

James Lesson 01

James Chapter 1

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Memory verses for this week: *Deu 4:31 (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them..*

Introduction: We begin a new study this week on the book of James. In the New Testament, there are four men identified with the name of James. It is believed that the author of this book was most likely the half brother of Jesus Christ, since he possessed all of the qualities of the author. We find he was the one James referred to by his name alone in Galatians and Acts, and was apparently well known to the scattered believers.

James was a leader in the Jerusalem church, and grew up in Nazareth. He moved to Capernaum when Jesus began His public ministry, but like the other half brothers of Christ, did not truly believe in Jesus as Lord until the end of Christ's earthly ministry. It is believed that the book of James was one of the earliest books written and was addressed to the 12 scattered tribes of Israel.

Early tradition holds that James was martyred in about A.D. 62 and that this epistle was written some years prior to that. The focus is upon 'Messianic synagogues.' As the infant church developed initially through the Jewish Diaspora, assemblies of believing Jews still referred to their congregations as 'synagogues,' especially east of Palestine. It is of interest that the word translated as "assembly" in James 2:2 is in fact 'synagoge' or 'synagogue.'

The epistle therefore is quite Jewish in character. In content, it is one of the most elementary of the New Testament epistles. The epistle is practical in nature. It begins with why there is testing of faith. He then deals with partiality in the church, the hazards of the tongue, worldliness, the danger of affluence, preparation for the Lord's return, and finally, effective prayer.

I. Purpose of Testings

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

As mentioned in the introduction, James is the author of this book and he identifies himself as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. He addresses the letter to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad. We know that 10 of the tribes (those making up the northern kingdom of Israel), were scattered before the Babylonian captivity. The final two, Judah and Benjamin, were scattered after Christ's death.

As noted in the introduction above, the inspired author, James, likely was the half-brother of Jesus. Though the writer could have identified himself as the 'brother of Jesus,' he rather more humbly referred to himself simply as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." God places great emphasis on humility.

The epistle will clearly show that its intended readership were assemblies of believers, likely Jewish in character. In as much as Paul was the apostle to the gentiles and took the gospel to the west, it may well be that James, like Peter, was an *apostle* to the substantial Jewish settlements still located to the east where the Babylon empire once was.

It should be remembered that only a small percentage of the Jews transplanted there by the Babylonians returned during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. There remained Jewish communities in that region throughout most of the twentieth century. James sends **greeting**. The word so translated, (cairw) *chairō*, literally means to 'rejoice' and was an idiomatic form of greeting in that day.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;

James 1:3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

James exhorts the brethren to count it all joy when they fall into temptations. He goes on to explain why in verse 3, as those temptations try our faith and teach us patience.

James wastes no time in going directly to his first topic of discussion. "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.*"

Implied here is that his intended audience of believers were probably facing trials in their Christian walk. Trouble and trials are never encouraging and most difficult to hide. One may remain silent but their countenance will speak with out inquiry or provocation. James, with the wisdom of spiritual maturity, counsels them to be glad when various testing overwhelms.

He refers to *faith* for the first of twelve times in the epistle. The fact is that the trial of our faith develops patience. The word so translated ('upomonh *hupomone*) conveys the sense of 'endurance,' 'steadfastness,' and 'perseverance.'

And so we see here that God allows trials to develop the virtue of spiritual perseverance. It is a mark of spiritual maturity. As difficulties arise in the Christian life, we ought rather than becoming discouraged, to rejoice therein.

Such trials will produce greater spiritual maturity. God knows that and therefore allows such testing.

The thought parallels Romans 5:1-5.

Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Rom 5:2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Rom 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

Rom 5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

Rom 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

The Believers Study Bible said this about the temptations we face.

In this chapter (vv. 2, 12–14) is found the classic example of the biblical distinction between “trial” and “temptation.” “Trials” in v. 2 comes from ???(Gk.), which often means a “fiery trial” or a “proving,” tests which are for the purpose of building fortitude in the believer. The word translated “perfect” means the “end” or “completeness” of a process or thing. The trials are designed to bring about spiritual maturity and completeness in the believer (v. 3). In vv. 12–14, James makes it clear that God never takes the initiative in “tempting” men. The general biblical teaching on this distinction is that whereas God allows men to be tested, He cannot by His very nature test men with evil intent (v. 13). Clearly when men are tempted to do evil, it is the consequence of yielding to Satan’s enticements because of their own fallen sinful natures. ⁱ

James 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

By nature, we are inclined to be impatient. Even Christians sometimes rebel against the ways of God when those go contrary to God’s desires. As we grow in the grace of patience, we will stop our rebellion against the will of God. And as God matures us, we will become Christians of strong moral character. We have many examples of God maturing men in this manner. Job is an excellent example of a man who was tried, and when tried, he was found faithful to God.

