' primary topic in this section. Commenting on verse 2, Laws writes, "This clause forms the transition from the special case of the teacher to the general topic of the use (or abuse) of speech."[356] As the warning applies to teachers, it serves as a reiteration of the promised *greater* or *stricter judgment* that those who hold that office will experience. "The whole expression is not so much a humble confession as a proverbial observation which should warn the teacher to take care in the face of the coming judgment."[357] Still, it will become evident as James continues that the warning is by no means limited to teachers: all believers sin with their tongue, and such sin constitutes one of the gravest threats to the harmony and health of the believing community.

James' mention in verse 2 of a 'perfect' man is important to the understanding of the entire pericope. The word is a familiar one in the New Testament – *telios* – from the Greek word for 'end' or 'goal.' A 'perfect' man is one who has achieved the 'end' for which God made him, that is, holiness. This is the same term that Paul uses in Philippians

[354] Adamson; 141.
[355] Martin; 109.
[356] Laws; 144.
[357] Davids; 137.

3, where he speaks of not having attained 'perfection.' It is almost as if James views control of the tongue to be both the universal challenge and the final hurdle for the believer to attain that perfection or maturity that reflects complete conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. "By *perfect* he means the completeness and maturity that will mark us when God has fully wrought in us all that he intends for us in Christ – in a word, the holiness of those who see him and are like him."[358] Thus, as James proceeds to add metaphors that might confuse the reader if pressed too literally, we must remember that he continues to speak of the maturity of faith of which he writes in Chapter 1. The beginning of this wisdom is to take due notice of the dangerous influence of the tongue, and to pray as the psalmist,

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

Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. 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. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. **(3:3-5a)**

This seems a very simple set of metaphors, illustrative of the point James is making – that a small member of our body can cause great trouble. But Martin, having bound himself to the interpretation that James is addressing *teachers* only in this passage, manipulates the obvious sense of the metaphor so that the 'small member' is the teacher himself, the larger body – the horse or the ship – representing the church congregation. He writes, "James' intention is to show that the tongue is the means by which a body of great size – namely, the church – is controlled by a separate part of much smaller size, namely, the teachers who are decisively influential out of proportion to their number, as they control the direction of the whole body."[359] A natural reading of the passage, especially the ensuing section about blessing God and cursing one's brother, does not lead to such a narrow interpretation as this. In addition, the metaphor of the tongue

[358] Motyer; 119.
[359] Martin; 110.

applies most naturally to the speech of the individual; it is an unnecessary stretch of exegetical imagination to apply a further metaphor, linking the tongue to the teacher. What James has to say in the latter part of verse 5 and following, about the tongue as a fire, would be a very odd thing to say indeed, if he were referring to the teachers. Would God set teachers in the midst of the congregation as a flame set on fire by hell? No, the natural interpretation is the one that should be adopted: the tongue represents the speech of believers, and the tremendous damage that can be done through its instrumentality.

The analogies are also clear to understand: the small bit allows the rider to control the horse, as the small rudder permits the helmsman to control the ship. The reasoning here is just to show how a little thing can control a much larger object, determining its course of movement. Now a direct, overly literal application of these two word pictures to the tongue would cause confusion, because the movement of a man is by no means determined by his tongue. A number of commentators seem to fuss with great anxiety over James' discordant use of the bit, the rudder, and the tongue, but doubtless James' readers (then and now) see his point plainly enough. The 'course' of the man is not his locomotion, it is the manner and impact of his life – the 'works' that he does that are actually either confirmed or overruled by his speech. It is in this sense that the man who can control his tongue is 'perfect,' as Laws points out, "the man who is master of his speech is *ipso facto* in total control of himself."[360] This is true, and James says as much in verse 2. But it is also impossible.

The analogy between the mechanical instruments and the physical tongue is not intended to teach that a man may control his tongue in the same manner as a rider pulling on the reins or a helmsman at the wheel of the ship. The bit and rudder are mechanical devices without agendas, or as James Adamson puts it, "Bit and rudder are useful inventions; the tongue is by nature pregnant with evil."[361] This conclusion of the bit and rudder analogies leads directly into James' third analogy: fire. The tongue is a moral force; the bit and rudder are inanimate objects. The bit and rudder obey the impetus

[360] Laws; 145.
[361] Adamson; 143.

given them by the rider and helmsman; the tongue fights against the intended and proper course of a man's life. "The very difference of the images serves to make James's point clear: control of the tongue is imperative, because the tongue is a force for evil."[362] Moo summarizes,

> A strict application of this imagery would suggest that the believer similarly uses the tongue to control 'the whole body,' but it is difficult to understand how the tongue could directly control the body. Probably we should make the application a little differently: just as the bit determines the direction of the horse and the rudder the ship, so the tongue can determine the destiny of the individual. When the believer exercises careful control of the tongue, it can be presumed that he also is able to direct his whole life in its proper, divinely charted course: he is a 'perfect man.' But when that tongue is not restrained, small though it is, the rest of the body is likely to be uncontrolled and undisciplined also.[363]

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! 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. **(3:5b-6)**

The Greek of verse 6 is notoriously difficult, but fortunately the overall sense of what James is saying remains quite clear. Laws comments, "The general sense of the statement is clear enough, but as with i. 17 it is made in a verse which is extraordinarily difficult for the translator and exegete." The difficulty of the Greek may be a result of the energy with which James is 'talking' here – this is his most severe indictment of the tongue, his most graphic imagery of the danger this small member poses to the body. Again, it is easily understood that by 'tongue' he is not referring to the physical part of the human anatomy residing behind the teeth; he is obviously referring to the things the man says, as will become even clearer in just a few verses. As for the difficult construction of the verse, the various different renderings in our English Bibles do not materially impact the sense of what James is saying, so an in-depth analysis of the exegetical options is liable to detract rather than aid our understanding. Anyone who has read the

[362] Laws; 148.
[363] Moo; 122.

labyrinthine discussions of options in even one critical commentary will undoubtedly marvel at the darkness shed there. The sense is clear, we can walk in that light.

And, as noted, that sense is as entirely negative as anything James has said or will say in this book. The tongue is *"a world of wickedness,"* signifying the incredibly broad scope of impact for such a small member of the human body. Such a small spark igniting such a massive forest fire! James switches to the analogy of a great conflagration being started by a small spark in order to both continue the train of thought – that a little thing can have a massively disproportionate impact – and to move to a metaphor that is far more alive, far more indicative of the evil of which he speaks, than either the bit or the rudder: *fire*. Fire is living, powerful, and destructive, a fit analogy to the destructive power of the tongue. "James clearly intends to reiterate the magnitude of the tongue's destructive potential."[364]

Some of the terminology used in verse 6 ties back to what James said in 1:26, where we first read of the tongue. It is significant that in the earlier verse James speaks of the believer 'bridling' his tongue; in Chapter 3 the bridle is simply an analogy, the tongue being far more powerful. In 1:26 James is introducing a key statement concerning *"pure and undefiled religion"* and one of the component aspects of such a life is *"keeping oneself unstained by the world"* (1:27). The word translated 'unstained' is the negation of the word used in 3:6 which refers to the tongue *"staining the whole body."* Thus James is consistent with regard to the danger that the believer's speech poses to his or her profession and manifestation of true faith. Connecting the two passages, we can reasonably conclude that control of one's speech is essential to walking in *true and undefiled religion* in the sight of God.

James claims, infallibly, that the tongue is not only set amidst our physical members as an uncontrolled spark in the midst of dry tinder, but that the source of the fire is *Gehenna* itself. The word 'Gehenna' derives from the Valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem, where the refuse of the city and from the Temple altar were burned in a

[364] Moo; 125.

continuous fire. Laws summarizes the meaning of the term in Second Temple Judaism, "Its traditional character as the place of burning is variously derived from its being the place where the fire sacrifices had been offered, and from its being the place where refuse from Jerusalem was burned. By New Testament times the corruption 'Gehenna' becomes the term for the place of punishment after the last judgment."[365] James clearly is using the term in this latter, eschatological, and negative sense, which is why most English translations insert the word 'hell' for 'Gehenna.' It is a very strong statement, that every human being possesses, as it were, a direct wick of fire from the demonic source of evil, hell.

This analysis must not be toned down or limited either to the speaking of the teacher, or to what we would today call 'profanity.' James is referring to the interpersonal relationships among professing believers, characterized as good or bad by the reciprocal control of individual's tongues or, better put, the *lack* of such control. Motyer reminds us of similar words from our Lord to Peter,

> The tongue becomes an instrument of Satan himself. This is by no means to be thought of as something confined to what we would recognize as improper or questionable uses of the tongue. One day Peter took the Lord aside to give him the best advice he was capable of and to do so with the most loving and concerned intentions. But the Lord Jesus replied, 'Get behind me, Satan!'"[366]

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
(3:7-8)

One more metaphor, again showing the recalcitrance of the human tongue. Man was created in the image of God to rule over God's Creation, and in that capacity has 'tamed' the animal population almost without exception. 'Tamed' is in quotation marks simply because the meaning of the word is broader than just domestication: it means that man has exercised authority and dominion over the animals just as David says in Psalm 8,

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[365] Laws; 152.
[366] Motyer; 123.

You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen – even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.

(Psalm 8:6-8)

"In the beginning the Creator gave to the man and the woman their joint dominion over the whole creation and in pursuance of this the animal creation has been subdued and is being subdued. The God-given dominion over creation is still being executed, for good and ill. But, by contrast, *no human being can tame the tongue – a restless evil.*"[367] James highlights in this section the incongruity of the situation: man has figured out how to direct a horse and steer a ship against mighty winds; he has successfully dominated the animal kingdom either through hunting, breaking to the use of labor, or domesticating even to companionship; but the same man cannot control or tame his own tongue, he cannot gain mastery over this instrument of hell. James echoes the Apostle Paul in his litany of human depravity in Romans 3,

There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one."
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. Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known."
There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Romans 3:10-18)

Is it the case that every man speaks evil all the time? No, that is not what James is claiming, nor is it what we should expect from an instrument set on fire by hell. The fundamental problem with the human tongue is not that it is always profane, but that it is sometimes good and sometimes evil. Or as James puts it in the next verses,

[367] Motyer; 124.

> *With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.* (3:9-10)

We know that what the devil speaks is always and at all times a lie. But this does not mean that Satan speaks his lies clearly and openly. Being the most subtle of God's creatures, he rather masquerades as an angel of light – he speaks the truth of Scripture with a lying tongue in his attempts to deceive our Lord; he does the same with everyone, and thus we see the *modus operandi* of the tongue that is set on fire by hell. "The complaint against the tongue then is its treacherous inconsistency – and evil irreducible to order, to a consistent character of disciplined obedience and to righteousness."[368] Davids adds, "Thus the tongue shows its demonic nature in its instability and lack of single-mindedness and peace. It is not, as James will explain in 3:9-10, that the tongue never speaks good, but that it speaks evil as well."[369]

Having thoroughly indicted human speech as a prime, if not *the* prime, source of stumbling for the believer, James will go on to give examples of the negative use of the tongue within the community. He warns against speaking judgmentally of a brother (4:11-12), knowing that there is one Lord and Judge who will not yield His prerogative to another. In a similar vein he exhorts his readers not to 'grumble' against one another (5:9), which is seemingly another form of judgment against a brother, as James refers immediately and again to the Judge who is standing at the door, ready to condemn.

> *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. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?* (4:11-12)

> *Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!* (5:9)

[368] Adamson; 144.
[369] Davids; 145.

There is one additional usage of the tongue that James addresses, also in a very cautionary manner – the swearing of oaths.

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. **(5:12)**

Though James does not mention the 'tongue' here, he is clearly dealing with a form of speech – the oath or vow – and ties his admonition here in with the previous ones through the common reference to 'judgment.' The warning echoes the words James probably heard his earthly half-brother utter during His Sermon on the Mount,

> *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.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.*
>
> (Matthew 5:33-37)

Oaths presuppose dishonesty just as laws presuppose criminality. No one would require an oath from a man whose trustworthiness and honesty was beyond doubt, but such a man does not exist in this fallen world, and thus oaths are used and even required in courts of law. But it should not be so in the church, the Body of Jesus Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit. "The community member ought not to use oaths, for his yes or no should be totally honest, making oaths unnecessary; truthfulness is the issue. Since God holds one to this standard, oaths are dangerous, for they make some speech more honest than other speech."[370] Adamson concurs, "Paradoxically, swearing not only increases the untruthfulness which oaths are supposed to prevent but also as inevitably leads to blasphemy. The oath is the commonest and most serious moral fault in speech, and James is hardly to be blamed for ranking it…above all errors of the tongue."[371]

With this exhortation James encompasses all forms of 'Christian' speech that is both unnecessary and dangerous. Professing Christians should not only avoid oaths, but

[370] Davids; 190.
[371] Adamson; 194.

should equally avoid using the Lord's name in connection with a personal decision – which is itself a form of an oath. When the believer says, 'The Lord told me…" and then speaks his or her plan or decision, it is tantamount to claiming direct revelation, the New Testament equivalent to the 'thus saith the Lord' of the Old Testament prophet. Thus bridling the tongue (1:26) is more than avoiding judgmental or grumbling words against a brother, and more even than hurling a curse against him. It is honesty in speech, without the accoutrement of the oath. It is also reverence in the use of the Lord's name, and great hesitance in linking that most holy name with our own desires or ambitions. In all speech, "reverence for God may well be called paramount in the discipline of the tongue."[372] It is fundamentally a thorough distrust of the heart, even the regenerate heart in which residual sin still abides, knowing that *"out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*

[372] *Idem.*

Week 12: The Royal Law
Text Reading: James 1:22-25; 2:8-13; 5:19-20

"If Christ lives in my heart through faith,
then all things proceed from faith for ever into love,
in that love to be rooted and grounded."
(Rudolf Stier)

As noted in the opening lessons of this study, the book of James has acquired a reputation for being 'anti-faith' and even 'legalistic,' on the basis of Luther's negative assessment of what James has to say concerning faith and works. Luther acknowledged that James did have some good things to say, mostly concerning proper behavior within the church, but overall considered it an 'epistle of straw' due to its apparent lack of the key 'justification by faith' theme so central to Luther's own soteriology. The suspect passage – James 2:14-26 – will be the focus of the next chapter, but the exegesis of that controversial section must be predicated on what James has to say about 'law' in general, and that is the topic of this lesson. Two points are significant in this analysis – doubtless among many others – the first being that James nowhere advocates continued adherence to what Paul calls *the works of the law*. James, though writing to Jewish believers in the *diaspora*, does not even mention circumcision, the Sabbath, or dietary laws, those essential marks of being Jewish in a pagan world. It is hard to accuse James of advocating a 'works-salvation' when he fails even to advocate continuance among Jewish Christians of the things that most powerfully marked them as members of the covenant people Israel.

