

JAMES STUDY NOTES

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Regarding this epistle, it is impossible to state with certainty some of the most basic facts we like to know when we approach a book of the Bible. For example, there has been great uncertainty about who wrote this letter and when they wrote it. Some suggest it was written early by James the apostle, the brother of John and son of Zebedee. Others suggest it was written by James the son of Alphaeus, another of the apostles. Others suggest that it was written by James the brother of Jesus. Some have identified from Scripture five different individuals named James and suggested it could be any one of them. Some have approached this group of five and painstakingly shown that the five are really two individuals being referred to in different ways, and so arrived at their conviction as to the author. Still others suggest that it was not written by any of these, but that it was written by another who used the name James, hoping to connect his work with one of the afore mentioned individuals.

The approximate date of the writing of this book is equally elusive. It is very difficult to reconstruct when the book appeared and began to be read in the Churches. In general, whomever one proposes as the author of the James dictates when they believe the book to be written. So we find among the scholars that if one chooses to think that the individual who wrote the book was James the brother of John, then it was believed to be written early, since this apostle was martyred early, about 44 A.D. (Acts 12:1-2). If this James is the author, then this epistle is likely the first of the New Testament books written. If one espouses the idea that James the brother of Jesus wrote it, then it could have been written later, perhaps between 50-60 A.D., but the precise date is still uncertain. Those who believe that it was written by someone who represented it as the work of James generally believe it was written after the first century.

Historically there has been much debate surrounding the content and theology of this book, and Martin Luther was one of its great critics. The debate generally centers on the theology of 2:14-26. Many have believed that the doctrine of justification suggested in those verses opposes that taught in the writings of Paul. This is a chief reason why the book of James has always been regarded with some skepticism and why it was among the last books affirmed as being a legitimate part of the New Testament. When we arrive at that passage in verse-by-verse analysis, we will see that the apparent contradiction between Paul's words and those in James can be resolved by an analysis of the words themselves.

The debate regarding James is also fueled by its positive tone with respect to Judaism. The critique usually is that it makes only two references to Christ and aside from these, says nothing that a pharisaical Jew would not heartily agree with. The problem with this line of thinking is that it does refer to Christ, that it refers to Him as "our glorious Lord" (2:1), that there were many things about Judaism that were right, and that the gentile's faith had to be rooted in the Old Testament and so that an all-out assault on the Jews would profit the church little in the long term.

Another part of the debate surrounding James has been the sophisticated nature of the Greek used in it. The general wisdom was that the style of the Greek in James is more characteristic of works written after the first century. However, research now casts doubt on this idea, though it is still doubtful that James the brother of Jesus, or

the two men named James who were part of the original twelve, would have such an ability in Koine Greek as the book demonstrates.

One of the more ingenious proposals is that the book is not a letter at all, but that its core thought was taken from the teaching of James the brother of Jesus in the Church that he led in Jerusalem. Perhaps a sermon he preached there addressed certain unhealthy mentalities that had developed among those Jewish Christians. Some who were a part of that church, or of the apostolic company, proposed that this sermon was critical to Jews everywhere. There was perhaps the general observation that the same unhealthy patterns were a problem everywhere among those Jews that had turned to the faith. There was a kind of collective lethargy setting in among them. This concern led to the re-constitution of James' sermon, perhaps from an original manuscript, and the preparation of a document to be circulated in churches everywhere. An individual with a very sophisticated understanding of Greek did this, and James could very well have meticulously overseen the work. The resultant work took on the style of this person, and then found its way into the churches.

In some cases, particularly among those with a low view of Scripture, this kind of thinking leads to the discrediting of James as anything more than Christian literature. But it should be pointed out that this theory does not necessarily demand that we view the book as uninspired. It requires only that we believe that the Holy Spirit inspired the words of the text we have, through the words used by James, in someone who was perhaps a disciple of James. By this line of thinking, we have in the Epistle of James a work that came about in a way that is similar to Mark's gospel, which we believe was constructed by Mark from the testimony of Peter. It also came about in a way that is similar to the writings of Luke, which we believe were Holy Spirit inspired in Luke through apostolic testimony. Similar theories have been set forth regarding Hebrews, another book that has been greeted with considerable skepticism throughout church history.

In the final analysis, there simply is no hard data given to us in the book itself, except that its first word is "James." The circumstances surrounding the writing can only be approached implicitly, pieced together from what is inferred in the theology of the book and its subject matter. So a theory of what stimulated the letter, and what led to its theological tone, must be constructed as one attempts the larger task of accurately imagining from available data the mid-first century church. In other words, the theological and practical circumstances reported in the other writings of the New Testament may shed as much light on the book of James as the book itself does.

It appears that by some means James had become aware of certain attitudes that were present in the Church. Perhaps among all the leaders of the Church in that day there were similar realizations as those we have today when we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry and the historic account of early church life in Acts. Who does not have the sense that something has been lost in our experience? Perhaps in them there was this same sense as the decades drifted by and as they recalled what had been. And perhaps this is always the task of church leadership. There seems to be in all the New Testament writers this calling back to what had been present in the faith and what was essential to its vibrancy. The epistles could all be seen as a shaking of the church out of the slumber they naturally fall into.

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1:1—James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

Despite all the debate surrounding the authorship of this book, the first words of the text clearly attribute it to James. We find early Christian writings like the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Barnabas, and a host of others that supposedly were written by apostles or great figures of the early Church. We refer to these as the pseudo-pigrapha, and view them as that— spurious, with some value. But their value is simply as early Christian literature. So the fact that James is said to be the author does not necessarily mean that he is. However, if the book is inspired by the Holy Spirit, then it represents an accurate transmission to us of the thought of James. As in the books of Paul this does not eliminate the possibility that another person did the writing. Only that if they did, the Holy Spirit so inspired the words they chose to write that the original manuscript conveyed the thought of James and God for us and did so without error.

The question of which James is being named is impossible to absolutely resolve. The name is the Greek rendering of Jacob and was for that reason a common name among Jews of the era. There may be as many as five individuals named James mentioned in the New Testament, though most believe that there were only three or four. The one mentioned most often in the gospels is James the son of Zebedee, John's brother and one of the original twelve. He was martyred around 44 AD. It would be unlikely that the book was written by that early date. If it was, it would be the earliest New Testament writing. It could have been a manuscript written under the direction of James son of Zebedee that was circulated later for whatever reason.

At the head of the listing of the rest of the men named James is James the brother of Jesus. The book has historically been attributed to this man by most voices within the Church. There is also James the son of Alphaeus. He too was one of the twelve, and some attribute the book to this individual. Two other persons are named James in the New Testament. These could be different individuals, or one of the above-mentioned referred to in a different way. One was the father of Judas (not Iscariot), who was one of the 12. The other was the son of a woman named Mary whose siblings were Joseph and Salome. Most have concluded that this James was Jesus' brother, whom we know had a brother named Joseph (Matthew 13:55).

There is no compelling reason to break with the early and persistent tradition, that this book was sourced in James the brother of Jesus. The primary objection to this is that the author does not mention this when he describes himself in this opening statement. However, his preference, to refer only to himself as a servant of Christ, can be explained in other ways.

Apostles such as Peter and John certainly enjoyed a special friendship with Jesus. That closeness and the hours spent alone with Him gave them unique and important understanding of spiritual things. Yet that special friendship is not directly cited in their epistles and their statements about Christ are noteworthy for their absence of this common familiarity. Such relationships seem to have taken a back seat once their understanding of the identity of Christ as the Almighty One became complete. In all cases their preference seemed to be to choose expressions of humble reverence and awe over familiarity. The closest they come is John's expression of himself as the one Jesus loved, and his expression that they had seen with their eyes, examined, and touched with their hands the word of life (1 John 1:1).

James chose to represent himself simply as a servant of Jesus Christ. This would precisely reflect the mentality and character of Christ Himself, and the teaching that He called his followers to on many occasions (Matthew 10:25; 20:26; 23:11; Luke 22:25-27). They were not to flaunt titles nor their authority. This was a lesson Jesus' followers learned well. It was with great reluctance that the apostles themselves cited the authority vested in them by the Lord in bestowing on them the title "Apostle" (2 Corinthians 10:1-2; 11:16-12:13).

The readers are addressed as the twelve tribes in the Diaspora—the dispersion, or the scattering. This term means to scatter throughout, a reference to sowing seed in a field. It came to be a reference to Israelites who, because of "the scattering" were living outside Palestine. The term is used first in the New Testament in John 7:35. It is a reference to the known existence in faraway places of communities of Jewish people who continued to embrace faith in Yahweh.

Ten of the twelve original tribes had been scattered around 722 BC, with the fall of the northern kingdom centered in Samaria. The Assyrians had taken many of them out of the land and settled them in other places (2 Kings 17:1-7). They had also settled others in their place in the cities of the northern kingdom (2 Kings 17:24-41). The accounting of this makes clear the fact that though the Assyrians deported them, these Israelites were scattered because they had been unfaithful to the Covenant. In other words, it was the judgment of Yahweh that led to their scattering.

The "scattering" of the other two tribes of the southern kingdom of Judah occurred in stages that were consummated in 586 BC. This similarly was represented as God's judgment against them for the breaking of the covenant. The scattering of Judah was carried out by the Chaldeans (2 Chronicles 36:15-23). In the order the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures appeared in, they ended with the concluding verses of what we know as 2 Chronicles. These present a sad ending of what had been a glorious nation, with only a faint glimmer of hope.

The term Diaspora occurs in the Septuagint at Deuteronomy 28:5, where the judgment of Yahweh was assured if Israel broke the terms of the covenant. That context gives the term a specific theological tone. It was a reminder of disobedience and broken relationship with Yahweh (Deuteronomy 28:58-68). It was also a summoning to the hope that lies in repentance (Deuteronomy 30:1-10; 2 Chronicles 6:36-39). To a Jewish readership in the first century acquainted with the Scriptures, the term was a reminder of their utter failure under the Old Covenant, of their need to repent and turn to their Redeemer, and of Yahweh's promise to provide forgiveness for their sin with rescue and restoration. It was a solemn reminder to respond to the revelation presented by Jesus Christ and so avoid the spiritual lethargy natural to humanity that led to "the scattering."

In the Roman world of the first century, the world's Jewish community should be understood as being roughly divided into Palestinian Jews, who were chiefly agriculturists, and Jews of the Diaspora, who were dwellers in cities outside Palestine and mainly traders. Among the Palestinian Jews Aramaic and Syriac were spoken. This was also true among Jews of what could be called the eastern Diaspora, those Jews living to the north and east of Palestine.

Among the western Diaspora, those living to the west in Asia minor and in Greece, the language was Koine Greek. James is written in Koine Greek but with an appropriate Hebraic tone. It seems unlikely that James the brother of the Lord, or any of the other individuals by that name in the New Testament, would have had the command of

Koine Greek that the writing reflects. The language in which the book is composed has for this reason been evidence to some that the book is spurious.

But there is another legitimate explanation for this. It is that the audience of the western Diaspora was intentionally targeted, and so James used a writer skilled in Koine Greek to compose his work. If this is true, and it seems very likely, we can say that the book's original audience was among the western Diaspora, likely many of the churches that Paul had worked in and written to in the provinces of Asia minor and Greece.

This has some implications in our interpretation of James. One very important one is this: since the record of Acts and Galatians shows harmony and agreement between James, Paul, and the Church in general, and since that record reflects the absolute submission of Paul to James, we should expect harmony between Paul's epistles and those of James. Since there is overwhelming evidence of them standing on common ground and of them striving to unite the Churches, we should be able to discover the common message their writings clarify. That has been the goal of much of the research that has been invested in the book of James by those who embrace its inspiration.

The term Diaspora is used by James not so much because he wished to address Jews only, or even Jews in general—Christian and non-Christian. His choice of this term is likely due to the simple fact that the early church consisted mostly of Jewish believers. From a Scriptural point of view Gentile converts were viewed as being grafted into Israel (Romans 11:17-24). They were part of the Church because of the promise to Abraham that all families of the earth would be blessed through him (Genesis 12:3). The gospel preached to all nations was bringing this about. Though all these together were New Covenant believers, their faith was rooted in the Covenant made with Abraham and the revelation made to the nation of Israel. From the point of view of Jewish Christians in the first half of the first century, the gentile converts were joining a faith that started with Abraham and received its fuller definition through Christ. And so the gentiles were part of the twelve tribes by virtue of their faith in Christ. As James' writing is examined it will be seen that his target audience was believers in Jesus Christ, who happened to be primarily Jewish people.

James first word to his readers is "greeting." This is also the first word addressed to the churches by the letter sent out by the first Jerusalem council (Acts 15:23). That group was apparently moderated by James the brother of Jesus, or at least he was a key influencer in it as the leader of the mother church, the Jerusalem Church. The letter sent from that council to the churches could easily have been composed by him and was most certainly influenced by him. We would expect that we could perhaps find some trace similarity in style between the two letters, if they were influenced by the same man. This may be one such similarity.

1:2—Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,

James' begins very abruptly. One cannot help but notice how quickly he moves to his first command to his readers, which is "consider." That word is *ἡγησασθε*, which is an aorist middle imperative. The noun form of this word is used of one who leads or governs. This gives us some insight into what is meant by James when he commands us to "consider" trials joy. "Considering" in this case is an intentional act of governing our thoughts that we are to engage to make ourselves think in a specific way about the many trials we encounter. Our minds tend to drift and be led in a few different directions other than joy when we encounter trials. This is the direction in which we

must intentionally point ourselves. The varied trials are all joy. The following verses will tell us why and so provide us some sense for how we engage our own thoughts and lead ourselves in the seasons when trials intrude.

The command James gives clearly presupposes our ability through the Holy Spirit to govern our thoughts. This is the great presupposition of the New Testament writers. They do not picture the regenerate person as one who is enslaved to any way of thinking shaped by circumstances. That was the entire purpose of the death of Jesus, to release us from slavery to such instinctive living. The Holy Spirit is given to lead us first and foremost in our thoughts. Using the Scripture, He directs us in what is true and right. These true and right things are a source of joy in trial.

The significant thing is that we are given a command regarding ruling over our thinking processes and pointing them in a specific direction. It is the task James immediately calls us to. We must understand that we can do this. We must grow in our alertness to the moment when this need arises. We must become quicker at “considering” the matter before us in the way Scripture defines it. This is the work of trusting Yahweh in the moment, and so of being “saved” in it. Repeating it results in us becoming seasoned in the faith over the course of our lives.

This brings us to the need to understand the word joy. The word has already occurred, having been the one-word-greeting recorded at the end of verse one. Used as a greeting it was a way of saying, “Be well!” It conveyed the cheerfulness of the greeter at the thought of the person they were greeting. Having just expressed joy to the readers, James calls us to embrace it as our mood in seasons of trial. If we were to plot joy along the continuum of human emotion, we would find that it is used of positive emotions from peace or composure all the way over to happiness and bliss. Like most words, context allows us to find where in the zone of potential meaning the usage of a word falls. James is likely using the word as an expression of inner calm and peace, where optimism and cheerfulness come into play.

Knowing the words meaning, we can now evaluate our obedience to James’ command. Having been called to joy, we should understand that we are not sinning if the trial does not make us happy. On the other hand, we should understand we are sinning if we are simply allowing ourselves to drift emotionally in it, so that we are angry, irritable, and generally grouchy over it. A trial represents an opportunity to rise to trust God, not to do the more instinctive thing of doubting His presence or His goodness. As we examine our obedience in time of trial, the question is this; am I rising to ponder what I know to be true, or am I simply adrift in the natural flow of the emotion of the occasion?

The word for trial is *πειρασμοί*. This word also has a considerable range of meaning. It speaks generally of adversity. It is used of the temptation that the devil exerted on Jesus to interrupt His divine mission (Luke 4:13). It is used of the mental tug-a-war that occurs within us when our flesh tempts us to stray into sin and to lapse from faith (Matthew 26:41). It is used of adversity through which God allows others to observe our faith and character (Luke 22:28). It is used of the concoctions of other people who deliberately try to undermine our credibility (Matthew 22:18, 35). So trial is the experience of adversity that can come from several sources, that threatens our well-being.

The word “various” is an important one to reckon with. The adversity we encounter is diverse. There are trials that come from Satan (Luke 4:2). There are those that come as a result of living in a fallen creation (Galatians 4:14) and fallen people (Acts 20:19).

There are those that seem to partake of all the above (2 Corinthians 12:7). James desires his readers to rise in trial, no matter what its exact nature, and he sees this as beneficial to the readers themselves. He could have focused on the good served for the cause of the gospel, for the glory of God, or for the reputation of the Church. He chooses to exhort us to govern our thinking in trial for the good it will bring us, and it is a considerable good.

Now, for the purpose of governing our mindset during a season of trial, it is not terribly important to understand the source of the trial—whether it is of God, Satan, other people, or ourselves. At the point of our experience, it is simply adversity, no matter the source. We should not vex ourselves too deeply trying to understand its source. Our effort should be focused on governing our mental response to it. What James says next indicates that we are to consider such adversity an opportunity to display the character of Christ. Specifically, our mood and behavior is to be a display of trust in Yahweh.

1:3—knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.

This verse provides the rationale that enables us to consider trial to be a joyful thing. Ultimately, if we are to perceive something as joyful, we must also perceive it as either pleasurable or valuable. It need not be both, since there are many things, we engage that are not particularly pleasurable, but we do them because of their value. So for example, we take joy in pursuing education though it requires considerable effort and sacrifice on our part. We do so because we embrace its value. Similarly, there is a value in adversity with respect to our faith that will lead us to embrace it joyfully, though it is not pleasurable.

James says that adversity, whatever its source may be, “tests” our faith. The word James uses for test is δοκιμον. This noun refers to a test that reveals the nature or value of something and affirms its worth. In the language of James we will see that the thing which is submitted to such a δοκιμον, if it meets the criteria, is said to be δοκιμος (1:12)—approved, or we might say authenticated, or certified. So adversity represents the opportunity for our trust in Yahweh to be authenticated, documented, or we might say certified. Difficult things that test us have capacity to document our faith in the sense that they put our faith on display. Faith is an abstract idea. Trials bring faith into the realm of the concrete where it can be observed and experienced. This is an important idea and will be critical to our understanding of the difficulties of chapter two.

The natural question that arises is to whom does our faith need to be authenticated? James and the other writers that spoke of this authentication or documentation, certainly knew that Yahweh knows the heart of every human and what is in it. There is no need for Him to test our faith for its genuineness. Our faith is His work, a result of His choice, an ability He has sovereignly bestowed on us to believe. And so, from His perspective, the fact that He has chosen us guarantees that faith will become present in us. It is only a question of whether the moment He has chosen has arrived. This approval or documentation then, does not relate to whether God views us as belonging to the family of God. To whom then does our faith need to be authenticated?

There are two Scriptures that help shed light on this entire matter. The first is in the Old Testament, in Genesis 22. It involves the incident in which God tells Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice. In the first verse of that chapter, we are told that in

doing this God “tested” Abraham. In the Septuagint version the word used for “test” is the same word James used in verse two when he says to count it joy when you encounter various “trials.” Genesis 22 then, is a story that shares some common ground with what James is speaking to.

When Abraham had proven his willingness to offer Isaac up, the angel restrains him from going further. Then Yahweh makes His great statement of His approval of Abraham, “...now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Now God certainly knew what the outcome of the incident would be before it played out in history. He knew the heart of Abraham as he lived out the test. Yet we have the clear statement, “Now I know . . .” We can only surmise that what God had Himself known was now provable by factual history. What God alone had known by virtue of His foreknowledge; He now knew as we know things—through a series of past events in real time. It was now provable to the rest of humanity throughout time and eternity. It had become such that it would be made known for all to examine.

Our approval or documentation then, has the knowledge of others in view. But likely of greater significant. it has God’s final judgment in view along with His reputation and glory. We are a display of Yahweh, and He wishes to document to all who wish to know that we belong to the family of those who trust Yahweh. Beyond that, we are a display of what He was able to bring about during the kingdom of evil, amidst all the adversity it has brought about. In effect, our growing faith proves as nothing else His power to use evil to bring about good.

A second Scripture is in the New Testament, in 2 Timothy 2:15—“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.” The word “approved” in that verse is δοκιμον, the same word we will see James’ use in verse 12. Paul tells Timothy to exercise diligence in demonstrating his competency in handling the Scripture. There was a standard of competency in view in Paul’s mind that made one a “documented workman.” We might refer to some such person in our lives as “the real deal.” In this sense the word carries the idea of competency.

Our approval or documentation can be said to refer to our competency to represent Yahweh accurately or well. James’ message is that a Christian, through applying their faith in adversity, develops competency in the faith. This would refer to an acquired ability to model faith and to encourage it and bring it about in others as Yahweh directs it. There is a point at which one has moved from being a person with faith, to being a craftsman of the faith. It is an acquired ability and credibility.

This documentation, because it benefits Yahweh and His family, brings great benefit to us. That benefit was important to the writers of the New Testament. The adversity James is speaking of brings us to points of decision and clarifies belief in us. It raises questions in us such as “In whom am I going to place my confidence? With whom am I going to choose to stand? Whose word am I going to believe and attach my hopes to? So in many ways adversity leads us to “tipping points,” where we arrive at the point of being “all in.” It is like a smelting process that makes metal purer. Peter uses this imagery, and some of this same vocabulary, to say that we emerge from such testing with a purer faith that will then be rewarded at the coming of Christ (1 Peter 1:7). There is then, great reward in being “documented.”

In this verse, James names the work accomplished in us through the testing of our faith. He says that testing produces endurance in faith. The quality of endurance,

υπομονεν—the ability to remain under the weight of something for a longer period of time, is highly valued in Scripture. It is the inability to keep trusting and keep believing in Yahweh's word that is presented as the essence of human failure. Adam proved unable to do this in the garden. The Exodus generation began to doubt Yahweh's goodness as soon as they saw Pharaoh pursuing (Exodus 14:10-12).

They crossed through the sea on dry land and believed in the power and goodness of Yahweh and had new confidence in Moses (Exodus 14:29-31). Three days later they were grumbling at Moses (Exodus 15:22-16:3). This failure to rise in adversity and to endure in trust in Yahweh was a pattern that Yahweh allowed to come to a head on a total of ten occasions (Numbers 14:22). It was this failure to develop endurance that led to the discipline of an entire generation.

It is precisely at this point that we fail, if we do what is instinctive in us. Those who by the power of the Spirit have risen to faith in such moments are specially commended in Scripture (Heb 11). Their enduring trust in Yahweh's goodness is to be the “new normal” as we pursue in the Spirit the life of faith. It is at these points of decision amid adversity that we rise, if we follow the leading of the Spirit. We then become examples of faith.

It is likely that we see in this concept expressed by the term δοκιμον, the reason and purpose of James' letter. His burden is that more would arrive at that personal “tipping point” enabled by the Holy Spirit in adversity and that we be a community of people who are “all in” in terms of the faith. Trusting more in trial rather than less, is a beginning point. Embracing revelation more in such seasons, rather than slipping into skepticism, doubting God's presence and goodness, is our calling and God's agenda for us. Dialing up faith, as opposed to slipping downward into lethargy should be our response in adversity.

This theme and heart concern of James will lead him to address numerous other symptoms in the Church of the same spiritual lethargy reflected in the story of Israel. So he will speak of our tendency to be hearers but not doers of the word. He will address our human tendency to make value judgments against one another based merely on fleshly things. He will address our tendency to not allow faith to transform our actions. He will speak to the destructive nature of our speech. All of his teaching seems motivated by this vision that each believer in “our glorious Lord” be a vibrant, legitimate source of life and that the Church does not take the same tragic turn that the Israelites took on their journey to the promised land.

1:4—And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The word for endurance is υπομονη. This is a compound word composed of the preposition meaning “under,” and the word for remain, or stay. So its etymology conveys the idea of staying under. Appropriately then, in usage it speaks of cheerful waiting, of steadfastness in trouble, of the one who is unswerving in purpose. It is an important word in the epistles of the New Testament, occurring thirty times. It is also an important word in the overall thought of the New Testament. Endurance is the expression of that primary thing we have left to do, which God has provided for, but which we must rise to (Luke 8:15; 21:19; Hebrews 10:35-39; 12:1).

James presents endurance here as if it is a force that is somewhat independent of us, with capacity to bring about in us what is good. Yet he also presents endurance as something we have capacity to choose. In that sense it is in us. The very fact that he commands us to “let endurance have its complete work,” indicates that it is something we have capacity for, must intentionally choose, and follow through with.

The reality of human existence is that to be able to endure is to make progress in almost any endeavor. It is essential for the completion of tasks and obtaining objectives. The one who can endure will accomplish more. But endurance is also such that it imparts character to those who engage it. Enduring creates added capacity in us to endure, and that is itself a great character asset. Endurance is a learned behavior that becomes one of our great assets. In the end we will find that it has shaped our performance at the emotional, physical, and spiritual level of our being. It is always a catalyst of transformation.

James also presents endurance as something we can cut short. That is inherent both in the concept of endurance and in our nature as humans. Implicit in James’ words is the idea that there is both a legitimate end to our ability to endure, and an illegitimate one. Endurance that is legitimate is persisting in times when the purpose of the trial has not been achieved so that we see it through and achieve that purpose. Endurance that is illegitimate occurs when we are mindlessly putting up with something that could and should be rectified. James is calling us away from something that is instinctive in us—avoiding pain and discomfort. We are being summoned to this most unnatural response, to remain subjected to the difficulty until it has done a complete work in us. This raises in the mind of anyone undergoing trial a critical question. What is that “complete work” that endurance does that we must not cut short?

A discussion of this “endurance” is not sanitary. When someone has endured enough and when they can be released to escape the circumstances cannot be reduced to some universal formula. The inevitable tension is due in part to the fact that the specific purpose of any trial is not easily known. When we look at individuals in the Scripture who endured great trial, it is doubtful how much they knew about Yahweh’s purpose in their suffering. Did Job know anything about how Satan was contesting his soul before God? We know as we read the account. But did Job? Could Joseph have known when he was in prison all that was being developed and sharpened in him as his life spiraled downward? It is certain that we know far more from Scripture’s account of their lives than they knew in the moment. It seems then that letting endurance complete its work in us is not related to us having a clear, detailed understanding of the purpose of the trial. Instead, the complete work of endurance seems to be endurance itself—the increased ability to endure.

At this point it is important to clarify the key element in the Scripture’s call to us to learn endurance. Through the story of Israel, Scripture summons us to endure in faith, specifically faith in God’s goodness and in His promises to be good to us. In other words, Scripture summons us to something other than just to “get through it.” People who don’t believe in God “get through it.” It is to get through it in belief that is the challenge of Scripture. It is to continually process the adversity in a way that one’s confidence in God’s power and goodness increases.

Initially trial bends us toward disbelief. It shakes our faith. Endurance as James is envisioning it begins in that moment as we are shaken, as we are wondering if God is all-powerful and if He really is good. Endurance is a choice to believe He is both, in that moment. It is to repeat that expression of faith often as the trial drags on. It is the choice to embrace that belief against the rising uncertainty, doubt, hurt, cynicism,

resentment, bitterness and the like that can and will take root in our minds. Trial leads us to the precipice of unbelief. James is challenging us to continually turn back in those recurring moments to faith, which always involves the unseen.

We arrive at the complete work of endurance when we find ourselves continually turning toward His goodness and our ultimate hope, His new creation. We must avoid an overstatement of the following, but there is a real sense in which trial is achieving its purpose as the trial itself grows in irrelevance to us, and we are leaving our release from it in the hands of Yahweh.

This purposeful mindset in trial that allows it to do a complete work in us, leads to our completeness. James uses two terms to emphasize this idea of completeness. The first is *τελειοι*, meaning complete or mature ones. This is the same word used earlier in the verse so that we have a word play—"Let endurance have its complete work so that you will be complete ones." The second term is *ολοκληροι*, meaning complete-in-every-part-ones. So two over-lapping ideas are conveyed to us. There is the idea of a mature faith as opposed to an infantile or juvenile one. There is also the idea of there being no holes or missing elements in our character—all elements of the character of Christ are present in us. These two words are then further strengthened by the addition of the phrase "lacking in nothing." The entire verse alerts us to the emerging theme of James' message—don't stagnate in the faith; move forward and live it. James wants the readers to avoid the classic human error exemplified by Israel, and to realize the full salvation Yahweh has for us.

1:5—But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

It is certainly a tricky thing to know how to navigate one's way through trial. When should strings be pulled to be free of adversity, and when should it all be left alone so that lessons are learned? This verse and the one following provide the only formula available to us for processing trial.

Adversity calls for wisdom. And so there is this invitation from God Himself that has always been extended to humanity. A fundamental element of Yahweh's character is that He hears and responds to those who cry out to Him (Exodus 2:23-3:10). So true is this of Yahweh that a great maxim of human experience is that all who ask will receive and all who seek will find (Matthew 7:7).

Navigating trial is personal. Others can give counsel and should be appealed to as part of the search for wisdom. But in the end the person themselves must make faith decisions and discern what God wishes them to become through the adversity. This invitation from God means that He expects us to personally appeal to Him and to seek to hear His reply.

There are three things said by James about the way God gives wisdom. They are astute observations made from Scripture and from experience. First, He gives to all men, meaning to all people who ask. There are no insiders or outsiders in terms of whose cry He hears. If it is a cry of the inner being to Him, He responds.

Second, God gives generously. James uses the adverb *απλῶ* here, which the NASB has rendered "generously." The word occurs only here in the New Testament. It is formed by joining a privative to a word meaning "braided." So it is a term that conveys simplicity, authenticity, and an absence of hidden motives. God's wisdom is given to affirm that He is the reliable source of wisdom, to affirm that He is the source of

blessing, and to affirm His relentless love for individuals. Generosity here calls attention not so much to the volume of wisdom, but to the absence of ulterior motive. He gives first and foremost because that is His nature.

Third, God gives “without reproach.” The term used is *ονειδίζοντος*, which is used in the New Testament of scathing rebuke (Matthew 11:20), or more commonly of a taunt, such as those endured by Christ on the cross (Matthew 27:44; Romans 15:3). So God does not taunt. He gives wisdom without humiliating the one who finds themselves lacking in it. He does so in a way that keeps their dignity intact, rather than in a way that makes them feel foolish for having asked.

James ends with the very manner-of-fact statement “and it shall be given to him.” That phrase will be conditioned by James’ next statement, but it is a very strong and important one. It is significant that it is stated first. If we lack wisdom, it is only because we have not yet heard from Yahweh. First and foremost, God is presented as the gracious source of wisdom to all. We should assume this and trust it above all, and so keep asking and keep knocking. This is faith in God’s goodness to keep searching and gather up clues from the counsel of the godly, from the words of Scripture, and from the healthy introspection that grows from these.

The promise of wisdom given here should not be understood as a promise to be given full knowledge of all that lies behind the adversity, we are in. The degree to which we understand the causes and effects of circumstances in this fallen world varies. The wisdom that God gives can be devoid of this kind of understanding, though not necessarily. What is promised is an understanding of how God wishes us to behave in each moment and season of our adversity. If no other understanding comes with this wisdom, it is “shalom”—peace that God and His kingdom are bigger than it all. It is the composure of spirit that is enabled by the knowledge that nothing can thwart Yahweh’s promise of salvation to us. If the trial should rob us of physical life, wisdom teaches us that it cannot take from us that which is the essence of life nor can it threaten that experience of true life that awaits us. It is as James has already said, there is in trial the potential for us of enhancing that life that awaits.

1:6—But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

Our acquisition of wisdom hinges on our faith. Faith is the requirement for entering the kingdom of God and it is the requirement for experiencing its wisdom in this life. To enter the kingdom of God we must have faith that Yahweh has provided for our salvation through Jesus’ death on the Cross. So it is belief and trust in the significance and value of something God has done. Once we believe this, we have become God’s children. Then to experience all the potential of that relationship, we must trust in Yahweh’s unchanging nature—things like His innate goodness, His power over all things, His unconditional love, and His absolute sovereignty. So to enter God’s family we trust in what He has done. To experience His life, we trust in who God Isaiah

It is clear in Scripture that those whom God clearly views as citizens of heaven, fail frequently in their trust of Him. This was the failure of the exodus generation who believed in Yahweh and Moses (Exodus 14:31), but within three days of that moment of belief were doubting His goodness (Exodus 15:22-26). In their failure the vulnerability of redeemed humanity is demonstrated. It is due to this vulnerability that the writer to the Hebrews calls believers to endurance in the faith. This is the same purpose of James, to summon us to rise against the spiritual lethargy that easily sets in as our exercise of faith in Yahweh falters.

In our acquisition of wisdom then, we must exercise faith. This has to do with our tendency to seek wisdom of God and then, when He leads us to it, decide whether we think it is wise. We must believe that whatever is of Him is inherently wise. We must believe that whatever He has already revealed in Scripture about the matter we are facing is wisdom, and we need search no further for it. We must believe that His wisdom is what we must do, whether it “works” in terms of this life, that even if the outcome doesn’t bring about what we wish, His way is still best and right. These are some of the things involved in asking in faith.

James labels the one who doubts as unstable. He likens such a person’s life to the behavior of the sea, which changes continuously. One cannot read the account of the exodus generation and not be astounded at their instability and the way their doubt in God’s goodness warped their perspective (Exodus 16:1-3; 32:1-6; Numbers 14:1-10). The whims of their own emotions or those of others drive all who doubt God. This instability is a way of life among those who are under-developed in the faith (Ephesians 4:14). There is a certain amount of this in the body of Christ that is to be expected, since new Christians are being born each day. We would expect that where there is young faith, there is unseasoned and easily shaken faith. But too often enough time has past and enough experience gained that doubt should not be present (John 14:8-11; Hebrews 5:11-14). It is this problem among such people who should be beyond the instability of young faith that the New Testament writers address in passages like these. An ongoing experience of Yahweh’s salvation is what they are concerned that we have. That experience is short-circuited by doubt.

1:7—For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

Where there is doubt, there should be no expectation of God acting. Unfortunately, the opposite is often true. A doubter has an expectation that God should act. In looking at the rhetoric of the unbelieving it seems that many do not believe because they say, they are not seeing God act toward pain and suffering in a way they believe He should. So we have the ongoing irony of many not believing God, articulating an expectation that this God they don’t believe in should be acting. It seems that there is a strange sense of entitlement that generally develops alongside doubt. It is not uncommon to find this among Christians who have fallen into a state of distrust of God. There develops in them this belief that it is God’s turn to move, to do something to inspire faith or confirm the validity of it. Somehow, He has never done quite enough for them to be all in.

The fact is that Yahweh has already moved mightily, having created the world and all that is in it, and then sustaining it and particularly sustaining human life. The fact is that the presence of a faith community on earth is His doing. They are who they are because He has placed in them the ability to believe in what cannot be seen and absolutely confirmed.

Faith is the only condition God places on receiving from Him. Even in this it is evident that He does not require a mature, fully developed faith. He has very clearly articulated to those who have been concerned about the volume of their faith that a pure faith is not what God requires. The truth is that He will respond to a miniscule presence of faith in a spectacular way (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:5-6).

And so we see in Scripture that an ability to believe in the unseen is given by God. Ignoring the debate over whether every person is given that ability, we must assume it is in us. We are, after all, reading and studying the Scripture because we have some measure of trust in it. But mature, fully developed faith has not been implanted in us,

which is consistent with how God has given us both mental and physical capacities that grow and mature from infancy. We have a stewardship toward this ability to believe and trust, a responsibility to exercise it and to strengthen it. And so there are challenges to our faith, moments when we must trust God when it is difficult to do so. It is in choosing faith in such moments, however small that faith may be, that we receive from the Lord wisdom and then fully rise to the occasion.

1:8—being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

We have been given capacity to believe and trust in the unseen. It is an infantile ability that needs to develop and become mature, much like our physical bodies are when we are born. But James is approaching the readers as those with that basic capacity. He is summoning them to exercise it.

He is also approaching them as those with the capacity to be distrustful of God and His truth. That is our reality, and it is as true of Christians as it is of non-Christians. We have capacity to believe the promises of God in the day-to-day routines of life, but also to be skeptical and to disbelieve, to cast aside those promises and behave instinctively. When we do so we are double-minded. James uses the term διψυχος, which conveys the idea of being two-souled. Our inner being is being prompted by the Holy Spirit to believe. Our mind is reminding us of various “realities” in front of us and urging us toward the more pragmatic “real world” perspective. The result is the mixed bag. We believe in Christ in terms of His work for our forgiveness, and there is no doubt in our minds about Him alone being our hope to enter heaven. But we don’t trust His words about the situation in front of us, and we do it our own way. We flip-flop. There is a list of things we apply faith to—death being at the top of the list. But there is a list of things we simply do instinctively, with no thought for what He might desire.

It is easy to see that doublemindedness is the central issue in the Christian community. It always has been and always will be, until we are made perfect by Christ Himself. For James this use of the term “two-souled” is another way of pointing out the challenge of the daily walk we are called to. He has already named the challenge by calling us to become “documented” in our faith-life (1:3), and to become “mature ones” or “completed ones” as Christians (1:4). He is pushing us along with a view toward us arriving at a “tipping point” where a greater usefulness and capacity are found. This maturity in faith is of such value that any hardship one must endure to lay hold of it is to be joyfully seized.

1:9—But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position;

It was assumed by the apostolic company that the value of maturity and completeness in faith surpassed that of any other treasure. This is the only reasonable conclusion given all that was revealed in the Old Testament and by the appearance of God in human flesh in the person of Jesus. Because trial and adversity are the prime means by which our maturity in faith comes about, our estimation of what blessing and wealth should be altered. The message of all revelation is clear. Maturity in faith—in trusting Yahweh, is the consummate treasure. That is the underlying premise that shapes the direction that James’ words now begin to take us.

Since adversity is the prime means by which our maturity in faith comes about, then adverse circumstances are a great blessing. They present opportunity for great reward. The author of Hebrews reveals that it was the perspective of eternal reward

that drove Moses to lead the Israelites (Hebrews 11:26). Trials are the prime opportunity presented to us to gain treasure that is eternal, which is likely life itself to a fullness unimaginable to us.

James says humble circumstances are that in which we should “glory.” That is the NASB rendering of what is the very first word in this verse. It stands at the head of the message of the next three verses. It is the word καυχασθω, which means to boast. It is an imperative—a command. This boasting is something we are to embrace and do intentionally. Since it is commanded, it is apparent that it is not a natural response or and instinctive one. It involves a shift in our thinking. This is a call to us to impose on our own minds the perspective of eternity and summon ourselves to an eternal plane of thought.

