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James

Practical Christianity

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James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.” Jas 1:1 With this simple and straightforward greeting James expounds similarly simple, straightforward and practical teachings that have challenged Christians for nearly 2000 years. James introduced himself without fanfare as simply “*a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Learned scholars have researched and argued for years about exactly who James actually was. The preponderance of evidence may favor the Apostle, James the Less (younger), the same James referred to in Acts 15:13-21 and Gal 2:9. But even if this assumption is correct, more importantly James humbly chose to emphasize that he was a servant of God and Jesus Christ rather than glorify himself in any way. Whoever he was, he appears to have been a highly respected Jew, someone whose pious reputation and influence was beyond repute. In fact, many of the Jewish Christians probably knew him personally and could attest to his selfless servant-hood and dedication to the Lord as the Messiah of prophecy.

He addressed his epistle to “*the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.*” Clearly his primary audience was the Jews; but to be more specific, to Jewish Christians living through-

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out the vast Roman Empire. You'll recall Jesus' instructions to the Apostles shortly before His ascension, "*you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*" Acts 1:8b Just after the stoning of Steven, we read, "*a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*" Acts 8:1 Through the mechanism of persecution, the first Jewish converts were dislodged and dispersed from the close fellowship of the Jerusalem church. And those who inflicted this persecution were fellow Jews, like Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1). Thankfully they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). You'll observe in a quick reading of this epistle that James does not address what we may call the first principles of salvation. His epistle was addressed to individual Jews who were already baptized believers in Jesus.

Bible students have struggled to reconcile the Spirit's teachings recorded in Paul's epistles with those of James. Even though the canonicity of James is well established, some noted scholars and religious leaders have actually sought to have it removed from the bible because they saw James' emphasis on showing faith by one's works as contradictory and incompatible with Paul's emphasis on being justified by faith. But in fact the Spirit is addressing two different aspects of the same doctrine

Paraphrasing from the Introduction to James from Barnes Notes; James looked at God's law as the means to regulate

life and to produce holiness. He lived in a corrupt age, and among corrupt people; among those who sought to be justified before God by the mere fact that they were Jews, that they had the true religion, and that they were the chosen people of God; and who, in consequence, were lax in their morals and obligations of personal holiness. He therefore contemplated religion, not so much in respect to the question of how men may be justified, but as to what kind of life our religion will lead us to live; and his object was to show that personal holiness was necessary to salvation. If our religion does not influence the kind of life we live, then what

If our religion does not influence the kind of life we live, then what good is it?

good is it? Paul, on the other hand contemplated God's law mainly with reference to another question – how men may be justified. He showed that men cannot be justified by their own works, but by faith in the Redeemer; if it were not for faith in Christ, it would be impossible for men to be justified. The point which he opposed was that men can be justified by good works, by conformity to the law, by dependence on rites and ceremonies, or by birth or blood.

Most assuredly there can be no justification before God on the grounds of our own works. The real ground of justification is faith in our Lord and His great sacrifice for sin. On the other hand, there can be no genuine faith which does not produce good works. Good works furnish the evidence that we have true religion, and are just before God. James wrote,

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“the demons also believe, and shudder.”
Jas 2:19 Mere faith furnishes no evidence of true piety. Where there is no holy life, there is no evidence of religion, no substantive faith, and no hope of salvation.

Joy in Tribulation

James 1:2-11

Phil Lumpkin

*C*onsider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” Jas 1:2-3 While we’re most likely familiar with James’ admonition, I venture to say that most of us don’t consider undergoing trials and tribulations a reason to celebrate. The Hebrew writer appears to agree with us when he wrote, *“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful.”* Heb 12:11a Let’s be honest, trials are not joyous in and of themselves. In 2 Cor 11:23-28 Paul detailed some of his suffering which included: imprisonment, beatings, shipwreck, hunger cold and exposure. And he doesn’t say anything about these being joyful. Trials may not be joyous, yet our faith, when tested, challenged and tried in the crucible of suffering makes us stronger. When, by God’s grace, we have successfully negotiated trials, we come through with stronger faith, deeper commitment and fuller trust in Him. It is this end result that is joyous. Charles Spurgeon penned these thoughts: “The trials which come from God are sent to prove and strengthen our graces, and so at once to illustrate the power of divine grace, to test the genuineness of our

virtues, and to add to their energy. Our Lord in His infinite wisdom and superabundant love, sets so high a value upon His people's faith that He will not screen them from those trials by which faith is strengthened. You would never have possessed the precious faith which now supports you if the trial of your faith had not been like unto fire. You are a tree that never would have rooted so well if the wind had not rocked you to and fro, and made you take firm hold upon the precious truths of the covenant grace. Worldly ease is a great foe to faith; it loosens the joints of holy valor, and snaps the sinews of sacred courage. The balloon never rises until the cords are cut.” When great distress overcomes us, when we come face-to-face with things we can’t control or can’t fix, it’s at these times that we turn to God and beg for His infinite grace, mercy and lovingkindness. It’s these times when we learn to depend on Him instead of ourselves.

