



A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF
JAMES

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A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES

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Introduction

Authenticity is a word that is closely associated with the Christian church. Throughout church history there are those who have succeeded and those who have failed to be authentic. What makes someone an authentic Christian? When their salvation shows in how they live.

It seems as though James was addressing a common problem of his day and ours - people who profess faith but present very little evidence of a life that lines up with it. The strongest terminology for this would be *hypocrite*; a little gentler word would be *backslider* or even *forgetful*. Forgetfulness is not forgetting something but knowing something and failing to live up to what you know to be true. James writes to this type of person - everyone to some extent.

It would seem that these Jewish Christians who James was writing to had fallen into this type of trouble. It also seems that they didn't realise it. Evidently many of them were facing trials and troubles and James tells them that their trials are God's training and they should welcome it. He tells them that their behaviour is less than godly and for this reason God is sending trials to encourage godliness. Worldliness, criticism and prejudice have crept in unnoticed and God won't have it. James writes a letter that contains the wisdom they need: he encourages them to pray that God would give them what they need in the situation.

This letter will always be relevant to the church. Every generation will probably say it matters for them more than ever. (Except Martin

Luther who called it 'an epistle of straw' - but that was because of his context.) Western rich, flamboyant and comfortable living is poised on a slippery slope. Spiritual coldness and social prejudice are close friends of physical wealth. As we look at this boo we'll see James tell us there is a kind of Christianity that knows an awful lot but fails to live according to what it has heard.

We will have to hear James afresh if we want to count for God. We will have to hear God guiding us. "Let every person be quick to hear and slow to speak", James will tell us (1:19). This epistle is thoroughly practical, full of preacher style encouragement and, if heeded, is sure to bring the listener to a deeper Christian experience of Jesus.

The intention of this study is to get to grips with the message of the book of James. This is obviously not an exhaustive study.

For a more detailed study there are a huge number of works on James. For this booklet Michael Eaton's PTTB: *James*; R.T Kendall's two volumes on James by Paternoster; Douglas Moo: *the letter of James*; Alec Motyer: *James* BST series; Roger Ellsworth: *Opening up James* were all consulted John Calvin and Matthew Henry are recommended as well.

Let's approach James with the intention to hear the Father talk to us afresh.

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Part One

Salvation needs to be evident

James' overriding theme for his letter is godliness. Growth in godliness is imperative for the Christian. God saved us to be like Him. But this growth is not linear and doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens in everyday life with the people God has placed us with.

Godliness is practical. Some of it is hidden in the heart but much of it can be seen. It comes by pursuing Jesus with faith and patience. This pursuit leads us through many difficulties with the world and ourselves. There is a lot to overcome in the process; many passions to put down; many acts of love to complete. James writes his letter to help in this process.

Remember when trying to understand the Scriptures there are a few steps to go through logically to make our understanding full and correct:

- 1. Know what kind of genre the work is.**
- 2. Know all the contextual detail.**
- 3. Get to know the arguments and the teaching.**
- 4. Apply these to our context.**

So let's begin that process.

Who is this James?

There are at least four different James' in the New Testament. The James that writes this letter is James the brother of Jesus. How do we

know this? Because:

- James the son of Alpheus is a rather obscure figure mentioned only in lists of apostles and probably not well known enough to simply write his letter 'from James' – this would not be authoritative enough for him.
- It is generally taken that James the son of Zebedee would have already been martyred (A.D.44) at the authoring of this letter.
- The other James is only mentioned in Luke 6:16 as the Father of Judas. This name is only mentioned to distinguish between the two Judas' that made up Jesus' disciples.

This leaves James the half brother of Jesus to be the best match. There are other reasons for believing this as well but we don't have space to delve into those here. He is mentioned in the gospels but only became a follower of Jesus after the resurrection (John 7:5). He became a prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12:7). Interestingly, two hundred and thirty words in the letter of James are the same as the words of James in Acts 15.

Early church historian Josephus tells us that James was arrested and stoned to death. His charge was the violation of Jewish law. He died in A.D. 61.

Who is James addressing?

James is most certainly addressing a Jewish Christian audience. He is

writing in A.D 45-50 to Jewish Christians scattered around the known world. He wants to encourage them and begins by addressing them as the ‘twelve tribes of Israel’.

James knows what they are going through. It's what the true people of God have always gone through. The narrative of Israel is in view – redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb and then travelling through the trouble of the wilderness to reach the Promised Land. Oh how they battled to enter into what the Lord had promised!

James is addressing the ‘twelve tribes’ in the new world and they will to have to deal with life amongst pagan people with temptations and struggles on every side. They are just like Israel living amongst the *‘weight of life’s pressures, the lure of this world and ever present pressure to conform to its standards’* (Motyer 1985:25). They are genuine believers but are not yet home yet. For now they will need James’ letter like Israel needed continual help from the Prophets and servants sent by God.

What is James addressing?

James is a thoroughly practical book. He doesn’t spend as much time as Paul does in establishing why we should behave as we should. But you do find them there, they are just a little less obvious.

James shows a keen awareness of the problems his readers are facing. He knows the times, knows the challenges and knows what they need to know to triumph. And James knows our times, our challenges and what we need to triumph. He knows this because what we read here are actually God’s words written to His people whenever they read

them. It just has to go from being read as God's word *then* to God's word *now* , and that needs the Holy Spirit's power. And our reading of the letter will certainly need that!

It is our view that James does have a major theme that he is dealing with. He has a central aim. His aim is to bring these Christians to a high level of godly living. This is also a major theme of every New Testament letter. To fill this theme out James will tell them what is happening to them and why; he will tell them what should be happening but isn't.

Here are what we consider to be some of the *background ideas* and where we should start before navigating James in more detail. We would need to make a few decisions and realise a few principles in advance.

Fooling ourselves is easier than we think

“Don't be deceived my brothers and sisters” (James 1:16). Spine chilling words if we understand what they can mean.

The two great problems with deception are (1) it leads us into error (2) when someone is deceived, they generally don't know it. That is scary indeed! Many of us would probably say, “There is no way I'm deceived”. But such confidence is unmerited. James will have to help us all. Some of the greatest people in the Bible were deceived.

The most 'spiritual' and God fearing people of the New Testament – the Jewish leaders – were totally deceived. Adam and Eve were deceived (Genesis 3:13). Deuteronomy 11:16 says, “Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and

worship them.” This will forever warn us. To serve something (career, wallet, personal affections, success, esteem) more than we serve God is so very easy!

