

THE BOOK OF JAMES – 1

STABILITY IN SUFFERING 1:1-27

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER ONE

The first chapter covers several admonitions: when we are faced with trials, we are to count them all joy and allow patience to do its work in our lives so we will mature in our Christian walk. When we lack wisdom, we simply ask God and He will freely give us the wisdom we are seeking. The rich and the poor are the same in God's eyes and preference should not be exhibited toward the wealthy. There is a crown of life for all who endure temptation and we can trust that God will never change. We are admonished to be quick to listen and slow to speak or get angry. As we receive God's Word with a humble heart, we are exhorted to be doers of the Word as expressed in our actions toward others, especially widows and orphans.

OPENING SALUTATION (1-2)

James addresses Jewish believers scattered among the nations as well as his own congregation at Jerusalem. The fact that he is a humble man is reflected in the way he makes reference to himself as a "servant" rather than as the brother of Jesus.

JAMES: A SERVANT OF GOD

Jas 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

James, a servant (doulos) of God and the Lord Jesus Christ . . .

1. James

- a) He is the Lord's half-brother (Matthew 13:55-56) and the youngest of the sons.
- b) He was not a believer during the public ministry of Jesus (John 7:5).
- c) He did not become a believer until after the resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15:7; James 1:1).
- d) Eventually he became the leader of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; Galatians 1:19, 2:2, 9, 12).

The church went astray, but we have no account of James doing so. He strongly pointed out sin in the church long before it fell apart. Many of the elders of the church under James were carnal and persuaded Paul to take a vow in the temple (Acts 21:17-24). There is no reason to believe James was involved in these things, but he seemed to offer no resistance to them. He seemed to be stronger in speech and letter than in practice.

2. James was a humble man (doulos: servant)

- a) He did not associate himself with Jesus to gain fame. Peter was the one who mentioned James's association with Jesus (2 Peter 1:16-19).
- b) He did not call himself a brother of the Lord Jesus. This would have been one of the easiest ways to gain attention. James saw Jesus every day growing up. He knew the word was more important than human relationships or merit. James was a famous man, yet he claims only to be a servant.
 - 1) Physical heritage from David to his parents, Mary and Joseph (Matthew 1, John 3) did not give James any physical or spiritual advantage.
 - 2) Physical talents do not give us any advantage with the Lord.
 - 3) Physical birth, even in the family of Jesus, did not mean James automatically received the new birth. He had to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior for himself.
 - 4) James could have begun his letter with "James, the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, born into the line of Jewish aristocracy from David through Solomon and Nathan," but he did not.
- c) He did not even call himself an apostle, but a servant of the Lord Jesus. As believers, we are, first of all, servants to God the Father and the Lord Jesus.
- d) God's grace provides for everything but excludes human birth and merit. Human birth and merit are different for each individual. Some have a great ancestry, and some do not. Equality does not come through human birth but through the new birth. We all have different parents in human birth. We all have one Father in the new birth.

JAMES: MINISTER TO SCATTERED JEWISH BELIEVERS

. . . to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad (diaspora: dispersed as seed) greetings (chairō: rejoice).

Many have been dispersed by persecution (Acts 8:6). "Greetings" in the Greek is the word for "have joy." This will be the theme of chapter 1, having supernatural joy and rejoicing in the midst of trouble and testing.

Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,

My brethren (adelphos) . . .

This is the new race, believers in the Lord Jesus, not just his Jewish friends.

COUNT IT ALL JOY (2-18)

The demonstration of joy and the development of patience and endurance are key to a successful Christian life. James reminds his congregation that both the rich and the poor are alike in God's

eyes, that God never tempts with evil, and that, although people and circumstances change, God never changes.

FAITH TESTED IN TRIALS

...count (aggeomai: conclude after facts, calculate)...

This conclusion comes from the facts of the Word of God. Trouble comes because of the Word (Mark 4:17) and deliverance from trouble comes from the same Word of God. This is application of God's promises. No one can make you do this. It is something you must do yourself.

... it all (the entirety) joy (chara) ...

Only he who has joy can count it. This person pulls joy from the soul and applies it to the situation. This is a result of faith, which is based on what you know God has done for you in the past, knowing He will do the same for you again. You know He will deliver you because of the promises of the Word, not because of feelings or circumstances.

... when (on occasion of) ye fall (peripto: to fall into a hole) into divers (poikils: many categories, various types) temptations (peirosmos: testing to determine the quality of something; pressures).