*S*eeing ultimate joy while in the midst of trials is a real challenge. James acknowledges that we need God’s help and states, *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”* James 1:5 Let’s face it, it takes wisdom to see the eventual joy of persecution when we’re in pain. And thus James advises saints to ask God for His wisdom and to be confident that God will answer our prayers generously. Job’s faith was tested and he struggled to see any joy in it. After his friends had given him such bad counsel and urged him to repent, God talked

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directly with him and imparted His wisdom. Job came to understand and accept that God's purposes are to be paramount. Job said, *"I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."* Job 42:2-3 Like Job, when we are suffering we tend to focus on ourselves, and we probably don't think to ask what God's purpose may be for us. God, through the pen of Isaiah said, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."* Isa 55:9 God's purpose in our tribulations will not be thwarted, His wisdom helps us to understand and make the right use of affliction. Praying to eliminate our suffering may not accomplish His purpose to strengthen our faith. But He wants us to diligently pray, without doubting, for wisdom to see beyond present trials to the joy of stronger faith.

James gives two extreme examples. Just think about the challenges of suddenly going from poverty to riches or just the opposite, from riches to poverty. At first, you may think that going from rags to riches isn't a trial or test at all. Yet, history repeatedly shows that most people who suddenly come into riches fall into complete ruin. Consider how easy it is to trust in riches, especially sudden riches. Losing one's wealth can easily be blamed on God; one might get the feeling that God doesn't care and allows bad things happen to good people without cause. With these examples James is saying

that sudden, traumatic reversals in life should be viewed as tests, as opportunities, as dramatic trials intended to strengthen our faith in God. Sudden, massive transitions and changes in our lives are difficult, but the joy from a deeper faith in God far outweighs our momentary trials and suffering.

Perseverance Under Trials

James 1:12-18

Debra Sweet

"No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." 1 Cor 2:9

The Lord has prepared an eternal reward for those who love him. We cannot even begin to imagine the complete peace, beauty and contentment that will be offered to those who follow His words. James writes, *"Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him."* Jas 1:12 God has generously offered us this crown if we remain faithful and true. The challenge comes when we are pulled away by our weaknesses. The decision we make says that choosing to fall behind is more of a priority than pressing on to our eternal reward. He didn't say that we must overcome in our trials or that we cannot make a mistake. Our failure is only when we fail to remedy our situation. We are provided a way of escape. *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man."*

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God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but will provide the way of escape, that you may endure it.” 1 Cor 10:13 He knows that we will stumble. We need to handle our trials and have enough wisdom to recognize our escape. We need to face our temptations and the potential consequences of sin with dignity. Whatever your trial or temptation may be, stay on top of your battle. *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak”* Mat 26:41 I encourage you to visualize heaven as you meet with temptation, asking yourself if falling into a state of sin is worth losing the greatest of all blessings.

T*he Lord does not give us these trials. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’ for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one.”* Jas 1:13 We have no one to blame for our sin. Our sinful actions are produced from what we have been thinking. Sin starts on the inside and works its way out. We need to remember the words of Paul when he wrote, *“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”* 1 Cor 9:24-27 Keep in mind how you have felt at the end of a race, a successful diet and exercise program, a unit of study,

after the labor and delivery of a child. Remember how rewarding a glass of lemonade is after working in the yard all day. Challenge yourself to press on through adversity and pain and earthly pleasures to accept the ultimate gift planned for us as His children. Our perseverance, working toward the heavenly home, and offering our best shows our Lord how much we appreciate His graciousness.

Look at your past trials. I would imagine that you have found, as I have, that many have been blessings. A loss of a job can show you a clearer sense of priorities. A loss of a loved one can show the importance of a Godly life or the consequences of a godless one. A betrayal can teach you to understand and forgive. Use your experiences of trials and temptation to help others. *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.”* Rom 12:10-12

Doers of the Word

James 1:19-27

Aaron Lumpkin

As “first fruits among His creatures”, the redeemed of the Lord enjoy a highly-privileged status. The ancient Jews had no trouble grasping this concept, and those Jews to whom James wrote, who had realized the promised salvation through Jesus, had even more reason to rejoice in who

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they were. The fierce loyalty and supreme goodness of the Lord toward His people were well known and documented. While rejoicing in this wonderful reality, it is easy to lose sight of the responsibilities that children of the Most High God incur. It seems that it's this complacency, along with several resulting problems, that James is addressing in this letter and introduces in this passage.

James says to *"humbly receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."* 1:21b This may seem a strange thing to say to those whose were already saved. Faith and baptism in Jesus bring about salvation and being numbered among the sons of God (Gal 3:26-27). Yet the granting of this honorable position is just the beginning of our walk. *"Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness"* is James' way of saying that we must

constantly be progressing in our quest to be godly. To become spiritual, rather than fleshly, as we all were when we first accepted the truth of the gospel. As I heard recently in a hymn, we are to strive to "become what we already are." It's fascinating to me that this idea isn't unique to James' teaching, but is also a theme throughout Paul's writings, and is addressed by John, Peter, Jude, and even the writer of the Hebrew epistle. Just as the power of the gospel message spans every time and culture, so too do the challenges of those who answer the calling of the Lord – we would be wise to learn from this frequently repeated instruction and *"press on to maturity!"*

Christianity is an active religion, not a passive one. Perhaps the Hebrew

Christians that James addresses fell into the trap of thinking that their exalted status as the "chosen race" was simply something to be enjoyed. On the contrary, James says they must be *"doers of the word, not merely hearers."* 1:22 Our Lord calls us to follow Him; the gospel writers record this statement 19 times! This emphasizes not only the importance of the initial decision to follow Jesus, but also the ongoing, active nature of our service. Again, we don't stop following our Savior once we become citizens of the kingdom, but rather we have just started. James illustrates his point with the analogy of a man looking into a mirror (23-25). Literally, the man sees the "face of birth" (Greek: *prósoopon teés genéseos*).