The second point to be made in a general way, is that when James does mention 'law,' he frequently does so with modifiers, and these modifiers are significant: *royal* and *liberty*. He mentions the *law of liberty* twice – in 1:25 and 2:12, both within the purview of this lesson. The *royal law* is mentioned in 2:8 in a verse that begins the overall section of James' letter that includes the controversial passage concerning faith and works. Understanding what James means by 'royal' and 'liberty' in these references to the law will go a long way toward properly interpreting his discourse on faith and works. At the

very least it will help the exegete avoid the same mistakes that Luther made in his reading of the passage.

Luther's exegetical errors are understandable when one considers the milieu in which the German Reformer performed his theological and exegetical work. 'Justification by faith alone' – *Sola fide* – was a clarion call in the early 16th Century to return soteriology to the sovereignty of God and the majesty of divine grace. But it has long been recognized that Luther approached Scripture – not least this book of James – looking for justification to be expounded by the biblical writers in the same, absolute terminology that he himself used. He came to James with an agenda, as it were, and James failed to abide by that agenda. We will see, as multitudes have since Luther's day, that this was not because James disparaged faith in the salvation of a sinner, nor that he was somehow opposed to the teachings of the Apostle Paul regarding grace versus works. But one cannot simply jump into James' alleged dichotomy between faith and works, in 2:14-26, without fully and firmly establishing the background of the entire letter.

This has been the labor of these lessons, and hopefully we have established James' *pastoral* focus on the proper behavior of professing believers within the community. His interest is not *theological*, pure and simple, though thus far nothing has been revealed to in any way call James' theology into question. His interest has been primarily to expose sinful behavior within the congregation, and to point the way to proper relationships among believers in the community. This pastoral emphasis is the context of James' discussion of 'law' throughout the letter, and this fact is highlighted by those two modifiers he uses: *royal* and *liberty*. Here, as elsewhere, we will find James speaking in the same terms as Paul; there is no conflict between them at all.

Perhaps the most significant place where these two leaders of the early church agreed was in the centrality of *love* in their assessment and use of *law*. As we exegete James' writings concerning the *royal law*, seeing how he emphasizes in this context the Levitical precept, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself,*" we ought to be able to also hear the thoughts of Paul from Romans 13,

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

(Romans 13:8-10)

There is a great deal of discussion and disagreement among commentators of the book of James, as to the reference he makes to the 'royal' law. The closest connection, though, is immediate: James quoted Leviticus 19:18, referring to it as 'law' – *nomos*, rather than 'commandment' – *entolais*.

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18)

Because James uses the more general term here, rather than the more specific 'commandment,' commentators fairly demand that he cannot be referring to Leviticus 19:18 as the 'royal' law. But this is to place too high a premium on word choice, and also to fail to recognize the central place this verse from the 'Holiness Code' – Leviticus 19 & 20 – occupies not only in the teaching of James, but also of Jesus and Paul. Therefore, in order to set the stage for properly interpreting James' discussion of the 'royal law,' it is necessary that we first set forth the more general understanding of Leviticus 19:18 within the teachings of Christ and His disciples. But in order to do that, we must first spend a little time establishing the meaning of that verse in its own context. Victor Furnish points out, for instance, that the injunction to love one's neighbor is directed to the nation of Israel itself, and not to the world in general.

Victor Paul Furnish (*b.* 1931)

Referencing both the Holiness Code in general, and Leviticus 19:18 in particular, Furnish writes, "Clearly, the love of humankind, universally, is not in view here. In this instance the concept 'neighbor' is restricted to members of one's own group, 'the people of

Israel.'"[373] Furnish does point out that the injunction is expanded to include aliens dwelling in the midst of Israel in Leviticus 19:34, a point that confirms that universal humanity is not within the scope of the Levitical command in verse 18,

> *The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*
>
> (Leviticus 19:34)

Technically, these verses from Leviticus 19 would be referred to as 'commandments' and not as 'law,' though James uses the latter word in 2:8. The reason for this is not that difficult to find, beyond the fact that word usage is very fluid even within a single author's writings. What James is indicating here by using the more general term instead of the more specific, is the centrality of this commandment to the heart of Christianity, the heart of Jesus' fulfillment and expansion of the whole law. Again, James is saying no less than Paul does in Romans 13:10, "*Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*" Both New Testament writers emphasize the place of love in the true fulfillment of the law, but this is not the same as the common statement among modern evangelicals, the love somehow *replaces* the law. Both James and Paul, each in their respective contexts mentioning the 'royal' law of Leviticus 19:18, do so while also reiterating several commandments from Sinai. Nor is love a 'summary' of the law, as if we can boil each and every commandment down and 'love' is what is left in the kettle. It is rather as Furnish notes, that love is the *key* to understanding the law. "The love commandment seems not to have functioned only as a *summary* of the law…but as the hermeneutical key to the law's *interpretation*."[374] This conclusion not only illuminates the age-old debate regarding the relationship of the believer to the law, but also helps to explain the frequency with which Leviticus 19:18 is either quoted or alluded to in the New Testament. Again Furnish, "But the pervasiveness of this commandment

[373] Furnish, Victor Paul "Love of Neighbor in the New Testament," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Fall 1982, Vol. 10, No. 2; 327.
[374] *Ibid.*; 329.

in the earliest Christian literature and the consistent emphasis upon its importance suggest that it probably was a *characteristic* part of Jesus' teaching."[375]

Perhaps the *locus classicus* of the 'love commandment' is Jesus' response to the question, *"Which is the greatest commandment?"* The Lord's answer is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, though each in slightly different contexts and emphases. Matthew's account is, however, sufficient to establish the essence of Jesus' perspective regarding the 'royal law.'

> *But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:34-40)

The key statement in this passage is the last one: *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.* With these words Jesus takes away the option of loving God (the first and greatest commandment) and loving one's neighbor (the second, like unto the first). Indeed, so intimately are these two commandments united that the Apostle John disallows the possibility that the one can be fulfilled without the other,

> *He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.* (I John 2:9-11)

> *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.* (I John 4:20-21)

Therefore we must acknowledge that even though Jesus used the terms 'first' and 'second,' He never intended that the two be separated; they are, as has often been said, two sides of the same coin. What is revolutionary about the New Testament teaching on

[375] *Ibid.*; 328.

the second greatest commandment, the 'royal' law of James 2:8, is shows the people of God just how they are to interpret and apply the first greatest commandment. "Thus, the remark that 'on these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets' means, not just that all other requirements can be deduced from them, but that all of the other statutes of the law must be *interpreted by* them."[376]

It might not seem apparent at first glance, but this understanding of the 'law of love' actually sorts out the statutory commandments of the Mosaic Law in a manner far better and more biblically than the more-common division of 'moral,' 'civil,' and 'ceremonial' law. The essence of fulfilling the law, then, is not in parsing the 'type' of law it is in order to determine whether it even applies to Christians, but rather to interpret each and every statute in terms of one's relationship first, to God, and second, to one's neighbor. It may really be argued, from both the Old and the New Testament, that in practical application it is the second of these that has primacy, as God is, it would seem, best loved when He is loved in our neighbor. Of course, this leads to the question that was posed to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" A preliminary answer can be found again not in casuistry, but in love. "The problem of 'neighbor' is not one of definition but of performance, and where there is performance, where one's deeds are moved and shaped by love, there is neither time nor reason to ask, *'Who* is my neighbor?'"[377]

In the context of James 2, then, the 'neighbor' is represented by the poor man who has been despised. It might be argued by those who are perpetrating the bigotry, that they are honoring their 'neighbor,' the rich man, but the hypocrisy is evident. The sin is partiality, and where partiality is present there cannot be true love of 'neighbor.' Partiality, as James notes, is a wicked form of judgment in which the bigot determines the identity of 'neighbor' by the criterion of self-aggrandizement or benefit, and this can hardly be considered 'love.' Calvin writes, "If you pretend that there is a sort of love in

[376] *Ibid.*; 330.
[377] *Ibid.*; 331.

what you do, this may be easily disproved; for God bids us to love our neighbours, and not to shew respect of persons."[378]

But what does it mean to 'love' one's neighbor? Again, biblical instruction like that of the parable of the Good Samaritan and the book of James provides insight by example as to the meaning of 'love' in the royal law. It should be noted up front that the definition does not include fondness or affection for the neighbor, nor on the other hand does it demand either merit or reciprocation. A survey of the passages, starting in Leviticus 19 and moving through the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, and then to the exhortations of Paul and James where Leviticus 19:18 is quoted or alluded to, will show that 'love' essentially means first, *doing no harm to one's neighbor*, and second, *doing that which is within your power to alleviate your neighbor's need.*[379] Furnish notes, "In Leviticus 'love' means not bearing grudges against others and not exploiting them for private gain. In the New Testament it means nonretaliation, refusing to show partiality, active goodwill and service to those in need."[380]

Furnish also helpfully points out the intimate association of this 'royal law' to Jesus Himself, since it is only in Him that the law can be accomplished and fulfilled within us. The concept of loving one's neighbor does not mean, as Furnish develops, *self-abnegation* or *self-denial*; it does not require vows of poverty or lives of charity. He writes, "The *giving* of oneself to the neighbor in love is something different from that. It is the investment of one's self in another, and that must and does presuppose a fundamental acceptance and affirmation of oneself ('You shall love your neighbor as yourself.')"[381] The foundation of Christian love is, of course, the prior love of God that has been *"poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*[382] John reminds us that *"we love because He first loved us."*[383] So there ought to be a ready understanding that the love with which we love our

[378] Calvin; 305.
[379] Passages in the New Testament that quote or allude to Lev. 19:18 are Matt. 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27; Matt. 5:43 and 19:19; Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:9; and James 2:8
[380] Furnish; 332.
[381] *Idem.*
[382] Romans 5:5b
[383] I John 4:19

neighbor is not going to arise from within our natural heart, nor look like what passes for love in literature, nor be dependent on either the loveliness or reciprocity of the object.

> Thus, the motive for the self-giving for which the love commandment calls is not the 'ideal of self-abnegation,' but the service of Christ…Faith perceives and confesses that it is Jesus himself who is the incarnation of love and the one through whom believers have been reconciled to God and to one another. In him both the nature and scope of love are disclosed. In him the 'stranger' becomes a 'neighbor,' indeed, 'the brother for whom Christ died.' From this point of view, love is not replenished by the beloved who loves in return. Indeed, according to Paul one's debt of love to the other is never repaid (Romans 13:8*a*). Rather, love is replenished precisely as it is expended, that is, precisely where faith is actively receptive and responsive to the prior gift of God's love in Christ.[384]

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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 he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 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. **(1:22-25)**

This passage was analyzed in Lesson 5 as part of the 'worldliness vs. true religion' theme in James. What is significant here for the current lesson is the way in which James refers to the law as *"the law of liberty."* As with most of the New Testament writings, the presumptive interpretation of the word 'law' – *nomos*, in the Greek – is the Mosaic Law, unless the context demands otherwise. In so Jewish a book as is James, a different meaning or reference would need to be quite explicit to be convincing. Thus most commentators conclude, as they should, that James is indeed referring to the Mosaic Law, the code of statutes and commandments handed down to Moses on Sinai. But Christian teaching over the past two millennia, and especially Protestant teaching since Luther, stumbles on putting the words 'liberty' and 'law' together as James has done here and 2:12, both passages under examination in this lesson.

Yet such a combination of words would not have shocked or disturbed James' original audience, Jewish as it most likely was. Christians understand that the law was a state of bondage, but fail to realize that this state of bondage was relative to the freedom

[384] Furnish; 332-333.

that is now to be found in Christ Jesus. Relative to the rest of the world, there was no freer people than Israel under the Law. The Law was never presented to Israel as bondage, but as something that lifted her above all the nations surrounding her, all the godless pagans, the *goyim* who did not have the Law. Although the word 'liberty' is not used, one can sense in Deuteronomy 4 the elevating nature of the Law to Israel in comparison with all her neighbors.