It is this shift in thinking, enabled by the Holy Spirit, that gives “weightiness” or significance— what the Scripture refers to as “glory,” to us. It was this glory, the glory of God Himself, that was marred by the fall. Since the fall human life has been a search for significance or weightiness. That search is satisfied only through the faith lifestyle, and specifically the strong partnership with the Creator that grows out of it. We were made for this partnership and all the functions that go with it. To experience this is to have it all. It is the most elite status possible for a human being. Faith is the only legitimate sign that one has attained a high standard of living.

1:10—and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

James’ words are placing an important proposition in front of the readers. Due to the unsurpassable value of faith, the precious possession of a rich man is a season when he is humiliated by loss, if through such a season he embraces faith and endures in it. In that transition the rich man stores up treasure in heaven for eternity. If James is thinking in harmony with revelation, then in that course of action the rich man gains more for himself than the entire value of his earthly estate. James takes the readers back to the Old Testament to verify that his thought processes are in accord with Yahweh’s revelation.

The figure of the flowering grass appears in the Psalms (90:5-6; 102:11; 103:15), Isaiah (40:6-7) and Job (14:1-2). It is a picture that is seen and understood by all people in all cultures. There is a majestic beauty to wildflowers, whether in a desert topography or in the tropics. But either way the beauty is seasonal and comes to an end. The same cycle is seen in the spring and autumn leaves, and more profoundly in human life.

This picture of the fleeting nature of everything that is of this earth is repeated for us each year in many ways, and people of faith take it to heart. It is an important part of natural revelation.

The fact is that this present life and everything connected with it fades, and then passes. Yahweh is the lone exception. Whatever His plan and decree have ordered is what will stand for all of eternity, in the case of each person. The opportunity to endure in one’s faith in the face of adversity is the opportunity to be blessed with an eternal inheritance shared with Christ.

Therefore, the humiliation of adversity and loss is the weightiest of blessings if it brings us to faith.

1:11—For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

This portion of the figure being employed by James speaks of the judgment that God brings against sin, both its present and future nature. He has established rhythms in this fallen creation that are relentless. They wear down all that we would do and be for ourselves, and in the end wear us out. These are observable to all. They are gracious warnings from Him of the end that we are speeding toward. They are meant to turn our hearts toward Him and the salvation He has for us.

For the blessed among the rich, an understanding grows out of the losses—their own and those of others, that occur in this life. It leads them to an accurate perception of the nature of material wealth and the value of spiritual things. For the unbelieving loss becomes nothing more than a painful reality they live with, are reminded of, and ignore. Their willful ignorance will catch up with them in death and judgment. Their condemnation is a tragedy in the sense that it is completely avoidable through the salvation Yahweh has provided.

The figure seems to be pointing particularly to the second half of the normal experience of human life. By mid-life the lessons of early life are learned, abilities are sharpened, and skills honed. At the very time when we are set to do our best work, our bodies begin to fade, and our physical lives can deteriorate rather quickly and end abruptly. At what we know as “middle age,” we are like wildflowers in the summer heat. One thing is certain—the sun will win. The wise take this to heart to be laid hold of by God, and so to begin laying hold of what is truly life. The foolish seek to grab more and often succeed, which only makes their end more tragic.

The greatest blessing in life begins in the moment when we clutch our Creator and acknowledge the unique, utter significance of Him and His plan. The life lived apart from Him, though filled to the brim with pleasures of our wildest imaginings, will begin to fade, and then pass from us. As it does it will all seem so momentary and swift. And there is absolutely nothing within our power that can be done to stop the acceleration of it as it disappears from us.

1:12—Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

The lesson of life illustrated in the wildflowers is that human life in this fallen earth is very transitory. Therefore, the greatest of blessings we can experience is when events in our life lead us to greater faith and trust in our Creator. Those experiences hold blessing that relate to eternity. That is the understanding that lies behind the thought of James here.

The condition upon which our blessing hinges is perseverance. Perseverance of the sort James is calling us to, is not just surviving. It is living through the adversity with the mindset of faith—trust in Yahweh that sees and hears His words in it and pursues His purposes in it. If we exercise this kind of perseverance in faith, we do more than survive. We even do more than emerge stronger. We emerge with greater spiritual capacities. The entire book points to this journey toward completeness. It provides many concrete descriptions of courses of thought and action that characterize immaturity and incompleteness. We can know when these are present in us that we have unfinished business that the Spirit wishes to conduct in us. There are capacities God wishes for us to acquire.

This increased capacity is the “approval” that James is speaking of. His goal is to help us arrive at the tipping point where we become mature, with the subsequent credibility we gain as God’s children, and so lay hold of the greater trust He places in us as stewards. James’ purpose is not so much assurance of belonging to God’s family. It is approval of us as Yahweh’s spokespersons, craftsmen, and artisans. So the theme of James is re-surfacing here.

Now there is something of great importance in James’ words here. To live by the Spirit to arrive at what the Scripture calls completeness or maturity, should be our entire ambition because of the reward that goes with it. The reward is what these words are clearly pointing the readers to. The burden of James is that of all of Scripture—that Yahweh’s people should enter the promises of God, the full experience of His great salvation. This experience is the reward, and it is our great motivator.

A stewardship is the entrusting of a responsibility to another. In all stewardship there is the idea of accountability and then appropriate reward. This is basic to our concept of employee and employer relationships in our present world. It is also true with respect to our relationship with Yahweh (1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5). The understanding of Yahweh as One who rewards faithfulness is considered fundamental to our life of faith (Hebrews 11:6). So as one whose thought is shaped by the Scripture, James naturally speaks to the good reward that God has ordained for those who persevere in faith.

James calls this reward “the crown of life.” This will stand in stark contrast to the consequence that comes with not persevering in faith but yielding to the temptation that arises within us during trial. Succumbing to temptation leads to sin, and sin brings about death. These two ideas, the blessing of THE life, and the curse of death govern the thought of verses 11-15.

Whatever “the crown of life” is, it is represented to us as the reward that God has promised to those who “love Him.” This idea of a kind of life being given because of a choice is apparent in all of Scripture, and particularly in God’s revelation of Himself as both a God of loving kindnesses and of judgment (Exodus 20:4). In that language it is clear that among humanity two different kinds of experiences of human life are entered into by people. One is an experience of Yahweh’s goodness, clearly attached to those who choose to revere Him. The other is an experience of Yahweh’s judgment, clearly attached to those who choose to live independent of Him.

Before suggesting what might be meant by the term “crown of life,” it is important to consider the matter of eternal reward in Scripture. Specifically, some object to the whole idea of humans being rewarded for anything they might do by God’s grace. It does seem to conflict with the clear purpose of God’s plan, to display HIS glory. So what are we to make of this promise of a “crown of life” that will be given to those who persevere, and the whole concept of our being rewarded? A “zoomed-out” view of the whole of Scripture is important to an understanding of eternal reward.

As God’s covenant relationship with man was unfolding, God made this statement to Abram. “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your very great reward” (Genesis 15:1). Thus begins a chapter which is certainly one of the most significant in all the Scripture in terms of understanding Yahweh’s desire to relate Himself to man and how He carries out that desire.

In this statement God confirms His earlier promise to Abram (Genesis 12), that He intended to relate Himself to Abram and his offspring in a very special way. Here, in what appears to be a response to Abram's faith in leaving Haran, in separating himself from Lot, and in refusing a material reward from the king of Sodom, Yahweh appears to Abram in a vision to reaffirm His commitment to him. The language Yahweh uses on this occasion is covenantal, meaning that it is a clear expression by Him of the fact that He was viewing Himself as joined to Abram. All that Yahweh is now belonged to Abram, and all Abram was belonged to Yahweh.

This statement brings up two important questions. The first is concerning Yahweh's use of the word "reward." In virtually every other usage in the Old Testament of this Hebrew word it refers to wages, or something earned. So the first question is why does Yahweh present Himself here as Abram's "reward," implying that Abram had done something that merited God's company? The second question concerns Yahweh's presentation of Himself personally being Abram's reward. He seems to be saying that by whatever means, Abram now has Yahweh as his personal resource and protection. So the question is this, does this mean that we should view any reference in Scripture to reward as being relationship to Yahweh, and not to anything material? There is an answer to both questions provided in the text.

The answer to the question of why Yahweh presents himself to Abram as a "reward" is provided in Moses' commentary in verse 6. It says, "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." That important verse reveals a favorable accounting practice of Yahweh, one that enables us to experience a "wage" or "reward." Faith is so valued by Yahweh that it is accounted as righteousness. By Yahweh's accounting this is true, even though our faith is itself a gift given to us by Him. The reality then is that God places in us the capacity for faith. Faith is an ability like all others in that it is a stewardship. Where there is a stewardship there is accountability and reward, both negative and positive.

Now if we examine the story of Abram recorded thus far by Moses through this lens of stewardship, it seems clear that Abram's faith in Yahweh's words has been shaping his actions for a period of years. Through faith-inspired obedience, his fellowship with God was growing in intimacy, and his faith was increasing. By the end of chapter 14 Abram has arrived at the point where he will accept no reward from an earthly king for his faith-inspired actions. His faith is in "Yahweh God most high, possessor of heaven and earth." Through trusting Yahweh in real life events, Abram had become more complete in faith and was viewing Yahweh Himself as his shield and his great reward. So it is quite possible to view Yahweh's presentation of himself as Abram's reward to be the result of Abram stewarding faith, making practical life decisions inspired and shaped by what he had come to know and trust of Yahweh. God's declaration of what we would call "saving" faith, is a declaration of faith that had become more complete, that had begun to reach a "tipping" point. The reward was that a fuller experience of Yahweh's salvation plan would now be realized by Abram.

Was this reward given to Abram by Yahweh completely relational in nature, or did it have material aspects as well? It is evident that Abram understood intimacy with God as going hand in hand with gaining visible, material blessing. This is easily demonstrated in the text of Genesis 15 in the record of Abram's immediate reply to God. He says, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." It is noteworthy that in reply to Abram's question, Yahweh does not say, "I myself am yours, what more could I give?" Instead, there follows a conversation which involves material blessing—children and

land. This is followed by a real and tangible solemnization of the covenant between God and Abram. Then there is an actual legal description of the land God intended to bless Abram's heirs with, and a disclosure of some of the events that would transpire as they traveled toward that reward. In hearing from God, "I am your shield, your very great reward," Abram understood it as involving a visible, material possession that would be if God did nothing to dispel this, and in fact confirmed it.

Genesis 22 is the story of the further confirmation of this covenant. By this time in the narrative Abram's name has been changed to Abraham. In the opening verse of chapter 22, we are told that God "tested" Abraham. By this we understand that He tested him with the idea in mind of Abraham passing the test and demonstrating outwardly his trust in Yahweh. Abraham demonstrated that he was willing to offer up his only son Isaac as a sacrifice in obedience to God. Later in the Scripture we are told that he believed that God was able to raise Isaac up again (Hebrews 11:19). In response to his demonstration of faith God confirmed Abraham's reward.

Now our doctrine of grace teaches us that God Himself produced this obedience in Abraham. That is a correct doctrine. But it is clear from the text that God views this as an act of Abraham himself and rewards him for it. He says to Abraham, "By myself I have sworn, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son, from me, indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand that is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. And in your seed all nations of the earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." God rewarded Abraham as a good steward of the capacity for faith that He had placed in him.

There is one more critical idea that should be mentioned in conjunction with this passage. It is this; the concept of reward does not in any way lessen or cheapen the concept of grace. All Abram had done with respect to God's commandments was by grace through faith. If Yahweh was willing to reward Abram for work that He Himself had brought about in Abram, then it makes Yahweh's grace even more mystifying. Yahweh's grace is enhanced through His rewards, and He should be even more glorified.

Several hundred years later the Sinai covenant with the Law was given to Abraham's descendants. It changed nothing with respect to an individual's justification, which has always been by grace through faith. In fact, its ultimate purpose was to demonstrate human failure and so prove that Yahweh's grace was humanity's only hope for forgiveness. To this end, the commandments, with blessings and curses attached to them (Deuteronomy 29), were given to guide the offspring of Abraham so that they would experience the blessings that the covenant had given them access to. Yahweh's blessing was presented to them as conditional upon their obedience. Thankfully, their eternal salvation was not at stake in these commands, or they would have had no hope. God merely allowed a season in human history whereby His blessing was presented as conditional, so that the classic human theory that we can earn God's approval could be laid forever to rest.

By the terms of the Sinai covenant, God would reward the obedience of Israel. Just as clearly, He would reward in a negative way their disobedience. Both things are in their own way acts of grace, and both show that God is a "rewarder," who through tangible things responds to our degree of attention and diligence toward the truth. The Law was presented to Israel as that which would enable them to walk in a path that God would bless. Through it they could gain tangible reward from Him. This was of course, impossible for them to do. That is the brilliance of the entire arrangement. Israel's

history understood rightly frees humanity from the delusion that if we try hard enough, we can earn God's favor.

The Scriptures written later contain many concise statements that are made by various authors who observed the principle of the blessing and the curse at work in the practical dealings of humanity. There are myriads of statements that support the basic idea that God orchestrates life so that within the covenant community "misfortune pursues the sinner, but prosperity is the reward of the righteous" (Proverbs 13:21). In these writings it is simply assumed that such is the nature of life, because God is a "rewarder." David viewed this as basic to his people's understanding of God. He wrote, "One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard; that you O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done" (Psalm 62:11-12). There are also clear statements among these writings that portray the utter inability of humanity to succeed under such an arrangement (Proverbs 19:3; 20:9; Psalm 51:1-9; 130:3). That testimony too is persistent. But this does not keep the prophets from their portrayal of Yahweh as one having a time set when He would intervene in the affairs of man with His reward in hand. It was an expectation, given His just nature. Through all of this, the hope of reward is connected to faith. It is faith's value in the accounting system of Yahweh that allows hope in Yahweh's justice. Were it not for that, Yahweh there would be little to look forward to on the day He "rewards" humanity.

If all this reward language were somehow only related to the incomplete nature of special revelation in the time of Abraham, or to the typological nature of the Old Covenant, we would expect that Jesus' teaching and the rest of the teaching of the New Testament would clarify this matter. We would expect that recompense of the wicked would remain connected with the judgment of God but that the language of reward for diligence toward truth would be absent. We would expect that any concept of conditional eternal reward other than the prospect of perfect intimacy with God, would be absent. But this is not the case.

Jesus made numerous references to tangible reward offered in the kingdom of heaven for faithfulness. The following statements show a clear teaching from Him that judgment of God on humankind would include tangible reward for those who were faithful. "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21). "Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities" (Luke 19:17). He posed the question, "If you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? And if you have not been faithful in the use of that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?" (Luke 16:11-12). There is in these statements a clear expectation being raised of tangible reward in eternity. There is that moment when Peter says to Jesus, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" Jesus' reply constitutes a promise of reward that is both tangible and material. "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life." At the last supper, when the apostles had been arguing in a fleshly way about who of them was the greatest, Jesus rebukes their fleshliness, but affirms their eventual reward of greatness. "You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as my Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Luke 22:28-30). Statements like these made by Jesus reinforce the idea that God is by nature one who rewards faith and faithfulness.

Rewards come about simply because He is just. Because it is His nature and His nature does not change, His reward will be such that it will extend in some way into eternity. Paul's teachings are in perfect harmony with this idea. He speaks of us all appearing "before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). He speaks of each man's work being "shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Clearly Paul's portrayal of this process leaves little doubt that it occurs at the end of our present life with the reward extending in differing respects into eternity. This is reflected in the last book of the Bible with the picture of Jesus repeating the idea rooted in the Old Testament, "Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me," (Revelation 22:12, see with this Isaiah 40:16, 62:11).

The testimony of the writers of Scripture is consistent. God is a rewarder. He will reward all men with respect to their response to truth and stewardship of the capacity He has placed within them for faith. Unbelievers will be given the fruit of their choice. They chose to have nothing to do with Him and so for eternity will have nothing to do with Him. Those who believed have done so by grace through faith and have been rewarded by being joined to Him for all of eternity. Within that family there are varying degrees of faithfulness to the truth and diligence in the things of God. All will receive fair reward, reward that is commensurate with their faithfulness.

We have seen data from Scripture that would suggest that a legitimate argument exists for a doctrine of conditional eternal reward. The argument from Scripture and what it teaches about the nature of God is the significant one in any theological matter. But there is always the test of sensibility that must be administered since Scripture has some latitude in interpretation.

There have been objections raised to teaching regarding conditional eternal rewards because in the minds of some it cheapens and detracts from grace. The logic to this objection is that for God to reward our obedience, which is only possible because of His grace, is to obscure the real cause of our actions, and so detract from grace. This is of significance because if such a doctrine does cheapen grace, then by doing so it also detracts from God's glory which is clearly the goal of God's sovereign plan for the ages. It would be hard to imagine God endorsing a doctrine that detracts from His glory. There is also the problem of envisioning depraved men, whose righteous deeds are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), as doing enough to be deserving of any kind of reward for faithfulness. Why would God lower the standard of faithfulness by rewarding human faithfulness which at its best is quite transient? And then there is the problem of making distinctions among children of God, of the possibility of some being in some way elevated above others. How could He who has consistently spoken against any idea of difference in value among humankind be the author of distinctions among them Himself? So there are matters like these of logic that need to be somehow processed.

Does a theology of eternal rewards detract from grace and God's glory? There is certainly the possibility that a reward given could be seen as merited. That, in fact is the usual understanding of rewards received and given in the human realm. They are in some way deserved. But this need not be the case in the matter of eternal reward. When Paul says that our deeds will be examined to determine the quality of them (1 Corinthians 3:13), he is saying that the source of those deeds, their motivating force will be revealed. So, we believe that God will reveal everything for what it is and all

deeds will be clearly manifested as to what exactly brought them about. It will be clear that our apparent achievements were really by His grace and to His credit. He will give a reward to us, but the cause will be clear to all, and that cause will be His grace. Will this not enhance grace and make it more amazing when He rewards individuals for work that He clearly brought about in their lives? Grace is cheapened only where there is not full disclosure. Where there is full revelation grace will be plainly seen as it is in all its magnitude, and He will be more deeply glorified. The day will reveal the truth about our deeds. The reward will be ours, but it will be the Lord and His grace that will be clearly found to be the cause.

What about the doctrine of the depravity of man? Does a theology of eternal reward violate it? How could any of man's deeds be viewed by God as anything but feeble? It is undeniable that man's righteous acts fall hopelessly short when compared to the righteousness of God. There is no way, if the standard of performance is God, that man could merit reward. Now clearly, in the matter of being fit for heaven, there is none righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10-18, Psalm 14:1-3). Scripture speaks on multiple occasions in this absolute language. We also find that Scripture speaks in relative language when it comes to the righteousness of man so that a man like Job is called righteous and blameless by God Himself (Job 1:8). John speaks of people of God not sinning (1 John 3:9). It is said that Elders in the church must be blameless (1 Timothy 3:2). This can only be relative language, human behavior compared to the behavior of other humans.

Since God clearly speaks of us already in such relative terms, would it not be logical that He would use such a standard in judging our deeds? Is it not possible that the question that will be asked of Christian is if we have been faithful in terms of the capability of faith made possible by the Holy Spirit? There is every reason to believe that this will be the question asked in the matter of eternal reward. Our stewardship of faith will be what is called into question. Now even in this, no one could achieve any degree of merit by God's absolute standard. Again, grace will be applied in the standard of judgment and so grace will be enhanced.

In the matter of God making distinctions between human beings, of rewarding some with distinction, seemingly making them stand out, this is certainly a problem from the viewpoint of how we presently behave. However, we already see in Scripture distinctions made among angels as to authority. We see differences in the body of Christ related to office and calling as orchestrated by the Holy Spirit. Some are leaders, some are servants. These holy distinctions are frequently a source of pride among us in our current fallen condition. But they must not be inherently evil if God has orchestrated them. Why could the new creation not have distinctions of some kind which will be palatable to humanity as we then are made to be, even as such distinctions are currently palatable to the angels? It is also clear that while Jesus rebukes such fleshly pride, he acknowledges that distinctions in roles will be awarded (Luke 22:24-30).

Finally, with respect to logic, those who would oppose a theology of eternal reward must themselves deal with a few matters of logic. Is it consistent with God's justice and His fairness as it has been continually revealed in Scripture, that a disobedient child would be rewarded the same as an obedient child (we are not disputing that both will be rewarded)? Has the kingdom of God ever at any time existed in a form in which there were not differing levels of authority among those who carry out its rule (we are not disputing the equal value and worth of His subjects)? If God's blessing bestowed in response to faith and faithfulness for humans in their fallen condition is

legitimate, can it not be trusted when it is bestowed on humans in their fully redeemed state?

It is perfectly proper then, to speak of a theology of conditional eternal rewards. To reward people in a way that is commensurate with their faith and faithfulness to the truth is perfectly consistent with the character of God. Such a theology allows us to see that God's justice consistently is reflected in His actions. It does so while enhancing His mercy and grace. It does so without compromising His sovereignty.

It is perfectly consistent with Scripture to teach a doctrine of conditional eternal rewards. It flows very naturally from the roots of the faith in the Old Testament, from the language of the New Testament authors and from the teachings of Jesus Christ. It allows us to take these statements at face value rather than assigning some symbolic value to them that varies from interpreter to interpreter.

There are many unanswered questions about such rewards. We need not go beyond what is written and speculate too heavily about the nature of these rewards. That kind of speculation generally leads to something that simply sounds too much like fleshly hankering for rank and privilege. We should leave such curiosity alone and say simply that He is coming soon with His reward in His hand.

Returning now to James' statement, divergent ideas have been set forth in seeking to explain this mention of the "crown of life." Some see the "crown of life" as a plain literal statement— God will give a tangible physical reward to those who persevere. Some see that reward as an actual crown that will be worn through eternity. Others see the crown as the bestowal of the kind of privileges we would associate with nobility and position. Then there are others that view the "crown of life" as a figurative statement. They suggest a meaning along these lines, that God will grant to those who persevere some greater experience of Him. Others view the crown of life as referring to eternal life itself, and so believe that only those who persevere in trial will inherit heaven. Their position usually is that those who do not persevere either prove their faith was not genuine to begin with, or simply lose their faith and so lose their salvation. These various positions on the "crown of life" flow from broader theological positions must indeed be determined from other Scriptures.

From the viewpoint a "zoomed-out view of Scripture provides; it seems best to see the "crown of life" as relating to the restoration of the original purpose and role of humanity—to carry out for Yahweh His rule over creation. That is God's aim in redemption. He is reclaiming from fallen humanity a kingdom. His plan will bring about His rule through these He has reclaimed. In a kingdom there are all sorts of levels of authority assigned. That is particularly true of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ whose realm of authority extends to all creation. It is probable that the expression "crown of life" refers to the conferring of high privilege in this Kingdom on those who have stewarded faith well in trial. They will experience the fullest possible experience of human life in its present experience. According to a literal eschatology, this would also mean high privilege under Christ during His thousand-year reign on earth. This would also be their privilege in His rule over the new heaven and new earth.

1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

From the eternal and sublime potential of trial, James returns to comment on living during it and guiding oneself through it. He takes on one line of thinking that can arise in us as fallen people that can lead to a compromised outcome.

The word for being tempted used here is *πειραζω*. It is the verb form of the word used earlier for trial (verse 2). By way of reminder, this word has a considerable range of meaning. It speaks of adversity that can come from a few sources, that threatens our well-being. It is used of the temptation that the devil exerted on Jesus to interrupt His divine mission (Luke 4:13). It is used of the mental tug-a-war that occurs within us when our flesh tempts us to stray into sin and to lapse from faith (Matthew 26:41). It is used of adversity through which God allows others to observe our faith and character (Luke 22:28). It is used of the concoctions of other people who deliberately try to undermine our credibility (Matthew 22:18, 35). So it is action taken against us that threatens our well-being and soundness.

A look at James' statement in this verse and those that follow indicates that he is using this word *πειραζω* of the temptation to sin. Temptation is the mental tug-a-war that occurs inside of us. So *πειραζω* here is the adverse condition in which our flesh entices us to stray into sin and to lapse from faith (Matthew 26:41; Luke 8:13; 1 Timothy 6:9). The command James gives forbids us from engaging the idea that God is the source of such temptation. It is accurate to think that God has allowed adversity in our lives to strengthen faith. However, it is outside the boundaries of an accurate understanding of God to suggest that He is part of any enticement within us to engage evil. The plain truth is that God isn't enticed by evil and is not part of enticing us to do evil.

This twisted idea that God is the source of our temptation in its most benign form maligns God, and that is always ill-advised and dangerous. It will lead us to a very inaccurate view of God, which will lead us to a failure in faith at some point. That is the best we can hope for if we believe God to be the source of our temptation. The more extreme impact of this thinking is that it leads us to somehow think that a course of action that is devilish is God's will for us. So it can lead us blindly into thoughts and conduct that are very clear contradictions of all that God is and does. This thought that God is the source of temptation occurs more frequently among Christians than one might think. It leads to Christians engaging in murder, adultery, idolatry, and all manner of evil schemes. Therefore James confronts this issue so directly.

1:14—But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

We should not be surprised or befuddled by temptation to sin, as if the presence of temptation was an anomaly. It is in us. It is a part of who we are as fallen people. The truth is that we need no outside influence to sin. Sin is in us, we are naturally attracted to it, and we take pleasure in it. The critical finding of any post-mortem done on an act of sin is that there were a series of decisions made by us that brought about the action. We simply allowed ourselves to be carried away by our own desires.

The word rendered "carried away" is *ἐξελκομενος*. It is used only here in the New Testament. It is formed by joining the preposition *εκ*, meaning out, to the verb *ελκυω*, meaning to drag. By etymology then it conveys the idea of dragging out. In its use in Greek literature, it seems to be borrowed from the language of hunting, where an

animal is lured out of its normal defensive practices of self-preservation. The second word James uses, δელεαζομινοσ, means to trap through bait. So the two words convey being enticed away from practices that keep us safe and lured toward more reckless practices through what appeals to our instinctive desires.

James likely picked these words very purposefully, to emphasize our vulnerability to some very powerful internal instincts. None of this is to suggest that Satan and his forces of evil are not players in our temptation. We know from all of Scripture that he plays a key role (Matthew 4:1; Ephesians 4:27; 1 Peter 5:8). He knows the strength of our desires and by observation our personal weaknesses. He certainly can and will place before us things that play on our weaknesses, just as a hunter might bait an animal. It is in this way that Satan places things in our heart (John 13:2). He does not access our thoughts and plant foreign ideas in us. He arouses what is already there. But this statement by James, and another he will make later (James 4:7), show that we are not at the devil's mercy. We have capacity to ward off temptations. When we fail to do so, it is our failure to rule and lead ourselves.

One of the ways in which we differ from the animals and bear the image of God is in our high capacity for rational thought. We need not behave by mere instinct. We can and do behave by rational process. Through these we analyze, discover, innovate, and modify behavior that is damaging, and we practice what is advantageous. Though we are flawed in our capacity to exercise this ability, we certainly still possess it and are accountable to utilize it. It is precisely at this point that James is saying we fail, and the result is that we eschew what God desires for us and do what we desire for ourselves. This willfulness is the very essence of sin. A sinful act comes about because of the previous sin, that of the thought and decision that initiated the act. Sin begins with the decision of choosing our own will rather than God's.

1:15—Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

James uses the imagery of conception and birth to illustrate for us how a sinful act comes to be committed by us. It is as we have said. Several desires are slumbering in us that we have capacity to either deny or affirm. As these are stirred and awakened either by our physical senses, or just by thought processes, we must be alert to rule over them according to God's will. Some desires must simply be denied any outlet or even any time. We must simply deny them any audience. Others can be satisfied in a way that harmonizes with God's will. It is in these thinking moments that sinful acts are conceived. As a sinful course of behavior is pondered a sinful decision is eventually arrived at, and a sinful act or course of action will eventually result.

James speaks of death being the result sin works in us. That is an important observation by him. Whatever "the crown of life" is, it is represented to us as the reward that God has promised to those who "love Him." This idea of a kind of life being given because of a choice is apparent in all of Scripture, and particularly in God's revelation of Himself as both a God of loving kindnesses and of judgment (Exodus 20:4). In that language it is clear that among humanity two different kinds of experiences of human life are entered into by people. One is an experience of Yahweh's goodness, clearly attached to those who choose to revere Him. The other is an experience of Yahweh's judgment, clearly attached to those who choose to live independent of Him.

The word rendered “accomplished” in the NASB is *αποτελεσταισα*. It is an important word that conveys to the readers that sin develops. It has a life of its own that produces a state of being in us. It is an interesting word chosen by James because it utilizes *τελεω*, from which the word *τελειοι*, also comes. The apparent burden of James in this letter is that the readers become *τελειοι*, complete ones, or mature ones (1:4). That word and that concept comes to the surface often in his message. He wants us all to journey into the full experience of Yahweh’s salvation, not stop along the way. There is a similarity in opposite spiritual journeys illustrated by James’ use of this word. Just as the choice and exercise of faith brings us to maturity and completeness of faith, so the choice and exercise of our desires brings us to a point of maturity and completeness as those dead to God! We should not imagine that a sinful decision leads simply to a sinful act with some messy consequences. If we think this way, we will always think that we can somehow manage the intermediate pragmatic results. Sin leads to something far more significant, death.

What exactly is James talking about here by using the term “death”? He is talking about the symptoms and consequences of spiritual death—separation between us and Yahweh. When we choose to sin, we are choosing to live separately from Him on the issue before us, and the result is that we do. We become very vulnerable at that point. Our vulnerability is to evil people and that is bad enough. More importantly, we have severed our tether to wisdom and truth. So an avalanche of bad decisions can occur. We have even provided greater opportunity for evil beings to rob us of what healthy spirituality might remain. We can find ourselves very quickly in a place we had no intention of being in.

So sin brings more than messy consequences. It debilitates the very important capacity in us, that of consultation with Yahweh. This capacity is one that is essential to health and well-being as believers. In our analysis and decision-making, we must see and feel the weight of this consequence so that we are motivated to turn from sin at the first moment we are enticed by it. The entire record of Scripture aims at helping us understand the weight of this decision, the destructiveness that comes with separating ourselves from God. The fact that Yahweh’s grace allows our forgiveness and restoration does not remove the messiness and destruction of sin should we choose to engage it. The seemingly natural decision to follow our instincts brings a living death.

1:16—Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

It is easy to be deceived in temptation. Others can deceive us, and we can deceive ourselves. The first sinful act came about because Eve was deceived. Satan deceived here, casting doubt on God’s goodness. She deceived herself, believing that she could live better independently of Yahweh, who had made her. Adam shared in that sin.

There are several practices that protect us from being deceived. One is to be submissive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Another is to be practicing fellowship with others who are walking in the Spirit and submitting to them. Another is to be growing in our grasp of the plain statements of truth in the Scripture. All these practices and other acts of submission, help guard us in moments of temptation from substituting what we want to be true, or hope to be true, or even believe to be true for what IS true. Truth is what sets us free and keeps us free.

Even as believers we can and do walk the same path as Adam and Eve and are deceived. If we were not in such danger, James would not give this warning. Since this is a command, it means there is a real and present danger to us and so we must be on guard against deception. Implicit in such a command is a call to implement practices and routines in our life that will establish our hearts and minds in the truth. The next thought is critical to carry with us in every moment.

1:17—Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

This is a very critical fact to remind ourselves of in the moment of temptation. We must believe and trust this as a way of life. God is good by nature and is the source of all that is good. If we want what is good, it can be found nowhere else. We dare not grab for ourselves what appears good, if it conflicts with what God has revealed to be true and what He wishes us to do in the moment. It is easy for us to be blinded so that we turn away from God to experiences or things that we believe hold goodness for us. It is easy for us to do even when they are against what God has revealed. The Holy Spirit is in us to help us not lose sight of Yahweh as the exclusive source of what is good.

In describing what God gives, James uses another term along with goodness. He describes God's gifts as "perfect." This is the same word he used twice in verse 4. There it described the "complete" work accomplished in us when we are patient in trial. The result of that "complete" work is that we ourselves become "complete." By using this word again here, James helps us understand that what God gives is good in a "complete" sort of way, in a way that completes us.

There are several ways this idea of completeness helps us in confronting temptation. First, what comes from God is not that which has a good element mingled with evil. In Satan's dialog with Eve, he clearly suggests that a good, even god-like result would be found if Eve would just set an ungodly course. A course of action directed by God will not have this mixture. It is not goodness in a contrived way, where it must be justified or entered in a sinful manner.

Second, such a course of life that is God-directed will contribute in some way to our completeness as people of faith who trust Yahweh. It will add to the transformation that God has already done in us and make us more complete. It will not undo that which He has done. So the God-directed course is completely good and brings about a greater degree of completeness to our trust in God.

James refers to God as the "Father of lights." Beginning with Genesis 1, the Scripture presents Yahweh as the creator and master of the great lights—the sun, moon, and stars (Psalm 136:7; 104:19-23). In fact, it is possible to see the Scripture as presenting Yahweh as the creator of light itself, and then of these intermediate sources of light (Psalm 74:16). The sun, the moon, and the stars are significant in that they are seen as maintaining the rhythms of the earth (Psalm 76:17). These rhythms or boundaries in turn bless humanity and make human life possible and sustainable.

The capacity of these lights to make human life possible, makes light the perfect metaphor for that which makes spiritual life possible. And so in Scripture, light became a common metaphor of truth and Yahweh's revelation. While the more literal meaning of "Father of lights" is likely in view in this text, there is no mistaking the fact that Yahweh gives to us all that is the source of spiritual life. Those things that are sourced

in Him increase the quality of our life in Him. They do not lead us away from Him, nor would He be the source of anything that would lead us away from life in Him.

James extends the thought of the metaphor of light and by its analogy reminds us that Yahweh is unchanging. Our experience of time may have been primary in the mind of James and in the choice of His words. Time of day and seasons were discerned by the change of a shadow cast by a fixed object. Like the shadow on a sundial, all things in the realm of time change with time. Yahweh is not the shadow, the sundial, or the light. He stands above it all as the Creator of light. He is the source of such a reliable and faithful order that allows us to track time and so order our lives. So He is the source of the order that makes our lives possible and that makes order in our lives possible.

Yahweh is unchanging. By this we mean that He consistently expresses Himself in word and deed according to His nature. It is certainly true that in dealing with changing humanity and in carrying out His own plan, we see different sides of Him. But the fact is that He is unchanging in His character, and He behaves and speaks consistent with who He Isaiah

1:18—In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.

In this verse James is adding to the thought that Yahweh is totally separate from evil, being wholly good and the giver of good gifts. He is more than just a source of good things. Yahweh is the source of a process at work that is bringing about goodness in us. It is moving us toward a destiny that is a good one, even by the pragmatic standard of measure we often use in moments of doubt and temptation.

The end toward which God is working to bring us has been referenced as “completeness” or “maturity,” where we become documented faith-workers—agents of Him (v. 4). Here the end toward which our maturity serves is cited, one that reveals our future purpose and function. This is referencing an era that will envelop this world, and a creation that is beyond what we presently know.

This verse reaches back to eternity past and forward to eternity future. It begins with “the exercise of His will.” We understand that God planned the events of time in eternity past. Time then, is the unfolding of events that occur because they have been appointed or allowed in His plan. It was according to His own plan that God created humanity. We were made in His image and because of this were distinct from all other creatures. Our function was to rule for Yahweh over creation. So according to His plan, our function was to execute all that was His will for His creation.

But by the design and plan of God, humanity fell from that prestigious position. They did so when they chose to use their rather extra-ordinary abilities for their own purposes rather than Yahweh’s. God’s eternal plan covered this. His plan was to allow this to happen and then to intervene in behalf of fallen humanity to restore them to their place of privilege and dignity.

Their original purpose to rule for Him over His creation would not be thwarted. But it would be brought about only through His decisive and persistent effort in our behalf.

Within the human stream He began to draw out a people who would rule creation with Him and for Him one day. The essential element in drawing these out of the stream of humanity was “the word of truth.” This short phrase refers to that which is true about

Yahweh, humanity, the world, and the experience of human life. This is the message of truth. It was known immediately after the fall, was gradually lost in the aftermath by new generations who were born but was at the same time re-introduced by God at critical junctures as time went by. The result is that this body of truth has to some degree remained present among humanity throughout time.

The message of truth came to be posited in a book. That book began as a rather small one, which Moses wrote and left to the Israelites. Over the centuries Yahweh raised up other writers through whom His Spirit wrote installments that were added to Moses' book. So even as humanity was journeying away from truth and suppressing it, God was replenishing it among them and insuring its presence.

Then the time came in Yahweh's plan when this "word of truth" was embodied in a person. He Himself became a man and lived out the truth on the earth for all to see. Four different observers wrote a record of His life and words. The result of all this is the Scripture as we have it today. It is the "word of truth," and Yahweh has used its message of truth all along the way to draw millions whom He has chosen back to the truth of who He is and who we are. He has drawn them to faith and trust in His plan for us.

This is what James is speaking of when he says "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth." In eternity past Yahweh chose certain human beings from among all whom His plan would bring into being. Into the lives of each of these He brought the message of truth, utilizing their own conscience, the evidence all around them in the things He had made, and the spoken words of those who had already come to knowledge of Him. Among humanity He has always had a people that He has in this way gathered to Himself.

In James' words, Yahweh's plan for these people of His is that they be the first fruits of His creatures. That expression refers to an intrinsic value and worth that He has assigned to them. Its benefits include a role enjoyed in partnership with Him for all of eternity. These will be His rulers over His creation. They will be an exhibit and a demonstration of who He Himself is. They will make Him visible in a very precise way and will be the source of His thought and desire for all creatures that He has made. They will be His agents for all that He wishes to bring about in His vast realm. These are a large part of His focus in allowing the millenniums of human history.

It is good to remind ourselves of James' time in history and the vantage point from which these words came. His viewpoint was from the midpoint of this great action of Yahweh of gathering a people for Himself who were redeemed from fallen humanity and through whom He would rule His creation. James is looking back over the history of the twelve tribes to Yahweh's choice of them and His gift of the revelation of Himself to them. At James' time that knowledge was beginning to bear fruit among all people. James was seeing the beginning of what had been Yahweh's will that He had expressed to Abraham when He chose Him (Genesis 12:3).