Temptations come to all of us simply because we are believers and even more as we mature. What we do when confronted with temptations is determined by what information is in our soul and how we act on it. The mature believer uses the Word in his soul and counts the situation as "joy," knowing God will deliver him and bring him new strength in the middle of the trial. The key to all deliverance is knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE: THE KEY TO ALL DELIVERANCE AND SUCCESS

Jas 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. knowing

(ginosko)...

Knowledge is the key to all success in times of pressure. Knowledge is always the route to deliverance from any and all of Satan's pressures in the world (Philippians 4:11-12; 2 Corinthians 5:6). What you learn is the basis for counting or concluding joy in trials.

... that the trying (dokimion: testing for the purpose of approval) of your faith (pistis) worketh (katergozomai: working from the inside out) patience.

Patience is stability in the crisis. Stability is the theme of the upcoming verses, which holds us through trials and diversity and brings us deliverance. The opposite is true for the doubleminded and unstable man who receives nothing. God desires patience to be produced in trials. It glorifies

God and frustrates Satan's plans to destroy our faith. Romans 5:3 teaches the principle of patience being worked out through trials and testings. Patience is the product of the application of the Word of God to experience. This is not gritting teeth or endurance to the end. Patience is the outward expression of trust in God's Word and rest in His promises.

Pressure and the Development of Patience

Jas 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

But let patience have her perfect (telios: mature, complete, self-sustaining, without deficiency) work (production) . . .

If patience is allowed to run its course during persecution, it will produce something in the believer's life.

. . . that (ina) ye may be perfect (telios) and entire (olokleros: intact, undamaged) . . .

This means we will not only come through the problem with more maturity but with each part of our lives intact and undamaged.

. . . wanting (leipo: being deficient in) nothing (no area).

The Greek of verse 4 translates, "But let patience keep on possessing her fully mature production that ye may be mature and undamaged in all areas of life being deficient in none of these areas." The end result of God's Word in our lives is self-sufficiency, so we no longer need the help of other believers but can actually be of assistance to those who are not mature or self-sustaining.

Ask Without Wavering

Jas 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

If any of you lack (leipo: being deficient in) wisdom (sophia) let him ask (aiteo) of God . . .

This is not asking for knowledge of the Word but how to use the Word under pressure. Knowledge comes from the study of the Word (2 Timothy 2:15), but wisdom comes by prayer and Revelation of the Holy Spirit. Solomon did not ask for knowledge but wisdom from God to care for His people (1 Kings 3:5-10).

. . . that giveth (didomi) to all men liberally (aplos: generously without reserve) and upbraideth (oinedizo: insults) not . . .

When we ask for wisdom, God sends it liberally and never insults us for asking. Nothing is too small or insignificant to God. He is not stingy; He wants to shower us with blessings. Men may upbraid us and say we lack faith, but God never does. He gives to everyone because he is never partial. God will stop everything to answer our question. If it is important to us, it is important to God.

. . .and it shall be given him.

This is the assurance we have if we ask in faith (1 John 5:14-15).

Jas 1:6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

But let him ask in (by means of) faith (pistis), not wavering (diakrino: doubting nothing) . . .

This means that when faith is in operation, it cannot be accompanied by doubt toward the scriptures. One test of faith is to see if doubt is present.

. . . for he that wavereth (diakrino: doubts) is like a wave of the sea . . .

A wave is an example of instability and disorientation. It is controlled by the wind (a type of circumstances). It rises and then falls apart. It is momentary and totally controlled by its environment.

. . . driven (anemizo: tossed around) with the wind and tossed (ripizo).

These two terms describe instability. They describe the immature believer who tries to believe then doubts. A mature believer can admit to his spiritual level of faith and operate there. He can continue to study God's Word and grow. He is not tossed around by the wind of circumstances and false doctrine (Ephesians 4:14), but remains stable through all storms.

FAITH, DOUBT AND UNBELIEF

Although we use the terms "doubt" and "unbelief" together, they do not mean the same thing. Doubt stands between faith and unbelief. Faith has made up its mind. So has unbelief. Doubt wavers between the two, undecided. Faith is hot, unbelief is cold, and doubt is lukewarm. James is exhorting the Christians of his congregation to make up their mind and trust God. He warns them to stop vacillating in doubt toward God's Word.

THE ENEMY OF MATURITY

Jas 1:7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;

But let not that man (anthropos: anyone) think (oiomai: suppose, presume) . . .