> *Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*
>
> (Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

This high opinion of the Law vis-à-vis the rest of mankind is reflected in the rabbinic writings, such as Mishnah *Aboth*,

> R. Nehunya b. Ha-Kanah said: He that takes upon himself the yoke of the Law, from him shall be taken away the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care; but he that throws off the yoke of the Law, upon him shall be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care.[385]

> R. Joshua b. Levi said: Every day a divine voice goes forth from mount Horeb, proclaiming and saying, 'Woe to mankind for their contempt of the Law!' For he that occupies himself not in the study of the Law is called 'reprobate,' as it is written, *As a golden ring in the snout of a swine, so is a fair woman without discretion.* And it is written, *And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven* (haruth) *upon the tables.* Read not *haruth* but *heruth* (freedom), for thou findest no freedman excepting him that occupies himself in the study of the Law.[386]

But the relative majesty of the fulfillment of the Law in Christ is incomparable to the majesty of the Law under the Old Covenant, as Paul indicates in II Corinthians 3,

> *But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance,*

[385] *Aboth 3:5*
[386] *Aboth 6:2*

which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

(II Corinthians 3:7-11)

The Law is now bondage to the unbelieving Jew because he has really 'thrown off' its yoke by rejecting the One who is both the embodiment and fulfillment of the Law, Jesus the Messiah. The Law written on tablets of stone can no longer be freedom when the promise to write the Law upon the heart has been fulfilled. "As long as the law is preached by the external voice of man, and not inscribed by the finger of the Spirit of God on the heart, it is but a dead letter, and as it were a lifeless thing."[387] But now that the fulfillment has come in Jesus Christ, and the Law inscribed on the regenerated hearts of His redeemed, it is an even greater *law of liberty*, it is the *perfect* law of liberty. But the challenge that Christians have had for 2,000 years is just how to understand the fact that *it is the same Law*. This is where we find the 'love commandment,' or 'the royal law' of Leviticus 19:18 to be both the hermeneutical and the practical key to understanding just how the Law functions in the life of the Church and of the believer in the New Covenant.

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well… **(2:8)**

We remember that the context of this admonition is the situation in the congregation in which a well-dressed and obviously rich man was preferred in honor to a poorly dressed man, both apparently visitors to the assembly (as they otherwise did not know where to sit). James' allegation is that the congregation has acted in unrighteous judgment in according greater honor – greater *love* – to the rich man than to the poor, thus showing partiality. At this point James might well have quoted verse 15 of Leviticus 19, as it might seem to pertain more closely to the situation,

You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. (Leviticus 19:15)

[387] Calvin; 297.

Often Old Testament passages are quoted in the manner of *synecdoche*, by which more is intended than is stated. The connection between Leviticus 19:18 and 19:15 is the word *neighbor*, and that is the underlying issue that James is addressing. In a sense he moves beyond the current problem within the congregation in order to expand the scope of his admonition to a more general application: not merely the rich man versus the poor man, but the *neighbor* in general. And for this Leviticus 19:13 is, as we have seen, the key passage of all, the second 'great commandment' indispensable with the first, the 'royal' law. The rich man as well as the poor man both constitute, potentially, 'neighbors.' The sin was not that of honoring the rich man, but of dishonoring the poor man in relation to the rich man; the sin was of *partiality*, which is a sin against *neighborliness*, a sin against *love*. It is a violation of the 'royal' law; the consequence cannot be minor.

In what sense is the law 'royal'? There are as many answers to this question, it seems, as there are commentators who have taken it up. The word translated 'royal' in James 2:8 is *basilikon* which is used only two other times in the New Testament: once with reference to King Herod's clothing (Acts 12:21) and the second in I Peter 2:9, where believers are referred to as *a royal priesthood*. The suffix *-ikon* generally means possession – something that belongs to the one referenced. For instance, *kuriakei* in Revelation 1:10 is translated *the Lord's Day*, indicating the day that uniquely belongs to the Lord. The same is true of that particular word in reference to the Lord's Supper, in I Corinthians 11:20. Thus a preliminary interpretation of 'royal' in James 2:8 is *the law that belongs to the King* or *the King's Law*. Whatever else may be said concerning the adjective, this much should be fundamental: this law belongs to Jesus Christ, the King.

Interpretation of any word should proceed from the definition of that word to the closest cognate within the passage itself. How the author has used the term in the near context carries great hermeneutical weight as to how he is using it in any specific passage. Thus we note that James has just used the term 'kingdom,' *basileias*, in verse 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?"* It is also significant that possession of

the kingdom is related to those *who* ***love*** *Him*; love being an integral and essential part of this kingdom. As this kingdom is now reflected in the church, James is well within sanctified reason to assert that the law of the kingdom is the love commandment of Leviticus 19:18, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" Thus Motyer comments, "He has just said that God has made us *heirs of the kingdom*, and now he enunciates the *basilikon*-law, the kingdom-law, the law which in a very special sense belongs to the king within whose realm we are privileged to live."[388] Laws adds, "Lev. xix.18 is for James the *royal law* because it is the law of the kingdom of God."[389]

Douglas Moo has an interesting and helpful observation here. It is easy to conclude from this discussion that *love* is the way that we fulfil the *law of the kingdom*. Many have so concluded, and that has given rise to the anemic platitude, 'No law but love.' It is taught that we have no need of the commandments and statutes of God's Law; all we need is love. But this conclusion is contrary to the way both James and Paul have presented love in relation to the law – both authors quote from the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, in the very same context as love. We must conclude that 'love' is related to the 'law' in a manner that does not obliterate the law, but rather fulfills it. Moo writes, "If James says that the royal law is to be fulfilled *according* to the commandment of love, he probably intends to describe not the manner in which the law is to be kept ('fulfil it *by* loving others'), but the nature of that law itself – it is a law that has at its heart the demand that the Christian *love* his *neighbour*."[390]

This means that the believer's interaction with the law – the *Mosaic* Law, that is – is now governed and mediated, as it were, by and through the Spirit through whom God has poured out His love into the believer's heart. We consider the commandments now as they pertain to the two great commandments: love toward God and love toward our neighbor. It is in this manner that "*love is the fulfillment of the Law.*"[391] And the community thus guided consequently answers to Paul's criteria of 'otherness' in relation to the world:

[388] Motyer; 97.
[389] Laws; 110.
[390] Moo; 94.
[391] Romans 13:10

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."[392]

... but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. **(2:9)**

James remains within the context of the particular offense within the community of the *diaspora*, though what he has to say in these verses has much wider application. Partiality might seem to these professing believers a minor infraction (James will address shortly), but seen in the proper light of the royal law, the love commandment, it shows its true color, and that very dark. Partiality, as noted above, is judgment. It is false judgment based not upon the heart – which only God knows and judges – but upon outward appearance. It is not even based on outward actions, for James has just reminded his audience that it is the rich who oppress them and drag them into court. Partiality is false judgment, and it is foolish judgment for it rarely even results in the reward or reciprocal favoritism desired. Thus it is not just any 'law' by which the one who shows partiality is judged, it is the 'royal' law; the law of the king.

Modern believers rarely use the words 'transgressor' or 'transgression' unless quoting the Lord's Prayer or reading it in the Bible. But for a Second Temple Jew – and certainly a 1st Century Jewish Christian, the word was pregnant with meaning. Davids comments, "To transgress the law was a serious rebellion for the Jew and Jewish Christian. It was to throw off the yoke of heaven and to stand under the judgment of God."[393] This applies here specifically to showing partiality, but the universal application cannot be missed: any act of un-love toward one's neighbor is a transgression of the royal law. In the matter of the rich man versus the poor man, what the poor man needed was acceptance and honor – as a human being if not yet as a brother in the Lord. This the rich man did not need, receiving all the honor that the world willingly accords the wealthy. As will become apparent as James progresses through Chapter 2, supplying the neighbor's need is the essence of the love commandment. This is, of course, most

[392] Galatians 5:6
[393] Davids; 116.

wonderfully illustrated by Jesus himself in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Furnish concludes his excellent article by reminding us that biblical love is one that meets the needs of others first and foremost. "Its goal, more concretely, is to support and aid the neighbor, and this means that equality is measured from 'the other end,' not according to what is *given*, but according to what is *needed*."[394] James will soon state that to do otherwise is nothing less than an indication of *dead* faith.

For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. **(2:10-11)**

Just as one cannot make arbitrary or self-serving distinctions as to the identity of one's 'neighbor,' so also it is forbidden to divide the law into 'greater' and 'lesser' commandments. Verse 10 is perhaps the most powerful argument against any attempt to secure salvation through the law, for no one is capable of avoiding transgression in every single area of life, every single statute and commandment. But James is not alone in his analysis of true and complete law-keeping, for the final statement of the curses on Mount Ebal required nothing less.

> *Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law by observing them.*
>
> (Deuteronomy 27:26)

Paul explains in both his letter to the Romans and to the Galatians that the righteousness that is according to the Law is unyielding; there will be no grading on a curve, only 'pass/fail.' And a passing grade means consistent and unerring obedience to each and every commandment. Quoting Leviticus 18:5, Paul writes in Romans 10:5, "*For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."* To the Galatians he adds, "*Yet the law is not of faith, but 'the man who does them shall live by them.'*"[395] This requirement of the Law is impossible for any man to attain, but that does not give man the right to lessen the requirement, to lower the bar. Solomon,

[394] Furnish; 333.
[395] Galatians 3:12

perhaps at the height of his wisdom, acknowledged the complete inability of man not to sin. In the midst of his dedicatory prayer for the Temple, he acknowledges parenthetically what all men must know to be true: *"When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near…"* The *Shekinah* had just come down upon this Temple, signifying the presence of Yahweh in the midst of His people. Yet Solomon knew that this was not a universally and comprehensively sanctified visitation: men still sinned, and would continue to sin, and would thus continue to rely entirely on the mercy and grace of Israel's God.

So what James says here is nothing new, though because of the self-righteous pride of men it needs to be resaid frequently. With these words in 2:10-11 James also moves out beyond the specific issue of partiality within the community, and addresses the broader scope of the Law as it pertains to believers. Regeneration leaves no room for self-righteousness. While it is wonderfully true that Christ bore the penalty of the Law on the cross, and that "*there is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,*"[396] yet this does not mean that believers are sinless or that they can divvy up the divine commandments into greater and lesser categories.

The underlying principle in Scripture concerning the unity of the Law is the absolute oneness of God Himself. The logic here is airtight: the Law reflects the will of God for His people. There is but one God and there can be but one will of God. Therefore the Law is one just as God is one. "The 'law,' the will of God for his people, is an indivisible whole, and to violate one part of it is to be at odds with all of it."[397] Davids adds, "The commands only have force insofar as they express his will. And his will is violated no matter which command is broken. The law is a unity because the lawgiver is one."[398] But this must not be read as James attempting to bring believers back under the Law and more than did Paul in stating the very same thing. Far from there being any

[396] Romans 8:1
[397] Moo; 95.
[398] Davids; 117.

conflict in theology between James and Paul, the latter merely expands on the same theme as the former, in his letter to the Romans.

> *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. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 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? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds"* (Romans 2:1-6)

So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment. **(2:12-13)**

Far from being a legalist or advocating a return to the Law, James emphasizes again the *law of liberty* which must be the same as the *royal law* of verse 8. Certainly it is the same as that in 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.*" James' "*so speak and so do*" echoes his admonition to be both a hearer and a doer of the Law, but does not advocate a Pharisaical obsession with the minutiae of tithing on one's mint, and cummin, and dill. In Chapter 1 he says that the one who looks, as in a mirror, into the *perfect law of liberty* will be blessed; here he expands that thought by saying that this behavior will acquit the believer in the judgment. Hence, as Laws writes, "the stress is not on the observance of a sum total of minutiae, but on the maintenance of a complete integrity of word and deed."[399] And that complete integrity is itself governed by the *perfect law of liberty*, also referred to as the *royal law*: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*"

The striking note here in James is the same as in Paul: that true freedom does not come from lawlessness, but rather from obedience to the holy law of God. Motyer explains, "Our true freedom depends on discovering how we can give expression to our

[399] Laws; 116.

true nature. How can we live so as to be like him? James answers this crucial question by his startling expression, *the law of liberty*, bringing together the two things which people think of as opposites, *law* and *liberty*! But, as we have seen, the law is the nature of God expressed in commandments. When we obey his commands, then we are living like him. We are in the image of God; the law is in the image of God. When we bring these two together, we are 'being ourselves'; we are truly free."[400] The teaching of Jesus, of Paul, and of James regarding the *law of liberty* is both that obedience to God's will is true freedom, and that the *royal* law of Leviticus 19:18 is the very heart of that obedience.

But the believer's life is not to be governed by meticulous observance of statutes and ordinances; rather by love. Again, love is not the summary of the Law. It is the nature of the Law in its truest sense, for love engenders mercy and *mercy triumphs over judgment*. What do we think secured acquittal for us? Yes, Jesus' perfect obedience to every commandment, to every aspect of the will of His Father, perfectly. But what was it that motivated Him to do so on our behalf? What motivated the Father to send His only begotten Son into the world in the first place? Love. Perhaps the most famous verse in modern, Western society is John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son…*" But there is also Romans 5:8, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" And what did this demonstration of divine love accomplish? Yes, 'justification' of the elect; yes, forgiveness of sins and adoption as sons and daughters of God. But fundamentally, *mercy*.

