

**JAMES: Faith That Works**  
**By**  
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**I. THE MAN AND HIS MESSAGE, James 1:1**

Holy Scripture was given to us with a two-fold purpose: to tell us what to believe and how to behave. I enjoy listening to a Bible teacher who can open up the meaning of the Bible and then show me how it applies to personal life.

One of the most practical books of the Bible is called “The General Epistle of James.” It is the twentieth book in the New Testament. It is called a “general epistle” because it was addressed to the family of God as a whole and not to a particular church or person. The book is brief. It has only 5 chapters with 108 verses. The book has been overlooked by many. Yet it is one of the most challenging books in the Christian Scriptures because it calls believers to a practical expression of their faith in Jesus.

The theme of “The General Epistle of James” is this: The faith that saves is a faith that works. We might select James 1:22 as a key verse, “*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.*” Or James 2:26 might be a key verse, “*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*” It is that theme which we shall develop in fifteen studies of “The General Epistle of James.”

### **The Writer**

The writer is “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” James was such a common name in New Testament times that there are four believers named James who appear in the Gospel records. (1) James was the father of Judas, one of the apostles of Jesus (Luke 6:16). (2) James was the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3), known as James the less (Mark 15:40). (3) James was the brother of John and the son of Zebedee (Matthew 4:21), one of the inner circle of apostles. (4) James was the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55) and the brother of the writer of “The General Epistle of Jude.” We believe it was that half-brother of Jesus who wrote our epistle under study just now.

James did not accept Jesus’ claim to be Messiah at first. He even tried to get Jesus to quit His ministry, thinking Him mentally unstable (Mark 3:21-31). But Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:7), and James became a believer. He was later recognized as an apostle (Galatians 1:19) and was chief pastor of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15).

Here is a man who knew Jesus better than any other, growing up in the same house with Him. Here is a man who yielded to Jesus as Savior and Lord, considering himself a “bondslave” of Jesus. Here is his epistle—a book worth reading, written by a man worth knowing, about the practice of a faith worth having.

### **The recipients**

The original recipients of the epistle were “*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.*” Who were they? They were Jewish people, indicated by their identification as “the twelve tribes.” They may have been non-Christian Jews of the dispersion, all Christians whether Jews or Gentiles, or Christian Jews scattered from

their homeland. We believe they were Christian Jews living outside of Palestine.

Why would James write to them? Remember the earliest Christians were all Jewish. Some had been converted at the Christian Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. Others were scattered by the persecution led by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8). They all needed encouragement. So the Epistle was written to confirm their faith. The contents of the book indicate that the readers were in the midst of trials (1:2-12; 5:10, 11), were negligent in living their faith (1:22-25; 4:1-11) and had some doctrinal problems (1-13-16). “The General Epistle of James” remedies those problems, then and now.

### **The purpose**

The purpose of the Epistle is to produce conduct which agrees with our confession of Christ. It calls us to demonstrate with our lives what we say with our lips—to perform what we profess. It is an imperative to believe and behave as becomes true Christians.

So the text deals with trials, temptations, religious practice, partiality among believers, the necessity of works, control of speech, spiritual wisdom, the danger of worldliness and the importance of putting God in plans for the future. It warns against the improper use of wealth, calls for patience, teaches how to pray and gives guidelines about restoring an erring brother. How practical! How needful! How profitable to understand this book and apply its principles to our personal lives!

### **The date**

“The General Epistle of James” was one of the first books of the Christian Scriptures to be written. It may have been written within 15 years of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The contents of the book indicate its early date, so we believe it was written about A.D. 45.

James had come to trust Jesus as personal Savior only about a dozen years before writing this book. The freshness of his faith is still evident as he calls his half-brother his “Lord Jesus Christ.” The book was written by James in Jerusalem. From a place so hallowed by the ministry of Jesus, from the heart of a man who was half-brother of Jesus, with the fervor of a believer who was but shortly before converted to faith in Jesus, came “The General Epistle of James.”

### **The salutation**

The message of the book begins with the salutation, “*Greetings*” (verse 1). The word means far more than our saying, “Hello.” It literally means “to rejoice, to be glad.” What a strange salutation with which to begin this letter. James will refer

immediately to “diverse temptations” and “the trying of your faith” which requires “patience” (verses 2, 3). It is evident that his readers were in trouble and were to endure it for a long while before relief came. Yet, his first word to them was “Rejoice!”

How can one rejoice when he is surrounded by problems, when he sees no answers and when he finds no relief? He can rejoice in the assurance of faith. Through faith we understand, *“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). So even in the salutation of his epistle James calls for the exercise of faith.

Following the greeting to “rejoice,” James calls for the exercise of “*all joy*” (verse 2), pure and unmixed joy of the highest quality. Notice that he does not call us to be “happy” but to experience “joy.” Happiness depends on external circumstances; joy depends on spiritual relationship. Joy comes from believing in Jesus. It is “*joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (I Peter 1:8). So if you trust Jesus, I salute you with “*Rejoice!*”, in the blessed assurance of faith.

## **II. THE WORK OF FAITH IN TRIALS, James 1:2-12**

Having greeted his readers with a wish for spiritual joy (“Rejoice!”), the Apostle James turns immediately to a discussion of trials the Christian must endure. He makes six statements concerning the exercise of faith in times of trial.

### **Faith does not prohibit trials**

James writes, “*Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations*” (verse 2). Notice that the text does not say, “If ye fall,” but, rather, “WHEN ye fall” into different kinds of trials. Trials will come. If you were as sinless and sufficient as Jesus Christ, you would still experience trials. Jesus warned us, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Trials do not mean that God has forsaken you or that He no longer loves you or that He is punishing you. They mean that you are mortal and living in a imperfect world. Do not permit trials to hinder your faith. Rather, meet trials with the exercise of faith. Expect good to come from your trials. Know that God is with you through the trials. Draw near to God in the midst of your trials, and the burden will become a blessing! You can trust God to make it so.

### **Faith produces joy in trials**

Our text suggests, “Count it ALL JOY when ye fall into diverse temptations” (verse 2). That is more than approaching trouble with an optimistic spirit. “All joy” means full joy, the greatest joy, unblemished joy. As a mother looks to the birth of her child with great anticipation and joy, even though it involves the pain of childbirth, so you

know that beyond the trials are the treasures they bring.

The ancient prophet Habakkuk lived in a dying nation. Military invasion was coming. The land would be so devastated that there would be no crops in the fields or animals left in the pastures of that agricultural community. But Habakkuk trusted God and wrote, “*Yet will I rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength*” (Habakkuk 3:18, 19a). That is faith producing joy in trials. You can take joyfully your losses if you are sure “*that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance*” (Hebrews 10:34). Fiery trials will come to some of us, “*but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings*” (I Peter 4:13). Your faith will keep you from defeat and produce joy in the midst of your sufferings. Keep on trusting the Lord.

### **Faith expects benefits from trials**

James assures us, “*The trying of your faith worketh patience...that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*” (verses 3, 4). As the heat of the furnace purifies the ore by melting it and removing impurities from it, so the fire of trials purifies us. So Job testified, “*When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). The apostle Peter wrote, “*The trials of your faith, being much more precious than of gold...might be found unto the praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (I Peter 1:7). Again, the Bible says, “*No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*” (Hebrews 12:11).

Here is what faith can do in your trials. It will enable you to pray, “Father, I can see no possible good to come out of this situation. But I trust you, and I thank you in advance for the good you will produce.” Faith expects benefits to come from trials. Keep on looking to God in your troubles.

### **Faith claims wisdom in trials**

Here is a person who just cannot see a reason or any good for the trouble he is experiencing. He knows the promises of God regarding trials, but he does not see how they apply to his situation. Let him follow the admonition of James 1:5, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*” The counsel is, “Ask God to enable you to see what He is doing in the He has permitted to come upon you. Ask Him for wisdom to know how to respond to the pressure, whether you fully understand it or not. And He will give such wisdom to you.”

Our vision is so limited that we cannot see the work of God in a problem until long after the problem is solved. But a person of faith will ask God for wisdom in dealing with the problem that the best possible thing can come from it. Ask without doubting or wavering. Ask, and God will give, and you will rejoice.

### **Faith experiences peace in the midst of trials**

The result of trials may sometimes exalt the lowly and sometimes bring down the mighty, but the person of faith will experience peace in those changing circumstances. The adjustments required may be painful, but they will be endured with assurance that God is in control. So peace will fill the heart of the one who trusts Him (verses 9-11).

Hebrews 13:5, 6 counsels us, *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”* Being assured of God’s presence and care, we can endure any trouble that comes.

An artist painted a picture of a cliff by the sea where a fierce storm was raging. Waves were dashing, and trees were falling. But under the outcropping of a rock, protected from wind and rain, a little bird sat peacefully on its nest. We who trust Jesus believe, *“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms”* (Deuteronomy 33:27). We have peace in the storms of trials.

### **Faith finds rewards from trials**

James 1:12 is the most reassuring verse in this paragraph. It reads, *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”* What a precious promise. It assures us of treasures beyond the trials. It believes that *“our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”* (II Corinthians 4:17, 18). What blessed assurance!

God uses trials to purify us and make us more like Jesus in this world (Hebrews 12:11). And God uses trials to increase our rewards in heaven (II Corinthians 4:17, 18). So there are rewards both here and there. Endure your hardships with a confident faith that “it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.”