Through Jesus' words regarding what lie ahead, James could look ahead and see that the ending was more certain than it had ever been. Decisive steps had been executed by Yahweh in precise harmony with what His word had promised, beginning with the account of Moses.

1:19—This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

This verse begins with the command to the readers to “Know this.” They are to be forever confident of what James has just spoken. From our perspective, understanding the entire story of Scripture, we can understand the force of the command to be something like this; “Be forever confident of Yahweh’s goodness toward you, specifically His power and plan to restore to you the rule over creation, the blessing forfeited by Adam and Eve.”

James proceeds with a second command. It is introduced by the conjunction *de*, which indicates it is adding something further to the first command. We could render it “moreover” here and so capture what James sees as the relationship between the two commands. The second command defines behavior that follows in logical sequence our submission to the first one. It points us to the practical, day-to-day outcome of the mind that is confident of Yahweh’s goodness and a future experience of His promises. So there is the first command of faith and trust, and this second command that relates to ruling our impulses.

If we trust Yahweh’s goodness, it will restrain our instinctive reaction to all matters of life. We will quickly corral our rising emotions. We will remind ourselves that He is good, not simply that He does good things. His good pleasure cannot be thwarted. When His plan is complete all will be good for us. His goodness means we will choose our words carefully in trial. We will not

be among those who instinctively and in a reactionary way opine on God’s actions and purposes in what is seen. We will allow anger to arise slowly because we will be assuming God’s goodness and so wishing to submit to His purposes and realize the outcome. When we trust in His goodness, we will not be angry because we have been violated. If indeed we are violated, we can be confident that He Himself will guard our welfare, repay, and reward our loss. He can do nothing else since He is good, He is unchangeable, and He is the sovereign, all- powerful shaper of both time and eternity. Those who are growing in their trust in Yahweh’s goodness are increasing in their anticipation of His just and righteous outcome. They distrust any outcome that they themselves might orchestrate.

1:20—for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Anyone who trusts in the goodness of God should be laboring to bring about what God Himself is working to achieve. What He is working to bring about will be good. If we believe in God’s unfathomable goodness, it will seem that rationality alone should lead us to a posture of submission to Him when our way is blocked. The reality however is that such rational thought escapes us. In the heat of the moment our anger is ignited. When it is, we take our welfare in our own hands and set about to assure that our interests are served. The focus of our actions becomes our own interests, which would be amply supplied for if we would work for God’s glory. Our own willfulness in such moments is the number one reason we do not experience more of His goodness.

Our God-given capacity for anger is likely meant to equip us to be instruments of God’s justice. Justice is the key element in the biblical idea of righteousness. Anger is to be experienced in partnership with our Creator to motivate actions that establish His justice. The “anger of man” is that passionate reaction that wells up in us when what we want is denied or when our rights are violated.

In our fallen world the key issue in matters of justice is timing—God has a time to punish injustice and establish justice. In our fallenness anger easily leads us to slouch into self- obsession and even self-deification. We assume the time for justice to be now, and so begin to act as God, exacting our own brand of justice. We must understand anger to be such that it easily leads us to take actions that are contrary to what God justly intends to do.

James is calling us to trust in God's goodness in these very moments, and to be careful to do nothing that would thwart the good and just outcome that Yahweh's plan will certainly bring about once it has run its entire course.

1:21—Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Single-mindedness is what James has summoned his readers to so far in this letter. They are on a spiritual plateau that stops short of maturity and completeness. Such a state comes about because we are content to practice a faith of convenience with its moral and spiritual mixture. So James calls us to purity and single-mindedness.

Movement off this plateau requires a putting aside of certain things and a putting on of others. James' words reflect the classic pattern we are called to by the New Testament writers (Ephesians 4:22-25; Colossians 3:9-10; Romans 6:19). He calls us to put "aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness." The term "filthiness" is the term for dirt. Peter used a different form of this word to and associated it to those things done against the dictates of one's conscience (1 Peter 3:21). James is likely referring to this same issue. We are to engage fully those things that our Spirit directed conscience leads us into. Our lives are not to be a mixture of alternately seeking God and steeling ourselves against His leading. We are to view those things that oppose our conscience as dirt, and so to cleanse ourselves from them.

Second, James calls us to put aside all that remains of wickedness. He is calling attention to excess that remain in us. Such excesses are to be cleaned up through the power of the Spirit. They are remnants of our old life. There is great profit for any Christian who for the right reasons and in the power of the Holy Spirit faces the excesses in their life. This is true of all excesses from indulgence in food or drink, to an excessive need for praise, to the more dramatic financial or sexual excesses. Accepting even small compromises leads to mediocrity in the things of the Spirit. Any call up involves putting aside something in our lives we have not ruled well.

After calling us to "put aside" these things, James commands us to "receive the word implanted." The term "implanted" is ἐμφυτον, which refers to the germination of a seed. By using this term, he is characterizing the message of the truth revealed by God as that which has life. When we receive it, this message will come to life in us. He is referring to the message of truth that our ears hear and that the Holy Spirit applies from within us in a precise and personal way with respect to our life activities.

Therefore, receiving is our key activity. Receiving involves physically hearing God's truth. Then it involves submitting our own thoughts and actions to the ideas and words of God's truth to re-shape them. It is an intentional act in which we are willing before God to be wrong.

This intentionality is captured by James with the phrase "in humility." Humility is the English rendering of the word πραυτητι. That is a word that refers to mildness and even-temperedness. It is the golden mean of emotional states. We are not to be

combative towards the truth, but open before it—willing to be shown wrong by it. Through this “receiving” we can be made right. So “receiving” is an activity that requires our mind and our will, and it results in transformation.

James affirms that the word of God received in this way will “save our souls.” The term soul is used throughout the Bible as a synonym for our entire beings—our mind, soul, and body as it functions in the living state. That means the expression “save our souls” means something different in Scripture than it does in American Christianity. In our colloquial use of this phrase, it is synonymous with the act of God when He justifies us and pardons us from our sins. In the Scripture this saving of our souls accomplished by the message of truth is a reality that occurs at a couple of levels. It is true that when we receive the basic gospel message our souls are saved in the sense that we are forgiven for our sins and saved from the verdict of guilt that is justly ours. The result is eternal life with God. It is also true from that day forward that the Holy Spirit is joined to our spirits, and so the entire message of God is implanted in us. From within us comes His conviction and encouragement—the application of truth to our real-life moments. This implanted word saves us repeatedly from who we instinctively are, and so our lives are saved, or made sound, repeatedly as we walk with the Lord. This is the work of setting us aside—sanctification. He is carrying this work on in the lives of all who belong to Him, and so our souls are saved in the Scriptural sense repeatedly.

1:22—But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

This verse begins with the command to become something. That command further emphasizes the intentionality of “receiving” the message implanted in us through the Holy Spirit. Implicit in these words is a spiritual condition that we can easily slouch into. That condition is one of familiarity with the message of truth, without the appropriate actions and behaviors it teaches.

This is a verse about our behavior. In modifying behavior, it is a relatively easy matter to become aware of what a wise course of action is in life. That information is available to us through the counsel of others, through our own experience, and in written form. It is readily available for every aspect of our lives, from business and financial matters, to relationships, to our personal morality. This information is getting easier and more accessible by the day in our current world. But also, by availing ourselves of the Spirit of God living in us, we have great capacity to hear wisdom from God Himself. This hearing is not without intentional effort. But it is relatively easy to acquire the knowledge of the Spiritual course in life, and even the next steps in that life for us.

Who we are becoming in relationship to the truth God is revealing to us is more complex and requires more from us. This is due to our fallen natures. We naturally and instinctively are drawn toward what is contrary to God’s will. We must submit ourselves instead to the leading of His Spirit in such moments. So our reality is that we must walk a path of thought and behavior that is not instinctive. And so in doing this we are trying to become other than what we naturally are. We are seeking to become who we are as God’s children inhabited by His Spirit.

To recognize and absorb the teaching of the Spirit without following it, is to delude ourselves. The word James chooses for this self-deception is *παραλογιζομενοι*. Aristotle employed this word to speak of deceit that comes through false reasoning. One of our great liabilities as humans is that we employ our powers of reason to make the truth what we wish it to be. It is a common practice among us that we must be

alert towards (Colossians 2:4). The result is particularly disastrous and the verses that follow speak to it.

1:23—For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

A mirror functions to show us our natural outward appearance. The Scripture functions in a way that shows us our natural inner beings. We need to know the nature of our thoughts and imaginings. As we make decisions, we need to be able to rationally think through things like our fears, our hopes, our aspirations, and our relative abilities. The Scripture declares to us what is true, and so provides for us a standard by which we can correct our own thoughts. The critical thing is to correct them and so to conform our minds to the thinking of God (Romans 12:2). Aside from this corrective action enabled by the Holy Spirit, we are simply hearers of the word and not doers. We are seeing the state of things in our inner being, and just being informed instead of transformed. That will be the overall message of the illustration of the mirror.

1:24—for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

There are three actions James describes. These are the heart of the message he means to convey through this illustration. They describe what is happening inside the person who is simply hearing the message of truth. The three actions are looking, going away, and forgetting. In expressing the act of looking, James uses a word that describes more than a casual, cursory glance. He describes the action of looking intently—of observing and perceiving the issues. For the action of going away he appropriately utilizes the perfect tense, describing completed action with an abiding result. So the person has separated themselves from what they have observed and perceived. Then James adds emphasis to the act of forgetting by adding the adverb immediately—which alludes to a degree of intentionality. This intentionality is further developed by the word he uses to express forgetting. It is *ἐπιλαθετο*, which can express normal forgetfulness (Mark 8:14), but also intentional forgetfulness (Philippians 3:13), or even neglect (Hebrews 6:10; 13:2,16). It is more than likely that James is using this word in the sense of intentional forgetfulness—putting something out of one's mind.

To summarize, James has given us a word picture of one who perceives certain specific things about their physical appearance from what they see in their reflection in glass, then has gone away from the reflection, and intentionally put it out of their mind. This is what one who is just a hearer of the truth does.

1:25—But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.

James moves from the realm of illustration to that of reality as he describes what occurs in the one who proves to be a doer of the word. He uses four verbal ideas to describe such a person. First, he describes them as looking intently. Now the word used to describe the examination of the one who merely heard the word was not that of giving a cursory glance. However, this word describes a more intense act—that of stooping down to examine further something that has been noticed and perceived as of interest and value.

Second, James describes them as “abiding by” the word. In reading the English word “abide,” we might expect to find in the Greek text the word μένω, as in Jesus’ well-known command to us to “abide” in Him (John 15). Instead, we find a strengthened form of that word, παραμείναι. It is used to express an intentional and extended stay (1 Corinthians 16:6), or even a permanent one (Hebrews 7:23). The NASB rendering “abides by it” picks up this idea, indicating adherence to the principles of the word. This stands in contrast to the one who observed their own image in a glass and went away, intentionally withdrawing from what they had seen. This is the key to the contrast James is making between the hearer of the word and the doer of it. The hearer separates himself from what he has perceived about himself. The doer remains engaged with the truth, perceives even more about himself, and in a sense anchor himself there and lives life from that spot.

Third, James describes this person who abides by the word as one who becomes. That is a significant idea. They do not remain what they once were. They become effectual doers of the word. James calls such a one a “doer of work.” The emphasis is not the inward change that occurs, though in the mind of James we can be certain that is the essence of the transformation. But James emphasizes that these act as prescribed in God’s message of truth. So the picture of these James gives us is that they remain engaged with the truth, anchor themselves in it, and they become those who mimic it in real life.

Fourth, James describes these as being blessed in this working endeavor. It is a great blessing to have God empower us and enable us to be changed and be agents of change. The picture here is just that, of God intervening with His great power so that in what we are engaged with we are carried forward to results beyond what our own moral abilities would produce. We are blessed to rise to that character and engage that work that is far beyond us. The touch of God in our lives is something to be coveted, and it comes to those who anchor themselves to God’s message of truth.

James describes the “hearer of the word” as one who looks at his own image in a glass. He describes a “doer of the word” as one who investigates the perfect Law—the Law of liberty. What exactly is meant by this terminology? The word rendered “perfect” in the NASB is one that has been utilized several times by James now. It is τέλειον, a derivative of the term τέλος. It conveys the idea of completeness and maturity. Thus far James has spoken of us allowing perseverance to have its “complete” effect, so that we might become “completed ones” (1:4). He has warned us that sin when it has its “complete” effect brings death (1:15). He has reminded us that God is the giver of every “complete” gift (1:17). Now he speaks of the “perfect” or “complete” Law. The Law is a description of the kind of behavior that marks partnership with Yahweh—the complete human being as opposed to the fallen, marred one. Jesus Christ modeled perfectly that life.

The Law in the broader sense was the story of the natural incompleteness of fallen humanity. It contained a great message of hope through Yahweh of a solution to the lost blessing of Eden.

The Jewish readers would have immediately seen the term “the perfect Law” as a reference to the Law of Moses. The reality was that it had been given as a both a source of blessing to them and as the source of a curse. It had become a curse to them because they could not obey it. As a people they were living under that curse. When in the beginning of this letter James addressed them as “the scattered ones”, he reminded them of their experience of the curse.

How could the Law be seen by them as “the Law of liberty”?

The Law could only be seen as producing liberty if it was read in a certain way—the way it was written. The Law was a message of inability and slavery if it was read with any care at all. It projected Israel’s inability to inherit Yahweh’s blessing, and for that matter the moral inability of all humanity. It projected the need for Christ in its earliest pages and it projected the results of His work both in its words and its symbols. The legacy of the Law of Moses was clearly predicted in it. Israel would be cursed, because as humans they were incapable of performing all that Yahweh had commanded.

But there was also in its words and symbols hope conveyed. Yahweh would provide a Savior, as satisfactory payment for their sin so that they could inherit His blessing through faith. So there was in the Law itself the story of freedom. Paul would later refer to the Law as a tutor who leads its learners to Christ. So the Law in this sense brings about liberty. To anyone with the message of the Gospel in hand who paused, stooped down, and examined in the Law its projection of failure and the prophetic message of Yahweh as Savior, the Law itself freed them from the Law. The closer they looked, the more they learned that Christ had set them free from the Law’s curse, as the Law itself projected. They were now blessed because Christ had born their sin and joined them anew to Yahweh. By the Law’s own standard and pattern, they were Yahweh’s own people and He was their God.

The Law, if separated from its clear message of Christ, is a message about a hopeless predicament—a curse. However, if it is read attentively, it is a message about liberty and the restoration of the blessing forfeited by Adam and Eve. With the Gospel in hand the law becomes a guide out of the slavery that we naturally are born into. It guides us into THE life,

the way of life described by the Law and modeled perfectly by Christ. It leads us to the blessing lost by Adam and Eve in the fall. It is the restoration of partnership with Yahweh and eventual rule over creation rather than subjection to it.

To present day readers of James, we can understand this verse in this way. One will not persevere in implementing the Scripture apart from Christ. Shame will probably drive them away from even reading it. However, with a solid doctrine of Christ in hand, the Bible becomes a guide to freedom from slavery to sin and a description of how to live life as it was meant to be lived, in partnership with Yahweh.

1:26—If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is worthless.

James has placed in the context the idea of looking at and observing one’s reflection in a glass. He has linked this to our practice with respect to the truth. We are to act with respect to what truth reflects back to us about ourselves and the real-life situations we find ourselves in. Truth is to shape us as we engage these, and to the degree we are able, we as people of truth are to shape those situations. The entire process depends on us looking continually at what the truth is reflecting to us about all of it. We are not to draw out of our interaction with truth the affirmation of what we want to be true or hope to be true about ourselves. We are to investigate the truth as we would a mirror and let it tell us who we truly are.

This verse provides a great example of that. Our religion and our religious condition is to be judged by the truth, and specifically by what the truth reveals about what is governing us. And so if I think I am religious I can and should govern that thought

through what the truth says about one who is religious. The truth says that one who lives by the truth rules their speech.

They don't lie, their words are chosen with care, and they are marked by kindness. The truth then reveals to me the depth of my religious conviction through passing sentence on my speech. If my speech does not rise to the standard of truth, then my religious convictions are worthless. Perhaps worse, the truth reveals that I have been deceiving myself in thinking I am religious.

The word rendered “religious” in our English versions is θρησκός. It is used only here in the New Testament and its etymology is uncertain. Some say it comes from the word meaning “to tremble,” as in fear. And so they say it refers to one who has reverence for God—a God fearing one. Others say it comes from a term meaning “to adhere.” As such it describes one who adheres to the principles of a religious system. Either way, our term “religious” is probably fitting. James has chosen a term that speaks primarily of the outward impression—the image we have of ourselves and project to others, real or imagined.

1:27—This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Besides governance of one's own tongue, James cites two other courses of action that are signs of “pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father.” The first of these is visiting “orphans and widows in their distress.” The term visit, επισκεπτεσθαι, means to be physically present with someone to mitigate their circumstances in some way. It is the word used to describe God's action towards humanity in the incarnation (Luke 1:68,78; 7:16; Hebrews 2:6), and in the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:14). It is used of God's leaders when they are led to do God's work among people (Acts 7:23; 15:36). James' messages summons us to more than what we have referred to as “visitation.” He has in mind intervening to accomplish the work of God, whatever it might be in the moment, in the lives of orphans and widows. They are not to be alone and helpless during our watch.

The second course of action we are called to is to keep ourselves unstained by the world. By fully availing ourselves of the work of the Holy Spirit within us, our lives are to acquire an uncommon quality and shape. We are to become something different than what we were once becoming. This process has always involved laying some thoughts and actions to rest forever, while embracing and taking up others. It is a difficult call to answer because it involves moderating physical and emotional excesses—instinctive behaviors we have acquired pampering ourselves in a fallen world. Our goal is to bring glory to God on judgment day by having become by His grace something other than what evil has made of the faithless. We want our lives to reflect that we have continually availed ourselves of His grace.

The verse began by speaking about religion that was unspoiled. That word invokes images of spoiled food that can harm us. The verse ends speaking about us becoming unspotted by the world. There seems to be movement in James' language from the big mess to the work of finishing the cleanup. We begin our journey of transformation with a rather extensive mess on our hands. The New Testament writers teach that our focus should be understood as a long- range one—of becoming a new creation, even as the years pass, and our physical beings deteriorate (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5). That is not accomplished merely by an external strapping on of the acts of others. It is best accomplished by engaging those things that help us steward the moment in front of

us faithfully, seeking to be in tune with the Holy Spirit's leading. That pursuit always adds up to substantial transformation. There are actions that the Holy Spirit will call us to—outward courses of action such as embracing the needs of the vulnerable. There are also the rational and emotional processes that have not been governed by the truth that need to be corralled. The Spirit has been given to lead us in both pursuits. It is this “religion” practiced day to day that enables us to rise far above what mere religion can accomplish. It is this that James is calling his readers to.

JAMES 2

2:1—My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.

We see in this verse James continuing to work two important ideas. First is the idea of telos, or completeness that he wants the readers to be moving toward in their faith. God has an end in mind for them of mature faith. They have not yet achieved that end. James does not want them standing still but moving on toward maturity and so is identifying specific areas of immaturity.

Second, we see again the idea common in the New Testament writers that this movement toward maturity involves letting go of some things to hold on to others. So in this verse James presents a common human attitude that we must let go of, because it is contradictory to progress in the faith.

As people of the faith, we must not to hold on to our natural inclination to show favoritism to some over others. Personal favoritism is something we must let go of. The word rendered “personal favoritism” is προσωπολημψία. This is a Christian word. Even in Christian writings it appears very rarely. But it never appears in secular writings. It is believed to be rooted in a Hebrew expression that we see in Leviticus 19:15 (see LXX). It refers to the special reception or treatment given someone based on facial recognition. The Greek word is formed by combining the word “face” with the word “receive.” We see these two words being used near each other to express this idea of favoritism in other New Testament writers (Luke 20:21, Galatians 2:6). James combines the two words here. The word he forms occurs only here in the New Testament.

We show favoritism for a variety of reasons. All of them are fleshly. All of them indicate a point at which we are failing to trust Yahweh with something. So when we see favoritism in ourselves, we can be certain that it is instinct at work rather than faith. It may be fear, it may be desire for comfort and familiarity, but it is self-serving in some way. The wide-open embrace of others is an essential part of the journey of faith. Our own progress, that of others, and that of the unbelieving depends on us letting go of this instinct.

The reason that such favoritism must be put away by each of us is that we are called to love— to love others as Christ has loved us. We cannot rise to the degree of love we are being summoned to from within by the Holy Spirit each moment of each day if we hang on to this instinct. To practice favoritism is to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit.

2:2—For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

James uses a hypothetical situation to illustrate how easily we slip into the practice of favoritism. It is a part of our humanity and has been shamelessly practiced in the Church in every era. So this illustration is easily applicable to any reader across the millenniums that have elapsed since this was written.

Favoritism is the failure to practice the love of God. Every person that has embraced the faith has been confronted with their own inconsistency in love. There is no command more foreign to us than love. And so there is nothing which so dramatically affirms the presence of God’s Spirit in us than love that is without hypocrisy.

Therefore, there is potential of tremendous power for the Church in rising above the more common practice of favoritism.

In this verse James is establishing a contrast between two men who enter an assembly of a local church. He deliberately makes the contrast a purely external one, that of clothes and the underlying issue—poverty. James will make more of this point of the person's poverty later. He will show that favoritism toward the privileged is not only a lack of love, it defies a very pragmatic form of logic. If Christians somehow arrived at prejudice logically, they would hold it against the rich and in behalf of the poor.

The term rendered “assembly” is συναγωγή. It comes from a word that means to gather together. It is the word for a synagogue. It would be expected that James, a Jewish man, who was speaking to a Jewish audience, would speak in Jewish terms. We may be seeing in James' use of this word proof of an early date for this epistle. The early Church gatherings were patterned after the Jewish synagogues, sharing a similar purpose, and following a similar pattern. Jews would naturally unite practices they were familiar with to the new revelation of Yahweh through Jesus Christ. So in the early days of the Christian Church the gatherings had similarities with the Jewish Synagogue. The irony is that the human problem of favoritism persists wherever humans gather together.

There is something substantially more at stake in our governance of this human instinct due to the nature of the Church as taught in the New Testament. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer, the gatherings of Christians were different than any other assembly. As Christians come together, the Holy Spirit contributes to the whole through each individual person. Therefore, the contribution of each person is significant. To ignore or marginalize a person is to take something significant from the experience of the whole. It is contrary to the design of God and His sovereign workings. This is not a point that James references, but it certainly must underlie our understanding of this issue.

2:3—and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

James completes his development of this illustration with this that we have all been guilty of in some way. It is an assignment of significance and value based on the purely cosmetic reality of clothes. It seems pathetic in this story. But it is an error in judgment that we make every day of our lives. We do it despite our embrace of such sayings as, “You can't judge a book by its cover.” We must persistently face what our actions are communicating to others about their value to their Creator.

2:4—have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

James makes a straight-forward statement about what showing partiality reveals about us, even though we are Christian people. Making such distinctions among ourselves reveals that evil motives are ruling us. There is some profit or advantage to be gained by us that we are seeking to bring about. We are not thinking justly, we are perverting justice for our benefit. The Spirit is not ruling our thinking. It is being ruled by our flesh. At that point we have become ungodly and are creating opportunity for Satan in ourselves and others. We have taken what is supposed to be an assembly

ruled by God and have compromised it. We have placed a ceiling on our movement toward maturity and completeness as people of the Spirit.

2:5—Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?

The observation of many of the writers of Scripture is this, that Yahweh makes some very special choices from among the poor (Psalm 113:5-9). We find in the words of Job's friends this belief and hope (Job 5:13-16). David, who was aware of the reality of his social status (1 Samuel 18:23), saw himself as a prime example of such action by God (Psalm 78:70). Yahweh is persistently presented as one who passes over the rich and exalts the poor (Psalm 113:5-9). The Messiah is presented as one who would bring salvation to the poor (Isaiah 11:4). This image of the Messiah as a Savior of the poor was frequent in Old Testament prophecy. When John questioned Jesus' identity, one of the things Jesus cited as proof to John of His identity was that He was preaching the gospel to the poor (Matthew 11:2-10).

It is not that there is some special virtue in the poor or in poverty. There is no evidence in Scripture that the poor are less depraved, or that saving them requires any less effort and grace from God. Four things seem evident in Scripture in the matter of God choosing the poor. First, that the salvation of Yahweh is not the exclusive privilege of the rich. God's justice knows nothing but equal opportunity. He has chosen poor people, even as He has chosen rich people,

and in this He is distinct from fallen humanity. Second, in Yahweh's economy spiritual influence and impact are not the exclusive privilege of the rich but are clearly accessible to people of all social strata. There is real equality in terms of who may rise to influence in His kingdom. Third, wisdom is not inherent in poverty. Poverty is not a latent sign of wisdom or God's favor. In fact, poverty comes to fools, and these can and do decide to continue in their foolishness. Fourth, monetary wealth can desensitize people to their own spiritual poverty and keep them from turning to the gospel. There is spiritual danger in wealth. These are all factors that contribute to the reality James and others observe, that the gospel has more frequently taken root among the poor.

James raises in the minds of the readers this that has been their hope—that God has blessed many from the ranks of the poor with a summons to His family. The words that follow imply that most of his readers were poor. They will be collectively addressed in the next verse as those who are oppressed by the rich. We believe that in the early Church there were likely many more people from lower stations in life than there were the rich and privileged. For example, the Corinthian church was regarded as a local church that had been greatly blessed (2 Corinthians 8:7). Yet Paul says of them that among their numbers there were not many who were mighty or influential by the world's standards (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

In the ancient setting that we are dealing with in this text it would have been natural for those who were poor, and those who were slaves, to cower in the presence of the rich. They might naturally "take their place." James' words seem to indicate that the poor were propagating this, that they were elevating and serving the rich as they were use to doing in the world outside the Church. Because they did so, the worldly order was ruling the church and the Spirit's ministry was being marginalized. James was adamantly against this partiality that was being propagated because it was out of alignment with God's design. That design had diverse, Spirit empowered ministry

flowing from every believer, with the whole dependent on the healthy function of the individual parts. It must not be encumbered by worldly social rules and restraints.

2:6—But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

The opening statement of this verse provides a great contrast for the churches. They were God's children. But they were dishonoring those whom God had chosen and selected to be rich in the things of the Spirit, and His own heirs. Churches and Christians thrive when they do what the Father is doing. They fail catastrophically when they begin to do otherwise.

James follows this plain statement that they were dishonoring the very ones God had honored with two questions. He turns to pragmatic realities, appealing to their sense of logic and fair play. He asks the readers, "Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?" This question indicates that his readers were by in large poor. They were being oppressed at the hands of the rich. The word for oppress is καταδυναστευουσιν. It conveys the idea of exercising dominion against someone, of deliberately undoing any upward movement of others. The attack of the rich against the readers is deliberately made personal, demeaning, deliberate and ruthless. James is not trying to incite the readers to a posture of vengeance against the poor. He is only trying to show that wealth alone does not make one honorable. In fact, it clearly can and does have the opposite effect and the readers should know that.

2:7—Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

James' second question leads the readers to further understanding of the illogical nature of showing favoritism to the rich only because they are rich. Among the rich and those of greater social status there was not generally a reverence for Christ. In fact, they generally were dishonoring Him. There was not just apathy on their part, there was hostility. This being the general case, why would we bestow special honor in the Church on someone only because they were rich, without knowing their heart toward Christ? Once again, James is not trying to predispose his readers to look down on the rich. He is trying to lead them to a point where they make no judgment at all on anyone based on appearances and social status. His words imply that if the readers were going to make such a judgment, the logical one would be to dishonor the rich! The rich in normal experience dishonor Christ. If one were to jump to conclusions based on experience, it would not be to bestow special favor on the rich.

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

In this verse and the next, James puts forth the most powerful argument there is against the practice of personal favoritism. His words should have been the end of the matter forever among Christian people. Unfortunately, the practice is so rooted in us that it persists. These verses should enable us to call it what it is when it manifests itself in us.

James calls the readers to the "royal Law." The term "royal" is the English rendering of βασιλικός. That term applies to what is regal, belonging to, or befitting the sovereign. It speaks figuratively of what is preeminent, principle, or chief. This figurative use of the term is the sense that James is employing. He is saying that the command to "love

your neighbor as yourself” is principle and preeminent in Law. It is that upon which the Ten Commandments are based.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” appears first in Leviticus 19:18, 34. Jesus’ teaching sustained the view of the Rabbi’s, that this is the general principle upon which the specifics of the Law were based (Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-37). This teaching of the Rabbi’s and then of Christ was passed on by Paul to the Church as well (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14). James’ delineation of this as “the royal law” is in accordance with the Scriptures.

This “royal law” deals a deathblow to the practice of favoritism. Yet historically we have been ingenious in our desire to indulge this sin. We have even invented supposedly biblical positions and whole theologies that allow us to make distinctions between people based on social and ethnic factors. The reality despite all these plausible sounding arguments remains. Favoritism is fundamentally opposed to the opinion and character of the Lawgiver Himself—Yahweh, the Judge to whom we must all answer.

2:9—But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Yahweh embodies absolute and perfect justice. Justice is not something He does. It describes who He is. This means He treats all other beings by the standard that shapes His own character—impartiality. There is no partiality with God. In fact, partiality is impossible for Him. Therefore, when it rears its head in us and we engage it, we are doing what is contrary to Yahweh’s own character and His will for us. That is sin. Because it is sin, it is made plain to us as sin through the Law, our tangible expression of Yahweh’s character. That is one of the premier purposes of the Law, to make our sin visible to us.

In making our sin visible to us the Law does something else. It convicts us as transgressors—Lawbreakers. This is an important statement made by James about the service the Law performs for Yahweh as His messenger in humanity. As the Law reveals that we sin, it reveals that we are sinners—Lawbreakers. The word James uses to describe us is *παράβαται*. This is a compound word formed from the word for a pace, or a walking, with the preposition prefixed to it that conveys in this case the idea of “aside or amiss.” So it describes walking aside or walking amiss. It appears in discussions of the Law as the term that describes taking any action that is independent of the Law. The Law does us a great favor. It reveals to us the presence of instincts within us that lead us to make decisions and act independently of our Creator. In other words, the Law reveals our fallenness (Romans 3:20; 7:7).

This is important to the discussion of showing personal favoritism. Showing favoritism is a mark of our fallen condition. As such personal favoritism is the type of thing that God’s Spirit within us is leading us to act against and to rise above. If we are journeying towards maturity and completeness, we must see such things as the enemy.

2:10—For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

This verse provides an important principle of justice that is weighty in the matter of our human tendency to show favoritism. It is the principle of justice that is in God, meaning an expression of who He is. It is not external to Him so that He can be perceived as being regulated by it as an outside force. Rather, as perfect and entirely complete, perfect, and complete justice is a part of His being. He knows nothing else. The Law is a written summation of just behavior. It is the official and binding legal opinion on how humans are to behave from the Judge of their deeds. Therefore, the important principle of just human behavior is this; we are responsible to keep all of the Law, all of the time. To be a Lawbreaker we need only stumble in one point.

There are several noteworthy things about this principle—two are important to single out here. First, it is supported by other Scripture. The support is implicit in writings of the Law-giver, Moses (Deuteronomy 27:26). It is implicit in the ceremony of the Law, particularly in the laws of uncleanness. These laws illustrate the principle that the larger problem of uncleanness comes about through things that are relatively “normal” to human behavior and experience, even things that are “legal.” Jesus’ affirmed the significance of ALL the Law (Matthew 5:19).

This principle does not require that we view all sins as equally “serious” from a pragmatic point of view or in how they should be responded to. But all sins are equal in the sense that any sin committed means the one committing it is a Lawbreaker. Therefore, they separate us from God. Though it is certainly true that God views some humans as righteous, this is due to His work on their behalf motivated by His love for them, carried out by the strict standards of His justice. His mercy does not violate His justice—cause Him to set it aside or compromise it in some way. It has been satisfied through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice. It remains intact. This is its standard—that we are Lawbreakers, and therefore guilty before God, if we stumble in one point of the Law. The weightiness and absolute nature of this principle is why the message of Jesus the Christ is called “good news.”

James has already shown God’s testimony, affirmed by Him through Jesus Christ. His testimony is that to love others as we love ourselves is the principle upon which the Law is founded.

James has conveyed to us as readers that to show favoritism violates this principle upon which the Law itself rests. Now he tells us that to break one of the laws is to be guilty of all the Law, and that we are punishable as Lawbreakers. How much deeper our guilt to violate the Law’s very foundational principle?

James’ tactic is the same as that of other New Testament writers. It is not to suggest that we are unregenerate and unforgiven. It is to show us how incomplete our obedience is and how incomplete our experience of Yahweh’s salvation. It is to motivate us to apply more of His grace to our lives, to pursue Him and His voice harder, and so become more complete in our experience of His salvation.

2:11—For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

This verse serves to establish an important principle. The Law cannot be approached piece-meal. All its commands are to be seen as of equal importance and value. None are to be disregarded. Disobedience or neglect towards any of the Law's commands makes us Law-breakers. So one's guilt or innocence with respect to the Law's demands is determined by their response to its entire message. It is not sufficient that we simply do a good job in some selected areas of behavior directed by the Law.

This principle makes the matter of establishing our innocence with God that much more difficult. James leaves it to the readers to wrestle with the clear implications of his words. There have likely been a few readers over the years who could say based on actions alone that they have never committed the act of murder or adultery. But the statement of James clearly reveals that to covet what another has, or to dishonor one's parents, or to steal, or to lie, makes one a Lawbreaker just as clearly as one who commits murder or adultery. Who can say they have not done these that are widely regarded as lesser sins—as actions of those who are "only human."

Implicit in James' words is the greater point of the Law. As fallen human beings we cannot establish by our deeds our innocence before our Creator and Judge. By the standard of His Law which He has charged us with, we are guilty on many counts, even the best of us. The gospel is the good news of the Judge's intervention in our behalf. He has provided a Savior, one who is able by God's standard of justice to intervene in our behalf and pay our judicial debt to Yahweh. These gospel-related ideas stand outside the text itself but should be understood as running in the background. They are important to recall with what James is about to say.

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

We are called to speak and act in a certain way. James is concerned about believers making tangible progress in their experience of Yahweh's salvation. He wants the readers to become documented, or certifiable followers of Yahweh, made complete, or mature, in their faith. He had encapsulated this vision in several statements, the most prominent being his command to become doers of the word, not just hearers.

The standard by which our behavior will be judged is "the Law of liberty." What he has just said about the Law of God would make us view it as anything but a "Law of liberty." The Law is an impossible standard of behavior for us. We must keep it all, always, or we are deemed "Lawbreakers." Is James referring to another Law here, perhaps an easier one that God has provided that is more in tune with our moral ability? A look back at what James has already written will help us understand this idea.

This is the second time James has used this phrase, "the Law of liberty" (see 1:25). By way of review, the Law could only be seen as producing liberty if it was read in a certain way—the way it was written. The Law was a message of inability if it was read with any care at all. It clearly projected Israel's inability to inherit Yahweh's blessing (Deuteronomy 4:25-31; 5:28-33; 9:6-7; 31:14-22). In their ten-fold failure (Numbers 14:22), they illustrated the moral inability of all humanity. The Law projected the need for Christ in its earliest pages and it projected the results of His work both in its words and its symbols (John 3:14). The legacy of the Law of Moses was clearly predicted in it.

Israel would be cursed, because as humans they were incapable of performing all that Yahweh had commanded (Deuteronomy 30:1-6; 31:14-22).

But there was also in the Law's words and symbols hope. There was projected in it the promise of a new covenant that would provide forgiveness of sin and the joining of the Holy Spirit to their innermost beings (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:31-37). Yahweh would provide a Savior, as satisfactory payment for their sin so that they could inherit His blessing through faith. So there was in the Law itself the story of freedom. Paul would later refer to the Law as a tutor who leads its learners to Christ (Galatians 3:23-24). So the Law in this sense brings about liberty. To anyone with the message of the Gospel in hand who paused, stooped down, and examined in the Law its projection of failure and the prophetic message of Yahweh as Savior, and the promise of a new covenant, the Law itself freed them from the Law. The closer they looked, the more they learned that Christ had set them free from the Law's curse, as the Law itself projected. They were now blessed because Christ had born their sin and joined them anew to Yahweh. By the Law's own standard and pattern, they were Yahweh's own people and He was their God.

The Law, if separated from its clear message of Christ, is a message about a hopeless predicament—a curse. However, if it is read attentively, it is a message about liberty and the restoration of the blessing forfeited by Adam and Eve (Galatians 3:23-4:7). The Law of liberty is essentially the forgiveness of Christ that frees us from the curse of the Law, which Law is then spoken to us from within us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-7).

What then is speaking and acting “as those who will be judged by the Law of liberty”? It is speaking and acting as forgiven people—those whose sin has been paid for according to the Law's standard. And so it involves forgiving others and extending mercy and grace to others. It means helping them find and experience that same forgiveness. It is speaking and acting according to the prompting of the Holy Spirit of God who is in us because we are forgiven.

That means we speak and act according to His moment by moment prompting—with just the right words and just the right actions that bring about His will in the moment. We can define this way of speaking and acting James is summoning us to in this way; we are enabled by God to rise to rule with Him for His glory over the moments of each of our days by Spirit-directed words and actions. And so the deeds required of the Law come about through us as we live not by the flesh, but by the Spirit (Romans 8:4).

The Law we will be judged by is the Law, applied by the Holy Spirit to us in the myriad of moments that compose our lifetime. It is the stewardship of that treasure within us of the Holy Spirit's voice and influence that we will be judged by.

2:13—For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

The fact that the Holy Spirit is united with our spirits is a testimony to God's relentless grace and mercy. The essential nature of the attitudes and actions He is orchestrating from within us is mercy. So the call to mercy is always present in us. God makes known His great mercy to others through our words and actions.

We have a dilemma in this. We must make people judgments each moment of each day of our lives. We must do this for our spiritual, emotional, and physical survival. So we do it, and there is a legitimacy to doing it. This however must be balanced by the

understanding that all those we encounter are in some way guilty and undeserving of God. We can spot very quickly in some people reasons why they should be ignored and condemned. Others take a little longer. But it is certain that in every person, including ourselves, there is ample rationale for not extending them mercy. We must accept this as a given. It is inherent in all due to our fallen nature.

