

The Christian Application Commentary

James



By Ethan VanAernam

Last Update 10/28/18

For more commentaries or to check if a newer version is available just go to

<https://runningbygrace.wordpress.com/>

Background

As you might guess James is the author of this letter. This is not James, one of the twelve disciples, as he died before the book was written (see Acts 12:1-2). It is most likely James the brother of Jesus (Paul calls him an apostle in Galatians 1:19, and Acts 1:14 tells us all Jesus brothers became believers after His resurrection), who tradition tells us was an elder in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15 refers to this James). Seeing as he died somewhere between 62-66 A.D., this letter had to be written prior to 62. There is no way to know an exact date, but it is believed to have been written between 48 and 52 A.D. Being an elder in Jerusalem, James is likely writing to believers around this area and to a mostly Jewish audience. The letter focuses on the idea of faith and good works, and seeks to address the problem of those who claim to be Christian, but have no fruit in their lives to show it. It is important to note that James is not advocating salvation by works, but instead that true salvation through grace ought to change believers in such a way that they will naturally do good works. This is hugely important to our understanding of James.

James Chapter 1

James is a letter that is very applicable to churches and Christians today. The question of works and faith is one that needs to be addressed. As we look through James we will also look at parallel verses that talk about the same topics. Some of it will get very deep, but stick with me and I will do my best to walk you through it. Above all else take the words of this letter to heart and be doers of the word and not just hearers.

1 James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: To the 12 tribes in the Dispersion.¹

Here is James greeting. You may be wondering who on Earth he is writing to, and what does dispersion mean? First off, we need to know which James is writing. You may remember there being a disciple named James in the gospels. He was the brother of John, the disciple Jesus loved and author of several New Testament books. This James was killed by Herod in Acts 12:1-5, before much of the growth the church experienced. Given he died this early, he is not the likely writer. There is another James in the Gospels, the brother of Jesus. In the Gospels, he did not believe Jesus, but when Jesus rose He appeared to James. In fact, in Acts 15 we see that he is an elder in the Jerusalem church and holds authority on par with Peter. This is the James that wrote this letter. Just think about the complete change here. Once he thought Jesus was crazy, but now he refers to himself as a slave to the Lord Jesus.

The next question is who is he writing to? The use of the phrase 12 tribes should make you think of Israel, and certainly his target audience could be the Jews dispersed outside of Israel, as the word dispersion means to disperse, but there is another option. J.A. Motyer and D.A. Carson point out that “The phrase the *twelve tribes* probably does not mean that the readers were all Jews, but that James thought of them as the people of God, the true Israel, whether they

¹ Unless otherwise stated all Bible passages are cited from the HCSB translation.

were Jews or Gentiles.”² I think this goes a little far. I do think James was striving for an obvious parallel, but I do not think he viewed the church as the new Israel. Therefore, I believe his audience was primarily Jews, but also Gentiles as well. Again, this is still debated among scholars and for our purpose we do not need to dig that deep. James is writing to believers about an issue in the church that needed to be addressed.

2 Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

Here is where James start, and for many it is a rough place to begin. James points out that we should rejoice in trials, because trials will test our faith and through it produce faith in God. It is like anything else in life. There are hard times that none of us enjoy, but when we look back we can often see the good God worked out of it. James point here is to look ahead, trusting that God will use the current trials to produce more faith. Testing faith leads to endurance. Think of it this way, you are running a mile. At first you struggle and you take a long time to finish, but as you do it each day your muscles develop and gradually your time gets better and you run faster. That’s how trials are, the more you endure and trust God the more you will mature and grow in Him. That is why trials are something to be thankful for, as they help us mature.

5 Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. 8 An indecisive man is unstable in all his ways.

²G.J. Wenham, J.A. Motyer, D.A. Carson, and R.T. France. *New Bible Commentary*. (Intervarsity Press Downers Grove; IL), 1356.

It is interesting how James continues his thought. He tells us trials will bring faith and endurance, and then he talks about wisdom. This is interesting when you think about James' words that we will lack nothing as we mature. So, he points out that if you do lack wisdom, you should ask God for it. Even better, he points out God gives it generously and without criticism. God does not look at us and think, "ugh, sure here is some wisdom for you because you were pathetic!" No! He hears and graciously gives. Simply amazing.

