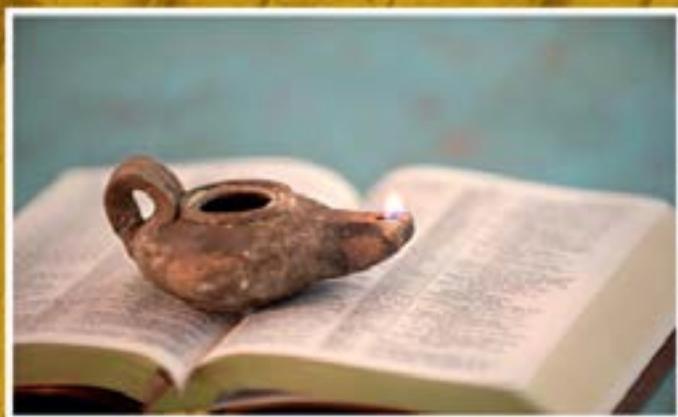


# THE LETTER OF JAMES



An Explanation of This Letter  
Especially for You

Ger de Koning

**ROCK  
SOLID  
10**



# **The Letter of James**



# The Letter of James

An Explanation of This Letter  
Especially for You

Rock Solid #10 (Part I)

Ger de Koning

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## Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

### **Old Testament**

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah  
Nah – Nahum  
Hab – Habakkuk  
Zep – Zephaniah  
Hag – Haggai  
Zec – Zechariah  
Mal – Malachi

### **New Testament**

Mt – Gospel of Matthew  
Mk – Gospel of Mark  
Lk – Gospel of Luke  
Jn – Gospel of John  
Acts – Acts of the Apostles  
Rom – Letter to the Romans  
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians  
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians  
Gal – Letter to the Galatians  
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians  
Phil – Letter to the Philippians  
Col – Letter to the Colossians  
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians  
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians  
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy  
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy  
Tit – Letter to Titus  
Phlm – Letter to Philemon  
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews  
Jam – Letter of James  
1Pet – First Letter of Peter  
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter  
1Jn – First Letter of John  
2Jn – Second Letter of John  
3Jn – Third Letter of John  
Jude – Letter of Jude  
Rev – Revelation

## Explanation of general format

**PERSONAL PRONOUNS** are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

**BRACKETS** [ ] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

**SHARP BRACKETS** < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** \* are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

**ALL CAPS** in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

## The Letter of James

### **Introduction**

The letter of James is a letter with its own particular character. Of course that goes for each letter in the Bible, but still this letter is indeed special, as you will discover. It takes a special place in the New Testament. You could compare the place of the letter of James among the other letters with the place that Jonah takes in the Old Testament among the other prophets. All Old Testament prophets have a message for the people of God, except Jonah. Jonah is an exception, for he is sent with a message from God to the Gentiles.

Many letters in the New Testament, especially those of Paul, address the believers as members of the church and as united with Christ. James is an exception, for he addresses his letter “to the twelve tribes” of Israel “who are dispersed abroad” (Jam 1:1). James writes his letter to the people of Israel as a whole. It is also remarkable that he, although he mainly addresses the Jewish Christians – he uses the word ‘brethren’ fifteen times –, also addresses the unbelieving Jews.

James does not speak about heavenly blessings in his letter, which are the portion of the church and the individual believer. He writes about the practice of the life of faith. In his letter he addresses everyone who confesses to belong to God’s people and tells him what such a person is supposed to show in practice. What a person says has to become visible. The life from God is to be shown. That is also essential, for the works of faith are *to other people* the only proof that there is real faith present in the heart. Faith *works* through love (Gal 5:6) as an expression of the new creation that the believer is in Christ (Gal 6:15; 2Cor 5:17).

In this letter you do not find much doctrine or teaching. Possibly this letter has already been written before Paul wrote his letters. Nevertheless, it must be said that for this letter to become a reality in your life, it is necessary that you know the teachings of Paul’s letters. It is not a letter that you simply put into practice overnight. It is about living out the new man, and about

that new man Paul tells everything in his letters. If you have read his letters you will certainly recognize this. Although the ranking of the letters, as we have in the Bible, is not inspired, the letter of James therefore takes, right after the letters of Paul, a remarkably justified position.

The recipients are the people of God that still belong to God's earthly people. They are still not separated from them. The people as a whole have rejected the Lord, while these recipients yet confess that they believe in the Lord Jesus as the Lord of glory (Jam 2:1). That means that through this letter God makes us familiar with a form of Christendom, which is a mixture: the Jewish Christendom. It is a letter that is written with a view to a transition phase of the old (Judaism) to the new (Christendom). The particular period of time in which we could best place this letter is the time of the church life of the first believers, as it is described in the book of Acts.

In this transition time God tolerates that certain customs of the old people of Israel are still maintained in the newly established church. Soon there will come an end to that transition time, due to the destruction of Jerusalem that will take place in the year 70 by the Romans – the letter of James is dated between the years 45 and 62. James also points this out when he speaks about “the last days” (Jam 5:3). In a certain sense you may therefore call this letter an ‘end time letter’.

That is why this letter is also relevant to us. We also live in an end time and indeed the end time of Christendom. Also the end time in which we live will be closed with judgments. Another thing is that we are on the threshold of a new time that will come after the judgments. That new time covers a period of a thousand years, a period that is characterized by peace in heaven and on earth under the most blessed government of the Lord Jesus.

In the order we have in the Bible this letter follows after the letter to the Hebrews. However, most apparently the letter to the Hebrews has been written later than the letter of James. In the letter to the Hebrews, also addressed to Jews, the call sounds to go out outside the camp (Heb 13:13). That call sounds also with a view to the coming destruction of Jerusalem. We do not find such a call in this letter.

The people of Israel are still addressed. James addresses those who are dispersed, namely the Israelites who are dispersed everywhere among the

nations. He still sees the whole people, like Elijah (1Kgs 18:31; cf. Ezra 6:17) and Paul (Acts 26:7) did, until God executed judgment.

James has a leading position in the church at Jerusalem. You may say that he is the leader of this church. The church at Jerusalem consists of Jews who came to faith in the Lord Jesus, but who, in the exercise of their religion, are not distinguished from their unbelieving compatriots. Among them James, together with Peter and John, is considered to be a pillar (Gal 2:9).

When Paul comes to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, he goes to James with whom all elders of Jerusalem gather together. In the conversation that follows Paul is told that already ten thousands of Jews have come to faith, who all are zealous for the law (Acts 21:20). Under the leadership of James they submit a proposal to Paul through which he could show that he is also a Jew who is faithful to the law. Paul's agreement with this proposal means the end of his public service.

Here you see how great the influence of James is. That great influence is also seen during the apostle meeting where James gives the decisive response that the Gentiles should not be troubled to keep the law (Acts 15:13-21).

# James 1

## **Jam 1:1 | Sender and Addressee**

*1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.*

V1. Although James is in fact the leader of the church in Jerusalem, he doesn't present himself as such in this letter. He presents himself as "a bond-servant of God". Each Israelite could have repeated that after him, for in essence each Israelite was a bond-servant. To James that was not an oppressive subjection to God, but he mentions it as a privilege.

Then he calls himself also a bond-servant "of the Lord Jesus Christ". Not each Israelite could and wanted to repeat that after him. James indeed calls himself like that and also here it sounds that he finds it an honor to be a bond-servant of the Lord Jesus. If you then also consider that he is a brother of the Lord Jesus according to the flesh (Gal 1:19), it is striking that he calls himself like that.

With him you do not notice anything of the popular spirit that talks about 'Jesus' as if He were a friend from the street. He calls the name of the Man, Who was born of the same mother as he was, with great respect. He did not always have that respect. During the life of the Lord Jesus James did not believe in Him as the One Who was sent by God (Jn 7:5). That changed when the Lord Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (1Cor 15:7). At least, it is very plausible that this appearance has been the reason for his conversion.

By the way, you see that James puts God and the Lord Jesus on the same level by calling himself both a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus. He honors the Son as he honors the Father (Jn 5:23).

James writes to "the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad". Peter also writes to those who are scattered abroad (1Pet 1:1), but then only to the believing Jews, those who are born again (1Pet 1:23). James writes to the whole.

With a brief “greetings” he expresses his fellowship with them. Greeting someone or conveying greetings to someone speaks of fellowship. This word contains a wish that the other person may rejoice and is happy – the word occurs two more times: in Acts 15:23; 23:26.

Now read James 1:1 again.