It is for this reason that Kingdom work always depends on us being willing to be merciful. If we extend ourselves only to those that please us, it is only a matter of time before we will withdraw from them. The same is true if we extend ourselves only to the attractive, the desirable, the dependable, the responsible, the intelligent, the safe, and so on. We must determine when our concerns are growing out of fear and prejudice, and judge these as illegitimate and ungodly. Only as we do will we become documented workers with respect to the Kingdom of God.

The judgment being referred to in the beginning of this verse is the judgment of God. We understand that this is both a future event (Revelation 20:11-15; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), and an ongoing process (Romans 1:18-32). This principle of judgment being carried out in our lives by God according to the standard we held others to is very present in the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 6:36-37). It is not an easy thing to understand, given the blood of Christ that makes its appeal for us and the many covenant promises of Yahweh. However, the fact that this idea is repeated often forces us to reckon in some way with it.

It seems most likely that we experience this merciless judgment in two ways. First, it is experienced by us in this life. It refers to that judgment which other people and the church carry out against us with God's permission. This comes to us on a sliding scale, determined by the scale we ourselves use in judging others. This is a way of saying that our own deeds will come back to haunt us at moments when we need mercy from others. It also refers to the time when as believers our stewardship is judged at the judgment seat of Christ (Matthew 25:24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:10). If we view kingdom work as being essentially a series of summons by the Holy Spirit to display God's mercy, then poor stewardship of those promptings will result in loss of the merciful reward offered to us. So even as believers, our experience of God's vast mercy can be limited if we fail to be governed by mercy ourselves.

There are two realities represented by James in the short phrase "mercy triumphs over judgment." The first reality is one we find in God Himself. His mercy did not lead Him to set justice aside. God's mercy motivated Him to provide a means whereby we could be spared from experiencing the demands of His justice. His mercy motivated Him to become a man and die for our sins in our place. Because of that act, He can justly extend mercy and join Himself to us. It is in this sense that it can be said that mercy triumphs over judgment. It has done so in God Himself as demonstrated by the lengths He was willing to go to to justly rescue humanity.

The second reality James is representing is found in us, particularly those who have come to understand the depth of God's forgiveness. That mercy triumphs over judgment is certainly less true in us than it is in God. But it is a part of who we become through the Spirit of God who is united with our spirits. Pondering God's vast mercy toward us stirs mercy in us towards those whom we might otherwise reject. One who understands the extent to which they have been forgiven, extends forgiveness to others. The longer we submit to this way of thinking the more mercy triumphs in our thought processes over bitter and vengeful thoughts.

2:14—What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

There has been much debate as Christians attempt to interpret this section of the book of James. Its words have caused many to dispute the book's authenticity and value. It is seemingly at odds with the teaching of much of the rest of Scripture on the matter of justification.

The verses that follow is a treatment of the two questions posed here in this verse. A clear understanding of these two questions provides a framework for interpreting what follows.

Two Questions, Two Words

This verse identifies a hypothetical situation—that of a person who says they have faith, but who has no works of faith. James wants to speak of this kind of faith, one that does not take the kind of action routinely associated with the beliefs embraced. James poses two questions regarding this situation. The first question is, “What use is such a faith?” The second is, “Can that faith save him?” We should observe that the second question narrows the scope of the first. That is, James wants to take up the question of what use that sort of faith has with respect to salvation. There are then two very important words that govern the passage—“use,” and “salvation.” How each of these words is used in the Scripture must be understood to interpret this passage.

“Use”

The word “use” is *οφελος*. It is a noun that speaks of profit. In English language the word profit speaks of net gain. It is what is left after the cost is factored in. This noun *οφελος* appears only one other time in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul uses the word as James does—in a hypothetical question. Paul writes, “If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” Paul is questioning the life altering benefit of his past actions if they were motivated by mere human ambitions. Profitability in this case has to do with eternal benefit, something of value beyond the experience of the present life.

This noun also is used in the Septuagint in Job 15:3. There it speaks of talk that is of no use. In the context it is speech that does not advance an argument in the mind of another—in that case God, to ease one's own suffering. Again, we see that *οφελος* refers to the presence of net gain.

The verb form occurs several times in the New Testament. It is used by Jesus of that which is of practical value and helps someone in need (Matthew 15:5; Mark 7:11). He uses it in His classic question, “What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul?” In that case we see it used in a hypothetical question that expects a negative reply. The words “what shall it profit a man” anticipate not only a lack of gain, but an actual loss. The phrase “lose his own soul” follows. In usage in the New Testament the term “soul” has a range of meaning that includes one's inner being (Mark 14:34, Acts 14:2), one's physical life (Matthew 20:28, Acts 27:22), the matters of one's day-to-day existence (Matthew 6:25), and of a person (Acts 2:41, Acts 27:37). The phrase “lose his own soul” need not be viewed as referring to the loss of eternal life. It could just as easily be interpreted as meaning loss or injury felt in one's inner being both in this life and in eternity. Jesus' question can be understood in this way;

“What is a person’s net gain if they lay hold of all this world’s goods, but in the process loose what is critical to their inner being?”

In Appendix 1 there is a listing of the occurrences of both the noun and verb forms of *οφελος*, with notes on its meaning in that context given in italics. In the New Testament *οφελος* means just what the word profit means in English—net gain after costs is calculated. A quick glance at the data shows that *οφελος* is used of gain around physical health (Mark 5:26), spiritual health (John 6:63), of merit in God’s eyes (Romans 2:25; 1 Corinthians 13:3), and of practical value to the spiritual growth of others (1 Corinthians 14:6). James is raising the idea of net gain—what net gain such a faith produces once losses are calculated. The net gain he is speaking of is that associated with salvation. Salvation is the second key word in these questions.

“Save”

The word rendered salvation is *σωσαι*, an aorist active infinitive from the verb *swzw*. It is a verb that occurs 109 times in the New Testament. Its basic lexical meaning can be stated in a concise way—to make safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction. Salvation is the biblical term for the process whereby Yahweh is to rescue and restore humanity to their blessed position of ruling over creation. Though this is by no means the only way it is used, it is utilized in this way. Because of this important usage much has been written about the verb form of that term, which is *σωζω*.

The challenge with such a word is that it develops a meaning in our minds that is based on our usage of it in our own language and culture. In American Christianity, the term “saved” refers to being brought into right relationship with God so as not to incur the judgment of hell. We associate being “saved” with taking the initial step of believing in Jesus Christ to be forgiven for our sin. So we associate it with what we refer to as justification—our being declared righteous through Christ by God. When the English word “save” occurs in the Bible, it is easy for us to assume that it is speaking of this moment of being forgiven and pardoned for our sin, every time it is used.

It is at this point that we must remember that this salvation from the penalty of sin—hell, is only the beginning of the salvation Yahweh is carrying out among humanity. By His plan forgiveness is extended to us so that His own Spirit can be joined to ours. His Spirit working within us “saves” us from the power of sin on an ongoing basis, in the day-to-day conduct of our lives.

He works to deliver us from error, corrupt notions, and from slavery to harmful habits. In Christian theology the term “sanctification” is used to refer to the process whereby we are “saved” from who we instinctively are. Sanctification is part of Yahweh’s plan of salvation for us.

However, there is more to Yahweh’s salvation plan even than this sanctification. Our full salvation is yet to come and will only be finally realized upon Christ’s return, when the very presence of sin in us will be finally removed from our being. We refer to this as “glorification.”

In terms of how the family of words associated with *σωζω* is used in Scripture, it is accurate to say that we are saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Some of that work is done, some is being done, and some will be done at a predetermined time

in the future. In each case where σωζω is used, we must determine if this overall process is being referred to, or if one phase of it is being focused on.

Like many Greek words we find that in actual usage in the New Testament there is a broad range of meaning to this word σωζω. Of the 109 times it is used in the New Testament, twenty speak to rescue or safe keeping in terms of some physical danger, Matthew 8:25 is typical of this usage of the word σωζω. Eighteen times σωζω is used to speak of physical healing from some bodily sickness or abnormality (Matthew 9:21 is typical). Six other usages are somewhat vague in their precise sense (Matthew 10:22 is typical). We find then that approximately half of the usages of σωζω refer to something other than the spiritual restoration and wholeness that we recognize as Yahweh's salvation plan for humanity.

A total of fifty-five usages seems to be speaking of the experience of spiritual salvation—of being restored by Yahweh to right relationship with Him. Thirty-one of these can be understood as focusing on no aspect of salvation, simply viewing its past, present, and future realities in their entirety (Matthew 1:21 is typical of these). Eight seem to focus on the entry point of salvation—belief, leading to forgiveness and right standing with God (Mark 15:31; Luke 8:12; Acts 16:31 are examples). Ten seem to be focusing on salvation's ongoing aspect whereby we are being saved from godless patterns and habits that grow in us due to our fallen state (Luke 13:23; John 10:9; Romans 5:10; 1 Timothy 4:16 are examples). Six seem to be focusing on its future aspect, when we will be saved fully; restored to a sinless state (Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:18).

James' question about whether faith of the sort that has produced no deeds can "save" a person, should be examined in light of the way in which the New Testament writers use the term "save." Is James speaking of someone being pardoned and forgiven with respect to their sin? Is he speaking of them being saved from sin in the moment-by-moment conduct of their lives? Is he speaking of being saved in the final moment of judgment when they face God? Or is he speaking of all of the above?

In James' own use of the word σωζω we find him using it in several ways. In 1:21 he commands his readers to lay aside certain patterns and to "receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls." The letter is addressed to Christian people, those we would call "saved." James is speaking of them being saved in the day-to-day matters of their life. They must allow Yahweh's salvation to have its full effect in them each day. The implanted word, as ministered by the Holy Spirit, can do this for any believer who will receive it.

James uses the word σωζω again in 4:12. There he speaks of there being one Lawgiver and judge who "is able to both save and destroy." Here James is speaking of God's power to pass final judgment on a person, either condemning them or saving them from eternal destruction. So he is speaking of that final salvation that will come to those who believe when they stand before God.

In 5:15 James uses the word in the following phrase: "and the prayer offered in faith shall heal the sick." He is using the word σωζω as the gospel writers did, to speak of physical healing.

Finally, in 5:20 James says, "Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins." Here the word σωζω speaks of bringing an individual into right relationship with God, and

into the experience of all that goes with it. This is the closest use of the word in James to the meaning we assign to “getting saved” in American Christianity.

We find in James writing that outside of the verse we are presently considering, he uses the word “save” in four ways. He uses it of the experience of the Christian who is saved every day from their instinctive sinful actions. He uses it of being saved in the time of God’s final judgment. He uses it of being healed and made sound physically. He uses it of conversion to belief in Jesus Christ. So in James there is the full range of meaning that we find for this term in its lexical meaning and in New Testament usage.

If James is using the term “saved” to question if a person with an inactive faith is forgiven and so a child of God, then we must say at the very least that works affirm our salvation. Then one finds the passage at odds with the teaching of Paul that separated all such deeds from what we call justification. The same problem exists if James is using the term to speak of our being “safe and sound” in the moment of God’s final judgment of us.

It seems a matter of intellectual honesty to consider that James is NOT dealing with the issue of one’s initial entry into the faith life. Instead, he is dealing with the matter of how one experiences Yahweh’s salvation in the day-to-day matters of real life. This aligns with James’ expressed purpose in speaking these words. He is hoping to spur the readers on to maturity. He wants them to become documented with respect to their faith—to develop the legitimacy that accompanies the practice of faith in the pragmatics of real life. Thus far His words have not been aimed at them entering the faith. They have been a call to be doers not just hearers of the message.

What is the Question?

When James asks the question “Can that faith save him?” it is most likely that he is in no respect questioning the hearer’s identity as children of God. He is asking if a faith that never produces action can alter someone’s habits from what they were. We could render the verse in this way to express James’ intent; “Will such a person personally profit in real life from such a belief? Will such a faith propel them forward to lay hold of all God has for them?” This question expects a negative reply and James turns to pragmatics to illustrate that such faith fails when it confronts real life situations.

2:15—If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

James presents another hypothetical situation. One cannot help but notice its practicality. It contrasts sharply with the abstract nature of the hypothetical situation presented in verse 14. There the reader is asked to focus on faith conceptually. Here they are stunned by the compelling image of one with no clothes and food. The former is theoretical. This is real life.

2:16—and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

James draws the readers into the subject further by including them in the action. His words, “one of YOU says” make us players in the story. Our role is not particularly flattering. He continues to draw us in by putting words in our mouth. We get to speak, and our words are that of pronouncing a faith-blessing on the person. It is a good blessing, harmonious in every way with the faith. But then James does not allow us to

act. This has the effect of making us feel the absurdity of the entire matter of not acting with respect to our faith.

James then very quickly poses the same question he began with—“what use is that?” He uses the same word he used in verse 14—*ofelos*. His question is, what is the profit in what we have done? What gain has the person experienced through us with respect to their lack of clothing and food? The point is that our faith produced words but did not produce change. We have heard the words of the faith and spoken them. But we have not behaved in faith. In this short story we are hearers of the word and not doers, and so there is no gain in the practical matters of life, and there is no gain in terms of our own transformation and certainly not in the transformation of another’s plight.

2:17—Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

James states the conclusion he intends for us to draw from the hypothetical situation he has made us a part of. Such a faith as this, that utters words but does not bring about action, is dead.

Now obviously he is using the term “dead” in a figurative way since faith is not a living thing. When the term “dead” is used in a figurative way it is speaking of unresponsiveness, ineffectiveness, and a sense of separation. It describes something that has become useless with respect to the function it would normally carry out. We use the term dead in a similar way in our vernacular. We describe an idea as “dead,” meaning it has no practical function or relevance. It is perhaps an idea whose time has passed, or that has been rejected.

The term “dead” here relates to the profitability of faith, the advantage to oneself or another that faith produces. It is used with reference to the question that ended the previous verse— “what use is that?” The practical value in view relates to the question originally posed by James, “can that faith save him?” We have seen that he was using the term “save” in the sense of someone being rescued and made sound in the day-to-day sense in which Yahweh rescues us from fallenness. Faith that does not inspire works is dead—ineffective, regarding transforming us, and certainly about transforming others through us.

To observe that faith without works is dead in the sense that it has no practical value is certainly a primary conclusion to draw from James’ words. It appears however that James may be saying something more than this. He attaches the short prepositional phrase rendered “being by itself” in the NASB. In the original language the phrase is *καθ’ εαυτην*. . A most literal and crude rendering of this phrase would be “according to itself.” This phrase can be taken as adverbial accusative of reference, indicating a standard or rule of measurement. In that case the meaning of James’ statement could be understood like this; “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by its own standard.” James uses the preposition *κατα* in this way elsewhere in this book (2:8, 3:9, 14). The next verse will bring clarity to what he is expressing through this short prepositional phrase

It must be remembered that this linkage between faith and works is made by James’ to those whom he has urged on in the faith (see under 1:4, 18, 12, 21). They have not yet become mature or complete in that faith. The statements spoken here, that faith without works is unprofitable, are meant to urge them forward in the process of maturity. It can easily be said that while we are in this fallen state, we can never suppose that the work of faith is finished and accomplished in us. That being the case we are in a sense constantly pushing back the lethargy or creeping death of spiritual

inactivity. Our faith can become inactive and such inactivity can give us an incomplete experience of Yahweh's salvation.

2:18—But someone may well say, "You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

The message of this verse is very clear. Faith only can be demonstrated through works. The person who wishes to show faith in any other way has an impossible task. It cannot be done. Faith's essence is trust. One can only demonstrate their trust in something or someone by their actions. There is an emptying of this portion of faith's essence if it is banned from the realm of the practical decision-making that produces our actions. In the language of the previous verse, such faith can be viewed as a container emptied of its contents, a body without a spirit.

We are also allowed through this verse to understand why the previous verse ended as it did, describing faith without works as being dead, *καθεαυτην* —"according to itself." By the standard of its own innate essence, such faith is dead.

Grammarians frequently refer to words like love, anger, endurance, obedience, and trust as nouns of action. By this they mean that the very definition of these words contains a verbal idea. In fact, many such words, including love and trust are also used as verbs. The word faith —*πιστις*, is such a word in the Greek language. It is a noun that conveys a verbal idea. From it comes the verb *πιστευω*, which means to exercise trust in something or someone.

Another way of saying this is that abstract ideas such as love and trust, become concrete through action. We understand their very existence through specific acts we associate with them. And so we do not really have love, or anger, or obedience, or endurance, or trust in an identifiable and concrete way until we have the acts we associate with them. Faith by its inherent meaning—trust, cannot be separated from deeds.

There is some evidence that Jesus himself believed in this idea that works or deeds are inherent in the concept of faith. He called belief a work, and this in a context where He was asked, "What must we do to work the works of God?" His reply was that the work of God was to believe in the One God had sent (John 6:28-29).

Our faith then, can become nothing more than an abstract idea or concept to us. This is much like what love can become to us. Love toward our spouse, our children, our friends can cease being something we act out. When it becomes that, it is dead—emptied of any difference-making potential. When this happens, the relationships that depend on it will soon atrophy.

2:19—You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

When our faith does not shape our practical decisions, we have emptied it of its essence—trust. At that point we are left with a body of ideas. When we find ourselves at that point, we must remember that demons espouse many of these same ideas about God. Yet they work great evil. Being aware of spiritual realities demons can speak of such things as God's existence and even be fearful of it. And so we find in the ministry of Jesus a belief expressed by demons in Jesus' identity as God's Son (Luke 8:28), and as the Christ (Mark 1:23-24). We see in their testimony a respect of Christ

and fear of Him. James had seen and heard these things. He wants the readers to know that when their faith is reduced to merely being accurate in their ideas about God, then they are certainly not on the high ground God wants them on. At that point they are not complete and mature in their faith.

That there is only One who is God is a critical belief. It is good and necessary to believe this. It was no small matter in the New Testament world to embrace this belief. In the thought of the Romans and Greeks, reality was shaped by many gods. There was likely a tendency among Jews to be deceived by the immense contrast between their monotheism and the polytheism of those around them. It is not hard to imagine that amid such superstition they felt quite conspicuous—that they had moved far from the mainstream. Given such circumstances it would be easy to think of oneself as having arrived at a greater point of transformation than had been gained. There would be a tendency to be desensitized by the familiarity of right thinking. That is a common trait in humanity in all areas of life. We can view certain things as “done” and complete, when the reality is we need to continually revisit and re-engage them.

James was not minimizing the significance of having an accurate belief system. He was saying that accuracy in a belief system is only the beginning—the foundation upon which a mature or complete faith can be built. A mature and complete faith develops as we shape actual life decisions by what we have come to trust as being true about God, about ourselves, and about the world. The lifestyle shaped by faith is what we are called to. It is a never-ending process.

The readers needed to get on with that work.

2:20—But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

James’ words have been increasing in intensity. He has drawn us into hypothetical situations that cast us in a bad light. He has suggested that we can share common ground with demons. Now he calls any who might be separating works from faith “foolish” fellows! We feel the sting of that label, having been personally drawn into the discussion. He is calling us foolish if we allow ourselves to drift into such a state as he has described.

The word rendered “foolish” is *κενε*, which means “empty” or “vain.” It describes that which does not produce an intended or desired result (1 Corinthians 15:10, 14; Philippians 2:16). It also describes someone who has been left with nothing (Mark 12:3; Luke 20:10-11). It is used of delusional, groundless ideas and pursuits (Acts 4:25; Galatians 2:2). James has already suggested such an emptiness is true of us if our faith is not demonstrated by our actions. Here he declares it outright. Those with an empty faith are truly empty. They have gone too far to enjoy the things of the world, but not far enough to enjoy the things of God. From a quality-of-life standpoint, there is no worse place to be than in such a lukewarm state.

From the viewpoint of our role as servants of God, our faith is idle and non-productive without faith-inspired deeds. The term “useless” is *αργη*, which means idle or unemployed (Matthew 20:3,6), and lazy (Titus 1:12, 1 Timothy 5:13). This term raises the idea that our lack of faith-inspired action could be intentional and due to laziness on our part. It is not merely that we have thought wrongly, it may be that our choice was intentional to avoid the effort and sacrifice deeds require.

2:21—Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

The term “justify” in our theological vocabulary refers to God’s declaration regarding those who believe in Jesus Christ. We who so believe are declared by God to be forgiven and pardoned from our sin. We stand righteous in His judgment. His declaration is made based on His provision of His own Son to be our substitute, and so to bear for us and in our behalf the punishment for our sins. Because of this act of Christ, we are “declared righteous” by God. This is the doctrine we refer to as the doctrine of justification by faith. It is an essential of the faith.

When we read of someone being “justified” in the Scripture, we can easily assume the term is being used in this technical theological sense that we assigned it long after the New Testament was written. We think of it as referring always to Yahweh’s judicial declaration that an individual is righteous. So in the case of this verse, we can easily think that James is saying that Abraham was declared righteous by God in response to his great act of obedience in being willing to offer up Isaac his son on the altar. Taken in this way this verse and the entire passage would support the idea that we gain forgiveness and become citizens in heaven through acts of obedience.

However, if we understand the word justify in this technical sense, and this verse and the entire passage in this way, we take up a position which directly opposes Paul’s statement that Abraham was NOT justified by works (Romans 4:1-5). We find ourselves directly opposed to the multitude of statements Paul made regarding the same man, Abraham—a man whose life Paul pointed to as proof that no person is justified by works (Romans 3:20-28; Galatians 2:16; 3:24; Titus 3:7). To take the verse in this way we must imagine that the apostles were divided about how one was declared righteous in God’s eyes.

Now if the apostles were divided on this important subject, we would have to face the fact that the Scriptures hopelessly contradict each other. On a more personal level we would have to conclude that we personally cannot know where we stand with God. Our other option would be to conclude as some have suggested that the book of James is spurious and does not belong in the Bible.

Fortunately, this dilemma is easily solved by observing how the word rendered “justify” is used elsewhere in Scripture. We find that it is not a word that has one exclusive usage—that of the declaration of God that we are viewed as righteous. In all it is used 40 times in the New Testament. 23 times it is used in the sense of absolute forgiveness and being declared righteous because of Christ’s work on the cross. 12 times it is used of the idea of making someone or something credible. For example, is used of vindicating oneself in the eyes of others (Matthew 11:19; 1 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Timothy 3:16). It is used of humans affirming or vindicating the decisions of God (Luke 7:29; Romans 3:4). It is used of those who seek to make themselves look good in the eyes of others (Luke 10:29; 16:15). Three uses of the word are somewhat uncertain. So it has well within the boundaries of the usage of the word in Scripture to interpret it as expressing the idea of vindicating oneself, proving to others one’s own authenticity.

In the account of Abraham’s life, we find that a very clear declaration is made that God accounted him righteous because of his faith (Genesis 15:6). This is the event the entire doctrine of justification by faith is based on. The event occurred sometime before the birth of Ishmael, who was born when Abraham was 86 (Genesis 16:16). Paul makes much of the timing of this declaration in Moses’ account. It came before the time of His circumcision, which is reported in Genesis 17:24, when Abraham was 99. Paul views the timing of these incidences in the Genesis account as authoritative on

the matter of how one is justified. He presents this gap in time of approximately 15 years as proof that all who are justified are declared righteous by God purely on the basis of their faith, not on the basis of works (Romans 4:1-12).

This Pauline argument can be used to argue that James is using the term “justify” in the sense of vindicating oneself or documenting one’s faith for all to see. James is not using the term “justify” in the sense of God declaring a person righteous. The birth of Isaac did not occur until Abraham was 100 (Genesis 21:5), some 15 years after the declaration that he believed in Yahweh and Yahweh accounted him as righteous (Genesis 15:6). We do not know the age of Abraham when the Lord tested his faith by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. We can surmise from the incident that it was a minimum of 10 to 15 years after Isaac was born. This would mean that the sacrifice of Isaac came 25 to 30 years after Abraham was declared righteous by Yahweh, when he was roughly 110 to 115 years old. If an event that happened roughly 15 years after Abraham was declared righteous by God had nothing to do with Abraham’s justification, then it is certainly safe to say that one that happened 30 years after God’s declaration had nothing to do with it either.

We must conclude that James is not teaching that we are declared righteous by works. He is teaching that there is a certain vindication and legitimacy that comes to us through such works. His concern is that the readers become documented practitioners of the faith. It is evident in the language of Genesis 22, as God spoke to Abraham after he had intervened and kept him from killing Isaac, that the entire incident was a test of faith whereby Abraham would prove the depth of his trust in Yahweh (Genesis 22:11-19). He vindicated himself as the father and prime example to all who would follow in the footsteps of faith. This is the precise observation James will make regarding Abraham in the next verse. It is in this sense that Abraham was “justified.” In like manner, we “justify” our confession of Christ by our deeds.

People expect to see them in us. We are legitimate in their eyes by our actions, and we justify our claim that we are Christ-followers by being doers of His words not hearers only.

2:22—You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected;

James’ words here affirm the way the previous thoughts are to be taken. One way of understanding this verse is to view it as a question. James asks us if we have understood that faith and works are intertwined in a dependent relationship, and in this symbiotic relationship the two bring about forward movement in faith. So his words here define the understanding that he has hoped to lead the readers into by his previous words. More importantly, this growth in faith is the very result James is seeking in the readers.

Abraham modeled growth in faith. Before he was called by God to this consummate act of faith—the sacrifice of his beloved son, there was a host of smaller works of faith he engaged. We can see in the account of his life that there was a time when the idea of even having a son was laughable to Abraham and to his wife. By the time he was asked to sacrifice Isaac, he so trusts Yahweh’s future for Isaac that he concludes that Yahweh will raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:17-19).

The account of Abraham’s life demonstrates what growing Christians have for centuries attested to. A course of action taken in faith increases faith, and so spurs us on to even greater faith, and then greater acts of faith. Therefore, where faith is acted

upon, there is a self-perpetuating process of growth. Faith becomes mature in this way and in this way, we are documented as people of faith. When we cease acting upon our faith, it ceases to be a living, active force in our lives.

2:23—and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

When we see the phrase "the Scripture was fulfilled . . ." it does not necessarily mean that the Scripture was at the time it was given, a prediction of a future event—the thing that is said to "fulfill" it. So there is no implication in this expression that the original statement was not true when it was originally spoken. We should understand this phrase as saying that an event occurring later in time gives a fuller, more profound meaning to a statement made earlier in Scripture.

In this case James is stating the fact that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac gave fuller and more profound meaning to the statement made about his trust in Yahweh twenty-five to thirty years earlier. The statement that Abraham believed God came about in a fuller way.

James is pointing to two events in Abraham's journey of faith. The first was a declaration that God made regarding Abraham. Based on his trust in Yahweh, Yahweh declared him to be righteous. The second was an event that occurred three decades later. It was the kind of milestone James wanted to lead his readers to. It was an event that demonstrated to all that

Abraham had come to believe in an even deeper way. Through this event his faith was documented—demonstrated for all to see, and he was vindicated as one who was righteous. It was a great demonstration of trust in Yahweh that Abraham showed himself willing and ready to sacrifice Isaac. This documentation of Abraham's faith serves the purposes of God to the present day. It provides the consummate example of trust in Yahweh. Usefulness with respect to what Yahweh is doing is what James was seeking for those who would hear his words.

It seems that James is not quoting Scripture in calling Abraham the friend of God. Rather he is citing a common expression of the Jews who referred to Abraham as Yahweh's friend. The expression that Abraham was the friend of God is found in English versions of Isaiah 41:8, and in 2 Chronicles 20:7. The term "friend" does not occur in these texts in either the Hebrew text or that of the Septuagint version. The actual phrase used in the Septuagint in 2 Chronicles 20:7 is τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ σου— "the one loved of you." The expression in Isaiah 41:8 is ὃν ἠγαπήσα — "whom I loved." The expression "friend of God" has been a favorite title of Jews for many centuries and later of the Muslims, and so found its way into the King James and other English versions. It is certainly legitimate to call Abraham the friend of God, since it can certainly be said of one who is loved of God that they are the friend of God. The Spirit affirms the legitimacy of the expression by inspiring these words in James.

The point of the verse is that through deeds of faith Abraham demonstrated himself to be a legitimate friend of God. Though all this was by grace and sourced in God, it is still true that Abraham's actions demonstrated to all that God's embrace of him had indeed happened. God's intention had been realized and the relationship had come to be, and the deeds of Abraham were proof-positive.

2:24—You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.

James is setting forth a principle that is demonstrated in the life of the one who is considered the patriarch of the children of God. The principle is that they are justified by the fact that their faith becomes visible in deeds of trust. For the second time in the context, James is using the word “justify” as it was understood by those he addressed the letter to. In terms of its everyday usage, it referred to being vindicated. Now of course, being vindicated by God is the critical thing in life, and Paul speaks frequently to this issue. But James is using the term “justify” in its everyday sense, not in the theological sense that it took on as Christian theology developed over the centuries. The truth is that Abraham vindicated himself as one who trusted God by this consummate act of trust, being willing to sacrifice his son of promise simply because God asked him to.

All who follow in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith vindicate themselves as people of faith by such acts of faith. These acts of faith are milestones in our journey of growing trust in Yahweh. These milestones seem to serve God in His purposes as well. They do so in two ways. First, they provide a basis by which He can justly entrusted us with more opportunity of service as growing stewards of the truth He has deposited in us. Second, they vindicate Him by demonstrating His effective grace toward us—giving a concrete demonstration of His own Spirit working in ours (Luke 7:29; 1 Timothy 3:16). Works of faith provide exhibits wherever God’s justice might be put on trial, and so bring glory to Him.

This latter purpose of providing an exhibit of the glory of God is likely primary. This purpose seems evident in the language used in the narrative of this great incident involving Abraham, Yahweh, and Isaac in Genesis 22. Yahweh is represented as “testing” Abraham (Genesis 22:1). Abraham is declared to have passed the test (22:12). Yahweh represents Himself as knowing for certain Abraham’s trustworthiness through the incident and so re-affirms the covenant (22:15-18). This is notable because God is willing to imply that He Himself, who clearly knows the hearts of all people without such tests, gained something through Abraham’s works. It can only be that He is using the phrase “now I know” in the sense that He now has visible proof of His goodness in bringing Abraham to such faith. It is proof that is readily available for all who question Yahweh’s character, as many have.

Through acts of faith then, we are “justified” as trustworthy servants, with a proven ability to carry out in a certain way a more responsible role in the plan of Yahweh. God is “justified” as well. Our works prove His Spirit has been present in us and has produced that which brings glory to Him. Our acts are exhibits of His faithfulness to His promises. It is not moving beyond what is revealed in Scripture to add to James words. In the way James is using the word “justify”, we can suggest that not only are we “justified” by our works, but God is “justified” by them as well.

2:25—And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

The story of this woman, Rahab, is certainly an interesting one in Scripture. In almost every mention of her name, the descriptive phrase “the harlot” is added. This in no way demands that we understand that she continued practicing the life of harlotry. But the tag appears with her name likely to remind the readers of the grace of God that reaches past all that lies in the wake of our fallen condition, to bring salvation to us.

Rahab was a Canaanite. No covenants were to be made with the Canaanites (Exodus 23:31-33). They were to be summarily driven out in the conquest of the land (Deuteronomy 7:16). She was a female Canaanite, and there were strict instructions that no Israelite man was to marry a Canaanite woman (Deuteronomy 7:1-6). Then there was the fact that she was a harlot. If any Canaanite was to be denied mercy, certainly this woman was. Yet she was spared, she married an Israelite named Salmon, became the great-great grandmother of David, and is listed in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:5). All of this because she embraced Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. The last previous mention of her in the Scripture is that of the harlot who had faith (Hebrews 11:31).

James' testimony is that Rahab was "justified" by faith. As he has already done, he uses the term "justify" in its more normal sense. Rahab was justified, vindicated as a person of faith, by her act of siding with the Israelite spies against the King of Jericho (Joshua 2). Her faith was profitable in that it saved her physical life and went on to give her a life and a legacy totally different than what would be expected from a whore. By the act of hiding the spies she demonstrated that she had come to firm belief in the God of Israel. She could be legitimately viewed by Israelites as "one with them," and they could legitimately enter a treaty of peace with her (Joshua 2:14). And so she was legitimately spared (Joshua 6:17, 23-25). We have the great affirmation of the Scripture that she was the harlot, who, because of her faith, was spared in the judgment of Yahweh on Jericho (Hebrews 11:31). She went on to achieve quite a legacy.

Her faith, because it gave birth to action, was insanely profitable to her in terms of real life. By her harlotry she had just survived and was facing death. By her faith she experienced real life.

2:26—For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

James has already stated this idea that faith without works is dead (v.17). He stated in what sense he meant this. He said that faith without works is dead by its own standard. Acts or deeds are inherent in the very idea of this action word. Apart from acts, faith is simply an abstract idea, which even evil spiritual beings can be said to have. Faith becomes concrete and virtuous only through works.

The imagery of this verse is that faith without works is a corpse. All that must happen to change a living being into a corpse is for what is their essence—their spirit, to be taken from them. When that happens, we no longer see a human life. We see a body that we associate with the actions of a specific person whose personality and mannerisms we recall. We are looking at something other than a human being at that point.

It is interesting that James likens the body of the human with faith. The spirit of the human being he makes parallel with works. We might expect the body to be likened to works and the spirit to be likened to faith in a biblical illustration. Such an illustration would be valid, since works apart from faith can be described as dead in the sense that they are ineffective in terms of accomplishing our salvation. That would be an excellent illustration to share with the unbeliever who was seeking to justify themselves before God.

But this illustration is for the believer who is justified before God already by faith. Their task now is to move forward to maturity in the faith. Their issue is different than in an

unbeliever. God is seeking to justify them before other humans. He is seeking to save them from actual life habits and instinctive drives and ambition. In doing so the gospel is made credible and given greater impetus. For such transformation to occur, their faith must be continually expanding. That happens through integrating their faith with the decisions of real life.

So since trusting in Yahweh in the day-to-day situations is the challenge for a believer, James likens faith to the body here. Faith is the thing we face real-life in each day, like our bodies.

Actual deeds, both our deeds of thought and action, fuel the growth and expansion of that body—our faith. In this imagery, apart from the normal kinds of deeds associated with faith, faith becomes like a corpse. The trappings and rhetoric of it might be present so that there is vague association. But like a corpse it is lifeless. We do not associate such a faith with what was modeled by Jesus and delivered down to us.

This statement then summarizes what James has said about the relationship between faith and works. There is an inseparable connection between the two. When these are separated, you are looking at a shell of what use to be. It is not going too far to say that where faith is separated from works, faith itself cannot be seen. We grieve at funerals because we'll no longer experience the person, though their body might be there. It is that way with faith. It cannot be experienced apart from works. The implication of this illustration to the readers is that when they do not act in harmony with their faith, the very things that characterize spiritual death begin to be visible. At that point their faith is not saving them from the old things, the very things that enslaved them and ruined them before they believed.

James has answered his original question posed in 2:14. There he asked if faith without works was of use with respect to salvation. He was speaking there of being saved from all the unwholeness and slavery associated with spiritual death. The answer has clearly been that such a faith is of no use in this undertaking. Such a faith is dead and lifeless and incapable of accomplishing anything with respect to this great work.

JAMES 3

3:1—Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

There is responsibility and accountability associated with all that God gives us. This is true of life itself, and all that goes with it. And so we are called to shrewdly manage virtually everything innately in us as individuals, and all that we acquire as we move through life. This principle of stewardship means that we are accountable for what we come to know and understand of God. When the call of God comes to someone to teach truth, they have at the same time been given the arduous pursuit of ruling themselves by the dictates of truth they come to know and understand, with no contradictions, and no hidden inconsistencies.

Applying this principle of stewardship, James says that teachers will “incur a stricter judgment.” The gift of teaching involves abilities associated with preparation. Teachers can analyze, and draw conclusions regarding what is true, and its implications. They can do so to some degree on their own. Where others need teachers, to some degree teachers need them less. They can simplify truths and articulate them. This ability God has bestowed on them means that there is a higher expectation of them. He expects more in terms of how they rule over the affairs of their own lives, the urgency they will show with respect to communicating to others, and the time they will invest in understanding the Scripture itself. It is only reasonable that someone behave in a way that is commensurate with what they know.

We do not know precisely what may have motivated this statement by James. Among humans there is always present a fleshly desire to be known and sought after as an expert. We suspect that James has observed this drive at work in the Church. This infatuation with being a teacher is really a work of our ego and there is no greater enemy to the truth than such fleshliness.

Every Christian has the responsibility of self-examination in such matters. There is also a community responsibility to guard each other from losing our personal battle against such motives that can arise in any of us. James is certainly not speaking against the legitimate exercise of a gift of the Spirit. He is reminding the readers of the principle that much is required of those who have much (Luke 12:48). Before opening their mouths as “experts,” they should think long and hard about the responsibility they are assuming.

James chose words that make this statement strong. He is not merely suggesting that teachers have greater accountability or that they fall under greater scrutiny. He assumes this and is saying that teachers will have greater condemnation. In other words, in being a teacher of truth there is a greater likelihood that you are setting yourself up for failure when your time comes to be held accountable by God. It is not that a teacher can lose their place in the family of God. It is that God’s judgment will reveal false motives, and there is great opportunity for such motives to be at work in teaching truth. From a fleshly perspective, teaching is an opportunity to look good. We must not be taken in by this. From a spiritual perspective, teaching is an opportunity to be condemned for teaching with wrong motives, teaching imprecisely, or teaching what is false.

There is much that can go wrong when we open our mouths (Prov. 10:19). The verses that follow will focus on the problem of the tongue. It is for this reason that we should only enter being a spokesperson for the truth prayerfully, when we are confident that

we have a message that is prompted and energized by the Spirit of God. The genuine call of God to teach is not an easy one to manage.

3:2—For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

This is the primary problem that should mitigate our fleshly desire to present ourselves as experts and instructors in spiritual things. We stumble in many ways—all of us. The truth reveals this about us. The word James uses for “stumble” is *πταιομεν*. It is derived from *πιπτω*, which means to fall. He used this word previously (2:10). There it does not describe the colossal moral failure of a lawless person. It is used of someone who keeps the whole Law, but “stumbles” on one point. One can stumble or trip and right themselves. Now they may totally lose their equilibrium and fall, but one must not actually fall for it to be true of them that they stumbled. To stumble or trip means to sin. Such a momentary loss of equilibrium may lead to a greater spiritual failure, but not necessarily.