Trust God when all is well. Trust God when it seems the whole world is against you. Trust God and He will make your troubles become your treasures.

## **III. THE WORK OF FAITH IN TEMPTATIONS, James 1:13-16**

The testings of trials may become enticements to evil when the devil becomes involved. Therefore, James moves from a discussion of how to deal with our trials (1:2-12) to a discussion of how to deal with temptation to evil (1:13-16). To be found in this paragraph are six principles which will help you and me deal with enticements to evil in our own lives. Notice the place of faith in God as we deal with the problem of temptation to sin.

### **Faith recognizes the nature of temptation**

Temptation is an enticement to evil, an incitement to wrong doing (verse 13). It is not of God. It is of the devil. Faith recognizes that there is a right and a wrong in this world. It believes the right agrees with God and the wrong opposes God. It believes that if we don't do what is right, God is displeased, and we suffer as a consequence. It believes that if we do what is right, God is pleased, and we rejoice as a consequence. The person who casts off faith in God may have no standard of right and wrong by which to govern his actions, and he becomes like a ship at sea without a pilot to steer her.

James 1:14 describes the nature of temptation in these words, "*Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*" That's it! "*Drawn away* (from God) *by his own lust.*" Faith confesses that yielding to temptation never makes one a better person or closer to God. It leads to sin, which always injures us. The element of evil is always involved in temptation. Flee from it!

### **Faith comprehends the scope of temptation**

"*Let no man say WHEN he is tempted...But EVERY MAN is tempted,*" according to our text (verses 13, 14). It is not "IF" one is tempted to sin but "WHEN" one is tempted. Temptation will come. It does not mean that you are a wicked and vile person. It means that you are a normal human being. Jesus was sinless and self-sufficient, but He was tempted to sin (Matthew 4:1; Hebrews 4:15). And you will be tempted also.

"*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man*" (I Corinthians 10:13). Every temptation is "common to man," the experience of people in general. What you experience, others have experienced. In the areas in which you are enticed, others have been enticed. And as others have gained the victory over evil, so can you. Believe it and seek it with God's help.

### **Faith understands the source of temptation**

James 1:13, 14 makes it so clear that temptation to sin never comes from God but from within our own depraved nature. Notice that (1) God cannot be tempted to sin, (2) neither does He tempt anyone to sin, but (3) a person is tempted when he permits his own lust to draw him away. But what excites the lust and makes it desire to do wrong? The devil!

Matthew 4:1 reports of the wilderness temptation of Jesus that He was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness "*to be tempted of the devil.*" Tempted by whom? "*The devil.*" He is called "*the tempter*" in I Thessalonians 3:5. He is a person of inveterate evil who is committed to leading into sin every person he can influence.

When a temptation arises, faith accepts the witness of Scripture and knows the devil is at work. It turns from his to God. It knows God is a refuge from temptation

and seeks His strength to resist. And so the victory can be won if a person believes God and what He has said in the Holy Bible.

### **Faith knows the course of temptation**

The course of temptation is ever downward to increasing sin. James 1:14, 15 gives the steps: (1) There is the improper desire as lust is aroused. (2) There is the act which commits the sin. (3) There is the judgment, which is called “death.” Look again at the progress of temptation: from desire to deed to discipline—from lust to sin to death. That is not the course of only a few temptations or temptation to the worst of sin. That is the course of every temptation.

Look back to Genesis 3 and remember the temptation of Eve concerning the fruit of the forbidden tree. (1) There was desire: she saw the fruit was good for food and wanted to eat of it. (2) There was action: she took of the fruit and gave some to her husband; then they both ate of it. (3) There was discipline: They were both put out of the Garden of Eden and excluded from the personal presence of God, being condemned to burdensome toil and physical death. That is the course of every temptation to evil. Beware! “*Resist steadfast in the faith*” (I Peter 5:9).

### **Faith fears the danger in temptation**

It is not a contradiction of terms to say faith fears. Faith accepts the promises and rejoices. Faith believes the warnings and dreads. What is the end of temptation? “*Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death*” (verse 15). Faith fears such a judgment because it knows the judgment is real and the sentence just that severe.

All the Bible speaks of death as being the consequence of sin. God warned Adam against eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, saying, “*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). God caused the prophet Ezekiel to write, “*The soul that sinneth, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4). God caused the apostle Paul to write, “*The wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). Faith accepts those warnings as true. It flees from sin because it fears the danger involved. It resists temptation because it knows temptation leads to sin. It believes and fears and trusts the more.

A traveler driving down the road sees a sign warning, “Detour: Bridge Out.” If he believes the warning, he will detour and travel safely. If he does not believe it, he may continue to his own harm. You are exercising faith as you flee from temptation because you believe God’s warnings as well as His promises.

### **Faith responds to warnings against temptation**

Faith heeds the biblical counsel, “*Do not err, my beloved brethren*” (verse 16). That is a warning against being led astray, mistaken or deceived on the subject of temptation to sin and the consequence of yielding. If you believe God’s testimony in

the Holy Scriptures, you will watch, as Jesus commanded, “*Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak*” (Mark 14:38). So the believer will consider the source and the consequences of every action before he does it.

Faith recognizes that temptation always leads to sin when it is followed. It understands that every person is tempted to do wrong. It agrees that the source of all temptation is the devil. It knows (often by experience) that yielding to temptation leads deeper and deeper into sin. It accepts the verdict that death comes as the eventual end of sin. And it responds to those facts by seeking to live in purity. Behold the work of faith in times of temptation!

#### **IV. THE WORK OF FAITH IN SANCTIFICATION, James 1:17-27**

What do you know about Bible teaching on sanctification? It is a great Bible doctrine, and our lives will be greatly improved as we understand it and live by it. James 1:17-27 does not mention the word, but the concept of sanctification runs through all the passage. Look at the work of faith as our lives are conformed more and more to the design God has for us in making us like Jesus Christ.

##### **Faith recognizes the divine source of sanctification**

Our text says “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights*” (James 1:17). That means that all material or spiritual benefits we receive are from God. Even what may not seem good to us at the moment, but works out for our good in the future, is from God. The Holy Spirit’s sanctifying us more and more into the image of Christ is the work of God Himself, one of His good and perfect gifts.

The potential of our sanctification is indicated in these words from I Thessalonians 5:23: “*The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Who does the sanctifying? “*The very God of peace*” sanctifies you. What is the scope of His sanctifying work? “*Your whole spirit and soul and body*” are included. What does God do when He sanctifies you? You are “*preserved blameless.*” And for how long does His sanctifying work continue? He sanctifies you “*unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Believe it! Trust God to do it in you. Submit to His work in your life. Faith is the key to the sanctification.

##### **Faith enjoys the divine life in sanctification**

James 1:18 says, “*Of his own will he begat us...that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*” How does the sanctification begin? It begins with the new birth, being born again by the Spirit of God (John 3). In the conversion

experience the life of God begins to be lived in us by His indwelling Holy Spirit.

The outliving of the indwelling life of God is very essence of being sanctified. Romans 8:11 reads, *“If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”* To “quicken” means to make alive, to endow with life. It is the Holy Spirit’s living the life of God in our human spirit which makes us Christians. To be a believer means that *“Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). By faith the life of God is put in you. By faith the life of God is lived out through you. So, faith is the key to your experience of sanctification.

### **Faith exercises self-control in sanctification**

James relates sanctification to a very practical area of life: to one’s speech and one’s temper (James 1:19, 20). Verse 19 calls us to the exercise of self-discipline, realizing we can govern our words and can control our temper. If we truly believe that *“the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God”* (verse 20), we know that self-control is at the heart of our spiritual growth.

How does a sanctified life express itself in the areas of speech and temper? (1) It makes one as ready to hear as to speak, as ready to understand the thoughts of another person as to express his own. That indicates a spirit of humility, which is a mark of sanctification. (2) It keeps one in control of his temper, making him refrain from sullen resentments of sudden outbursts, knowing the anger of man never works the righteousness of God.

Faith believes those principles is he truly sanctified. That is why I say that faith promotes self-control, while self-control is an evidence of a sanctified life.

### **Faith follows divine principles in sanctification**

James 1:21-27 gives us four divine principles which are manifest in the sanctified life. They are obedience, discipline, benevolence and purity. Let’s examine them.

1. Obedience is essential to sanctification. So James counsels, *“Receive with meekness and the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”* (verses 21, 22). It is essential that you know what the Bible says, believe the truth of it and put its principles into practice. Faith prompts obedience, and obedience indicates your sanctification of life.

2. Discipline is essential to sanctification. To illustrate that truth James turns again to our speech, calling us to bridle our tongues. How do you put a bridle on your tongue? By controlling what you say. It is that simple, but it is not unimportant. James wrote, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth*

*not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain*" (James 1:26). An undisciplined tongue can prove a man's religious profession as futile and worthless. Faith prompts discipline, and discipline proves sanctification.

3. Benevolence is an expression of sanctification. "*Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction*" (James 1:27). That is benevolence in its purest form. It involves personal time and effort. It shows a deep concern and sympathy. It is a reflection of the spirit of Jesus Christ. It demonstrates the life of God is being lived in the person who professes to trust Him. Faith brings the new birth. The new birth means that God's life is lived in us. God's life in us makes us concerned about and willing to help those in need. Helping those in need is evidence of sanctification. So faith and benevolence are related in sanctification.