This is prideful thinking. This comes from a conceited and inflated ego drawing a conclusion from wrong information or no information. This is human viewpoint applied to the situation instead of divine viewpoint (God's Word).

. . . that he shall receive anything from the Lord.

It is not that God will not give an answer; it is that we cannot receive the answer. Faith does not get God to give, but puts us in a place to receive. God gives grace and more grace to the humble, but he resists the proud (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). The humble man builds his faith on the Word of God. The proud man supposes God will give to him because of his knowledge or good works.

THE DOUBLE-MINDED MAN

Jas 1:8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

A double-minded (dipsuchos: double souled) man (aner: specific believer) . . .

A double-souled man is under the authority of his emotions. Pride, arrogance, and ultimately confusion take over. This man looks at the Word, then listens to his own thoughts and feelings and acts on them instead (cf. 1 Chronicles 12:33; Psalm 12:2). This man acts like a schizophrenic with two personalities. He has a man in himself who is controlled by the world's way of thinking and another who is controlled by the Word. He cannot make up his mind; he does not know which thinking he should go with, so he vacillates. "Man" in verse 7 was anthropos. In verse 8 it is anhr. The difference between these two words is that verse 7 treats him like any unbeliever and verse 8 as a mature believer. The "man" in verse 8 shows his potential before the Lord as a great and noble believer.

. . . is unstable (akatastatos: not able to stand, inconsistent, turbulent, restless, vacillating) in all his ways (daily actions).

Lack of knowledge and a false foundation of emotions and human viewpoint leave a believer unstable in every area of life. A foundation in the Word builds stability in all areas of life and leads to rewards in eternity (1 Timothy 4:8).

THE RICH AND THE POOR

Jas 1:9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,

Let the brother (adelphos) of low degree (tapeinos: humble, grace oriented) . . .

This man does not have many possessions. He will be contrasted to the rich man later. It is not accidental that we go from verses about double-mindedness to a discourse on those who love

money. Jesus did this in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-24. A person's attitude toward material things is a good indication of his attitude toward spiritual things. Faith in God will be the great equalizer, which elevates the poor and humbles the rich. All of this is still in the context of handling tests and trials. Testing from Satan comes to all, rich or poor, high or low class, male or female, black or white.

. . . rejoice (kauchaomai: glory, celebrate) (because) he is exalted:

This man can celebrate even though he is financially poor because he knows God's Word and is applying it to the circumstances. This person does not have the love of money but the love of God. He is perfectly oriented to life and does not need details of life for contentment. This man can rejoice because through Jesus Christ he has been exalted in life and in eternity. He can rejoice in his position of truth, what Jesus has done for him by means of the cross. Being singleminded toward the Lord is the great equalizer in the body of Christ. It elevates the poor and humbles the rich (1 Corinthians 7:20-22). It brings the proper perspective to suffering, which comes to us all.

Jas 1:10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.

But the rich in that he is made low

"Making low" is not making poor. The rich people in the New Testament church were to rejoice like the poor man, but for another reason. At one time the rich depended upon riches for security and power (Matthew 19:23, Luke 18:23-27), but they have been humbled to realize that their newfound strength is in the Lord who has just saved him by grace -- unmerited favor.

Money could not have purchased their deliverance, only the ransom price of the blood of Jesus Christ could.

The lowering of the rich man is as much inward as the elevating of the poor. This is not an outward bringing in of finances to the poor or taking away from the rich. Relating this back to trials and persecution, which is the theme of chapter 1, neither wealth nor poverty will bring a person through trials. Only faith in the Word can do this and it is available to all, whether or not they have money.

. . . because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

Life is as uncertain to the rich as it is to the poor. Riches cannot keep you on earth past a certain time period. Death comes to all despite color, sex, nationality, or social standing. People in the church needed to understand this in Jame's day and still need to understand it in our day. The expression "the grass of the field" is taken from Isaiah 40:6-8 and Matthew 6:28-30. Jesus used this term in the Sermon on the Mount as an illustration about worry. Tomorrow is uncertain for us all, but God takes care of the grass of the field, which is here today and gone tomorrow. God cares more for us than the flowers of the field, so we do not need to worry over money, clothing,

or the necessities of life. Other scriptures dealing with the shortness of life include Psalm 90:5-6, 102:11, 103:15, Isaiah 51:12, and 1 Peter 1:24.

Jas 1:11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning (scorching) heat (wind), but it withereth the grass, And the flower thereof falleth, and the grace (beauty) of the fashion of it perisheth . . .