Paul seemingly makes this distinction between *πταιω* and *πιπτω* in Romans 11:11. There he asks the question of Israel “did they stumble (*πταιω*), to fall (*πιπτω*)?” Peter utilizes *πταιω* to describe what happens to a Christian who fails to cultivate virtue, and the loss they will incur in eternity, though without losing citizenship in heaven (2 Peter 1:10). Later in this letter, James will use the word *πιπτω*, fall, of what happens to us if our word is not good. That is a condition we can “fall” into. It comes because of us stumbling—not fulfilling our word. Stumbling in this way, can lead to a fall. We can fall under the condemnation of others and all manner of legal entanglements that will discredit us and cause us loss.

Through the word stumble, James is describing the thing that all believers do. He includes himself in the company of those who stumble. He is referring to the simple and obvious fact that we sin. Circumstances pop up on the path of life and we respond according to our flesh rather than by the Spirit, and we sin. We stumble in this way many times each day. We see in this our fallen human condition. Each time it happens we are reminded of our fundamental moral shortcoming.

This ongoing revelation of our shortcomings should cause us to step away from the spotlight, not into it. Furthermore, there is little chance of not stumbling in what we say, since one who does not stumble in what they say is complete or mature spiritually. To imagine oneself capable of this is to imagine oneself to be complete.

This casts in ominous light the prospect of living in community with a group of people and establishing credibility to teach them with authority. Teaching involves verbal communication—lots of it. Since whenever words are spoken there is increased opportunity for sin, the prospect of credibly and convincingly speaking to others is dim. We must be well aware of the impossibility of all this and engage teaching with a humble spirit. The power of the Spirit of God in us is our hope whatever calling God summons us to. This is certainly our only hope in the call to teach others. Only in His Spirit should we sense any adequacy at all to instruct others in the faith (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).

3:3—Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well.

James begins a series of examples of little things that bring about big things. There is no human with the physical strength of a horse. Yet by placing a relatively small thing in the mouth of a horse, a human has power to direct the horse's strength and utilize its potential for work. James is showing that a big thing—a horse, can be utilized for important purposes through a small device that controls its mouth.

James effectively plants the idea that so great a purpose as instruction in spiritual things can be brought about through control of our mouths. James dangles the possibility in front of us and leaves the reader to ponder what might be a solution to the dilemma of the tongue. He raises the hope that there might be a "bit."

3:4—Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.

James moves to a second example of a little thing that brings about a greater thing. In the previous example of the horse, he started with the little thing, the bit placed in the mouth of the horse. He then moved to the result—control of the horse. In this second example he starts with the thing great in size, a ship. He also points to the fact great forces beyond our control propel the ship. So we are given an example of something larger than us being powered by that which we cannot control. Then James points out that the ships direction is controlled by the pilot.

This comes about against all odds, because of a small device called the rudder.

Again, through this illustration hope germinates. Is it possible that so great a force as the tongue, driven by powers we cannot control, might be able to be directed for the great good of spiritual instruction?

3:5—So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!

James takes his comments in an unexpected direction. As we read of horses being controlled through a bit placed in their mouths, we might have expected technique for the control of our tongues. As we read of the ships being controlled by the pilot, we might have expected to be encouraged to steer our lives through control of our mouths. Instead, James simply says that our tongue is like the bit in the horse's mouth, and the rudder on the ship. It controls our direction. James has not been proposing a solution. In fact, he has been illustrating the immensity of our problem. The point of his two examples is that our tongues are little things in our bodies, that create a huge problem.

He illustrated his point further. This time he utilizes a forest fire to illustrate the mess that develops through our tongue. In today's terminology, the tongue is the point of origin in this fire that then burns out of control. The illustration carries over into the next verse.

3:6—And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.

James makes five sobering statements about the realities of our speech. Our speech is of course, the problem not the tongue itself. James uses a figure of speech called a metonymy— the substituting of one word for another. Here the tongue is named in place of the words it produces.

The first of James' five statements is that the tongue is a fire. He has set up this statement in the previous verse by pointing out the destruction fire brings to a forest. Quite simply, the tongue is a destructive force. That it can also be of great use is not his focus at this time. He wants to speak to our need to rule over it. Our words can incite great evil. That is James' point here.

In the second of these five statements, James calls our speech "the very world of iniquity." The term rendered "world" is *κοσμος*. This term often describes an orderly arrangement, an aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort. So *κοσμος* is used by James of the collection of thoughts and deeds that accumulate because of living apart from our Creator (1:27; 2:5; 4:4). There are classic thoughts and courses of action that accompany a worldview devoid of Yahweh. James is saying that there is no more classic demonstration of this worldview than that which our speech provides. It is a representative sampling of our unrighteousness.

James' third statement is that "the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body." He is describing the de facto role of the tongue. The word rendered "set" is *kaqistatai*. The root of this word is *kaqisthmi*. It describes what has been constituted or established or set down to be observable and predictable. The tongue is so constituted as a body part that it verbalizes thoughts that are in us. By virtue of this role, the tongue generally represents the leading edge of our evil acts. Evil starts with a thought. Very often our next step is to verbalize it. This is often followed by other actions. So the first act of sin is usually our words and the rest of our bodies get caught up in the action.

James is likely recalling the teaching of Jesus, who said that what defiles us is what comes out of us (Matthew 15:11-20). Jesus' teaching explained that our speech comes because of our thoughts, and so reveals the sin that is part of the fabric of our beings. By saying our speech defiles us, James is not minimizing the unrighteous thoughts that lead to our words. He is likely saying that when these thoughts become words that others hear, then our guilt is established, and the visible damage of sin has begun. In terms of us influencing others and speaking truth into their lives, our tongue is our great liability. Our tongues can bring about things that the rest of our body is incapable of.

James fourth statement about the tongue is that it "sets on fire the course of our life." The word rendered "course" is *trocon*. This word means wheel, or when used figuratively a course. Combined with the words that follow this likely refers to the normal life cycle of fallen humanity and particularly the downward spiral that comes with our lack of restraint. The picture he paints with these words is unpleasant. When we fail to restrain our tongues, other restraint tends to be cast off, and a further moral compromise in some area of our life generally follows. Apart from repentance, the words we speak set our course. Generally, we defend them. We don't take them back. Our pride keeps us from apologizing. We cling to them and so they set our course.

James fifth statement reveals the source of the destructiveness of our tongues. It is the powers of hell that we allow to rule over our tongues. The reality we must accept is that Satan and his fallen beings have gained a foothold among us through sin that is in us. The result is that things we say can and do conform to his thought and agenda. They bring about his destructive purposes. That is the awful truth! Words can come from our mouth that destroy the dignity of others, that strip them of any feeling that they are of deep value and concern to Yahweh their Creator. Our tongues can destroy God's creation rather than redeem and reclaim it. If we allow that, then our own tongues have destroyed what God has tried to do with us. We have turned from His vision for us and so in the end we ourselves suffer great loss.

3:7—For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race.

James writes these words to build toward his point in the next verse. This is the beginning of a summing up of the problem inherent in us that plagues our ability to speak God's truth. The problem will be plainly stated in verse eight, then in verses ten through twelve James will lament the problem.

While humans have achieved notable things, they are not capable of taming the tongue. So many creatures have been brought under our control. We have even brought about the extinction of some. The word James uses to describe this is from *damazw*. That word sounds like our English word *dominate*, and by its other usage in the New Testament we can see that idea in it, more than the idea of producing a change in something (see Mark 5:4). Over so many creatures, humans have proven themselves to be dominant.

It is worthy of our meditation—this thought of how thoroughly humanity has proved their domination over the rest of the animal world. From our perspective today we might make two observations about our taming of wild animals that have application regarding the tongue.

First, we have moved even further in confirming our dominance since James made this statement. We have moved so far that the present mindset has let go of the need to prove that dominance. Rather than trying to achieve absolute control over the various species, we are more focused on preserving them in their wild state and more natural habitat. In that sense we are focused on taming ourselves—of creating boundaries to eliminate our influence. Our present perspective points out the irony James is describing even better. We struggle mightily to rule over our own excesses. It is precisely these excesses that corrupt our speech and cause it to be very destructive.

Second, despite our dominance over animals, we have come to understand that we never tame a wild animal to the point where it can be totally trusted. The call of the wild remains. We have documented the ability of such animals we have “tamed” to destroy their handlers. Our concept today of “tamed” aligns better with ideas such as *dominate* and *control*, a primary idea in the Greek word James uses. We may control wild animals in cages and with various management techniques. Yet to think we have changed their essential makeup and nature is a grave mistake. This is exactly the point James will make in the next verse.

3:8—But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

This is our dilemma very plainly stated. No one can tame the tongue. It cannot be brought under control so that it becomes only a righteous instrument. No amount of human effort will produce this result. This is not to say that it cannot be reined in. Neither is it to say that it cannot bring about what is useful. It is to say that bringing it into such a state is never a finished work. Like the wild animal, we cannot change our essential nature. And so controlling our tongues remains a work in progress and our own words remain a great liability each of us must assume.

James describes the tongue as a “restless evil.” The term rendered “restless” is ακαταστατον. He has already used this word in 1:8, where it describes one who is unstable. It is formed by prefixing the α privative to the word καθιστημι. The net effect of this is that we have a word that means the opposite of καθιστημι. James used καθιστημι in verse 6 when he was describing the de facto role the tongue plays in shaping our conduct. Καθιστημι describes what has been constituted or established or set down to be observable and predictable. So ακαθιστημι means unpredictable and unstable. The tongue remains unpredictably and wildly evil. Like a wild animal we think we have tamed, it can instinctively turn on us.

James adds that it is “full of deadly poison.” The tongue always has its full destructive capacity. We cannot ever allow ourselves to think it is safe and be unrestrained in our speech.

3:9—With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;

James will spend three verses emphasizing the two extremes of our speech. He begins by pointing out the capacity we must bless through our speech. He follows with the reality that we also have capacity to curse through our speech. The truth about the humans we curse is that they are the creation of God and as such bear His likeness. We are not thinking like the very God we bless when we curse other people. James' words are written with Genesis 1:26 in mind. There we read that God made humanity in His likeness and blessed them. With our tongues we work the opposite of what God doggedly seeks for humanity.

As James describes the contradiction in our speech, he uses the present tense form of both the term for blessing and cursing. In this way he presents us as doing both things simultaneously. It isn't just that we do one and then later do the other. It is that we mix the two activities together. This reveals that the dichotomy is not simply in our words, but that it is in our very beings.

3:10—from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

James calls us out for this contradiction we allow. When we find this in us, and James' words indicate that we will, it ought to offend and grieve us in the worst way. It is a contradiction of who we are—an indication that the Spirit of God is not having His way in our choice of words. Like Peter, we should weep bitterly when we become aware that we have slipped downward into this (Matthew 26:74-75).

3:11—Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

James wants us to feel the contradiction that is in us due to sin, that rears its head in the things we say. So he illustrates it to us in a way that our own senses can recall. It is likely that many of the readers of the day had drunk water from a spring that produced bitter water. Bitter water occurs naturally in some springs because of deposits of different minerals such as sulfur in the strata that the water comes through in the ground. These give the water a pungent odor and taste. It is an experience your taste buds recall vividly when you think about it. James wants the readers to associate that nasty taste with the act of cursing others.

James also shows that what we can do with our speech is contrary to and unobservable in the rest of nature. In a sense it is an aberration and violates all that we observe in the naturally world. We can produce with our mouths both what is fresh and what is bitter. Two things, opposite in essence, come from within us. That can only be because two things, opposite in essence, are in us. Further, it is because we allow ourselves to be influenced, then controlled by that which we know to be contrary to God's will. The result is a twisting and contorting of the likeness of God in us. Like Him, we should be a source of blessing to humanity. But we become a source of cursing.

3:12—Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh.

James moves from the imagery of a spring of water to other common-sense illustrations from the natural world. Both illustrations are meant to equip our conscience for those real-life moments when the Spirit's control needs to prevail over our spoken words.

Trees produce the expected fruit, the fruit associated with their species. We are not surprised by what they produce. This is a way of reinforcing the idea that our words should be shaped by who we really are—persons who at the deepest level of their beings are joined to God.

Salt water does not become fresh, no matter how long one waits. James may be viewing salt water negatively, returning to the imagery of verse 11. If so, he is illustrating that the unspiritual person will produce unspiritual words, no matter how much time passes. Something fundamental in their character must change for it to be otherwise.

James may also be speaking in a positive way of salt water. It is likely that salt water was utilized as a preservative—specifically to preserve meat, or to cleanse a wound. This would parallel the thought of Jesus when He spoke of His people being the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). Our speech should in this same way be salty (Colossians 4:6). If that is James' intent, then he is telling us that salt water can be relied on to do its work of preservation. That is just its nature. It does not change. It is reliable as a preservative. The words orchestrated by the Spirit can be depended on to bring healing and to arrest the corruption that would naturally occur through us. Spiritual people speak Spiritual words. They bring healing. They produce what is Spiritual in others. We contribute through them to upward movement, not to moral and spiritual entropy.

We are from a public point of view, undocumented as vessels of God's Spirit until this contradiction produced by our words is persistently addressed. Our words bear witness to our moment-by-moment submission to the Holy Spirit. In allowing Him to

shape our words rather than speaking by mere instinct, we demonstrate a more completed work of faith and trust going on within us.

3:13—Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

This verse gives a command to those feeling the urge to teach. The urge to teach can be fleshly, nothing more than the desire for recognition and influence. It can also be a burden placed upon someone by the Holy Spirit. It seems quite likely that in its initial phases, it is a mixture of both. There is a sense within of one's own surplus in understanding, a feeling that they themselves understand spiritual things that in some way others lack. This sensation is not an altogether egotistical thing. There must be a reality that since God appoints teachers, there must be placed within them a Spirit-energized ability and habit to gain a supply of spiritual things from which others can be nourished. But there is no doubt that in the beginning stages of one's call to teach there is a mixture of motives and some illusionary thinking about the strength of their anointing. This entire passage is likely aimed at guiding people through this stage and helping them arrive at the point where they have credibility as teachers, are teaching for the right reasons, are humble learners, and able to repent of words said in error or with the wrong tone.

This verse contains sage advice for one embarking on this calling. Any who would become instructors in spiritual truth must first become practitioners of that truth. We do not fully know truth until we have implemented it and modeled it so that it comes out in our opinions and actions. So James calls those who would be known for wisdom and understanding to demonstrate the same through their behavior.

There is a second thing such instructors in the faith must have. It is the "gentleness of wisdom." The ability to learn can make one a brash fool. They can become self-promoting and eager to speak. They will become rather quick to declare their own wisdom. These are signs of being in the very early stages of their own calling. They must acquire something James calls "the gentleness of wisdom." The word used for gentleness is *πραυτητι*. It was used earlier by James (1:21), in the phrase "receive with humility the implanted word . . ." This exact word is used one other time in the New Testament (1 Peter 3:15), where it is also rendered with the English word "gentleness," and joined with the word "reverence." Interpreters view the word as describing a mild demeanor—one of restraint. This is the mark of one who is wise. They have learned the vastness of the Scriptures and so state their conclusions with restraint.

Those ready to be thrust into the forefront as teachers have gone through the earlier stages of development. Spiritual teachers are never done with the maturation process. But there are certain lessons they have learned in using their gift. These are the kind of lessons learned by actual experience, for example, they have made enough mistakes and had to revisit their own words enough to not be brash with their opinions or dismissive of those of others.

Their restraint grows out of being humbled, and so the word "humility" could be rightly substituted for "gentleness" here. Among wise teachers one cannot help but notice this—a lack of dogmatism and an ongoing eagerness to listen and learn. This can be the mark of one who really knows nothing. So we should not go overboard and allow those with no aptitude in spiritual things to teach. In other words, humility, and gentleness in and of itself is not the only thing essential to good teaching. There must be all the skills of analysis and communication.

These must be practiced with the humility that comes with reverence for the vastness of the subject matter and for the wisdom of the body of Christ. Sighting this in an individual along with real giftedness to teach, is a good sign that they are ready to be entrusted with greater opportunity.

3:14—But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

James states some forces that oppose the gentleness of wisdom. These are things mentioned only in passing by him. But we should observe them closely and understand them. They can be present in legitimate, though immature teachers. They are also present in would-be teachers with no calling of God upon them. We must discern such things in ourselves as well. It takes only a little indulgence of the flesh to enable them to creep back into prominence and become the motives of the best of us.

The English expression “bitter jealousy” is the rendering of ζηλον πικρον. Ζηλον means zeal. In the New Testament we hear of zeal that is admirable (2 Corinthians 7:7,11). We are also informed that there is a kind of zeal that is misdirected (Romans 10:2), and a zeal that is evil and dangerous in the Church (1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 12:20). James is describing zeal that is wrongly motivated. It is a zeal that is being driven along by bitterness, pikron. He is likely describing those who have had the bitter experience of having been passed over or in some way short-changed by some person, persons, or circumstances. As a result, they are being driven along by a desire to rise higher than others. They want to pass them up in their level of influence to a position of greater significance.

Selfish ambition comes from the term meaning “labor for hire.” It is often rendered by the English word “strife.” But “selfish ambition” likely conveys the meaning of the word better than words that express the idea of strife or conflict. The word, εριθεια, , spoke one whose character was shaped by self-interests. Where their character was concerned, they were “for hire.” The term was used of politicians who would compromise on one point to gain something of interest to them on another. Now we all know the value of compromise in leadership, but this is different. It speaks of the person who has no conviction, but who will adopt the conviction of another merely to achieve some personal advantage. I can be understood as prostituting one’s convictions. Paul used the word in this way several times in his letters (Romans 2:8; Galatians 5:20; Philippians 2:3). We are to search our hearts for this tendency to become self-seeking and manipulative.

When we become motivated by such things, we inevitably begin to alter the truth so that it serves our purposes. James calls this boasting and lying against the truth, and that is what it is. Rather than being subject to the truth, we make it subject to us. We appropriate it as a tool in our hands to use to craft the outcome we desire. When that happens, no one is safe.

3:15—This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

When truth becomes a tool in our hands to craft an outcome favorable to us, we have given ourselves over to serve the purposes of the evil one. This is what fallen people instinctively do. It is how we become enslaved to the devil. It is the very plight that Yahweh’s salvation is meant to rescue us from. It is the kind of motivation that God’s

Spirit is seeking to cleanse from His people and His Church. Christ, with very pointed words, identified it in the thinking of Peter (Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33).

The three words James uses point to the antithetical nature of this wisdom in the community God's people. The first two terms, earthly and natural, remind us that there need be nothing out of the ordinary at work in us for such sordid agendas to be present. We just need to be who we are. If we come together and behave as normal human beings, jockeying for position in the limelight and subjecting the truth to our own agendas will mark our lives together. These two adjectives, επιγειο and ψυχικη, express what we can expect on earth, flowing from the mixed bag within us.

The third term, δαιμονιωδης, identifies our vulnerability in this state. We create the perfect atmosphere for demons to function and thrive in. Their work is destructive. Far from bringing us the affirmation we seek; they bring about a bitterness in the entire experience. We either turn away from the very thing that is our hope, or we conform to this counterfeit experience of it. The quest of self-gratification is a ride on a carousel. There is plenty of noise and motion, but always a return to the same realities of our own incompleteness. Demons assure that the experience will result in nothing more.

3:16—For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

James brings us back to the same two terms he used in verse 14, ζηλος and επιθεια. He then names two things that are companion features to these. They are “disorder and every evil work.” The word for disorder is ακαταστασια. It comes from the word meaning to establish, appoint, ordain. It is used often of the establishment of authority. Here James prefixes the α privative to this word. It is used of situations that are out of control, where predictability and normal order are absent (Luke 21:9; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 12:20). From the beginnings of Genesis, Yahweh is presented to us as the One who orders what was merely random. In creating humanity, we see Him declaring a role for them in bringing about His order in creation. Since the fall of humanity, we see that His plan and provision is that His intended order be re-established. Redemption is His effort to salvage from the confusion of evil a people who will be agents of the order He intends to re-establish. Disorder then is presented as the fruit of evil's presence in creation, and this is affirmed in James' message.

Disorder is just the beginning. When God's order is abandoned, a host of other evils take root, many symptoms of the greater evil of rejecting our Creator. The expression “every evil thing” is the rendering of παν φαυλον πραγμα. The word φαυλον is a less common term for evil in the New Testament, occurring only three other times (John 3:20; 5:29; Titus 2:8). It is a good word to pair with ακαταστασια— disorder, because it speaks of that which is fouled or flawed. A πραγμα usually can be understood simply as “a matter,” a certain condition that has developed through a series of events or actions. So it can refer to a business “matter” (Romans 16:2), a legal “matter” (1 Corinthians 6:1), a “matter” of prayer (Matthew 18:19), or a church “matter” (2 Corinthians 7:11). So James is reminding us that evil “matters” come about where there is the “bitter zeal” and “selfish-ambition” of verse 14.

3:17—But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

In stark contrast to the bitter vexation that accompanies selfish ambition, James speaks of “the wisdom from above.” That little phrase reveals that it is not sourced in our fleshly desires, the normal motives of human action. This wisdom is sourced in God, implanted in us through His Spirit. James has already referred to this as that which rescues us (1:21). Here he lists eight characteristics of this wisdom. These are useful for us in determining the source of a particular impulse we might feel.

The wisdom that God is imparting in us through His Spirit is pure. The word used by James is *α γνη*. It is derived from the term we usually render “holy.” It speaks of that which is wholly different from what is common or normal in that it is uncorrupted—not of mixed character. This means it stands apart as distinctly different from the mixed bag and expedience of *επιθειαν* in verse 14. The wisdom that comes from us is never pure. It is fleshly. There is something of our own motives in our every strategy, something for our own gain in every course of action we envision. The Spirit is given to allow something much different to come from us. That which He brings to us stands alone as simply wise. It is not wise because it works for us and not wise because it is shrewd. It is wise because it is in harmony with the plan and intention of Yahweh, and because of this, will be of benefit to us.

Second, the wisdom of God is peaceable. The word is *ειρηνικη*. Though related words are common in the New Testament, this word only occurs one other time (Hebrews 12:11). That the wisdom from above is peaceable means that it has the welfare of all in mind and when it is embraced it promotes that welfare. Again, wisdom that arises from within humanity promotes the welfare of some. It is simply impossible for fallen, finite minds to conceive of that which would be of benefit for all. Only wisdom gained through the Spirit of God can be peaceable in this all-inclusive sense.

Third, the wisdom of God is gentle. The Greek word here is *επιεικης*. It is a word that describes moderation—appropriate action and emotion. God’s Spirit inspires this in us. Instinctively we over-react or under-react, we don’t declare the truth as it really is, or we declare it too harshly. That is the nature of the wisdom that is governed by our flesh. The wisdom that is given by God is temperate and occupies the golden mean.

Fourth, the wisdom of God is reasonable. The Greek word employed by James here is *ευπειθης*. It describes one who is agreeable. There are a few things that make a person agreeable. It is certainly more common in those who are not self-centered. It is more likely in those who are submissive to authority. It is not found often in those who hold grudges and who easily become bitter. It is rare in those with something to prove. The Spirit’s work in us seeks to undo all these things and make us more agreeable. It does not mean we are compromising on matters of principle. It does mean that in our firmness we have learned to rise above being mean-spirited and arrogant.

Fifth, the wisdom from above is full of mercy. The short phrase is *μεστη ελεους*. Mercy speaks of a readiness to help those in trouble. Wisdom from above, being “full” of this readiness, does not consist of thoughts, plans, or courses of action that pass over the need or plight of others.

Wisdom inspired of the Spirit includes responsiveness to human need, and courses of action that mitigate existing need and do not create additional need in others. Wisdom that is influenced by self-centeredness is self-serving even when it is merciful.

Sixth, the wisdom sourced in God is full of good fruits. John the Baptist presented good fruits as a course of life and thought shaped by repentance (Matthew 3:8). Similarly, Jesus presented them as the product of a changed heart (Luke 6:41-49), the result of remaining in Him (John 15:2-8). Jesus also taught that good fruits involve a message that seeks to bring about the will of God among other people (Matthew 7:15-27). Wisdom that is from above fosters repentance, humility, and a clinging to Christ and the message of God.

Seventh, the wisdom from above is “without wavering.” This is the NASB rendering of a single word, ἀδιακρίτως. It consists of the “α” privative prefixed to the word which means to discriminate, to separate thoroughly. ἀδιακρίτως then, expresses the idea that God’s wisdom is such that it lifts us above our instinctive tendency to alter justice and to make distinctions and show partiality. He leads us in a course that does not waiver from what is just, from which these normal ambiguities are absent.

The eighth characteristic of God’s wisdom that James identifies is that it is without hypocrisy. This term reaches back through all the others to the very first term, pure. It emphasizes the authenticity of the wisdom the Holy Spirit can lead us into. It is a wisdom that is without wrinkle, that has no contradictory elements attached to it. That is an amazing thing. In nearly every course of action we take, we can look back and identify something about it that could have been better. That is the result of our own inability to discern His Spirit’s leading or to set aside our own prejudice. There is in the leading of the Holy Spirit the absolute pure wisdom of God, not simply that of humanity or experience which might consist of wise elements. Our quest is to lay hold of the pure wisdom of God.

Without too much effort, these eight terms could be construed to be arranged in a chiasmic structure, to draw attention to the idea of being other-centered. The structure can be diagrammed in the following way, with each phrase labeled with a letter of the alphabet to show how the phrases relate to each other. The bracketed statements expand the meaning of the terms and help see how they are related within the chiasm.

“But the wisdom from above is:

- (A) first pure,
- (B) then peaceable, (having the welfare of all in mind)
- (C) gentle, (moderate)
- (D) reasonable (agreeable, devoid of self-obsession)
- (D) full of mercy (focused on the plight of others)
- (C) and good fruits,
- (B) unwavering, (just, or impartial)
- (A) without hypocrisy.”

Chiasmic structure is frequent in Scripture. Its purpose is to bring emphasis to a single idea. That single idea occupies the center of the entire structure—in this case the statements labeled by the letter “D.” Two ideas, each expressing a focus on others, occupy the center. The readers are led into that core thought, and then led back out again to James overall theme of authentic and mature faith. That broader concern is

expressed by the terms pure and without hypocrisy in the “A” position, at the fringe of the chiasmic structure.

3:18—And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

The verse begins with the expression καρπος δε δικαιοσυνης —“and fruit of righteousness.” Fruit of righteousness is a common expression in the Septuagint (Isaiah 32:16-18; Proverbs 11:30; Amos 6:12). It also occurs in the New Testament (Philippians 1:11, see also 2 Corinthians 9:10).

The words “the seed whose” are added by the translators to make the text clearer. There is some discrepancy as to how the term δικαιοσυνη should be understood. It could be taken as a subjective genitive and rendered “the fruit produced by righteousness.” It could be taken as an objective genitive and rendered “the fruit that produces righteousness.” It could be taken as a descriptive genitive and rendered “the fruit that is characterized by righteousness.” Most take it in the latter way. They believe James is describing the righteous way of living that is in harmony with Yahweh’s just standard (James 1:20).

It seems however, that James might be using δικαιοσυνη as a subjective genitive—fruit produced by righteousness. He is motivating the readers to rise in their faith and so experience the fruit that righteousness will produce. Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for such a life will be “blessed” and filled (Matthew 5:6). Righteousness is presented in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament as that which brings about fullness or completeness in those who pursue it (Proverbs 10:16,24,28; 11:4-6, 18-19; 12:7; 16:31; 21:21. We have already seen how fullness and completeness are the primary themes James words are calling the readers to. This fruit comes through the way of living dictated by the wisdom from above that James just described. He is teaching the readers to sow righteousness to reap its fruit. Specifically, He is teaching that this is done through peacemaking.

There is a symbiotic relationship between righteousness and peacemaking. In fact, the words righteousness and peace often occur side by side in the Scripture (Psalm 72:7; 85:10; Isaiah 32:17; Hebrews 12:11). So if we wish to experience what righteousness brings about, then peacemaking must become a part of who we are.

Peacemaking is essentially an issue of being willing to live in a position of vulnerability with others. Peacemakers are vulnerable. One who is willing to lay aside the quarrel can be taken advantage of. The price they pay is that of inviting injury and loss on themselves. This was the essence of the mindset of Christ. Vulnerability describes His incarnation. It describes hundreds of moments in each day of His life. Anyone wishing to follow Him must eventually accept this vulnerability. This is the death of Jesus that “we carry about in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:10). It was perfected in Him. Like Him on the cross, we must learn to be entrusting our well-being “to Him who judges righteously” (2 Peter 2:23).

It is a mission of peacemaking that God wishes to carry out through us. This is our present role in ruling the earth with God. We live to bring reconciliation between individuals and their Creator, Yahweh (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). We establish great credibility for the gospel when we ourselves take initiative in letting go of a quarrel. We incarnate Christ and the love of Christ in initiating reconciliation in practical affairs

of life. How much better it is to be defrauded and accept humiliation, than to take up the quarrel and lose credibility in that larger work (1 Corinthians 6:7-8).

James' words provide linkage back to the wealth of assurances given in the Old Testament about the fullness of life that the righteous enter. Any who would make themselves vulnerable in a matter and initiate peace, plant seed that germinates, and then grows into righteousness that in turn bears its own fruit. This will happen in them and for them regardless of the other party's response. If we hunger and thirst after righteousness, then peacemaking is the essential thing we must engage.

When our faith becomes such that we can entrust ourselves to God at moments when our personal rights are violated, and when we willingly accept loss for the greater good of being a credible representative of Him, then we are moving into the realm of mature faith.

JAMES 4

4:1—What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you: Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

This verse follows on the heels of a great statement of James about peace and peacemaking. Having just given the readers a vision for the pursuit of the maturity God's wisdom brings, James now speaks to the pragmatic realities of human life and life in the Church. These realities make peacemaking essential. Unless we embrace it with greatest zeal and urgency, our experience of Yahweh's salvation will be marginalized, and with it our credibility as Christ-followers.

Fights and quarrels are a fact of human relationships. They are present in the most intimate of human relationships—marriage. They erupt in the sacred relationships that exist within the Church. We should anticipate them. We should not ever accept them as normal. This lack of tolerance should start within our own personal lives. Peacemaking should not be something we demand of others until we are being consumed by it ourselves. It is critical because the credibility of Christ's identity as the Son of God rests on our oneness (John 17:20-21). If we cannot make ourselves vulnerable by disengaging from the common quarrels, we will never be able to make a significant contribution to the work of the gospel.

The cause of quarrels and fights is the reason we should not tolerate them. They come from our fleshly desires that directly oppose what the Spirit desires for us. So-called "fleshly desires" are an entire group of instincts that are present within us because of our fallen condition.

When Adam chose to sin, something happened within his being that was then passed on to every human being. It is spiritual death, in that our spirits are not joined to the Spirit of God as they were meant to be. Physical death is a symptom of this greater death. Physical death is manifest in all of us. It demonstrates the severity and the universality of this greater problem within us. We have become slaves to an entire set of instincts that are more characteristic of lower life forms. Instincts like our desire for pleasure, for having our needs met, for various comforts, for recognition, all produce fights and quarrels among us. These are the things James is referring to when he speaks of τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑμῶν —your lusts. We fight because we lose the war within us between these desires and those of the Spirit. James will delineate the strength and intensity of our actions incited by these things in the next verse.

Therefore, as bad as fights and quarrels are, they are only symptoms of the greater problem in us that the Spirit of God is seeking to correct. If we wish to be transformed people and to experience all that Yahweh's salvation plan has for us, we must yield to the Spirit in those moments when the urge to fight is aroused. As we mature in Christ, we must embrace those things He has taught to be true of us, rather than embracing in the moment what our fallen minds convince us of.

4:2—You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask..

Humans are designed to be joined to God. We are not designed to simply co-habit with Him. We are designed to be in intimate union with Him, our spirit merged with His, so that our mind and body make visible His character. The potential of such beings and the potential of the world such beings might shape and preside over is

stunning. This is who Adam and Eve were before they chose to separate themselves from Him. They became who James describes here, and that was passed on to all humanity.

These inner desires lead to coveting—wanting what others have. Once we allow covetous thoughts, we are led into evil plans of action. James says of the readers, “You kill and covet.” It is impossible to know what James specifically had seen in them to see them as having killed. As he has already done in this letter, he is likely viewing their thoughts and actions through the lens of the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 5:21-22). James is using such strong language to show that the thoughts that are leading them to quarrel with each other are the same types of thought that inspire murder. We need not understand the readers to be actual murderers, nor equate hateful thoughts with murder. We do need to understand that in justifying hateful thoughts we are justifying the kind of thinking that leads to murder. That is a significant moral compromise. At the very least it condones quarrels and fights. If we allow that such a compromise in thought is permissible, and if as Christians we allow our churches to be riddled with quarrels and fights, we should not be so shocked when among the unregenerate some become murderers.

James then introduces an important thought on prayer that he continues in the next verse. The thought must be taken as a whole. The first part of the thought is that there are things we lack, because we do not ask God for them. The Christian’s first reaction to any sense of need in their lives should be to ask God for what they lack. This is not to say God will give it. But to take it before God is to force oneself to articulate their need to Him. And to articulate the need is often to see it in light of what it is—what it is to us, and what it is relative to the larger view of things. It is to enter conversation with the Holy Spirit about the need. In such a conversation He will speak to us definitively about it. That is always profitable to us.

However, it is important that we view our asking as a privilege God has granted us so that we will ask. We should not twist this privilege as something we do that is meant to lead us to NOT asking! Conversations about these verses often take us in that direction. The lesson hammered home seems to be that we ask, so as not to be led to ask! God wants us to ask, and continue asking (Matthew 7:7). He wants us to be confident He will answer us (Mark 11:24). And so asking Him for what we need is to be our first response. That this may lead us to see the matter differently is true.

The truth is that God desires for us to see Him as being the source and supply of our needs. Our theology of prayer must include this idea, that we have not because we ask not. It is healthy to be continually realizing, “I’ve never asked God for that, though I have wanted it often!”

4:3—You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures..

James has made clear the fact that we are to ask God for the things we need. We are not to assume that we are simply to live without them. It is important to have in our thinking the idea that we don’t have because we don’t ask.

In this verse James gives us another important idea with respect to prayer. It has to do with our motive in asking God for something. We should not expect God to be a source we turn to get those things that arise purely from a quest for pleasure. James views the readers as those who ask, “with wrong motives.” This is a rendering of one

word in the Greek text, κακῶς. This is an adverb that means “badly.” The following phrase focuses in on a particular way of “asking badly.”

“Asking badly” is appropriating and exercising prayer merely for the ordinary human pursuit of pleasure. The words James uses indicate that he is advocating against what we would call hedonism, the elevation of pleasure as one’s main life pursuit. In fact the word he uses for pleasure is ἡδοναῖς, from which the word hedonism comes. The word he uses for spending, δαπανῇ.

σῆτε, can express the squandering or waste of money (Luke 15:14). We should not hijack the privilege of prayer and expect God to aid and abet the empty pursuit of pleasure.

This does not prohibit us asking for and receiving things that bring us pleasure. Presumably, godly things bring us pleasure, since God is good above all else. We should not fail in our trust in God’s goodness as Israel did and suppose that God will not providing us with good things that will be gratifying to us (Exodus 17:1-7). Our best approach to prayer is to enter conversation with Him about all that we need. Once in the conversation we can listen for His Spirit’s leading and so discern our motives and His will in the matter. This leads to appropriate prayer that God will answer. The readers needed to learn this kind of praying. It is the kind that mature faith produces.

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

The reality that inspired this letter was that the reader’s faith was incomplete. James could see it and feel it in what he heard about the young churches. His own experience with Christ and his knowledge of his own heart made him keenly aware of the message they needed to hear.

He knew they had divided hearts because they were, like him, fallen human beings living in a fallen world.

Who among us has not had moments and even seasons when we were “friendly” with the world? We easily lapse into pursuing the world’s approval and enjoying its pleasures. We easily slouch toward thoughts, then opinions, and even actual decisions that reflect the world’s values. It is a novice Christian who believes they have become so strong that this danger is behind them. When our zeal for Christ Himself stagnates, when our level of service and sacrifice flattens, we can be sure that it is because we have gotten friendly with the world.

This condition is often addressed in Scripture through the metaphor of adultery. This figurative speech expresses its seriousness in terms we can understand. Our most natural response to passages like this is to assume they must be addressed to non-Christians. But there can be no adultery except where there has been a marriage. We do ourselves a favor as Christians if we pause over statements like this in Scripture and ponder our own fickleness toward Yahweh. We must constantly recognize the compromises we make in our thoughts and call them what they are, so that they do not shape courses of action.

At such times we do not feel hatred toward God. However, James wants us to know that in such compromise we are aligning ourselves against Him, regardless of the feelings we have. In fact, we might have warm feelings toward God and at the same

time warm feelings toward the things of the world. That is not uncommon in either physical or spiritual adultery. The curse of such compromise is that it can feel so right and so natural.

None of this is to say we must hate the people of the world or become hostile toward them. But the pain and emptiness their sin brings about in them should be continually stirring us. This awareness, along with the love of Christ stirring within us, should be compelling us to prayer and gospel-centered actions toward them. This awareness of sin should also be arming us so that we are not vulnerable to its seductiveness. With respect to sin, the only thing we should become accustomed to is that it will appear attractive to us, but its sting is certain. In embracing its thoughts and actions we are aligning ourselves against God.

4:5—Or do you think Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?

There are several times in the Old Testament when God describes Himself as jealous (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9; 6:15; Zechariah 1:14). So concerned is He that we understand this about him that He says His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14), meaning jealousy is a part of the expression of His perfection. The Hebrew word used in all these statements should likely be understood as zealous. We generally understand jealousy as bad, and it quite often is just a fleshly response (Genesis 37:11; Numbers 11:29). God is not jealous as we might be, because of our own insecurity, covetousness, or desire for power. He is zealous/jealous for what is rightfully His, for His plan and purposes, for justice and righteousness, and all the things that are dear to Him.

However, this word φθονον, is always rendered “envy” in the NASB. It comes from a word that means to spoil, corrupt, or destroy. It carries with it that idea, speaking of that which is corrupt or fleshly. It is never used of God in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. It is not used in a good sense, as the word jealous, ζηλωτης, can be. James was certainly acquainted with ζηλ

ωτης, having used it in verse 2. Furthermore, φθονον is never used in a good sense in its eight other occurrences in the New Testament. This is one factor that makes interpretation of this verse difficult.