4. Purity is the essence of sanctification. "*To keep himself unspotted from the world*" is the goal of the believer (James 1: 27). He is commanded not to be conformed to this world, but to present His body to God (Romans 12:1, 2). He is promised that being pure in heart He will see God (Matthew 5:8). He has the Spirit of God within him, calling him to purity in spirit and in action (I John 3:1-3). It is by such purity that he is shown to be sanctified believer in Jesus.

Keep in mind that it is God who sanctifies, that He sanctifies you by living His life in your mortal body, prompting you to self-control and obedience to the divine standard of obedience, discipline, benevolence and purity. And it is faith that joins you to God. "*For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:26). Faith in Jesus is essential to a sanctified life of purity.

## **V. THE WORK OF FAITH IN BROTHERHOOD, James 2:1-13**

Jesus described His relationship with us and our relationship with one another in these words, "*One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren*" (Matthew 23:8). James takes up the theme of brotherhood and develops it for our better understanding. I see five areas in which our faith in Jesus relates to the spirit of brotherhood we share, as indicated in James 2:1-13.

### **Faith lays hold on Jesus, the basis of brotherhood**

We are brothers because we have the same Heavenly Father, and God is our Father because we are trusting Jesus. So in 2:1 James relates "*my brethren*" with "*the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*" Remember the words of Galatians 3:26, "*Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*" An ancient prophet of God asked, "*Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?*" (Malachi 2:10). The answer to those questions is an emphatic "Yes!" God is our Father by creation. But more, He is our Father by regeneration, the new creation which comes by faith in Jesus.

I may never have seen you in the flesh, but you are my brother or sister if you are trusting Jesus. We are members of the same spiritual family, the family of God. And we have entered that family by personal faith in Jesus Christ. So I can say in truth faith establishes our relationship to Jesus, and He is the basis of our brotherhood.

### **Faith removes partiality, the enemy of brotherhood**

James gives this illustration. Suppose the church was meeting and two believers came in. The first was a man of wealth and prestige; the second was a common man without wealth or power. Suppose the wealthy man was given a good place where he could sit comfortably, hear and see easily and be recognized by all in attendance. And suppose the poor man was given an uncomfortable place to the side, where he had difficulty seeing and hearing, because they wanted to keep him out of sight. Such a thing is heartily condemned by the apostle James (verses 2-4). He calls that being “*judges of evil thoughts*” (verse 4). Favoritism or partiality is contrary to the spirit of Christ and the enemy of real Christian brotherhood. He accepts everyone who comes to Him, showing no difference between them, and so are we to do the same. Anything less is sin.

### **Faith recognizes spiritual values, the key to brotherhood**

How do you estimate people? By the way they dress or by the way they act? By how they appear or by what they are? Faith causes us to judge on the basis of spiritual values and not on material or financial principles (verses 5-7).

So James reminds us that the poor of this world can be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom of God (verse 5). That may sound surprising, but it is true. He points out that the rich men whom many would admire the most are the ones who may oppress you for the sake of financial gain. His counsel is that we hold in higher esteem the poor man who trusts Jesus than we do the rich man who rejects Him and blasphemes His name. That is a key insight for us to learn when our generation is so inclined to magnify the wealthy, the powerful, the athletic and the talented without regard to their lifestyle or relationship with God. Do not look on people in fleshly terms but look at them as God would see them. Spiritual values are the key to a brotherly spirit among us. Neither wealth nor training nor mutual interests can establish the relationship between us that faith in Jesus establishes.

There are some people whom I love in the Lord with whom I would have no relationships apart from our mutual faith in Him. But because of Christian faith, we are truly “brother” and “sister,” feeling a relationship Jesus has established.

### **Faith exhibits love, the expression of brotherhood**

What do you think is the “royal law” of the Bible? The greatest of all commandments, Jesus said, is, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,*

*and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”* And He said the second greatest commandment is, *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself”* (Mark 12:30, 31). It is the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself which James quotes and calls “the royal law,” the supreme and sovereign principle to govern human relations (verses 8, 9).

How is our faith in Jesus related to that? We are justified by faith and that means that the love of God is spread in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:1, 5). Faith is the cause, and love is the consequence. Since love is the basis of brotherhood, and faith is the forerunner of love, you see the relationship of faith and brotherhood. There can be no true self-giving love, the expression of real brotherhood, apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ.

To do anything less than love as brethren is to commit sin and be convicted by the law as transgressors (verse 9). How much better to believe, to love and to enjoy fellowship in Christ.

### **Faith accepts liberty, the freedom of brotherhood**

We have been made free by the Son of God, Jesus Christ (verses 10-12). To break one law is to become guilty of being a lawbreaker (verses 10, 11). A man can be convicted and sentenced for one crime, even if that is the only one he has ever committed. But there is a freedom in Christ Jesus which we enjoy as members of the family of God.

Jesus said *“If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36). And He has made us free! *“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us”* (Galatians 3:13). So we do not live bound under a rule which requires us to love one another and serve one another or be punished. We live in a spirit of freedom in which we love and serve one another because we want to, because we belong to one another and are sincerely interested in one another. It is not a freedom from serving but a freedom in serving. I do not feel an obligation toward you; I feel an interest instead. And what a difference that freedom makes. You have been set free by faith in Jesus Christ. I have been set free by faith in Jesus. So we are free to be brothers in Him. What a privilege!

Look back at what we have seen in James 2:1-13. Faith lays hold on Jesus, the basis of brotherhood. It removes partiality, the enemy of brotherhood. It recognizes spiritual values, the key of brotherhood. It exhibits love, the expression of brotherhood. It lives in liberty, the freedom of brotherhood. So our brotherhood is based on our personal faith in Jesus and the difference He has made in our lives. Be sure you are trusting Him as personal Savior and are a child in the family of God.

## **VI. THE WORK OF FAITH IN PRINCIPLE, James 2:14-20**

Jesus said, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). That is a recognition that it is one thing to make a confession of religious devotion but another thing to show by one’s conduct that his confession is real. James takes that principle and develops it in practical terms in his epistle. The paragraph in which he discusses the subject (2:14-26) may be divided into two parts. The first (2:14-20) deals with the principles involved in the practical expression of faith and the second (2:21-26) gives two examples which show the application of those principles to daily life.

Let us first consider the work of faith in principle (James 2:14-20). James gives four principles which govern the expression of faith in daily conduct. We shall review them in order.

### **Faith is expressed by words**

Faith can be expressed by words (verse 14). A man may say he has faith, whether his conduct demonstrates it or not. There should be a confession of one’s faith by his words. The Bible says, *“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy”* (Psalm 107:2). To a newly converted man, Jesus gave this instruction, *“Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee”* (Mark 5:19). And to every believer Jesus says, *“Ye shall be witnesses unto me...unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8).

You and I should speak about Jesus to relatives, friends and strangers. That is involved in being a “witness,” for a witness is one who gives a first-hand account of a thing. And we who have trusted Jesus as Savior can give a first-hand account of our conversion experience and the difference He has made. Faith can and should be expressed by words. Be a vocal witness for Jesus.

### **Faith involves more than words**

Faith must involve more than words. It is possible for one to profess more than he possesses. Words alone are not effective; they must be accompanied by a life style which shows the words are true.

James gives a quite common illustration (2:15, 16). Here is a person who is destitute, needing both clothing and food. Someone sees him and says, “God bless you. May you be clothed, and may you be fed.” What good does that do? None! It is not kind words but food and clothing which are needed.

I have met some people who talk a great deal about the “Good Lord” but whose conduct does not indicate that they have met Him. In that case their words become mockery, and they are revealed as the hypocrites they are.

Let a man who lies, curses or steals confess conversion to Christ. We expect his life style to change. If he continues to lie, curse or steal with no change in his

conduct, we conclude that he has not truly been saved. That conclusion is true. The faith which makes no difference in conduct will not save any person (2:14, 17). It is not works that save. It is faith that works.

### **Faith is not genuine without works**

Faith is not true faith when it has no works with it. Consider these words of James 2:17, “*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*” I say it again that works do not save you. But a faith which does not have works-which makes no difference in your conduct-will not save you either.

Have you seen the storm cloud from which lightening flashed and thunder rolled? I have, and it is a spectacular display of the majesty of God who rides upon the clouds! But have you seen the storm cloud in which you could see the lightning in the distance yet not hear the thunder? I have seen that also. Suppose someone was looking at a cloud from which the lightning was so distant that the thunder could not be heard. And suppose that person was fearful that the lightning might strike him. You could say, “Lightning will not strike here when you cannot hear the thunder.” That would be a correct statement. Lightning strikes, but only that lightning which is accompanied by thunder.

So we may say, “Faith saves. But only that faith which produces works is able to save you.” And that statement is correct. If one’s faith is so weak that he makes no change in his life style upon exercising his faith, his faith is too weak to bring a life-changing conversion to Christ into his life. Faith is not true faith when it has no works accompanying it. Be warned. Trust and obey.

### **Faith controls conduct**

Faith will control one’s conduct. Here is a person who says, “I have faith. I believe there is a God.” To him James responds, “*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble*” (James 2:19). The person who is content with believing that there is a God is not even on the level of the demons in their belief. The thought of the existence of one God causes the demons to tremble. How can a man say he has faith if he can accept the fact of God’s existence with a mere shrug of the shoulders?