However, James puts a condition on it. He comments that if you ask, you must ask without doubting. Now there is a tall order! What does it even mean? Personally, this verse makes me think of Mark 9:20-27. In case you do not have the whole Bible memorized I will tell you what it says. The passage takes place right after Jesus, Peter, James, and John just came down from the transfiguration. There is a whole crowd because of a demon possessed boy that the other disciples could not help. The father looks at Jesus and said, "But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus replies that everything is possible to one who believes. Here the father makes one of the best cases I have ever read. He looks at Jesus and says I do believe, please help my unbelief! And it is then that Jesus drives the demon from the boy. Many of us would assume from the context that the father was still having trouble believing, but he cried out for Jesus to help him.

With this in mind, how do we look at doubting? Carson points out that doubt in this context does not mean wondering whether or not God will answer the prayer, but that it refers to a doubleminded person. So, what does that mean in English? There is a difference between having doubt and yet believing like the father with Jesus in Mark 9, and doubting whether God really is the way to go. Think about it like this, a believer prays to God for something. He feels like God does not need to answer or that his request is unworthy and so even though he hopes

God will answer, he still has doubt if He will. This believer still expressed faith and has a hope that God will answer. However, another person prays not truly believing God will answer. This 'believer' really does not follow the Bible or know God. He may have grown up with God, but he still is unsure of God. When he asks he does not believe in any way. This is the person who is indecisive and unstable in all his ways. They are driven and tossed about by their doubt and it drives them from God, which is why they do not get what they ask for. I know that was a lot to take in, but it is an important point.

9 The brother of humble circumstances should boast in his exaltation, 10 but the one who is rich should boast in his humiliation because he will pass away like a flower of the field. 11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and dries up the grass; its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will wither away while pursuing his activities.

Speaking of hard things to grasp, James moves on to humility. Here he points out something that seems backwards to us (a paradox). The brother who is in humble circumstances should boast in his exaltation. What does that mean? It means that one who is not exalted, but lives in poverty without recognition should rejoice because his life is not here. On the flip side one who is rich should only boast in the fact that one day all that he has on this Earth will be gone. If the rich focus on what they have here and now and chase riches, in the end all of it will pass away and mean nothing. The rich man will find it harder to focus on God and eternity than the brother of poor circumstances. This is mainly a perspective on eternity and the here and now. This reminds us to focus on eternity as our home is not here.

12 A man who endures trials is blessed, because when he passes the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. 13 No one undergoing a trial

should say, “I am being tempted by God.” For God is not tempted by evil, and He Himself doesn’t tempt anyone. 14 But each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desires. 15 Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death.

Now James brings us back to trials. He talked about how we are blessed when we go through trials, but now he talks about enduring them. The believer who endures trials passes the test and receives the crown of life. After reading that you might be thinking, ‘Does that mean God is the one who tempts us in trials, if it’s all a test?’ As if reading our minds, he follows up his statement by pointing out that we cannot say that God is tempting us. Why cannot God tempt us? Because he is unable to be tempted by evil and therefore He cannot tempt others to evil. Perfect goodness cannot tempt people to do evil. So where does temptation come from? The sad news, from our own desires. At creation this was not the case. However, after the fall our sinful nature twisted our desires and now pushes them from proper enjoyment to indulgence in ways that should never happen. That means our desires, twisted by sin and wishing to be fulfilled in wrong ways, in the source of temptation. That desire draws us from God through enticement, and when it is finally indulged it results in us sinning. Then that sin leads to our death if we do not repent. Through Jesus we have forgiveness and redemption in the face of the death that our sin should bring. We should never lose respect for the sacrifice God made to restore us.

16 Don’t be deceived, my dearly loved brothers. 17 Every generous act and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights; with Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning. 18 By His own choice, He gave us a new birth by the message of truth so that we would be the firstfruits of His creatures.