This verse is speaking of the utter uselessness of the depending on anything in life other than the Word of God. For the rich to depend on wealth is absurd. When the circumstances of life come, no exception is made for social standing and financial power. The same scorching sun and dry land will wither grass, flower, and weeds alike. Nothing is immune. Often the flower is the first to go because of its frailty. This is a type of the rich. Often they become weak in their ability to stand because of their long dependence on finances. When trouble comes and finances are in short supply, they cannot stand the pressure and leap from buildings or give up on life altogether. No one is exempt from trouble. Neither is anyone exempt from the blessing of God because He sends the rain and the sun on the just and unjust alike (Matthew 6:45).

The four verbs in this verse— risen, withers, falls, and fade away— show a series of events in life that come to the weak believer. The scorching sun is a type of the afflictions of life (Mark 4:6, 16-17). Because the flowers or grass have no water to draw from, they wither and die. Only a plant that has an unlimited supply of water will survive. A tree or plant beside a river will continue to grow and remain green when everything around is dying. This is a type of the believer who is founded in the Word of God (Psalm 1:1-3, Jeremiah 17:5-8). A person who has put trust in their money or position in life will face a day when the water dries up. A person whose strength comes from the Word of God will never face that day. The same afflictions come to us all, but those who trust in the Lord and His Word will remain.

. . . so also (in the same way) shall the rich man fade away in his ways (pursuits).

Rich and poor suffer alike and die alike, but the rich man is more obvious in both. Since he is more of a spectacle, he is like the flower when it fades in comparison to the grass. Both die but one is more missed or regretted in the eyes of men. The focus of this chapter is not the attitude or eyes of men but of God. The divine view of life is the subject here. All believers need to see the divine view of life and quit living our lives to please men. God sees and rewards according to a different scale of values. Permanence is not found in the pursuit of the material or natural but in the pursuit of spiritual.

The Crown of Life

Jas 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Blessed (makarios) is the man (rich or poor) who endureth (through faith which is available to all) temptation (testing) . . .

This man is blessed, happy and needs to count (esteem) it all joy. Once again, this means seeing problems and testings through the eyes of the Lord and counting things in life as the Lord does. His will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven. This is the pattern Abraham used when he called those things that be not as though they were (Romans 4:17). This joy and happiness does not come from external conditions of life such as pleasant circumstances or material wealth, but from the knowledge and stability of the Word of God.

Temptation is endured (upomeno: to remain under), not existed. When a person stands up under the pressures of life and does it with joy, it makes life a pleasure despite the bad circumstances. God has not given us eternal life just to exist until death or the rapture, but so we can have life more abundantly.

. . . for when he is tried (dokomos) he shall receive the crown (stephanos) of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love (agapao) him.

This crown of life is available to all believers who stand and come through trials (2 Timothy 2:12). It is part of the rewards God has for the believers at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, Romans 14:10, 2 Corinthians 5:10). The reward is not eternal life; it is a crown of life.

Eternal life is not a reward; it is a gift. Rewards are not given but earned by us while we are alive on the earth. Because the Lord gave this promise of a crown, we can depend on it to come to pass. The Lord will not promise something and then not perform it. This promise was made in eternity past at the counsel of divine decrees; it is part of the eternal life package that was seen as complete before the foundation of the world. This promise is potential, based on our performance in tests and trials.

God has given us all the provisions, in His Word and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to go through life successfully. He has not promised us the potential of success without giving us the equipment to perform it. Those who love Him are those who know His Word (2 John 4:7-8). When we are saved, we know the Lord. When we grow in His Word, we love Him.

Temptation

Jas 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Often, during a testing period, it is easy to lose our perspective, get caught up in the emotions of the moment and even blame God for our troubles. These testings and temptations are those that would draw us away from the Lord. This is the solicitation to evil, which comes from our flesh and is ultimately backed by Satan himself.

God also tests believers and has done so since Old Testament times. But He tests us with the good things He gives us. He is always testing priorities through the spiritual and natural blessings He gives us.

Satan, however, tempts us to sin and reject the leading of the Word and the Holy Spirit. He wants us to follow our emotions and lusts instead of the Word. He uses circumstances and time periods to get us to give up and cast away our confidence and patience. This testing never comes from the Lord, and it is a blasphemous statement to blame Him. The first one to blame God for Satan's device was Adam when he told the Lord that it was the woman "whom thou gavest" (Genesis 3:12).