Three times James uses the word *deceive*. (In 1:16; 1:22 and 1:26). To be deceived here means exactly what it means – to ‘reason amiss’ or ‘to wonder from what you know to be true’. James mentions three areas where this can happen so easily: (1) when things go wrong in life, (2) when we read the Scriptures, and (3) when we talk. These are three major areas where deception is easily possible. We will deal with each of these in their respective chapters.

For now we are to know that James, at some point in his letter, may help us discover that we are in fact deceived. We may know something but fail to live up to what we have heard. This can happen to the best and worst of us.

We should approach James by asking the Father for help even before we read a verse.

Spiritual recovery requires skillful consideration

RT Kendall believes a major theme in the book of James is patience. This is shown clearly in 1:19-20: *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”*

Here James is talking about a person who approaches the Scriptures. Many people are so very quick to throw in a ‘but’ when they read the Scriptures and are challenged by them. We say things like, *“I know, but.”* Or, *“Yes, but.”*

If we were to provide the full meaning of the *but* it would be "I know what God says but he doesn't seem to really understand my situation," or even worse, "I know what God says but personally I don't like it very much, so who cares really?". This is a clear sign of what Michael Eaton calls 'respectable backsliding'.

This is whom James is addressing – people who think they aren't that bad. Their problems are not major moral or obvious, such as immorality or drunkenness. We will see that the book of James is for us today. For you, reading this right now.

James knows something. When someone is self-righteous they will be quick to talk back to God. They are quick to throw out their opinion and make excuses and throw the truth aside. Spiritual recovery requires careful consideration. Forgiveness from God is easy. A person comes back to God and asks Him to mercifully forgive and it's done, but to begin to live for God when you are so used to comfortable sin is not so easy.

We should approach James knowing that God will speak to us. It would be good decide in advance that when the Word points something out in your life and heart you'll lower your voice and go into your room and cry to God for help. These things are done by His Spirit.

Christianity needs to be evident

Ask a Christian what their definition of spiritual maturity is and you may be surprised by the answers you get. In our circles the most

common answers will be someone who reads their Bible a lot; prays a lot; doesn't swear; prophesies regularly; and a few more of the same type of answers.

If we asked the apostle Paul what he would call spiritual maturity he would say, "Someone who knows what it means to live a godly life and has then learned to live that godly life". He makes this clear in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. He calls them babies - they were still jealous of each other's different gifts.

James has the same concern. It seems there were people who knew about the Christian life but failed to live according to what they knew. How could James have known this would be so relevant today? There is more information at hand than ever before in history. The Internet has given us more information than we can cope with! We know so much, yet we are so the same! Christianity needs to show; he who knows what they should do and doesn't do it sins; he is yet a baby, James will say. (James 4:17.)

This is James' point in the first chapter of the book around suffering. James says they are suffering because God wants to make them into someone holy. They are lacking in their godliness. They have heard but they have not behaved; now God will help godliness come about and He will use trials to do it.

For James godliness works itself in two areas:

- **Good works**
- **Separation from the world**

A godly person has learned to add good works to their faith. They are also someone who is 'done' with world; someone who has finished sleeping with the enemy; someone who desires above all else to serve God in God's way.

Before we approach James we need to know that his message is going to work out practically. If you are unwilling to change the way you live your life rather don't read James. If you have no plan to break old routines for new behaviours, stop now. Godliness will involve changed behaviour. You've got to be ready to want that.

Every Christian will have to learn to pray. And really pray

We can be grateful for James 5:16: "The prayer of a righteous person has great power." James will have us learn to pray. He won't teach much on the practicals of prayer, he already knows where his life of prayer has brought him. Prayer is one of James' solutions to the problem of lack of godliness. Each Christian will have to learn to pray. But really pray. Each one will have to learn to go through all the problems that come to anyone who wishes to grow in a life of prayer. Distraction, a lack of answers, and confusion with the principle of prayer itself are common to everyone who has seriously tried to pray. Some make it through though while others quit. James will have us persevere. The people who learn to live righteously and learn to pray will also know what it is like to have great power.

Is there anyone who doesn't want great power? Probably not. But not many are willing to get it the way God gives it. Godliness and prayer are linked.

If you wish to embark on reading James, it will involve learning to pray, and really pray.

The Christian is to continually esteem and revere the Word

If you were to ask the question: “What is the one thing that God wants most from me?” the answer would be that God primarily wants us to take Him at His word. God wants to be believed and trusted on His Word alone. He wants the fact that He said it to be enough for us.

The fundamental failure of James’ readers was that they were belittling the Word. Somehow they had forgotten who was speaking through it. They began to take it lightly and they became familiar with it. The fact that they failed to esteem the Word as they should actually meant that they were not esteeming the God who spoke the words. To believe His Word means to believe the God who spoke them.

James will have us come to a place where we trust implicitly the word.

Some key verses:

1:16-17

“Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change”

1:22

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

2:8

“If you really fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing well.”

5:8

“You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

Part Two:

Salvation that is evident in our approach to trial and temptation

James 1:2-18

Some of the most freeing and challenging words are spoken here in James 1.

Keep in mind what James is dealing with. His hearers are in trouble. They have let sin creep in and are okay with living in a proud, critical and discriminatory way. God is not. He has sent trials and allowed temptation.

Trials and temptations are closely linked. How we respond to the trial is of tantamount importance. The trials are God's loving discipline; if they fail to grow us it will be a serious failure indeed. The worst thing that could happen is that God would leave them alone. But He hasn't done that yet. Now while He is still active they need to learn, they need to respond the right way. It will be good for them and good for God.

The single greatest secret about trials and temptations are that they are *needed*. They are needed in order to grow spiritually. This is James' major revelation for us to grasp - we need them! That can (and should) change our entire outlook. Jesus was perfect through suffering says Hebrews 2:10. We will likewise be made perfect through suffering. And we want to be perfect don't we? Thank God then for trials... if you can't thank Him, James will help us get to that point.

Here are five important things James wants us to know about trials and temptations:

1. Dealing with trouble is firstly a matter of not being deceived by them

James says in 1:3, “for you *know* that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” Deception according to James is to fail to know something in this case. We can count trials joy for one reason only: We know they are being allowed by God to make us into who He wants us to be. We also know that God is good and an exceedingly great Father. There is no chance that He is out to destroy us. There can also be no doubt that the devil is somehow sneakily destroying us. No chance! Don’t be deceived! God knows what you are going through and works everything for good, even the bad things! He never loses control and never makes a mistake! He even works with our mistakes to achieve His purposes for us.