Again, James seeks to clarify. Not only is God not tempted by evil and does not tempt others, but He is also the source of every perfect gift. Every generous act comes from God. He describes Him as the Father of lights and points out that God does not change or vary. Lastly James highlights that God gave us the gift of salvation of His own choice.

19 My dearly loved brothers, understand this: Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, 20 for man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness. 21 Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save you. 22 But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but one who does good works—this person will be blessed in what he does.

Moving on James brings up more valuable points. First, he tells us to be quick to hear, in this case he is referring to the word of God as you will see in the next verses. He also tells us to be slow to speak. This seems odd until you connect it to the next line which is to be slow to anger. James will bring this up latter by talking about controlling the tongue. The reason he says this is that man's anger does not accomplish what God desires to accomplish. We must put off all the worldliness that seeks to corrupt and instead to put God's word, the Bible, in your heart.

Knowing the word is not enough. James points out if you only listen to the word without seeking to apply it to your life, then you deceive yourself. What do deceive yourself about? The scary truth is your faith. You make yourself think you are really a follower of Christ, but your heart is far from Him. John 14:15 says much the same, quoting Jesus saying that if we love Him

we will obey His commands. James then uses an analogy (that just means a comparison using like or as). He says one who hear but does not apply the word is like a man who looks into a mirror, but after he leaves the mirror he immediately forgets what he looks like. He contrasts this by saying the one who **looks intently into the perfect law of freedom** is not forgetful, but instead applies what they hear in the form of good works. What is the perfect law? Jesus and His commands. Jesus came to fulfill the law and is the perfection of the law. Those who hear and apply God's words are blessed.

26 If anyone thinks he is religious without controlling his tongue, then his religion is useless and he deceives himself. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Now James comes back to speech, this time focusing on the tongue. He points out that if you think of yourself as religious, but cannot control your tongue than your religion is literally of no value. Even worse you once again deceive yourself into thinking you really are following Christ. At this point he tells us what pure religion is: taking care of orphans and widows. This echoes Jesus' words in Matthew 25:31-40, where He points out that what we do for the least among us is as if we have done for Him. The question is, are we concerned with only knowledge and appearance, like the Pharisees, or are we concern with truly following Christ?

So What Do I Do With This Now?

All the information is great, but what do I do with it now?

1 We learned that trials should be rejoiced over because through endurance they build faith and lead to righteousness in Christ. We know that temptation is not from God as He is not tempted by evil and does not tempt people. We must watch our own desires that have been twisted by sin

and not give into the impulses they entice us with. Instead, rejoice remembering that although our sin leads to death, God chose to die to take away our sins. Always remember and appreciate what Jesus did for us.

2 We also learned if we lack wisdom we should ask God. However, you must ask truly believing in who God is and hoping in Him.

3 We learned that our focus should not be on the here and now, but on eternity. If we are gifted with riches, we must not spend our time chasing wealth and other temporary things, but instead pursuing a godly life and seeking to tell others about Jesus. Do not let wealth distract us.

4 We learned we must not just learn the word, but also apply it to our lives. If you do not apply God's word than you only deceive yourself about following God. You only use religion to look good, but have not been changed by God.

5 Lastly, we learned that pure religion is to care for orphans and widows. Everything we do to the least of people is as if we have done it for Jesus. We must use the resources we have to help those in need as Jesus would.

James Chapter 2

As we dive into chapter two keep chapter one in mind. This is a whole letter and cannot be taken in parts but must be seen in the whole. Much like we would not take one sentence out of a letter written to us, the same must be applied to biblical letters. My goal is to show you what the Bible really says. To be saved you must have a real relationship with God and comes through faith and obedient works as I will show you. James 2 continues on the idea of works showing the believers faith. Please do not get me confused, works do not save you, they serve as visible proof of your faith. Well without further delay, lets jump in.