We can argue theologically that judgment was fully executed upon Jesus on the cross, and that is wonderfully and forever true. But we cannot forget that God was in no way obligated to send His Son to die on that cross. The love that He demonstrates in His Son and in the cross is first and foremost a victorious act of mercy over judgment, as the psalmist declares in one of the most beautifully evangelical verses in the Old Testament,

> *Mercy and truth have met together;*
> *Righteousness and peace have kissed.* (Psalm 85:10)

[400] Motyer; 101-102.

James' point here, beyond reminding us of our own debt to divine mercy, is to show that the essential quality of biblical love is *mercy*. Again, Christian love does not require affection or reciprocation. It does not look for worth in the object, but only need. In mercy the believer best imitates his heavenly Father, for lovingkindess and compassion are God's preferred work. "God, the author of judgment in 13a, delights in a situation where his mercy may over-ride his judgment."[401] We are, therefore, most like Him when we are most merciful to those in need.

> *He has shown you, O man, what is good;*
> *And what does the LORD require of you*
> *But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 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. **(5:19-20)**

What is the greatest need that a man – and especially one who professes faith in Jesus Christ – may have? To be recovered from error, to be restored to fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, and with Christ's body, the Church. Cain asked God if he was to be his brother's keeper. It seems the rest of Scripture is God's answer: Yes! "James concludes, then, with a picture of a Christian community whose members take responsibility for their errant brothers, to their mutual benefit, as they regularly act together for their common deliverance from sin and its consequences."[402] Peter echoes James' admonition of mutual care and restoration among the brethren.

> *But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*
> (I Peter 4:8)

Thus the *royal law*; thus the blessedness of both the believer and the church.

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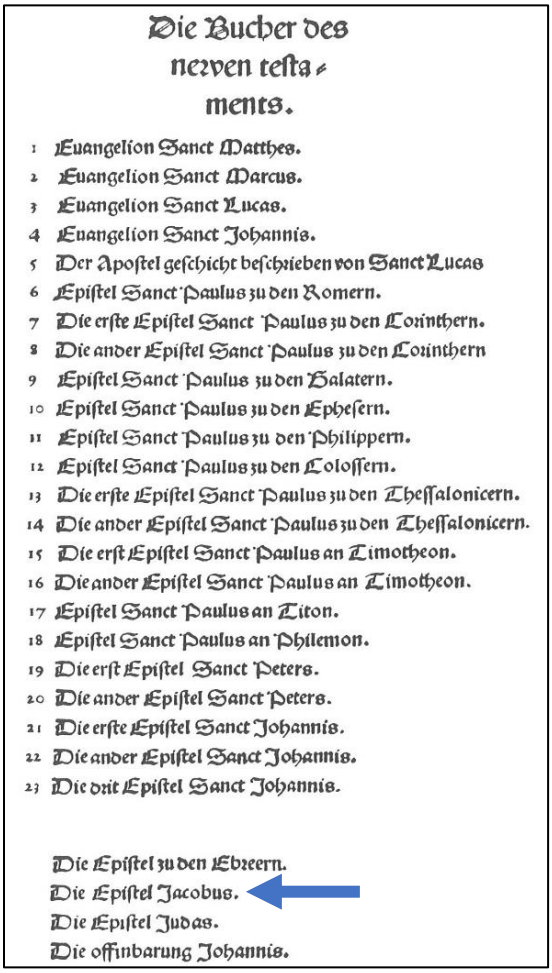
[401] Laws; 117.
[402] Laws; 241.

Week 13: Faith and Works
Text Reading: James 2:14-26

"To pretend that one has received the word but not to obey it serves only to reveal the pretence."
(Mariam Kamell)

Five hundred years after Martin Luther proclaimed the book of James an 'epistle of straw,' scholars and every-day believers still struggle with what James is saying in the second half of the second chapter. There really can be no argument that James is "the most consistently ethical document in the New Testament."[403] And this distinction tends toward a stereotypical reading of the book as 'works' – whether for salvation or sanctification often depending on the perspective of the reader. "The Epistle of James is most commonly known as the epistle of works, and, given its emphasis on practical social action, it most deservedly earns a place in a discussion of the New Testament and ethics."[404] James' emphasis on behavior, consequently, often clouds the reader's view and conclusion regarding James' soteriology, and nowhere is this phenomenon more vivid and controversial than in James 2:14-26.


Die Bucher des
newen testa-
ments.

1 Euangelion Sanct Matthes.
2 Euangelion Sanct Marcus.
3 Euangelion Sanct Lucas.
4 Euangelion Sanct Johannis.
5 Der Apostel geschicht beschrieben von Sanct Lucas
6 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Romern.
7 Die erste Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Corinthern.
8 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Corinthern
9 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Galatern.
10 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Ephesern.
11 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Philippern.
12 Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Colossern.
13 Die erste Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Thessalonicern.
14 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus zu den Thessalonicern.
15 Die erst Epistel Sanct Paulus an Timotheon.
16 Die ander Epistel Sanct Paulus an Timotheon.
17 Epistel Sanct Paulus an Titon.
18 Epistel Sanct Paulus an Philemon.
19 Die erst Epistel Sanct Peters.
20 Die ander Epistel Sanct Peters.
21 Die erste Epistel Sanct Johannis.
22 Die ander Epistel Sanct Johannis.
23 Die drit Epistel Sanct Johannis.

Die Epistel zu den Ebreern.
Die Epistel Jacobus.
Die Epistel Judas.
Die offinbarung Johannis.

Contents List from Luther's 1522 Bible

But is James a legalist? Does he advocate a works-salvation? Or perhaps a synergistic soteriology whereby works and faith – law and grace – combine to bring about

[403] Laws; 27.
[404] Kamell, Mariam J. "The Implications of Grace for the Ethics of James" *Biblica*, 2011, Vol. 92, No. 2; 274.

one's salvation? Some of what he writes in this section would seem to support an affirmative answer to each of these questions in turn, and this is what troubled Luther so deeply that he separated the epistle from most of the balance of the New Testament canon in his German Bible, listing it (along with Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation) at the end of the canonical survey and with a telling gap between the lists. Luther failed to find grace in James, seeing only a works-righteousness that contradicted the writings of Paul. And Luther's assessment has powerfully impacted James studies in the five centuries since, with only the past several decades seeing a significant shift away from the Lutheran presupposition and hermeneutic. Modern commentators and scholars are more able to see grace in James, as the title of the article quoted above testifies. Sadly, however, modern commentators and scholars often fail to approach the book with even a semblance of a doctrine of inspiration, and consequently consider James from a purely human, literary perspective.

This phenomenon is the product of unbelief in general – or at least a practical unbelief among scholars who might otherwise hold a profession of Christian faith. It is most powerfully manifested in the 'critical' studies – textual criticism, literary criticism, and the infamous 'higher' criticism. Where this phenomenon manifests itself in modern scholarly treatments of the Scriptures is in the realm of 'intertextuality.' This is simply a complex word to describe the simple concept of similarity in words, phrases, and grammatical structures between two or more writings. For instance, if there is a similarity between the Genesis account of Creation and a similar account in an ancient Babylonian or Egyptian text, scholars conclude that one must have borrowed from another – and usually it is the Bible that does the borrowing, or so say the scholars. In the case of James, the 'intertextuality' is between him and Paul, especially the latter's epistles to the Romans and to the Galatians. Similarities between these two biblical authors (and one does not have to agree that the authors are the real Paul or James, the Lord's brother – that is of little consequence to the critic) are called 'resonances.' For instance, Jane Heath comments in her article, "The Righteous Gentile Interjects," that "between James and Paul there are many resonances, some of which are weak, others are strong, and many are somewhere

in between. The cumulative effect of these is that in reading James, an audience familiar with Paul constantly feels him peering over their shoulders."[405] Heath concludes, as do most modern biblical scholars, that these 'resonances' are due to James interacting with the Pauline letters – hence driving her to determine that James is a pseudonymous letter written some time *after* the Pauline corpus.

Thus we find in the study of the Synoptics, that similar passages and similar phrasing 'requires' either borrowing from one of the books or a proto-document, Q, from which each of the Synoptic authors drew their material. But does resonance require borrowing? Is a common source necessary for Matthew, Mark, and Luke to write on similar events in a similar way? More to the present point, do similarities between James and Paul mean that the former was interacting with the writings of the latter? Yes, one can conclude this, as long as one has either a weak or a nonexistent doctrine of *inspiration*. There is no denying 'resonance,' and we will be investigating some of the more powerful resonances between James and Paul in this lesson. But it is a terribly mundane – meaning 'earthly' – perspective and hermeneutic that insists that such similarities are due to either borrowing or document interaction. Modern scholarship has jettisoned the guiding principle of biblical inspiration as defined by Peter, *"for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."*[406] There is intertextuality and resonance in the Scriptures simply because they are inspired by the one God through the one Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is this very evident intertextuality that ties the entire council of God together into one, grand redemptive narrative from start to finish. James did not interact with Paul, nor did Matthew and Luke borrow from Mark and 'Q.' Rather each was moved (except for Q, who does not exist) by the same Holy Spirit to write the revealed will and purpose of God.

Why is this important? Well, the controversy surrounding James 2:14-26 is precisely upon the question of resonance – or lack of resonance – with Paul. James,

[405] Heath, Jane "The Righteous Gentile Interjects (James 2:18-19 and Romans 2:14-15)" *Novum Testamentum*, 2013, Vol. 55, Fasc. 3 (2013); 279.
[406] II Peter 1:21

according to Luther, taught a doctrine of justification by works. Paul taught and defended a doctrine of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*. If there are resonances between James and Paul, and if those resonances are on the issues at hand – justification, faith, works, etc. – then the apparent divergence between the two authors narrows and, perhaps, disappears altogether. Too often James is read through the lens of Paul, which is how Luther read him, and is found wanting. "Through the centuries James has often been misinterpreted, as people have read him through Paul's eyes, comparing him to Paul before they have really grasped what he is saying, and so they have barred the way to a proper understanding of his message."[407] James and Paul utilize the same terms, but language is fluid, and it may be that their use of the words 'faith,' and 'works,' and 'justified' is, while undeniably different, not contradictory or antithetical.

But one must not commit another common error: to exegete James 2:14-26 by itself, as it if were James' treatise on 'justification' as a doctrine. We will see in the exegetical part of this lesson that verses 14-26 are tied integrally with the previous section, James 2:1-13. Furthermore, to claim from 2:14-26 that James advocated a works-salvation would be to ignore the centrality of divine grace that is present in the rest of the epistle. In the opening paragraph of her article titled "The Implications of Grace for the Ethics of James," Mariam Kamell writes of common interpretations of the book, "The role of God, however, appears limited to various clichés, whether simple that 'God wants people to act in a loving manner because Jesus taught so', a focus on the potentially 'legalistic' nature of James' God, or ultimately a more complex discussion based on Jas 2,5 that 'God has chosen the poor' and hates the rich. None of these does justice to James as a wisdom text rooted firmly in the background of God's gracious covenantal work."[408]

Perhaps the key passage in unveiling James' perspective on salvation is not to be found in Chapter 2, but rather in Chapter 1, verse 21, *"in humility receive the word implanted, which his able to save your souls."* James' use of the word 'implanted' is

[407] Nicol, W. "Faith and Works in the Letter of James" *Neotestimentica*, 1975, Vol. 9, Essays on the General Epistles of the New Testament; 15.
[408] Kamell; 274.

significant in that it is a word often associated with conception – the implantation of the seed in the womb, the act that brings life. "The term 'implanted' develops the idea of conversion, for it draws out James' use of birth imagery in depicting God's new creation 'by/for the word of truth' (Jas 1:18)."[409] James does not view the 'word' in a legalistic, works-righteousness sort of manner. Rather he sees it as the seed of rebirth, the source and power of regeneration. "God has brought us into being through the word, and this word is implanted in us to save our souls."[410] There is a notable resonance here with what Paul has to say to Timothy,

> *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*
>
> (II Timothy 3:14-15)

It may very well be true that James does not emphasize God's monergistic covenantal work as clearly and powerfully as Paul does, but this does not mean that James held to a legalistic, works-righteousness at all. The same section from which verse 21 was quoted above, is no less clear than II Corinthians 5 or Ephesians 2, for instance, in maintaining the strictly divine causation of the new creation, including the new birth of every redeemed sinner.

> *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. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.* (James 1:17-18)

These two verses should not be separated. The greatest of the 'perfect gifts' is that of salvation, the 'bringing forth' of dead sinners into new life, as *'firstfruits of His creatures.'* "The idea that he 'gave birth' to these people indicates a new nature: they are no longer trapped by their fallen natures but have been re-created by the word. His audience, James says, are the 'firstfruits' of something new that God is doing, brought into this by the very

[409] Heath; 286.
[410] Nicol; 13.

creative word of God."[411] The language is no less gracious – indeed, *sola gratia* – than that of Paul in Ephesians 2 and II Corinthians 5. But again, these 'resonances' are not due to one author interacting or borrowing from the other, but rather due to the common source of each, the Holy Spirit.