Reflection: What makes this letter so special compared to the other letters in the New Testament?

## **Jam 1:2-5 | Faith in the Midst of Trials**

*2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have [its] perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

V2. The call of James to consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, connects wonderfully to the wish of the previous verse. By addressing his readers with “my brethren” after the general salutation of that verse, he makes them feel how much he is connected to them. It emphasizes again that he doesn’t address them as a leader, but as a fellow brother.

Without any other introduction James speaks directly about “various trials”. He suddenly places you in the world and what you can possibly go through there. In the world the trueness of your confession is tested by temptations and trials. For the company to whom James is writing, that trial consists primarily of poverty. That may also be the case for you. But these trials can also be sickness, invalidity, unemployment or the passing away of a beloved person. These are all trials that the Lord allows on the path of the believers to see in whom they put their trust.

James therefore starts with the test of the trueness of the faith. As is already said in the introduction, the point for him is the practice of their life of faith. You may say that the world with its trials is the testing room of the faith.

James tells his brothers to welcome the trials to which they are exposed, with a feeling of joy. That seems like an impossible order, doesn’t it? It even seems to be in contradiction to what Peter says in his first letter. Peter actually says that trials cause distress (1Pet 1:6) and that’s easier to understand. Still it only is an apparent and not a real contradiction.

James and Peter approach trials from two different points of view. When you are going through a trial, it makes you distressed, sad. You do not undergo a trial stoically and unstirred (Heb 12:11). Nevertheless you may remind yourself that each trial is a matter that God has planned in your life. He is dealing with you.

The important thing for James is the fact of the trial of which he emphasizes that it may be different for each person. That's why he speaks about 'various'. The purpose is that the trial you are going through, drives you out to God. If that indeed happens, it is a result that makes you rejoice, but above all it is a result that rejoices God. In that way you are able to experience something that Paul has experienced, which caused him to say: "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing" (2Cor 6:10).

V3. James also explains to his readers why they should count it all joy when they fall into trials. He can also tell them that they know the purpose of the trials. After all they know that those trials, through which their faith is tested, make their faith stronger and those trials also challenge them to hold on. The purpose that God has with the trials we encounter, is to teach us to endurance. Endurance is the proof of true faith.

You may say now: 'Does salvation then depend on our own efforts after all?' No, absolutely not. Salvation is anchored in the work of Christ. When we say that we are saved, it will be proved by the endurance in faith, even though we encounter the toughest trials.

The most difficult thing of trials is the time that it can take. Sometimes you manage to maintain yourself well and keep on trusting God if you suddenly encounter a trial. But the real test comes if the trial takes longer. Then that is precisely the time to keep on trusting God that He has everything in control. Then it is important to trust that He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able (1Cor 10:13).

V4. In case the trial keeps on going that long that you may think: 'When will it ever end?' then that is a trial that has the purpose to let endurance have its perfect result. In the life of a Christian endurance is an important characteristic. When Paul summarizes the signs of an apostle he mentions first 'perseverance', endurance (2Cor 12:12). To both James and Paul the word endurance or perseverance means: to bear the suffering with endurance or perseverance. Like James also Paul shows the blessed results of endurance or perseverance in trials (Rom 5:3-5).

An example of a person with whom endurance did not have its perfect result, is king Saul. He is not able to wait for Samuel and offers the burnt offering too early. That costs him his kingdom (1Sam 13:8-14). But also

David fails in his endurance. He is continually chased by Saul. The long duration of that trial becomes too much for him at a certain moment and he says to himself: "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1Sam 27:1).

The only solution he sees is to seek refuge with the Philistines. That indeed delivers him the rest he was looking for, because Saul no longer chases him, but he, however, loses his fellowship with God. With him endurance did not have its perfect result, because instead of asking God for wisdom about what he should do, he came up with his own solution. In contrast to Saul, David came back later on the path of and with God and in that way endures until the end.

Endurance lasts until you at a certain moment completely subject yourself to the will of God. "Have [its] perfect result" indicates actually that you fully subject yourself to God and that His will becomes yours. That is a process and that process will last your whole life. With the Lord Jesus there was no own will, but He was certainly tempted as us, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). With Him the result of the temptation was that He has been made perfect. In that way He became the source of eternal salvation (Heb 5:7-10).

If this work has been fulfilled in you, in other words, if you are fully subjected to God, that doing His will is the only thing that you desire, then you are "perfect and complete" and you lack nothing. That does not mean that you now know everything of God's will and that you do not need to learn anything from God anymore. The point is that you have rest in the will of God with your life and the circumstances you find yourself in. You trust Him that He only wants your best. In that subjection to Him He can reveal His will to you. You are then accessible to Him and also usable.

The perfection James is talking about here, has got nothing to do with sinlessness. Even if you live in subjection to God, it can occur that you, how well your intention may be, still sin. An example of that you see in the life of Peter. He really wanted to live fully subjected to the Lord. He even said that he was willing to give his life for Him. But the Lord had to tell him that he was going to deny Him three times.

With all his good intentions Peter was blind to his own weakness. And because he even neglected the warning of the Lord, he sinned by denying

the Lord. Fortunately, he repented and received forgiveness (Lk 22:33-34; 54-62). Peter failed to endure in his faith when he was tempted because he lacked the wisdom for the right decision and for the right confession.

V5. To be preserved from such experiences requires “wisdom”. Wisdom is making use of the knowledge that you have in the circumstances you find yourself, where your faith is put to the test. Because your faith is continually tested, you are continually in need of that wisdom. You will surely feel the lack of wisdom when you look at the life of the world around you. I surely do.

To be able to go on, to be able to endure, it is important to see what the purposes of God are. That means that you need to go to Him, in the sanctuary. In the sanctuary you see which way God has in mind to go with you. You also see that His ultimate purpose is blessing.

What a great word James is speaking about here. It is in fact a wonderful invitation. James invites you to ask God for wisdom. He also tells you how God responds to that request, generously and without reproach.

If you ask people for help, you have a chance to be reproached. They just think you’re cheeky or they feel used or tell you to fend for yourself because they can’t help you anyway. God does not react in such a way at all. If you ask Him, you will learn to know Him as a giving God. He is not a demander to whom you approach as a beggar to soften Him. No, He is a God Who loves to see you coming to Him, Who loves to listen to you and Who loves to answer you.

Now read James 1:2-5 again.

Reflection: Ask God for wisdom with a view to the temptations you are dealing with.

**Jam 1:6-12 | Do Not Doubt, but Persevere**

*6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 [being] a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man [is to glory] in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which [the Lord] has promised to those who love Him.*

V6. In the previous section you saw that God loves to see you come to Him. But there is a condition attached to it. That condition is that you should come “in faith” (cf. Heb 11:6) and without any doubt in your heart concerning His kindness. If you ask God for wisdom, while you still doubt His kindness for giving that wisdom, you look like the surf of the sea. In such a case you focus yourself on God to ask Him for wisdom, while in your heart you still seek other possibilities where you might find wisdom to escape the trial. You open yourself to God, but at the same time you listen to the opinions of others or you look at the circumstances and make your decisions dependent on that.

Then there is no room for God to make something clear to you. The result of such an attitude is that you are tossed to and fro, like a wave of the sea is driven up and down. Doubt looks like the open sea, where the waves are a plaything of the wind. Such is a man who doubts: he is a plaything of opinions of other people to which he opens himself.

V7. It is not wrong to seek one another for advice, but that advice is not to take the first and leading place. If the advice of others means that much to you that your trust in God is not effective anymore, you will receive nothing from the Lord. Seeking others for advice or listening to the good advice of others, must on the contrary increase the confidence in God. God wants you to trust Him unconditionally.

V8. A man who doesn't do that is "double-minded". That such a man is inwardly double-minded will also appear from his ways. He is "unstable" in all his ways, it is not possible to understand him. You may think for a moment that he is on the right way, but a moment later he goes a totally different direction. He is not a reliable person. He has a wavering course. He has no stability at all in his faith life.

V9. After the general principles about endurance in trials, James applies these principles to "the brother of humble circumstances". You can derive that from the word "but". In that way James makes a contrast with what is earlier said and especially with the doubtful person. The lowly or socially deprived brother is in danger to doubt the love of God for him. As an Israelite he was raised with the thought that richness is the proof of God's blessing and that poverty is the proof that God's blessing is withheld, due to unfaithfulness. But things are not like that anymore, James says. Poverty is not necessarily a proof of unfaithfulness and God's dissatisfaction about that. Poverty is a temptation that can be endured with joy because it can be seen as a test of faith.