1 My brothers, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. 2 For example, a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and a poor man dressed in dirty clothes also comes in. 3 If you look with favor on the man wearing the fine clothes and say, "Sit here in a good place," and yet you say to the poor man, "Stand over there," or, "Sit here on the floor by my footstool," 4 haven't you discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers: Didn't God choose the poor in this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? 6 Yet you dishonored that poor man. Don't the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? 7 Don't they blaspheme the noble name that was pronounced over you at your baptism? 8 Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. 9 But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Looking through the Bible you will see God does not show favoritism. Romans 2:11 especially makes this point, and Jesus told the disciples that the last would be first in Matthew

19:30. Here James is making the same point. God does not show favoritism and neither should we. Matthew 19:16-22 shows us the rich ruler who wanted to follow Jesus, but would not give up his possessions. In comparison, the poor are rich in faith. James ends this by making the offense clear. To show favoritism is to sin. There is no way around that. We must care for all.

8 Indeed, if you keep the royal law prescribed in the Scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well. 9 But if you show favoritism, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all. 11 For He who said, Do not commit adultery, also said, Do not murder. So if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you are a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law of freedom. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

These two sections bleed into each other so I have included those verses again. James reminds the reader that loving our neighbor is very important. To show favoritism and not love to your neighbor is a sin. Now remember that we were saved from our sin by Jesus. We broke the law. Even if you broke only one law you are still guilty. Therefore, remember that because of Jesus we are under the law of freedom. If we do not show mercy and love to others than we cannot expect to be shown mercy. We must show this undeserved forgiveness to others as we received a much greater forgiveness from God. In Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus illustrates the foolishness of not forgiving others by telling a parable. A slave had an unimaginably high debt that he could never repay. His master forgave the whole thing, but that slave went out and found a man who owed him a small amount and threw him into prison. Imagine that, being forgiven millions of dollars just to go right out and beat a fellow worker for the ten dollars he owes you. That is what our unforgiveness looks like to God. We must forgive as we have been forgiven.

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can his faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothes and lacks daily food 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you don’t give them what the body needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way faith, if it doesn’t have works, is dead by itself. 18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder. 20 Foolish man! Are you willing to learn that faith without works is useless? 21 Wasn’t Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active together with his works, and by works, faith was perfected. 23 So the Scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness, and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way, wasn’t Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by a different route? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

Now we hit the deep stuff. Chances are you have heard the kind of debate this passage and others in James have brought up. Many believe James is in direct contrast to Paul's words in Romans. But what is James saying here? James looks at what these people called faith and points out a problem. They say they believe in Jesus, but if they won't take care of their brothers and sisters do they really show God's love? 1 John tells us repeatedly that those who love God know God. How do they show they love Him? By obeying His commands. Love, trust, and relationship with God, cannot be divorced from obedience to Him. Let's put it in an analogy. You have a mentor, the best mentor anyone could have. You tell him you love working for him

because he cares for you. Now whenever he asks you to do something you look at him and say no. Time and time again this happens. Would you say you truly loved that mentor when you refuse to listen to him? How much more with God Himself. James has a harsh comparison for those who claim to love God but do not obey Him. Demons called Jesus name and acknowledged Him as God (Mark 3:11 and many others), and yet they are not saved. Jude 1:6 tells us they are in chains awaiting judgement. They tremble in fear while we arrogantly lecture God on why we won't obey His commands. Faith works with deeds. Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac in obedience to God. His action showed His faith. Paul talks about Abraham in Galatians chapter 3 pointing out that it was not the works of the law that saved Abraham, but faith. James points out that Abraham showed that faith by his works (not to be confused with works of the law as the Mosaic law was not around in Abraham's time). It was not the action but the faith that saved, but that action was what showed his faith. Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 25:31-46. Many said they loved Him, but those who did not take care of those in need were sent away. We need to really see this. There are two parts to life changing belief. There is the belief in who Jesus is and trust that He will do as He said. There is also the obedience out of a desire to please God. These two together are a true relationship with God. One cannot function without the other. Belief in Jesus without loving obedience is a faith that does nothing in your life. As James said it is dead. Likewise works without faith is legalism, trying to earn salvation. Both are wrong and both demonstrate indifference to Jesus. This is what Paul tells us through the book of Romans. We love God by what we believe about Him and by what we do in His name. Paul and James are not contradicting each, but supplementing each other. Paul tells us works without faith is worthless and James tells us faith without obedience is dead. You need faith and obedience to be in a true relationship with Jesus, the one who saves our soul.

So What Do I Do With This Now?