> *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 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 2:4-9)

> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* (II Corinthians 5:17-19)

We can wish that James spoke with such emphasis on grace, but we cannot deny that he knew well the same doctrine that Paul preached, and that he preached no other gospel than the one Paul preached. But we have already seen that the nature and purpose of James' letter differs from any of Paul's: James is *wisdom* not *dogma*, and is intended to guide believers in the proper living out of their faith, not to replace that faith with 'works.' Kamell concludes, "The ethics of James are not some sort of 'works-righteousness' but a triumphant acceptance of God's grace…James roots his imperatives in the very character and nature of God who in his grace initiated a covenant relationship."[412]

Finally, by way of introducing this controversial passage in James 2, it should be noted that the dichotomy here is not between 'faith' and 'works,' but rather between 'living or effective faith' and 'dead faith.' Laws comments, "the contrast here is not simply between faith and works but between a dead faith and a living one."[413] Works are presented as *demonstrative* not as *salvific*, though James does use salvation-language in a

[411] Kamell; 278-79.
[412] *Ibid*.; 286-87.
[413] Laws; 122.

manner that can indeed cause confusion. But to circle back to the comment made above regarding inspiration, one might paraphrase Hebrews 11:6, "He who comes to God's Word must believe that it is His, and that He will bless those who faithfully seek Him in it." In other words, it is an unbelieving hermeneutic to approach James with a mindset of opposition to or from Paul; both were inspired by the same Holy Spirit, they cannot contradict one another. With a believing perspective one will readily see the resonances between the two instruments of divine revelation, resonances that are to be expected in the one revealed will of the one God.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 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? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
(2:14-17)

This is where too much commentary on James' view of 'justification' begins – verses 14-17 of Chapter 2. It is also where too much of modern 'liberation theology' and 'social gospel' begins, making social action and benevolence the essence of the Christian faith. These divergent interpretations both fail to recognize the contextual flow between the previous discussion of partiality to the rich (2:1-13) and the need to have a living, merciful faith (2:14-26). Indeed, verse 14 has the most logical connection with verse 13, which cries out, "*For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*" Immediately, then, James posits what most likely was a too-common event within the congregations of the *diaspora* – the needy being turned away, not with mercy, but with pious platitudes. To solidify the connection between the two halves of this chapter, we might even consider the brother or sister to correspond to the poor man in dirty clothes of 2:2, though it is likely that the first instance is a visitor and not necessarily (yet) a brother. Still, the correspondence of poverty does bracket James intervening discussion of partiality toward the rich which itself implied merciless degradation of the poor. James is simply now asking, 'Is this *really* faith?' Can anyone think that faith that fails to show mercy when the opportunity and the means are present constitutes true, saving faith? Sadly, yes some can – both in James' day and today.

As a bit of a sidebar, and by way of modern application, we must consider as we study James 2:14-26, the modern 'Lordship Debate.' Briefly, the point of contention is whether or not a person can be truly saved by making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, followed by a life of indifference and even immorality. We have had occasion to show the subtilty of this heresy – that one can accept Jesus as 'Savior' without having to bow to Him as 'Lord.' But the underlying question is still the same: *can a faith that produces no work – or as Paul might put it, no fruit – be salvific?* James is blunt: such a faith is 'dead.' Indeed, the bluntness of this statement follows the typical development of a theme in James, for the heartless turning away of the needy brother or sister is nothing less than a manifestation that one's professed faith is not *'pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God.'*[414] Thus Blomberg and Kamell write, "Workless faith resembles the vain religion of 1:26-27."[415]

The context is, of course, the judgment of verse 13, and indeed James does proceed to speak of 'works.' But the context defines the terms, and the 'works' of which James speaks in the second half of the chapter are defined by the opening verses: works of *mercy*. The worthlessness of worklessness is the evident absence of *mercy* in the heart of the professing believer. Such a man's faith cannot save him in the judgment because there is no mercy in him to triumph over judgment. "It could not save him, presumably, from the judgment of vv. 12-13, for he has no deeds of mercy to boast in the face of judgment."[416] Now it must be admitted that, at face value, these passages seem to set up a soteriology in which the merciful deeds of the penitent will prevail in the judgment over his sins, resulting in salvation. This would indeed constitute a works-righteousness, if this were all that James had to say about the matter. But as we have seen in the introductory comments above, James understands the gracious foundation of the covenantal work of God in salvation just as well as Paul does. James, however, is operating from the viewpoint of Jesus' words, *"By their fruit they shall be known."* James is following in the

[414] *Cp.* James 1:27
[415] Blomberg, Craig L. and Mariam J. Kamell *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: James* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic; 2008); 125.
[416] Laws; 119.

dominical tradition of the separation of the sheep and the goats (*cp.* Matthew 25:31-46) in which the division between the two groups was based on acts of mercy shown to needy brethren, "*the least of these My brethren.*" The complete lack of such deeds merely manifests a complete lack of grace.

> *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.* (Matthew 12:33)

The statement, "*Go in peace*" is a common Hebraism, a common form of saying 'Goodbye' within the Jewish (indeed, the Middle Eastern) world. It is a phrase of dismissal; the conversation has ended. It is to be assumed that the person saying this has the wherewithal to at least alleviate the needs of this brother or sister, but resorts to a cursory 'goodbye' along with a benediction: "*be warmed and be filled.*" These two latter verbs are in the middle or passive voice – the construction is the same for either – so we are left to decide which is meant. The middle voice would mean, "*warm yourself and fill yourself*" and would constitute a 'pick yourself up by your own bootstrap' response to the needy brother or sister. "If middle, the insult to the poor person merely becomes even more outrageous."[417] It is probably best to translate the verbs in the passive, as most English Bibles do, and read it as a prayer that the Lord would provide for their needs of warm and food. We are reminded that the speaker professes faith. "This use of the passive to express hope should further be understood as a reverential paraphrasis: the hope is not simply that somehow or other these wants will be supplied, but that *God* will supply them."[418] Thus we have a seemingly pious commendation of the needy brother or sister into the hands of God, who cares for the needy. Laws continues, "Confronted with a case of need, he commits it with prayer to God, who clothes the naked and feeds the hungry, and sends away his fellow-believers with expressions of confidence."[419]

That this is the best reading of the statement fits with what James is doing here – showing that alleged faith that is not accompanied by deeds of mercy, is dead. He is not

[417] Blomberg & Kamell; 131.
[418] Laws; 121
[419] *Idem.*

castigated manifest unconcern but empty piety. The speaker desires the needs of his brethren to be met, and 'trusts' that their common God will meet those needs. "He believes God would wish such need to be relieved (since his prayer is that God will respond to it), yet he does not himself act in accordance with that belief."[420] He does not see that, the need having been presented to him and he having the means to relieve it, the will of God is thus revealed: *he is to meet the need himself.*

Perhaps, to use modern charismatic parlance, he thinks the cold and hungry brother needs only to 'have more faith' and then God will provide for him. Perhaps, again to paraphrase modern views, the sister needs to 'confess her sin(s)' so that God will turn away His displeasure and again provide for her needs. The theology behind these positions, if there is one, is that God acts *im*mediately – meaning He acts without intermediate means – in dealing with the needs of His children. Advocates of this view can point to numerous biblical examples, such as the ravens providing food for the prophet Elijah.[421] But even a cursory reading of the Law, and especially the Holiness Code of Leviticus 19, will show that these examples of direct provision were rare and were not to be considered God's standard operating procedure. Rather it is the case that He intends the needs of His children to be met by the provision He supplies to His other children, their brethren. This is the point of Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in the matter of the Judean Famine Relief Drive.

> *For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."* (II Corinthians 8:13-15)

Thus, in spite of the pious plea that God provide for their need, the 'man of faith' in verse 14 is, in fact, in possession of a faith that is 'dead' (v. 17). "Just as words without action profited the poor person nothing, so faith without works profits the 'believer'

[420] Laws; 122.
[421] I Kings 17:6

nothing."[422] Verse 17, of course, is critical to the whole passage: what does James mean by 'dead faith'? Is the man's faith a mere sham, or a 'false' faith? Kamell writes, "To pretend that one has received the word but not to obey it serves only to reveal the pretence [*sic*]."[423] The standard Reformed interpretation of the passage is that the person is a false believer, and that certainly would be a valid understanding of 'dead' faith. But it would be out of character for James, based on the rest of the epistle, for him to judge the professing believer as to the validity of his faith. 'Dead' can certainly mean 'lifeless,' but it can also mean 'unfruitful' or 'without benefit.' By connecting the first and last verses of this pericope we can arrive, at least in a preliminary form, at James' understanding of the word 'dead' in verse 17.

> *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?... Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.* (2:14,17)

We can connect the rhetorical question of verse 14 – *Can (such) faith save him?* – with James' answer in verse 17 – *(such) faith by itself…is dead.* But James is not making that judgment; he intends to show that it is self-evident both to the nature of faith and to the biblical examples he will provide in a few verses. What James is saying in this passage is not to be viewed as an ultimate condemnation of the man with workless faith; it is rather similar to Paul's admonition to the Corinthians that they 'examine' themselves, to see if they are in the faith.[424] The 'faith' that the man professes is real enough, in itself, and need not be a willful and knowing pretense. James is not protesting the validity of the 'faith,' just as he will not protest the validity of the demons' 'faith' in verse 19 (of course, interpretation of that verse depends on who is actually saying it; more below). It is important to recognize that the man who 'believes' but does not work is not necessarily attempting to deceive either God or others; it may very well be that he is himself deceived, and fatally so if the situation is not remedied. Thus Nicol writes, "it is clear that James implies that it is dead because it does not save a man: it does not lead to

[422] Blomberg & Kamell; 131.
[423] Kamell; 282.
[424] II Corinthians 13:5

justification…James' point is not that faith without works is not faith; as faith he does not criticize it, but merely stresses that faith does not fulfill its purpose when it is not accompanied by works."[425] And this is something with which Paul would have agreed, adding probably one of his *'may it never be remarks'* when confronted with a workless faith. Though the terminology is different, the meaning is much the same:

> *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?* (Romans 6:1-2)

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. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? **(2:18-20)**

Christoph Burchard (1931-2020)

This passage is widely recognized as one of the most difficult, if not *the* most difficult exegetical challenges in the New Testament. The translation referenced here – the New King James – takes the same liberties as do all translations in terms of punctuation, for there is none in the original. It is a classic example of the difficulty of translating ancient languages without the benefit punctuation. Jane Heath quotes the late German theologian and Judaic scholar, Christoph Burchard, as summarizing the essence of the problem with these verses: "Wer sag zu wem was bis wohin in welchem Ton?"[426] This, according to Google Translate, roughly translates to "Who says What to Whom in What Tone?" The rhetorical exchange is perhaps not critical to the understanding of the overall passage – certainly James bolsters his argument with the examples of Abraham and Rahab in the ensuing verses – but it is integral, and therefore every attempt should be made to figure it out. However, it must also be accepted that, without punctuation, any scholar's rendering will be somewhat

[425] Nicol; 16

[426] Heath; 273. The German is quoted because of the alliteration: *wer*, *wen*, *was*, *wohin*, *welchem*, which undoubtedly intensified the mystery of the passage to Burchard's German readers.

conjectural, as Laws admits of her own: "This solution to the difficulty is adopted because it seems to make the best sense in context, not because it is entirely satisfactory."[427]

The first difficulty is to determine whether the imaginary interlocutor is speaking against James' position or in support. The phrase, "*I will show you my faith by my works"* is precisely what James has been arguing, which would make this third party an ally, assuming that this is coming from his lips. But it seems more likely that this is a response from James to the objector, a conclusion further confirmed by the initial formulation, *someone will say,* which is almost universally introductory to an *opponent's* view. If we key on the second-person pronoun in the verses, perhaps we can better diagram the exchange:

> **Interlocutor:** "*You* [*i.e.*, James] *have faith, and I have works"*
> **James:** "*Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*
> **James:** "*You* [*i.e.,* the interlocutor] *believe that God is one; you do well: the demons also believe, and shutter."*
> **James:** "*But are you* [again, the interlocutor] *willing to recognize, you empty head* [lit.], *that faith without works is useless?"*

There are several other common arrangements, but space does not allow a thorough analysis of each one. This is offered, as Laws says, "*because it seems to make best sense in context, not because it is entirely satisfactory."* In favor of this arrangement is that it takes the introductory phrase, "*someone will say,"* in its usual and uniform sense as introducing an objection. Also a plus is James' first response is essentially what he has been saying, and will continue to say, throughout both this passage and the whole book: "*I will show you my faith by my works."* Finally, the latter two phrases seem clearly to refer to someone who is objecting to James' position (certainly calling the man an 'empty head' is not indicative of someone whose views are in line with James'!).

The difficulties with this arrangement are basically two. The first is that the objection itself does not follow from the previous verses, in which a 'believer' allegedly has faith but not works. The objector complains that he has works and *you* – ostensibly

[427] Laws; 124.

James? – have faith. This difficulty has been addressed by some commentators who switch the noun order: *You have works and I have faith*, but there is no textual validity to this manipulation: the text stands in the order we have it. It is possible, however, that James is shifting to a different viewpoint regarding faith and works: that they are two distinct entities within the overall paradigm of justification. Laws posits a hypothetical thought process behind the interlocutor: "James has stated that faith without works is dead, that the two are inseparable. But is this true? Might it not be objected that they are different activities, doubtless complementary and equally praiseworthy, but the provinces of different persons?"[428] This does not remove the problem of the word order, faith before works, but it is perhaps as valid as any other theory.