James adds a special encouragement to that. He says to the socially deprived one that he may rejoice in his spiritual riches and "his high position". He may do so because of his connection to Christ. The poor may glory in his exaltation because Christ is not ashamed to call him 'brother' (Heb 2:11). This title is ignored and counted as nothing in the world. The poor, however, knows that the glory of this world will pass away as a flower of the field, while he rejoices to be a partaker of those who are acknowledged by the Lord of glory as His own.

V10. James has also a word for the socially prosperous one. The rich man who glories or boasts in his riches must realize that in a spiritual sense he is lowly and poor in his riches. James calls on the rich man to glory "in his humiliation", which means in what he in himself is to God. In himself the rich man is a sinner who cannot stand before God. In addition, it will be a good thing for him to realize that all his riches will pass away. That not only goes for the *riches* of the rich man, but also for the rich man himself, "he will pass away".

V11. Grass represents the prosperity of human life with its inextricable link that that prosperity will quickly pass away. The flower gives the grass color and luster, but the color and luster of the flower also pass away quickly.

You see the illustration of that in the history that the Lord Jesus tells about the poor Lazarus and the rich man (Lk 16:19-25). Lazarus was really poor. The rich man did not care about him at all. Lazarus means 'God is help' and God had brought Lazarus in such particular circumstances to bring the meaning of his name into practice. Lazarus had nothing and no one else to help him, but God. The rich man lived only for himself alone and needed no help from God. But at the other side of death the roles are reversed. There the rich has become a poor man and the poor Lazarus has become a rich man.

The value of being rich, or better said, the meaninglessness of being rich, appears to be as the heat of the sun as an illustration of tests in life. If sickness and death make their entry, it appears that health and life are priceless and not for sale, even if a person would possess all the money of the world.

You can also see the sun with its heat as a metaphor of the Lord Jesus, Who is presented as "the sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2). When He comes to judge the earth He will humiliate everything that is lofty and lifted up (Isa 2:10-12). What man considers highly and prominently, will be destroyed by Him. All things in which the heart of man can possibly put his trust and through which he thinks not to need God for, will pass away when the Sun of righteous appears. In the light of the Sun, which reveals everything, it will be seen what it has been all worth.

V12. With the promise "blessed" to the man who perseveres under trial, James concludes the introductory section about the test of faith. The man who has overcome the trial, receives beside that approval also a reward. To him "the crown of life" will be given.

The Greek word for 'crown' here is *stephanos*. There is another word for crown, the word *diadema*. The 'diadem' is the symbol of royalty or imperial dignity. That word is quite often used in the book of Revelation. Here it is *stephanos*, which is a crown of honor as a symbol for a winner. This crown is not of gold, but of bay leaves. Therefore it has no material value.

The symbolic value, however, is enormous, because of the honor that goes together with it.

This crown is received by someone who has delivered an exceptional achievement. This crown was to be gained during the Olympic Games in those days. With this crown in view, a participant was prepared to make great efforts and impose on himself all sorts of denials. The *stephanos* is a great encouragement to run the race.

In this sense the 'crown of life', also mentioned in Revelation 2 (Rev 2:10), will be handed over by the Lord Jesus on the day of decoration. Other crowns to be deserved will also be handed out on that day, like 'the crown of righteousness' (2Tim 4:8) and 'the unfading crown of glory' (1Pet 5:4). Those who have endured the trials and who have testified not to be living for the life on earth, but for the true life, who were even prepared to pay their faithfulness with death, will receive that crown as an exceptional homage from God.

When the Lord Jesus returns with His own, they will be characterized by 'life'. That means that it will be seen by all people that they bear the special mark of the Lord Jesus as the life, for He is the life (Jn 11:25; 14:6). They will bear life as an honorary distinction. The life that they have lived and of which the excellent quality in the most difficult circumstances has been demonstrated, will be received out of the hand of the Lord Jesus, what will be visible to all people. In this way He will be glorified in His saints and will be marveled at among all who have believed (2Thes 1:10).

We ought to be Christians who exercise themselves in abstaining from everything that could keep them from gaining the prize (1Cor 9:27). To be able to do that with heart and soul, we need love. James speaks about that in the last part of verse 12. Only those who love Christ are prepared to subject themselves to a hard and long lasting exercise.

"Those who love Him" is a wonderful expression, which appears four times in the New Testament, of which two times in this letter (Rom 8:28; 1Cor 2:9, Jam 1:12; 2:5). That shows that the true practice of faith is only possible if love for the Lord Jesus is the driving force. Only love for Him will have the effect in you that you exert yourself and make sacrifices. To

make that happen in you a total change had to take place, for you were an enemy of God. Loving God is your answer to God's love for you.

Now read James 1:6-12 again.

Reflection: How can you receive the crown of life?

**Jam 1:13-18 | Partakers of the New Creation**

*13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.*

V13. The temptations James is talking about in this verse are of a totally different kind than the temptations or trials he has been talking about up to now. The temptation he has spoken about up to now are the temptations or trials you have to deal with in the life around you. Those are circumstances in the midst of which you find yourself in that challenge you to show your faith.

The temptations that James refers to in verses 13-14 are temptations that have their origin in yourself. Those are temptations that are related to your flesh, in other words, your sinful nature. So you see that James indicates two kinds of temptations: temptations that are challenging you from the outside and temptations out of yourself, from your inner being.

God can test you through outward circumstances. His purpose with that is to bless you. You see that with the example of Abraham. To tempt Abraham, that is to test him and make his faith visible, God asked him to offer his son (Gen 22:1). You see that in the way that Abraham goes in the obedience of faith, his faith reveals itself as faith in the God of resurrection. Of course God knew that he possessed that faith, but now you know that too. The faith of Abraham has become visible. Therefore this temptation or trial does not come from Abraham himself, but from God. When there is no question of sin, but obedience and perseverance are tested, it concerns the condition of the heart, to be taught, guided and formed.

But as soon as there is a question of stirring up the lusts, it cannot possibly be said that God is tempting. The temptations that are coming from your inner being do not come from God. You can never say that God is trying

to incite you to sin. A temptation to sin occurs when you do not keep your lusts under control, but give in to it.

God cannot be tempted by evil, for there is no evil in Him. Therefore evil or sin cannot possibly come from Him to tempt you in one way or the other. You see that in a striking manner in the Lord Jesus, especially in the temptations to which He was exposed in the wilderness (Lk 4:1-13). He was and is without sin (Heb 4:15). He could not possibly be tempted by something from Himself, because there was no sin in Him (1Jn 3:5). The ruler of the world could not find anything in Him when He was on earth, not a single connecting factor (Jn 14:30).

But the Lord Jesus has been in very tough circumstances. His path on earth, which He went through in dependence on His God, was the cause of that. He wept at the grave of Lazarus and over Jerusalem (Jn 11:35; Lk 19:41). His sorrow was true, for He felt the consequences of sin in perfection. Calamity did not pass Him by. Despite all sadness and disappointment He kept on trusting God. But He has never been tempted by God to sin. Neither does God incite us to sin. He does not tempt to sin.

V14. When you give in to temptation then that is because you are drawn away and enticed by your own lust. You might have watched something bad on the internet and you started to think about it. In that case you have not judged it radically, but you allowed yourself to be enticed by what you saw. It might have been a beautiful car, a beautiful woman or a handsome man. You gave your fantasy the free reign and you have let yourself be drawn away by your own lust.

V15. Once that process has started lust will not only remain an inner lust but it will surely result in a deed. You now have come that far in your thinking about the lust that you also want to possess it. Then lust gives birth to sin. You take possession of the object of your lust, either in reality by for instance buying that car or in your feelings by inwardly taking possession of that woman or man and start to have sexual intercourse with her or him in your feelings. If you continue to live in this situation, then sin will have power in such a way over you that you cannot control it. It becomes full-grown and strong. It rules in such a way over you that it leads you in death.

James says these things to warn you not to let you be misled in the temptations that come from yourself. Those temptations do not come from God and therefore you should not try to consider them at all. If you do, then it means the end of your life as a Christian. The end of the path of a sinner is death (Jam 5:20). You may say that lust is the grandmother of death: lust gives birth to sin and sin brings forth death.