All the information is great, but what do I do with it now?

1 The first point is clear, do not show favoritism. Do not give better place or position to those who are rich or influential or successful. All people in the church must be treated the same. If you fail to treat all people well, as you would treat yourself, you break the law and are held guilty.

2 Do not simply hear the word of God but seek to actively apply it. Your actions will show where your heart is. If you love God you will want to do what He commands, and if you do not want to then you must examine your heart.

I hope I put all of this simply, but please do not be afraid to ask more questions. I do my best to put the truth at a level anyone can reach, but I do not always do so. I pray these words benefit you and I hope you will apply them to your life. God bless.

James Chapter 3

James chapter three picks up on the ideas of faith supported and visible to others through works. He also takes this chapter to expand upon the tongue and the power it has. First however, he starts with a word of warning to those thinking to be leaders. Let's dive right in!

1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment, 2 for we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a mature man who is also able to control his whole body.

Here James takes a pit stop and makes a great comment. He points out there are not many people who should be teachers. Why? Simple, you will be held to a high standard when Christ judges the world. Why will we be judged? Because all of us mess up in many different ways. If someone does not mess up then they are mature and in control of their body. But the human flesh is untamable by man alone. If you become a teacher in the church remember you will be judged for how you lead others.

3 Now when we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we also guide the whole animal. 4 And consider ships: Though very large and driven by fierce winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So too, though the tongue is a small part of the body, it boasts great things. Consider how large a forest a small fire ignites. 6 And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among the parts of our bodies. It pollutes the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is set on fire by hell. 7 Every sea creature, reptile, bird, or animal is tamed and has been tamed by man, 8 but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly

poison. 9 We praise our Lord and Father with it, and we curse men who are made in God's likeness with it. 10 Praising and cursing come out of the same mouth. My brothers, these things should not be this way. 11 Does a spring pour out sweet and bitter water from the same opening? 12 Can a fig tree produce olives, my brothers, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a saltwater spring yield fresh water.

Now James comes back to the tongue. Above he talked about being in control of the body and now he shows just how hard it is to control our tongues (ie what we say). He points out we can tame huge animals and vessels but not ourselves. Much as the rudder is small but guides the whole ship the tongue can affect our path. Like a small spark burns a forest so can the tongue destroy. The tongue can pollute the whole body and set people on a course to hell. We cannot tame the tongue. It is restless evil full of poison. We can praise God one moment but curse men as well. Bitter words contaminate the whole body.

13 Who is wise and has understanding among you? He should show his works by good conduct with wisdom's gentleness. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't brag and deny the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peace-loving, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without favoritism and hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who cultivate peace.

James issues a challenge to his readers. He points out, if you are wise then your deeds should prove it. If you really learn God's word, then you will apply it to your life. If you apply it to your life others will see it. There is a false wisdom the world flaunts. This wisdom is rooted in bitterness, envy, selfish ambitions and other evils that come from an evil heart. This kind of

wisdom, in reality, is from not only Earth, but demons. Selfishness is a direct of cause of many kinds of evil. In contrast wisdom from God is pure. It seeks peace and is gentle. It is full of mercy for others, good fruits and does not have favorites or show hypocrisy. The deeds of righteousness are done with a peaceful intent by those who are peace-loving. To be in God does not mean to always be fighting, but as Paul says in Romans 12:18 we must live in peace as much as it is possible on our end.

So What Do I Do With This Now?

All the information is great, but what do I do with it now?

1 If you are asked to be a leader in the church, remember that you will be held accountable to that position by God. Check your heart and be sure God has called you to it before you jump in.

2 Be careful what you let leave your mouth. Your words have the power to praise, and the power to destroy. You must do your best to control it.

3 Remember that true wisdom is rooted in gentleness and humility, not selfishness and bitter envy. This is opposed to what the world tells us. God is the only source of wisdom.

James Chapter 4

I hope you have enjoyed James thus far. The real purpose that James writes for is getting his readers to see the connection between works and faith and how they show the believers heart. Chapter 4 continues this point. Please bear with me as this is a very important chapter.