If we are becoming like He who called us then we should see the Lord Jesus, into whom we have our new birth, when we look into that mirror. In a similar passage, Paul told our Corinthian brethren, *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image."* 2 Cor 3:18 Isn't the very point of Jesus' sacrifice so that we can be like Him? This certainly seems to be what Jesus had in mind as He labored in prayer before His betrayal (Jn 17:20-21). The "perfect law of liberty" that James mentions frees us from sin so that it becomes possible to know our Redeemer and diligently work to be like Him. Or, as James puts it, to *"achieve the righteousness of God"* by proving yourselves *"doers of the word."*

Christianity is an active religion, not a passive one.

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The Law of Moses to which these Jews had previously been bound was not one of liberty from sin. On the contrary, it had the effect of *“shut[ting] everyone up under sin”* (Gal 3:22) in that it made sin so obvious. Sadly, by failing to act and not becoming doers of Jesus’ law, the recipients of James’ letter were throwing away their freedom and ushering sin back into their lives. They were becoming slaves to sin again without even realizing it! Consider Jesus’ discussion of an unclean spirit leaving a man in Luk 11:24ff. If an unclean spirit leaves a man and nothing replaces it, then the spirit will just return with even more evil spirits. Likewise, our sinful souls have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, but if we don’t replace with good the evil that once existed there, then that evil will simply return. Filling our lives with righteousness is done by becoming a *“doer of the word”*, or as Jesus makes clear just a few verses later, *“blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.”* Luk 11:28 James introduces several sins that had crept in as result of the failure to be a *“doer of the word.”* He speaks of anger (19-20), of uncontrolled speech (26), of failing to provide for brethren’s needs (27), and of corruption by association with the world (27). All of these are dealt with in more detail later in the epistle, but what James makes abundantly clear is that each of these fleshly actions is a direct consequence of spiritual inaction.

We don’t know how well the Spirit’s words through James were received, or how successful these brethren were at changing their stagnant faith into one with an active, motivated work ethic.

Yet if we’re honest with ourselves, we can likely see some of their inaction in our own lives. While it may be easy and comfortable to sit back and glory in our God-given salvation, this is not what the Lord has called us to do. As King David advised his son Solomon, *“Be strong and courageous and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you!”* 1 Chron 28:20 And as the prophet Azariah told King Asa and his people, *“be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work!”* 2 Chron 15:7

Partiality

James 2:1-13

Carol Fertig

In chapter 2 of his letter to scattered brothers, James gives a lesson against practicing partiality by God’s people. William Barclay says in his commentary on James *“partiality”* originally meant simply to accept another person with favor, but by the time James warned Christians against it, it meant to favor or prefer one person over another to the detriment of the one not preferred. This sort of partiality can exist both in heart and in action. James gives an example of how such partiality was practiced within the assembly of the saints at that time. He then tells us what causes such a thing to happen. Finally, James completes his thoughts by telling Christians why they absolutely must not engage in this practice.

It’s easy to spot the partiality in James’ example of the wealthy man who wears his wealth ostentatiously in the form

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of jewelry and fine clothes when he comes to the assembly. At the same assembly, a poor man in shabby clothes enters. The preferred guest, the wealthy man, is rewarded with kind attention and honor, while the poor man is humiliated by being made to sit at the feet of the others. Modern gatherings have more social consciousness than to blatantly exercise such partiality. Today it takes the form of a slight pulling away from the shabby, or even not-so-clean visitor. A well-dressed and well-spoken man is perhaps introduced around and invited for a meal. An obviously not-so-well-off brother may find a small space around him where no one enters to speak with him or to find out about him. Perhaps the poor person fades away from the group with no one noticing or caring that much about him. Sometimes partiality can happen within the congregation itself. One or more affluent people or families seems to be above reproach, while others not so powerful or wealthy are corrected at every opportunity. Some are more “popular” than others, so that their company is preferred over others. God taught Peter a powerful lesson about partiality with the vision of the sheet from heaven with mixed clean and unclean animals in Acts 10. Later when Peter began to teach Cornelius and his household, he said, “. . . truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” Acts 10:34-35 The point being made at that time was that Peter was to realize there was no longer any difference between Jew and Gentile, but the point is also that

Mercy triumphs over judgment

there is no partiality for any reason in God. Partiality takes many forms today which we can use our good judgment to locate and root it out of our lives and hearts.