If you consider the way Paul speaks about that, it seems it doesn't agree with what is said here. Of course each agrees with the other, only you ought to know how Paul presents these things and how James does. When Paul says that lust comes forth from sin, then he means with sin the indwelling sin, the power of sin (Rom 6:12). The indwelling sin, the sinful nature, is the source out of which all sinful deeds come. The indwelling sin produces lust (Rom 7:8).

When James appears to say the opposite by saying that lust gives birth to sin, then that is an apparent contrast. What he says is not in contrast to what Paul says, but it connects with it. James speaks about lust as a sinful *deed* that can only produce another sinful *deed*. Therefore you may say that James deals with the *efficacy*, while Paul deals with the *source*.

V16. James appeals not to deceive yourself regarding the fact that what comes forth from yourself does not come forth from God. He does that with a special appeal on how much the brethren mean to him. You hear that in the way he addresses them, namely as "my beloved brethren". When you see your brothers and sisters as your 'beloved brothers and sisters', you will not allow that something disturbs that relationship.

V17. A wrong perception on temptations disturbs that relationship. If you say for example that God is against you when you are tempted, you give a false impression of God. James has exposed that. But now he will explain that although you are in the midst of temptations and although there are temptations which may come forth from you, you still belong to a perfectly new world. He speaks about that when he says "that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures" (verse 18). That means that you, by faith in the Lord Jesus, already belong to that new creation that will be revealed when He will reign in majesty and glory.

That wonderful new thing and everything that's connected to it, finds its origin "above" in heaven, from where it comes down as a "good thing given" and a "perfect gift". The expression "every good thing given" refers to the act of giving by God, in which there is absolutely no wrong motive. The expression "every perfect gift" refers to the content of what God gives.

The good thing given and the perfect gift of God is the Lord Jesus (2Cor 9:15). You may also think of His Spirit and His Word as good things given and perfect gifts. That is the case with everything that comes from God. From God only good and perfect things come forth. Here you see that God is a Giver, while in the Old Testament He is the Demander.

He gives as "the Father of lights", which means as the origin of a manifold light. Every gift comes from the light but will always remain in relation with the light. Therefore a gift of God will never ever be connected with darkness and sin.

V18. Therefore, to be able to give you according to the purposes in His heart for you, it was necessary that God Himself started to work that in you. Because He cannot change, you had to be changed. He has made that happen. He planted the new life in you. He did that "in the exercise of His will", which implies that He will never come back to that matter. He did that "by the word of truth", for only in that way you learn to know God and also yourself. That Word has been applied to you by the Holy Spirit. That is how you became a new creation.

It is still "a kind of" because it still does not apply to your body. Inwardly, however, you already partake of what will be general in creation, in the millennial kingdom, in future. In the old creation God now already sees people who belong to that new creation. You happen to be one of them. Isn't that a reason to praise God?

Now read James 1:13-18 again.

Reflection: What are the contrasts between the section of verses 13-15 and the section of verses 16-18?

**Jam 1:19-27 | The Practice of the New Life**

*19 [This] you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak [and] slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and [all] that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for [once] he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the [law] of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his [own] heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of [our] God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, [and] to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

V19. After the wonderful explanation of the work of God in His own James continues with the practice of the new life. His purpose is that his readers, whom he again calls “my beloved brethren”, may know what ought to mainly characterize the new life. The first thing he mentions is “to hear”, to listen. If you are newly converted it is especially important to listen to the Lord and to do that in the attitude of the young Samuel. Eli taught him to say: “Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening” (1Sam 3:9). The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of Someone Who hears (Isa 50:4). Therefore He absolutely always knew, when He was on earth, what to say to the right people at the right time.

You also can only say something meaningful if you have first listened. It is good to consider why God has given you two ears and only one mouth. Be quick to hear what the Lord has got to say.

Do not be quick to respond to what men say. Control your tongue and try not to be rash with your mouth (cf. Ecc 5:1). Don't let yourself be tempted to react sharply and angrily if people treat you unjustly. That anger can just suddenly pop up if you see or hear something that is unjust or if you feel yourself to be offended. Then you lose your patience just like that.

V20. Of course it is not always wrong to get angry. Anger is a feature of God. When He gets angry He exerts His anger in perfect righteousness. Sometimes it is necessary for you to be angry, but be careful that there is no self-interest involved. Therefore it is for a reason why Paul warns us not to sin when we are angry (Eph 4:26). For when you get angry because of seeing a certain injustice, you can get so upset and angry that you cannot control yourself anymore. Then you say or do things that are not fitting to you as a 'first fruit among His creatures'.

With the Lord Jesus anger and grief go together perfectly (Mk 3:5a), while with us anger can possibly go together with being personally offended. When we are angry because we are personally offended, it has got nothing to do with "God's righteousness". In that case it becomes clear and visible that we are our own judge, while there is nothing to be seen of God's righteousness.

V21. In order not to fall into the trap of a wrong anger, James passes on some instructions. You have to put aside something and receive something. Consider the order. You ought to *put aside* something first, for then you create room to *receive* something. James mentions two things you should put aside. As a matter of fact he is up to date when he starts with "all filthiness". The world is full of that and it easily clings to the believer.

Filthiness may just jump toward you; it splashes from the bill boards alongside the road and if you do not watch out it is also on your television or computer screen. Do not look at it, turn your eyes off of them, do not be occupied with such things. You must inwardly take distance of those things.

That also goes for "[all] that remains of wickedness". Do not be tempted to express your anger in a way that you show more of yourself instead of showing the reason why you are angry.

James urges for a good mind. That good mind expresses itself in "humility". If you are humble, God can implant His Word in you. 'Humbleness' is the right ground for the implanted Word to grow and to come to maturity. Then that Word can be effective. Then you will be led by the Word on your path of life and in that way you will be able to proceed that path up to the

full salvation. Your life will bear fruit that comes from the new creation that you are, a fruit which is a joy to God.

V22. In that way it will become clear that you are not only a hearer of the Word, but also a doer. Herod for example was only a hearer. He loved to hear John speaking (Mk 6:20), but he was not a doer of the word spoken by John. When it came down to it, he would rather have John killed than go back on a promise he quickly made under the influence of his aroused lust (Mk 6:21-27).

V23-24. John had held up a mirror to him. Herod had looked into that mirror for just a moment. He saw what kind of man he was, but he went away and forgot what kind of person he was. If you read in the Bible you must not do that in a hurry, but calmly. If you just read something quickly, you do not really look into the mirror. The Bible has to be given the chance to show you what kind of person you are, that you may adapt your life to it.

V25. You ought to look into "the perfect law of liberty". The perfect law is not a series of rules and commandments that God imposes on you as His demands. With the perfect law is meant the whole Word of God. That Word of God holds up to you the law, which means the lawfulness, of liberty. He who has received the implanted Word with humbleness will show the fruits of that Word. That is a lawfulness, a process that cannot occur in any other way.

You see that perfectly in the life of the Lord Jesus. The law of God was in Him (Psa 40:8) and that law completely connected to His desire to do the will of God. A small example may possibly clarify this. If I give one of my children the command: 'Eat of those cookies', then he or she does that delightfully, because it is fully in accordance with his or her desire. Being obedient out of love and doing things that you naturally love to do, give the greatest sense of satisfaction.

James adds to it that it is important to abide by it; that means that you must persevere. Then you will "be blessed" in what you do; it gives you the sense of happiness. It doesn't mean that you will succeed in everything you do, but that you experience happiness in everything you do.

V26. James comes back to the tongue. The tongue is the most important measure of what dwells in the heart of man. The Lord Jesus even says

that we are justified or judged according to our words (Mt 12:37). If you know how to bridle your tongue, then you are also able to serve God in the right way. But he who thinks to be religious, who thinks that God should be satisfied with the way he serves Him, while from his tongue comes a waterfall of words, deceives his own heart (Pro 13:3b; 10:19).

Why is James that sharp in his judgment of the tongue? He will explain that penetratingly in chapter 3, but it is already clear here that what matters to him is that it comes down to deeds and not nice words. He says: 'Just show what religion means to you. All that talking doesn't mean anything to me.' He who talks much, but does not do, has a 'worthless religion'. He may think that he is doing great, but what he is doing is worthless.

V27. In the final verse of this chapter James explains the way it supposed to be. It is about "pure and undefiled religion in the sight of [our] God and Father". All service of God must happen in purity of the heart. Insincere motives are not to be playing a role here. Even the service itself ought to happen without being stained by using any inappropriate means. Serving God means that God is in the center. He determines how the service is to be done.