James counsels, “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” As God’s people, we are enjoined (the verb have {ecw echo} is imperative) to allow patience to fully develop through testing.

The alternative is to give up. The goal is that we may be (1) perfect. The word so translated (teleiov telios) among other things has the idea of being ‘mature.’ In this case, the thought is of being spiritually mature.

Then also, patience is good that we might be (2) entire and complete.

ⁱ W.A. Criswell, *Believer’s study Bible [computer file], electronic ed.*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

Finally, another purpose of testing is that we might be wanting nothing or be not lacking spiritually.

Many people today buy into this Christian Prosperity teaching. They say if we get saved, that all of our problems and trials will be over. The only problem with that is that it isn't in God's Word and it is a lie. Trouble does come in the Christian life. Sometimes its of our own folly or lack of wisdom. God, on other occasions allows it to come, nevertheless, to develop spiritual maturity and perseverance within. We are directed to rejoice therein rather than mope and complain. We do have a promise that God will meet our needs, but a life full of riches is never promised. As a matter of fact, we are told that if we live Godly that we will suffer persecution. Paul warned young Timothy to expect problems.

2 Tim 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

James shifts to another related matter. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

The word translated as lack (leipw leipo) is the same word which was translated as wanting in the previous verse. It may well be that which was lacking in verse 4 is the wisdom mentioned here.

If so, there is a link between trials in the Christian life and the development of godly wisdom. The sacred writer further instructs that when we need wisdom to seek it directly from God.

Prayer here before us becomes a vehicle for the reception of wisdom. Such prayer is faith-in-action as will be further described in verse 6.

Mark 11:22 And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God.

Mark 11:23 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Of interest is that James notes that God is willing to give to His people especially in the matter of wisdom. This certainly is praying according to His will.

1 John 5:13 These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

1 John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

1 John 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Prov 4:5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

Prov 4:6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee.

Prov 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

In such cases, God will give liberally. We are to go to God in our prayers 'without reservation.'

Moreover, when we go to God seeking His wisdom in a matter, He upbraideth not.

When we seek God for wisdom, he will not deny us or berate or chastise us. Rather, when we come to God seeking wisdom, not only will He grant it without reservation, He in no wise will rebuke us for so asking. Here is a precious promise for wisdom whenever it is needed.

In verse 6, James adds a word of caution. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

It says we are to ask in faith not doubting. The man or woman who prays and doubts is like the waves of the sea as it is tossed about. Some one like that will never receive wisdom. Because this person is unstable and lacks the faith God requires to acquire wisdom.

The injunction is to ask in faith without wavering. The word so translated (diakrinw dia- krino) here has the sense of 'hesitation' or 'doubt.' Doubt is the direct opposite of faith.

Doubt will drain away the reservoir of faith if allowed. Faith is simply taking God at His Word. Sounds simple enough, but it takes a lot to look past today's problems and issues and just trust the Lord no matter what. We have to realize that there is no problem too big that God cannot grant the wisdom to solve. The

error on our part is that we assume our problems are such that even God cannot solve them. Therefore, doubt precludes us from seeking God's help in the first place. God created all the universe and everything we see. Do we really think He can not overcome the trials that we face. Doubt is likened to the instability of the seas. "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."

When we doubt that God is able to solve our problem or move our mountain, we for our part manifest spiritual instability like waves at sea. Bodies of water large or small are routinely agitated by the wind. Waves roll across the seas manifesting their instability. So are those who doubt that God can provide the wisdom to solve that which troubles them.

James 1:7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

James 1:8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

James warns further, "For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

Last ditch prayer mingled with doubt is feeble and such prayer does not move God to do anything.

Verse 8 has a serious warning... a double minded man is unstable in ALL of his ways. A man or woman like this can not be depended upon. When I think of a double minded man, a politician comes to mind. Many politicians seem to talk out of both sides of their mouth, saying one thing one time, and something else the other time. They want to stay popular by being on the side with the higher mark in the polls. A backslidden or carnal Christian may try to live for God some days, and live for the devil too. But it won't work.