The matter of using good judgment brings us to the second point James makes: the causes of partiality. He asks a rhetorical question in 2:4: “*have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*” For hundreds of years the people of God had been told even in the old Law that “*You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.*” Lev

19:15 Though Jesus judged the poor to be worthy of inheriting the Kingdom of God, we sometimes judge them not to be worthy of even the smallest of our attentions. (Luk 6:20)

Righteous judgment is called for, not judgment based on evil criteria – like how much one has or how one looks. Christians must make judgments every day. What will I tolerate in my life? Who will I encourage to be around me? Every situation calls for judgment based on the word of God. To do less is to blaspheme the name we wear and by which we were called.

The second cause of partiality is that we do not fulfill the royal law, the law given by the King of Kings for a Royal purpose in a Royal Kingdom. Long before Jesus taught His disciples this law it had already been given to the Israelites: “*You shall not take vengeance, or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall*

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love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” Lev 19:18 In the first recorded sermon of Jesus he plainly told his disciples how to practice obedience to this law: “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” Mat 7:12 I Corinthians 13 is a beautiful description of the love to be practiced in this law. If we fulfill it, we cannot possibly be partial to anyone.

James paints a bleak picture of the payment in store for one who shows partiality. If you judge someone to be unworthy of your unbiased attention, James says you might as well have murdered him or stolen from him or committed any other unlawful (sinful) act against him because to transgress in one part of the law makes you guilty of the whole thing! There are no little sins and big sins, just *sins*. We are to behave as the law bids us to behave because we will be judged under that law.

This section ends with an interesting segue speaking about mercy. In a way it seems not to flow with the rest of the passage, but it goes back directly to the Royal Law and the way Jesus explained it, both in the sermon on the mount and in His model prayer. Treat others as you want to be treated, and God will treat us likewise. The added idea here is that of mercy. If you judge without mercy, you will receive no mercy. It’s as clear as that. The final statement of the passage should give joy to all who believe and hope: *“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” Jas 2:13*

Faith and Works

James 1:14-26

Steven D. Baxley

This section of James has been very controversial among believers, especially since the days of the Protestant Reformation. In reaction to the unbiblical doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church which promoted works of merit as a means of reaching salvation, Martin Luther, leader of the Reformation in Germany, pronounced his belief in the doctrine of salvation by faith only (*Sola Fide*). However, Luther was troubled by what he read in James 2:14-26. This passage went against the doctrine that he was actively promoting. The result being that Luther pronounced his own judgment on James, declaring it to be “an epistle of straw,” and questioning whether it really should be a part of the New Testament. John Calvin, leader of the Reformation in France and Switzerland, also promoted the doctrine of salvation by faith only. The result of the efforts of these two men is that virtually every Protestant denomination today holds to this doctrine as a foundational truth. Of course, this requires them to either ignore or explain away James 2:14-26.

This passage is best divided into two parts: verses 14-17, and then verses 18-26. Verses 14-17 contain a basic statement of the relationship between faith and works. James stresses the importance of faith being coupled with, or demonstrated by, what Christians actually do. The hypothetical example he gives is of Christians seeing their brothers or sisters in need of cloth-

ing and food, but doing nothing to alleviate their needs. Instead, these Christians give them the greeting *“Go in peace, be warmed and filled”* 2:16 What good have they done? None, says James. The conclusion then is: *“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead”* 2:17 Faith which does not motivate the Christian to take action, to do what is necessary, is cold, lifeless, and unproductive.

In the second section of this passage, verses 18-26, James deals with an objection that some might raise: *“You have faith and I have works”* 2:18 The idea behind this objection is that somehow faith and works can be separated from each other. Some Christians have faith, others have deeds. James clearly shows that this objection is false. He tells them: *“Show me your faith apart from your works”* 2:18 The word translated “apart” here is from the Greek word *“choris”* which means separate or apart from. The King James Version usually translates this word as “without.” James knows that this is impossible, faith cannot be shown apart from works. The Bible continually stresses that belief is demonstrated through action. Instead, James counters the argument with the simple statement: *“I will show you my faith by my works”* 2:18 What Christians do speaks volumes about what they believe. Christians do what they should do because they believe God’s Word. On the other hand, when Christians don’t do what they should, it is because they lack true faith. James gives three examples to illustrate. First, the demons: *“Even the demons be-*

lieve—and shudder!” 2:19 Unfortunately, all too often the “faith” that many claim to have will not help them any more than the faith that demons possess. Their faith will not save them. Either they (the demons) won’t repent, or more probably they have lost that chance due to their rebellion against God. Instead, they “shudder” at the knowledge that one day they will be cast along with Satan into the lake of fire.

The final two examples are positive in nature. The first concerns Abraham, who was justified when he obeyed God’s command to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham had believed for years in God’s promise that he would have a son with Sarah. That child was born, and then later God told Abraham in effect to give the boy back to Him by sacrificing him. Abraham made the trip to Moriah as commanded, but all along he trusted in God’s original promise of descendants through Isaac. In fact, the Hebrew writer clearly tells his readers: *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.”* Heb 11:17-19 Abraham trusted that God would accomplish whatever He had promised. It is interesting that in Hebrews 11, three references are made specifically about Abraham:

1) *“by faith ... Abraham obeyed”* (11:8)

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The Bible continually stresses that belief is demonstrated through action.