Know this, James says. Don’t be deceived! But be aware that there are two ways to know here: by revelation and by experience. We are to have both.

2. Trials and temptations *will* come

Both James 1:2 and 1:13 use the word *when* to describe the coming of trouble. Trials are ‘fallen into’ but temptation is always there with us. The difference between trial and temptation will be explained later. We are to know that they will come.

But no need to panic. People panic for two reasons: (1) they forget that God is perfectly in control, or (2) they think that trouble is *always* a result of sin. God does not always treat us in accordance with our sin. At times we may fall into trouble because of sin, but not always. God sends trouble to help us. He sends it at the right time. *It's always to help us.* Even the consequences of sin, which can be disastrous, will be used by God to bring us into being more careful next time. He succeeded with Israel – after Judah and Israel were exiled they never did fall into idolatry again.

Trials and temptation will come because God knows what He is doing. He knows how to rescue the godly from the folly of sin. If there were another way to make us perfect He would surely use it. But this is the best way – it's His way and it if we accept that it will bring great peace to us.

3. We are to know what trials are and how they come

The original Greek words for *trial* and *temptation* are basically the same. There are some similarities and some differences but we should not make the distinction too stark. Every trial will tempt us and each temptation will be a trial to us. It's a principle not a science.

A trial is a testing that we come into. James says we 'fall into' them. The same word is used for the man who 'fell among thieves' in Luke 10:30 in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Trials will be of many kinds. **They might always come at exactly the wrong time.** We will always *feel* as though we cannot cope and the situation is too much to handle.

RT Kendall points out five differences and similarities between temptations and trials:

Differences	Trials	Temptations
Origin	With-out	Within
Moral relevance	Morally irrelevant	Moral
What is tested	Strengths	Weaknesses
Environment	No control	Can be avoided
Time	Constant	Intermittent

Similarities	
Control	Both are devil's activity under God's ultimate control
Timing	Worst and best possible time
Coping	Both are within our ability to cope
Suggestion	Accompanied by the suggestion that 'giving in' is best
Opportunities	Both opportunities for spiritual growth

Trials are the work of the devil with God allowing it. This is hard for some people to handle especially considering the wickedness that goes on under the sun. But it remains true. The world is not out of God's control. Habakkuk was clearly told this. God doesn't explain everything but He does say, "Even if I were to explain, you wouldn't understand". At some point, we have to let God be himself.

4. Trials present an opportunity to test our heart's deepest desire

James promises four things will be ours when we deal with trials as he says we should: steadfastness, perfection, completeness, and lacking nothing. We needn't be scholarly to know that experiencing those words in our lives in an increasing way must be the most fulfilling and rewarding experience second to knowing you will get to heaven. The experience of godliness is the highest reward that God can give us in

this life. He will give us more one day. Make no mistake; you will never regret pursuing James' teaching on handling trials with joy!

5. Trials are to be faced with joy, patience and prayer

James calls us to respond to trials in the right way.

He first calls for joy. He is not calling for foolish-shouting happiness that you have come in serious trouble. He is not sadistic. He says we are to *count* the trials joy. What might a joyful reaction look like? When we can honestly say thank you for it. Thank Him that He is still busy with you and hasn't left you to yourself. We don't grumble, especially not against God. We see it as an opportunity given to us to grow. We face it head on, determined to get all that we can from this opportunity.

Secondly he calls for patience. This means: don't panic! Don't fall into unbelief! Don't let anxious thoughts totally take over. Remind yourself that God is in control, God sees and God knows. God is making sure that this trial is 'passable'. Tell yourself: *"I will never be crushed by this, it's impossible, God has made it that way."* Know that it will pass and won't last forever.

Thirdly, James calls for prayer. Prayer for wisdom. He says that God promises to answer this prayer any time, for anyone, no matter what his or her condition. James will say in chapter 5 that a righteous person will be powerful in prayer. The prayer for wisdom needs only one thing: to be asked believing it is answered for any Christian whenever it is asked. God will give wisdom to whoever asks him confidently. We especially need wisdom in a trial. Trials can confuse

and cloud many things in life. Christians will have to learn to pray if they want to make it through the trials that will definitely come.

The below points are based on the book *Pure Joy* by RT Kendall.

How do we practically do what James is asking for?

1. **Welcome trials**

- a. Welcome it as you would the Holy Spirit. Not like you are thrilled, but welcome it anyway. Like a visitor into your house when they are welcome to come in, "Can I make you tea?"

2. **Don't panic**

- a. Remember God said okay to it.
- b. He is controlling all of the aspects of it. It will not get out of control, it is being carefully watched.

3. **See the trial as a complement from God**

- a. Before you get down, see God as working with you. See yourself as the genuine deal. Congratulations to the person in trial.

4. **Never forget God allowed it**

- a. God has filtered it
- b. We will never know whether he caused it or allowed it - no point asking. We know this - he allowed it!
- c. It's not evil to ask why. Even Jesus did (Matthew 27:46). It's only wrong when you become bitter with Him.
- d. Can't coax God into feeling sorry for you.
- e. If you grumble it will only delay God doing what he wants to for you.

5. **Know that there is a purpose in it**

- a. Growth. To make us more like Jesus. That is worth it all!

6. Don't try to end it

- a. God will do that when the time is right.
- b. We will pass the test if we let God end it.

7. Don't grumble

- a. It takes no grace and strength to complain. That is what sinners do.
- b. It takes great grace to endure temptation and remain self-controlled; to suffer in a trial and keep quiet.

8. Know that God wants you to pass the test far more than you do

- a. He loves us so much.
- b. It brings glory to him.

6. A specific problem

James mentions a specific problem. He will deal with it more fully in James 2. The problems the rich and poor have are ever present trouble. James has a piece of wisdom for both. There were obviously people in the churches at the time who were rich and others who were poor. Money will always have spiritual trouble attached to it. The rich and poor are not immune.

How do you evaluate yourself? James says that spiritual evaluation is the only wise way to evaluate ourselves.

He first has a word for the poor. He says the poor man is honoured. He is honoured because he is chosen to be rich in faith (2:5). The poor man has received a high place in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. He is exalted there to the same position as any human. In the world he is looked down on but with God he receives a special blessing and

special help. He should rejoice that while he has little, he has a whole lot more than he thinks! Of what really counts, spiritual things, the poor person is better off. Money is a trial to the poor man. He has to look past money to spiritual things.