When you visit widows and orphans in their distress you show them God's Fatherly love. He is after all the Father of orphans and the Judge for the widows (Psa 68:5; 146:9). God's love seeks the helpless and the socially deprived ones. When you visit them in their distress it means more than only showing your interest in them. It means that you are trying to empathize with them in their circumstances and in that way expressing your concern for them.

However, this is not the only way to give substance to 'pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father'. If that was the case, then Christendom would not be more than a social program. God is not only love, but He is also light. That's why James adds to it that you ought to keep yourself "unstained from the world". True religion doesn't lose out of the sight the natural character of the world, but takes into account that the world has rejected the Lord Jesus. The world lies in the power of the evil one (1Jn 5:19). You have been delivered from it (Gal 1:4), you do not belong to it anymore.

Therefore you cannot use anything from it in your service for God. Everything you would like to use from the world to only make your staying in there as pleasant as possible dishonors God. His assessment of the world should determine your dealings with it, just as His care for the defenseless in that world should determine your care for them.

Now read James 1:19-27 again.

Reflection: How do you put into practice of what James says in this section?

## James 2

### **Jam 2:1-7 | Chosen to Be Rich in Faith**

*1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with [an attitude of] personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world [to be] rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?*

V1. You have seen in the final verses of the previous chapter that God is a caring Father and that He is light and love. By helping widows and orphans you can show that God is a Father Who looks after those who are deprived of all help. Because God also is light, the command goes together with keeping yourself unstained from the world.

Now to keep you from becoming excessive in your separation from the world and falling into Pharisaism, James presents to you in the first verse of this chapter "the glorious Lord". He does that in connection to the admonition that there should be no "personal favoritism" with those who believe in our "Lord Jesus Christ".

James calls the Lord by His full name because he must rail against the great evil in the Christian church regarding giving preferential treatment to certain people, due to their social position. Such a conduct is absolutely in contrast with the Person of Christ and the confession of faith in Him. Partiality is totally strange to Him (Acts 10:34). That is also not the way He dealt with you and me, right?

If you are impressed by socially successful people, people with a high position, and admire them for the nice looking car by which they come to the meeting and the nice clothes they wear for that occasion, then you have not really looked well to 'the glorious Lord'. What does that entire earthly splendor mean in the light of His glory?

The Lord had glory with the Father before the world was (Jn 17:5). Also on earth He had glory, not for men (Isa 53:2), but for those with faith (Jn 1:14). This glory radiated through His humble stature. He will have glory when He returns to earth (2Pet 1:16-17). There is also a glory that is typical of Him and which we will see without taking part of it (Jn 17:24). He is the center and the radiation of all God's thoughts and glory (Heb 1:3). All glory is in Him.

That glory is in sharp contrast with earthly glory. In the light of the Lord of all glory there is no room for rank or position. Then everything that is attractive to the man of the world shrinks and also the matters that still exert a strong attraction on us as believers, such as wealth, reputation, position and power. Those are all matters that make man blind for true glory and through which he is on his way to hell. We too are inclined to look at the outward appearance (1Sam 16:7). Let us bear in mind that what is highly estimated by men is an abomination to God.

By the way, James is not calling for "leveling", that is, eliminating ranks and classes from the world and making everyone equal. He only wants the differences that exist in social life to play no role among believers in their dealings with one another as believers. In case that happens, he wants this evil to be judged. There are indeed differences among believers that are to be considered in their dealings with one another, such as a difference in age, in gender, in gifts. Those differences were made by the Lord. The differences are not to be played off against one another, but are supposed to be complementary to one another.

V2-3. James calls the evil by its name. He describes how men behave toward a rich man and toward a poor man when they enter the synagogue. Both the way they approach the rich and the way they approach the poor are wrong. It is far below the level of the glory of the Lord in Whom they say they believe. They look up to the rich man, due to his golden rings and

his nice clothes and they look down to the shabby clothed poor man. They guide the rich man with a bow to a nice place, and they give the poor man a standing place or a place by their footstool.

V4. With such a behavior they show an arrogance that comes down to playing the role of judge. They have neither authority nor ability for such a way of acting. The distinction they made, they made among themselves, for their own benefit. There is nothing of the Lord in this matter. On the contrary, they act "with evil motives". Such an evil motive is for example that they try to gain favor with rich people, because that can deliver them profit. They cannot gain any profit with poor people and therefore they do not care about them.

Do you remember what James said about 'pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father'? Was it not that precisely the poor people were to be visited in their affliction? How far away is making this distinction with evil motives from the true religion!

V5. "Listen, my beloved brethren", James says. In other words: 'You must listen carefully. You are really my beloved brethren and therefore I tell you how God thinks about the socially deprived people. The poor in the world have priority with Him, they have a special place with Him.'

Paul also says that to the Corinthians, who were also that sensitive to the honor and reputation of the world (1Cor 1:16-28). The fact that God has chosen the poor does not mean that He has chosen them because they have no money, but because they have no rights and because they are dependent on others. With God it is about people who are of no account.

By their being chosen they became rich in faith. To be rich in faith means to be rich in God (Lk 12:21). These riches cannot be expressed in money. Even the world is theirs (1Cor 3:21-23) because they belong to Him Who owns all silver and gold (Hag 2:8). They still have to wait for taking possession of that until the Lord Jesus comes back.

The Lord Jesus was the poor One par excellence. He was rich, but became poor for our sake, so that we might become rich through His poverty (2Cor 8:9). That poverty was not the feeding trough in which he was laid after His birth and the cloths in which He was wrapped, for that could not possibly make us rich. It was also not His poverty on earth, where He had nowhere

to lay His head (Mt 8:20). We have become rich through nothing else than through the poverty of the three hours of darkness on the cross, where He suffered the judgment of God on our sins.

That is also the only ground on which God could have made us “heirs of the kingdom”. When the Lord Jesus comes back to claim His kingdom, then all heirs will share with Him in His kingdom. God has promised that kingdom “to those who love Him”. James connects the promise of the kingdom to loving God.

That kingdom is appreciated only by those who know Who God is in His love. The love for God is present with all who know that God first loved them (1Jn 4:19). If you have seen and also experienced that God has loved you, of which the highest proof is the gift of His Son, then there is nothing else left for you than to love Him, isn't it?

Therefore you as an heir can also look forward to that kingdom. Up to that moment you are able, just like the poor about whom James is talking, to enjoy your spiritual riches. Do you already know something about your riches? They are all included and hidden in Christ (Col 2:2-3). It is up to you to dig them up.

In the light of His riches all riches of the world will lose its grip on you. Each investment of time and effort to make the riches of Christ to be your own, will show its efficiency when the Lord Jesus comes back. When you are that rich you will also be able to make other people rich. Then you can be a person of whom Paul says: “As poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things” (2Cor 6:10).

V6. James points out to the readers that they have dishonored the poor by treating them with such disdain. They are blind for what these poor ones mean to God. But also for their conduct toward the rich with whom they love to gain favor, they seem to be blind. What God has done to the poor is in sharp contrast to what the rich had done to the poor.

Just take a good look at what the rich are doing, James says. They oppress you and personally drag you into court. You think it will benefit you if you treat them with honors, but in the meantime you are fleeced by them. These folks are about corpses.

V7. And the worse thing is: through the conduct of the rich the “fair name” of the Lord Jesus by which you have been called, is blasphemed. Therefore there is absolutely no reason to look up to them and to approach them obsequiously.

Now read James 2:1-7 again.

Reflection: Do you approach your fellow believers without personal favoritism?

## Jam 2:8-14 | The Royal Law

*8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin [and] are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one [point], he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by [the] law of liberty. 13 For judgment [will be] merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. 14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?*

V8. The difference between the poor and the rich in the meeting is reprehensible. It is strongly condemned by James. He speaks out his condemnation in such a powerful language, that it cannot be misunderstood. When they despise the poor, they violate the "royal law". In that law all Israelites are considered as objects of God's favor. There the people are addressed as a whole. James brings his admonition in a positive way. He tells them that they do right if they fulfill the royal law "according to the Scripture", which means when they carry that out in the way it has been written in God's Word and according to its purpose.

The royal law is the law of the ten commandments. James calls it 'the royal law' to emphasize its high value, which will serve as another exhortation to obey it. This law will be effective in its fullness and excellence in the kingdom to come, that will be reigned by the Lord Jesus as King. That law will then be written in the hearts of the members of God's people (Heb 8:10). Because that law is written in their hearts they will also be able to live accordingly.