The New English Bible translates Hebrews 11:1: “And what is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes, and makes us certain of realities we do not see.” When one is certain of the unseen realities, he will act like it. It will make a difference in his behavior.

A child may be afraid to step outside at night for fear that there would be some wild animal in the dark which would attack him. His fear might be groundless, and his parent might require him to go ahead. But suppose you knew there was a fierce animal waiting just outside the door. You would not require your child to go, nor would you go yourself. To be convinced of a fact will make a difference in how one acts.

Real faith will make a difference in your behavior. One should speak of his faith, but he should live it also. James challenges us, “*A man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works*” (verse 18). Faith can be shown only as it influences conduct and makes a person act differently because of what he believes.

Here are the four principles relating to faith and works in James 2:14-20. (1) Faith can be expressed by works. Not only can it be so expressed, it should be spoken of as a witness for Christ. (2) Faith must include more than words. If it is shown by words only, people will not believe the words. (3) Faith is not faith when it is only words. Real faith produces actions and attitudes which are changed for the better. (4) Faith is proved by conduct which agrees with one’s words. Here is the conclusion of the whole matter, “*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (verse 20). Let us believe and behave.

## **VII. THE WORK OF FAITH IN PRACTICAL CONDUCT, James 2:21-26**

Two Bible examples will show the difference faith makes in daily conduct. You can read of them in James 2:21-26. You can read, “*Was not Abraham our father justified by works...Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works?*” (verses 21, 25). What interesting examples those are. Abraham was a saintly man called “*the friend of God*” (II Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23; Isaiah 41:8). Rahab was a prostitute who was not respected by the people of her city. Yet each was justified before God and before men. Let’s think about those two persons and their experience of being justified.

### **Abraham: Faith trusts God for promised blessings**

Abraham was justified before God and men. That is a foundation truth of the Old Testament which is developed in detail in the New Testament. In what way was Abraham justified by works, as James 2:21 says he was? He was justified before men when he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice.

But Abraham was justified before God years before he offered up Isaac. Consider the chronology of Abraham’s life. Abraham was 75 years old when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land which God would give him for an inheritance, that is, the land of Palestine. Fifteen years later, when Abraham was 90 years old, God promised to make Abraham’s descendants as numberless as the stars in heaven. The Bible recounts, “*And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness*” (Genesis 15:6). That was when Abraham was justified by faith before God, as Romans 4 and Galatians 3 make very clear. That was ten years before, but Isaac was a lad in his early teens when Abraham offered him as a sacrifice to God. That meant that God justified Abraham more than 20 years before the offering of Isaac. But our text says Abraham was justified by works when he offered up Isaac (verse 21).

Here is the explanation. Abraham was justified before God when he believed in the Lord. We are justified before God the same way: *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). But people cannot see what is in the heart. God could see Abraham’s faith in his mind and heart, but men could not see it there. Men could see Abraham’s faith only when he did something to show that he trusted God. Offering his only son Isaac, in whom all God’s promises rested, was the evidence that he trusted God. Abraham was so sure that God would do what He had promised through Isaac that he believed God would raise the boy from death to do it.

Abraham was justified by faith before God. He was justified by works before men. The same is true of you and me. God looks into the heart and knows if and when we trust Jesus. But people do not know until they see a change in our conduct. They know us to be justified as they see our works.

James 2:22 says, *“Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?”* That means that faith and actions operated together, each influencing the other, and so faith found its highest expression and was fully proved by its actions. That same principle applies today.

### **Rahab: Faith trusts God for personal protection**

Rahab was justified before God and men. You can read the history of Rahab in Joshua 2, 6. She lived in the city of Jericho at the time of the Hebrew invasion of the land of Palestine. They had to conquer the city of Jericho. Secretly, spies were sent to look over the city and bring word to Joshua. They came to the house of Rahab, who told them, *“We have heard of how the Lord has blessed you in your exodus from Egypt. We know that he has given you this land and that you will conquer it. So please spare me and my family when my city falls.”*

Look at the faith she was confessing. She acknowledged God as supreme God. She believed His promise about giving the land to the Hebrews. She believed that a promise of safety from the Hebrews would protect her and her family. Look at the faith that woman had. God set her apart as His own from that hour. The spies gave her a scarlet cord to hang in her window to identify her house, and they promised her protection when the city fell.

The day came when the city fell. Rahab had believed in God. She had believed the promise of the Hebrew spies. So she gathered her family in her house, hung the scarlet cord in the window and waited for the city to fall. It fell. Every person in the city was killed except Rahab and her relatives.

How, then, does the Epistle of James say that Rahab was justified? *“Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?”* (verse 25). It was by that act that she showed her faith to those men. God already knew of her faith. He did not justify her on the basis of merit, the good deeds she could do, for no one is ever justified before God on the

basis of good works (Ephesians 2:8, 9). Her faith justified her before God, and her works justified her before men.

But if her faith had not produced works, it would not have been saving faith before God. It would have been a mere intellectual agreement with a truth but not a trusting reliance on the Savior.

Three times in James 2 (verses 17, 20, 26) there is the same truth expressed in slightly different words. It is, "*Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone...But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?...For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*"

By saying it three times in the space of ten verses of Scripture, God must have been concerned that we know it. What is He saying? He means that faith which is not accompanied by obedience is not true faith at all. One who thinks otherwise is not using his mind which God gave him to think. As the physical body is dead when it is separated from the human spirit, so faith is dead when it is divorced from actions. God expects the believer to act like a believer in Jesus.

What is your character? Are you a godly person like Abraham, the friend of God? If so, you must show the reality of your faith in God by your actions. Are you a public sinner so that you have lost the respect of those who know you best, but have come to faith in Jesus now? If so, you must show the reality of your faith by your actions. There are no exceptions to that rule.

Faith in God produces a holy life style in which one seeks to shun sin and to develop a likeness to Jesus Christ. So we give the members of our bodies to be weapons on the side of righteousness in the spiritual warfare (Romans 6: 12, 13). We prove our faith by our works, and we are known as justified before God and man.

### **VIII. THE WORK OF FAITH IN SELF-CONTROL, James 3:1-4**

The first great change which comes at conversion to Christ is to change in the believer's own life. The Bible says, "*If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*" (II Corinthians 5:17). When that blessed change comes within so that one becomes a new person who has been created in Christ Jesus, it makes a difference in all of his life. One of the first expressions of that change is the exercise of self-control in the person who trusts Jesus. It is the relation of faith to self-control which is the theme of James 3:1-4. I see the following principles there.

#### **Faith controls ambitions**

Faith will control personal ambitions (verse 1). James warns against people crowding in, trying to be teachers of spiritual things. That seemed to be a desire to control people, to put one's ideas as authoritative over others. It is an expression of personal ambition. But a real faith in God motivates one to serve rather than to be

served. It is not the promotion of self but promotion of Jesus which is the concern of the Christian. Personal ambitions have no place in the kingdom of God or in the heart of the believer in Jesus.

Teachers are judged by a more strict standard, James warns. It is enough that one trust Jesus and serve people in His name. If promotions come, thank the Lord. If promotions do not come, thank the Lord anyway. God will give the real rewards when we stand before Him at the end. Faith gives us assurance of that, so we are content in the place of God's assignment now.

### **Faith controls the tongue**

Faith will control daily conversation. James 3:2 turns attention back to our use of the tongue in speaking. He points out that each one of us makes mistakes and does wrong. There are many different ways in which we might err. But one who is able to control his speech so that he does not sin in words is showing himself to be a mature and fully developed person. He who can control his speech is able to control every passion in his body.

Think of the times you have spoken a word in anger, let an improper word slip into your conversation, told an off-color joke you quickly regretted or let a half-truth be believed by someone who thought it was a fact. Yes, we all err in our talking. To control the tongue is the goal of each saint of God and is a proof that one is spiritually mature.

Jesus said, "*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man...bringeth forth good things: and an evil man...bringeth forth evil things*" (Matthew 12:34, 35). Therefore, we must control our speech in daily conversation.

### **Faith controls instincts**

Faith will control natural instincts (verse 3). There is a natural instinct in a horse to go on its own way, follow its own will. So the rider puts a bit in the horse's mouth in order to control it. The bit is small, but it can turn the whole body of the horse this way or that.

We must control the natural instincts in our bodies. Our human nature is inclined to boast, to tell what is sometimes hurtful to others, to lie when it is to one's advantage. But those natural instincts must be controlled. Like the bit in the horse's mouth, the tongue can set the direction of our lives. It must be controlled by divine grace.

Faith makes that control possible. It makes real to us the unseen realities of God. A professor of mine once said, "The tongue is the last citidel of Satan to fall to the forces of divine grace." You may find it necessary to discipline yourself quite severely to bring those powerful natural instincts under control, but it can be done. The Apostle Paul expressed this goal, "*I keep under my body, and bring it into*

*subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*” (I Corinthians 9:27). You can subdue your passions, including the tendency to speak what you should not. You can if you trust Jesus to help you do it. You can cast down false teachings and bring every thought (and word) under the authority of Christ, making each surrender in obedience to Him (II Corinthians 10:5). Conquer yourself. Your faith in Jesus will make it possible.