Money is also a trial to the rich man. He will have to look past money to spiritual things. And there he will find humiliation. Why? Because his money will get him nowhere with what really counts before God. He is humiliated because in spiritual things he fades away quickly because his money distracts him. Jesus' words are piercing to the Christian with money in Matthew 19:23-24: *"It is hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom"*. The rich are brought low because before God they have nothing special, just like the poor man in the world. Riches are fleeting, they can be gone in an instant; security in riches is, spiritually speaking, embarrassing (verse 11).

If the poor man will boast in his position (think of himself as exalted) it will give him the right perspective in this trial of his life. If the rich person will boast - or think of themselves as nothing special - it will be for them the right perspective in the trial. The only thing that matters to both should be getting the crown of life - to get this from God, the poor and rich have to endure the trial well.

7. God rewards the person who endures trials

Thank you to God for these words of James 1:12 *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him"*.

Reward is a theme in the entire Bible. God comes to Abram by means of a promise of blessing. Doing good to us has always been God's aim. *Blessed* could be changed here for the word *congratulations*. Congratulations to the person who handles trials. They will get to be like a king or queen with a crown. They will reign. And their reign will be the experiencing of 'life'. Blessed could also be translated 'fulfilled'. This will be rejoicing, gladness, joy and fearlessness. We can have it in this life and the next. Go for it, it is to be ours.

Some further help if confusion sets in

I can almost hear James asking a question and then answering it for us. He is asking: why does God lead us to be tempted? We are told to ask that temptation wouldn't happen, and if it does it is from God. But then does that mean that God tempts people?

James knows something. He has probably been through this before in his own life. He knows that going through trial is messy. Life doesn't happen in a clean science lab! Life is a complex web. Handling trial is a process of growth, winning, losing and getting up again.

Why is God testing us like this? James knows we will fail at times and it's the person who fails that thinks the trial is so tough that God is 'making' them fail. Or that He 'set them up for it'. But God does not tempt! James makes this clear! Let no one say this! *God causes no one to sin*. He hates sin with a righteous fury.

When temptation comes it comes in five stages and it comes from within each person. "*It is suggestion mixed with desire - plus pressure.*" (Michael Eaton). It is our desires wanting to take control. The

underlying temptation is always a fear that we will be unsatisfied in some way. This is an utter impossibility. There is nothing more satisfying to every part of man than to be in an unhindered, fresh and alive relationship with the living God.

James will then tell us how we overcome temptation. Firstly we are to know how temptation works (vs 13-15) - suggestion, conception, sin, growth of sin, death. Then we are to trust in the satisfying goodness of God (vs 16-17). Thirdly we have been given the new birth (vs 18). The new birth was that we may be the 'firstfruits', the best part of His creation. We also have been given the Word, but that is for the next chapter.

Part Three:

Salvation that is evident in our approach to God's Word

James 2:19-27

James is quick to the point in his style of writing. He compresses a lot of teaching into a small space. He has been helping his readers - us - to understand trials and temptation. His purpose is to give us courage and wisdom. He gives elements of truth to be understood and believed. This knowledge is to work out practically in how we live. We are to *be* joyful in a trial and to learn to resist temptation. God is at work in us and so are we at work on us. He empowers, we resist.

Some people say that James doesn't have much flow to it and they call it a compendium of random thoughts. You will still gain from it if that is true, but it doesn't seem to be true. James has been talking about temptation and how to face it. The only thing that is present in this world pulling us down is temptation and God is never the one tempting us. If we can deal with it we will soar. Temptation is a pressing desire calling us to obey something contrary to God's ways. The new birth is given to counter this, as James has told us. But so is the Word. His Word will help us.

James' underlying concern is godliness. Godliness is living in a way that reflects and pleases God. Godliness comes to us when we learn to respond correctly to the words of God.

There is a right and wrong way to respond to God's words

“Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth...then be quick to hear..”.

God's word was accurate and powerful enough to save us. The saving word came to us and we believed it. “God is willing to forgive sins”, “God is reconciling Himself to us in Jesus”. We believed it. We abandoned ourselves to it. We are following it. We heard Him for salvation. James says we are to now go on hearing Him!

James knows a secret. People find it easy to believe and listen to God for salvation but can regularly fail to hear him for godliness. We can be quick to hear a promise that God will forgive and rescue for free. But when His word comes to us again we can be slow to hear, quick to say ‘but’ and quick to get frustrated and just as quick to delay godliness. The way to godliness is to hear and listen and to slowly attend to God's Words to us.

Here's an example of how not to respond to God's words. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 God's words are clear: to partner closely with a non-Christian is not good for us. But more than one lonely, older and concerned woman has been known to take to the likings of a seemingly Christian man. If you ask them why the first response is “I'm lonely”, and “I think they are Christian; they mention God.” You might also be told, “Don't judge me! Why aren't you happy for me?” We can sympathise but this is what James says is the wrong way to approach the Word. Why? It shows you don't trust Him! At the bottom of it, the person lacks trust in God themselves. His ability to care, provide and direct are all indirectly questioned and positively put aside as

frivolous.

We may fail and refuse to hear. We may refuse to believe what he says is right, or we may refuse to do what we know is right. All of these responses won't lead to godliness. *We don't pursue godliness, we pursue attentively listening to the Father*, and this produces godliness – the fruit of the Spirit in us (Galatians 5:22).

God's words should find little resistance in us

James makes his previous point practical. There is a big battle at hand with the many sins that beset us. Listen to God's Word and don't let it find resistance in you. Humbly and meekly, without claiming your rights, put aside all the things that are ugly about you. Do it diligently and because you can. Don't say, "Well I have this special problem," or "That's just me!" or, "Can't I just let my hair down at times?" Don't resist His words! If you do, it's like resisting Him and His Holy Spirit and you don't want to do that!

Two conditions to being blessed

It is the easiest thing in the world to know something and do nothing about it. These days the world is full of more information than ever. The Internet has opened to us so information that we have to learn to shut some of it out! But very little of that knowledge actually leads people to do something about what they have heard. Especially if it's not information about getting rich fast!

James knows, before the Internet, that Christians are frightfully prone

to this problem. They will want to be blessed but will fail to realise there are two conditions to being blessed. You need both conditions. We need to hear *and* we need to live it out. We need to hear the law of liberty. It pronounces us free to begin to live freely for God. It says the bondage to the Law and to sin has been broken. It is a law of being able to be whom God wants. It's a law of little frustration if you will hear and do. If you will attend to the small things God reveals it will make differences. But both conditions need to be met. It's easy to forget this.