Another puzzling thing to interpreters has been that this word for envy is placed alongside the word επιποθει. This is a word that expresses an “earnest longing.” It is used eight other times in the New Testament. In all other cases it refers to a good and righteous desire, not an evil one (Romans 1:11; 2 Corinthians 5:2; Philippians 1:8; 1 Peter 2:2). In effect then, we have a verb that describes what is normally a good action—an earnest longing, but then a noun naming the extent to which this longing is to occur—to the point of envy. It is confusing.

A further difficulty is that in this verse James is not quoting a single Scripture. This can only be resolved by saying that there is considerable overlap in the words jealousy and envy. As we have seen, the Old Testament does affirm the principle of jealousy in Yahweh (Genesis 6:3-5; Exodus 20:5; Isaiah 63:8-16). In effect, it is this teaching of the Old Testament James is reminding us of, rather than a particular Scripture. The principle is that Yahweh desires our worship of Him and our partnership with Him over His creation. He is zealous for this. It was His intention in creating us. It is His intention in His plan of salvation to recover this relationship. We could say then that James substituted the word “envy” for “jealousy,” perhaps to strengthen the idea of the

immensity of Yahweh's emotion in this matter. He is picturing God as the One who will not sit idly by and allow His people to fall in love with what is evil.

A further difficulty is that here are several ways to understand James' words. Below is a treatment of the linguistics of this verse from the UBS New Testament Handbook Series.

He yearns...: this is one of the most difficult sayings in the whole book. There are at least two difficulties. The first problem has to do with the source of the quotation. James says that the quotation is from the scripture. To the early Christians the Old Testament was their scripture, but no one can locate the exact passage in the Old Testament from which the quotation comes. A few suggestions have been made as to its probable source. The most likely explanation appears to be that James is not quoting exactly from any single passage in the Old Testament but summing up the theme of God's jealousy from various places (compare Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Zechariah 8:2). In certain languages it will be possible to restructure the opening sentence of this verse, putting the idea of do you suppose it is in vain at the end of the verse as follows: "We read in the scriptures [or, the book of God's words] 'The spirit that God placed in us ' This saying is true, and you must not doubt it."

A more difficult problem is the meaning of the quotation. Unfortunately, there is no clear consensus of scholarly opinion. There are several ambiguities in the text. First, is the spirit the subject or the object of the main verb yearns over? Secondly, is the spirit to be understood as God's Spirit (Holy Spirit) or the spirit that God breathed into man at his creation? Thirdly, what exactly is the meaning of the verb rendered yearns over? Is it to be taken in the good sense or the bad sense? Fourthly, is the saying a statement or a question?

These questions are answered in different ways, and therefore a variety of renderings have been suggested. It is perhaps best just to list some of the more representative ones and to consider the good and bad points of each translation.

He yearns jealously over the spirit which he made to dwell in us: in this case the subject He refers to God. We know this from the statement's connection with the argument in verse 4. This is also clear from the fact that the subject of the subordinate clause (he has made to dwell in us) as well as that of the quotation in verse 6 is God. The spirit is the human spirit, namely the spirit that God breathed into man at his creation (Genesis 2:7). It is also the object of God's yearning. The phrase "to envy" (ASV "unto envying") is taken adverbially as jealously. The clause "God yearns jealously" is then understood in the good sense of "God is zealously devoted to . . ." or "God truly cares about..." indicating God's extreme care and great love for the human spirit to the point of wanting to claim absolute possession. The background of this thinking is found in passages like Exodus 20:5 (also Exodus 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24), where the Lord is said to be "a jealous God" who tolerates no rivals-God demands undivided loyalty from his people. This statement then, in effect, is giving the scriptural authority for what has just been said in verse 4 about the incompatibility of friendship with the world and friendship with God. This interpretation is favored by translations like Mft, TNT, TOB, NRSV.

There are, however, some difficulties with this interpretation. Scholars who are against this translation point out three things, all centered around the verb clause "God yearns jealously." First, the verb "to yearn" is never used with reference to God in biblical Greek. Secondly, and more importantly, the Greek word rendered jealously is never used in a good sense in biblical Greek. It has a negative sense and therefore has never been used with reference to God. Thirdly, since the word jealously is always used in

the bad sense, describing some aspect of base and sinful human nature, it is most likely that it is used here to sum up the related attitudes of "bitter jealousy" and "selfish ambition" in James 3:14, and "passions...desire...covet" in 4:1-3, rather than the character of God.

"He yearns jealously over the Spirit he has put in our hearts" (Gspd). Structurally this translation is the same as (1). The difference is in the object of God's yearning. It is not the human spirit but the Holy Spirit. This interpretation makes better sense with the relative clause which he has made to dwell in us, for it seems pointless for James to call attention to the fact that our spirit, with its base longings, was placed in us by God. The verb "to make dwell," which appears nowhere else in the New Testament, makes better sense if the reference is to the Holy Spirit. What James seems to be saying here, then, is that Christians are indwelt by God's Spirit, and therefore God has a special claim on them. This indicates that the indwelling of the Spirit is incompatible with the sinful desires and yearnings that disrupt the peace and harmony of the community. CEV follows this interpretation and translates "God truly cares about the Spirit he has put in us."

This interpretation also has a couple of difficulties. One, as in (1), is the difficulty of understanding "jealousy" in the good sense. Another is the fact that this would be the only instance in the book where a reference is made to the Holy Spirit, and this is therefore considered to be unlikely by some scholars.

"The spirit that God placed in us is filled with fierce desires" (TEV). In this rendering the human "spirit" is the subject of the verb yearns...over, and the verb phrase is usually taken in the bad sense of longing for something with jealousy and envy. It is a yearning with "fierce desires" (TEV). On this interpretation, what James is saying here is that the human spirit by its nature inclines to pursuing base desires and so sets itself at enmity with God; but God "gives more grace" (verse 6). This understanding has at least two advantages. First, it makes smoother the connection to what James will say next, putting in sharper focus the contrast between the human tendency to sin and God's grace. Secondly, it takes the word "jealousy" in its usual New Testament sense of an evil disposition and quality. This understanding is reflected in other translations like NEB/ REB, NAB, NIV, REB.

This interpretation also has its drawbacks. For one thing, while not impossible, it is grammatically awkward to have "the spirit" as the subject of the main verb "to yearn over," and to have "God" as the subject of "to make to dwell," the verb of the subordinate clause. For another, if "the spirit" is understood as the human spirit, prone to jealousy and sinful longings, it is strange for the author to underline the fact that it is made to dwell in us by the act of God. In other words, the whole argument seems to be pointless.

"The Spirit he caused to live in us longs jealously" (NIV second alternative rendering). In this instance the Holy Spirit is the subject of yearning. But God is the one who caused the Holy Spirit to live in us. The verb phrase "to yearn jealously" is taken in the good sense of "to long jealously for our full devotion," or "to love us passionately." What James appears to say here, then, is that Christians are indwelt by God's Spirit, and that the Spirit longs for the undivided loyalty and the love of God's people. The unstated application of this is that it would be inconceivable for Christians to continue to live in accordance with their own sinful desires and passions.

To think of the Holy Spirit as dwelling in human beings is a concept well known in the Bible (Romans 8:11; 1 Corinthians 3:16). The indwelling in human beings is the act and purpose of God. It makes more sense to say that God placed the Holy Spirit in us,

rather than to say that he placed in us the human spirits with tendency to sin. However, the difficulty is that this would be the only reference to the Holy Spirit in the book, and this is considered by some scholars as most unlikely. Furthermore, it would be unnatural to link the Holy Spirit with envy and jealousy. For this reason, we would have to interpret the word "jealousy" in the good sense of a strong desire to love and care. This, to some scholars, is contrary to its normal usage in the New Testament, and it is therefore considered to be doubtful.

"Does the Spirit that God has made to dwell in us yearn with jealousy?" In this translation the subject is the Spirit of God, and the word "jealousy" is taken in its regular bad sense. The rhetorical question is meant to indicate a "no" answer, meaning that the Spirit of God does not yearn to the point of being jealous. The purpose of the quotation in this case is to show that the Spirit is incompatible with human passions and envy.

ASV has a similar rendering, except that it has the human spirit as the subject; thus "Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?" The expected answer in this case appears to be that the human spirit is indeed by nature jealous and envious, but that we can expect more grace from God; he is ready to help.

Grammatically this interpretation is a bit forced, and the meaning does not seem to fit the context as well as the others.

Possible alternative translation models following the first five interpretations given above are as follows:

You must not doubt what we read in the Scriptures [or, book of God's words]: "God truly cares about the spirit that he has placed in us."

"God truly cares about his Spirit that he has put in us."

"God has placed a spirit in us that is filled with fierce desires."

"God's Spirit that he caused to live in us cares for us very much."

Does God's Spirit that he has caused to live in us love us so much that he is jealous?

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This treatment captures the scope of difficulty involved in interpreting this verse.

Of the options above, the most intriguing is number 5 above. James is asking a question something like this; "does the Spirit which took up its abode in us long enviously?" It would seem possible that there is a key word in the initial part of the verse. That word is κενῶς. It is an adverb that means emptily or vainly. James, rather than quoting a Scripture, may be asking the readers if there is a Scripture that would propose that the Spirit of God would speak such an empty thing in us as to be envious of another. So perhaps we should understand the verse in the following way. "Do you think the Scripture to be emptily saying that the Spirit He caused to dwell in us is fervently longing to the point of envy?"

This interpretation has the advantage of continuing the distinctions James is making between the wisdom from above and that which is of our own flesh. It also has the advantage of not trying to find James' words in the Old Testament, because they are not there. That is his point. Any longing that springs up in us for what belongs to another should not be seen by us as a prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is a longing from

our own self-centered desires. There is no Scripture that affirms that God would orchestrate such a thing. In the next verse James will tell us what the Scripture does say

4:6—But he gives a greater grace. Therefore it says: "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble."

There is a constant rumbling within us individually and collectively. The cause is our own self-centered desires that spring up within. These lead us to have quarrels with each other. All such instinctive living continues in us unless we humbly face it as sin. When we do that, we find grace from Yahweh. It is certain that every human contributes to the collective mess that develops due to the sin in us. But it is equally certain that God's grace is working in many to undue this damage.

The grace spoken of here is not just the grace principle, speaking of His gracious forgiveness for our sin. It is all that comes because of that forgiveness. His gracious forgiveness allows for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and His strengthening of our minds in just such moments as these when the desires of the flesh are aroused in us. So the grace He gives is the favor of God the Holy Spirit, who enables us in the moment to eschew such fleshliness and embrace godly behavior. That "he gives us more grace" means that His grace unleashes a power that is greater than our instinct to sin.

The Law and the Prophets looked toward the indwelling Spirit of Yahweh that would come once the New Covenant was instituted (Jeremiah 31:31-34). It would change everything. James cites Psalm 138, which is a song attributed to David. It looks forward to a day when all the kings of the earth will recognize Yahweh's glory and give thanks to Him. It anticipates the day when "every knee shall bow." It then makes this statement that James quotes. It is the principle that Yahweh will be seen to have operated under in history and all will acknowledge it. It is a grace principle. Specifically, the principle is this, that God aids the humble, but aligns Himself against the proud.

This principle was spoken of early on in biblical history—in Job's day (Job 22:21-30). It was taught in the wisdom literature (Psalm 10:17; 37:7-11; Proverbs 11:2; 29:3). It was attested to by Yahweh Himself as a principle for his people when He appeared to Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:14). It was affirmed by Yahweh to the most wicked of His people (2 Chronicles 33:10-13), and even to the heathen (Jonah 3:5-10). It was spoken of by Mary as she spoke of the Messiah she was carrying in her womb (Luke 1:52). It was taught by Jesus and recorded in the gospels for His Church to teach (Matthew 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14). Later in this chapter James will give a command based on this principle (4:10). Peter states the same principle and gives the same command (1 Peter 5:5-6). This is an overarching principle of history. It is what has preserved life and truth.

Where there is sin and evil, Yahweh has extended this great grace. The power of grace made available is greater than the power of the evil present. This power over evil is not experienced by the arrogant, who call their evil good and justify it (Isaiah 5:20-25). Grace that decisively defeats evil is conveyed to those who are humble, who cry out to God regarding their own evil. The following verses describe what is entailed in humbling ourselves.

4:7—Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The humbling of ourselves to God should not be seen as a one-time event in our lives. Because of the ongoing presence of “the flesh” within us and the stimulation of those desires by a fallen world, it is imperative that this humbling of ourselves be an ongoing mindset. It must be understood as a whole series of resets, or re-starts, in which we are restoring proper priority to the leading of the Spirit and the Kingdom concerns that He places before us.

The first element in such a reset is to submit ourselves to God. Our submission to Him is the first thing that begins to get distorted and subverted in us during any normal day. Our flesh likes things done by our dictates, in our time, and in a way that honors us. So we must re-submit ourselves to God and die to ourselves in each moment. In real life this is the act of over- ruling our emotions. Rather than being shaped by what we feel, we rule over them with Spirit- enabled thoughts. We do this by taking up faith and trust in what we believe about Him.

Submission to God must occur in multiple moments in any given day. This is because so many strong emotions are aroused in us as we are engaging life in a fallen world. So many times each day a follower of Christ is saying to emotions such as fear, insult, attraction and desire, “No! I believe my greatest good is in God’s goodness and therefore in His plan! I refuse to pursue it my own way!” That is placing one’s faith in Christ and submitting ourselves to Him. It is this that the indwelling Spirit can help us do. It is His presence and this ability He enables that can provide a different outcome, one of blessing, that the wilderness generation with Moses could not attain. This is the activity of the mature in Christ.

It is an amazing and strategic thing to know, that the devil will flee those who resist Him. The natural tendency among all who come to believe in a being who is the very embodiment and energy of evil, is to placate him. And so the world has always been full of superstition and magic practice aimed at appeasing evil spirits and the like. The result is that such beings can have great power and influence over us. Long before the term terrorist came to be, humanity began to be victimized by the fear and terror of these beings. Much resource was and is spent making “necessary” provision for the forces of evil.

Scripture is somewhat vague about the power of such beings. One thing is certain. What power they have, has been granted by God. They have never been permitted to do anything that He did not intend to use for some purpose in His plan for the eventual blessing He is preparing for humanity. Another thing that is certain is that fear enables these beings a measure of control and impact in the affairs of humankind that greatly multiplies the actual power they have. In this sense they are exactly like terrorists. Fear of them becomes a powerful force although their power has no factual basis.

Scripture teaches specifically that fear of death enslaves us (Hebrews 2:14-15). Any examination of any strain of religious practice among humans reveals complex superstitions surrounding death, the spirits of the dead, and evil spirits. Superstition in this regard frequently finds its way into Christianity. We frequently lapse into prayer and ritual that looks decidedly pagan—meant to ward off evil. The reality is that our safe conduct through death has been provided for in the truth of the Gospel. The work against death that needs to be done is finished.

These words of James should immediately come to mind when fear or terror arises within us. They are words that are both re-assuring and instructive. The only

instruction we need in dealing with the entire “nether-world” is that we are to resist. That is our protection. Other Scriptures give us insight as to the practice and methods of resistance (Romans 13:12-14; Ephesians 4:25-27; 6:11-18; 2 Timothy 2:22-26; 1 Peter 5:8-9). But there is this one strategic word we need to remember in dealing with evil beings—resist!

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

James’ continues a series of imperatives that are to be engaged along with the commands to submit to God and to resist the devil. These can be understood as the pragmatics of maintaining such a course in life. The imperatives are all aorist imperatives and indicate action James’ is urging the readers to begin to do. So he is treating the action as if it had not been fully engaged by them just yet.

This verse is like the instruction given by the writer of Hebrews, where we find these words: “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22—commentary on that verse is provided in Appendix 5). Both verses urge the readers to draw near to God, though using different words for drawing near. Both verses speak of cleansing that needed to be engaged as part and parcel of drawing near. Both make use of the imagery of the practices of the priests who ministered for the people while they were under the Old Covenant.

James commands sinners to cleanse their hands. This is a call to Christians who are living marginally, tolerating sinful patterns, being hearers of the word and not doers. Specifically, it is a call to confession and repentance. Their sins have been atoned for by the blood of Christ. But living in sin marginalizes one’s ability to hear and discern the leading of the Spirit. Dealing with these sins is an important part of drawing near to God.

This phrase uses old covenant imagery to project a new covenant activity. Under the old covenant there was a basin located between the altar and the tent of meeting. Whenever the priests ministered with respect to the altar or in the tent of meeting, they were to wash their hands and feet with water from that basin, or they would die (Exodus 30:17-21). The priest who entered the holy place once a year, could do so only if attired in special clothing and that only after a special washing (Leviticus 16:4). The book of Leviticus records many laws with respect to washings that were to be observed by worshipers in order to be ceremonially pure. All these washings were intended to raise the awareness of the inherent moral shortfall of humanity next to the perfection of Yahweh, and of the corrupting effect of life in an evil world. This phrase pictures the reality that confession and repentance are ongoing callings in the Christian life.

James calls on us to purify our hearts of double mindedness. That is a work that is ongoing— never done. The heart was the thing Yahweh pinpointed as unaddressed by the old covenant (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4; 30:6; Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 31:33). The “heart” referred to the inner being—the place of the mind, emotions, and will. There is a double-mindedness inherent in fallen humanity. Even as God’s children, we have both a desire to serve God and a desire to serve ourselves (Romans 7:7-25). This double mindedness explains why we cannot save ourselves, and why we are so dependent on the grace of God. It also defines the entire target zone of Yahweh’s salvation plan. Early on God made known His intention, to circumcise the hearts of His

people (Deuteronomy 30:6). The brilliance of the New Covenant is the work that God can do in our innermost being.

During the era of the old covenant obedience by rote covered a bad heart (Isaiah 29:13-14). It still does, so that we can be deceived into thinking we are more dedicated to God than we are. The flesh can produce the look of obedience, but such obedience is really just double-mindedness. It is self-serving in that it produces all the perks of spirituality, with none of the sacrifice of death to self.

James can give us this charge as Christians, because of the joining of Yahweh's Spirit to ours, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. An unbeliever has no capacity to understand or accomplish this purifying of their heart. Only a believer, because they have within them the Holy Spirit, can respond to this command. A pure heart is one that is being directed by the Holy Spirit, yielded to take steps toward Yahweh He is directing. The Holy Spirit impresses on our minds in each moment the actions and thoughts that are God's will for us. We are to do these at His bidding, whenever and wherever we happen to be. That is the essence of drawing near to Him with a pure heart. As we respond obediently to these leadings, we find that we receive even more by way of leading. That is the experience of Him drawing near to us, and it is the most blessed experience we can have in this life!

4:9—Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.

There is much in the teaching of Jesus that speaks to the joy that the children of God experience (John 15:11; 16:20-24; 17:13). Joy accompanies knowledge and experience of the truth. However, there is also an appropriate grief and sadness that accompanies knowledge of the truth. James speaks to it here. In this context it appears to be grief over one's own sin and sinfulness. He commands us to transform, μετατραπητω, our laughter and joy to the opposite emotions of mourning and grief. We are to intentionally seek these out. His words show that the life of faith is not all rejoicing. They imply that there is a rejoicing over God's grace and forgiveness that can be entered into frivolously. We do so when we do not ponder at all our weakness and failure and its potential ability to enslave us, to cause us to miss the will of God in the moments of the day, and so to damage others.

It is a fine line we walk. God's grace is extreme! It could be no other way to bring about our salvation. Grace allows us to not be paralyzed and sidelined by sin. Our knowledge of God's extreme grace should not lead to us take lightly the remaining strongholds of fleshliness in us. It should not moderate our attacks, carried out in the Spirit, to subdue these. We should be offended by our own sin and the atonement of Christ's blood should not moderate our sin's offensiveness to us. This misery and grief should enable in us a relentless offensive against our own lack of godliness. This is godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8-12), and it produces in us a zeal to separate ourselves from evil.

We find then that in the rhythms of the practice of faith, joy and celebration should give way to moments of healthy sorrow. James' words show it to be profound and deeply felt. It is a disappointment over not availing oneself of all that is ours through grace. It is an expectation that by now we should be beyond where we are spiritually (Hebrews 5:12). It should not drag out, but neither should it be squelched prematurely, and that is the essence of the fine line we must walk. The mark of godly sorrow is that it does not paralyze. But it is certain that it is a blessing (Matthew 5:4), and that we are only having the complete experience of Christ if it is a part of our life in Him. Our

knowledge of grace brings our grief to an end, but also strengthens us to see our sin for what it is and to relentlessly attack it in the Spirit.

4:10—Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

This command is based on the principle James stated in verse 6, where he said, “God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.” That is a statement of a principle found in Psalm 138:6. This principle was spoken of early in Biblical history, in Job’s day (Job 22:21-30). It was taught in the wisdom literature (Psalm 10:17; 37:7-11; Proverbs 11:2; 29:3). It was attested to by Yahweh Himself as a principle for his people when He appeared to Solomon (2 Chronicles 7:14). It was affirmed by Yahweh to the most wicked of His people (2 Chronicles 33:10-13), and even to the heathen (Jonah 3:5-10). It was spoken of by Mary as she reflected on her privilege of carrying the Messiah in her womb (Luke 1:52). It was taught by Jesus and recorded in the gospels for His Church to teach (Matthew 18:4; 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14). No command is better founded on biblical principle than this one Isaiah Peter states the same principle and gives the same command as James (1 Peter 5:5-6).

This command can be stated in this way; “be humbled in a way fitting to the scrutiny of the Lord.” The idea is that Yahweh sees all our actions, and He knows every motive involved in our deeds. Nothing in any matter is hidden from Him. In addition, He holds absolute authority over us in judgment, with power over life and death. He is our absolute sovereign, who has already blessed us with much mercy and grace simply because He is good. We have proven Himself absolutely trustworthy—one with whom we can be totally transparent in our failures. This is the humility James is urging us to embrace and display. It is nothing less than complete transparency in failure.

Men as wicked as Manasseh and the inhabitants of Nineveh are witnesses to what will be His gracious response to such a humble appeal (2 Chronicles 33:10-13; Jonah 3:5-10). James states simply, “He will lift you up.” This is a statement composed of only two words in Greek, *υψώσει υμας*. This lifting up refers to forgiveness and cleansing, and to renewed opportunity to die to personal sins and live to righteousness (Romans 6:17-23). It renews opportunity for faithfulness, commendation, and reward.

This humbling of ourselves is commanded to Christian people. It is the solution for the lethargy James was seeing in the Church, and it remains so today. It should never be seen as a completed act. It should be seen as the ongoing, life-giving thought process of each day. It is the essential part of walking in the Spirit. Its presence is the essence of being “poor in spirit,” the very quality that when present leads to the experience of the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:3). Living in the sphere of God’s kingdom produces radical transformation in us, and strong kingdom impact through us. Humbling ourselves is the lifeblood of the experience of the life.

4:11—Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

The term rendered “speak against” is *καταλαλιετε*. It is a word which is used in a way that adheres closely to its etymology. Besides its use in this verse, it appears only two other times in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:12; 3:16). In all instances it seems it is referring to speaking falsely—slanderingly, about someone to adversely affect what is thought of them. In this sense it is a violation of the Mosaic Law, in that it is bearing false witness (Exodus 20:16). It is also a violation of the “royal Law” cited by James in

2:8. Whether one is loyal to the Mosaic Law or the teaching of Christ, there is clear condemnation of speaking against another.

This verse provides us with more of a clue as to what James was seeing or observing that led him to this entire message that now bears his name. He was seeing in the Church the rumblings and whisperings that characterize people who are envious of each other and who are quarreling with one another. There was no room for such normal human behavior in the Church. So James paints a very definitive picture of what this behavior Isaiah It is placing oneself in a position of moral authority above Yahweh's moral standard. It is replacing it with oneself. It is not just breaking a rule. It is saying the rule is inconsequential and the rule-giver irrelevant.

There is some point at which our sin becomes willful and takes on an obnoxious arrogance. James was seeing that the Church community life had taken on this very human fragrance, rather than the fragrance of Christ. He has already spoken words to this effect (2:9-13) regarding his readers. He returns now to this same frame of reference and will strengthen it further in the verse that follows. His goal is to portray the awful nature of these rumblings and schisms in the Church and so to purge from the reader's minds any thought that their behavior was tolerable.

4:12—There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

The very hope of the people of God lies in the fact that Yahweh is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king (Isaiah 33:22). We are confident that when His plan has been fully carried out, not a single injustice will stand. We build our entire lives on this belief. We know that there is great blessing in store for those who have trusted in Yahweh in this way and placed their hope in this about Him. This lies at the heart of our belief system.

There is nothing more contradictory then, than for us to imagine that we ourselves are trustworthy enough to speak against each other. Unfortunately, to do so is an instinct that is in us because we are fallen. But though this speaking against another is instinctive, it is our greatest folly. There is no sense in which we are equipped to do it or called to do it. If it were of any use to speak against another, then our faith in Yahweh is in vain.

A key statement James makes here is that God can save and destroy. These are powers necessary if one is to effectively judge a human being. The power to judge is only resident in the One who can do both things. That is why even legitimate judgment passed by Divinely appointed human agents is only preliminary. This power of Yahweh to save and to destroy, means that He has the final say in every matter of judgment. To pass sentence without such power is to waste one's own time, energy, and relational equity on irrelevant activity. James' question, "who are you who judge your neighbor?" is the essence of the matter. Our judgment is meaningless. It is only the judgment of Yahweh that has any relevance.

There are human ministers of justice that God has established (Romans 13:1-2). James is not undermining this principle that we are to respect and be subject to such people. There is also discipline the Church is called to which is to be carried out by the Church. James is not undermining this. He is talking about Christian as they live normal life within the sphere of the mutual fellowship in the Spirit. The Spirit is not leading us to speak against one person to another person. He will at times lead us to speak against the attitude or actions of a person to them, in a face-to-face conversation. He will not

lead us to simply speak evil of them to others to marginalize them in some way and for some reason.

4:13—Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

The verse begins with an attention getting expression. Literally it is "Lead now." It is like various idioms we might use in our speech to stimulate another to re-examine a course of action they are choosing. We might say something like, "Stop for a minute," or "Come on!" Posed as a question it is "Do you really think _____?" The implication of the expression is, "You're not thinking right!" The expression also marks a switch in style to a more direct and personal one. James has already been quite direct. By using these words he is ratcheting up the intensity even more. It is a call to a more intense self-examination.

Though James appears to switch directions, what he says is related to the entire matter he has just addressed. He is continuing to call us to humble ourselves before Yahweh and to subjecting ourselves to His will and plan. We are to be acknowledging Him, His power over us, and our absolute dependence on His care as we live our lives. Humbling ourselves is an ongoing activity that we should assume is never complete in us.

As said in the introduction, we see that by some means James had become aware of certain attitudes that were present in the Church. Perhaps among all the leaders of the Church there were similar realizations as those we have today when we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry and the historic account of early church life in Acts. Who does not have the sense that something has been lost in our experience? Perhaps in them there was this same sense as the decades drifted by, and they recalled what had been. And perhaps this is always the task of church leadership. There seems to be this calling back to what had been present in the faith and what was essential to its vibrancy in all of the New Testament writers. The epistles could all be seen as a shaking of the church out of the slumber they naturally fall into as fallen human beings.

Part of the image of God in us is that we identify objectives we would like to achieve, and we make plans. This is the ability He created in us that gives us capacity to rule His creation for Him. Under His control it is a significant asset. Apart from His control it compounds our waywardness. It is this ability that James is calling us to exercise in a humble way. It is a great thing to establish high objectives for our business in harmony with His will. It can be of great use to the kingdom. It is more normal for us to establish objectives that serve ourselves and leave Yahweh on the fringe. This is the issue that James is holding in front of us now. Whom are we setting out to serve when we make plans?

4:14—Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

There is a variant reading of the Greek text in this verse. The alternate English translation would be something like this: "Whereas you do not know the things of tomorrow. What is your life like? It is a vapor for a little while appearing and then no longer seen." So the middle of the verse poses a question that the last part of the verse answers. Either way the verse is understood, there is an important declaration made by it regarding the nature of human existence.

James assumes the knowledge of Yahweh as the sovereign ruler overall. Yahweh has a plan and a series of decrees that have shaped history and continue to do so. Ultimately, these are far and away the most significant factor to be reckoned with as we live our lives on earth. Yet these plans of Yahweh are to a large degree unknown to us. Even in deep intimacy with Him, significant things He is doing remain a mystery (Matthew 24:35-36).

James presents the view of humanity affirmed in the testimony of the Old Testament. There is a great contrast between the human and the Divine experience of life (Psalm 90:1-6; 102:11-12; 103:15). It is not that human life is insignificant in God's eyes. It is that it is very brief. This brevity of life was imposed on us by God to preserve and protect all of creation, including humanity. Early on God proved that we do not get wiser and better with experience. We get worse. And so He shortened the length of the experience of human life (Genesis 6:1-8). The result is that the length of human life is not significant compared to the total of the years of time. Furthermore, the plans and achievements of any individual human tend to quickly give way to those that follow them. We are simply not here long enough for it to be any other way.

Who we know God to be, and who we know ourselves to be should combine to make us particularly humble as we plan the events of our lives. We simply do not know what our lives are going to be like beyond the present moment. We should be highly motivated to engage in only what Yahweh desires for us.

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

As Yahweh's children and agents, our intentions, and our expression of them should reflect a posture of submission to Him. James suggests a formula for our words, but his intention is that this be a rule to guide our thought process as we plan our future.

First, we should be consumed by accomplishing Yahweh's will. This should be first and foremost in our lives. Yet, James is representing God's will to us as something that we cannot fully know. Our passion should not be so much to know His will, but to bring it about. That is an important distinction. So even when we proceed toward an objective that we are sure agrees with His plan, we should remain submitted to His right to make something quite different of our efforts.

Second, we should be consumed by the fact that our every breath is from Him. We live on only because it is His will and where He has a will, He has a purpose. Therefore, each moment is a stewardship. Holding this principle always in view will lead us to a tremendous quality of life.

We will neither be overly enamored with life in this world, nor will we be disappointed by it. Life will simply become a means to an end, the end to which all of creation has been pointed.

Third, we should engage in action. James is not advocating inactivity. He is advocating humility and submission in our activity—a God-centeredness that engages in a godly way the affairs that He has marked out for us. There is something fundamentally wrong with a faith that does not recognize the time to intentionally embark in courses of activity.

4:16—But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

There are two words used in this verse that help us understand a factor in the atmosphere in the local church that was beginning to emerge in James' day. It had the potential to become dominate. The two words are the one rendered boast, *καυχασθε*, and the word rendered arrogance, *αλαζονειαις*.

The first of these, the *καυχασθε*, is used in both a negative and a positive way in the New Testament, as is the noun *καυχησις*. The verb occurs 38 times. Except for two uses by James (1:9; 4:16), it appears exclusively in the writings of Paul. In the positive sense it means to rejoice (Romans 5:2-3, 11; Philippians 3:3). In the negative sense it means to brag (Romans 2:23; 1 Corinthians 1:29). It is used on occasion both in a negative sense and in a positive sense in the same verse (1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17; 11:30). The earlier use of this verb by James was a positive one (1:9), referring to that about which we are to rejoice. We will see that in this verse James uses *καυχασθε* in the negative sense. The readers were bragging, and so engaging in sin.

James' usage of *καυχασθε* reflects its basic meaning—to “glory.” To “glory” is to make a declaration of value—to declare the worth of something or someone. If one assigns the same value that God does, then they have engaged a noble activity. They have agreed with Him and rejoiced. If one is seeking to skew the values God has assigned, then they are taking God's place and so have stood against Him. In that case their “glorying” is evil.

The second important word used here is *αλαζονειαις*. It defines what the readers were glorying in. This word appears just twice in the New Testament (1 John 2:16). It refers to what we call today “swagger.” It is empty assurance and trust in one's own ability and in the stability of earthly things, combined with a marginal view of God's role, purpose, or power in life matters. Among some, disdain for God is articulated. Among others God is simply left out—His opinion is not considered, nor His role acknowledged. It may be accidental or purposeful. Either way, God is assigned irrelevance. In all cases there is the irony that the One who holds our life breath in His hand is brushed aside. This “swagger” amounts to grabbing life, emptying it of the worship of its Originator, and living it as one pleases.

James saw Christian people within the Church picking up a boastful worldly swagger. There were conversations occurring where they were speaking of all they were going to do and accomplish in the world of commerce and business. It was braggadocios, devoid of worshipful reverence of Yahweh and of allegiance to His purposes for them. They were behaving as if normal worldly achievements were weightier than matters of the kingdom of God. Their boasting reflected erosion in belief and conviction. These early Christians were abandoning godly values and embracing worldly ones. They had drifted far from what had characterized them early on (Acts 2:43-47; 4:32-37). They not only had a swagger about them, but it was also a public and boastful one. This was evil. It was not just misguided.

Paul noticed this same swagger in the Corinthian church, but in a little different way. They had developed a moral swagger. In moral matters they had embraced a worldly standard and so had arrived at a place where they were not offended by conduct that even the heathen saw as immoral (1 Corinthians 5:1-2). Paul says this swagger they had developed was not good (1 Corinthians 5:6). A great window through which we can examine the health of our inner being is to examine what we brag about—what to us is a significant achievement.

In labeling this growing characteristic evil, different Greek words were available to James. He chooses to use πονηρα . It can be traced in origin to the word penw, which refers to the toil for daily survival. It emphasizes the toilsome side of evil and brings to mind the curse that hangs over creation itself due to evil (Genesis 3:17). So it utilizes the effect of evil to name and label evil. Another word for evil, κακος, emphasizes the intrinsic nature of evil—it is morally bad. Still another word, σαπρος, emphasizes the corrupt and corrupting nature of evil—it is spoiled and produces spoilage. All the terms mean evil. But they are derived from different words that express some aspect of evil. James is perhaps reminding the readers that the entire striving of humanity to rise above each other and to distinguish oneself above others is a never-ending, fruitless, grievous, and evil, labor.

4:17—Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

There were two words available to James that expressed the idea of goodness. One is αγαθος, which expresses intrinsic goodness—that which is of God and harmonizes with truth. James uses another word for good, καλον. It emphasizes what is good in the more pragmatic sense, in terms of being valuable and virtuous. It parallels the word he used in the previous verse to characterize the boastfulness the Christians were embracing—πονηρα. That word emphasizes the grievous, painful, and enslaving nature of evil. This word καλον, emphasizes the profitable nature of good to humanity.

Perhaps in this verse James is pointing out how this unchristian arrogance had regained its hold among Christians. He focuses us on the stakes involved in each decision we make. There are hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of such moments in our lives each day. They are moments when we know what the good thing to do Isaiah In that moment, we make a choice. If we choose to do evil, we commit sin. A sin is simply a choice to disengage from what the Holy Spirit convicts us is right. The result is that we engage what is more natural. We will never rise above our slavery to evil if we do not choose in such moments what is true and right. Truth can lift us to all that is good and profitable. Sin ties us to what enslaves and corrupts.

Christians do what non-Christians do and are enslaved by it because they choose not to engage what they know to be true and right. That had come about in the Church of James day, and it persists wherever Christianity exists. The result is that Christian people engage the more instinctive pursuits for things like material goods, social status, and pleasure. The decline in spiritual fervor James was observing was happening one moment at a time and one decision at a time. The cumulative effect of lost moments is dramatic.

JAMES 5

5:1—Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.

This chapter begins with James charging the rich to take up right now the lament that will be theirs once the Judge arrives to right all wrongs. This should probably be understood as a general lament with respect to all the world's rich. Why does James take this lament up in a letter written to Christians, and why so at this point in the letter? He does so to remind the Christians, who have obviously been lured into the quest for material things, of the emptiness and foolishness of the chase for anything of this world.

To believer and nonbeliever alike, riches are a snare. The unbeliever can be kept from faith by riches. The believer can be drawn away from the truth by them, steward their faith poorly, and so lose all eternal reward. This lament serves all people well. We should continually stir up our minds to regain a realistic estimation of the eternal worthlessness of the pleasures and goods of this life. They will profit us nothing in the day of wrath (Proverbs 11:4; Mark 8:36).

There is no need to think that every specific practice James alludes to in this lament was present among the Christians. But these were the practices of the rich that the believers could slouch into. The lament is appropriately placed because of this danger.

James begins this verse with the same expression he used in the beginning of his instructions to those who were getting caught up in business pursuits (4:13). It is the simple word *αγε*. To repeat, this is an attention getting expression. Literally it is “lead now”. It is like various idioms we might use in our speech to stimulate another to re-examine a course of action they are choosing. We might say something like, “Stop for a minute!” or “Come on!” or “Come now!” The implication of the expression is, “You’re not thinking right!” It is the continuation of a very direct and confrontational style. It is yet another call to a more intense self-examination.

Some among the readers were boasting in their empty pursuits (4:13,16). James summons them to weep and howl. They were caught up in the emptiness of the chase. James labeled it sin (4:16) and calls them to see and repent from the braggadocious way of life they were slipping towards. They had to realize that to continue this path meant certain miseries were headed their way. They are called not only to weep, but to “howl.” The word rendered howl is *ολουζοντε*

s. It occurs only here in the New Testament, though it occurs also in the Septuagint. It is an onomatopoeic verb; the sound of a howl being built into its pronunciation. James adds this word as a participle to his command to weep. So he is commanding the readers to “weep in a howling manner.” It is a call to a more extreme expression of grief than just weeping. It helps add to the serious tone of James’ words and to the severity of his concern for them.

5:2—Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

James constructs a word picture that will extend through verse five—a very vivid one. It portrays the degradation of the things of earth. The reality of all that we work to accumulate is that time will degrade it. Now there is the delusion, due to the potential

of investments to increase in value, that this can be avoided. But in terms of the Kingdom of God, the reality is that it will all become worthless.