### **Faith controls response to pressure**

Faith will control your response to external pressures (verse 4). James turns to the picture of a sailing ship. It is a large ship. Strong winds whistle through her rigging and strain at her sails. The ship is carried rapidly across the waters. Will it end wrecked on some distant shore? Will it drift aimlessly to an unknown destination? Not at all. It is guided by a pilot by the use of a very small helm. The waves may roll, and the wind may blow, but the pilot controls the direction and speed of the ship. It follows his will, not the power of the wind.

So pressures come in our lives from the outside. There are circumstances we cannot change, but we are not subject to circumstances. By faith we call on the help of God. He enables us to direct our lives in the right way. Behold the power of faith!

### **Faith controls self**

Faith is concerned to control one’s self, not to control others. Have you observed that the commands of God are addressed to the person who should obey them? It says, “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:22). But it never says, “Husbands, make your wives submit to you.” It says, “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (Ephesians 5:25). It never says, “Wives, make your husbands love you.” Each of us must account to God for our personal obedience or disobedience to His commands. So we are obligated to control ourselves.

As you read through this practical application of faith to daily life in the Epistle of James, look for the repeated requirement that each one trust for himself and discipline himself. You will account to God for that. It is a solemn point to consider, isn’t it? None can blame the others. Each answers for himself.

Romans 14:22 reads, in part, “*Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.*” That means to exercise your conviction based on spiritual understanding as in God’s presence. That is the ultimate test of faith. How much do I trust Him as I stand before His presence? He knows how much you trust Him. And men will know as you live before them.

Is faith exercising control over your personal ambitions, daily conversation and natural instincts? You must answer that question someday before God. Answer it now in your own heart and ask for grace to trust Him more and serve Him better than ever before. “*Lord, increase our faith*” (Luke 17:5).

## **IX. THE WORK OF FAITH IN GOVERNING THE TONGUE, James 3:5-13**

James 3:5-13 discusses the control of the tongue. It is a continuation of the discussion begun at the first of the chapter. We approach it with the words of Jesus in our minds, when He said, *“Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”* (Matthew 12:36, 37). No wonder that James, the half-brother of Jesus, would make such an emphasis on control of one’s speech.

### **Faith recognizes the power of words**

Be warned that words carry great power in them. That is the meaning of James’ statement, *“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!”* (verse 5). As a single spark can start a fire which burns great buildings or thousands of acres of forests, so a single word can start an issue which will harm many.

People who lived in Jesus’ day knew the power of words. When a man sought Jesus’ help in the healing of his servant, he said, *“Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed”* (Matthew 8:8). He recognized the authority of Jesus, and he believed in the power of the spoken word. Do you?

You have seen evidence of the damage an ill-spoken word can do, haven’t you? A word spoken in anger, a lie whispered as gossip, a truth told when it was not necessary has often had consequences far beyond the intent or thought of the one who spoke. Be aware of the power of your words. Control your speech.

### **Faith controls the motive of speech**

Guard the motive behind your speech. James warns us that the devil can motivate our speaking the same as God can. He warns that the tongue is like a fire. Among the members of our body it represents the world with all its wickedness. It can contaminate, stain and pollute our whole body (verse 6). How it must be guarded!

What is the motive when you speak? If it is to build up and help another, the speech is of God. If it is to hurt another person’s reputation or blight his emotions, it is of the devil. Words spoken in haste from an angry spirit are not words from God. Be aware of what spirit is prompting you to speak.

Here is the principle to follow: *“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”* (Colossians 4:6). Do you see how your faith in Jesus Christ can and should influence your speaking?

### **Faith tames the tongue**

Recognize the difficulty in control of your speech. James points out it is easier to domesticate and train wild animals than it is to control the tongue (verses 7, 8). He

says, “*The tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison*” (verse 8).

How can we discipline our speech if no man can tame his tongue? Man cannot tame it, but God can. He enables us to put a bridle on our mouth, just as we put one on the horse (Psalm 39:1). The tongue can be controlled, speech can be helpful, but only when one is under the control of God. That is why faith is so essential to the discipline of one’s words.

I had developed the habit of using curse words before I came to Christ. I desired to use those words no longer, taking the name of our Lord in vain, but I discovered that they would slip out when I was not thinking of it. I prayed often, asking God to enable me to honor His name by speech free from such terms, and He heard my prayers. My speech cleared up, and I have no more problem with that. But if I had not come to Jesus, my language would have continued to be foul and vulgar. If you have a problem with your speech, bring it to Jesus and ask His help. He wants you to have “*sound speech, that cannot be condemned*” (Titus 2:8). He will enable you to speak honestly and honorably.

### **Faith produces consistent speech**

Remove contradiction from your speech. It is possible for the contradiction to be there, and James warns against it (verses 9-12). He points out that out of the same mouth may come words of blessing to God and words of cursing to men who are made in the image of God. We agree with his conclusion, “*My brethren, these things ought not so to be*” (verse 10).

Nothing in nature produces two different types of fruit. James points out that no spring of water produces sweet water and bitter water at the same time and from the same source (verse 11). No fig tree is ever expected to bear olive berries (verse 12). No person should ever express blessings and cursings from his mouth (verse 10). It is as contrary as if you went to a grape vine and found figs growing on it (verse 12). Nature itself teaches us that if we belong to Jesus, our speech should be honorable, upright, just and designed to help others.

What is this passage saying to your heart? If you feel condemned before God as a consequence of this teaching, tell God about it. Ask His forgiveness of it. Commit yourself to quit it. Depend on His help to enable you to do it. And then discipline your life hour by hour. You can have the victory.

### **Faith makes speech and conduct agree**

Upright speech and honorable conduct must agree in your life (verse 13). A wise and well-instructed person will agree with this teaching. His good conduct in word and deed will bear consistent testimony.

I was in a business house one day when a salesman came in to see the owner. The salesman was cursing in sentence after sentence. The businessman, who

was a fine Christian, suddenly asked, “How well do you know Him?”

The salesman asked, “Know who?”

“How well do you know the Lord?” was the reply.

A little embarrassed, the salesman said, “I guess to tell the truth, I don’t know Him very well.”

“It is strange,” said the businessman, “that you use His name so freely if you are not personally acquainted with Him.” And that ended the cursing.

Someone has written, “Let our lips and lives express the holy gospel we profess...” And so they must. “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom*” (verse 13). That is wise counsel. Will you join with me in a commitment to be honorable in motive, pure in speech and helpful in conduct?

When God called us to “*present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*” (Romans 12:1), that included our tongues. When He called us not “*yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin*” (Romans 6:13), that included our tongues. When Paul prayed, “*The very God of peace sanctify you wholly...your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Thessalonians 5:23), that included our tongues. So let us settle the issue of pure speech before God right now.

## **X. THE WORK OF FAITH IN PRACTICAL WISDOM, James 3:14-18**

James 1:5 sets forth the promise, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*” He seems to pick up that theme again in James 3:14-18 and develop it in a much greater detail. Here the emphasis is not on the prayer for wisdom but on the nature of human wisdom as over against the nature of the wisdom God gives. Woven through the paragraph is the almost unspoken truth that faith in God is essential to the possession of true wisdom. I suggest five principles which will help us understand the passage.

### **Faith perceives the danger in unaided human wisdom**

Those who do not seek the wisdom God gives are in for serious problems, four of which are mentioned here in verse 14: (1) There is the problem of “*bitter envying.*” Envy, rivalry and a spirit of bitter jealousy will accompany human wisdom which ignores God. You see it today in the fields of education, politics, business and even religion. You and I are in danger if we live by natural human wisdom alone. (2) There is the problem of “*strife.*” That indicates the party spirit and rivalry in which each one seeks to get ahead of his fellow. It is the expression of self-centeredness. (3) There is the problem of arrogance, indicated by the verb “*glory not.*” That is the result of knowledge puffing up a person rather than making him useful (I Corinthians 8:1). Such a person has been called “an educated fool.” (4)

There is the problem of falsehood. One who pretends spiritual insight when he has only unaided human knowledge will “*lie against the truth.*” He is repudiating the truth which he seeks to teach because his conduct does not agree with his teaching.

That is a problem we face today. Much of what is called “religious instruction” is based on human wisdom rather than divine illumination. That is why many contradict the Bible or ignore the Bible in their religious practice. Any pretended knowledge which is not received by the instruction of the Holy Spirit is dangerous and should be shunned. Man cannot know divine truth without divine aid (I Corinthians 2:9-16). One with faith in God recognizes that and shuns such teachers.

### **Faith acknowledges the nature of mere human wisdom**

Mere human wisdom is described in four terms in verse 15: (1) It is “*not from above.*” It is not of God. That is a warning flag. God has revealed Himself, and that revelation is recorded in Holy Scripture. Any desire to know the truth of God must go to His revelation. Otherwise, the possibility of error is almost certain. “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God*” (James 1:5). (2) It is “*earthly.*” It belongs to this earth. It is earthbound in that it comes from the world and is limited to the world. It is no wonder that a person with such wisdom, even though he may be a genius, does not understand the things of God. (3) It is “*sensual.*” That is, it depends on what can be known by the five senses of touch, taste, sight, smell and sound. God is spirit and is known through none of those senses. He is “*spiritually discerned*” (I Corinthians 2:14) by the instruction of the Holy Spirit. (4) It is “*devilish.*” The word means “demonic,” belonging to evil spirits, from the devil himself. How can such knowledge coexist with the truth about God? It cannot. That is the wisdom in which men “*by wisdom knew not God*” (I Corinthians 1:21).