Knowing the message of our salvation explains to us the freedom we to come into. We can't come into right living until we know we can. But we also can't come know we can until we actually do it! He says it's like looking into a mirror and seeing your saved self there - all shiny and new. You see a child of God, washed and white as snow in the Lord Jesus, but then go off and live like a thief and tramp. James says this is ridiculous: how could you forget? It doesn't make sense that someone who can be free from the bondage of sin would want to go and dwell it so freely. But that is if you are sure sin is bondage. If you aren't sure of this, James' words here won't mean much to you.

God has told you that you can live like Jesus. Persevere in doing it because you can! Hear that you can now do it! Hear and obey and blessing will come to you – the crown of life!

The definitive test

Remember James' underlying theme of deception. Remember also James' flow of argument. He is helping us in dealing with temptation and following our desires.

James 1:26-27 offers us three tests to know whether or not we are being spiritual according to God's ways. It follows from his previous point about knowledge.

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

Generally people who have a lot of knowledge tend to think of themselves as spiritual. Most Christians have their markers of spirituality. The most generic marker is if things are going well in life then we are doing well spiritually! But this unfortunately a wrong marker. In fact it could be a sign that God is most displeased!

James’ tests may seem surprising to us. They are simple and very practical. Being spiritual involves three things: **(1) how you talk; (2) how you care for the weak and needy; (3) how you resist worldliness.** These three issues will be James’ agenda from here until the end of the letter.

(1) How you talk

For most people reading James’ strong words the solution will be to keep a little more quiet. This would be the wrong response. He is not saying that a quiet person is spiritual but one who has a bridled tongue. There is a lot more he will say about the tongue later on. For now he deals only with bridling it. Keeping the tongue under control

and in the right direction is a sign of spirituality.

The issue is not only that you don't say what you shouldn't but also that you say what should be said. We are to be those who build up; those who speak the truth; those whose speech is open to scrutiny and found blameless. Here's a small price of advice: the angels are listening and recording, now speak freely.

(2) How you care for the weak and needy

Orphans and widows are to be "visited". What does this mean? From the other uses of the word in the New Testament (Matthew 25:36; 25:43; Luke 1:68 and more) we can see that it's about *caring* for people. (Some translations will use the word 'care' instead of 'visit'). Two things are called for here: (1) practical hands-on ministry, (2) practical help.

We should be willing to get our hands dirty. We need to get involved. Having an arms-length attitude is not allowed with the weak and needy. We are not to let the 'specially gifted' work with them. In some way we all need to be involved! Matthew 25 says, "you visited me, you came to me" – we are to get *involved* personally and practically in some way. This is about hands-on ministry.

Secondly we will need to *help*. Again, James will pick this up later on. He will say it's no point just saying "bless you son" to the weak and walking on. He, the needy person, will need to be *helped*. Not only are we to get our hands dirty and get involved but we are also to *help*. Luke 1:68 says, "God visited the earth and *redeemed* his people". We are to be involved in building and helping the weak and needy. This is a task that requires careful consideration and care, but it cannot be left

out.

James calls *this* the measure of spirituality. Not success or a smooth life or even a huge ministry, but down-to-earth hands-on involvement and help. We can sometimes get over-ambitious with ministry, resulting in us forgetting the weak and needy in order to “change the world”. But we ought to bringing change to people right where we're at. That's our call – every one of us.

(3) How you resist worldliness

Lastly, James says that keeping ourselves unstained from the world is a sign of spirituality. He will qualify this in more detail later. (He seems to have in mind our attitude. He mentions quarrels, coveting, jealousy, and pride.) What is clear here is that spirituality is both seen and hidden. Speech is seen; compassion towards the weak is seen; but some worldliness is hidden.

The Holy Spirit is telling us an open secret here through James. James knows it's easy to 'keep out of the world' in an obvious way – it's not a major sign of spirituality to abstain from drunkenness at bars, avoid pagan festivals and major sexual misconduct. The world attacks and seeks to influence our attitudes, our loves, our passions and our motivations. It wants us to make other things our treasure instead of God. For “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21.) The world's slow penetrating message pollutes the insides. Spirituality is purity of attitude.

That is all James will say for now with regards to the Word. He has now introduced his next three themes and will cover them more

thoroughly. As you continue this study don't forget: be slow to speak, slow to anger, and meekly receive His word that can totally rescue your soul. What a promise and teaching!

Part Four:

Salvation that is evident in our approach to others

James 2

Some people claim that James has no structure in his writing but this doesn't seem to be the case at all. He is skilfully teaching us and bringing us to a place of understanding what it means to be deceived. At this point deception means that we know what James has mentioned so far but we've done nothing about it. It's a terrible problem when people realise they are deceived but purposefully remain in the same place.

Socio-economic class is to mean nothing to the Christian

Here we see in James that everyone is to be afforded the same level of dignity by Christians. We are to not discriminate or be partial toward anyone on any point. This is not just about money but also about education, beauty or anything this world places so much value in.

We hold the same faith as that of Jesus Christ (or at least claim to) and He certainly didn't discriminate. His life was mostly lived amongst the underprivileged. He never targeted the rich in particular. He treated everyone with equal dignity. Surely to the Lord Jesus Christ, the 'Lord of glory', everyone is stained to a disgusting depravity. If we only were able to look at the heart and judge with God's heavenly glory in sight we would see what He saw. Everyone is equally shabby to Him and

everyone is equally loved by him. The shabby – us – are the very people he came for!

Marks of discrimination are visible. The root lies deep

James is incredibly practical. Three principles mark an attitude of discrimination. These are (1) what you pay attention to, (2) what you say and (3) how you make a person feel (2:3-4). These are the external evidence of a discriminatory attitude. These show what a person is really like, what they really value, and how they really understand God and His world. James says indirectly that the proof of the pudding would be to ask the poor man how he feels about your treatment of him. If he were to give an uncorrupted answer that would be our test. If they don't respond with words such as 'with dignity' or 'just like everyone else', something is wrong.

Most Christians probably know James' teaching here. Christians worldwide are known for helping the poor and NPO's are generally headed and started by Christians. Some still need to learn this, no doubt. But it's worth digging a little deeper into these verses. Discrimination at its root shows a serious misunderstanding. It can be patched over too quickly and easily. We can easily be deceived at this point.