We have to have a single mind dedicated to God to be blessed of the Lord. I think it is wise to decide which side we are on, and stay there. And it needs to be God's side. Margaret Thatcher, the great speaker from England, once said she did not like to sit on the fence leaning to both sides. She said people on the fence don't know where the rocks come from, since they will be thrown at you from both sides. That is pretty good logic when it comes to making up our minds and staying with our decision. If you want to be on the right side, get on God's side and stay.

It has been my observation that weak Christians seek God's help as a last resort and then with the thought that He probably can't or won't do anything about it anyway. I'm afraid when we come like that, God acts accordingly.

In verse 8, James concludes this matter by noting, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.” The word translated as double minded (diquocov dipsuchos) has the additional sense of ‘wavering,’ ‘uncertain,’ or ‘doubting.’

It refers to divided interests. The greater thought is of a Christian, a supposed believer, yet at the same time doubting God’s ability to provide deliverance from the trouble at hand. A person who is unstable is not at peace with God or themselves, and they are in effect unsettled. The thought is of ‘lacking a solid foundation.’ We indeed have a solid foundation in Christ our Rock. When a person is walking in the spirit and being guided by the Holy Spirit, there is no fear and none of this instability. But the wicked are afraid of most everything.

Prov 28:1 The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.

Doubt can shift us away from that foundation to the bobbing waves of spiritual instability. As long as we allow ourselves to continue in this fashion, we drift away from God. Our faithless state will grow in severity. Misery is at hand.

God gives us instructions as to what we should do if we lack wisdom. We are to come to him and ask. But when we ask, we are not to come with an attitude of “Oh well... I’m probably not going to get an answer to this prayer anyway.” Rather, we should come EXPECTING to receive an answer. All men need wisdom. Perhaps the wisest man who ever lived was King David’s son, Solomon. He showed wisdom early in his life when given the opportunity to receive whatever he desired, he chose for God to give him wisdom.

2 Chr 1:7 In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.

2 Chr 1:8 And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast showed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead.

2 Chr 1:9 Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.

2 Chr 1:10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?

2 Chr 1:11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:

2 Chr 1:12 Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had

that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

Prov 8:11 For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.

Prov 9:8 Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

Prov 9:9 Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.

Prov 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

II. Our Attitude toward the Rich and Poor

James 1:9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

James 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

Down through the ages, there always have been Christians who are materially poor. “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.” One of the trials of life is the difficulty of being poor. That likely is what James so refers to as “the brother of low degree.”

However, the sacred writer encourages such an one to rejoice in that he actually is exalted. Though we may be of low estate financially, as far as the world is concerned, the truth is that we actually have high rank in Christ. The fullness thereof will not be realized until Christ returns. Nevertheless, it will come to pass.

James continues, “But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” Then, even as now, there were brethren in the churches who in some cases were of substantial means.

James counsels them to rejoice in being humbled. Affluence is fragile indeed. Unforeseen circumstances can destroy one’s wealth overnight. If and when that might happen, he urged his financially wealthy readers rather to rejoice. James is back to where he began in urging his brethren to “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”

Some of the tests in life come by financial reversal. Nevertheless, God is able to provide and may even allow such to develop spiritual maturity. Whether one is poor or rich, rejoice in the Lord and trust Him regardless.

Verse 9 points out that we are happy when we are exalted. And God one day will exalt many who are perceived to be of a low degree. The man or woman who faithfully serves the Lord year after year in humble sincerity will one day receive for all the good they have done. But there is a warning to those who may not think they need God, that they will be made low. Just having money does not make us bad, but trusting in uncertain riches is a sure way to fail. The rich man may seem to prosper, but all too soon, he has to die.

Mat 6:19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

James 1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

The middle-eastern reader was all too familiar with the power of the sun. As summer drew on, the midday sun routinely withered the flowers of spring. Their beauty fades and their blossoms fall. The same fate faces the wealthy. If they do not lose their wealth, they will lose their health and their vitality as age wears on.

Retirement communities of our day are full of people of means who are faded flowers of the prominence they once held. The greater thought at hand is that Christians who are poor ought to rejoice in God and their coming exaltation at Christ's return. Christians who are financially wealthy ought to focus on the Lord and rejoice in Him. Their earthly wealth is shaky at best.

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James 1:12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Blessing is promised for those who endure times of testing. James has come full circle. He began by enjoining his readers to rejoice in testings. Now, he notes the blessing for so enduring such testings. The word translated as tried (dokimov dokimos) in this context has the sense of being 'tested.'

In that direct context is promised "the crown of life" for persevering in times of testing in the Christian life. This may be part of what he was referring to in the

brother of low degree rejoicing. As Christians go through trials in life, patiently persevering therein, God has promised a crown of life.