It is so important that our children know that truth when they go to school and have an unbeliever as a teacher. It is so important that our adults know that truth when they are confronted with the theories of the cults or the philosophies of the so-called intellectuals. “*This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual devilish.*” Spiritual wisdom comes from trusting God and knowing Him.

### **Faith identifies the result of earthly wisdom**

Those who move in the realm of unaided human wisdom are constantly challenging one another. The result is “*envying and strife*” (verse 16). Jealousy relates to the desire to promote one’s own interests and be honored as superior. Strife is the effort to gain ascendancy over one’s competitor. It is the natural outcome of human wisdom, and it is evident all about us. The result is “*confusion*” (unrest, disorder, disharmony) and “*every evil work*” (base actions of every vile and ignoble kind). That is the result of living without God and trying to be wise without the wisdom of faith. Flee from it and from those whose lives are guided by it. Ask God to give you true wisdom and trust Him to do it (James 1:5).

### **Faith treasures the character of heavenly wisdom**

Verse 17 mentions nine qualities of the wisdom which God gives in answer to the prayer of faith: (1) It is “*from above*” in its source. It is both a “*good gift and a perfect gift*” which comes down from the Father (James 1:17) and surpasses human wisdom as heaven is above the earth. (2) It is “*pure*” in its nature, being clean and uncontaminated. The person who possesses it will shrink from any thought, word or action which will defile. It has no ulterior motives but is pure like Christ. (3) It is “*peaceable*” in its effect. It seeks to promote harmony and good will among men and between man and God. It gives peace and promotes peace. (4) It is “*gentle*” in its relationships. The word means to be fair, considerate, reasonable and forbearing, showing a spirit of kindness in dealing with people. (5) It is “*easy to be intreated*” in times of conflict. That means it is open to reason and willing to be persuaded by the truth. (6) It is “*full of mercy*” toward the unfortunate. It not only feels sympathy but it also renders necessary aid. (7) It is “*full of good fruits*” in its activity. Practical deeds of kindness is the evidence that the divine wisdom is within. (8) It is “*without partiality*” in social relations. It does not discriminate on the basis of external things, but it helps where and how it may. (9) It is “*without hypocrisy*” in its appearance. There is no lie, deceit or pretense in it. Being the gift of God, heavenly wisdom agrees with His holy character. That is the wisdom which God gives to all men liberally upon their asking (James 1:5).

### **Faith enjoys the product of heavenly wisdom**

The harvest heavenly wisdom produces is uprightness (verse 18). How needed that is in our world. Earthbound wisdom produces a harvest of disorder and various kinds of evil. Heaven-sent wisdom produces a harvest of righteousness and peace. The former is of the devil. The latter is of God. Which do you wish to characterize your life? The difference is based on faith or lack of faith in God. “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering*” (James 1:5, 6). “*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full*” (John 16:24). Seek God’s wisdom and be truly wise.

## **XI. THE WORK OF FAITH AGAINST WORLDLINESS, James 4:1-10**

Are you familiar with the term “worldly” or perhaps “worldliness”? It refers to being concerned with the present world, being committed to its values and living by its standards. “Worldliness” is a term we use in our religious vocabulary to mean a person who has turned from spiritual concerns to a lifestyle identified with the unregenerate society in which he lives. It is an appropriate term to describe the problems addressed in James 4:1-10. Let’s examine the passage and see how faith in God militates against and is the remedy for worldliness.

### **Faith resists strife**

Faith opposes the conflict caused by worldliness (verses 1, 2). And what a conflict it is! Look at the description of the conflict: *“wars, fightings, lusts that war, kill, desire, fight, war.”* It is almost depressing to read that list. That is not what the world produces at its worst; that is all it produces. From the general state of jealous hostility there burst out occasions of conflict. Self-seeking is the basis of the problem. The readers of the epistle had turned from seeking the wisdom of God and were following the wisdom of the world. Therefore they were experiencing the same tensions and sinful expression of them. To desire and not be able to obtain that which is desired leads to fighting, warring and even killing. How tragic. How the spiritually sensitive spirit flees from that. So I say that faith opposes the conflict caused by worldliness. Chapter 3 concluded with the statement that the wisdom God gives in response to the prayer of faith produces the fruit of righteousness and peace. Seek that wisdom. See the difference faith in God makes.

### **Faith treasures prayer**

Faith values the prayer life, worldliness hinders it (verses 3, 4). Verse 2 ends with the tragic statement, *“Ye have not, because ye ask not.”* Our needed resources are available upon our asking. Faith claims God’s repeated promises to answer prayer and gets what is needed because it asks. Worldliness ignores God’s promises and suffers lack because it does not ask.

“But,” someone objects, “I asked, and God did not give.” In that instance James replies, *“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts”* (verse 3). Lusts arise from worldliness and hinder prayer. How much better to trust God, tell Him our needs, and receive His provision than to doubt God and suffer lack. Faith values prayer and practices it. Doubt rejects prayer and suffers because of it. Which quality of life do you follow?

### **Faith rejects the world**

Faith fears the antagonism produced by worldliness (verses 4-6). Yes, I say again it is proper for faith to fear some things. It fears the course it knows will bring suffering. It turns from it to the way of God.

*“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”* (verse 4).

There are two spirits at work within those who trust Jesus. The indwelling Holy Spirit of God longs to lead us in the ways of righteousness. The indwelling spirit of sin seeks to lead us into sin. Each exercises a strong desire, yearning intensely to control us. We determine by the act of our will which we will obey. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto*

*righteousness?*” (Romans 6:12, 16). Yield to Jesus Christ as Lord of your life. The antagonism ceases as He is given the consent of your will to live His life in you.

### **Faith accepts the remedy**

Faith accepts the remedy available for worldliness (verses 6-10). Three things are suggested concerning God’s remedy for worldliness. (1) Grace is required on God’s part. He does not fail. *“He giveth more grace...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble”* (verse 6). He does not fall in judgment on our sin, but forgives us and strengthens us against falling again. We can experience personally *“the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:7).

(2) Humility is required on man’s part. *“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God...Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (verses 6, 7, 10). Pride is not willing to receive; humility is willing. So God blesses the humble.

(3) Repentance is required on man’s part. The divine imperative is for the erring brothers to *“draw nigh to God...cleanse your hands...purify your hearts...be afflicted, and mourn, and weep...humble yourselves”* (verses 8-10). That is real repentance, the sinner’s only way to return to God.

Humility and repentance by the sinner will be met with grace from God, and forgiveness is the blessed consequence. Trust God to do it for your.

### **Faith rejoices in victory**

Faith rejoices in the victory possible over worldliness (verse 10). To all who are bowed down by the load of this world, a precious call is given. Here it is: *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”*

The answer to worldliness is not to give a list of things to be shunned. James does not write, *“Refrain from doing these things...”* and then give a list. The answer to worldliness is humble surrender to God. If you are truly available to Him, you will not be at all available to the world.

But how does a person humble himself in the sight of the Lord? The preceding verses calls us to resist the devil, forsake sinful deeds and thoughts and to give up the desire to follow them any longer. Since God gives grace to the humble (verse 6), humble yourself before God (verse 10).

The way up is down in all spiritual matters. Jesus said, *“Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”* (Luke 14:11). Therefore, *“humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up”* (James 4:10). The apostle Peter makes the same appeal and accompanies it with a like promise, *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time”* (I Peter 5:6). Self-exaltation leads to ruin but humility brings divine honors. If you believe it, practice it!

Look at the difference faith makes in dealing with the problem of worldliness. It opposes the conflict worldliness brings. It practices the prayer life worldliness hinders. It rejects the conflicts worldliness produces. It accepts the remedy worldliness needs. It rejoices in the victory by which worldliness is overcome. That is the life of faith. I want to live it, don't you? Show yourself to be a friend of God by trusting Him every day.

## **XII. THE WORK OF FAITH AGAINST PRESUMPTION, James 4:11-17**

Humility is a Christian grace which lies at the basis of all the believer's relations with God or man. It stands as the antithesis of pride and self-exaltation. So the Bible's call is to "*humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord,*" and the promise follows that "*he shall lift you up*" (James 4:10). That principle is applied in the problem of presumption in James 4:11-17. The passage deals with three areas in which a presumptuous spirit will manifest itself: in judging others contrary to God's Word, in planning for the future without consulting God's will and in being proud of knowledge without living according to what one knows. Let us examine those three areas and see how faith in God will correct the abuses.

### **Faith does not presume to judge**

Faith refuses presumptuous judging (verses 11, 12). When true humility is absent, malicious talk and vindictive judging will occur. That was happening among the readers to whom James wrote. He used the verb to "speak," which means to speak against, to speak down on another. It carries the idea of lessening a person's influence or degrading another's character. It shows an attempt to exalt oneself by a malicious slander of the other person. One is not surprised if the non-Christian speaks against Christians (I Peter 2:12; 3:16), but it is a contradiction for a Christian to speak against a Christian.