Fulfilling the royal law happens if we love our neighbor like ourselves. Then we do right, then we live right, then we live just as God wants it. This commandment makes clear that in the Old Testament each member of God's people had his own place before God and that they were all equal in the sight of God. Each member of the people was the neighbor of the other

and the other had to be treated with the same love with which a person treated himself. By dealing in that way with one another there would be no room for a preferential treatment of the one person or the neglect of another. In loving your neighbor the whole law is fulfilled (Gal 5:14; Rom 13:8-10).

You may now ask yourself: 'But we do not live under the law anymore, do we?' Indeed, we do not live under the law anymore. Therefore James' purpose is not to bring us back under the law. He shows us that if you love the other you do what the law demands. Do you remember that James writes his letter in a period that God still tolerates His scattered people keeping the law? That's why James refers to that. He appeals to them in their confession of faith.

This word must also appeal to you. Not in the way James addresses his readers, for you, most likely, do not belong to Israel. The application to you is, that if you love the other you will never do something that damages or hurts the other. Loving is not a performance you perform because the law requires it of you. Loving is the expression of your new life that seeks the good for the other. If you seek the good and not the evil for the other, then it is clear that you, so to speak, automatically fulfill the law.

V9. The law puts everyone on an equal level of responsibility toward God. That law says: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. If we then still make distinctions, then we do not act according to the royal commandment. The neighbor is my brother or sister in faith, the member of God's church, of which also I am a member by grace.

All Israelites belonged to the one people and each Israelite was a neighbor of each other compatriot. That is how we also are connected to one another. If you pray for your brother that he may be well, you pray that also for yourself at the same time, for if your brother is well, you also will be well. If love is true your preference will disappear. God has not dealt with you according to preference either.

If you still act with partiality then you sin evidently. Is it not clearly in contrast with the law that says that each member of His people is equal to the other and that you are to treat each member of God's people with the

same love? It is undoubtedly a violation in case you still make a difference in your approach to the members.

V10. By violating this one commandment you are guilty of violating the whole law, although you have not violated each of the commandments. That is because in the law the will of God comes to you. The authority of the Giver of the law supports the law. When Moses comes back from the mountain, he does not just erase one single commandment, but he throws both tablets from his hands and shatters them (Exo 32:19). The violation of that one commandment caused the people to be guilty of all the commandments. If you violate a commandment you are dealing with God Who gave both the commandment you violated and all other commandments.

V11. James uses an example. You can keep one commandment, but violate another commandment. Then you are by definition guilty of violating that commandment and in that way you stand guilty before the law wherein the other commandments are also established. The law forms a whole because God is the Giver of the law. If you violate one commandment, it means that you have given in to your own will and that you have despised the will of God, which He has revealed in the total of the law.

V12. As it is said, it is not the purpose of James to put us under the law of the ten commandments. His argument is meant to clarify on the basis of the law how the interactions in the church are to be. The law contains the words of God and contains also useful education for them. James is giving the education with the view to the Jewish-Christian church, but we can also learn a lot from it. The true meaning the law has acquired for him, now that he believes in the Lord of glory, is that of freedom. He has spoken it earlier (Jam 1:25) and here he returns to it.

Freedom is not being unfettered. Freedom has limits. Those limits are not to limit our freedom, but to prevent that we will use freedom in a wrong way. True freedom is doing the will of God and showing Who He is. That was done perfectly by the Lord Jesus. We see that the law of freedom perfectly comes to expression in His life. He was perfectly free because there was nothing of His own will or sin in Him. This allowed Him to be completely bound to the will of God. There was nothing that separated Him from that, nothing that could come between Him and His God and Father.

V13. That law of freedom is the measure of judgment that we ought to make use of in our contact with others. If we live just like the Lord, in undisturbed fellowship with the Father, then that will be heard and seen in our speech and actions. We will especially show our awareness of being judged by the law of freedom by showing mercy. In that way God's love also came to us. God came with His mercy in our miserable circumstances.

If we do not express in our speech and actions to others the mercy that we have received, we prove that we have not received new life and cannot act according to the law of freedom. God will judge that and that judgment will be just as merciless as the mercilessness with which we have treated others. If we show mercy, we act in the same God also acted when He dealt with us. Then we do not judge the other, but we show him God's mercy. In that way mercy triumphs over judgment. Mercy conquers judgment.

V14. If you are merciful you show that you yourself are the object of God's mercy. You may claim that you have faith, but if you do not show that from your works, by showing mercy for example, then it is no more than sweet talk. It is cheap talk and it doesn't prove anything of the inward life. To claim that you have faith is hollow and empty if there are no works.

You cannot see faith, but it becomes visible from works. Therefore faith and works are inextricably linked. The faith that a person claims to have, cannot save him. You do not see the roots of a plant, but when it grows and flourishes it is proof that the plant has roots. You do not see electricity, but when a lamp goes on it is proof that there is electricity. The Lord Jesus also speaks about the new birth of which you do not know how that happens, but you certainly hear its sound (Jn 3:8). Works prove that there is faith indeed. James gives an example in the following verses.

Because Luther the reformer had had much difficulty to understand this statement of James, he called this letter 'a straw letter', in other words a letter without any nutritional value. He said that, since he had discovered the forgery of the doctrine of the roman-catholic church that says that works are necessary to be saved. But in that way Luther threw the baby out with the bathwater. James definitely does not teach that a person is being saved by works. On the contrary he urges to prove faith by works that come out

from that faith, works that prove that there is faith. Otherwise there is no faith and therefore no salvation. A 'lip faith' doesn't give salvation.

Now read James 2:8-14 again.

Reflection: How do you bring the royal law into practice?

## Jam 2:15-26 | Works That Justify Faith

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for [their] body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, [being] by itself. 18 But someone may [well] say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without [the] spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

V15. James clarifies by an example what he means with works that show faith. He suggests his readers to imagine "a brother or sister" who has not got enough cloths against the cold and who has just enough food to survive. That example is up to date to his readers, for they didn't like the poor (verses 2-3). They might have felt quite addressed.

V16. It could have been the case that they had just had a nice talk with one or other poor brother or sister without giving them what is necessary for the body! When they have enough themselves they can easily say to the poor: "Go in peace." When they even say in addition that they should be warmed and filled *without doing anything about that*, then all that talk is plain hypocrisy.

V17. Talking about someone's lack or even praying for it, without any desire to do something about it, is dead faith. The showing of mercy is missing, and if that is missing, there is no faith. Where there are no works, the faith present in the mouth, is dead in itself. Then faith is not alive, there is no living faith. Faith and works cannot be separated. Faith as such

cannot be seen. It can only be made visible by works. Through works it becomes apparent that faith is present.

V18. The argument of James is quite clear. Despite that there comes an objection of someone who wants to make a distinction between faith and works. It is someone who has heard what James said about faith and works. The person himself has no faith, but he can point at a lot of good works. Because he has no faith he has missed the point in James' message. He is boasting in his works.

James responds to him that the distinction this person makes between faith and works is not possible. If he wants to make a distinction, let him then show his faith without his works. He is not able to do that, but James is definitely able to show faith out of his works. The point is not that James ought to show faith to *God*. God is sure about his faith. No, the works of faith are precisely to show to *men* that there is true and living faith in him.

V19. If it is only about faith, without works connected to it, it is no more than an orthodox confession. You can speak that out with your mouth, without it having any meaning to your heart. Look at the Jewish confession. The orthodox Jew wholeheartedly confesses that God is one. That is what God has also prescribed (Deu 6:4). That is a wonderful and fully just confession. It is a good thing that that confession is made.

But do you really think that only speaking that out is the proof of true faith? You can forget about that. Then it would mean that demons also have faith, in other words that they trust God. Demons do believe, but they shudder at the same time because they know that God will judge them because of their works that are all done in rebellion against God.

V20. James concludes his dispute with his (possibly imaginary) opponent. As a kind of conclusion he again clearly says to him, whom he addresses as "foolish fellow", that faith without works is "useless" or meaningless. By means of two examples he shows the true efficacy of faith.

V21. In the two following examples James clarifies what the works of faith in fact are, how faith becomes apparent from works. These are not examples of works that men call good works. According to human standards, without including faith, we would call Abraham a child-murderer and Rahab was nothing but a traitor to the land.

You will see however that their works are in fact excellent works of faith. These deeds were done out of love for God (by Abraham) and out of love for God's people (by Rahab). These are the two characteristics that every work of faith has. Both works speak of full trust in God.