2) "by *faith* ... he *went*" (11:9)

3) "by *faith* ... Abraham *offered*" (11:17)

In every case, faith is coupled with a verb of action. Abraham believed and so he did what God had commanded. This is the kind of faith that results in justification.

The second example is Rahab, the prostitute of Jericho. She believed in the God of Israel, and this motivated her to actively protect His people who had come to spy on the city. Rahab is also mentioned for the same reason in Hebrews 11:31.

Both Abraham and Rahab demonstrate in a positive way the main idea of this passage: "*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*" 2:24 James repeats what he had already written in verse 17 again at the end of this passage in verse 26: "*...faith apart from works is dead.*"

Regardless of what Luther and Calvin thought and regardless of what many people today may believe, faith without action is hopelessly useless and perpetually dead. The only place in the Bible where "faith alone" is mentioned is in James 2:24, and it is here that James tells Christians that justification will not be through faith only!

James reminds his readers that Christ has called His followers to live changed lives. Christ has called Christians to demonstrate a living faith that motivates them to fulfill His commands and follow His example. Christians who refuse or neglect to live practical lives of Christian service and obedience can never hope to be justified before God.

The Tongue Is A Fire

James 3:1-12

Craig Sweet

As children, many of us were taught the nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." We teach this to our children to help them cope with childhood name calling and taunting. However, as adults, we find that this common nursery rhyme is pure fiction. Those who say, "words will never hurt me" have become insensitive and developed a cold sense of self. Words can and often do hurt.

James 3:6 refers to the tongue as a "*fire, the world of iniquity*". It is so easy to say something that can hurt. Often, we say something and do not realize it hurt a brother or sister in Christ and then there are times we say something we know will hurt them. James 3:10 states, "*from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.*"

It is very difficult to fix something that was said when we did not know it hurt another's feelings. So, how can we tame our tongue? First, we need to get to know our brothers and sisters better and learn where they have sensitive areas. The only way we can do this is to spend time with them and communicate often. Do we spend time with our brethren before and after services or do we come in at the last minute and leave as quickly as possible? The more we know

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about one another, the more likely we will know the areas where they are sensitive and the less likely we will say something that will hurt their feelings.

Secondly, we need to think before we speak. Are we thinking about ourselves or are we listening to the other person. There are some who suffer from what I call the “One-up Syndrome”. This is where you might talk about an event or situation you are in and they quickly turn the conversation on themselves by telling you of something that happened to them that made what you are discussing less important or even insignificant. They are not listening to you because they are too busy thinking about themselves and want to make sure that they are better than you. This hurts people’s feelings and sometimes they do not even catch themselves doing it. So, in conversation if we find ourselves “one-upping”, we need to do more listening and focus on the other individual instead of ourselves. Then, we will be less likely to say something that will hurt their feelings because we are focused on them and not thinking about ourselves.

Thirdly, we need to watch for signs (body language, facial expressions, etc.) that show what we are saying is what is being heard. One sign might be the lack of a response when you expect to receive one. Another sign might be that they close their eyes for a long time or they tilt their head away from you after you make the comment. We might see a frown or a cold expression. Sometimes, we can see it in their eyes. It might even be that the receiving person

quickly excuses themselves from the middle of the conversation. If we watch the signs, we can realize that something might have been said that we did not intend and then we might have an opportunity to fix it before it becomes a real long term issue.

But, what if we are saying something we know might hurt? Is it because we are angry? Is it because we just don’t like the other person? Is it because they did or said something to us where we were hurt and we want to lash out and hurt them too? There are many reasons why we might do this. However, the core problem is likely that our heart needs some work. How can we stop a hurtful word before we say it? We need to have love. “*Love is patient, love is*

kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” 1 Cor 13:4-7 If we are saying things to hurt, let us check our heart for the love of our brethren.

Everyone will face these problems at one time or another. James 3:8 says, “*no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.*” James tells us that it will be **WHEN** we say something, not **IF** we say something that hurt someone. When it happens, we need to take steps to mend the relationship. So, what steps can we take when we say something (either unknowingly or knowingly) and want

Problems rarely go away if not addressed.

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to make it right?

First, we must address the issue. We must not let our pride get in the way. We cannot ignore it and expect it to just go away over time. We cannot “sweep it under the rug”. Problems rarely go away if not addressed. Face the issue and commit to address it directly.

Secondly, we must address the issue quickly. Sometimes there needs to be a short “cooling off” period, but that should not be very long. The longer we wait to resolve an issue, the longer it has to fester which could cause the problem to become much more serious and harder to repair. Don’t wait too long or the effectiveness of addressing the issue will also be reduced.

Thirdly, address the issue face-to-face. Do not hide behind letters or e-mail or any other unemotional method of communication. It is commonly said that only 10% of communication is in the actual words said. The other 90% is in the tone of speech and the body language of the person speaking. This can only be heard, seen and felt in a face-to-face conversation. Address the problem in person.