The second problem with the arrangement above is that James' response does not really answer the objection. Again, this would be alleviated if the nouns were reversed in the first clause, but they cannot be. It is as if James is now combining what he has said in verses 14-17 and the contents of the objection. What he is definitely saying is that faith and works are not divisible, that they are integrally linked and inseparable, and that the one [works] are demonstrative of the other [faith]. This last comment goes far to confirm the proposed arrangement, for *works* being the manifestation of *faith* is the essential message of the two examples that follow, Abraham and Rahab. Thus we offer the above arrangement, warts and all, as the best solution to a difficult passage.

A comment must be made regarding the 'faith' of demons, mentioned here in verse 19. It would be an error to conclude that the faith of demons is a 'false' faith, even though it is certain that demonic faith is in no way salvific. James proves that the demons' faith is no mere intellectual assent to the deity, the majesty, of the one God: on account of that faith, the *shudder*. "The demons' faith is by no means merely intellectual: in believing that God is one they believe something about him that evokes a response: that as *one* he is wholly and consistently their enemy, and *they shudder*."[429] This shows that James is not interested in developing a theory on different types of 'faith' – *true* faith versus *false* faith

[428] Laws; 123.
[429] Laws; 126.

– but only in showing that the faith that is effective toward salvation – *justifying* faith – cannot be without works. "James does not mention them [*the demons*] to make a point about kinds of faith, but to emphasize that faith without works will no more help someone be saved than the demons are saved."[430] Again, James' issue is not between 'faith and works,' the common rubric under which this passage is frames again and again. He is dealing entirely with faith – *saving* or *justifying* faith – and what that will look like in terms of 'works.' Laws summarizes,

> He is not concerned to contrast faith, as intellectual assent, with works, but to indicate the necessary outcome of faith, if it is a live faith, and the impossibility of existing alone…The idea that belief in God as one carries implications for action is not of course a new one, but goes back to Deut. vi.4 itself: 'The Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might.'[431]

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 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. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. **(2:21-24)**

From Luther's perspective, here we have the offending passage – especially verse 24, where James seems to deny fully the Reformation doctrine of *sola fide*. Commentators have compared James' reference to Abraham with Paul's similar reference in Romans 4, and have often found James lacking and, perhaps, even somewhat false. There does indeed appear to be somewhat of a conflict between the two biblical authors.

> *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.* (Romans 4:1-4)

The crux of the matter is that both authors quote the same passage from Genesis 15:6, "*And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*" The key to

[430] Nicol; 15.
[431] Laws; 128.

understanding the mutual reference, and to defusing the apparent conflict, is to notice the stage in Abraham's life that Paul, on the one hand, and James, on the other, addresses. For Paul, the context of Abraham's faith (and consequent justification) is the promise of the birth of a son from Sarah's womb,

> *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. 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, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised… And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness.*
>
> (Romans 4:9-12, 19-22)

James discusses the faith of Abraham at a very distinct point in the patriarch's life: the offering of Isaac recorded in Genesis 22. *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?"* But by no means does James intend to dismiss faith, for he immediately says, "*Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?"* Indeed, James' focus here is not really on works at all, but on 'faith made perfect,' which is a theme found at the very beginning of the letter, where he speaks of trials and tribulations as 'testing' faith,

> *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* (1:2-4)

Thus it seems apparent that the two biblical authors are taking Abraham as illustrative example to prove their point, but from two different periods in the patriarch's life. Paul is establishing the basis for the imputed righteousness ('accounted') of Abraham as being his trust that God *"had promised"* and *"was also able to perform"* regarding the birth

of a son by Sarah. But James is speaking of the *mature* or *perfected* faith of Abraham, and that was not achieved – at least according to the biblical record of the patriarch's life – until he willingly obeyed God and offered up his son on Mt. Moriah. The real issue of James 2:21-24 is not works at all, but *perfected* faith. "The scope of Jas 2,20-24, reinforced at every point by the literary structure, is to understand *faith* primarily: how it acts (to the advantage of works), how it is perfected (through works), and how it is not 'apart from' or 'in addition to' works. When faith is acting, it is 'together with' works."[432] Lodge, a Roman Catholic, seems remarkably to understand the primacy of faith in the example of Abraham, pointing out in his own diagram of the passage how the actual justification of the patriarch is put (as with Paul) in the *passive* voice, as something that is done on behalf of Abraham and not by the patriarch himself. Lodge notes the chiastic structure of verses 21-24,

a Our title for Abraham: *our father*
b Question: was he not justified (passive)
c His works: (when) he offered (active)
d (faith – works)
d′ (works – faith)
c′ His faith: he believed (active)
b′ Answer: he was reckoned righteous (passive)
a′ God's title for Abraham: friend (of God)[433]

James is not pitting faith against works, nor is using Abraham as an illustration to somehow disprove the doctrine and teaching of Paul. His focus throughout has been *faith* – living faith, faith that saves, faith that one can be assured in. And such faith *works*, especially works of *mercy*. "He is not concerned to set faith and works against each other and deny the former any role in justification; what he is contrasting is 'faith without works' and 'works inseparable from faith.'"[434] Righteousness was credited to Abraham when he believed God's promise of an heir, but that righteousness by faith was not fully

[432] Lodge, John G. "James and Paul at Cross-Purposes?" *Biblica*, 1981, Vol. 62, No. 2 (1981); 204
[433] *Ibid.*; 207.
[434] Laws; 137.

perfected – and manifested as *living* faith – until he was willing to offer up that son as a sacrifice to God. "Abraham's faith was not mature until he acted upon it."[435] Blomberg and Kamell quote biblical commentator Ronald Fung, who differentiates "between what he calls 'forensic justification by faith' and 'probative justification by works.' The first is a legal declaration made by God at the time one commits one's life to Christ. The second is the demonstration by a transformed life that such a commitment was genuine."[436] Lodge adds, "To say that the faith of Abraham, the friend of God, worked along with these works and was perfected by them is to say no more and no less than that his faith was 'working through love'"[437] And this, of course, is no more or less than what Paul says,

> *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.* (Galatians 5:6)

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **(2:25)**

James' second example serves to confirm our interpretation of the first in that it also deals not with the presence of 'justifying' faith, but with the manifestation of that faith through a particular act of faith. The passage in Joshua that relates the narrative to which James refers, makes it clear that Rahab had already come to believe in Israel's God and *on account of that faith* she risked her life and the life of her family to protect Joshua's spies.

> *Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men: "I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you,* ***for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.***
> (Joshua 2:8-11)

[435] Blomberg & Kamell; 137.
[436] *Ibid.*; 139.
[437] Lodge; 213.

As with Abraham, Rahab's faith was tested and perfected by the 'work' of hiding the Israelite spies, risking exposure and execution as a traitor to the city and inhabitants of Jericho. The text does not say, of course, that this was 'credited to Rahab for righteousness,' but she was indeed rescued (with her family) while the rest of the city was put to the sword. Furthermore, Rahab will providentially, and graciously, be counted within the lineage of the Messiah. James' point, however, is consistent: Rahab's faith *worked*, thus confirming it to be living faith and not dead.

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. **(2:26)**

James concludes his argument with a different metaphor, and one that is quite vivid. The analogy does not pit faith against works as if either can be considered sufficient for life. Rather it powerfully emphasizes the necessity of unity between the two – one cannot be alive without the other. A dualistic perspective would place works (spirit) above faith (body), but the Bible is not dualistic. It may, however, be fair to interpret James as saying that works are the living principle to faith and that, without works – as without the spirit – faith is as a corpse. In this he is saying nothing less than what Paul says in many places, though in different terminology. "Like Paul, James is seeking the kind of faith that has the power to save."[438] This is still faith, but its evident power to save can only be demonstrated – as it was with Abraham and with Rahab – through works of obedience, works of mercy. James does not contradict or conflict with Paul. "Clearly, it was an act of divine providence that included James in the canon. He opens our eyes to the cardinal importance of ethics, and the Church that does not read him carefully harms itself."[439]

[438] Heath; 291.
[439] Nicol; 23.

Week 14: The Two Paths Revisited
Text Reading: James 4:17; 5:13-18, 19-20

"Neither suffering nor ease should find us without a suitable Christian response in prayer and song."
(Alec Motyer)

We have had several occasions to note that the book of James does not read like a typical New Testament epistle, and this final lesson is case in point. There is no 'ending' to the book; it just ends. No final summary, no greetings, no plans to visit; just what seems to be a very abrupt ending. The final two verses are themselves a unit, but their placement at the end of the document seems discordant, especially if one attempts to read the book as a letter and not as an example of Wisdom literature. As with the rest of the book, however, there are connecting words and thoughts in the final verses of the last chapter, that tie the ending in with all that has gone before. For instance, the final admonition and encouragement of 5:19-20 are likely a brief statement of the underlying purpose, or occasion, that motivated James in the first place. In brief, two things can be immediately discerned from these concluding verses that harmonize intimately with all that has been written thus far. First, that there are men and women in the congregations of the *diaspora* who are *"wandering from the truth."* This is again the language of the Two Paths, and it has come to James' attention that some are following the wrong path. These have been mentioned in the body of the text: those who are double-minded (two-souled), those who are partial to the rich and despise the poor, those who refuse to show mercy on the needy when it is in their power to do so, etc. The reality of these wanderers leads to the second immediate truth to be drawn from so abrupt a conclusion: that it is each and every believer's responsibility to try to *"turn"* the wayward sinner from the error of his path, to restore him to the right path. Thus these two seemingly incongruous verses at the end of the book are themselves a powerful summary of the entire work.

Another feature of the closing passages in James that shows the overall unity of the book is the *patience/prayer* structure of the middle part of Chapter 5. In verses 7-12, James mentions *patient, patience, waiting, and endurance* seven times; whereas in verses 13-

18 he mentions *prayer* seven times. Though the context of both of these sections is stated, the underlying theme is the same *patience/prayer* paradigm with which the book started. This, too, is part of the Two Paths motif of wisdom, as Motyer notes, "The positive way forward in situations demanding endurance is the way of prayer."[440] James gives some very general examples, "*is any among you suffering?*"; "*is any among you cheerful?*" and some very specific examples, "*is any among you sick?*". But the response in each and every case is patience and prayer, the guideposts along the Right Path.

Healing in the Church

Before exegeting the remaining passages of this study, it might be an interesting and profitable sidebar to discuss the concept of healing in the church as it is presented by James in Chapter 5, particularly the phenomenon of the elders praying and anointing a brother or sister who is ill. James 5:14-15 is a passage very similar in its historical impact to the passage in the Gospel of John where Jesus washes His disciples' feet. It is not immediately apparent if the 'ritual' in these two verses at the end of James' book are intended to be normative in all ages, or whether they are merely indicative of a cultural (and medical?) phenomenon of those early centuries. We will attempt to answer this challenge as part of the exegesis of the verses in question; at this introductory stage it is intended simply to highlight briefly what the professing Church has made of them in the years and centuries since James wrote them. The most interesting fact is that James 5:14-15 eventually became the 'prooftext' for the Roman Catholic sacrament of 'Final or Extreme Unction,' the anointing of a parishioner facing imminent death. Referencing James 5:14-16 in the footnote, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states,

> By the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them. And indeed she exhorts them to contribute to the good of the People of God by freely uniting themselves to the Passion and death of Christ….From ancient times in the liturgical tradition of both East and West, we have testimonies to the practice of anointings of the sick with blessed oil. Over the centuries the Anointing of the Sick was

[440] Motyer; 186.

> conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death. Because of this it received the name 'Extreme Unction.' Notwithstanding this evolution the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation…The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is given to those who are seriously ill by anointing them on the forehead and hands with duly blessed oil – pressed from olives or from other plants – saying, only once: 'Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.[441]

Elders are replaced by priests; the oil is 'blessed' by a bishop; the ritual is ever more exclusively reserved for the dying and not just the sick.[442] These mutations started fairly early and evolved along with the development of the episcopacy and the priesthood in general. "By the third century AD it had become the custom for oil used in anointing the sick to be 'consecrated' by the bishop of the area in which it was to be used. By the tenth century, it was increasingly the practice to insist that the anointing be carried out by a 'priest.' By the twelfth century, the terms 'extreme unction' and 'sacrament of the dying' are found and the anointing is restricted to those whose imminent death seems certain."[443] Thus what appears to be a simple, congregational prayer service of the elders for a sick congregant evolves (or *devolves*) into one of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. "In the thirteenth century, the ceremony of anointing was declared to be one of the 'seven sacraments' instituted by Christ himself, so that the Council of Trent (1545 onwards) can pronounce an anathema on anyone who denies that extreme unction is 'properly a sacrament, instituted by Christ…promulgated by the blessed apostle James.'"[444]

As with other perversions of biblical doctrine and practice by the Roman Catholic Church, this sacramentalizing of James 5:14-16 prejudiced many during the Reformation and afterward to minimize and even negate the practice of calling on the elders for prayer and anointing. The steady advance in the modern era of medical science contributed to

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[441] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday; 1994); Imprimi Potest; Sections 1499, 1512, 1513.
[442] This exclusive use of Extreme Unction (still reserved for the dying) was expanded to the 'seriously ill' at the Second Vatican Council.
[443] Motyer; 191.
[444] *Idem*.

this neglect, and even disdain, for the practice outlined by James, to the point that many (if not most) modern, professing-evangelical churches do not make provision for the elders to pray and anoint the sick. Morton Kelsey, a 20th-Century Episcopal priest and Jungian therapist, notes the contrast between modern 'Christian' attitudes to a healing ministry within the Christian community and the apparent practice of the early Church. "It is difficult for most modern Western Christians, clergy included, to see any particular relation between Christian practice and health of mind and body…This is certainly in contrast to the belief, in the early life of the church, that Christians were given both power and the direction to heal, as well as to teach and preach."[445]