James starts with Abraham. He says that Abraham was "justified by works", without mentioning faith. By presenting it this way James underlines once again how necessary works are, if you want to make a statement about faith.

If you only look at this verse, without reading the following verses, it seems as if he forgets for a moment that justification can only be received by faith and that he comes into conflict here with what Paul teaches in Romans 4 (Rom 4:2-3). As you have seen earlier James and Paul of course do not contradict one another. Through the Spirit each one of them approaches the truth from another point of view.

Paul speaks about *the person* of Abraham in his relation *to God*. With Abraham God saw a faith that was focused on Him. God saw that Abraham trusted Him with a faith that He will do what He had said to do, while there was no indication at all that it was going to happen. Because of that faith God declared the person of Abraham righteous. But James is not talking about the *person* of Abraham *to God*; he is talking about *the faith* of Abraham that became visible *to men*. The faith that God saw in him was made visible to people.

God needed no proof of Abraham's faith, but he led Abraham into a situation in which his faith became visible to his environment. Therefore you read in Genesis 22 that God tested the faith of Abraham (Gen 22:1). He asked of Abraham to offer his son Isaac on the altar (Gen 22:2,9). James says that "Abraham our father" (after all, he is their forefather), was justified "when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar". You know that he did not literally need to offer Isaac, but to God Abraham really offered his son. V22. In that way he showed that his "faith was working with his works". It even goes further. The faith that Abraham possessed inwardly, was perfected by his works, in other words completed, accomplished.

V23. By this deed, by this work of faith, the Scripture was fulfilled that says: "And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righ-

teousness.” This quotation comes from Genesis 15 (Gen 15:6) and there it refers to the justification of Abraham because of his *faith* in God. But James connects this quotation to Abraham’s *work of faith* in Genesis 22, because this work of faith confirms that he truly possessed faith. Only in that way Abraham could offer everything he had on the altar. Do you also do that? All your possessions, you yourself, your family?

In Isaac Abraham offered everything on the altar. In that way he even offered all God’s promises on the altar. In doing so Abraham proved that as for him God was above everything. The Giver surpasses the gift. The only way Abraham could offer his son was because he looked to God because He trusted God and loved Him. In this all Abraham behaved as “the friend of God”. This is how Jehoshaphat speaks of him toward God (2Chr 20:7) and that is how God Himself calls him (Isa 41:8). When you are a friend of God it means that you love God.

V24. James concludes this example of Abraham with the undeniable conclusion that works of faith are absolutely essential to prove the presence of faith. It is only justified to say that you believe in case it also appears from your works.

V25. In order to illustrate this more abundantly James points at another example from the Scripture. Next to the great man of faith he places Rahab, the harlot, the woman from a cursed nation. In that way he delivers a striking proof that with God there is no partiality. He says that she “in the same way”, which means like Abraham, was justified by faith.

And what did her works consist of? She received “the messengers” in her house and hid them from her compatriots. James calls the spies (Heb 11:31) ‘messengers’ because they came to her with a good message. By receiving the messengers she chose for God’s people and against her people. She believed that the land where she lived was under the judgment and that this land was given by God to His people. She sacrificed the present possession to possess it together with God’s people. That is faith in action.

Do you also sacrifice the land where you live in, the world, to possess it with the Lord Jesus in future? If you know you are connected to God’s people who will only later take possession of the world, you are a traitor in the eyes of the world because you will not commit yourself to anything

in this world. Don't let it weigh you down. Look to the Lord of glory and you will know for Whom you are doing it.

V26. James concludes his teaching about faith and works with a metaphor that is conceivable to everyone: just as the body is a dead thing if there is no spirit in it, so faith is dead if there are no works.

Now read James 2:15-26 again.

Reflection: Which works of faith has James mentioned up to now?

## James 3

### **Jam 3:1-6 | The Danger of the Tongue**

*1 Let not many [of you] become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many [ways]. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and [yet] it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the [very] world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of [our] life, and is set on fire by hell.*

You have received practical teachings in chapters 1 and 2, a practice that is surrounded by heavenly light. That practice can only, as you have seen in chapter 1, become reality when there is new life. That means that only new creatures (Jam 1:18) are able to bring faith into practice. In chapter 2 your attention was focused on an object for the heart: the glorious Lord (Jam 2:1), the center of the new creation. By Him you are attracted to follow a straight course through the world. But another thing is needed and that is wisdom which like the gift of the new life comes down from above (Jam 3:17; cf. Jam 1:17-18).

V1. Before James starts to talk about this wisdom from above he first urgently demonstrates the danger of the tongue to you. The tongue is the most accurate measure of what is present in your heart. It is for a reason that the Lord says that the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart and that we will be justified or condemned by our words (Mt 12:34b,37).

James calls on his brethren because of the fact that it appears that many people tend to present themselves as a teacher. By that he means that they tend to place themselves above others to lecture those others about how

things should be done. So he is not talking about the teachers in the church who are given by the glorified Lord as gifts to His church (Eph 4:11). It is not possible that James is addressing those teachers.

It is about those who want to be something that God has not given to them. It is the same like *wanting* to be rich, which is different than if *God* makes a person rich. James warns that you should bear in mind that if you want to be a teacher, you will receive a stricter judgment. If you want to be a teacher without first being taught yourself, then it will appear from your words that you do not know what you are talking about. However, you will be judged by it.

In itself, it is not wrong to have the desire to teach others and it is certainly a good thing that there is room to teach in the meeting of the church. That seems also to be the case here, for this admonition would be superfluous if the freedom to speak were not open to all brethren. Only it seems that it became crowded at the pulpit. It is like the Corinthians with whom Paul also had to put a brake on their impulse to express themselves (1Cor 14:27-33).

If you want to teach others in the right sense of the word, you absolutely need to be taught first at the feet of the Lord Jesus (Lk 10:39). He Himself gives the right example. To Him has been given a tongue of disciples or of those who have learned, in other words: of someone who has been taught (Isa 50:4). He had always obeyed His Father. He never passed on anything, unless He had heard it from His Father. Therefore He was able to talk with the weary woman at the well of Jacob and tell her everything she had done (Jn 4:6,29). He was able to speak because He had opened ears (Psa 40:6).

V2. Another instruction for not desiring to be too eager to be a teacher, is that we stumble in many ways in what we say. If you honestly look at yourself, then you need to admit that it regularly happens that you do not put in the right words what you mean, do you? When you look back you sometimes have to regret that not everything you have said was right. It shows your weakness and you have to be well aware of that.

If you are perfect in your speech, thus if you perfectly control your tongue, then you will also control your deeds and the course you take. The Lord Jesus is the only One Who has never stumbled in His words, which also

makes only Him perfect in everything His body did. To us it is important to guard our tongue, for that is the greatest stumbling block for us.

V3. James wants to clarify the functioning of the tongue and the effect of both the right and wrong use of it through examples from nature. You keep your body in control by keeping your tongue in control. It is the same as how you bridle a horse. If you want to bridle a horse you must put bit and bridle in its mouth (cf. Psa 32:9). In this way you can manage to direct the whole horse to your pleasure and turn it wherever you want. That large body of the horse is totally in your power through the small bit in its mouth.

Horses were primarily used in combat. We may apply this example in that sense to a battle of words. Precisely then it is important for us to control our tongue. Especially in battles of words or disputes we often say things that we later regret.

V4. The second example is that of a large ship that is driven by the hard wind in its sails. Still it is not a plaything of the wind and the waves. That large ship has, in proportion to the large ship, a very small rudder. That very small rudder is directed by a pilot. When the pilot directs the rudder with his firm hand, then that large ship obeys according to the position of the rudder. The position of the rudder determines where the ship is heading to and not the wind.

We can apply this example of the ships at sea to our journey through the sea of life which we are sailing and where we are exposed to all kinds of winds. Events in our life stir us up. If we know that the Lord Jesus is standing at the rudder of our life ship, we know that those events do not happen accidentally. That will prevent us from sinning with our mouth, as we see that with Job (Job 2:10). We stay on the right course if we keep focusing on the Lord and our home harbor with Him.

V5. After the positive examples of the use, or better said, the control of the tongue, James turns to the destruction that the tongue often causes. He already showed how the tongue as a small part of the body can control mighty powers. Now he shows how the tongue as a small part of the body is an indomitable force that wreaks great havoc.