Fourthly, we must ask for forgiveness for the hurt we caused with our words. *“Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you.”* Acts 8:22-23 Asking their forgiveness will be the beginning of the healing process. Even after the forgiveness is achieved, it could still take time to heal the hurt. Don’t expect everything to be fixed immediately after you receive forgiveness. Words hurt and take time to heal.

Finally, we need to learn from the mistake in what we said. Proverbs 1:5 says, *“A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”* Proverbs 19:8 states, *“he who gets wisdom loves his own soul; He who keeps understanding will find good.”* If we learn from our mistakes, we will become wiser and hopefully not repeat the same mistakes in what we say. Let us all strive to bridle our tongue and *“Let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.”* 1 Jn 3:18b

Worldliness and Selfish Ambition

James 3:13-4:12

Russ Ward

He’s a legend in his own mind. I don’t know where this phrase originated but what a unique play upon words and very applicable to the message God had in mind for James to pen. James weighs in the balance from the very start of his epistle, on one side “it’s all about God” and on the other “it’s all about me;” which way will the scale tip. Heaped up for us is the wisdom of the world and the vain glory of life, it’s appealing and appetizing but not satisfying. It continually whispers to us in a sensuous voice feeding our inward and earthly vanity; “Ya gotta be bigger, better, smarter, work harder, letting nothing or no one hold you back. Climbing, fighting, clawing, and conquering to achieve and secure what? Satisfaction, wealth, possessions, position,

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status, etc. *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”* Jas 3:16 Overflowing and bountiful though is the wisdom that cometh from above, a never ending stream of delight, clear fresh waters that once tasted has the power to quench the unquenchable desires of the earthly man. Listen as the Holy Spirit directs James, *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”* 3:17-18

James’ epistle, written several years after the establishment of the Church, is chocked full of practicality with imploring undercurrents of exhortation and admonition. It speaks with clarity; “Brothers and Sisters this is not a new and profound revelation from God, these are the things you have witnessed and heard since the Gospel began to be preached.” Christ laid the foundation of these teachings; *“You have heard it said of old but I say...”*, Paul quantifies in Romans *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”* Rom 11:33, and Peter confirms in his second epistle *“... be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior.”* 2 Pet 3:2 These words continue to speak volumes to us today because the message has not changed and the direction of the world has not deviated from selfishness and self-centeredness. Listen as James provides the following arguments for consideration.

Where do wars and fights come from, do they not come from desires for pleasure? You lust, covet and murder and cannot obtain. You fight and war yet still you have nothing! You even ask of God yet you ask without understanding. Why? These things are sought for personal pleasure and satisfaction and not for the glory of God or the betterment of others. So to whom does James accuse of these actions. Christians! Those who practice these things are named as adulterers and adulteresses, which would only be directed towards those who are in breach of a covenant. Here again James places before the reader a choice, friend of the world or a friend of God, enemy of the world or an enemy of God.

James follows with the natural reaction of any Christian desiring to serve God given the choices at hand. I want to choose God and draw near unto him; I want to be his child and servant. How do I do this? Resist the devil and he will flee from you. *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* 1 Cor 10:13 Wash your hands of the world and purify your heart from evil desire; lament and mourn the actions you have taken. *“..Put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,.”* Col. 3:9-10 Humble yourself in the sight of God. *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* Jas 4:6 & Prov 3:34

Opportunities and Riches

James 4:13-5:6

Tim McCarthy

This section of James provides us with a way to look at our situation in life and how we must handle ourselves as Christians. We are instructed to have a spirit of submission to God the Father and yield to his will verses our will. Many times we have plans or make plans to do something and we often forget that we are lucky to be here in the first place. We are fortunate to just be partaking in the many blessings we have on this earth. Does this mean we should not plan ahead and prosper? No, not at all. We are instructed however, to have the proper perspective on life and where it may lead us. We are to be humble and give credit where credit is due. When you first read James 4:13 by itself, it does not seem that bad of a thing to have plans or make plans. Have we all not thought something similar in our lives? It's not what was said that was wrong, but the attitude behind it. James is warning of an attitude that lacks respect for our Lord and his overall plan. Many of us have heard certain slogans over the years or corporate ads that say "Attitude is everything". I find it interesting that most of these types of sayings can be found in the bible centuries before we all heard them from modern writers.

In verse 14 James reminds us that our life is but a vapor. Job talked about his life being but a breath... that is was futile, without substance or of little value. Psalms 78:39 describes life as a wind that once gone will never return. So then, what is this time

we have on this earth? Is it luck? A curse? Or is it a gift: One that we should never take for granted and is only futile or of little value if we do not have faith and give the Lord his due glory. We all have this gift of life, but it is up to us to decide how we live it. What we do and say makes all the difference. Will it be just a physical life only or one with substance and a spiritual life as well? That is up to us.

Humility is another trait that James talks to us about in verses 15 – 16. The example of, "*If the Lord wills...*" Again, it is a matter of attitude and being subject to God with all meekness instead of arrogant, self-righteous mind-set. The Lord wants us to be successful, but not without giving Him the praise and honor for the gifts we receive. The Lord may want us to be successful in other ways that are not at all pertaining to wealth, prosperity or prestige. We can very well be a successful Christian, with humility, maturity, wisdom and meekness.