Kelsey's attachment to Jungian psychology does not commend him as an exegete and commentator on James 5, but his assessment of the current state of Western Christianity *vis-à-vis* the concept of a 'healing ministry' within the believing community is sadly accurate. He points out that the prevailing departure from viewing bodily health as within the purview of the church was by no means a foregone conclusion and indeed did not take place in the Eastern (Greek) wing of Christianity. "It took some thinking to reject completely a Christian ministry of healing. This ministry bulked large in the practice of Jesus and the early church, so large that it was necessary to justify its absence in later times. Thus the idea gradually developed that Christians had neither the ability nor the right to heal the minds and bodies of men. It was the soul that Christianity should heal."[446] Attempts to resurrect or reinvigorate a 'ministry of healing' as an integral part of Christian corporate life, Kelsey notes, were often made by those who were otherwise deemed off-the-mark in terms of orthodoxy: Aimee Semple McPherson, Mary Baker Eddy, Little David – just to name a few. But Kelsey comments on this phenomenon, "how often must we remind ourselves that something does not become silly just because silly people may be doing it?"[447] The point being, of course, that our guide must at all times be Scripture, even if others may pervert or distort it. That 'faith healing' has become a

[445] Kelsey, Morton T. "The Healing Ministry Within the Church" *Journal of Religion and Health*, Apr. 1970, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Apr., 1970); 105.
[446] *Ibid.*; 106.
[447] *Ibid.*; 107.

regrettable fact of history no more disqualifies the text of James 5:14-16 than does the development of the Romish sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Perhaps, however, it is too late. Modern medical advances have made the idea of 'faith-based' healing sound fanatical and most Western believers look askance at brethren who refuse, for instance, to take their children to the doctor in the event of serious illness (to say nothing about the strong minority view concerning vaccines). Kelsey further comments, "The medical profession, of course, did rather well without religious help; it made such strides in healing by purely physical means that it seemed man's body was taken care of. By the first part of this century [*i.e.,* the 20th], most of us considered that, given time, medicine would solve all man's physical ills, and do it by treating him just about as it would any other piece of matter. A British physician, Dr. F. W. Crookshank, has poked fun at this view of human illness, commenting in one of his articles:

> I often wonder that some hard-boiled and orthodox clinician does not describe emotional weeping as a new disease, calling it paroxysmal lachrymation, and suggesting treatment by belladonna, astringent local applications, avoidance of sexual excess, tea, tobacco, and alcohol, and a salt-free diet with restriction of fluid intake; proceeding, in the event of failure, to the early removal of the tear glands.[448]

This is not to say – and Kelsey does not say – that Christians should not avail themselves of modern medical advances. It is merely to point out that modern medical science has entirely displaced, in the minds of many professing believers, James admonition to *"call for the elders"* in the event of illness. This is remarkable, considering what we read in the Gospels of the multitudes bringing to Jesus their sick and demon-possessed, and His record of healing all who came to Him for relief. This might indeed be considered just a manifestation of His incarnate glory, a testimony to the approbation of His ministry by His Father – and it *is* that – if not for Paul's mention of *"gifts of healing"* in I Corinthians 12, and James admonition for the elders to pray over and anoint the sick

[448] *Ibid.*; 111.

in James 5. "The apostolic church continued the healing ministry just as Jesus had done. There are nineteen accounts of healings in Acts, healings brought about by Peter, John, Philip the deacon, Stephen, Ananias, Paul, Barnabas, and the apostles in general."[449] This continued into the early centuries of the church, "The fathers of the church continued the same tradition. In nearly every one of the important church fathers – Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen – there is clear evidence of the belief in exorcism and the power of the church to heal. The church was *the* place in the ancient world to bring the demon-possessed to, whether they were Christians or not, and these men make matter-of-fact reference to the healings that Christians performed as one demonstration of the truth they taught."[450]

At the same time that Christianity was devaluing the possibility and blessing of a 'healing ministry' within their communions, medical science was discovering the inexorable connection between a person's physical and emotional/spiritual well-being. To be sure, modern medical science in general has no place for the spiritual in terms of biblical Christianity, but many studies have shown that a person's ability to heal and recover is tied to his or her 'mental health,' which includes the intangible concepts of spiritual awareness and hope. Thus we have chaplains in most of our hospitals – rarely evangelicals, to be sure – as well as 'pet-therapy' and the practice of Eastern mysticism in coordination with medical treatment. The Church, however, has largely abandoned the field to modern science, forcing the latter to find false substitutes for the *truth as it is in Christ Jesus,* the only sound foundation for mental, emotional, spiritual, as well as physical health.

It thus remains a very critical element – perhaps the most critical – in any exegesis of the passage in James 5, to first determine if a 'healing ministry' still exists within the Christian congregation and, if so, what its nature should be. James is quite clear in his directions but 'Christian' practice has veered very far from his simple words. Whether it is the sacramental evolution of Extreme Unction, or the outlandish claims of modern

[449] *Ibid.*; 114.
[450] *Idem.*

'faith healers,' or the complete neglect of believers' physical well-being by much of modern Western evangelicalism, few can look to James 5:14-16 and say that they are both 'hearers' and 'doers' of this word.

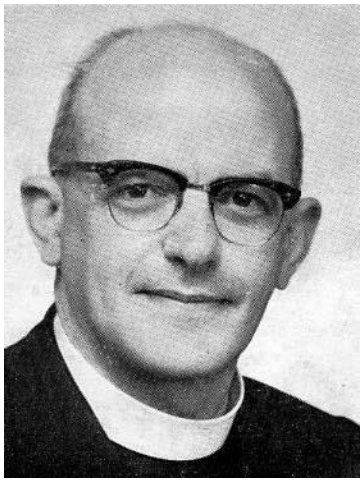
Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin. **(4:17)**

This verse sits awkwardly in its location, sandwiched between the discussion of presumptuous merchants and the avaricious wealthy. Commentators have struggled to determine the placement of 4:17, which by its construction appears to have been a common proverb in the early church. Its very generalness in terms makes it appear out of place at the end of our Chapter 4, but with Wisdom literature the insertion of a proverb is never out of place. What seems to trouble commentators the most is the emphasis of the proverb on sins of *omission*, when the passages both before and after the verse highlight sins of *commission*. To be sure, it can be argued that not saying *"if the Lord wills"* before embarking on a voyage is a sin of omission, but the emphasis of the previous paragraph is still more clearly on the active sin of presumption.

Verse 17 does, however, fit well within the overall Two Paths paradigm suggested as a general background for James' letter. He fairly frequently uses the word 'way' in this document, and often contrasts the 'good' way with the 'bad.' Although the actual word is not in verse 17, there is still the contrast between good and bad paths, each deriving from an awareness of the *right way* – the *"good thing to do,"* which is the more literal translation of the phrase.[451] James may be implying here that those things he is admonishing – especially, in context, the asking of the Lord's will and blessing upon one's plans – are things these believers of the *diaspora* should know to be the 'good thing to do.' At the very least he is stating that it is far from enough to refrain from doing active wrong: the believer is to *do* the good he knows. "They cannot take refuge in the plea that they have done nothing positively wrong; as Scripture makes abundantly clear, sins of *omission* are as real and serious as sins of *commission*."[452] This fits with the overall

[451] *Eidoti oun kalon poiein* – Therefore he who knows the good to do…
[452] Moo; 158.

paradigm of *doing* and not just *hearing,* the *so speak and so act* of 2:12, which in turn fits well with the rubric of the Two Paths. The way one walks is never merely a line on a map; it is a life *done* and *acted.* Avoiding the wrong is only a part, and maybe even only a small part, of the righteous life. Motyer quotes C. L. Mitton, "We may be able to avoid committing forbidden evil; but who can ever seize positively every opportunity of doing good?"[453] Thus this verse intensifies the overall message of James with regard to the professing Christian's *behavior*. It is an echo of the extended treatise on living versus dead faith in Chapter 2. It is not sufficient to have Kind and benevolent thoughts toward a needy brother, one must *do* the right and the good that one knows. And far from being a simple oversight, James declares unequivocally that *to him it is sin.*



C. L. Mitton (1907-98)

Willful ignorance is no escape. The believer is bound by the indwelling Holy Spirit to know the ways of God through His Word, and knowing to then obey and do what God has revealed as the good and right path. Ignorance can only be the plea of the novice and cannot be claimed by those untaught, for if they are in the Lord they also have the anointing, and have no need that any should teach them.[454] But greater knowledge brings greater responsibility, for merely knowing God's will necessitates doing God's will. "Sins of knowledge are most dangerous. They are more sins than others, as having more of malice and contempt in them."[455] But no believer is able to fully obey and do what he or she already knows to be 'the good.' We are, as always, thrown back upon the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Yet we strive, and must strive, to do the good that we know and not simply avoid the evil of which we are also aware. Here again James says no more than Paul,

[453] Motyer; 163.
[454] I John 2:27
[455] Manton; 396.

> *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.* (Galatians 6:9-10)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. **(5:13)**

The final section of James' letter is tied together by the phrase *is anyone among you…* It is here in verse 13, again in verse 14 and again in verse 19. Thus James closes with a section that is full of corporate fellowship and mutual concern. The 'answer' to each situation is the same, though not in the same manner: *prayer*. "Prayer is clearly the topic of this paragraph, being mentioned in every verse."[456] There is the prayer of the believer who is suffering, the 'prayer' the joyful believer singing songs of praise (literally, *psalletō*, from the same root as that of psalms), and there is the prayer of the elders accompanied by anointing oil. Elijah is mentioned as a 'righteous man' whose prayer brought about mighty deeds (though James is quick to point out that the great prophet was also *a man of like nature with ourselves*). In this context we can thus see that the singing of psalms is indeed a form of prayer, as it was in David's day it has always been. Moo comments, "This singing in praise was closely related to prayer; indeed, it can be regarded as a form of prayer."[457] Thus in every situation, the believer's immediate reaction is *toward* God. "Neither suffering nor ease should find us without a suitable Christian response in prayer and song."[458]

The situations that James mentions are intended to be representative, not exhaustive. We are not given direction in Scripture for each and every eventuality of providence in our life, but we are given comprehensive instruction as to Whom we turn in each and every situation. Motyer writes,

> It is not so much that our religion should cover all experiences, as that we have a God for all seasons. Both in periods of suffering and trouble, and in times of joy, prayer and praise alike acknowledge that he is sufficient. To pray to him is to acknowledge his sovereign

[456] Moo; 175.
[457] *Ibid.*; 176.
[458] Motyer; 188.

power in appointing our circumstances. Whether as the source of supply in need, or the source of the gladness of our joy, God is our sufficiency.[459]

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

(5:14-15)

The implication here is that the believer is quite ill, though there is no reason to interpret the term James uses as indicating imminent death. The Greek word literally means 'weak,' as in 'without strength,' and is used to describe conditions ranging from physical illness to emotional paralysis. The only indication that the illness is somewhat severe is that the sick brother (or sister) is to *call for* the elders, implying that the sickness has rendered them immobile. Thus James describes a healing ritual within the church that has no parallel in any other New Testament document: the anointing with oil by the elders.

We have no reason to take the term 'elders' in any different sense than we have encountered it from the Book of Acts on through the Pauline and Petrine epistles. The word is *presbuterous*, from which we get 'presbyter' and 'Presbyterian.' Indeed, James' casual mention of this group of men is additional evidence that the elder-leadership pattern was both early and pervasive in the church. "Both Peter and James assume the existence of *elders* in the church, showing that the office must have been a widespread one in the early church."[460] What is remarkable in the history of church polity is not that there were elders in the early church – that much is undeniable – but that the congregations ever saw need to depart from that pattern. Here in James both the presence of elders and their ministry of healing are presented unapologetically, as a natural response to serious illness. Laws writes, "The visit of *the elders* is of a formal character, with the expectation of healing attached to it. James does not give the impression of instituting a new practice, rather of describing a response to the situation of sickness that

[459] *Idem*.
[460] Moo; 176.

should be as obvious as praying in time of hardship or singing when cheerful."[461] But both the office of elder and the act of praying and anointing the sick soon fell out of practice, the former becoming a non-clerical, lay office and the latter becoming the duty of the priest.

We noted in the introductory portion of this chapter that 'healing' itself is generally viewed by evangelicals as something unique to the apostolic age, something that only charlatans trade in these days. But again, James presents it not as a spiritual gift – a *charismata* as it is presented by Paul in I Corinthians 12 – but as a seemingly normal activity for the seemingly normal elders. This assigning of the healing ministry to what is evidently intended to be the ongoing leadership and pastoral ministry of the local congregation indicates the same expectation on James' part that the prayer/anointing ritual would also remain. "Since it is not as much hinted in the New Testament that the church would ever need – or indeed should ever want or tolerate – any other local leadership than that of the eldership group, we may say that James vests this ministry of prayer, anointing and healing in the ongoing life of the church."[462] The elder is linked with the ministry of healing in an analogous manner as that of the shepherd who binds the wounds and anoints the lamb of his flock. Thus the pastoral function of prayer/anointing of the sick belonged at first, and was to belong always, to the pastoral ministry of the elders. Speaking of Paul's admonition to the Ephesian elders, recorded in Acts 20, Moo writes, "Since the Ephesian elders were to 'shepherd', or 'pastor' their flock, and 'pastors' are never mentioned along with elders, it is probable that the function of what we know as the 'pastor' or 'ministry' was carried out by the elders."[463] Where did the church get authorization to change this?