The prohibition is clear: "Stop talking against one another, brethren." To show the absurdity of such a thing, James uses the term "brethren" or "brother" three times in one verse. Each of us is one for whom Christ died (Romans 14:15). We are all brethren in Him, and Christ is the master of each of us (Matthew 23:8, 10).

Here is the reason we must not stand in criticism over one another: to speak evil of a brother and judge him is to take the place which God has reserved to Himself. The "law" to which James refers is not the law of Moses but the moral law of God. That law said we are to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:31). To speak against one's brother to his harm is to violate that law. The person who practices it, therefore, sets himself above God's law and determines that it does not apply to him in judging another. He ceases to feel obligated to obey the law but becomes a judge of the law itself. There is only one person qualified to judge the law; He is God. So what person is there among us who dares to assume God's place in standing in judgment over the

law and those who are to obey His law?

We should observe Paul's admonition in Romans 14:13, "*Let us not therefore judge one another any more.*" The prohibition is not against those decisions by which we separate right from wrong. What is prohibited is the attempt to build up one's self by tearing down another person. God forbids it, and faith militates against it. Trust God to do what judging is necessary.

### **Faith does not presume to plan**

Faith rejects presumptuous planning (verses 13-16). The text recognizes three elements in dealing with this problem. (1) There is a person who plans his tomorrows without the thought of God. (2) It is foolishness to so plan because a person does not even know if he will be alive tomorrow. (3) The wise course is to make all plans conscious of and in agreement with the will of God. Any course other than that is sheer presumption.

Have you heard a person say something like this: "*Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain*"? Such planning is all too common in our secular society. We plan our investments we sign contracts, we anticipate our profits without once thinking of God. Jesus told of a rich farmer who did that, making plans for his wealth into the indefinite future. God said, "*Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*" (Luke 12:20). See how foolish it is to plan without God?

"*Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (verse 14). How can a person so limited in knowledge he does not even know about tomorrow plan for a year? How can a person whose life is so uncertain that it is like the smoke of a breath on a cold day plan for the future?

"*Ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that*" (verse 15). It is by the will of God that we live. It is by the will of God that we do this or that. Everything is subject to His will. It is presumptuous to plan without taking His will into consideration. Faith prompts us to seek His will and plan in agreement with it.

### **Faith does not presume to know without doing**

Faith denies presumptuous knowledge (verse 17). Here is a truth so concise and applicable it might be considered a proverb: "*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin*" (verse 17). The person involved has a clear understanding of what is right. By the choice of his own will he refuses to do it. Therefore, he sins.

But no one would do that, would he? Yes, many would. Some who do not do what is right exalt themselves in the knowledge that they do know. But it is

presumption to assume that knowing is any substitute for doing. Knowledge alone will only increase pride (I Corinthians 8:1). It is submission to what one knows that is the key to pleasing God.

I do not speak of an active wrongdoing but of a passive neglect of doing right. The person who does not do what is right is sinning in his neglect. We call that the sin of omission. It is a sin the same as the sin of commission, the doing of what is known to be wrong.

What does God want us to do? The prophet Micah gives the answer, “*What doeth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*” (Micah 6:8). The apostle Paul summarizes it this way, “*Love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law*” (Romans 13:8). It is in that area we are in danger of sinning more by neglect than by doing wrong. The prophet Samuel recognized that failing to pray for his people was a sin against the Lord (I Samuel 12:23). Not just an unfortunate omission, mind you, but sin.

How dangerous that we fall into the sin of presumption. Guard your life. Do not presume authority God has not given you by judging with a critical spirit the people about you. Do not presume control of your life by making plans without a consideration of your frailty and God’s sovereignty by which you consult God’s will. Trust God to be involved in your daily affairs, and presumption is not necessary.

### **XIII. THE WORK OF FAITH IN FINANCES, James 5:1-12**

The Bible warning that “*the love of money is the root of all evil*” (I Timothy 6:10) does not mean that a man of God cannot be wealthy. To the contrary, a great many saints of God have had great sums of money. It is, rather, a warning against the abuse of wealth when one seeks it or after one has it. But a vital faith in God will influence one’s relationship to finances: how it is gotten, how much is kept and how much is given to divine purposes. It is that subject which James addresses in 5:1-12 of his epistle.

#### **Faith sees the insecurity of wealth**

Faith recognizes the insecurity of earthly wealth (verses 1-3). There are three things in the text which indicate that insecurity.

1. Wealth does not bring happiness. James calls, “*Ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you*” (verse 1). If wealth brought happiness, the rich men would have no reason to weep and moan for they would have no miseries (hardships) to endure. But that is not the case, as James makes clear. Great troubles were impending for those whom the writer addresses. Like the rich man of whom Jesus spoke who “*died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments*” (Luke 16:22, 23), many will find that earthly wealth does not guarantee future bliss.

2. Wealth does not give security. James spoke of riches rotting away, of gold and silver corroding and rusting and of the treasure heaped together eating into the flesh as if it were fire (verses 2, 3). The very thing the rich men thought would protect them became a witness against them and destroyed them. There must be some other source from which real security comes.

3. Wealth does not protect from judgment (verse 3). The treasure that is heaped together is so temporary. It is piled up in an age that is near its close. It is like a man buying a new home when he is on his death bed in the hospital. He may boast of it, but he will never enjoy it. Verse 4 warns that illgotten gain will become a witness against one in the day of judgment. When wealth has been abused, it increases the severity of judgment rather than protecting one from judgment. One must look elsewhere for real protection.

By faith in Jesus Christ we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken (Hebrews 12:27). There is where safety is to be found.

### **Faith does not abuse wealth**

Faith rejects the abuse of wealth (verses 4-6). James mentions three abuses of wealth which God condemns and which faith in God rejects.

1. Fraud is an abuse of wealth. Laborers worked in the fields to gather in the harvest, and their wages were kept back by fraud for the profit of the land owner. Their cries are heard by the Lord of Hosts (verse 4). Those cries will not go unheeded. Woe to the employer who defrauds his employees by unjust wages, by abuse of pension funds or by any other way that works to their harm. God will bring all such abuse into judgment.

2. Wantonness is an abuse of wealth. Some people live self-indulgent and profligate lives. They plunge into dissipation and sensual excesses (verse 5) just because they have the money to do it. But it does not go unnoticed of God. They are like cattle and have fattened themselves for a day of slaughter. The time of accounting will come.

People of faith recognize, "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad*" (II Corinthians 5:10). Wanton living will receive its just reward in that day.

3. Heartlessness is an abuse of wealth (verse 6). Those in position of power have often condemned and even killed righteous people (particularly the Righteous One, Jesus Christ) for the sake of personal advancement. God will take the part of the innocent sufferer and will bring justice to light, either in this world or in the world to come. Read the prophets of the Old Testament (particularly Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Micah) and notice their rebuke of such a lifestyle. To make other people suffer for the sake of one's personal gain deserves divine judgment, and will certainly receive

it. But the person who trusts Jesus keeps a right attitude, the spirit of mercy and love, whether it is financially profitable or not.

### **Faith seeks to comfort the poor**

Faith comforts those without wealth (verses 7-12). It is not necessary to have much money to be happy. But it is necessary to have faith in Jesus to experience true joy.

1. Faith waits patiently for its reward (verses 7, 8). As a farmer plants the seed and waits for harvest, so the Christian keeps up his courage because he trusts God to come and make all things right. Even when many wants are unfulfilled, the believer trusts God and waits with patience.

2. Faith guards the attitude (verse 9). It makes no complaints. It utters no murmurings or grumblings. It does not blame its troubles on another person. To the contrary, faith waits before God, knowing He is already standing at the door to judge the affairs of men.

The person who is touchy, quick-tempered, easily offended and self-centered is not living in fellowship with God. Faith in Jesus will make one of a tender and unselfish spirit.

3. Faith follows the example of the saints (verses 10, 11). James calls our attention to Job in his sufferings and the good brought out of it by the Lord. It demonstrates that God is full of pity, tenderness and compassion. A man of faith can wait in patience, even when he is suffering lack and is in pain for it, because he knows what God will do. Read the life story of Bible saints and notice how faith made them strong. Then follow their example because you believe.

4. Faith stimulates self-control (verse 12). There is no need to take an oath to obligate one's self or God. It is enough to say "Yes" or "No" plainly. To go beyond that might involve a person in sin. So the person who trusts God is willing to live simply and let God vindicate him at His own good time.

What does this portion of the General Epistle of James say to you about finances? It says that you must not come to depend on your wealth, but always depend on God. It says you must not abuse people in getting or using your wealth, for God will certainly require it. It says you can have assurance, even if you have no wealth, for God will reward you richly for your commitment. So trust and obey and let God be responsible for providing for you.

## **XIV. THE WORK OF FAITH IN PRAYER, James 5:12-18**

The Christian's most blessed privilege is to pray. Prayer is communion with God and is our highest duty. He who does not pray is no better than he who cannot pray. So James takes up the subject of prayer in his epistle (5:12-18) and relates it to six areas of life.

### **Faith prays in affliction**

Faith prompts prayer in times of affliction. *“Is any afflicted? Let him pray”* (verse 13). What is the affliction to which reference is made? It is the experience of any hardship or distress. The word literally means “to suffer misfortune.” The term is used to describe Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (II Timothy 2:9), as well as the sufferings of the Old Testament prophets (James 5:10). Reference is to the hardships which come on us from the outside.

