

LIVING YOUR FAITH IN THE MODERN WORLD

EXAMINING THE BOOK OF JAMES



OVERVIEW: WHO WAS JAMES?

THE BIBLE HAS GONE THROUGH MANY LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS. THE NAMES "JAMES" AND "JACOB" ARE VARIATIONS ON THE ROOT HEBREW NAME "YAAQOB", MEANING JACOB. THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT TRANSLATED THIS NAME AS IAKOB. WHEN THE GREEK SEPTUAGINT WAS TRANSLATED INTO LATIN, IAKÓB (OR IAKÓBOS) BECAME IACOBUS OR JACOBUS.

LATER LATIN INTERPRETATIONS CHANGED SPELLINGS AND PRONUNCIATIONS. THE NAME BECAME IACOMUS OR JACOMUS. LATER, THE FRENCH ADAPTED THIS LATIN NAME TO "GEMMES" OR "JAMMES". THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM THERE INTERPRETED IT AS "JAMES". SO, THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK OF JAMES IS ACTUALLY JACOB...THE HALF-BROTHER OF JESUS CHRIST. AND YES, IF YOU'RE WONDERING, THE APOSTLES WHO ARE CITED AS JAMES IN THE BIBLE WERE ALSO NAMED JACOB. WE'LL STICK TO CALLING THEM JAMES JUST FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY.

The Book of Acts details the early days of the Christian church. James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ was not originally a follower of Jesus. Like Paul, he became an apostle because he witnessed Christ's resurrected body. James went on to become the leader of the Christian mother church in Jerusalem for twenty years. Paul called him one of the pillars of the church (see Galatians 2:9).

James figured prominently into the events of Acts 15:13-22, also known as the Jerusalem Council. Paul had been travelling, planting churches and attempting to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles so that they might be saved. His work was being hampered by some who held to Jewish tradition and the Law of Moses. These people went to Antioch, where Paul was attempting to convert the Gentiles, and began falsely teaching that Gentiles must become Jewish proselytes, specifically that they had to obey legal rites such as circumcision in order to be saved. One can imagine that this would cause many to turn from Christian faith.

THE BOOK OF JAMES IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN WRITTEN PRIOR TO THE EVENTS OF THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL, SOMETIME BETWEEN AD 45-48. THIS IS BASED ON THE ABSENCE OF REFERENCES TO GENTILE CHRISTIANS IN THE BOOK OF JAMES.

THIS WOULD MEAN THAT THE BOOK OF JAMES IS PROBABLY THE FIRST BOOK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TO BE WRITTEN.

DURING THE TIME OF JAMES' LEADERSHIP, THE REGION WAS EXPERIENCING FAMINES WHICH LEAD TO GREAT POVERTY AND HARSHIP. POVERTY AND WEALTH ARE ONE OF THE THEMES OF THIS BOOK. THE MOTHER CHURCH IN JERUSALEM WAS MADE UP OF MESSIANIC JEWS. IT WAS THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. THEY EXPERIENCED MUCH PERSECUTION BY TRADITIONAL JEWISH LEADERS, BEGINNING WITH THE MARTYRDOM OF STEPHEN. MANY JEWISH CHRISTIANS FLED, HIDING WITH JEWS OF THE DISAPORA (THOSE WHO HAD BEEN SCATTERED INTO GENTILE LANDS CENTURIES EARLIER).

In AD 49, Paul and Barnabus and several other believers were appointed to take up the matter with the mother church in Jerusalem. The Pharisees there repeated the demand that Gentile Christians must be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses.

The Apostle Peter also spoke against placing such requirements on the Gentile Christians. He had witnessed how God had given the Holy Spirit to Gentile believers just as He had to the Apostles and Jewish Christians. God had told Peter not to declare anything unclean that God had made clean, specifically meaning the Gentiles. He reminded the assembly that it was not fair to place a burden on the Gentiles (meaning the Law) when even the Jewish people had failed to live up to it. Paul and Barnabus agreed, speaking of the signs and wonders they had witnessed God perform among the Gentiles.