James makes the point that Jesus didn't discriminate because of who he was and because of what he understood. He understood the Father. At the heart of discrimination is a *wrong understanding of God and misplaced value*.

He says, "Has not God chosen the poor?" in verse 5 and "but you have

dishonoured the poor man” in verse 6. God has chosen the poor. James certainly doesn’t mean that they are the *only* chosen people but He is doing what Jesus often does – making the point so strongly that he almost discounts the other option. Jesus says we should ‘love Him and hate our family’ Luke 14:26! Surely he didn’t mean we have to hate our parents! He meant that in comparison to how much we love Him it’s like we hate our parents. He is using a figure of speech we, in English, call ‘hyperbole’ – exaggerated speech to drive home a point. (This is also common in ancient-near-east culture.)

The Bible is peppered with references to rich people. In fact James will mention Abraham and Isaac – incredibly wealthy people. He is not saying only poor people matter to God but is making the point that it’s actually mostly poor people who are saved in world history, which is true. He also makes the point that the poor believer has *great* value. He is rich in faith and can display great levels of godliness. If we were looking at the right markers we would realise that the poor are sometimes better off than the rich. Money can spoil spirituality – many poor people are rich with spiritual power and grace. A misplaced value in money means discrimination is knocking at the door; maybe it’s already taken up residence. It shows a care for worldliness that should make us blush. To care what people look like, how much influence they have, and how much money they have that causes you to behave differently towards them means you don’t *really* care about God’s values. What is important to Him is not as important to you.

To discriminate means you have not understood an aspect of God. God has and will see special value in the poor and weak. That has always been His way. To discriminate means you are not like God in your treatment of the poor. You don’t realise that God has the poor on

His mind and they are in His plan.

The root of this lies deeply in human nature. James knows this all too well. Discrimination was a fibre of Roman society (2:6-7). No special grace or godliness or help from the Spirit was needed to behave the same way as those who worship idols. Mere human sinfulness causes discrimination; this should not be so with the Christian. We are to be a new people all together.

Deception is easy when it comes to discrimination

James now uncovers two aspects of deception with regard to discrimination; **2:8-13** – not realising discrimination is serious to God; **2:14-26** – not realising Christian faith must mean Christian behaviour.

James has mentioned two reasons why discrimination is wrong – it is against God's nature and it is worldly and makes no sense. He now brings in a third reason: It violates the law of love and the law of love is the highest law there is.

Firstly, It would seem that James' readers share our problem. They seemed to have *special alarm bells for certain sins and not so for others*. While all sin is sin, also all sin is not the same. Sin differs in its consequence and severity. Murder is certainly worse than stealing a chocolate biscuit from the office although both are sin. James' readers had eyes mostly for the ten commandments and didn't see discrimination as that bad of a sin. In today's society we seem to be very sensitive to sexual sin at the expense of other sins. If we were honest many wouldn't consider discrimination against the poor as bad as adultery. But James says it is!

Again our speaking and our acting need to conform to the same God. We are now in the place where we can do as God wishes. Failure to show mercy is a great failure indeed. If we show mercy we will experience an abundance of God's mercy.

Secondly, it seems James' readers fell into *spiritual talk that was not backed up by Christian behaviour*. James says this is 'half' a gospel. Faith is to produce works.

Extensive commentary of James 2:14-26 is needed but unfortunately we do not have the space to offer that here. Hopefully a few exegetical comments will suffice and then we will move on to the message James wants us to hear. At the back of this book we have mentioned other resources which can provide more analysis of this section of scripture.

Firstly it is important to know that James does not have 'getting to heaven' in mind when he is writing here. He calls them *brothers*. He is not threatening hell for those who don't produce works. Faith saves not works; the New Testament makes this clear. *After* we have come to initial faith in the Lord Jesus then we begin to do good works for Him and with Him. This is James' concern here.

Secondly, the 'him' in 2:14 is taken to refer to the *poor man*. 'Can that faith save *him*?' (the poor man.) Or, as Michael Eaton and RT Kendall translate this passage, 'Faith cannot save anyone, can it?' . In the next verse James explains himself by adding 'If someone says they have faith and doesn't lift a finger to help, that faith cannot help anyone alone'. (Again, Michael Eaton and RT Kendall's translation.) James is not contradicting the whole New Testament. A believer's faith alone

cannot help (save) a poor person in their immediate need unless the person with faith *actually* helps. Remember, 'save' is not a technical term in the Bible – it is used in several different contexts and the original Greek word also means 'heal'; it really depends on the context of the passage.

Thirdly, James uses the word “justified” differently to how Paul uses it. Again, “justified” is not a technical word and the context here makes this clear. In James' talking about Abraham and Rahab we must see that both had faith in God before they did anything. Then their actions 'completed' / furnished / perfected and justified / vindicated / authenticated their faith. 2 Peter will say the same thing in 2 Peter 1:10, “Be diligent to make your calling and election more sure.” God saves, God calls, God justifies, but we then fill out or work out to the full what we have been given.

James' message then in 2:14-26 is a message to lazy Christians. There are many lazy Christians around. They are those who profess faith but never get their *hands dirty being* Christian. They say 'God loves the poor and weak' but never help them. They profess faith but never really love people. They never harbour strangers like Rahab or sacrifice the things closest to them like Abraham. Lazy Christians are mere talkers. They are around today. Sometimes they are the loudest voices. Some of them are very gifted and seem devout and spiritual but they are lazy. James says these lazy Christians are no better to the kingdom than demons. Demons also have faith (2:19), demons also fear God, but they never get to do anything for God. They never show their true repentance in their behaviour. What a comparison to make!

James is an incredibly challenging book. No one should really feel at

ease when they get to understand what is being said here. This should shake us and rattle us. We should ask ourselves if we are deceived and lazy. But only for a second. The next thing we are to do is to look to Jesus! Rely and rest on Him! We are to live for Him in a fresh way determined not to be lazy. We are to change our behaviour toward the poor and attempt to root out discrimination. The Holy Spirit is our help, thank God His help is enough! Take it.

Part Five:

Salvation that is evident with respect to the world

At the end of chapter 1 James introduces his three big themes. Discrimination, the tongue, and worldliness he now takes up in more detail. The way we live these three things out are the signs of true spirituality.

James continues to be so practical that it can be painful. He also continues to put small little teachings in big flows of thought and not all of those can be commented on in the space we have here.

He has three words for the tongue and for worldliness: (1) a word of caution, (2) a word of practicality, and (3) a word of hope. James doesn't follow these linearly but you can pick them out.