What do you do in such times of trouble? A person without faith may curse, or make rash vows or give up hope. Not so the man of faith. He prays! Yes, he just prays! His praying may be asking for deliverance. Or it may be asking for strength to endure. Or it may be thanking God for the good which will come from the experience. But while the unbeliever turns attention on himself and his suffering, or his hatred on the person who causes his trouble, the believer turns his attention toward God, in whom alone there is hope. That is the difference faith makes. Are you a believing person when trouble comes to you?

### **Faith prays in sickness**

Faith prompts prayer in times of sickness (verses 14-16). Sickness may call for the united prayer of believers. If a person is sick, it is right for him to call for the elders of the church to pray over him. The prayer, whether private or corporate, is the key to recovery of the sick. *“The prayer of faith shall save the sick,”* God promises (verse 15).

Two things are received as a consequence of *“the prayer of faith.”* (1) The Lord will restore the sick person to health, according to His own will. (2) The Lord will forgive the sins which resulted in the person’s illness. What precious promises! Where does your mind turn when you are ill? If you are a believer, it should turn to God in whom alone is your hope. Faith prompts prayer when illness strikes.

### **Faith prays for forgiveness**

Faith prompts prayer for forgiveness (verse 15). Let’s dwell a little longer on forgiveness in response to prayer. The Bible says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (I John 1:9). You see an example of that in the publican who stood in the temple and prayed, *“God be merciful to me a sinner.”* Jesus said of him, *“This man went down to his house justified”* (Luke 18:13, 14). It is as Paul wrote, *“There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Romans 10:12, 13). Scripture references like those can be multiplied, but that is sufficient. If you believe the Bible, your faith will move you to pray when there is conviction for unforgiven sins in your life.

Hear James say it again, “*The prayer of faith shall save the sick...and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him*” (verse 15). Believe it and do it. Ask, and you will receive, to the joy of your heart and the growth of your faith.

### **Faith prays for cleansing**

Faith prompts prayer for cleansing. James advises, “*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed*” (verse 16). The healing of which he speaks is probably physical healing, particularly since he was speaking of sickness in the preceding verses. It indicates that physical sickness is sometimes related to guilt of personal sin.

But the healing can be spiritual as well. The person in sin is said to be sick and in need of a physician, a spiritual physician who is Jesus (Matthew 9:12). To such, God offers “*the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Titus 3:5). He promises, “*The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (I John 1:7). If you believe it, you can have it. “*According to your faith be it unto you*” (Matthew 9:29).

I remember the poor leper who came to Jesus with the request, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” Jesus responded, “*I will; be thou clean.*” And immediately his leprosy was healed (Matthew 8:2, 3). It can happen to you, if you believe. Trust Him and ask for His cleansing.

### **Faith prays for power**

Faith prompts prayer for power. James writes, “*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (verse 16). What is a “fervent” prayer? It is a heartfelt supplication, an earnest prayer, a sincere prayer. What does James mean in saying that it is “effectual”? It means that such a prayer accomplishes something, it has great power and virtue, it accomplishes its purpose by receiving what it requests. Whose prayer is it that has such power? It is the prayer of a “righteous man,” a man who is good, upright and virtuous. What does it mean that it “availeth much”? It means that it accomplishes much, brings powerful results, and is dynamic in its working.

Is that the way you pray? It can be if you are a person of faith. When we depend on man, we get what man can do. But when we pray, we get what God can do. He is “*able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*” (Ephesians 3:20). Therefore, trust and pray. See God at work doing mighty things in your service for Him. You can pray with power when your faith is in God.

### **Faith prays for natural blessings**

Faith prompts prayer for natural blessings (verses 17, 18). Look at the ancient prophet Elijah as an example of power in prayer. “*Elias was a man subject to like*

*passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*” Now that is power in prayer! It is recorded in Holy Scripture to encourage our faith that we might pray for the natural blessings of rain, growing crops, etc. God knows we need those things and will give them as we ask.

Your prayer life will be in exact proportion to your faith in God to answer prayer. James 5:12-18 teaches us to pray in all conditions and circumstances. We should pray in afflictions, in sickness, for forgiveness, for cleansing, for power and for natural blessings. Jesus invites us, “*Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full*” (John 16:24). Will you accept His word? Will you believe His promise? Will you ask, trusting Him to give according to His will? If so, you will experience the work of faith in prayer.

## **XV. THE WORK OF FAITH IN CONVERTING THE ERRING, James 5:19, 20**

The last two verses in the General Epistle of James form one of the most beautiful sections of the letter. They read, “*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 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*” (verse 19, 20). That shows the work of faith in relation to reclaiming an erring member of a congregation of Christians. I see in that paragraph the possibility that a brother will err. I see the possibility of restoring him. I see the benefits of his conversion. Now look at the ministry of faith in those three areas.

### **Faith recognizes the need for converting the erring**

Is it possible that a believer may “*err from the truth*”? Yes, it is not only possible, but it happens within the experience of most of us. We have erred personally, or we know someone who has. Who is it that errs? James wrote, “*Brethren, if any of you do err.*” It is one who is recognized as a Christian brother who errs. The immaturity of new converts makes such erring possible. And the experience of temptation for all saints, even the most mature, makes erring possible. To “err” is to wander away, to stray, to be seduced so as to depart. It is a serious matter, as our text indicates.

The erring is not so much from the church as from the truth. That is the body of truth revealed in the Christian Scriptures. Some were departing from the faith in those early years of the Christian era, and they needed to be reclaimed.

Faith in God and confidence in the revelation He gave in Jesus Christ was the motive of believers to seek to reclaim the wayward. Faith recognized the need for seeking the straying and bringing them back to the fold.

### **Faith rejoices in the possibility of converting the erring**

Two times the word “convert” is used in reference to the wayward brother. It is commonly used today to refer to the initial Christian experience in which one receives Jesus as personal Savior and Lord. But that is not the meaning here. The term simply means “to turn back again.” It can refer to the restoration of the wanderer as well as the persuasion of the one who has never come to Christ. Jesus used the word in reference to Simon Peter, the apostle, saying, “*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*” (Luke 22:32). He referred to the restoration of Simon Peter after the tragic denial he made after the arrest of Jesus.

The blessed thing is the fact that an erring brother can be restored. It is possible to convert the sinner from the error of his way. Praise the Lord! A brother is not gone forever just because he misses the mark. Go after the one who is astray. Bring that wandering sheep back into the fold. He can be reclaimed.

What is your attitude toward one who has backslidden? It might be anger, envy or ill will. It should be sympathy, love, pity and a desire to help him come back. Here is the Bible principle: “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Galatians 6:1, 2). Faith in the saving and forgiving grace of the Lord Jesus will make you rejoice in the possibility of reclaiming a wandering brother or sister.

### **Faith desires the benefits in converting the erring**

Converting the erring produces two blessed benefits (verse 20). A soul is saved from death, and a multitude of sins are hidden. Consider those two great benefits.

1. Converting the erring will save a soul from death. The term “soul” is used in the New Testament with the same meaning as “life.” To save a soul from death means to save a person’s life. The death that is spoken of here is not the eternal death of hell fire, for the person involved is a child of God through personal faith in Jesus. (He is a “brother” in Christ.) It is the physical death God permits to come on wayward Christians as a discipline for their sins. Such a verdict fell on the church in Corinth because of their abuse of the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 11:30). And it came on Ananias and Saphira because of their covetous lie to the Lord (Acts 5:1-10). To convert the erring Christian may save him from physical death which would come because of his sin.

2. Converting the erring will hide a multitude of sins. That does not mean sin will go unforgiven. Before God, sins are hidden only when they are covered by the blood of the proper sacrifice. Before man, sins may be covered when they are kept from exposure and made a public display before others. The sins which are past are forsaken, and so cease to be public knowledge. And the potential sins which might follow if one is not converted are never committed and so hidden from public

view. So before God (in forgiveness) and before men (in forsaking sin) there is a multitude of sins which will never be exposed to the shame of the erring or the blasphemy of the name of God. Thank God that sins can be forsaken and forgiven.

Have you erred? There is hope! You can be restored by repentance and asking God for forgiveness. Then you can start over again in the service of God. Simon Peter did after his grievous sin of denying Jesus, and so can you.

Do you know someone who has erred? Seek out that person and help him to start over again. It is possible because God is gracious to forgive and reclaim the penitent. That is our hope.

So we have come to the conclusion of our review of *The General Epistle of James*. We have seen all the way through it that the Christian faith is practical, not merely philosophical. It joins faith and works to make our religion relate to this world and to the world to come. We have seen faith at work in trials, temptations, sanctification, brotherhood, practical conduct, self-control, governing the tongue, practical wisdom, worldliness, presumptuous attitudes, finances, prayer and restoring the erring. That is quite a scope for faith to cover, isn't it? Yet it covers them all and more.

James does not end his letter with greetings, or concluding statements, as Paul does. He leaves his message in our minds with all its practical application. He shows the power and place of faith in our personal lives and then ends, as if to say, "That is the principle; engage in the practice." Faith is not a vague wishful hope of ultimate blessings. It is down to earth. It is a life-transforming experience with Jesus Christ which shows itself in practical deeds of daily life. Christian faith is a faith that works. Try it. It will work for you and through you to your good and God's glory.