Unavoidably we conclude that Jesus Christ has vested a healing ministry within each and every congregation – apart from, and perhaps even above, the *charismata* of healing. Vested in a local minister (the elders) rather than an 'at large' minister (apostle,

[461] Laws; 229-30.
[462] Motyer; 189.
[463] Moo; 176.

prophet, evangelist), this ministry of healing was not to be found in just one congregation in the region, or at a convention center in the big city, but rather in each and every local assembly. This ritual, though mentioned only once in the New Testament, bears all the signs of being a perpetual ministry of healing in the churches. "James recommendation that regular church officers carry out the practice would seem to imply its permanent validity in the church."[464]

But what of the anointing with oil? Is that also perpetual? If so, what is its significance? Does it matter what kind of oil is used or how it is applied? Are the elders to lay hands on the sick person even though that common part of the ritual is not mentioned by James? As with many aspects of early Christian life recorded in Scripture, details are lacking. What is clear is that the elders are to pray for the healing of the sick brother or sister, and that it is the prayer that is instrumental in accomplishing that goal: *"and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is sick…"* What is the function of the oil, then? Is it similar to the water of baptism? Is James referring to a practice bound to his time and culture, such as the washing of feet? Can the elders pray over the sick person without anointing him with oil, and that still be effective? It is hard to conclude that the oil is critical to the success of the ritual in the same way that the *prayer of faith* is critical. But that does not necessarily mean we can dispense with the oil altogether.

We do know that oil was widely used in the ancient world for its medicinal properties and effects, and find examples of such use in the Bible as well as many other places in ancient literature. The Good Samaritan bound up the wounded Jew on the road to Jericho, anointing him with both oil and wine. Moo notes that "Other ancient sources attest to its helpfulness in curing everything from toothache to paralysis (the famous second-century physician Galen recommended oil as 'the best of all remedies for paralysis')."[465] Thus many commentators dismiss the modern use of oil in the ritual as being a cultural matter, for a time when oil (and wine) were used medicinally as they are no longer used today. But this interpretation fails to note that, in the ancient world, oil

[464] Moo; 179.
[465] *Ibid.*; 177.

was not used universally for any and all ailments, but specifically for some ailments. "Evidence that anointing with oil was used for *any* medical problem is not found."[466]

A second objection to this cultural interpretation is that the ancient world *had physicians*, and so did the church. Luke was a physician, and one can easily imagine that most congregations had one or two physicians, as the occupation was not so well-paid and honorable as it is today. If the use of the oil was purely medicinal, why call for the elders? Why not call for the physician? The presence of the elders and of prayer strongly indicate that the use of oil was not, at least not primarily, intended as medicinal. The answer lies more in the biblical use of oil as a sacramental vehicle for divine blessing, than as a medicinal treatment. Moo concludes, "the oil could be considered to have a sacramental function in that it acted as a 'vehicle of divine power.'"[467] The use of the oil is perhaps symbolic of the Holy Spirit, invoked in the prayer of healing for the sick brother or sister. Thus the oil and the prayer are joined together, as Moo further notes, in an early practice of the Greek church: "On the basis of this text the early Greek church practiced what they called the *'euchelaion'* (a combination of the words *euchē*, 'prayer,' and *elaion*, 'oil,' both used in this text), which had the purpose of strengthening the body and soul of the sick."[468]

The combination of the oil and the prayer seems to indicate that the healing of the sick brother or sister was more than merely a matter of physical well-being – and that sickness is *always* more than simply a matter of the physical body. Modern man has all but lost sight of the spiritual component of 'health,' the wholeness that underlies the concept of *shalom* in the Hebrew, or *weal* in the Old English. The connection between the physical and the spiritual is found in the text itself, as James mentions the possibility that the illness is related to sin: *"and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."* But this is an aside; James ends with this clause, he does not start with it. In other words, he does not draw the all-too-common causal relationship between illness and sin – it is *possible* that

[466] *Idem.*
[467] *Ibid.*; 178.
[468] *Idem.*

the illness is related to, or even due to, sin but it is equally possible that there is no such cause-and-effect situation. "But James' *and if* makes it clear that he does not believe that sickness is necessarily the result of sin, and in this, of course, he is following the teaching of Jesus."[469]

> *Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.* (John 9:1-3)

The key to the relationship of the oil to the prayer seems to be in the formula accompanying the anointing: *in the name of the Lord*. This should certainly take the anointing with oil out of the realm of the medicinal, and place it within the realm of the sacerdotal, the sacramental – the realm of grace. As with the water in baptism, and the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, so also with the oil in this prayer for the sick: there is a spiritual significance and power associated with the oil that complements the *prayer of faith*, resulting in the healing of the sick brother or sister. Sickness is never merely physical; indeed, sickness in general is the result of the Fall and the corruption of all nature by sin. Physical illness, as well, disrupts more than just the body, as modern medicine knows. But in the church, the illness of one member impacts all members (*cp.* I Cor. 12:26). The participation of the elders – the biblical *pastors* of the local congregation – signifies the corporate element of the healing ministry: the restoration of one member is the blessing of the entire body. "Both the gathering of the elders (as representatives of the community) and the mutual prayer and forgiveness of sin among all community members (5:16) serve to restore the unity of the corporate body."[470] This holistic approach both to illness and to the body is essentially biblical, the same to James as to Paul as to Jesus, and should always inform the church's understanding of the 'ministry of healing' in its midst. Illness has both physical and spiritual components, individual and corporate

[469] *Ibid.*; 181.
[470] Albl, Martin C. "Are Any Among You Sick? The Health Care System of James" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Spring, 2002, Vol. 121, No. 1 (Spring, 2002); 131.

impact, and thus the oil and the prayer combine to bring about the restoration of the brother or sister both physically and spiritually. "The anointing is performed *in the name of the Lord*, and is thus part of the single event of spiritual healing, the request for which is the religious response to sickness."[471]

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. **(5:16)**

This is an unusual verse considering what we have just read and studied. The sick person is to call for the elders and the elders are to pray over him and anoint him with oil. But here it seems that every member of the congregation is to participate in mutual confession of sin, mutual forgiveness, with the result of mutual healing. Is James countermanding his instructions in the previous two verses? Commentators seem to be at a loss as to how to deal with this verse. Some churches have responded to this verse by instituting public times of confession, sometimes at special services such as 'communion season' and sometimes at each Lord's Day gathering. Others have concluded, perhaps in negative response to the 'confessional' of the Roman Catholic Church, that James' point is that believers ought to confess their sins to those whom they have sinned against, and that those sinned against should be ready to forgive their offender. Thus Laws summarizes the prevailing conundrum, "It is not anyway clear whether this reciprocal confession and prayer is part of the public worshipping life of the whole community, or the private activity of smaller groups within it."[472]

We can rule out the Catholic confessional on the basis of ruling out the place and role of the priest in the community: the New Testament makes absolutely no provision for such an intermediary office in the life of the local church. But what of a 'confession session' in the liturgy of the worship service? One indication within the text is that the confession is not directed *toward God*, to whom all confession of sin is due and from whom alone comes forgiveness. Thus we read in John's first epistle, *"If we confess our sins, He*

[471] Laws; 227.
[472] *Ibid.*; 233.

is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."[473] Motyer writes, "The believers whom James brings before us have not met to engage in mutual confession of secret sins – for the 'confession' of such is owed to God alone. Rather it is the case that one has sinned against the other and is seeking opportunity, in private fellowship, to put things right, or because each has offended the other and they are ready to confess and be reconciled."[474]

To be sure, this is an inference from other passages and the nature of confession and forgiveness being the unique and sole province of God, rather than the pure exegesis of James 5:16. Still, such 'canonical' hermeneutic is needed to avoid the egregious error of the confessional, and to avoid the unnecessary humiliation, and possible ostracization, that can accompany public confession of sin. The essence of what James is teaching here is really the unity and harmony of the community, which is a theme throughout his work and is closely related to the teachings of Jesus, John, Peter, and Paul. Verse 16 is, therefore, an overarching summary statement to verses 14-15, challenging the believers of this *diaspora* community to keep short accounts, to be ready to ask forgiveness of an offended brother, and to be ready to forgive when so asked. This, in light of verses 14 & 15, will be conducive not only to spiritual harmony, but also to physical well-being. Again, it is really nothing more than Paul writes in regard to the Lord's Supper, and the improper observation of it, in I Corinthians 11.

> *Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.* (I Corinthians 11:27-30)[475]

Thus James, no less than Paul, maintains a corporate emphasis even when dealing with individual sickness. "As we have seen throughout his letter, James is deeply

[473] I John 1:9
[474] Motyer; 202.
[475] It is worth noting that Paul uses the same term for 'weak' as James uses for 'sick' in 5:14; *astheneis*.

concerned about fellowship. It is the soil in which a harvest of righteousness comes to full fruition (3:18)."[476] And the common denominator throughout has been, and is, prayer: *"The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."* Individual prayer, the elders' prayers, corporate prayer – all are part of the vital force that unites the community of believers, heals it, strengthens it, and causes it to grow. "It is characteristic that James should suggest that prayer is to be understood as something active. He is concerned to encourage confidence in the efficacy of prayer, but the man whose prayer is efficacious will be one for whim it is not just a matter of words, and certainly not of half-hearted or doubtful petition."[477]

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. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. **(5:17-18)**

James choses some interesting characters from the Old Testament to illustrate his teachings: Job to illustrate patience, and here Elijah as an example of prayer. Perhaps this use of Elijah as an exemplar of prayer was due to the exalted place the ancient prophet held in all Jewish minds. James would thus be encouraging his readers with two facts about the prophet: first, he accomplished the great deeds of his prophetic ministry – including control over the rain – *through prayer*, and second, that he was not some superhero of the faith, but was *"a man of like nature to us."* James is not saying that every believer will be able to call down fire upon his or her altar, or control the rain. What he is saying is that prayer is the consistent language of the believer, manifesting a constant dependence on God that was the *modus operandi* of so great a prophet as Elijah. "Very often the really striking things the Bible records are intended to give a foundation to our faith, rather than a model for our expectations."[478]

Another reason James might have chosen Elijah, apart from the prophet's fame among all Jews (including, no doubt, Jewish Christians), is that the situation faced by his

[476] Motyer; 202.
[477] Laws; 234.
[478] Motyer; 208.

readers probably did not compare in intensity to the *Sitz im Leben* of Elijah's ministry. Yet the same power, the same resource, and the same promises are available to every believer no less than they were to Elijah. "If the example of Elijah is to serve to encourage his readers to similarly confident and energetic prayer, it must be clear that the efficacy of Elijah's prayer is not related to any superhuman gifts or qualities in the man (even prophetic charisma) but only to the fact that he prayed, and prayed with fervor."[479]

But are the effective, fervent prayers of the righteous always answered in the manner desired? Is the sick person always healed through the ministry of healing of the elders, the prayer and the anointing with oil in the name of the Lord? If not, does this mean that the elders lack faith? Well, it might. And it is *the elder's* faith of which James speaks. But even the fullest faith does not override the providence of God, and the elders cannot know the deep counsel of God with respect to the recovery of a sick brother or sister. It is perhaps best to think of this whole section in the same way that we consider the proverb – again, part of Wisdom – "*Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.*"[480] This is not an inerrant guarantee with respect to the future destiny of a believer's child, nor is the waywardness of such a child an infallible indication of failure on the part of the parents. We must make a distinction between God's *normal* providence – the way things are arranged in the normal sequence of cause and effect – and God's *special* providence, the purpose and plan that He keeps within His own counsel, unrevealed to His children. James is merely saying, in the language of Wisdom literature, that healing and harmony are normally the result of mutual confession and prayer, the implication being that the lack of these two latter qualities will usually result in the lack of both health and harmony in the body.

[479] Laws; 236.
[480] Proverbs 22:6

Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 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. **(5:19-20)**

There is a far more serious situation than physical illness: the falling away of a professed brother from the right path, the path of truth. This has really been the issue all along in James' wisdom letter, the various issues and problems and exhortations all combining to answer Cain's infamous question, that we are each our brother's keeper, and must at all times be on the lookout as to how we might rescue someone who has strayed from the truth. This is the ultimate 'Two Paths' wisdom – the path of salvation according to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and the path of destruction. "James concludes, then, with a picture of a Christian community whose members take responsibility for their errant brothers, to their mutual benefit, as they regularly act together for their common deliverance from sin and its consequences."[481] Once again we see a powerful resonance between James and Paul, who writes to the Galatians,

> *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. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* (Galatians 6:1-2)

With this mutual care and responsibility in mind, Mariam Kamell aptly summarizes the entire book of James:

> Because God is generous, his people ought to be generous. Because God opposes the proud, his people ought to strive for humility. Because God is pure and single-minded, his followers ought to shun the things of the world that taint and lead them to double-mindedness. Because God speaks grace and truth to his people, his disciples' speech ought to be gracious and considerate, not judgmental. Because God loves the poor, his people ought to love the poor…James roots his imperatives in the very character and nature of the God who in his grace initiated a covenant relationship.[482]

[481] Laws; 241.
[482] Kamell; 287.