As we look ahead toward the certainty of the Kingdom of God, it appears that wealth will be re-assigned by Christ the King when that Kingdom commences in a visible way on this earth. We find in Christ's statements specific teaching about this. When He comes to earth to rule, only those who have believed in Him will be a part of His kingdom (Matthew 13:36-43, 47-50). The experience of this kingdom is a part of their inheritance as children of God. They will also be given an inheritance in terms of the more material aspect of that kingdom, related to role and privilege (Matthew 19:28-29; 25:14-30). This will be based on their faithfulness to the kingdom in its present form (Luke 19:11-27)). So there will be a great re-assigning of wealth at the beginning of Christ's reign. The wealth of that kingdom, whatever it is, will be assigned purely based on faithfulness to the commands of Christ in this present life, without regard for wealth or social status (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

It appears that this eschatology was central to the mindset of the apostles and that many of their exhortations were based on it. The inescapable fact this end points to is that all the wealth related to the present order of things in this world that anyone may have accumulated will be of no value. James' description summarizes its future value perfectly.

5:3—Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

The degradation of our material wealth is compared to rust by James. The term rendered "rust" is *ιοσ*. It is a term that refers to the venom of a snake, or the rust or corrosion in metals that seems to proceed out of them like the venom of a snake. The corrosion is very minimal in these precious metals. Perhaps James is doing this purposefully, to show that these, that from our point of view always hold their value, even these will become valueless due to the cataclysmic alterations that are certain with the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. The "rust" of these is pictured as being like fire. By James word picture we could say in our vernacular that those who pursue, and grasp material things are in the end burned by them.

The pursuit of silver and gold is portrayed not only as an empty pursuit but as a damaging one. This is a particularly inexplicable pursuit for a Christian to engage in "the last days." In the apostles thinking, and from the point of view of the Old Testament, the advent of Christ marked the beginning of the last days. His advent was one that signaled the beginning of the end. There was no revelation of the reality that generations would come and go between His laying down His life as the sacrifice for sin and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth.

This "last days" perspective can be seen in the question of the apostles to Him after His resurrection and just before His ascension (Acts 1:6). They wanted to know if He was going to establish His Kingdom right then. His reply was simply that it was not for them to know the times and the seasons. He left them with the understanding that His kingdom would be established, but with no firm idea of the time frame. They were living in the last days, as far as they knew.

With this knowledge in hand, the idea of pursuing earthly things was absurd to James. It should be to us all. It was one thing to have to exercise faith in the times of the Old Testament, when the Messiah had not appeared. It was quite another thing in James'

mind to doubt after Christ had appeared on earth, had fulfilled so much of Scripture, had showed from Scripture the rest of the plan of God, had been raised from the dead, had sent the Holy Spirit as the first installment of the New Covenant, and had so plainly spoke of His coming Kingdom. It was incredulous to Him that Christians could be motivated by such worthless things as silver and gold. This absurdity is portrayed by him in the sarcasm of the last sentence. We rightly understand if we see it conveying this message, “It is incredulous to me that of all times, in these last days, you have stored up this so-called ‘treasure.’”

5:4—Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

The pursuit of riches can lead us into injustice. It was the way of the rich in James’ day, and this has always been. Oppression and injustice had come about among the Israelites under the Old Covenant (Zechariah 7:8-14; Malachi 3:5-6), even though the Law had solemnly warned against the oppression of others (Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The Law had specifically charged that in Israel the wages of a hired man were to be paid at the end of each day (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Yet the more instinctive urge to withhold from another to have more for oneself still took over. It was not at all an uncommon occurrence nor is it today in various forms.

James represents the appeals and protests of the defrauded ones as having already entered the ears of the Judge. He uses the term *εισεληλυθασιν*, a perfect tense, conveying action that has occurred with an abiding result. The Judge is identified in a way that is unusual in the New Testament, *κυριου Σαβαωθ* (see Romans 9:29 for only other use). The term *σαβαωθ* speaks of an assembled army and recalls the expression more common in the Old Testament, “The Lord of Hosts.” The term *κυριου* occurs without the definite article. The meaning of this expression should be understood as THE VERY Lord of hosts. We see in this expression in the Old Testament that it conveyed the absolute uniqueness of the person and power of Yahweh (2 Samuel 6:2). This was the expression used by David when he confronted Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45), and so his dramatic victory demonstrated to all Yahweh’s incomparable essence.

James’ use of this expression certainly heightens the potential seriousness of this offense of the rich. The protest of defrauded wage earners has been noted by the Commander Himself, the One who leads the army that cannot be thwarted. In view of the accountability of creation to its Creator, it is wise to live with reverence for what His judgment is of our thoughts and actions. They have already come under His scrutiny. He has already determined their nature.

The good news of the gospel is that forgiveness is extended by Him and so the relationship is made whole as we repent.

5:5—You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

James’ lament of the rich continues with this description of where riches can lead any human. Hopefully, none of this occurs among believers. But it can and does to varying degrees. So James describes the path of a person who pursues riches and luxury with abandon. It is a good reminder for believers so that we constantly bear in mind the end of such a life. It is the grimmest of tragedies if we drift back towards it. This is a

Divine revelation to us of its realities. It is meant to guide us safely through moments when we are tempted by the allure of anything other than Yahweh.

Three words in this verse are used by James to describe the error of the chase. The first is *ετρυφησατε*, rendered “luxuriously.” It emphasizes the pampering of the body—demanding less of it. This typically goes with the lifestyle of the rich. In today’s world such people might discipline their bodies in terms of exercise and eating habits. But that is not the pampering Scripture is as concerned with. Scripture is concerned with the pampering of self-centeredness, self-indulgence in the sense of being consumed with one’s own happiness and pleasure. Such pleasure can be of a sexual nature but can just as easily be continually gratifying one’s own ego and meeting one’s own need in the moment. This is the essence of fleshly living and is the root cause of the sexual excesses we generally associate with sensuality. This sort of pampering is the opposite of what Scripture calls us up to. It calls us to deny our bodies, and demand that they serve the objectives we point them toward (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The second word is *εσπαταλησατε*, rendered by the short phrase “wanton pleasure.” It refers to that deliberate choice of excess in the pursuit of pleasure where we do not stop at moderation. It is continual over-indulgence inspired by the deluded belief that more is always better. Just as the dignity of a human can be lost in extreme poverty, so it can be lost in abandoned living.

Excess always leads to less of what matters.

The third word is *εθρεψατε*, rendered “fattened.” This word comes from *τρεφω*, which refers to nourishment (Matthew 6:26; 25:37). Applied as it is here to the heart, it refers to the nurturing of our inner beings. To abandon our inner beings to pleasure is to nurture and feed our fallen state, to feed the evil in us. The nurturing of this in us will lead us to pursue the very things our Creator/judge will condemn. Rather than preparing our hearts for the execution of Yahweh’s will, we become like those who abandoned the nurture of their hearts and so lost His blessing (Psalm 78:8). James points out the irony of doing this during the time of our earthly lives. This is the very time when a decision is being made about us regarding our eternal destiny. So ironically, we can be nurturing evil in us “in the day of slaughter,” at the very time when our experience of eternity is at stake. This expression compares us to an animal that is deliberately fattened up, with slaughter and consumption in mind. In making choices that nurture ungodliness in our hearts, we are inexplicably choosing catastrophe. We are reducing ourselves to living life as creatures of instinct. Tragedy, foolishness, and loss of dignity are all conveyed by this short expression. It captures the loss any person incurs by nurturing ungodliness within themselves.

5:6—You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

James laments the fact that the rich have historically resisted and stood in opposition to the faith. He has already referred to this (2:6). It is not that wealth per se is evil. It is that the belief in it and pursuit of it can become so intense in us that it takes the place meant for and devoted to Yahweh. When that state of things comes about within us we have excessive, even violent reaction, to the workings of the Spirit of God. The posture of such persons towards the faith can become very hostile.

Why is this statement an important one to address to Christian people? Because if the pursuit of wealth captures our affections, it will absolutely wipe out our zeal for the

things of God and the family of God. Though a Christian might not go so far as to kill others, they will at best be apathetic toward the faith. They will become unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). A Christian is not insulated from the misdirecting of their worship (1 John 5:21). What James saw taking root in the Church was ominous. He wants to remind the readers in the strongest possible terms of what such wandering produces if it goes unchecked in our hearts.

5:7—Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.

Much wandering occurs among Christians simply because they lose patience. This was demonstrated by the Israelites in their wilderness experience. They were unable to persist in the belief that God was good and defer gratification. That is the challenge for all who embrace the faith.

The word rendered “patient” is μακροθυμῆσατε. It occurs twice in this verse and will begin the next verse. Among other things it is given as a characteristic of love (1 Corinthians 13:4). It is formed by prefixing μαχρoς, meaning long, to the word θυμος. Qumos refers to our emotions or passions. A way to understand Qumos is as referring to that which burns inside us. We could understand μακροθυμῆσατε as a command to be “long burning.” The imagery of the word recalls a fire that burns long, as opposed to one that flares up quickly then dies down just as quickly. It also recalls a candle or lamp that burns long. So being patient is a matter of providing for ourselves that which we need to fuel the light of truth that God has placed in us. It is to be taking in always that which provides for continued follow-through in the life of faith.

James illustrates the necessity of patience from the business that most of his readers were familiar with—farming. They had confidence in the processes God had ordained about producing crops. They had to allow seed to germinate, for it to interact with the soil for months and become a mature, fruit producing plant. They were dependent on elements completely out of their control, namely the weather. They had to trust that these would provide the right thing at the right time, and just wait for them. They did all this routinely. Some years were better than others, but generally their lives were sustained because of the rhythms of the seasons that they had learned to take advantage of. That is the same thing we must do in our practice of the faith.

Time is unfolding according to the plan of God. It is on schedule. The Lord will come, and then the fruit of our labor will be given to us. That hope rests first in His power. We believe He controls the events of this world and that they come about according to his plan. Nothing that comes about is unanticipated by Him. We do not know all He has planned. But He has revealed enough that we can catch glimpses of the progress of the plan. He has revealed enough about how He works that we can see that the delays we think we are seeing in the progress of His plan are not delays at all. They are simply characteristic of His very deliberate method of bringing about His own will. His power enables Him to sustain the progress of His plan through all the obstacles that might hinder us.

Second, our hope rests in His goodness. We believe His goodness is unmitigated and uncompromised. What He has for us can certainly be nothing but the best. He has no ability in Himself to produce anything less. We realize that this is the first point at which our faith falters, and that our faltering in this belief in His goodness is completely unfounded. And so we renew our hope in this—that He is good and that

we will see that goodness if we wait patiently for His work to be finished and fulfill our small part in completing it.

The coming of the Lord is our hope. He will intervene in the affairs of the world directly. When He does, He will set all things right and only what is just and right in His eyes will stand. Our reward, our fullness, and our joy will come then. Our hope is not in what we can somehow wring out of our present existence as fallen people in a fallen world. Our hope is in the perfection of His power and His goodness. These justify our willingness to wait and to do so even when our eyes do not see the end.

5:8—You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

This verse begins with the command to be patient, as the previous verse did. Like the farmer, who must wait for the God-ordained processes of nature to bring to completion his own efforts, we too must wait for all that God has ordained to come about. Like the farmer, we contribute our efforts to the kingdom of God. As we do we must allow for all that God has ordained to occur. His plan, in its totality, must be completed. Nothing else will yield the perfect end He has decreed.

The second command to us is “strengthen your hearts.” The word rendered “strengthen” is στηριζατε. It is derived from ιστημι, a verb that means “to stand.” This word capture that and adds to it the idea of permanence. It means to “set fast.” It occurs a dozen times in the New Testament. This strengthening is most frequently represented as a work that God does in us (Romans 16:25; 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; 3:3; 1 Peter 5:10). James’ representation of it as something the readers do is harmonious with the rest of his message.

His entire letter emphasizes the human contribution we must make to our own spiritual welfare. God does not change with respect to the work He does day in and day out. We do change. We can become lethargic, and it is this that James was seeing in the Church and was addressing.

So this command is to be persistent in opening our hearts to this work that God engages in always, the strengthening of our innermost beings to be instruments of His will in each moment of each day. It is a critical activity and there are some very inspirational verses in the writings of Paul and Peter that center on our becoming “established.”

James says that “the coming of the Lord is at hand.” The word rendered “at hand” is ἐγγικεν. It means to draw near. It is a perfect tense, so James is presenting time as having moved along to the point in Yahweh’s plan when it can be said that the Lord’s coming is near. The term “at hand” describes the stage in a journey when the destination is being approached. It is not definitive in terms of the distance—how near the destination is. When used of time it is not definitive of how long. For example, it is the word Stephen uses in describing the time when the promise made to Abraham was “approaching” (Acts 7:17). What did the word “approaching” mean in that context? How many years away was it?

Here is what we know from the account in Genesis and Exodus. Abraham had been told by Yahweh that His offspring would be strangers in a foreign land for 400 years and be enslaved and oppressed there (Genesis 15:13-14). Yahweh assured Abraham that after that time He would deliver them and take them back to the promised land. Stephen says that “as the time of the promise was approaching,” that is, as the 400

years were coming to an end so that their deliverance would occur, certain things began to happen. As he speaks of those things that began to happen, one of those things is the mistreatment of the Israelites. We know that mistreatment likely went on several years before the birth of Moses, which is the next thing Stephen mentions. We know that the Exodus did not happen until Moses was 80 years old. We know that none of those who left Egypt, except Caleb and Joshua lived to see the entire promise made to Abraham fulfilled. “Approaching” in that context meant a time of 80 to 120 years. It did not mean that it would occur in the lifetimes of those who were alive as it “approached.”

So though the term “at hand” might sound to us like a decade, or at least in our lifetime, biblically it is an indefinite time period. It does not necessarily convey shortness of time; in the way we experience time. Biblically it seems that we are certainly in the second half of God’s planned day of judgment. If we view the plan that leads to the day of judgment as a journey to a certain city, it is certainly appropriate to view ourselves as approaching the city, since at least half of the journey has been completed. So it is accurate to say that the coming of the Lord is at hand.

There was on the part of the New Testament writers this perspective always, that the time of the consummation of the ages was approaching. We can only say that God wishes us to live with the expectation of seeing it in our day, and that is why He consistently represents it as near and at hand.

5:9—Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

Again, in this verse James gives us the perspective that the time of the consummation is near. His words call to mind the statement of Jesus when He spoke of certain signs of His return, ones indicating that he was “near, right at the door” (Matthew 24:33). This imagery, in which Jesus is “standing right at the door,” conveys the urgency to be found doing what He has asked us to do when He opens the door and enters (Matthew 24:45-46).

There were likely many incidences that those close to the Lord during His earthly ministry looked back on with regret. The light of the world had been with them, and they were consumed at times with trivia, like which of them was the greatest (Mark 9:34, 46; Luke 22:24). Those memories gave them a perspective on the urgency of time that inspired thoughts like these.

This urgent language is used by James to address the importance of how Christians were conducting themselves toward each other. The trivial bickering and infighting that we slouch into is James’ target. Such conversations should not become “normal” to us, because the Judge will not be pleased with them. He will not see them as “normal,” so with His judgment of them in mind, we had better see them for what they are.

The command, “Do not complain” is the rendering of μη στεναζετε. Στεναζω is used 5 other times in the New Testament. Most frequently it describes the act of sighing or groaning, and the emotion that goes with it (Mark 7:34; Romans 8:23; 2 Corinthians 5:2,4). It is used in one other place as it is by James (Hebrews 13:17). So it is used of the good and legitimate emotion of concern, or of the negative emotion of being irritated or to some degree vexed. James is addressing the negative undercurrent that develops wherever people work together. It is the murmuring, complaining, and down-speak that is present like background noise in any organization. The opinions and

judgments bantered about far from the frontlines of ministry never have to stand up to the realities of implementation. Any idea holds promise in fantasy. People who engage in such backroom talk engage fantasy. They sound credible to each other. But it is all arrogance and sin. Criticizing, slandering, passing judgment, all of these are the workings of evil and the evil one.

Such murmuring is passing judgment. James has already spoken much about such judging, and its sinfulness (2:1-4; 3:13-17; 4:11-12). In fact, the entire book could easily be seen as written primarily with this issue in mind. Those who so judge, without mercifully respecting the weight of the entire matter, will themselves be judged without mercy (2:13). Furthermore, their judgment is certain. Perhaps James wants us to understand that the Judge Himself is standing at the door over-hearing our arrogant boastings. Christ is an active participant in the Church—in every conversation. Each person will give an account of how their work contributed to the building up of this spiritual body of His (1 Corinthians 3:5-17). We do not want our conversations to be among those that tear the building down (1 Corinthians 3:17).

5:10—As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

This is another abrupt statement by James that can seem like it is a switch in directions. But it is part of the continuing exhortation to stand firm and to patiently endure in the life as they had been taught. It is a new thought added to James' ongoing appeal to us not to slip downward into the agenda generated by the self-obsession that characterizes our fallenness.

The prophets stood alone. They spoke the truth exactly as it was in the eyes of Yahweh. They were not concerned with how it was received or with how they personally profited or suffered as a result. Their only agenda was to speak in the name of the Lord—expressing His precise thought for the hearers. It was their lifework.

Two things characterized their example. They were an example of suffering. They are revered today, but they were ridiculed and persecuted in their own times. Time is the test of a course of action and the words spoken against it. In each case time proved them right and their detractors tragically wrong. But in their own day they suffered. There was the suffering of punishment inflicted by others (Jeremiah 38:4-6). There was also the suffering that accompanies knowledge of the truth and the burden of concern that goes with it (Jeremiah 9:1). They suffered in all kinds of ways, often brutally, for the task of accurate and precise proclamation of God's message.

They were also an example of patience. They persistently endured in the proclamation of the message. In fact, they displayed a kind of holy stubbornness given by God (Ezekiel 3:7-9). They proclaimed the message of Yahweh to Israel through methods that demanded patience from them beyond all human standards (Jeremiah 13:1-10; Ezekiel 4:4-8). To say the prophets were patient is one of the great understatements in Scripture. Their patience is a tribute to the enormity of Yahweh's patience with humankind.

They are our example. Too often our examples of patience and endurance come from those who endure in the empty pursuits of the world—Olympians, professional athletes, military heroes and the like. It is certain that there is a certain level of inspiration to be found in these. But those who display endurance solely for the unseen, for the possibility of the health and progress of the Kingdom of God, are the eternal heroes. There are incredible examples of endurance to be found beginning

with God Himself, in Jesus, and in the men and women who have been sold out to His purposes over the centuries.

5:11—Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

James cites the special status we accord those who have endured for the sake of Yahweh's purposes. Even some who have no belief in God admire the character of Jesus and anyone who would so suffer for what they believe in. It is generally true that such people we bless, and rightly so (Matthew 5:10-12).

It is one of the great ironies of human behavior that we can memorialize such people and hold them in highest regard, yet in our own lifetime join with those who inflict suffering on such as follow in their footsteps (Matthew 23:29-36). We can even receive the message of such people with great joy yet refuse to suffer for it ourselves (Mark 4:16-17).

It is because of this shallow infatuation that we have with truth and those who suffer for it that James calls us to endure. This is not a message just for prophets, or leaders of the faith, or those specially called. It is a message for every Christian. Endurance is the aim of all the Holy Spirit's dealings in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23; Hebrews 12:3-11; James 1:2-4).

James calls us to contemplate the story of Job, and to focus on the outcome of the Lord's dealings with him. That story illustrates to us Yahweh's ability to shape the outcome despite the forces of evil that are at work along the way. It is not that every life will end well, and that every loss will be recovered by us in the present life. It is that Yahweh has the power to bring about His goodness. Nothing will thwart the outcome He determines.

It is so critical to live for the outcome of Yahweh's plan, not for some intermediate pleasure or comfort that might appear for a season during the intermediate stages of His plan. The outcome is the thing, always. Believing in the outcome is the great challenge of the life of faith—the thing that marked the failure of the Israelites in the wilderness (Numbers 13:27-29; 16:12-14). We must guard ourselves against doubting the outcome due to some intermediate condition we observe prior to the completion of the plan. The work of enduring is essentially that of restraining ourselves from the deception of mirages that appear along the way (Psalm 46, 49).

5:12—But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.

This verse begins with the prepositional phrase *προ παντων*. The preposition *προ* means before or in front of when speaking of time or place. When used figuratively it means superior in rank or importance. That is its use here.

This precise expression “above all things” occurs only here and in Peter's first epistle (1 Peter 4:8). It conveys the idea of the absolute priority of what follows. In using this expression Peter speaks of fervent love having top priority with his readers. James speaks of the priority of his readers being true to their word. James' words address a prime law that shapes relationships—the law of trust. So Peter's exhortation that love

is THE priority, and James' exhortation that we be people of our word can easily be harmonized. James is addressing the prime point of failure among Christians in their fulfillment of the "new" commandment of Christ to love one another (John 13:34-35; 1 John 2:7-8)—the very commandment Peter calls us to.

The principle of this teaching is that we should not need to add to our words anything to assure those we are dealing with that we will follow through on what we have said. We must do what we have said we will do. In today's world, others should not need us to take an oath or sign a contract to trust us. It is not that these are wrong. But they do enable the deviousness in us. Self-interests lead us to set aside clear obligations. We begin to suppose there is a distinction between what we testify under oath or sign our names to, and what we simply say. We should not need to even say, "I give you my word on this." That implies that our normal statement of our intent is not reliable. This all applies not just to business matters, but to little things like being on time and completing volunteer assignments.

When we do not follow through on commitments, we have compromised a very important part of our character. At that point our love is no longer safe, and we will damage the body of Christ. We must demand something higher of ourselves and keep demanding it. If we do not hold to our word, we will eventually commit injustice and then come under judgment. This simple compromise can generate all sorts of action against us—civil, criminal, and Divine.

This principle was set forth by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:37). It was affirmed in His great condemnation of the Pharisees (Matthew 23:16-22). Paul seems to be dealing with this principle in defending his own ministry (2 Corinthians 1:15-24). When our word loses its credibility, our spiritual experience with other believers and our effectiveness in spiritual leadership will be set back.

5:13—Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.

In the verses that precede James has been speaking of persistence in the way of faith. Endurance implies repetition. It implies known courses of action practiced to the degree that they are an anticipated and natural fit in our lives. They are the rhythm that our lives move to, godly reflexes that shape our reaction to changing moments of each day. Like notes of a music score indicate specific rhythm and sound to one playing an instrument, certain events in our lives should inform us of specific activities and responses that are appropriate.

James begins with two opposite emotional experiences. He is implying that for each point on the great continuum of human emotion there is an appropriate godly response that we are to move into. And so when we begin to suffer we should respond by moving into prayer. When we begin to be cheerful, we should respond by moving into singing of praise. A host of other responses could be added. When we are lonely, we should seek the fellowship of others and God Himself. When we are under stress, we should reflect on the greatness of God's power in us. When we are elated over our success, we should ponder God's grace in it. When we are ashamed, we should focus on Christ's sacrifice for us. For every human emotion there is a godly way of expressing and ruling it.

5:14—Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

The subject of healing is a very complex one to wrestle with. To some degree we must have a “theology of sickness” to begin to process the lines of thinking that are possible when it comes to Yahweh healing sick people.

One of the first things we must do is try to hold in our minds all the things the Bible says about the cause or source of sickness. A second thing we must hold in our minds is what this IMPLIES about Yahweh healing sickness. A third thing we must hold in our minds is what the Bible states about healing.

There are several causes of sickness implicitly or explicitly taught by the Bible. It seems of first importance that sickness is implicit in the fall of Adam. He died spiritually when he ate the fruit. The result of spiritual death was that later he died physically (Genesis 2:17; 3:19; 5:1-4). The Bible does not report the cause of Adam’s death, but it is reasonable to assume that sickness of some sort led to it. Further judgment of God on humanity shortened the years of their life (Genesis 6:3). It is reasonable too that this would be caused by increased sickness. Physical death became the experience of all of humanity by God’s decree (Hebrews 9:27). So the cause of sickness in general lies in the decree of God in response to the rebellion of humanity against His rule. Sickness is simply part of living in this sense. This does not mean God is the source of sickness, only that it is experienced by us because He has willed it so.

As to the cause of instances of sickness in people the Bible reports several different things. Many instances of sickness happen to individuals “just because,” that is, as a normal experience of life in a fallen world (Ecclesiastes 5:17). Some sickness happens because God is disciplining the particular person for sin (2 Chronicles 21:15; 1 Corinthians 11:27-32). Some sickness happens to good and bad people alike because the time arrives in the plan of God for them to die (2 Kings 13:14). Some sickness happens because of Satan’s desire to upset an individual’s faith in Yahweh (Job 2:1-8).

What are the implications of these biblical ideas with respect to healing? Primarily they are two. First, Yahweh will not answer every prayer for healing. If He did, it would be a distinct possibility that one would never die. So whatever we believe about healing, we should not believe that every sickness will be healed in answer to our prayers. Second, the Bible reports many instances where Yahweh does heal sickness. In fact, in doing a word search of the use of the word “sick” in the New Testament, one is struck by the fact that in most cases where sickness is mentioned, it is healed, whether by Jesus or the Apostles. If God disciplines someone through sickness, He would be willing to bring healing to them if they repented, given His mercy. So whatever we believe about healing, we should believe in it and we should seek it.

What are the explicit statements of Scripture with respect to healing? As mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are numerous reports of Yahweh healing sickness in the Scripture. It is such a common occurrence that no person remotely acquainted with the narrative of Scripture would suggest that Yahweh doesn’t heal. Besides these reports of Yahweh’s healing, there are specific accounts of power being given to people to heal the sick (Matthew 10:1; Acts 28:7-8). There is even the report of healing occurring through objects due to the power of God working through them (Acts 19:12). There is also the command specifically given by James for believers to seek healing from Yahweh through church elders (James 5:14-15). There is also the curious report about Paul. He had rather dramatic power to heal (Acts 19:12; Acts 28:7-8), but later testimony by him indicates that he had to leave a companion sick and allow the

sickness to run its course (2 Timothy 4:20). There is often in Scripture linkage between faith and the experience of healing (Matthew 8:10; 9:2, 22; 17:14-20; Acts 3:16). But because we have already seen that it is clearly not God's will to heal all sickness at the present time, we cannot say that where healing does not occur, a lack of faith is the cause. It seems from the words of Jesus Himself that it takes very little faith for healing and other miracles to occur (Matthew 17:20).

Four statements summarize the testimony of Scripture. First, Yahweh does heal. Second, Yahweh commands us to seek healing from Him. Third, Yahweh does not heal every sickness. Fourth, a lack of healing does not necessarily mean a lack of faith.

There are circumstances that come about in our lives for which the appropriate godly action is within us. Some of those were mentioned in the previous verse. There are other circumstances where godly action is outward and pragmatic. Such is the case when we are physically sick.

James instructs us to summon the elders of the church when we are sick. The instructions are that simple. There are no parameters placed on making such a request. Do it when we are sick.

The word used is *ασθενει*. In the gospels it is used exclusively of sickness. In the epistles it is most often used of weakness—physical (2 Corinthians 10:10), or spiritual (Romans 14:1). So in the practice of faith and godliness, we have great freedom to ask for the prayers of the elders.

The elders are to do two things. They are to “pray over” the sick person. This refers to the simple practice of gathering around the sick person and praying specifically for them, as the Spirit might lead. Second, the elders are to anoint the sick person with oil in the name of the Lord.

What is this anointing of oil? We know that the normal practice of what we would call first aid, involved anointing the person with oil in ancient times (Luke 10:34). We know that anointing someone with oil was also a sign of honoring them (Luke 7:46). There is some indication that anointing oneself with oil was a sign of gladness as well (Matthew 6:17; Hebrews 1:9; see also 2 Samuel 14:1-3). We know that there was a special anointing oil to be used by the Priests of the Old Covenant (Exodus 30:24-25). Anointing with this oil symbolized the sacredness of objects—the dedication of them to Yahweh (Exodus 40:9). It had the same meaning when used on individuals, and more specifically conveyed the idea of them occupying a special office with its appropriate powers (Leviticus 8:12; 1 Kings 1:39). In this sense it was symbolic of the Holy Spirit's presence on someone with respect to their calling, and they were to conduct themselves very soberly when it was on them (Leviticus 10:7; 21:10-12). We know that the Twelve anointed the sick with oil when Jesus sent them out in ministry (Mark 6:13).

There are probably two things conveyed by this practice of anointing with oil. First, it was likely symbolic of the presence of the Lord being brought to bear on the sick person. It was a visible practice meant to encourage them with this thought. Second, it represented about the only kind of medicinal practice the average person would have known. The significance of this is that calling the elders to pray for the sick does not preclude utilizing what medical practices are known and available.

Our ministry to the sick need not dichotomize medical science and Yahweh. Where medical practice is accurate and true, it is certain that it is based on truth God has established, whether that is acknowledged by the practitioner. All who are authorities

in medicine readily admit much remains unknown. This is why Christians practice what James teaches here, along with seeking medical help from professionals. There is no one who understands the body like God does. So as is the case in any human undertaking that He leads us into, we always appeal to Him to augment our relatively feeble human efforts. He is the master physician, mechanic, engineer, builder, lawyer, leader—whatever else we might want to add. This should be our attitude no matter what we are led to undertake.

5:15—and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

James has given direction to those who are sick to call for the Elders of the Church to pray for them. He now projects that such prayer by the Elders will be effective in several ways. From these statements it may be proper to conclude that the prayer of Elders should be sought out in a variety of situations.

The first statement about prayer by the Elders is that it is offered in faith. That means faith on the part of the one asking for prayer and on the part of those praying. The person who asks the Elders to pray over them is exercising faith by such a request. They are exercising confidence in the power of prayer and in the anointing of such an office. It would seem as well that the Elders are doing the same by responding to such a request and carrying it out. But it should be remembered that this is a faith exercise. God is honoring the faith demonstrated in the exercise, not the exercise itself. So faith is a critical element in the process.

What then of the sick person who believes in such prayer but has some doubt about whether they will be healed? What about any imperfections in the faith of the Elders? Here is what we should remember. First, James has already stated that our requests that we make to God should always be done in faith, apart from double mindedness (1:5-8). Faith is the only condition God places on receiving from Him. However, it is evident from the rest of Scripture that He does not require a mature, fully developed faith. Jesus has very clearly articulated to those who have been concerned about the volume of their faith that a pure faith is not what God requires. The truth is that He will respond to a miniscule presence of faith in a spectacular way (Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:5-6).

Second, we see in Scripture that an ability to believe in the unseen is given by God. Ignoring for the present time the debate over whether every person is given that ability, we must assume that the ability to believe has been implanted in us who have believed in Jesus Christ.

But mature, fully developed faith has not been implanted in us. This is consistent with how God has given us both mental and physical capacities that grow and mature from infancy. We have a stewardship toward this ability to believe and trust, a responsibility to exercise it and to strengthen it. And so there are challenges to our faith, moments when we must trust God when it is difficult to do so. So in such moments as when we are sick, or when we are praying for the sick, we must choose to exercise belief and trust. In choosing faith in such moments, however small that faith may be, we are enabled to fully rise to the occasion.

The word James uses for “sick” is *καμνοντα*. In the previous verse he used the word used more frequently for sick—*ασθενεω*. It occurs 41 times in the New Testament. It is used of physical sickness, or of spiritual weakness. On the other hand, a form of *καμνω*

occurs only one other time for sure in the New Testament (Hebrews 12:3). There it refers to weariness in the faith. It may be used as well in Revelation 2:3, where it also would be referring to weariness in the faith. It means to grow weary from labor. It was used of both fatigue and sickness in the writings of the era. James may be switching verbs for stylistic reasons, since the two words have considerable overlap in meaning. But he may also be broadening the range of sickness that Elders should be summoned to intercede in to include spiritual weakness. Other terms and ideas in this passage may point to this as well.

The term used for heal is *σωσει*. It is normal to use this term for the healing of the physically sick and their restoration to physical soundness (see Appendix 3). In fact, it would be abnormal not to use it. It is the term for restoration to spiritual soundness as well—the normal term rendered “salvation” in many passages in our English versions. Thus, James could be neatly providing impetus for prayer by the Elders for those who have wearied in the faith, as well as for those who are physically sick.

The last phrase of this verse is, “and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.” The fact that James adds this idea indicates that there are physical sicknesses that are brought about because of sin. This does not mean that every sickness is such. But there are occasions when we are disciplined by physical sickness (1 Corinthians 11:30). When this situation arises, God recognizes the repentance demonstrated by the individual in their summoning of the Elders, and so will forgive their sin.

Again however, in this phrase we find impetus to the idea that the prayer of Elders is useful in restoring individuals to spiritual health. These can summon the Elders of the Church to pray over them with respect to their spiritual failure, whether they are sick physically. We know that sins are forgiven because of the individual sinner’s repentance and confession. The activity of the Elders does not convey forgiveness to the unrepentant sinner. But in asking the Elders to pray with respect to their sinfulness they are expressing their own repentant heart. They are assured by James that God recognizes this repentance. They have demonstrated it by summoning the Elders. On that basis they can be assured that God will forgive their sin.

5:16—Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

This verse seems to be building on the idea that was inferred in the previous verse, that an unhealthy spiritual state can be addressed through the intercession of others in prayer. Where the previous verse focused on the prayer of the Elders, this verse broadens the scope of such ministry to all in the body of Christ. It is a ministry all believers can engage with each other. This does not marginalize the significance of calling the Elders to pray. It adds to it the practice of being transparent with other believers about one’s personal sins.

The thing we are to do with each other is to confess our sins. This is the normal word for confession—*εξομολογεω*. By etymology it expresses the idea of speaking out the same words.

By usage it conveys the idea of agreement or even siding with others with respect to something (Luke 22:6; Acts 19:18) or affirming and aligning with the judgment of God (Matthew 11:25; Luke 10:21; Romans 14:11). Confession of sins amounts to agreeing with and taking God’s side as we judge thoughts, actions, or courses of action we have chosen. Confessing our sin to one another is verbalizing these conclusions we have made in concert with God to each other.

The purpose of such confession to each other is that we might be healed from such sins. The word used here for healing is different than the one used in verse 15, though they are synonyms. It is *ιαοματι*. It is used in the New Testament primarily of physical healing. But it is also used of spiritual healing (Matthew 13:15; 1 Peter 2:24), and emotional healing (Luke 4:18). Wholeness and soundness can be experienced by us through the prayers of others for our specific spiritual issues.

The idea of spiritual healing through the Messiah was projected in the Old Testament using this word (Isaiah 6:1 LXX, quoted in Matthew 13:15; John 12:40; Acts 28:27). This was a promise made to Israel, whose story had plainly revealed the spiritual sickness of both them and all of humanity. Christ's substitutionary death provided the basis for this healing. The New Covenant, established based on Christ's death, allowed God's Laws to be written on our innermost beings by uniting our spirits with God's Spirit. He then instigates in us and in the entire community of faith thoughts and actions that bring about our health.

Confession of our sin to each other, and ensuing prayers that we make for each other with respect to specific areas of spiritual weakness, bring Yahweh's power to bear where spiritual health has waned. The result of these prayers is added wholeness and strength.

This verse ends with an important declaration about the effectiveness of prayer. The word rendered "effective" by the NASB is *ενεργουμενη*. James uses this exact word only here. It is important to understand this word because we all desire "effective" prayer. The term effective is merely tantalizing to us, unless there is some clue in its usage that allows us to gain an understanding of what makes for effective prayer. After all, there must be ineffective prayer if there is effective prayer, which we all suspect we have engaged in. We wish to pray effectively, not just pray as a means of off-loading anxiety. We all would agree that "effective" prayer accomplishes much. But the question is how do we pray effectively?

This is a word Paul used more frequently than James. He uses the present middle participle just as James does in this verse on three occasions (Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 4:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:7). In each of those cases Paul uses it of behavior produced spiritually, either by the Spirit or by evil spirits. From those uses we could say this word references "a spiritual working." Various forms of this word are employed by Paul when he is referencing the supernatural working of the Spirit in believers that produces the extraordinary pragmatic results/events/ministry of the New Covenant (1 Corinthians 12:6, 11; Galatians 2:8; 3:5; Ephesians 1:11, 20; 3:20; Philippians 2:13; Colossians 1:29). In Paul's discussion of spiritual phenomena with the Corinthians he uses a form of this word in speaking of the "energizing" or "workings" of God through His Spirit in the gatherings of believers (1 Corinthians 12:6).

There seems to be a strong possibility that in this word we do have a pointing toward the key element that makes prayers effective. The message of James to the readers may have been understood by them as being something like this: "The energized-by-the-Spirit prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." We know from all the biblical data that prayer prompted by the Holy Spirit is aligned with the will of God and therefore is effective in bringing about the specific tangible results that God wishes. It is for this reason Paul commanded us to "pray at all times in the Spirit", that is, in harmony with the promptings of the Holy Spirit within us (Ephesians 6:18).

We are told that such prayers of a “righteous man” can accomplish much. “Righteous” is used in a relative sense by James, as it often is by the writers of Scripture. We know that strictly speaking, “there is none righteous, not even one” (Psalm 14:1-3; Romans 3:10). In the example he will give in the next verse, he will be careful to speak of Elijah as an imperfect man with a nature like ours. A “righteous man” in the New Testament is a person of faith in Yahweh and His Son, Jesus Christ, who has no unfinished business with God. They are not concealing sins and they are confessing impurities as the Spirit reveals them. They are imperfect people who through the gospel, keep themselves in tune with the Holy Spirit. Because of this their prayers are effective.

The term “accomplish much” is the NASB rendering of *πολυ ισχυει*. It is a phrase that conveys the idea of much force or forcefulness. In the New Testament *ισχυω* speaks of ability to do something (Matthew 26:40; Luke 13:24). It is used of prevailing or winning out, either in a negative or positive sense (Acts 19:16, 20). So it is a great way of expressing that prayer orchestrated by the Spirit brings about the will of Yahweh against all odds. James will go on to give an example of such prayer.

5:17—Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

James wished to give the readers an example of forceful prayer that was so because it was energized by Yahweh. He turns to the life of Elijah for such an example. The Old Testament account does not speak of any prayer of Elijah with reference to the beginning of this three- plus year drought (1 Kings 17-18). It says only that Yahweh revealed through Elijah that it was coming. The account does describe the end of the period of drought, and it appears that fervent prayer was offered by Elijah in connection to this ending (1 Kings 18:41-46). The text describes only that Elijah made the declaration that the message of Yahweh to Israel was that “there shall be neither dew nor rain these years except by my word” (1 Kings 17:1). In the third year of this drought the message of God to Elijah was that rain was on its way, and Elijah was to reveal this to the King of Israel, Ahab (1 Kings 18:1). It was in the context of this knowledge conveyed to Elijah by the Lord that Elijah then engages in what appears to be earnest prayer for the ending of the drought (1 Kings 18:42-43). This was all connected to the broader purpose of God of demonstrating clearly to Israel that He Himself was their sovereign Maker and Lord, not Baal.