1 What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from the cravings that are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your evil desires. 4 Adulteresses! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy. 5 Or do you think it's without reason the Scripture says that the Spirit who lives in us yearns jealously? 6 But He gives greater grace. Therefore He says: God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

If you remember James 3 ended with the statement that wisdom and righteousness are from above. Continuing that theme James asks what the source of their fighting is. James points out that the fighting with others actually is a product of the fighting within themselves. They say they are Christians, but they have let the world influence and even stop them at times. Their Christianity wars with the desires of their flesh. They use wicked methods to get what they want. The irony is that by doing so they do not receive it. James says they must ask God, and he foresees their biggest complaint. "I have asked! They would likely cry and James answers by pointing out their motives were selfish and wrong. Why do you want a raise? Is it to glorify God

or simply to make your materialistic life easier? We ask for more and turn around and use it to further our investment in this world and our own pleasures rather than giving it to God and helping those in need. The scary truth is we would rather let people starve than be even a little inconvenienced and that is wrong. By seeking our own ends and neglecting God and those in need we commit adultery against God. We cheat on God with the world! Not surprisingly that makes us an enemy of God because we no longer care to serve Him. Jesus told us we cannot serve two masters and that is what James is illustrating. If you desire the world you will shun God, if you desire God you will reject the world. God is jealous of our love and does not want to see us pour it out on things that He made rather than He Himself. James balances this by telling us of the great grace God gives. Turn and repent and a greater grace than you can imagine will be there for you. Do not be prideful of the things you have, but be humble remembering that all of it comes from God. Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us the same thing, boast only in God.

7 Therefore, submit to God. But resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people! 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep. Your laughter must change to mourning and your joy to sorrow. 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you. 11 Don't criticize one another, brothers. He who criticizes a brother or judges his brother criticizes the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

So, what are we supposed to do? The world pulls and pulls how can we fight it? James' gives us the hard but simple truth, submit. This is a work that our pride hates! The idea of lowering ourselves and listening to someone else kills our sinful nature. However, there is a

second part, resist. We are called to resist the Devil. Notice it does not say fight or defeat, only resist. We cannot fight him, much less defeat him, but we can resist and we are held accountable for that. How do you resist? Draw near to God. Spend time in prayer seeking God and obeying His commands and will. Ask for forgiveness for your sins and confess to God who will clean you. We ought to weep and mourn over our sinful state. No longer laughing, but feeling the full despair that we might turn to God who comforts. We must humble ourselves before God. We criticize and enact judgment on others for their failures, but judgement belongs to God. There are times when we are called to carry out a judgement, but that judgement is from God and given to us in His word. We are fallen and sinful, how can we judge others for stumbling? Only God knows the heart and if a person has truly repented and so we leave final judgement to Him.

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will travel to such and such a city and spend a year there and do business and make a profit.” 14 You don’t even know what tomorrow will bring—what your life will be! For you are like smoke that appears for a little while, then vanishes. 15 Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17 So it is a sin for the person who knows to do what is good and doesn’t do it.

Not only are we to trust in God for the strength we do not have, but also for all our plans. James points out that we make plans as if they are definite, but God may have different plans. It is arrogant to think that we can control what will happen. Now he does not say that planning is wrong, just that all plans are subject to God. Therefore, when you plan anything you must do so remembering that if God desires to change it He will. Finally, James caps off the whole section by pointing out a sin we often ignore. If you know what is right, what you are supposed to do, what God desires you to do and do not do it, then you have sinned. Never forget that.

So What Do I Do With This Now?

All the information is great, but what do I do with it now?

1 When we ask God for things we must do so with a desire to see His plans fulfilled, and not just the furtherance of our own entertainment. If you get a raise praise God and give to those in need. Praise God for provision and take care of those in need rather than over indulging in things that you do not need and will not last.

2 Submit yourself to God by spending time reading His word. Spend time in prayer with Him. Learn His character and obey His commands. We must love God and show that love. Our words mean nothing if our actions do not support them. Show your love for God and resist the Devil. The only way to resist sin and the Devil is by God's strength, gained by being in a real relationship with Him.