It was James, however, who had the final word on the matter as leader of the mother church:

THOUGH JAMES BELIEVED IN CHRIST, HE STILL HELD CLOSELY TO THE LAW OF MOSES AND JEWISH TRADITIONS. NEVERTHELESS, HE WOULD AFFIRM CHRIST TO ANYONE WHO ASKED. HE WAS KNOWN AS “JAMES THE JUST”, KNOWN FOR HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RESPECTED BY THE SEVEN SECTS OF THE JEWISH FAITH AS WELL AS CHRISTIANS. HE PRAYED FOR FORGIVENESS OF THE JEWISH UNBELIEVERS.

UNFORTUNATELY, HIS INFLUENCE CAUSED SOME OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES TO FEAR THAT HE WOULD BRING MORE PEOPLE TO FAITH IN CHRIST. IN AD 62, WHEN THE PHARISEES ASKED JAMES TO SPEAK FROM THE PINNACLE OF THE TEMPLE DURING PASSOVER, HOPING HE WOULD SPEAK ABOUT THE ERROR OF FAITH IN CHRIST, JAMES INSTEAD AFFIRMED CHRIST AS SAVIOR. THEY CLIMBED THE TEMPLE AND CAST JAMES DOWN, ATTEMPTING TO KILL HIM. WHEN HE SURVIVED AND BEGAN TO PRAY FOR HIS ATTACKERS, THE PHARISEES ON THE GROUND BEGAN TO STONE HIM. JAMES WAS MARTYRED.

¹³ When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me. ¹⁴ Simon^[a] has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. ¹⁵ The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

¹⁶ ““After this I will return
and rebuild David’s fallen tent.

Its ruins I will rebuild,
and I will restore it,

¹⁷ that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who bear my name,
says the Lord, who does these things’^[b]—

¹⁸ things known from long ago.^[c]

¹⁹ “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. ²⁰ Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

Interestingly, James and Paul had similarities in their teachings, even though Paul primarily focused on Gentile Christians and James maintained strong connection to his Jewish roots. Both affirmed that Gentiles could become Christian believers without being forced to follow the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. Both believed that God's grace alone could save man from sin. Both believed that every individual had to respond in faith to God's offer of salvation. However, Paul's teachings insisted that the Law of Moses enslaved men to sin rather than freeing them in the sense that nobody could achieve salvation by obeying that Law because only Jesus was capable of living a life that perfectly fulfilled all the requirements of the Law. Christ fulfilled the Law on our behalf. James' writings speak of the law in a more positive light, mentioning the "Torah of Freedom", while still maintaining that faith and not law makes one right with God. Paul emphasized that doing "good works" in the sense of obeying the Law does not bring salvation (freedom). These are not the "good works" to which James refers in this book either. Like Paul, he does not teach that man can achieve salvation by works, but rather that doing good works is a manifestation of a genuine relationship with God that comes from faith. Faith brings the gift of salvation; good works are our response of gratitude for the gift.

The Book of James has two main sources of inspiration: Jesus' teachings (particularly the Sermon on the Mount) and the biblical Wisdom Literature (particularly the book of Proverbs). James' words have a new relevance in our changing modern culture, where Christianity is facing new oppressions and persecutions and new cultural pressures that can divert us quickly into sinful desires that drag us away from God.

JUST A RECAP

WE DO NOT BECOME CHRISTIANS AND EARN GOD'S SALVATION THROUGH THE WAY THAT WE LIVE. BECOMING CHRISTIAN IS A MATTER OF **FAITH NOT WORKS.**

LET'S RECALL WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME CHRISTIAN BEFORE WE DISCUSS JAMES' WISDOM FOR LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN.

- IT BEGINS WHEN A PERSON HEARS THE GOSPEL MESSAGE ABOUT JESUS CHRIST. THE TRUTH IS THIS: JESUS WAS BORN IN THE FLESH AS THE SON OF GOD. HE LIVED A LIFE WITHOUT SIN (BLAMELESS), FULFILLING ALL THAT GOD REQUIRED OF MAN...ALL THAT MAN WAS NOT ABLE TO DO BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF SIN IN HIS HEART. SIN MADE MAN GUILTY BEFORE GOD AND THE PENALTY SHOULD HAVE BEEN DEATH. CHRIST WENT TO THE CROSS, ACCEPTING THIS PENALTY OF DEATH FOR OUR SINS. HE WAS BURIED IN THE EARTH THREE DAYS. BY GOD'S POWER, CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD INTO ETERNAL LIFE. HE NOW SITS AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, AWAITING THE TIME GOD HAS APPOINTED FOR HIS RETURN. AT THAT TIME, THERE WILL BE A JUDGEMENT OF ALL MEN. BELIEVERS WILL BE GATHERED INTO CHRIST'S ETERNAL KINGDOM. THOSE WHO HAVE REJECTED CHRIST FACE ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD.
- THAT'S WHY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL. THE HOLY SPIRIT PREPARES THE HEART TO RECEIVE THE TRUTH. THE PERSON WILL FEEL BOTH A SENSE OF CONVICTION (IT'S NOT A BAD WORD) AND REGRET FOR THEIR PAST SINS. WITH THIS IS THE GENUINE DESIRE TO SEEK RECONCILIATION WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST AND TO TURN FROM SINFUL BEHAVIOR. THIS IS REPENTANCE.