(1) A word of caution about how we talk (3:1-10a)

The most important idea James wants us to grasp about the tongue is the immense power of it. This is not about (and can't be used to prove) Pentecostal teaching around positive confession and the "power" of the tongue to make things happen. This is showing us just how much the way we speak affects our entire Christian life and spiritual walk.

James knows that these Christians have underestimated the effect of trials, discrimination and the tongue all have on spirituality. He says that not many people should want to go into 'talking for a living' (3:1 – 'teachers'). Talking for a living / teaching is dangerous because of what

foolish words can do to yourself and others.

He then gives us a word of caution in a positive way. How do you plan on getting to be a mature Christian? Prayer, Bible reading, helping the poor? James says if you never offend anyone by what you say you will be mature. His caution is quite profound: "Don't you realise!" he shouts to us, "if you never offend with the tongue you will be able to bridle your whole body!"

What a statement! The tongue is the key to the passions that won't listen. If you wish to control the two most prolific urges, sex and anger, try to never offend anyone in what you say. We live in a time where sexual sin carries more weight than others. Many people spend their effort trying to control these passions; James says control the tongue and sexual urges will follow suit. All urges will come into line if we don't stumble in offending in our speech.

He then has word of caution (3:3-5). What we say affects our whole being. He gives two examples of this: a horse and a ship. Both are guided by small elements. The whole ship and horse move where the bit and rudder point. Your whole life pivots from the tongue. It directs your whole life. It seriously matters! (3:5)

James' further word of caution is that we need to realise not only that what we let out of our mouths control our whole future but that the tongue is desperately wicked (3:6-10). The tongue is a world of unrighteousness. It may be the place the devil attacks and works on the most, he says. It is the part that needs to have the most sanctifying. It is so desperately bad that James even says that no one will succeed in controlling it. It is desperately hopeless. Notice James'

words here: We basically need to go through a salvation of the tongue. First we have to realise that it is important; we have to realise life after death is real. Next we need to hear the message. Man is lost - the tongue is hopeless. Sin is punishable - the tongue is untameable. We are truly lost! Desperate indeed! Until we realise we need help because the problem is so bad, we will never look for help.

James says the tongue is all together horrible. The way the average person talks is a world of insipid evil. Who knows if they realise or even care? Maybe they put it down as unimportant. Please don't.

A word of practicality ('we' in 3:1-10)

James says 'we'. We have tongues like this. There has only ever been one perfect man - the Lord Jesus Christ. All that James has said about the tongue is true for James as well. All hope is not lost we are in the company of James the apostle. Never forget Jesus came to save humans from sin, even the great sins of the tongue. You could even say especially for the sins of the tongue. Thank God for the Saviour from sin.

We cannot quit out of hopelessness. We should not think that it is impossible to grow in godliness. Paul says he finished; he awaits a crown of achievement. So can we. James is a skilful pastor. Lift your heads; this is normal life for everyone. No excuses that 'your problem is especially bad' and 'you cannot help it are allowed'. The fire is on all of our tongues. The chance of being perfectly mature is before all of us. We all have to run the race.

A word of hope (3:10b-18)

The most encouraging thought in the Christian life is the fact that 'we can'. Israel couldn't. We can. James says that the way we live ought not to be so. He says this because it is possible that it is not so! It is possible because we are no longer polluted springs or wicked 'trees'. His point is that when we come to Jesus the most powerful thing happens - we are born again. We are regenerated. Our hearts are changed, never to be the same again. We have been given a new heart (Ezekiel 36). People that speak badly do so because they are bad people. We speak badly not because we are bad people but because we are so used to behaving and talking badly. It actually goes against our nature. When we offend with our words it is inconsistent. We are then trees that bear the wrong fruit - it doesn't make sense.

James has another use for his illustration. A salt pond cannot yield good water. The way we speak is a good indicator of our growth as Christians. To be quiet is not always godliness but to always have something to say is not either.

It is possible to grow in godliness. We do it by controlling our tongue. We do it by saying the right thing and snapping out the wrong thing. When we talk to people we need to think, negatively: don't offend (people or God) with your words, and positively: build up with your words. When we talk about others we always take care that it would be okay if they heard us. We can speak honestly and openly. Even difficult things can and sometimes need to be said and can be said appropriately with grace and love. We talk carefully and with the fear of God in mind - always with him on the tip of our tongue.

A final word to silence any argument (3:13-18)

Many people have never tried to live out James' teaching and are hugely 'successful'. Many Christians become successful and many a 'great man or woman of God' has a character that should make them blush. James says, 'don't be fooled'. God's way is what he has just explained to us. There is an easy way to live without care. False wisdom teaches that ungodliness doesn't matter very much. It doesn't talk about the difficult things to do in the Christian life. Real wisdom produces and pursues purity, peace, and gentleness in sincerity. This leads to righteousness.

Next James moves onto worldliness. How we view and deal with the world is very important. This follows from his prior teaching on wisdom and is on his mind from 1:26. He is not so concerned about talking about wisdom per se but more with what true wisdom brings about.

It seems that the original readers might have been listening to a few different explanations of what real wisdom was. False wisdom leads to ungodliness and relational trouble filled with trouble no different to the world. All their talk of wisdom was getting them nowhere.

A word of caution regarding the world (4:1-4)

The world is no friend to the Christian. There is nothing wrong with enjoying creation and family and all things good in the world. In fact there is something wrong with us if we don't! James doesn't have that in mind here. The anti-God total fleshly indulgence of the world's people fuelled by the enemy is the problem. Or is it?

James' readers were in trouble. Their relationships had deteriorated to arguments, angry harsh words, and borderline physical fighting. He asks and answers where this trouble is coming from: within them. There is no one else to blame. It is their fault: it's their desires and passions. They are desirous for leadership, to be influential and seen as wise, but they are going about it the entirely wrong way.

James even calls them adulterous! They are behaving like people who do not know God. But it is not the world's fault, it is theirs! You may have heard it said, "I can resist anything but temptation". The passions we have are from within fuelled by the world. These passions are at war inside the Christian. The Spirit and bit of old 'flesh' that remains are fighting against each other. We need to win the fight in resisting the flesh, resisting its desires.

God wants us to win the battle. He is jealous for us. His Spirit in us wants us to be near to Him. By His Spirit we can do this! If we follow the fleshy desires we are befriending the world. We make ourselves at odds with God. But He wishes something else for us. God wants all of us and never wants to compete for our affection and attention.