3 Submit your plans to God. Never think that you cannot change a plan. Remember, Paul wanted to minister in Asia, but God redirected Him several times before he finally went there.

4 This is one of the most important. If you read about something that God commands, if you know about something you ought to be doing, then do it. If you do not, then you are sinning. There is no middle ground. If you do not do what you know you should do, then you sin.

Well, I know that was serious and very long. I just want to thank you for reading, and please take these words seriously. It could mean your very soul.

James Chapter 5

So here we are on the last chapter. Guys this is a hard book and I know this likely has not been easy to hear but we must listen. These are God's commands to us and if we truly love and follow God we must hear and obey. Please continue press on in God.

1 Come now, you rich people! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming on you. 2 Your wealth is ruined and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your silver and gold are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You stored up treasure in the last days! 4 Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers who reaped your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Hosts. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the land and have indulged yourselves. You have fattened your hearts for the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned — you have murdered — the righteous man; he does not resist you. 7 Therefore, brothers, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near. 9 Brothers, do not complain about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door! 10 Brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name as an example of suffering and patience. 11 See, we count as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and have seen the outcome from the Lord. The Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Ok so to start we have a very large passage. Bear with me as this needs to be shown together. Again, James talks about the rich. We might feel he is being unfair, but remember the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (reference). No not every rich person will be visibly wicked, but more often than not the debt for money leads to indulging in many sins. We can sit while a child is starving in Africa and not give money because we really want the next iphone. We would rather have an ounce more comfortable for ourselves than saved people in need. That is why our money will testify against us. Make no mistake everything you have came directly from God. You are only a steward of it and as such must use it wisely. No one wants to hear this and so they do whatever it takes to avoid being confronted over it. Now on the flipside James talks to the rest of us saying we need to leave justice to Him. We are told to wait patiently for God to dispense justice. We are to endure ill treatment and persecution just as the prophets did. Think about Jeremiah who endured much abuse for speaking God's word until Jerusalem finally fell. We have seen those in scripture that have endured and we are called to do the same knowing that God is merciful and will strengthen us to endure.

12 Now above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. Your “yes” must be “yes,” and your “no” must be “no,” so that you won’t fall under judgment.

This is an interesting verse that seems oddly placed. James takes the time here to point out that believers should not swear oaths. His point is you should live in sure a way that if you say yes people know you will do what you said without a doubt. There is no need for an honest to swear because people know they can trust their word. And if you do swear by God and fail you will be judged for it. Avoid swearing and instead be known as a person of your word.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. 15 The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit.

James begins wrapping up his letter by bringing up prayer. Are you suffering? You need to pray. Are you joyful? You should be thanking God in prayer. Are you sick? Call the elders to pray for you. That prayer can make you well, but more importantly can lead to the forgiveness of sin. The prayers of the righteous are powerful. To demonstrate he uses Elijah. His prayer stopped the rain. Part of this prayer is confession of sin. Sin hampers prayer as it separates us from God. We cannot live in unrepentant sin and expect God to answer us. In all things seek God in prayer.

19 My brothers, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Now for one of the hardest points for many of us to swallow. James says if you see a brother or sister in Christ straying from the truth we are to correct them. Many people quote do not judge as seen above but forget the future context. When we see a believer's sin or forsake truth we are commanded by God to correct them that we may save their life. If we do not, they

will die and we will be accountable. Much like Ezekiel was told to tell the exiles of their sin so we to are called to warn believers and if we do not then we bare their blood.

So What Do I Do With This Now?

All the information is great, but what do I do with it now?

1 If you are rich (and honestly nearly every American is rich compared to the rest of the world) do not trust in your money or love it. It is from God and must be used faithfully as God has commanded to take care of those in need and advance the gospel.

2 If you are being persecuted by the rich you are called to endure like Job and to rely on God for strength and not try to seek justice by our hand.

3 Live in such a way that your word is believed. That when you say you will do something everyone knows you will. Do not depend on oaths for people to trust your word but be an example of truth in your conduct.

4 Whether you are in need or are overjoyed turn to prayer. Prayer needs to be a priority for all of us. Remember to confess your sins to God so they will not separate you from God.