JUST A RECAP

WE DO NOT BECOME CHRISTIANS AND EARN GOD'S SALVATION THROUGH THE WAY THAT WE LIVE. BECOMING CHRISTIAN IS A MATTER OF **FAITH NOT WORKS.**

LET'S RECALL WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME CHRISTIAN BEFORE WE DISCUSS JAMES' WISDOM FOR LIVING AS A CHRISTIAN.

- WHEN WE TURN FROM THE WAYS OF SIN TO THE WAYS OF THE LORD, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE ONLY REAL WAY WE CAN BE RECONCILED TO GOD IS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. FORTUNATELY FOR US, THIS IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF SAYING YES, WE BELIEVE THAT CHRIST IS THE RISEN SON OF GOD WHO DIED TO REPAY OUR SINS. YES, WE BELIEVE THAT GOD IS WILLING TO FORGIVE US NOT BECAUSE WE DESERVE IT BUT BECAUSE FORGIVENESS IS GOD'S GIFT TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN CHRIST. AND SEEK TO FOLLOW HIM. GOD THEN DECLARES THAT WE ARE RIGHTEOUS. THIS IS JUSTIFICATION.
- FROM THERE, THE BELIEVER SEEKS TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE A LIFE THAT GLORIFIES AND OBEYS GOD. WE SEEK TO KNOW WHAT CHRIST AND THE APOSTLES HAVE TAUGHT US ABOUT LIVING ACCORDING TO OUR FAITH. TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITIES, WE TURN FROM SINFUL WAYS, STUDY THE WORD (THE BIBLE) SO , THAT WE MIGHT APPLY IT TO OUR LIVES AND BEHAVIOR AND CONNECT WITH GOD IN PRAYER. WE ACCEPT GOD'S PLANS FOR OUR LIVES, SUBMIT OUR LIVES TO HIS PURPOSES. THIS IS SANCTIFICATION.
- BAPTISM DOES NOT EARN SALVATION. BAPTISM IS THE WAY THAT WE PUBLICLY DECLARE OUR FAITH IN CHRIST. WE ARE SYMBOLICALLY "BURIED" WITH CHRIST AND "RAISED" WITH HIM TO NEW ETERNAL LIFE.

WHEN WE HAVE RECEIVED CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOR, WE CEASE TO BE CITIZENS OF THIS WORLD AND BECOME CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. THIS IS NOT THE FUTURE KINGDOM CONTINGENT UPON CHRIST'S RETURN. HIS KINGDOM IS ALREADY ESTABLISHED ON EARTH. IT WILL BE BROUGHT TO IT'S FULL GLORY WHEN CHRIST RETURNS (A TIME KNOWN AS JUDGEMENT DAY OR THE PAROUSIA).

IN THE MEANWHILE, CHRISTIANS ARE TO LIVE AS THE CITIZENS OF HEAVEN THAT WE HAVE BECOME. WE STOP VALUING THE THINGS THAT THIS WORLD VALUES (WEALTH, STATUS, ACHIEVEMENT, SELF-GLORIFICATION) AND SEEK TO LIVE AS CHRIST. THIS MEANS GOD'S PRIORITIES BECOME OUR PRIORITIES. GOD GLORIFIES THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLE, THOSE WHO ARE POOR, THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED, THOSE WHO ARE MEEK, AND THOSE WHO SUBMIT THEIR LIVES TO GOD'S WILL. THE REASON IS SIMPLE: WE CAN TRUST IN THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD (WHICH IS A LOT EASIER TO DO WHEN WE'RE LIVING COMFORTABLY AND FOLLOWING WHATEVER DESIRES COME INTO OUR HEARTS) OR WE CAN TRUST IN GOD TO PROVIDE WHAT WE NEED AND TO SUSTAIN US PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY THROUGH WHATEVER COMES OUR WAY IN THISE WORLD. OUR ACTS ORIGINATE IN THE DESIRES OF OUR HEARTS...WHETHER WE DESIRE THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD OR DESIRE THE LORD.