. . . for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

This part of the verse gets us back to the real issue at hand: the character of God. When we have our attention fixed on His unchangeable character, we will know who the culprit is and will continue in patience until the answer comes. We can fulfill the verse that tells us "having done all to stand, stand therefore" (Ephesians 6:13-14). We can know with Romans 8:31 that "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Satan, the flesh, and the world are the problems, and God is the answer to them all. He has provided everything we need to come through any battle victorious.

Jas 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

But every (ekastos: each) man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust (eipthumia: cravings) and (by being) enticed (deleazomenos: drawn by bait).

The blame of sin does not begin with the devil but with us. The nature of the flesh is the culprit, and it abides in our body (Romans 6:6, 12, 7:5, 18-19, 23-24, James 1:4) and is passed on to us from the original sin of Adam (Romans 5:12). The flesh produces "works" or manifestations that need to be overcome by a walk in the Spirit and submission to the Word of God (Romans 8:2-9, Galatians 5:16-25). Temptations come to each of us because we personally have a nature of the flesh (Mark 7:21-23). The temptations of one may not be temptations to another. When we are

drawn away by our own lusts, we are enticed or baited away from what is righteous. Like bait, there is always a hook in the enticement. We are drawn away to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which quickly fade away and demand more indulgence daily. The righteous life demands work and diligence but brings a lasting joy that cannot be removed. Although Satan also tempts the believer, he will be dealt with later when we are told “Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you” (4:7). You cannot resist your flesh and expect it to flee from you. It will always be present and have to be dealt with until death or the rapture. In many cases, Satan is easier to deal with than the flesh.

Jas 1:15 Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Then when lust hath conceived (sullabousa: reached conception), it bringeth forth sin (hamartia): and sin, when it is finished (apotelesteeisa: full-grown), bringeth forth death.

This statement proves that temptation to sin cannot come from God because he never came to bring death; He came to bring life.

The series of events described in this verse parallels the prostitute in Proverbs chapter 5. She entices the young boy to her apartment where he yields to her own lusts and commits fornication. A hook is placed in his life that draws him back to this lifestyle many times until he is filled with disease and eventually dies. Just as there is conception in the womb of the woman when sexual relationships have taken place, there is conception when lust is acted upon and sin is committed. The result of impregnated lust is the bearing of sin. Lust is the mother of sin.

The death referred to in this verse is not spiritual death but a temporal death for the believer, separation from fellowship with God (Luke 15:24). This is the first of many terms used in James for the carnal believer (whom he compares to the unbeliever) (5:20). A carnal believer looks and acts like an unbeliever. There are many forms of death found in the Word and each one of them is traceable to a root of sin.

Every Good and Perfect Gift

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

Do not err (stop being deceived), my beloved brethren . . .

The seriousness of the command comes through with a love toward his people. James warns his congregation to stop being deceived. As he is warning them, his pastor’s heart comes through with the first of three admonitions to his people when he calls them “my beloved brethren” (1:19, 2:5).

Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Every good (agathe) gift (dosis: act of giving) and every perfect (teleion) gift (dorema: thing given) is from above, and cometh down (continually) from the Father of (the) lights . . .

The Greek of this verse translates, "Every act of giving which is good and every gift which is perfect is from above." This verse again refutes the claim that temptation and trials come from God (13-14). The perfection of any gift reflects the goodness of the One giving it (Luke 11:13). "The Father of lights" is a reference to God the Father who oversees the stars in heaven. The stars are examples of His glory (Psalm 119:1, 136:7). He has created them, but He is not to be identified with them. These creations are not to be worshiped as God, but to be appreciated as gifts and testimonies of His Majesty. They testified to the fact that "God is light" (1 John 1:5) both in the natural and the spiritual, which is the illumination of His Word (2 Corinthians 4:6). His gifts are not to be worshiped over Him, the gifts over the Giver. This verse takes us to proper priorities in life, that we would not turn from the Lord "to the right hand nor to the left" (Joshua 1:7).

. . . with whom is no variableness (can be no variation), neither shadow of (that is cast by) turning.