5 Lastly if you see a believer sinning or if they do not believe the truth in the Bible you are called to correct them that you may save them from death. If we see believers sin and do not confront them then we will be held accountable for their blood. If they do not accept the correction you are not responsible, but if you do not bother to tell them then you will be held accountable.

Book Recap

James is likely writing to believers around this area and to a mostly Jewish audience. He is writing to address the hypocrisy of those who claim to believe in Jesus and yet their lives are no different then they were before. James starts in chapter 1 reminding us that trials are a blessing because they build up our faith. He is quick to clarify that God does not tempt us and that sin comes from our own desires. Then he dives into the point of his letter, to not only hear God's word, but to put God's word into action. Chapter 2 gives details of what this means by telling us not to favor the rich over the poor. James asks can we really say we believe in God if we do not do the things He wants us to do. In his own words, "You believe that God is one. Good! Even the demons believe—and they shudder."

Chapter 3 points out a hypocrisy we all often fall into, failing to control our tongues. We need God's help, the wisdom from above, to be able to do good works in the first place. Finally, chapter 4 hits the point home by showing how own actions are tied to our pride and reminding us we need to be humble. Part of that humility is knowing that our plans depend entirely on God's will. Chapter 5 draws the letter to its conclusion, warning the rich against worshipping money and telling the believers to patiently wait for the Lord as they endure trials. He also tells us to speak truthfully and call on God in prayer with our needs. James ends by telling his readers that we must correct believers who are in sin, and that by doing so we turn them from death to life.

So what are the major points of this book?

1 Rejoice over trials because through endurance we build faith and it leads to righteousness in Christ. We know that temptation is not from God as He is not tempted by evil and does not tempt people. We must watch our own desires that have been twisted by sin and not give into the

impulses they entice us with. Instead, rejoice remembering that although our sin leads to death, God choose to die to take away our sins. Always remember and appreciate what Jesus did for us.

2 We learned that our focus should not be on the here and now, but on eternity. If we are gifted with riches, we must not spend our time chasing wealth and other temporary things, but instead pursuing a godly life and seeking to tell others about Jesus. Do not let wealth distract us, and also do not treat the wealthy better others. If you have wealth do not trust in it, but trust in God and give thanks.

3 We learned we must not just learn the word, but also apply it to our lives. If you do not apply God's word than you only deceive yourself about following God. Your actions will show where your heart is. If you love God you will want to do what He commands, and if you do not want to then you must examine your heart. Also, if you read about something that God commands, if you know about something you ought to be doing, then do it. If you do not, then you are sinning. There is no middle ground. If you do not do what you know you should do, then you sin.

4 Care for orphans and widows.

5 If you are asked to be a leader in the church, remember that you will be held accountable to that position by God. Check your heart and be sure God has called you to it before you jump in.

6 Be careful what you let leave your mouth. Your words have the power to praise, and the power to destroy. You must do your best to control it.

7 When we ask God for things we must do so with a desire to see His plans fulfilled, and not just the furtherance of our own entertainment. Whether you are in need or are overjoyed turn to prayer. Prayer needs to be a priority for all of us. Submit yourself to God by spending time reading His word. Spend time in prayer with Him. Learn His character and obey His commands.

8 Submit your plans to God. Never think that you cannot change a plan. Remember, Paul wanted to minister in Asia, but God redirected Him several times before he finally went there.

9 Live in such a way that your word is believed

10 Lastly if you see a believer sinning or if they do not believe the truth in the Bible you are called to correct them that you may save them from death. If we see believers sin and do not confront them then we will be held accountable for their blood. If they do not accept the correction you are not responsible, but if you do not bother to tell them then you will be held accountable.

Sweet! You made it to the end. I know this has been a hard book and there are things that might have upset you but please remember these are not my words or commands, but God's. If you truly are saved, you will desire to apply these words and if you do not then you do not love God. There is no in between and no way to sugar coat it. This does not mean you will not fail. We all will still fail, but it does mean you will constantly turn to God and repent, not continue in sin with no regret. Please if you are struggling find someone in church to talk to and guide you. Make the head knowledge of Jesus become heart knowledge of Jesus and love God with all your heart. God bless.