NOW, LET'S EXAMINE WHAT JAMES THE JUST HAS TO TEACH US ABOUT LIVING A LIFE THAT TRUSTS IN GOD AND RESPONDS TO THE GIFT OF SALVATION THROUGH WORKS THAT GLORIFY HIM.

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR THE MODERN CHRISTIAN AS DISCUSSED IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

FAVORITISM VERSUS LOVE

THE DANGERS OF THE TONGUE

TRUE WISDOM VERSUS FALSE WISDOM

GENUINE FAITH

A DIVIDED HEART/DIVIDED LOYALTY

WHOLENESS AND INTEGRITY

ENDURANCE AND PERFECTION

POVERTY VERSUS WEALTH

RESTORING OTHERS

FAITH-FILLED PRAYER

DANGER OF TAKING OATHS

BEING DOERS OF THE WORD OF GOD

PATIENCE AND ENDURANCE

LOVE GOD AND LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS
YOURSELF

GOD GIVES WISDOM TO THOSE WHO ASK IN
FAITH

GOD GIVES NEW BIRTH THROUGH JESUS

OUTLINE

James' book is based heavily on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

James also underscores Christ's teaching on the two greatest commandments:

³⁶ *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*

³⁷ *Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."*^[a] ³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.* ³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*^[b] ⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."* (Matthew 22:46-40)

CHAPTER 1: FAITH & ENDURANCE; LISTENING TO THE WORD AND DOING THE WORD.

CHAPTER 2: WARNING AGAINST PREJUDICE; FAITH WITHOUT GOOD WORKS IS DEAD

CHAPTER 3: CONTROLLING THE TONGUE; TRUE WISDOM COMES FROM GOD

CHAPTER 4: DRAWING CLOSE TO GOD; WARNING AGAINST JUDGING OTHERS; WARNING ABOUT SELF-CONFIDENCE

CHAPTER 5: WARNING TO THE RICH; PATIENCE AND ENDURANCE; THE POWER OF PRAYER; RESTORE WANDERING BELIEVERS

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)

When Adam and Eve gave in to temptation in the Garden of Eden, the innate tendency towards sin was placed in the hearts of all men and women. It makes us desire the things of this world and tempts us to rebel against doing what God says is right to do what satisfies the desires of the flesh. God is never tempted to do wrong, and He would not tempt us to do wrong. Be sure the inner voice that you listen to is the voice of the Holy Spirit, not Satan.

God has not only given His Word to us in the form of the Bible, He will write His Word on our hearts through the Holy Spirit if we will humbly accept it. However, God doesn't want us to just HEAR or READ the Word---He expects us to DO WHAT THE WORD SAYS. He expects that the Word will be the foundation of our decisions, of our interactions with others, how we invest our time and money, how we love, and will be the basis of our life priorities.

Jesus warned believers that they would have troubles in this world. James encourages believers to view troubles and hardships as opportunities---when our faith is tested by our circumstances and we persevere in the faith, we grow spiritually to be more like Christ. Trials are a process by which we are spiritually refined. We learn not to lean on the things of this world, which are temporary and insubstantial, but to trust in God alone. We can't do both---our hearts cannot be loyal to God and to the world. By human nature, we favor one over the other. Where our desires are found, our hearts gravitate. We should be careful that we are desiring and moving towards God. The things of this world can only sustain us in this life (and even then, there's no guarantee); God can and will sustain us now and in the eternal kingdom to come. He has promised this to those who love Him.

CONTROLLING THE TONGUE IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. (JAMES 1:26)

James teaches that if people could only control their tongues, we would be closer to perfect images of God and could control ourselves in every other aspect of our lives. In his time, he was talking about how people spoke to (and about) one another. He could never have anticipated the age of social media, where a person's "tongue" would take the form of text messages and social media posts that extend beyond an audience of one person or a small group. There are people whose earn a living by exerting social media influence over the life choices of others. The pursuit of the "like" and "follow" is a priority and motivation for many. But is that bringing glory to God or to ourselves? And is it building His kingdom?