Stars are good just as is all of God's creation. But as good as stars are, they vary in intensity. The sun is the largest star near the earth and causes shadows to appear by both its movement and the movement of the earth. God is not that way. His creation might vary and move in its course, but the Creator does not. Anything God created that we may begin to worship will always vary and change from its original course. If we keep our eyes on the Lord and His Word, everything else in life will be in perspective. "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God is always light, and there is no variation in Him. Times of partial darkness would be necessary for God to vary. But it is impossible for God to have any darkness because He is light and He never varies. This is the reason we can ask for wisdom from Him knowing the answer is coming. Unlike man, God does not vary like a wave of the sea, and He has given us His nature and His Word. Because of the Word of God in our heart and having His very nature, we should be as unwavering and stable as God. We should not blame Him when things go wrong because He cannot tempt us with evil nor be tempted with evil Himself. Darkness will not and cannot invade His character in any degree.

Firstfruits

Jas 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

Of his own will begat he us with (by) the word of truth . . .

The new birth did not come to us because of the goodness of the receiver but because of the goodness of the giver. Sin brought forth (begat) death (1:15), but God brought forth life out of death. "Begot he" is from the same Greek word translated in verse 15 as "bringeth forth." It is the Greek word *apekuesen*. God's will was not to leave us in a state of death but to give us His eternal life. Having willed it, God did what was necessary to bring it to pass without any outside agency to help. When God saved us, He gave us every blessing pertaining to life and eternity, and He accomplished this before the foundation of the world, the angels, and all of creation (Ephesians 1:4). The new birth came through the agency of "the word of truth." This is the Word of God (John 17:17). When the message of the Word of God is heard, faith arises in the heart of the hearer and when acted upon, salvation occurs (Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 4:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:23-25). There is no substitute for the proclamation of the gospel.

. . . that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (*ktisma*: creation).

The example of firstfruits is taken from the Old Testament (Exodus 23:19, Leviticus 23:9-11, Deuteronomy 18:4). Firstfruits was when the first growths of the crops came forth, showing the quality of the full harvest. The priests would cut the best of the crop at the time of harvest and wave it before the Lord as an indication that the rest of the crop would be good. Paul used this term when he referred to the first converts in the area (Romans 16:6, 1 Corinthians 16:15).

The term is also used of the Lord Jesus when He was raised from the dead as the first fruits of the great crop, the church, which was still to come (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). The church becomes the firstfruits of the rest of creation. We are the first of creation to be born again and all of the rest of God's creation will come into the same glorious liberty as the church (Romans 8:19-21). As Jesus was the firstfruits for the church, the church is the firstfruits of the rest of creation.

Production of the Word (19-27)

James emphasizes that it is the Word that will stabilize their lives and, above all else, action needs to be put to their faith. They must become doers of the Word and not hearers only. Pure religion is not just reading or meditating on the Word; it is the Word in action demonstrating God's character to the world.

From verse 19 through the end of the chapter, the production of the Word in our lives will be the issue. The Word will be called a seed (verse 21), a mirror (verse 23), and a law of liberty (verse 25). Verses 19 and 20 discuss our reaction to the Word of God. Verse 21 presents the necessary conditions for effective reception on the Word. Finally, verses 22 through 27 explain the nature and the importance of obedience to the Word.

A. Being a Witness

Jas 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every (each) man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath(orge):

This portion of scripture begins with “my beloved brethren,” displaying the heart of a pastor James has toward his congregation. His greatest desire is to see the Word producing in their lives and causing a noticeable difference. The Word in a believer’s life will produce patience in the midst of suffering (Romans 5:3-4). James brought this issue up because the members of the congregation at Jerusalem were not putting the Word into use in their everyday lives. As a whole, their witness before the city was not a good one. When a life is controlled by the Word, Jesus Christ will be seen in every action and word. Being “swift to hear” means to be quick to receive the Word of God on a subject before speaking or acting.

Being swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath are listed in their proper order. The first area of responsibility in a situation is to build faith by “hearing” and finding the Word of God about a situation. We should find as many Scriptures as possible to meditate on and build inner strength to face that situation (Psalm 1:1-3, Proverbs 4:20-22).

A person should be “slow to speak,” and guard their mouth, so they are not hasty to speak in reaction to a situation, or to speak things contrary to the Word. Keeping quiet is a spiritual virtue (Proverbs 10:19, 13:13, 14:29, 29:11, Ecclesiastes 5:2). “Swift” and “slow” show attitudes behind the actions. The Word of God should build attitudes in our lives to know when to be quick to act and when to be slow.

“Slow to wrath” is the last thing mentioned. Quick words and reactions to a situation without scripture and patience to back it up will produce emotional outbursts that will later be regretted. The feeling of anger toward the acts of Satan and evil are not wrong. Jesus demonstrated this when He drove the moneychangers from the temple (John 2:15-16). This was a defense of righteousness. The problems of life are to be confronted with patience and a dependence on the Word of God.