Paul refers to the same general reward in I Corinthians 9:25.

1 Cor 9:25 And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

This very well may be one of a number of crowns which will be awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

James goes on to note that this crown has been promised by God “to them that love him.” Clearly implied is that love for Christ is a major motive which keeps God’s people faithful in times of testing.

In Revelation 2:10, Jesus Himself promised the crown of life for faithfulness in the face of persecution.

Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

There are several crowns promised in the Word of God. This verse says that if we endure temptation, we shall receive the crown of life. What a blessing to know that God will bless us for being faithful to Him.

J. Vernon McGee said this about enduring temptation.

Testing is one of God’s methods of developing us in the Christian faith. This is the way He is going to enable us to grow and develop patience in our lives down here, but He also has something in mind for the future—“the crown of life.”

Testing of any kind, but especially if it is a severe calamity or tragedy, has a tendency to produce a miasma of pessimism and hopelessness. I do not blame the man whose wife was ill with Parkinson’s disease for feeling like he did. I do not blame him for asking, “Why?” But the child of God can have the confidence that God is doing it for a very definite reason and that He has a purpose in it all. today? How many cynics? How many are there who are filled with bitterness, although they have everything? We are seeing an epidemic of suicides among teenagers, and thousands of other young people are

dropping out of society today. Why? It is because they have no goal in life. One of the more sensible news commentators made this remark: “Back during the depression people had a will to live and there were very few suicides, but today when everything has been given to them they want to die.”

When faith is tested and surrounded by darkness, when the waves are rolling high and all seems lost, the child of God knows that this is not the end. It may be gloom now, but it will be glory later on. As the psalmist said, “... weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Ps. 30:5). James says here,

However, the man of the world will sink beneath the waves of adversity. Life, even at its best, makes him pessimistic. How many pessimists are there “He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” ⁱⁱ

II. Temptation to do Evil is Not of God

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

James 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

James now shifts to the other aspect of temptation, the enticement to do wrong.

He warns, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” The word translated as tempted (peirazw peirazo) is the verbal derivative of the word translated as temptation in verse 12 (peirasmov peirasmos).

Here, it is used in the negative sense—an enticement to sin. James warns against any alleging that such temptation is from God. He sets forth two obvious truths. God cannot be tempted to do evil. The infinite holiness of God is in view.

Because God is holy, He never has nor ever will tempt any man to do wrong. 3) Such blasphemous folly (alleging that God tempts to do evil) is incongruous with the very nature of God.

In verse 14, it says man is lured by his own lust. It is inherent within. “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

Though on other occasions, the devil is mentioned as a tempter, here, James places the blame squarely on human lust. In the first verses of this chapter, James spoke of temptation in regards to testing or undergoing a trial. Now he speaks of the temptation of the flesh to sin. God does not tempt men to sin.

ⁱⁱ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

Back in the garden of Eden, when the first person was tempted, Eve yielded to temptation because it was her choice. It says that every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed.

Gen 3:6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

The lusts of the flesh are not of God. They are failures on our part when we fail and sin against a Holy and Righteous God.

1 John 2:15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

1 John 2:16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

1 John 2:17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

James 1:16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

Notice the pattern... What lust hath conceived, it brings forth sin and death. But James wanted them to understand and not make those errors. King David recognized that when he sinned, it was against a Holy God, and against Him only. But David had a desire to know God's Word that he might not sin.

Psa 51:2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psa 51:3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

Psa 51:4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.

Psa 119:10 With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments.

Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Many times we are lured by our own lusts and thus baited and caught even as a fish. The blame therefore lies squarely upon us. God certainly is not the agent thereof. We cannot even claim, 'the devil made me do it.', a term that the comedian Flip Wilson used to use in the 70's. Temptation rises from within. The devil may take advantage of that fact which he often does. But temptation stems from unholy desires within.

James then shifts the analogy to that of conception and birth. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." The thought is how lust will develop within which leads to the sin, whatever its character may be. The bitter truth is that sin thus conceived leads ultimately to death.

Eve didn't really believe God who warned Adam in the day that thou eatest thereof "thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Her disobedience led to immediate spiritual death which ultimately brought physical death. The course of sin is described as that of a birth. The sinful desire is the conception; the sinful deed, the birth; spiritual and eternal death are the final result.

In that context, James warns in verse 16, "Do not err, my beloved brethren."