The individual Christian is no longer limited to properly representing God on that intimate level: Our words—whether they praise God, encourage and build up others, or mock, scorn, slander, and tear down—are now set upon a worldwide stage.

Anonymity on the web encourages some people to speak poison to others or post images meant to humiliate and hurt. Remember this: There is no anonymity that can hide you from the Lord, who is present everywhere and knows every man's heart. We represent God to people in other countries, other cultures, other religions, to the unchurched and the lost with every keystroke and shared meme. More than that, our words inspire others in social media. We can encourage them to pile on when we tear down or inspire them to acts of kindness and praise of the Lord.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. (James 3:9-10)

James calls the tongue a fire and a world of wickedness. He's very blunt about it: The tongue can not only corrupt the whole body, but this fire---which James states is the fire from hell itself---can set one's whole life on fire. Think about that text message or email you wish you could rescind. Think about the words you've spoken to a loved one that you wish you could take back (which probably caused both of you pain). Think about words spoken in anger on the spur of the moment that had life-altering repercussions. Think about the child bullied by words on social media to the point that he or she has committed suicide. Think of those who used cruel words or boasting to mask their feelings of jealousy, insecurity, and envy.

Not only can we spread poison with our words, other people can also harm us with their words. It is not always easy in those circumstances to respond as Christ requires, but this is again our opportunity to reflect Christ to the world. As we have been forgiven for sins and harm that we have done, we are expected to forgive from the heart wrongs that are done to us. This includes forgiving hurtful words from those who do not control their tongues. The Lord will bless us when we patiently endure and forgive such persecutions, more so when we respond with love. Jesus knows forgiveness is not always easy, but He modeled it for us supremely by forgiving the people who put him to death on the cross. James also died praying for the Lord to forgive those who were stoning him. So did Stephen. Treating others with love and forgiving their trespasses are foundational principles of Christian living.

AVOID SHOWING FAVORITISM, FOR GOD HAS NO FAVORITES.

(see also Romans 2:11-29).

Refusing to show favoritism is also countercultural. Culture encourages us to pick favorites in all aspects of our lives (from favorite musicians to political and social groups right down to choosing whether you are a “cat person” or a “dog person”).

The favoritism James speaks against in chapter two gives the specific example of favoring rich people above the poor, the widows, and the orphans. James pointed out that it was the poor whom God made rich in spirit and the wealthy who were oppressing people, dragging people into court, and slandering Jesus.

He is clear: When you love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing right. When you favor one group (or conversely, when you hate a specific group for any reason), you are committing a sin. God loves every man and woman equally. As His image, Christians are to do the same by loving people regardless of their race, gender, political affiliation, culture, social status, age, and every other factor. That does not mean that we have to condone their behavior, especially if it is sinful. We will speak the truth to them in love and mercy, but we have to understand that it is up to God to judge them, that is not our privilege or right. Don't forget, YOU are going to be judged as well. Control your tongue. Control your temper. You shall love your neighbor as yourself, and **all** humanity is your neighbor.

FAITH WITHOUT GOOD WORKS IS DEAD.

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20)

Believing in Jesus is the beginning of Christianity---but it is not the whole of being a Christian. James summed it up quite elegantly: *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless” (James 2:19-20).* James tells us that a faith that doesn’t produce good works will not save us. Why? Because the person is either immature in the faith and needs guidance in how to grow in relationship with God or the person is seeking salvation without allowing the Word to really turn their hearts towards God.

Believing the word of God is the beginning. Living according to the Word is where the rubber meets the road. It’s the meaning of being a Christian. It is not faith if it doesn’t change us inwardly and manifest in how we live. I think of the child who adores a parent and seeks to be like that parent in everything he or she does. The child wants to make the parent proud and to honor them. Our relationship with God is no different. Our Father gives us the greatest gift---salvation from eternal death and forgiveness of wrongdoings (just as any loving parent wants to forgive a child who does wrong, especially when the child has been doing wrong due to lack of understanding what is right). This should make us joyful towards our Heavenly Father and eager to do what pleases Him out of gratitude and love and because we believe what He has taught us through His Word.

Are you seeking good or trying to get noticed?