A word of practicality ('you')

James used the word 'we' for the tongue. He doesn't use that here. James is not including himself in this quarrelling and fighting. He is not like them at this point. He has learned to resist the flesh and is seeking wisdom from God on how to go about life. Here the word used is 'you'. This is something we can live without.

A word of hope (6-12)

Worldliness doesn't have to win. There is a path to recovery that is always open. God is a God of grace and comes to help His people. He will not leave us helpless.

We need to start with submitting to God. Refusing to submit and humble yourself is refusing God's help. Think back to James' point in 1:19 - be slow to get angry at God's Word and ways because submission means to accept and follow, believing He does know better.

We will also need to resist the ever-present temptation the devil will bring. He will be accusing and tempting at the weakest spots. He knows all too well how to kick a person and keep them down. He will tempt you telling you 'do this or do that' and then when you do he will tell you 'you're guilty and can never be forgiven'. What a terrible foe. But he can and needs to be resisted. Resisting is a matter refusing to believe the lies and accusations. It is getting up again and serving God after a fall no matter how you feel. It is pursuing God's ways even when you haven't in a very long time. We must make up our minds that we want to follow God and then get to do it more and more. It will involve being sorry for sinful ways and taking time to deal with our deeper motives.

If we do this we will be exalted. There is a path to recovery from sin. God is full of grace. But just don't forget to control the tongue; it's a basic control for the whole life. Control the tongue, control the whole person, as James told us.

James concludes his thoughts on salvation in the world. We need to

watch how we talk and worldly behaviour should not be found in us.
Thank God He is gracious and will help us!

Part Six:

Salvation that is evident in how we approach the future

James 5

It is an interesting exercise to try and think what kind of person James was. His writing tells us little about him. He seems to have a few yet so many things on his mind all at once. This is clear in this chapter. He is still thinking of the immediate problems of discrimination in the churches but he is also thinking now about Jesus' imminent return.

Jesus' return is a common theme in the New Testament. His return is a constant encouragement to live for him. James 5:8 says, "establish your hearts, the Lord is at hand".

A sober view on money (1-6)

What we do with our money now will count when Jesus returns. Money poses a potential problem for all Christians - they can fall in love with it more than God. Money can be a god and too many serve it, following it like headless chickens. Having more money more than often poses a greater temptation to have it affect your life negatively. Learning how to deal with money is part of becoming godly.

James' hearers have forgotten an important point that has led them to behave in a way that deserves only a rebuke. They have forgotten that money is temporary (v. 2-3). Why invest so much time, effort and

energy into something that will fade? We won't take any money to heaven. Our riches will not speak when we face Jesus. Money itself wins us no reward with Jesus. We are to live wisely but always be mindful that money and riches will disappear. They may even disappear in this life! Riches are not here to stay. You could almost say with regards to the future that money is one big test that lasts our whole life.

Their love of money has led to detestable behaviour. This is common for non-Christians, but unbecoming behaviour for a follower of Jesus. They have (1) selfishly hoarded it for themselves (v. 2-3); (2) defrauded their workers (v.4); (3) indulged themselves without limit (v. 5); (4) hurt the poor and Jesus (v. 6).

By their behaviour they have condemned and hurt the poor person. Their hoarding and selfish spending has caused them to do to the poor exactly what was done to Jesus. Rich uncaring people murdered Jesus. They stumbled at Jesus because he was common and 'nothing special' in society. He didn't resist what they did to him. Likewise, the poor can't resist ill treatment. What wickedness it was to murder Jesus, what same wickedness to ill-treat the poor! This is not wise. The day of slaughter may come at any time. The butcher chooses the fattest animal first. God will not let them get away with their terrible behaviour.

Patient, steady change will rectify any problem (v. 7-20)

What they should not do (v.7-12)

James has made the point that his rich readers are in a serious

trouble. How can they get out of it? James the good pastor will help them.

The first attitude they need is *patience* (v. 7-8). Both the rich and the persecuted need this. In some ways he is repeating chapter 1's teaching. Patience is needed because mostly in life people are slow to change. Patience is a wonderful strength. The ability to wait something out is praised as a virtue that will see things happen. The rich will have to be patient when trials come upon them and the discriminated will need to be patient when they are persecuted for some time to come. Prejudice lies deep and the remedy of God will take time to take effect.

They also need to keep a *clear conscience* (v. 8). They should establish their hearts. Living with a clear conscience is a sure way to success with godliness.

Watching over their attitudes towards each other will need constant attention (v. 9). *Grumbling* is something they will be ashamed of when Christ returns.

The prophets had to go through the same kind of process of patience and endurance while suffering (v10-11). It was possible for all of them because no one who knows God suffers alone. *He is always there* with the sufferer every step of the way.

There is in the process one thing to watch out for - *self-righteousness* (v. 12). The poor are in danger of falling to saying 'God will judge you for this'. That is a sin of self-righteousness and only exacerbates the problem. The person who is wronged needs to be patient and forgiving

towards the person who wrongs them. They need to let go of wanting to get back at them. They will have to learn to pray for their enemies and allow time to change things while they pray and leave the issues to God to vindicate.

What they should do (v. 13-20)

They should *pray*. If we are in any kind of trouble we should not panic, despair, grumble or criticise, but we should pray. Prayer and honesty with each other will be to them a great remedy. The suffering, the cheerful, and the sick should all pray.

The prayer of someone who is living with God as best they can is tremendously powerful (v. 16). Elijah was just a normal man. He had times of great success and times when he fell in self-pity and prayer rescued him. God listened to Him. Major things happened when Elijah prayed. We are 'Elijah' today, facing a wicked world in which we are shining the light of the gospel. Reaching the world and avoiding 'self imploding' is realised through prayer.

They should also adopt an attitude of *rescue* (v. 19-20). Great compassion is needed between them. The rich are behaving terribly but how sad that they cannot stop and see it for themselves. How terrible to behave like a non-Christian when you are a believer. We are to rescue our brothers who are caught in sin. This needs great amounts of prayer and wisdom. We have done a great deed when one person caught in sin comes to serve God actively again. We should seek to rescue many.

And so James' letter comes to an end. He is punchy and to the point.

He leaves us with serious consideration for our lives. Patiently and slowly we will need to consider his letter for ourselves. The poor are amongst us, how shall we respond? Tongues are in our mouths, how shall we use them? Worldliness is an ever-present trouble, how shall we resist? Make no mistake; we avoid taking James' letter seriously at our own peril.



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