Then in verse 17 James uses the word "therefore" to get your attention and sum up what was just said. Reviewing and understanding what the writer is talking about leads us here: If we know it is right to do a certain thing, and we fail to do it..., it is a sin to us. Sin separates us from God and His glorious riches. The answer is simple if not hard to actually follow; we need to separate ourselves from sin as much as possible

In chapter 5 verses 1-3 James makes it very clear that what we have in the way of riches, physical wealth and "stuff", if

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you will, will be good for nothing because it is perishable. What good are a million apples that you have for you and you alone? How many can you consume before they perish? We need to view our worldly possessions in this manner.

Verse 4-5 talks about the “how” that wealth is achieved. If it was achieved at the expense of others that were robbed or denied their wages, then what is the inheritance from that? This is also telling us that we cannot hide anything from the Lord. He knows our true heart and intentions. We have all heard... “What goes around comes around.” This saying reminds me of Matthew 5:45 when it talks about raining on the just and the unjust. We may get by with all the marbles while we live on this planet, but can we take them with us to the afterlife?

These verses makes us ask the question, what exactly are our intentions on this earth? To gain treasures here or preparing for the life after this one? Most of us have heard and read the scripture that the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Therefore we should do the opposite and strive for the wages of everlasting life. A life that is not perishable but that will live on long after this world is gone. The bible was given to us to help us in this journey. These scriptures need to be read and studied frequently so that we can prevent ourselves from falling into the trap of dependence on this world and what it has to offer, rather than putting our faith and trust in the Lord.

Patient Endurance

James 5:7-12

Greg Sells

The scriptures are awesome! The study of this passage in James has revealed, yet again, just how amazing it is that God’s message penned by so many different people over a long period of time never changed. We benefit everyday from the limitless love of the Master as His mercy and grace allow us the opportunity to draw ever closer to His Son and His purpose in our lives. The message we receive from this portion of James’ letter to patiently endure is echoed throughout scripture and exemplified to us with every day that passes by God. Being equipped with the knowledge of the purpose to spread the message and what that message is, we must respond. The examples of leadership provided for us throughout scripture can help guide our steps in this effort even today when times are so different. One example of this leadership is James, who reached out to encourage the brethren in his letter by reminding them of those who had endured in times past. Another example of leadership in patiently enduring is Paul. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reached out to them to encourage them to keep on keeping on. These men are examples to us to take a leadership role as Christians who have been entrusted with spreading the message of God to all. Our ability to endure day to day in accomplishing this purpose can be a struggle and the Lord through James here reminds us to be patient.

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“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming.” Jas 5:7

“Be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.” Jas 5:8-9

James uses the metaphor of the farmer and the examples of the prophets and that of Job to help remind us to keep our focus on the results of our efforts. The farmer has to patiently wait for the harvest. The farmer knows that if he picks the corn too early he will miss out on some the grain. Patient endurance is a development process, it is not an event that just happens. We grow daily, not in a day. Not only do we wait patiently on Jesus’ return, but He waits on us to grow! He is not only preparing a place for us but us for a place. James also provides two other images for us to relate to for patiently enduring – that of the prophets and of Job.

Job lived a tough life patiently enduring severe hardships. Job didn’t give up and scripture tells us in Job 42:10-17,

10 After Job had prayed for his friends, the LORD made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before. 11 All his brothers and sisters and everyone who had known him before came and ate with him in his house. They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the LORD had brought upon him, and each one gave him a piece of silver and a gold ring.

12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys. 13 And he also had

seven sons and three daughters. 14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job’s daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers. 16 After this, Job lived a hundred and forty years; he saw his children and their children to the fourth generation. 17 And so he died, old and full of years.

Job’s comfort was sacrificed. He understood that there was a tradeoff and accepted this tradeoff by patiently enduring all of the hardships he was exposed to in his life and having done so paid great dividends. What a blessing to die old and full of years. God rewarded Job before he died and

Job will receive the ultimate reward of an eternal home with God because of his patiently enduring the struggles of life.

Hebrews 11:32-12:3

2 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and

Jesus is not only preparing a place for us, but us for a place.

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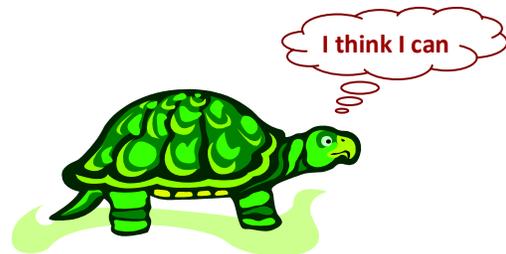
routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated- 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.