Jesus teaches us to consider the motivation for our good deeds. We are not meant to do good works because we think it will bring our salvation. It won't. There is no deed of man that can earn salvation because Jesus accomplished this by His blood on the cross. We are not meant to draw attention to ourselves when we do good deeds. We are trying to make our Father happy and bring glory to Him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes the distinction: *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”² “So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites (the Pharisees and Sadducees) do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.”³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)*

Jesus referred to the Pharisees as “hypocrites”, which in those days was a term for a theatrical actor. When the Pharisees prayed or did charitable acts, their intention was to have their holiness on display to be admired by others rather than honoring God. It was a performance. True faith does good deeds from a desire to obey and please the Father. True faith prays because it seeks relationship with the Father not the approval of spectators. God knows the motives of our hearts. If we do good so that others approve, that is the only reward we should expect. It's better to seek the approval of the Lord.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...so what is the rest of wisdom?

There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death. (Proverbs 14:12)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall ^[b]direct your paths. ⁷ Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

There are two kinds of wisdom: Wisdom of the World and Wisdom of the Lord. The world encourages us to trust in our instincts, our intuition, our education. The problem is that these things come from the desires of the heart. If our desires are towards the things of the world, our instinct will be to pursue things which satisfy those desires. If our desires are towards the Lord, our instinct will be to follow His wisdom and evaluate what we call intuition by whether it obeys God's Word.

James describes wisdom of the world bluntly as "demonic". It is born of envy and selfish ambition and ultimately leads to disorder and evil. Neither do we have the right to judge others. God is the Lord of Justice. Criticism of others (as God's image) is criticism of God, so don't speak evil of one another. Jealousy and selfishness are not the wisdom of God. These things only lead to strife and wickedness.

He describes the wisdom that comes from heaven as being that of the peacemaker: It is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive (to God's Word and the needs of others), merciful, impartial, and sincere. If you aren't sure that you are acting wisely according to God, go to Him in prayer. Consult with more spiritually mature believers in the church if necessary.

Jesus says that the peacemakers will be blessed and called the children of God. James agrees: *Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness. (3:18)*

Humility and submission to God—why is it so difficult?

Our loyalty is divided between God and the world.

I have friends who absolutely balk at the idea of being called a “servant” or “slave” of God, and yet the Apostles frequently referred to themselves as such. Why do people stumble at the idea of submitting their lives to God’s will?

It comes back to the conflict between the ways of the world and the ways of the Lord. The world tells us to keep control over our lives, to do what is best for us, that freedom is an ideal to be defended even to the death. Freedom is connected to individuality, our right to live in a manner that fulfills our desires. The world encourages us to make our own path, one that seeks acclaim, accomplishment, gratification, and reward as priorities. Nobody wants to feel invisible. Nobody wants jobs that are beneath their status (real or imagined). We are entitled to all that we can attain. There are endless ways to justify the means that we use for all that we gain so that we never have to feel guilt, shame, or apologize. If we work hard enough, we become our own boss and answer to nobody.

The result is quarreling, jealousy, fights, deception, and all manners of wickedness as we chase after the idols of the world (money, fame, sexual gratification, material goods). We run away from God when we chase after these idols. Colossians 1 and James 4 warns that we make ourselves an enemy of God when we follow the ways of the world. It is a sin to know what God wants us to do and then to choose not to do it.

Humility and submission to God—why is it so difficult?

Our loyalty is divided between God and the world.

The world ingrains into the individual to resist the notion that he or she is a sinner in need of repentance and forgiveness. It resists the biblical message to purify one's heart, grieve for one's sins (which must be acknowledge---you cannot survive a terminal injury if you pretend it doesn't exist), and turn to the Lord to humbly ask His forgiveness. Yet, God has an abundance of grace and is waiting to forgive those who are willing to simply, *sincerely* seek it. We cannot have divided loyalty: We have to choose whether to follow the ways of the world or the ways of the Lord. We will stand before God to give an account for our choices. We don't get to blame the world for our wrongs when we knew what was right.

Another reason for humility is that God alone knows what the future holds for us. We make our plans, but James reminds us that we don't even know if we'll survive the day much less where we will be tomorrow. For this same reason, James tells us never to make oaths of any kind, but to simply answer yes or no. We cannot know if the Lord will allow us to keep our oath. Think of those men who made oaths not to eat or drink until they killed Paul in Acts 23 (recap: The Lord didn't will that they killed Paul, so they either broke their oaths or died a painful death). Material gains, praise, sexual gratifications, and things of the world are temporary and insubstantial. The Lord's ways are right, substantial, and eternal. He is the treasure worth pursuing.