The word translated as err (planaw planao) has the sense of being deceived. He warns his beloved brethren of such deception: that God is the source of temptation and that of sin itself.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

We need to remember where the good things come from. Verse 17 tells us that EVERY good gift, every perfect gift, comes from above. It is God who gives us the good things in life. This week, I told my wife that people who don't follow the plan of God for the family have no idea the damage they do both to themselves, and their children and grandchildren. I'm afraid there is a great lack of love in far too many children today, and families are paying a price for not doing things God's way. We need to remember that all these great things are not something

to be taken for granted, but they are given to us by God. Even salvation itself is a gift of God. Verse 18 says of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

James moves on to another related truth. *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.”*

The goodness of God is further found in that He gives spiritual birth through the Word of God. However, the fact this birth is by the “word of truth” clearly indicates it is spiritual. He is referring to the new birth. Regeneration is through the agency of the Word of God.

1 Pet 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

“that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures,” James may be referring to the first generation of Christianity. They indeed were the first fruits of the greater body of believers which would accrue down through the ages.

First fruits were a concept familiar to the Jewish mind. It was the initial portion of a harvest which was reserved for God.

Exo 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

Exo 34:26 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

I. Instructions to Live By

James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

James continues with simple yet profound instruction from God. Before we move on let us remember; (1) the trying of our faith worketh patience and that (2) God does not tempt anyone to sin and that (3) every good gift is from above.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” There is profound wisdom herein. Many a problem in life would be precluded if this simple formula were universally practiced by God’s people.

(3)He is touching upon the matter of temper and its loss thereof which will be dealt with later in the chapter.

Verse 19 is one of those we need to memorize and take it to heart. We all should be SWIFT to hear, SLOW to speak, and SLOW to wrath. If you are like me, you want to speak up first. My personality is a lot like Peter’s was. I want to speak and let my position be made known. But sometimes a quick word does not show wisdom, but shows our lack of it. God wants us to be humble people who are not easily provoked. But when it comes to God’s Word, we should take it in totally and immediately. Our lives should be based off of ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ Psychology books will fail you. God’s Word has endured the test of time, and it will still be here in eternity future. It is solid, and very much what we need to live happy and contented lives.

James 1:20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

Verse 20 warns that wrath does not glorify God. We are to lay aside wrath and all the negative things of sin, and receive God’s Word with meekness.

Here is a truth that will help you if you can take it. “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” There is such a thing as righteous indignation. However, rarely are we afflicted thereby. Most wrath on our part emanates from the flesh and is a work thereof. Human anger or wrath rarely if ever accomplishes the righteousness of God. Or to put it another way, anger exhibited rarely is righteous.

In verse 21, James receives a most logical conclusion in this regard.

“Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.”

The word translated as filthiness (ruparia rhuparia) also has the sense of ‘defilement’ and here undoubtedly refers to the wrath of man mentioned above. Loss of temper invariably leads to sin.

The phrase “superfluity of naughtiness” has the literal sense ‘abundance of malice’ (or, ill will). Again, James is touching upon what evidently was a problem in his readers, a proclivity to anger, temper, and malice. He enjoins them (and us) to put such away. Rather, he directs to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” We are instructed to receive with such composure the “engrafted word.”

The word translated as engrafted (emfutov emphutos) has the sense of 'implanted.' In other words, James urged his readers to receive the Word of God and implant it in their hearts. Moreover, that blessed Word "is able to save your souls."

III. Test of Obedience

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

James 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

James 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

James 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

One of the old Nike commercials used to say "Just do it." Well, that may or may not be true, depends on what you are talking about. But when it comes to God's Word, we need to be doing it. To simply hear it is not enough. He likens doing that to a man looking in a mirror and then walking away. A reflection means little, but true acts of righteousness, God will reward. The doer of the Word is the one who will be blessed. That old saying that "Hell is a road paved with good intentions" might be true. Many intend to do something... they have good intentions. But they put it off. One small deed done is greater than a thousand good thoughts with no action.

Mat 10:40 He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

Mat 10:41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

Mat 10:42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

In regard to the engrafted Word, James now comes to his greater point. "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Our duty is as simple as it is profound. God has called a means to the greater end of us to do His Word and not just hear it. To be a hearer only is to be self-deceiving. How many a Christian to this day comes to a preaching service, sits, hears, goes home, and never does what was preached. They may think themselves as good Christians. However, James says they are deluded.

This will be touched upon in verse 26, still just beneath the surface lays the matter of loss of temper and a sharp tongue. It is clearly in that context that James is directing the matter of being a doer of the Word. The preceding context (verses 19-21) also touches upon this same matter.