Jas 1:20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

For the wrath of man worketh (ergazetai: work, to work out, to perform) not the righteousness of God.

Human anger is not an appropriate avenue for the production of righteousness even if the intent is good. God does not need man’s help to attain His goals. His goals are met with His power and

His Word. Man's wrath is the arm of the flesh, which is an abomination in the sight of the Lord. "And in my flesh dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18).

Jas 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Wherefore, lay apart (putting off) all filthiness (rupara: dirtiness) and superfluity (perisseian: overflowing) of naughtiness (kakos: wickedness)

an analogy of clothing is used in this verse, the putting off of old, dirty clothes and putting on of new, clean ones. This is a picture of holiness being worked in our daily lives. This is something we must do for ourselves; God will not do it for us (2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:6). We first rid ourselves of sins by confessing them to the Lord (1 John 1:9). Once fellowship is restored, we are ready to receive the Word. We are then in a position to be used by the Lord, a vessel unto honor (2 Timothy 2:20-21). James's congregation was living in filthiness, and evil overflowed in their lives. This too, was a bad witness to the city around them. It was time for them to take charge of their lives by the power of the Word of God that had been given to them by James.

B. Receiving the Word with Meekness

. . . and receive (dexasthe: welcome with open arms) with meekness (praus: teachable attitude) the engrafted (emphuton: implanted) word, which is able to save (sozo: save) your souls.

"Receive" is the other side of the coin to "lay aside." When you turn from something, you must turn towards something else. The Word of God is the object here to "put on." But now the analogy turns from clothes to seeds in the ground. Just as the laying aside has to be done by the individual, so does the receiving of the Word of God. It is not only to be welcomed but also with an attitude of humility. No one knows it all and never will. We never get to a place where we no longer need to be taught. At the point of the new birth, God implants the new birth in our heart, an incorruptible seed, which cannot be defiled. From that point on, it is up to us to implant the seed of God's Word in the same heart. The salvation of our spirit, the new birth, was instantaneous. The saving of our souls is a process, which occurs over our lifetime. Through time we take on the image of Jesus Himself as we study and meditate on His Word (2 Corinthians 3:18).

C. Being Doers of the Word

Jas 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

But be (ginomai: become) ye doers (poietai: producers) of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving (paralogizomenoi: deluding) your own selves.

James is quick to add that study of the Word is not enough. We have to put the Word to work in our lives and live it before others. This will be the theme of the upcoming chapter: works which accompany faith. If a person only studies and meditates on the Word, he will delude himself. It is like eating and never exercising. The Word is designed to do more than just feed our inner man. It is designed to produce power, to live the gospel out before the world. This is the end result of the Word. It has been given to help us fulfill the Great Commission, spreading the gospel to all men.

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

For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man (aner) beholding (perceiving) his natural face in a glass (mirror).

The mirror here is the Word of God. The Word is a mirror (1 Corinthians 13:12) in which we look to better perceive ourselves. The objective of the mirror of the Word is to keep hearing (looking) and doing until we look more like Jesus Himself (2 Corinthians 3:18). Scripture is the only mirror that will make us look like someone else: Jesus.

Jas 1:24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way (apeleluthen: goes away) and straightway (eutheos: immediately) **forgetteth what manner of man he was.**

Natural mirrors are not designed to be a great part of our lives. They show us what we look like in the morning and are used only long enough to obtain the momentary goal of appearance. They may be used throughout the day to reattain the goal, but that is all.

The Word of God is different. It is designed to be looked into and its revelations to be carried with us throughout the day. The Word of God is something we look into daily, but we also carry it with us in our soul to be drawn from daily. The mirror of God's Word is not like a natural mirror that we use when we have a problem. The Word is not to be studied only in church or occasionally as the need arises. This is not a natural mirror; it is a spiritual one. It is part of our lives, night and day, twenty-four hours a day. As we meditate on the Word, we place it in our souls. We are to be an epistle known and read of all men (2 Corinthians 3:2). We are a Bible, whether we have one or not.

Jas 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

But whoso looketh into (parakupsas: having stooped over and examined) the perfect (telios) law of liberty, and continueth (parameno: continue closely beside, alongside) therein . . .

The law of God is perfect (Psalm 19:7). It is what brings us into perfection (maturity). To shoot for perfection in our own lives, we must have a goal of perfection in front of us. We become more like the Word as we look intently into it each day. Looking into the Word is being a hearer of the Word. Being a doer of the Word is continuing by taking the Word alongside of us throughout the day into the world. Working the Word is a continuation of study.