Is James saying God hates the wealthy? Short answer: No, but...

**From everyone who has been given
much, much will be demanded; and
from the one who has been entrusted
with much, much more will be asked.
(Luke 12:48b)**

In the time of James, the rich were oppressing people, dragging poor people into court, and slandering Jesus Christ. People sometimes became rich by abusing the people who worked for them. We also have to remember that there was famine in Israel during the time of James, and this surely had a greater impact on the poor, the widows, and the orphans for whom James advocates. The Israelites of those times believed that riches and material goods were signs that God had blessed a person. Poverty and illness were viewed as indications of God's judgement and curse upon a person. Even today, some Christians still hold to this misperception.

It's true that God did sometimes bless those He loved with great wealth (as we read about in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon). It is also true that Christ Jesus lived His earthly life humbly, without a place to rest His head. He blessed the poor, the meek, and the humble. He called two coins given in charity by a widow greater than the sizable donations from the wealthy because the coins were all that she had for her own sustenance. The Apostles taught the people of the early church to share what they had with one another, and they did so. Those who were poor understood their vulnerability, their utter dependence upon God. Those who were wealthy tended to place their trust in their wealth rather than understanding their dependence upon God. God wants us to show love and concern for the well-being of others, taking care of one another as we would care for ourselves, and James did not see this happening in his time. God wants us to be grateful for what He provides, understanding that all we have is His gift, but again, the greatest gift and treasure is the Lord. God wants us to know that all He gives us is meant to advance His kingdom and serve His plans, not enhance our social status and give us a luxurious lifestyle. God expects much from those whom He gives much (Luke 12:48), whether its blessing of money, creativity, wisdom, charisma, or other spiritual blessings. To do less is a sign of spiritual immaturity.

Don't forget to pray.

Praying in times of hardship is important. James tells us to view hardships as opportunities to practice our faith. This is because times of external testing can easily backslide into times of internal temptation, the worst of which is the temptation to believe that the Lord has cursed or judged us, that the Lord has forsaken us, that the Lord is unwilling (or worse unable) to help us through our trials. At the most extreme, it can lead to the internal temptation to doubt God's very existence. Internal temptations turned to doubts can cause us to turn to worldly, wicked behavior to resolve our problems. Pray through it. Seek the counsel of the elders of your church. Pray for wisdom and the ability to release fear and anger so that you can trust the Lord to bring you through your circumstances.

Finally, James reminds believers of the importance and power of prayer. He encourages us to pray in times of hardship and to praise and sing in times of happiness. He calls on the people of the church to pray for one another and for us to seek the prayers of the elders of the church when we are ill.

James encourages that the earnest prayer of a righteous person (and, yes, that means you when you are praying with sincerity and trust in God) has great power and can produce wonderful results. Our prayers can even help bring back a person who has turned from the faith and lead them back to life in Christ.

Remember that Christ tells us not to pray theatrically, in the manner of the Pharisees who were seeking attention. Christ tells us to seek a private place. God does not require fancy, eloquent prayers from believers. A short, sincere prayer accomplishes more than a babbling half-hearted prayer (God isn't worried about the word count of our prayer). Remember that God is a good Father who is eager to give His children what they ask...but you have to ask and to be persistent in your prayers. Pray as one who is in relationship with God, like a child speaking to a loving parent. Believe the truth that your prayers are heard and matter to God.

Summarizing the wisdom of James

Choose love over favoritism and resist the temptation to judge others.

The tongue can cause a fire that can consume your entire life or the lives of others. Control it.

Know the difference between wisdom of the world that leads to sin and death and wisdom of the Lord that brings life.

Genuine faith has no divided loyalty. We are whole when we follow the Lord. We are fractured and divided when we attempt to follow the ways of the Lord and the ways of the world.

Life's trials produce endurance and trust in the Lord, which helps perfect us.

God grants wisdom to those who ask in faith.

Wealth will pass away; Hardship teaches us to trust is God. Have patience and endure, knowing that the Lord will provide what we need, including salvation and eternal life.

God is generous and gives us new life when we follow Christ.

Don't just listen to God's Word, DO WHAT IT SAYS.

Don't make oaths, just say yes or no.

If you boast, boast only in what the Lord has done for you.

Pray without ceasing in all things, knowing that God hears and responds to the earnest prayers which come from sincere faith in Him.

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