The point to us as New Covenant era readers of the Old Testament is profound. The Holy Spirit is revealing through additional information supplied by James and read into the Old Testament account of Elijah, that both the drought and the ending of the drought were the desire of Yahweh. These were revealed to the man Elijah. He then prayed for them, and they were brought about by Yahweh in response to his prayer. So we have a specific prayer orchestrated by the Holy Spirit about a matter that was Yahweh’s will. It was orchestrated in a human being, who by prayer asked for the event to occur. Yahweh then brought it about. Three plus years later the same man learns from the Spirit that it is Yahweh’s will to end the drought. He prays for that event to occur, in response to this knowledge. It occurs. So the point is for us to pray prayers for each other that are in harmony with the Holy Spirit’s leading and so in harmony with Yahweh’s will. These will come about in the lives of each other.

James emphasizes the humanity of Elijah. He uses the term *ομοιοπαθης* of Elijah. The NASB renders this expression “with a nature like ours.” This is the right rendering. The meaning of this term is clearly demonstrated by Paul and Barnabas in the account of their healing of a man in Lystra who was unable to walk (Acts 14:8-18). The witnesses

of that event began to proclaim that Paul and Barnabas were gods in human form. Paul and Barnabas vehemently denied this by stating that they themselves were ομοιπαθεις—meaning like those of Lystra in nature. So James purpose is for the readers to know that Elijah did the things he did through prayer informed by the Spirit, not because he was super-human.

5:18—And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

The Old Testament record of the breaking of the three-year drought does not specifically state that Elijah prayed. But it is a legitimate conclusion from what it does say—“he crouched down on the earth, and put his face between his knees.” He did this seven times. After the seventh time his servant reported to him that a “cloud as small as a man’s hand is coming up from the sea.” This became a heavy downpour, and the drought was over.

The entire three-plus year drought was the work of Yahweh to affirm to Israel their disobedience in following Ahab their king in his worship of Baal and setting aside of Yahweh. The drought was a declaration that the Israelites were covenant breakers (Deuteronomy 28:12, 18, 23-24). It was announced at its onset by Elijah, who demonstrated through signs and wonders his authority as a prophet. Its end also was announced by him and came in response to the contest on Mount Carmel. There Yahweh dramatically proved that the entire belief system Israel had embraced in Baal was nothing more than superstition. Elijah’s prayer came after he had carried out the Law’s death sentence against the priests of Baal. We can see in the account that Elijah was Yahweh’s minister to reveal to His people that they were covenant breakers and to seek to re-align them with Yahweh as favored people in covenant relationship with Him.

It is obvious that Elijah expected to succeed in this mission of restoration to Israel by what follows in the account (1 Kings 19:1-18). It was also obvious from the events that followed in Israel that the purposes of God were otherwise. As those experiencing the New Covenant, we know that the Old Covenant was destined to fail, in order to reveal to humanity, the necessity of the Messiah. This failure demonstrated the glory of Yahweh, His goodness in becoming a man and sacrificing His life for the sin of humanity.

5:19—My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back,

The discourse of James concludes with this statement of a possibility. James’ words have indicated that the readers were straying from the truth. He has addressed double-mindedness—being hearers of the message but not doers. He has spoken to the problem of personal favoritism, to sins in speech, to envy, jealousy, and infighting. He has addressed these as realities among his readers. Now, against the backdrop of Elijah’s ministry, which failed to turn Israel en masse back to Yahweh, James plants in us the challenge to rise to the same kind of calling.

The calling of Elijah was to turn wayward people back towards Yahweh. Yahweh’s ministry at the time of Elijah succeeded among relatively few in Israel (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:1-5).

Similarly, James presents our approach as individual. It should be aimed at turning back one-at-a-time. It is the norm to accomplish just this, and it is a notable achievement to do so.

5:20—let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.

James wants the readers to know that turning sinners from the error of their way is a most significant work to be involved in. This “turning” is the NASB rendering of the word *επιστρεψας*. We find this expression used three times in the life of Peter. It is used of him turning his body or head to be able to see someone or something (John 21:20). It is used of him turning from errant ways to those of truth (Luke 22:32). It is used by him in addressing Jews who needed to believe in Jesus as Yahweh’s Messiah (Acts 3:19). So when used metaphorically it speaks of a shift in mindset. It is choosing to see something through the lens of truth and taking appropriate action. This is the great shift James is challenging us to assist in the lives of others.

James speaks of two results that come about as we assist this shift in the life of another. First, it “saves his soul from death.” This is not an easy expression to understand fully because the terms “save”, “soul”, and “death” are each used in diverse ways in Scripture. The word for “saves” is *σозω*. We have already seen that this term refers to the act of rescue or restoration to wholeness and is used of physical restoration or rescue and of spiritual restoration or rescue (see Appendix 3). The term “soul” is quite often used of someone’s physical life (Matthew 2:20; 6:25; 1 John 3:16). It is also used simply for a person (Acts 7:14; 27:37). It seems to be used of the mind and thought processes (Acts 14:2; 15:24). Its use in the classic way in which we understand the English word “soul”, as speaking strictly of the immaterial part of one’s being that will exist forever, is relatively rare (Luke 2:35; Acts 2:27, 31). The term “death” can refer to physical death (Matthew 26:66; Mark 10:33; Luke 2:26). It is used of being under the death sentence of unforgiven sin, spiritual death, or separation from God (John 5:24; John 8:51). It is used of experiencing consequences of sin—symptoms of separation from God whether believer or unbeliever (Romans 6:16-23; 7:13; 8:6; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 3:14). It is used of the act of sacrificing one’s rights or dying to one’s own desires (2 Corinthians 4:11-12; 11:23; Philippians 3:10).

So saving the soul of someone from death can mean that we turn them to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It can also mean that we save them from physical death sinful ways can bring about. It can also mean we save them from a life lived apart from Yahweh and all the symptoms of spiritual “death” this brings about. To assist someone so that they turn to be governed by the truth is the imparting of life. It is the truth that “sets us free” in all the ways in which that expression can be understood. It saves those we assist and does so in several ways.

A second thing our assist does is that it “covers a multitude of sins”. This expression is difficult as well. Some take it to mean that by assisting someone else we compensate for our own sins. However, such an idea argues against the very essence of the New Covenant. Peter uses a similar expression in stating that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). In that expression he is not saying love compensates for sin in the eyes of God. He may be suggesting that it does so in the judgment of outsiders—those watching to see if Christianity is credible.

He certainly means that love leads us to be merciful toward the sins of others. That idea is taught and affirmed in the Old Testament (Proverbs 10:12; 17:9). To Peter love provided a safe covering in Church life. It was not that such a covering concealed sin. Rather, it restrained the more expected flash of harshness that humans can display toward each other’s offenses.

James is likely using this expression to convey two ideas. First, our work of rescuing others from sin gives credibility to the gospel movement, a movement composed of people of incomplete character. In a sense the transformation of people covers over their moral shortfall. Second, our work of rescuing others averts spiritual disaster in them, particularly if their sin is only in the thought stages and they are turned from it before it involves action. In this way their sin is a more invisible one with consequences that are likely less damaging. So transformation in such moments mitigates the disaster that could have developed and so covers over their sin in this sense.

The idea of covering sin comes from the Old Testament. Those writers teach that sin is not to be covered up by us, meaning concealed. Such a practice is condemned (Psalm 40:10; Proverbs 28:13). On the other hand, the idea is presented that Yahweh was providing a way to deal with sin according to His own standards. This allows Him to “cover” our sin justly (Psalm 32:1, 5; 85:2). He provided the means through the sacrifice of Christ that enables Him to extend forgiveness for our sin. Our sin is a fact of history, demonstrated in a series of events. His “covering” it means it is now to be viewed differently. It is to be viewed as over, dealt with thoroughly and justly by Him.

Within the being of God, love led Him to provide a just means of covering over our sin without violating His justice. In the thought of James, since Yahweh has done this, we are to lead others in embracing this grace of God. This means helping them see their sin through the lens of Yahweh’s grace—real, evil, and offensive, yet paid for, and forgiven. Seeing their sin through this lens of grace enables them to turn from it to the pursuit of truth that will then set them free.

APPENDIX 1

On δοκιμαζειν

The stem word that this family of words comes from is δοκη—watching.

δοκιμιον occurs in James at 1:3. It is a noun, a neuter singular nominative, formed from the adjective δοκιμιος. In the NT this word occurs one other place, at 1 Peter 1:7. It refers to a “means of testing.”

δοκιμος occurs in James 1:12. It is an adjective, a masculine singular nominative. It occurs six other times in the New Testament (Romans 14:18; 16:10; 1 Corinthians 11:19; 2 Corinthians 10:18; 13:7; 2 Timothy 2:15). The adjective δοκιμος denotes one who is tested in battle, reliable, trustworthy. It is used of a man who is tested, significant, recognized, esteemed, worthy. It is also used of objects that are tested, genuine or valuable. It is used of metals consistently in the LXX (Genesis 23:16; 1 Chronicles 28:18; 29:4; 2 Chronicles 9:17).

δοκιμαζειν is a verb meaning “to test” or “to try.” It is found a total of 23 times in the New Testament.

Luke 12:56—Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?

Luke 14:19—And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

Romans 1:28—And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Romans 2:18—And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

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

Romans 14:22—Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

1 Corinthians 3:13—Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.

1 Corinthians 11:28—But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

1 Corinthians 16:3—And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:8—I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

2 Corinthians 8:22—And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you.

2 Corinthians 13:5—Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Galatians 6:4—But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

Ephesians 5:10—Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

Philippians 1:10—That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

1 Thessalonians 2:4—But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 5:21—Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

1 Timothy 3:10—And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

Hebrews 3:9—When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

1 Peter 1:7—That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:

1 John 4:1—Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

It occurs in the LXX at Job 34:3.

The entire word group acquires a refined significance in the New Testament. This significance builds on roots in the Old Testament, then adjusts with certain expectations that the New Covenant raised. The Church in the present age was seen

by the New Testament writers as having received on the one side the salvation of Yahweh based on faith in Christ's work. They were seen on the other side as awaiting the judgment of Christ to whom they would give account. Christian conduct is presented as possible on the one hand due to the salvation of Yahweh and in particular, the indwelling Spirit. This conduct is also cast as fitting, due to the goodness of God. But significantly, it is also presented as profitable—as a means of receiving commendation and reward at the judgment seat of Christ. The word group appears in the context of these realities throughout the New Testament.

There are five theological ideas that seem inherent in the authors of the New Testament as they use these words.

Yahweh is testing humanity. This testing is played out in history and its aim is a day of judgment when God will pass sentence on humanity. The testing will be the record by which He justifies His verdict. This idea that God is testing humanity is clearly present in the Old Testament era (Jeremiah 11:20; 9:7; 6:27; 14:9). The experience was a conscious one that the saints of the era spoke of and sought to subject themselves to so that they would be prepared for all Yahweh had (Psalm 17:3; 26:2; 66:10; 139:1,23).

The primary object of this “testing” is faith. One cannot hope to test well apart from faith in Christ. And then after this comes the challenge to endure in faith. This means choosing to trust Yahweh's goodness as we make decisions in day-to-day matters. It is this latter test that Adam did not pass, which the Exodus generation repeated, and which remains humanity's greatest challenge. Whether testing unregenerate humanity, or the family of the regenerate, the thing being searched out is faith.

The eventuality of appearing at the judgment seat of Christ prescribes a lifestyle, in line with what Yahweh has revealed. While this prospect need not be a fearful one, it is one that reason argues should shape our life. And so we see exhortation to know by “testing” what the will of God is (Romans 12:2; Philippians 1:10). We are also called to “test” ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5), and so hold to the course of the faith. We are also the “test” the times and live appropriately (Luke 12:56). These are all logical and reasonable responses to the fact of our accountability to God.

Θλιψις—trouble, trial, adversity and the like, are presented in the writings of the New Testament as that by which our faith is “documented.” They are not presented as God-sourced. They are presented as allowed by God, with the intention of providing opportunity to us for eternal gain through them.

The writers seem to be envisioning for each individual believer the need to arrive at a point of legitimacy. This point of legitimacy is arrived at through enduring trouble. It does not relate to their legitimacy as members of Yahweh's family, since that is clearly established by faith apart from works. Rather, it seems there is some moment in the heavens when they are seen as documented workers, as certified managers, and servants ready to be entrusted with kingdom responsibility. It is clearly not a human judgment that gives them this legitimacy. It is the Lord Himself. This “tipping point” can be seen as having passed some significant series of tests of stewardship to be deemed “trustworthy.”

APPENDIX 2

Below is a listing of the occurrences of the word *οφελος* in both its noun and verb forms in the New Testament, with a notation in italics of its possible meaning in that context.

Noun Form Use:

1 Corinthians 15:32—If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.

I wasted my time—achieved no life altering benefit. It is a similar question to that of James—a rhetorical question anticipating a negative reply

Occurs in LXX at Job 15:3 “Should he argue with useless talk,” Or with words which are not profitable? The words “not profitable” are set in parallel with “useless”—unprofitable speech is speech that does not convince or advance an argument in the mind of another (in this case God, to ease Job’s own suffering).

Verb Form Use:

Matthew 15:5, Mark 7:11—But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; Used of practical help, aid—of that which helps someone in need

Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36; Luke 9:25—For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? A rhetorical question anticipating a negative reply. It anticipates not only a lack of gain, but an actual loss. Where the phrase “lose his own soul” occurs, the verb rendered lose can be legitimately taken to mean injure or damage, not necessarily total loss

Mark 5:26—And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, Used of a situation in which good health did not result, in fact, health deteriorated. Not only a lack of profit, but an actual loss occurred.

John 6:63—It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. Used to indicate what is ineffective in producing spiritual health

Romans 2:25—For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

Used of gaining merit or credit—in this case of hypothetical merit with God

1 Corinthians 13:3—And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Used of personal merit

1 Corinthians 14:6—Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? Used of the practical value or benefit to others.

Galatians 5:2—Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. Used of the impact or value of the sacrifice of Christ—could mean that they negate its efficacy in their behalf in the matter of justification, but more likely that they negate its day-to-day efficacy in the matter of forgiveness and experience of the Spirit.

Hebrews 4:2—For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. Used of that which benefits someone's spiritual condition by increased maturity

Hebrews 13:9—Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. Used of what produces spiritual health and fitness.

APPENDIX 3

Below is a listing of all the occurrences of σωζω in the New Testament, with a notation in italics of its possible meaning in that context.

Matthew 1:21—And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

Here the term is speaking of the full salvation of Yahweh provided through Christ's death for all who believe. Yahweh provides for this forgiveness for the penalty of their sin, power through the indwelling Spirit over the influence of sin in their present lives, and eventual rescue from the presence of sin and eternal life away from any influence of evil.

Matthew 8:25—And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.

Salvation speaks here of rescue from physical death by drowning.

Matthew 9:21—For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.

The term as used here means wholeness or physical health.

Matthew 9:22—But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.

The term is referencing the fact that the woman has been rescued from disease and made healthy. There may be a broader salvation that came to her through her faith, but the immediate subject was her physical health

Matthew 10:22—And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

This usage could be speaking of the full experience of Yahweh's salvation that is experienced by those who endure, or it could be speaking of those alive on earth just before the second coming of Christ, when endurance will be rewarded by the actual physical intervention of Christ who will fight for His own and deliver them from the persecution and trauma of the anti-Christ, and even saving their physical lives..

Matthew 14:30—But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.

Rescue from danger to one's physical life is the meaning of the term here.

Matthew 16:25—For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

This refers to acts of self-preservation, whereby one chose to grab hold of all that may provide physical safety or even pleasure and meaning for their own lives. So its meaning is fundamentally that of soundness—though by one’s own estimation.

Matthew 18:11—For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost

To save here is to bring the experience of Yahweh’s salvation from the penalty, power, and presence of sin to those who are otherwise lost in it.

Matthew 19:25—When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

This is a reference to soundness in terms of one’s relationship to God and in particular, entrance into His kingdom.

Matthew 24:13—But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved

See under Matthew 10:22

Matthew 24:22—And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.

See under Matthew 10:22

Matthew 27:40—And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

A call to rescue oneself from an obvious peril and predicament.

Matthew 27:42—He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

A reference to Christ’s claim that he would provide salvation to all who believe, and a reference to saving one’s physical life from certain death.

Matthew 27:49—The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

A reference to rescue from peril.

Mark 3:4—And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

To save as used here is obviously to save a physical life.

Mark 5:23—And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.

To be healed from a physical illness and restored to sound health.

Mark 5:28—For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.

To be healed from physical sickness and restored to sound health.

Mark 5:34—And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

Physical health.

Mark 6:56—And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.

Physical healing is in view here.

Mark 8:35—For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

This refers to acts of self-preservation, whereby one chooses to grab hold of all that may provide physical safety or even pleasure and meaning for their own lives. So its meaning is fundamentally that of soundness—though by one's own estimation. Second usage is a reference to spiritual soundness and likely emotional as well.

Mark 10:26—And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?

Has to do with right standing with God and in the context specifically with entering the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:52—And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

A reference to the healing of the physical body.

Mark 13:13—And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

See under Matthew 10:22

Mark 13:20—And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

The saving of physical lives is in view in this usage.

Mark 15:30—Save thyself, and come down from the cross.

This references deliverance from a physical peril—crucifixion, that would bring about death apart from rescue.

Mark 15:31—Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save.

First usage refers to Jesus' projection that he would save all who believed and make them right with God. Second usage refers to the saving of one's physical life.

Mark 16:16—He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.

Refers to being put right with God with respect to His final judgment.

Luke 6:9—Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?

The preservation of physical life is in view here.

Luke 7:50—And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

This usage is that of a woman's health being restored.

Luke 8:12—Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

This refers to rescue from slavery to evil—the spiritual restoration and health that the truth brings into a life. It speaks of rescue and wholeness in time and eternity.

Luke 8:36—They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

A state of wholeness in the present—emotional, physical, and spiritual, that resulted when a demon was expelled.

Luke 8:48—And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

Speaks of physical healing.

Luke 8:50—But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.

Used in the sense of physical wellness.

Luke 9:24—For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.

This refers to acts of self-preservation, whereby one chooses to grab hold of all that may provide physical safety or even pleasure and meaning for their own lives. So its meaning is fundamentally that of soundness—though by one's own estimation. Second usage is a reference to spiritual soundness and likely emotional as well.

Luke 9:56—For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

This is the broadest use of the term, referring to the complete salvation plan of Yahweh whereby humanity will be freed from all the effects of Adam's fall.

Luke 13:23—Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them.

This appears to be speaking of the few who are being restored to right relationship with God through the truth as Jesus revealed it.

Luke 17:19—And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

This is a reference to physical health and wholeness.

Luke 18:26—And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?

This is a reference to entrance into the kingdom of God.

Luke 18:42—And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.

Used in the sense of the restoration of physical sight.

Luke 19:10—For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

A reference to Jesus' role in the plan of God to provide eternal rescue and soundness for humanity.

Luke 23:35—And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

First usage refers to Jesus' projection that he would save all who believed and make them right with God. Second usage refers to the saving of one's physical life from peril.

Luke 23:37—And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

Save refers to delivering oneself from the physical peril of the cross.

Luke 23:39—And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

To deliver from danger and threat to one's physical life.

John 3:17—For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

The fullest sense of the term, restored to right relationship with God to be rescued from peril in time and eternity and to experience God's pleasure as it was meant to be.

John 5:34—But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved.

The broad sense of the term—restoration to health and soundness with Yahweh Creator.

John 10:9—I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

The term is clarified by the phrase that follows it. Saved in this context means to “go in and out and find pasture”—to experience fully Yahweh's care and provision.

John 11:12—Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

A reference to physical health and restoration.

John 12:27—Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.

Jesus uses “save” here in the sense of being kept by God from the suffering and death of the cross.

John 12:47—And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.

Speaks of the entire intention of Yahweh to restore humanity to Himself, undoing the damage of the fall.

Acts 2:21—And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Saved means restored to their place with Yahweh and the physical, emotional, mental soundness that will result.

Acts 2:40—And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief but is emphasizing the beginning—what we refer to as being justified.

Acts 2:47—Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief.

Acts 4:9—If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole.

Physical healing is being referred to.

Acts 4:12—Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief.

Acts 11:14—Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief.

Acts 14:9—The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed.

Physical healing is the sense of this usage.

Acts 15:1—And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Be fully restored to Yahweh. It most certainly is speaking of the full experience of Yahweh's salvation and likely assumes some more partial experience of it that the recipients had entered.

Acts 15:11—But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief.

Acts 16:30—And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

In the mind of the jailer, it likely was an uncertainty and arose out of an awareness that he needed something from their God—to be made right with Him.

Acts 16:31—And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Refers to being put right with God and made one of His children.

Acts 27:20—And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Saved meant that they would find their way out of the peril of a severe storm safe and sound.

Acts 27:31—Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

Come safely through the weather event that they were caught in.

Romans 5:9—Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

To be safe and sound when God judges sin and sinners.

Romans 5:10—For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

Refers to all that can potentially be laid hold of in this life and eternity through repentance and belief.

Romans 8:24—For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

Refers here to the state of safety and soundness that all who have faith are in because of their faith. They are safe with regard to God's judgment, and they are made sound by their access to Him through the presence of the Holy Spirit in them.

Romans 9:27—Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved.

Rendered safe with regard to God's judgment and restored to relationship with Him.

Romans 10:9—That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Enter and experience His salvation involving forgiveness, transformation in the present to not be enslaved by sin, and full transformation in the future.

Romans 10:13—For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

They will be forgiven for sin, and they will be granted wisdom regarding the peril of the moment, that which led to their cry.

Romans 11:14—If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Lead them to repentance and belief to bring them into the experience of Yahweh's salvation.

Romans 11:26—And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.

Led to belief in Jesus Christ to be forgiven and restored to Yahweh.

1 Corinthians 1:18—For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

The present, ongoing experience of forgiveness and moment by moment escape from the ways of sin that are instinctive in us.

1 Corinthians 1:21—For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

The experience of Yahweh's forgiveness and access to all He has for His children.

1 Corinthians 3:15—If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

"Saved" here means that the person will be spared from condemnation in judgment, though their work will be condemned.

1 Corinthians 5:5—To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

See above 1 Corinthians 3:15. In this case the person's spirit is "saved," meaning they will be resurrected as other believers and so will not be eternally condemned by God, though judged in this life.

1 Corinthians 7:16—For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?

In both cases the idea is that of bringing another to the knowledge of truth that will result in them experiencing Yahweh's salvation in the present and through eternity.

1 Corinthians 9:22—To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

"Save" here means to bring another to a knowledge of truth so that they repent and believe and experience Yahweh's salvation presently and eternally.

1 Corinthians 10:33—Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

This is speaking of the entire scope of Yahweh's salvation plan, its present experience and eternal experience.

1 Corinthians 15:2—By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

The meaning of the term saved is clarified here by the phrase that follows. In the gospel there is the experience of transformation—salvation and rescue from the power of sin that enslaves us. We experience this to the degree that we exercise faith—what Paul is referring to as “keeping in memory what I preached.” This is not revering to our future salvation and protection from condemnation since it is obviously conditional.

2 Corinthians 2:15—For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.

Those who stand forgiven and so accepted by God through Christ.

2:5—Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Ephesians Christ, (by grace ye are saved.

Saved here refers to the experience of the full salvation promised by Yahweh.

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

Saved here refers to the experience of the full salvation promised by Yahweh.

1 Thessalonians 2:16—Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Saved is speaking about the privilege of entering into the experience of the full salvation promised by Yahweh.

2 Thessalonians 2:10—And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

To be made right with Yahweh through Christ and so enter the full salvation He has promised.

1 Timothy 1:15—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

The term “save” here speaks of Yahweh’s plan to rescue the guilty from condemnation and separation from Him, their Creator, and restore them to their original state and purpose in creation.

1 Timothy 2:4—Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

To be rescued from sin and sinfulness and restored fully to their Creator.

1 Timothy 2:15—Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

This is likely referring to the birth of THE child, the coming of God to earth through woman to provide salvation to all who believe, and the complete experience of union

with Yahweh in every moment to those who are diligent in that faith. It is likely referring as well to the fact that women cannot be stripped of dignity and harangued because of Eve's choice, because humanity owes their ongoing existence to women—the bearers of humankind. So in that sense their dignity was preserved safe and sound by the fact that every human is indebted to a women.

1 Timothy 4:16—Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

The salvation spoken of here is the ongoing experience of being saved from instinctive human behavior that enslaves us to sin. Accurate understanding of what is true about us, God, and our world saves us from what would more naturally evolve in our day to day lives.

2 Timothy 1:9—Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

We are saved in the sense of a passed event that has been accomplished and completed because we have been forgiven and placed in Christ. Our sins have been removed through His blood. So the terms “saved” as it is used here is being used as it is most generally thought of in American Christianity—speaking of the moment of belief when we were pardoned by Yahweh for our sin.

2 Timothy 4:18—And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

σωζω is rendered in this verse with the English word “preserve.” Here it speaks of the portion of Yahweh's salvation plan that we have not experienced yet. It remains a future event. We will be raised from the dead and given new bodies and separated permanently and eternally from evil.

Titus 3:5—Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.

This usage of saved is referring to the work accomplished in us in the moment of belief. It can legitimately be viewed as done, though God's entire intention in our salvation is not yet done.

Hebrews 5:7—Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.

This verse is speaking of the ongoing prayers of Jesus during His life when He needed protection from the plots and schemes of evil men and evil beings. He prayed to the Father for salvation—rescue and safe-keeping, through all the intrusions of evil that came His way.

Hebrews 7:25—Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

This verse captures the scope of Yahweh's plan of salvation. It looks forward to the complete salvation of all who believe. That will have been saved in this life from the penalty of sin to be re-joined to God's Spirit. They will have been saved in this life from the power of sin on countless occasions and forgiven for those times they slipped into sin. They will have finally been saved once raised from the dead from the entire presence of sin in their beings and in their experience. This is the fullest sense of the term σωζω.

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.

The practice of laying aside certain things and receiving the truth from the Holy Spirit enables us to be saved in the day-to-day events of our lives to live them according to His will. So our existence (a legit. use of the term soul), is "saved" in the sense that it is reclaimed and made whole spiritually.

James 2:14—What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

The salvation in question is the same as what James spoke of in 1:21, the moment-by-moment reclamation of our lives so that they conform to Yahweh's will instead of the destructive desires of our own flesh.

James 4:12—There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

God alone has power to pardon us for offenses to His Law. "Save" here is speaking of forgiveness for offenses to God.

James 5:15—And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Save is used here in the sense of restoration to physical wholeness and health.

James 5:20—Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

"Save" as used here speaks to bringing another to the point of recognition of the truth about their sin. It could be understood either as THE moment of repentance, or simply A moment of repentance.

1 Peter 3:21—The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism likely is being used by Peter as synonymous with one's belief in Christ. So the salvation being spoken of is that of one's initial repentance and belief whereby they are forgiven and are placed in Christ, made members of the family of God.

1 Peter 4:18—And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

Speaking of Salvation as will be fully carried out according to Yahweh's plan. It scarcely happens in the sense that it requires something more than the best efforts of the best people. They themselves are saved only by mercy.

Jude 5—I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

“Saved” is used here of rescue from the plight of physical slavery and oppression—rescue to justice.

Jude 23—And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Refers to the work of bringing others to the knowledge of truth and to repentance to experience Yahweh's work of salvation for themselves.

Revelation 21:24—And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

This use of “saved” is a look forward at those who have experienced the end of Yahweh's salvation plan.

SOME ROUGH TALLIES . . .

55 verses seem to be speaking to the salvation experience of humanity, that of being restored to wholeness with Yahweh.

31 of these can be understood as focusing on salvation, simply viewing it in its entirety (Matthew 1:21 is typical of these).

Eight seem to be focusing on its entry point, belief leading to forgiveness and right standing with God (Mark 15:31; Luke 8:12; Acts 16:31 are examples).

10 seem to be focusing on its ongoing aspect whereby we are being saved from godless patterns and habits that grow in us due to our fallen state (Luke 13:23; John 10:9; Romans 5:10; 1 Timothy 4:16 are examples).

Six seem to be focusing on its future aspect, the future when we will be saved fully—restored to a sinless state (Romans 5:9; 1 Corinthians 3:17; 5:5; 2 Timothy 4:18).

20 verses speak to rescue or safe keeping in terms of some physical danger, of which Matthew 8:25 is typical.

18 verses speak to healing from some physical malady, of which Matthew 9:21 is typical.

Eight verses are somewhat vague in their precise sense, of which Matthew 10:22 is typical.

A SUMMARY

The term “salvation” is the key one in this phrase and understanding how it was used by the authors of Scripture is the key to understanding not only this verse but the whole New Testament. When we use this term today as Christians it is the term for God’s act of saving us from the penalty of Sin so that we will go to heaven instead of hell once we die. In its usage in the Old and New Testaments, the term rarely has this meaning. The verb “to save” occurs first in the Bible in Exodus 2:17. There it describes Moses’ act of help in watering the sheep belonging to Jethro, tended by his daughters. This usage is typical of the way it is used in the Old Testament. It describes acts that rescue another from danger or defeat (Deuteronomy 22:27; Josh. 10:6; Judges 12:2). The noun form occurs first in Genesis 49:18, where the salvation of Yahweh is spoken of. This idea of Yahweh’s saving acts becomes a frequent theme of Old Testament writers. These saving acts are related to rescue from oppression, from enemies in war, from disease, from bondage of various forms. It is used very rarely in the way we use it in the Church today. Yahweh’s salvation was seen very broadly, as His entire activity that grew out of a relational bond He formed, which then related to all aspects of our lives in an evil world. It referred to all that His children experienced daily to be rescued from myriads of emotional, spiritual, and physical dangers. It is a great challenge we must rise to in interpreting the New Testament to force ourselves to read the word “salvation” in this way.

This is the salvation God has always offered. It is certainly about rescue from hell. It is equally about rescue from sinful habits, and perils of every other sort. Yahweh’s salvation simply flows out of who He is, and so encompasses virtually every area of the human experience. It begins for us in a series of decisions made by God before the creation of the World (Ephesians 1:3-4; 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8; 17:8). Yahweh’s salvation will culminate in his new creation when we live with Him on the new earth (Revelation 21:1-8). So it is proper to speak of ourselves as having been saved, of being saved, and of one day getting saved.

APPENDIX 4

Relevant uses of preposition kata in the New Testament:

κατα ιδιαν — Matthew 17:19; 20:17; 24:3; (Adj, Fem, Sing, Acc)

κατα εαυτον — Acts 28:16; reflexive pronoun (3rd person, Masc, Sing, Acc)

κατα σεαυτον — Romans 14:22; reflexive pronoun (2nd person, Masc, Sing, Acc)

κατα — James at 2:8; 17; 3:9, 14; 5:9; preposition (Adj, Acc of reference)

APPENDIX 5

Hebrews 10:22— “let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”.

The author of Hebrews expresses similar thought to what James 4:8 expresses, and the commentary below on that passage is a helpful addition to an understanding of James’ words and his entire theme.

Based on the statements of the previous three verses the author now moves on to the point he began to touch earlier in Hebrews (4:16). The thought is that we must take advantage of all this that has been accomplished by Jesus in our behalf and draw near. Two other exhortations will be given in the next two verses. These set a decidedly practical tone for this entire section of the letter that runs through the end of chapter 10.

The three “let us” statements of verses 22-25 are hortatory subjunctives. The construction is a friendly way of giving a command. It is a leader extending an invitation to a follower to walk alongside him in a mutually beneficial course of action. So it is an exhortation with the force of a command. These three “let us” statements capture the heart of the author of Hebrews. They embody the grand theme of the book and express the action he wishes to inspire in his followers through this great treatise.

To this central concept of drawing near, several short phrases are added that describe an accompanying mentality that we are to embrace. It is a mentality that grows out of pondering and understanding the very great work of Christ the author has been delineating. It is a new way of viewing ourselves, legitimate because of the “standing” that has been accorded to us through the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). There are four of these short phrases that summarize the effect of the work of Christ on our standing with Yahweh.

First, we are to draw near with a true heart. In a sense the remaining phrases all develop this idea and define what is involved in having a “true heart.” The heart was the thing Yahweh pinpointed as unaddressed by the old covenant (Deuteronomy 5:29; 29:4; 30:6; Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 31:33). It is also the thing He promised to change with the new covenant. Interestingly the Greek word for true, ἀληθῆα, is formed from the word meaning to cover, with the α privative prefixed to it. Though it is going too far to say the word means “not covered,” it is true that in the case of the old covenant, obedience by rote covered a bad heart (Isaiah 29:13-14). It is also true that the promise of God stated early on was to circumcise the hearts of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 30:6). Circumcision is essentially a removal and an uncovering. All this language refers to the joining of Yahweh’s Spirit to ours, made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf. A true heart is one that is being directed by the Holy Spirit, inspired by Him to draw near to Yahweh. So the Holy Spirit impresses on our minds our need to draw near. We are to do so at His bidding, whenever and wherever we happen to be.

Second, we are to follow the Spirit’s bidding in “full assurance of faith. Failure to believe in the goodness of Yahweh, and failure to believe in His special care for them was the essence of the failure of the Israelites under the old covenant. They were never fully assured of His intent to bond with them and to extend His goodness to

them. We must not fail at this point. We must be confident of God's goodness, as proven through the favor He extended to us in Christ.

Because of the work of Christ, we have no need to be concerned in life's moments with our right to draw near, or with our cleanness/uncleanness. The basic right and privilege is always ours. It is our standing. The bidding of the Holy Spirit is itself assurance that Yahweh desires to be good to us. There may indeed be first things that we need to address with Yahweh as we converse with Him. But there is no doubt that drawing near Him is what the moment holds for us. We too can fail easily at this point, finding ourselves incapable of trusting His goodness and His intent to bless us. We too can feel cursed. We are to allow the truth about God's mindset toward us, as it was embodied in Christ, to assure our hearts in those moments. We are to be people fully assured by our trust in what He has demonstrated of His goodness, grace, and love toward us, so that we are eager for His company.

This urging to "draw near in full assurance of faith" stands out in sharp contrast to the testimony of the Pentateuch regarding the wilderness generation. They failed to trust Moses' testimony regarding God's display on the mountain and requested distance between themselves and Yahweh (Deuteronomy 5:22-27). They went on to test Him ten times, each testing being a specific distrust of Yahweh's intentions in leading them out of Egypt (Numbers 14:1-4, 11, 22). The author has referred often to this wilderness generation so that their actions form the backdrop for this exhortation in the mind of the attentive reader. Faith and trust are of deep importance to Yahweh!

There is a third short phrase in this verse that helps us understand what it is to "draw near with a true heart." It is the phrase "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." This phrase and the following one are intentionally placed in language of the old covenant. The blood of an animal sacrificed was sprinkled on the worshiper or on the object for which it was offered. This sprinkling visibly demonstrated that the objects or person's evil/uncleanness had been compensated for according to the terms of the Law. The term "sprinkle" became one that Yahweh used to describe the cleansing work He Himself would do through Christ both on Israel (Ezekiel 36:25), and on other nations (Isaiah 52:15). The term is used by the author here in an important way. The work God was doing in the wake of Jesus' death was solidly linked earlier in this chapter to the Old Testament promises of the new covenant (10:1-18). Through the word "sprinkle" that linkage is subtly reinforced here.

The real power of Christ's sacrifice is presented in such terms so that the symbolic actions of the old covenant could resume their intended role of being a visible demonstration of Yahweh's salvation. The sprinkling done under the old covenant only related to external appearance. The sprinkling done through the sacrifice of Christ relates to the cleansing of the inner being. The death of Christ produced the bonding of God's Spirit to the spirits of believers. The Holy Spirit renews their consciences. These had atrophied through a lack of use and had become unreliable through a lack of truth. Through His presence the conscience is enabled to give a reliable witness from within regarding the will of God in real life matters.

The conscience, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, becomes an important factor in our drawing near to God. It will convict us of any growing distance that begins to develop. It will also guide us to the specific reasons that distance is developing areas of neglect and sinfulness. The sprinkling of the heart is an accomplished work of Christ that enables an ongoing process of cleansing. We are to give attention to the voice of our conscience in the process of drawing near to God. Our confidence in drawing near is enabled first and foremost by our faith in the work of Christ. On a practical level our

confidence is strengthened by a clear conscience that leads us to confess sin to Him and resolve the inevitable messes that develop through the weakness of our flesh.

There is a fourth and final phrase in this verse that describes action that accompanies drawing near with a true heart. It is the phrase “and our bodies washed with pure water.” This phrase follows the pattern of the previous one in that it uses old covenant language and imagery to project a new covenant reality. Under the old covenant there was a basin located between the altar and the tent of meeting. Whenever the priests ministered with respect to the altar or in the tent of meeting, they were to wash their hands and feet with water from that basin, or they would die (Exodus 30:17-21). The priest who entered the holy place once a year, could do so only attired in special clothing and that only after a special washing (Leviticus 16:4). The book of Leviticus records many laws with respect to washings that were to be observed by worshipers to be ceremonially pure. All these washings were intended to raise the awareness of the inherent moral shortfall of humanity next to the perfection of Yahweh, and of the corrupting effect of life in an evil world. In the work of Christ, we are cleansed from all the guilt brought about by the thoughts and actions we carry out in our bodies as a result of our own fallen nature and our fallen world. Our outward behavior does matter to God. The first three phrases relate to inner changes the work of Christ has brought about in our beings. This phrase relates to those deeds we do in real life that grow out of sin within us and that were atoned for by the death of Christ.

In contemplating these four phrases and the truths they speak of, we are always aware of the “already-not-yet” aspect of the great truths of Christ. By that we mean that we are cleansed in Christ in terms of our guilt, but not entire cleansed of our inherent evil that lurks in our flesh.

That cleansing awaits us. Because of that there is a sense in which as we draw near, we need to do the work of purifying ourselves through repentance and confession of those things the Holy Spirit convicts us of. That is the ongoing nature of our relationship with Yahweh under the present form of the new covenant. Fallen people in a fallen world are experiencing the new covenant. It will be experienced by believers in a completely renewed state on a new earth, at which time this “already-not-yet” era will be history.