39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything **that** hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The Hebrew writer here drives this point home. The examples of so many who endured hardships even to the death are given along with the words of en-

couragement to throw off everything that hinders us and the entanglements of sin to run with perseverance this race which God has marked out for us. This theme of endurance is developed here to show us that the key to persistently enduring is passion. All of the men and women of faith mentioned in Hebrews 11 “made it” because they were passionate about God’s purpose in their lives. The writer here compares our lives to a race in an attempt to convince us that we must run with endurance if we plan to finish well. God through His providence has given us a goal to run towards – our effort is not aimless - it has purpose! We are given the benefit of perspective by the Hebrew writer. The perspective of endurance as it related to the men and women of faith, as it relates to our own lives as we are admonished to watch for pitfalls, and encumbrances as we run the race of our lives to stay focused on finishing well, and the perspective of Jesus, who endured the burden of the cross for all men keeping His focus on the reward.

Paul creates awareness for us in his letter to the Ephesians of this passionate, purpose driven, patient endurance with which we must equip ourselves. In Ephesians 3 Paul expresses his desire that all



are able to understand the limitless Love of God (3:14,18), experience the love of Christ (3:19), and be filled with the fullness of God (3:19) then he assures us as he declares that God is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all we ask or think (3:20). Passion is the first step in this development process of patient endurance. Living life this way, patiently enduring with confidence in God, will have the effect of creating spiritual integrity that will be experienced by those around us. In a world so full of inconsistency, we as Christians can stand out among all around us, capable of running this race with passion and purpose, establishing the kind of spiritual integrity that represents the image of Godliness that can go unquestioned in the eyes of men. James refers to this in chapter 5:12 *“..But let your “Yes” be “Yes” and your “No” be “No.”* We will have no need to establish this integrity of our own accord as God will establish Himself through us for His will if we just allow Him to work through us to reach out to those we come into contact with, keeping our focus on His promised reward. This is something we are all certainly capable of.

Power of Prayer

James 5:13-20

Aileen Fancher

I have a saying that everything in the bible is important, and when it is said twice then it is really, really important. James does this when he teaches us about prayer. In James 1:6 he tells us to *“ask in faith,”* and again in James 5:15 when he

tells us *“the prayer of faith shall save the sick.”* Faith seems to be a vital ingredient for the success of our prayers. Jesus also illustrated this in Matthew 17:14-22. A father had brought his son to the disciples to be healed, but they were unable to cast out his demon. Yet Jesus rebuked the demon and the boy was immediately healed. Perplexed, the disciples came privately to Jesus to ask why they had failed. He told them they needed faith as a mustard seed, then, *“you shall say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there, and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible to you.’”*

If God is willing to move a mountain as a result of our faithful prayer, then we can do anything through Him. James mentioned two things earlier that sap the power of our prayers. First is when we doubt. James 1:6 states, *“but let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”* Second is when we *“ask amiss, that we may consume it upon your lusts.”* Jas 4:3 Otherwise have faith and truly believe when we pray. God is both able and willing to answer our prayers.

James then gives insight into what we should pray for. And these appear to be related to the testing, the tribulations of life and the joy of patient endurance that he has mentioned earlier. *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you*

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sick?” Jas 5:13-14 In full confident faith, talk to your Father. When times are tough, pour out your heart and have confidence that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are making your requests known to Him. And especially when our health seems to falter under tribulation, then ask for the special prayers of the elders and brethren. When we have fallen into sin from Satan’s temptations, then fervently pray for forgiveness and be confident that the Lord will raise us up. When the trial is past give thanks, glory and honor to God for His mercy, grace and lovingkindness, for His strength, love and faithfulness.

In this context we are also taught to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another that we may be healed. The value of this is beyond calculation. First God will forgive us when we repent and acknowledge our sins. Sin not only separates us from God (Isa 59:2), but when we sin against each other, our actions and attitudes also drive a wedge between us and our brethren. Consider some of the deeds of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:20: *“enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying.”* These are all sins that separate brethren. James teaches us to confess such sins and then to pray for each other. Note that it is in this context of confessing to each other and forgiving each other that we find the familiar statement, *“the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”* Jas 5:16b Love is the glue that binds us together as children of God. Sins such, as Paul listed in Galatians 5, work to dissolve that glue. But when we forgive each other, pray for each other and in turn genuinely strive to practice holiness,

that strengthens the bond. It is hard to envy or be jealous of a brother who humbly confesses his faults and asks you to pray for him. Forgiveness is a two way street. Yes, the effective prayer of a righteous man or woman accomplishes much!

The power of prayer is illustrated by the example of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-18:46). By faith Elijah prayed for it not to rain on the wicked nation of Israel—and it didn’t for 3 ½ years. Later during the contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, he prayed for it to rain —and it rained. (James 5:17-18) It is only here in James that we learn the cause of this long drought. Elijah prayed for the rain to stop and then for it to rain again. His motive seems to have been to help bring the nation ruled by Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel to repentance. What a powerful demonstration of Elijah’s faith and God’s power. The message—God is ready to answer our fervent prayer, like Elijah’s

James concludes his epistle by emphasizing once again the incalculable value of encouraging our brethren. Encouragement to run with the endurance the race that is set before us. Encouragement to keep our eyes fixed firmly on the objective and to ignore the distractions and discouragements that come from the trials of life. Encouragement to turn back to God from the clutches of Satan when we’ve sinned. *“let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”* Jas 5:20 What if you are the one who strays from the truth? I think we all hope and pray for a brother or sister to turn us back and save our soul from death.