The looking in this verse is not a casual but a penetrating look. This is not simply reading the Word; it is studying the Word (2 Timothy 2:15). The continuing in this verse does not mean staying with your Bible all day, but continuing, after you have closed its pages, to walk in his commandments as you live your life before unbelievers.

. . . he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work (ergon: doer that works), this man shall be blessed in his deed (doing of it).

To keep from forgetting the Word, we must apply it each day. A doer of the Word is a doer who works. The greatest blessing in life is not just the study and revelation that comes from the Word, but the application of it to see the lives of others changed. This is the blessing James is speaking of to his congregation. James is also stressing the correct order. Working for the Lord does not come first. We are not blessed because we work for the Lord, but because we study His Word, know His grace and our authority, and then work. This is when we are blessed in our working for the Lord. The attitude behind work is more important than the work itself. Attitudes created by the Word cause our efforts to be blessed.

Jas 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

If any man (tis: anyone) among you seem (dokei: thinks himself) to be religious (threskos: outwardly religious), and bridleth (chalinagogeo: hold in check with a bridle) not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain (mataios: empty, non-productive). James now adds another warning to the believer who wants to be a doer of the Word. It does no good to say and do good works if the tongue is undisciplined. A gossip who helps believers in need and witnesses to the sinner is a contradiction. He may be doing good works, but they are all nonproductive. All this person is doing is stacking up a pile of wood, hay and stubble for the judgment seat of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). When the words of the mouth, as well as natural works, are under the control of the indwelling Word, this man is mature and can look forward to great rewards. Sins of the tongue are high on God's list of abominations (Proverbs 6: 16-19). The

man who may be filled with the Word and good works, but cannot control his tongue is said to “deceive his own heart.” He may be under the illusion that he is blessing the Lord and those around him, but he is not. Many believers today do not consider sins of the tongue to be evil, but they are not looking at the Christian life through God’s eyes. Sins of the tongue negate any positive results the Word and good works will produce (Colossians 3:17).

D. Pure Religion

Jas 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Pure (katharos: clean) religion and undefiled before God and the Father (the God and Father) is this, To visit (episkeptesthai: look in on) the fatherless (orphanous: orphans) and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

“Pure religion” is a summation of this chapter. It is the outward life of a believer before the church and the world, backed by a study of the Word, faith in the promises of God, and a control over the flesh. This man is said to have an outward religion, which below the surface is clean and undefiled in the sight of God. His life is an outward display of his heart.

The areas of ministry mentioned in this verse are only a small sample of many more possibilities. Visiting the orphans and widows denotes more than a casual social call. This denotes a visiting with aid and assistance. These two groups are totally helpless and must be sustained by those around. The widows mentioned in this verse must be “widows indeed” (1 Timothy 5:5, 9-13). Both of these classes were subject to exploitation and needed to be defended (Zechariah 7:10, Mark 12:40). God’s attitude toward the widows and orphans is one of great care (Deuteronomy 10:18, Mark 12:40).

In James, pure religion is defined and expressed this way:

1. Being born-again
2. Studying God’s Word
3. Being filled with the Holy Spirit
4. Stepping out in faith on God’s Word without doubting
5. Stability in the Christian life
6. Being humble rather than prideful
7. Enduring temptations
8. Overcoming the flesh
9. Continuing in the Word of God
10. Being a doer of the Word who displays good works as a witness before the world
11. Bridling the tongue

The believer is also to keep himself unspotted (unsoiled) from the world's system, which is backed by Satan (John 14:20, 1 John 4:4). A life of holiness is commanded by God (2 Corinthians 6:17, James 4:4). It is through a life of holiness that the world can see the power of God demonstrated in our lives. This holiness is not produced by our flesh or our own willpower, but by the power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Chapter Summary

James was the pastor of the church at Jerusalem. He loved his congregation but was tired of believers talking "spiritual" but not living spiritual. The epistle of James is about living a practical Christian lifestyle. James exhorts his congregation by telling them the world needs to see their walk of faith in action. One way to do this is through the demonstration of joy and the resulting patience in their lives as they walk through trials.

James emphasizes that God desires both our words and actions to reflect the Lord. He also emphasizes the importance of good works as our greatest witness before the world. The ultimate purpose of good works is for God to be glorified, as demonstrated in and through our lives.