In verse 23, James continues. “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass.” He likens one who hears the Word but basically ignores it to a fellow who gets up in the morning and looks in the mirror focusing on the visible external appearance giving no thought to spiritual matters.

And so is the one who merely hears the Word but does not integrate and implant it to the degree he actually does it. Until such time, it will be as seed on the surface. It is only when it is implanted (buried) that it begins to work. The greater lesson is the implementation of God’s Word into our lives. Jesus directed in the Great Commission to teach them “to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Jehovah directed Joshua to meditate in His Word day and night to the extent he might “observe to do according to all that is written therein.” The emphasis throughout the Word of God is the doing thereof. Hearing is only the beginning. It surely is not the end.

Great truth is at hand. James describes one who looketh into God’s Word. He further describes how this one continueth *therein*. The word so translated (paramenw *parameno*) has the additional sense of remaining in God’s Word. More than casual absorption or passing knowledge is at hand.

James speaks of one who takes the time to study the Word and continues to do so. This one is one who becomes a “doer of the work.” Those who will carefully absorb God’s Word over the long run will develop into those who actually do God’s work. The result is that *“this man shall be blessed in his deed.”*

God will bless what such an one does. Therefore, there is a simple, yet profound formula for the blessing of God upon our work. It is the continual absorption of God’s Word to the point that we actually do it. The thought closely parallels the truth in Psalm 1:2-3 and Joshua 1:8. Continual study of God’s Word, to the point we actually do it, leads to the blessing (prospering) of God on what we do.

Psa 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

Psa 1:3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Josh 1:8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

James here introduces a unique reference to God's Word. He refers to it as "*the perfect law of liberty*."

He goes on to mention it again in 2:12. At first glance, there might seem to be a contradiction of terms. God's Word certainly is perfect. The word so translated (teleiov *teleios*) not only refers to perfection, but also to completeness.

God's Word is both. Notwithstanding it contains the *Law* of God, at once and the same time it is the source of *liberty*. The gospel sets men free from their sins, the power thereof, and its penalty. It contains the Law of God. In the Old Testament, there is the ethical and moral law of God in the Mosaic Law. In the New Testament, there is the law of Christ. The New Testament law of Christ in particular is perfect and liberating.

IV. Test of True Religion

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Since the events of September 11th, I think the world has been made aware that there are lots of religions out in the world. There is a true religion, and then there are literally dozens of false religions. It says here that true religion is always in obedience to the Word of God. It is a religion after the true God. And this true God we speak of is not some mystical higher being, but He is the Almighty God Jehovah, the one declared in the pages of God's Word. The same God that Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac worshiped. False religion is a religion after man. It is disobedient to the teachings of God's Word.

After having touched such lofty heights, James returns to more ordinary problems in day-to-day Christian living.

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."

Of interest is the word translated as religious (yrhskov *threskos*). It has the sense of one who at least outwardly worships God. It would reflect the perception of outward piety. For such an one, however, James warns that if he cannot bridle his tongue, "this man's religion *is* vain."

James returns to the early warning of loss of temper, wrath, and anger. It inevitably manifests itself in an unbridled tongue. One can claim to be pious and religious. However, an unrestrained tongue is the absolute proof opposing such a statement. Such 'religion' is *vain*. The thought of this word is 'useless' and 'devoid of the truth.' James notes how such an one in fact "deceiveth his own heart."

Those who portray themselves as religious but will not restrain their tongues not only deceive themselves, and clearly are not doers of the Word. Such certainly does not fulfill the righteousness of God.

In verse 27, it teaches that pure and undefiled religion is twofold.

"visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction."

The greater thought in this context is to care for or give necessary assistance. A true religious spirit involves helping those who are genuinely destitute, especially when their poverty is not of their own folly. In ancient times, there were not the vast governmental social agencies to help the unfortunate so common today. Rather, orphans and widows often were on their own, often with no hope. James directed care for them, especially as they had contact with the church. The other aspect of true religion is holiness of life: "to keep himself unspotted from the world."

It is of significance that impurity is directly connected to the world. That is why the Word of God is so adamant about not being conformed to this world, of not being friends therewith, and not loving it. When these matters are settled we find the peace of God and are able to fulfill our purpose joyfully, which is the great commission. True religion is revealed in verse 27... to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Living Godly lives that are righteous and glorifying to our ultimate example, Jesus Christ.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be

blessed.