The tongue is a member by which the pride of man and his independence of God are expressed in the most arrogant manner (Psa 12:4). The tongue is the instrument by which man boasts in great deeds. You can hear that daily in the language that politicians use. Without the slightest modesty they summarize everything they have achieved, according to their own convictions. In these same speeches they also make their promises while they keep on overestimating themselves gigantically. It would be a shame for believers to use such prideful language.

This blustering and exaggerated language has often set the flame on fire. It is for a reason that James says that the tongue is a fire. The point is that although it is a small fire it is like a match stick that is able to set on fire a large forest or a great stack of wood. Look at the fall of man and all its consequences. The sin of the tongue has been the first sin that entered creation. The fire that has been kindled in paradise has been destructing the lives of all men until this day. Everyone who does not convert will be delivered to this fire forever and ever.

V6. It is the fire burning in hell that comes out through the tongue. "The [very] world of iniquity" is summarized in the tongue.

Of all parts of the body the tongue takes the place of 'defiler'. You can do as many good deeds as you possibly can and in that way build up much goodwill, but once you say something that causes others to stumble, you have been marked forever. People will always remember what you have said and they will always echo that after you. An irreversible stain has destroyed your garment of good deeds.

By the way, you not only must deal with the results of a wrong use of the tongue in your personal life. The whole nature, the way natural life develops and has its course, is set on fire by the tongue. Statements that are made in all kinds of areas without involving God, provoke a reaction that only make things worse and lead to greater destruction. The fire consumes everything that is in its environment. This fire is ultimately from hell, with which man without God is connected. No one will admit that. Men without God deny the existence of hell, but James shows the reality.

Now read James 3:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which positive and which negative elements are present in the tongue?

### Jam 3:7-18 | Two Springs

7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; [it is] a restless evil [and] full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless [our] Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come [both] blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening [both] fresh and bitter [water]? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor [can] salt water produce fresh. 13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and [so] lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

V7. “The human race” has the ability to tame all animals with their natural tendency toward freedom, in other words to control them. Man is able to catch and control the wildest, fastest and most uncatchable beasts, the highest flying birds and the most terrifying deep dark sea monsters.

V8. Man is superior to all creatures, but the tongue is the master of man. You may be able to control your tongue. That is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. If you give Him the control in your life He can manifest the new life through your tongue.

However, there is no way that you can have any control over another person’s tongue. No man will ever be able to control the tongue of another person. The tongue is a “restless evil [and] full of deadly poison”. You can arm yourself against poisonous beasts or put them in a cage so that they may not harm you, but it is absolutely impossible to prevent the deadly poison of the tongue. The tongue of natural man is compared to a serpent and its words to deadly poison of asps (Psa 140:3; Rom 3:13-14).

V9. You will fully agree with this sharp characterization of the tongue. But be careful. All of a sudden James puts the emphasis on you, while he includes himself also. He speaks about who profess to be believers and that includes you also. What do you do with your tongue? You bless the “Lord and Father” with it and you curse “men” with it who have been made “in the likeness of God” (Gen 1:26-27; 1Cor 11:7).

V10. How could it be possible that “from the same mouth ... blessing and curse” proceed? Or can you not recognize it? Haven’t you ever cursed someone because he treated you badly, while you also blessed God for the kindness and grace He has shown to you? Well, that is what James means and what should not be possibly. It is possible that in a meeting you may bless the Lord Jesus and the Father and right after that you slander your fellow believers or unbelievers with your tongue, while visiting someone.

V11. James radically condemns such a double-hearted use of the tongue. He clarifies such an improper use by some examples from nature. In nature it is impossible that opposite things come from the same opening of a fountain. The tongue forms an exception to that general, logic rule. Unfortunately, the tongue can utter opposite words. The tongue, considered as a fountain, can indeed cause both the sweet and the bitter to spring up. The tongue can make spiritual statements at one moment and fleshly statements at another moment.

You are able to speak a “fresh”, literally “sweet”, word at the one moment, a word that is pleasant, and at another moment a bitter word, a word that expresses bitterness. You must consider, however, that both words are not from the same deeper lying fountain. The good, “sweet” word comes forth from the new life, the “bitter” one comes forth from the old nature.

Therefore it is important to pay attention to which nature has authority over your tongue. The new life allows you to speak with a new tongue, that is, since your conversion you can speak in a different way than when you did not know the Lord Jesus. If there is still little sign of this, the cause may be that your heart is often little filled with the Lord Jesus.

V12. Each expression indicates out of which fountain from which that expression originates. If you slander a fellow man it originates from the old man. A praise to God originates from the new man. By the fruit you know

the tree (Mt 12:33). In nature it is natural that each tree bears the fruit that belongs to that tree and that it bears no fruit that belongs to another tree. It is foolish to assume that you would be able to pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a vine. Likewise it is impossible that you can drink fresh or sweet water out of a salty spring. Unfortunately, what is impossible in nature can be possible with the believer.

V13. However, there is still something that can help us to use the tongue properly. We can use our tongue properly if we are wise and if we are aware of the time we live in. We live in the end time. In such a time we can simply not afford to use our tongue improperly, for instance to undermine one another. In the end time we are appealed to be “wise and understanding”. That is why the question sounds who is ‘wise and understanding’.

The prophet Hosea also speaks about that (Hos 14:9). Hosea describes the ways of God with Israel. God’s ways result in a world that is full of peace under the rule of the Lord Jesus. ‘Wise and understanding’ is he who learns from the ways of God and applies that to his life. You can learn from the past of God’s people how you should live. Also in Psalm 107 the question sounds as a response to the ways of God (Psa 107:43).

It seems that James has pondered on those verses. That he asks the question means that not everyone is wise and understanding, but that he would want to appeal to the few, like you. In Israel there was mention of only one tribe of which could be said that it was wise in understanding the times (1Chr 12:32).

If you understand that you live in the end time, then you also know that it does not come down to words, but to deeds. It is about “a good behavior ... in the gentleness of wisdom”. Such a conduct has got nothing to do with powerlessness, but on the contrary with powerfulness. Only it is not natural power, but spiritual power. You see that in perfection in the life of the Lord Jesus on earth. You can learn it from Him (Mt 11:29). If you learn from Him and practice that in your life you will be an encouraging example to others (Dan 11:33).

V14. However, James says, nothing of that will happen “if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart”. You are envious if you begrudge another person to have something because you don’t have it

and you yourself want it also. That goes for both material and immaterial matters. Such jealousy expresses itself in selfish ambition or strife. Strife arises because you begrudge another person to have something. Big words come out of your mouth. You think you at least have the right to have what the other person has!

In that way you end up lying “against the truth”. You contradict the truth of God’s Word in which we see clearly that we are all different and that we also deal differently with things in life and also in the church.

V15. Such an attitude is not a sign of a wisdom that you have received from above, but on the contrary a wisdom that is from below. It is not a Divine, heavenly wisdom, but an “earthly” wisdom. It is not a wisdom that comes from the Spirit of God, but from your natural feelings, just say your ‘gut feelings’. It is a “natural” wisdom, for it is about the satisfaction of your fleshly needs. This wisdom is guided by the chief of demons, the devil, the father of lies (Jn 8:44) and is therefore also “demonic” by nature.

V16. You see that in the consequences of “jealousy and selfish ambition”. Envy and self-seeking cause nothing but “disorder” and a practice that shows all kinds of evil.

V17. It is possible to hand in and condemn that wisdom and replace that with being guided by the wisdom that is from above. That means that you look to Christ Who is the wisdom of God (1Cor 1:24,30). Thus He is also presented to the church at Colossae, and therefore there was no confusion there, but good discipline and stability in faith (Col 2:3,5).

1. The first feature of the wisdom from above is that it is “pure”. James emphasizes that purity comes “first”. The next features flow from this. Purity is the most important because it is about God Himself Who is pure. He is in no way connected to sins (Jam 1:13). When there is sin in your life, you cannot possibly be guided by the wisdom that is from above and there can neither be mention of the following features of wisdom.

2. If you confess the sin you become pure again (1Jn 1:9) and then you can be “peaceable” and go on peacefully. This is how the Lord Jesus speaks about it at the sermon on the Mount, where on purity also follows peace (Mt 5:8-9).

3. You will also be capable of being “gentle”, meaning that you will not seek to defend your rights and demand things for yourself.

4. You are also “reasonable”, which means to be subjective, available and correctable.

5. If you allow yourself to be taught by the wisdom from above you will be “full of mercy and good fruits”, that will be visible in your life, as it was the case with the Lord Jesus.

6. You are “unwavering” and therefore against forming sects and will not be dragged to join a certain party or sect.

7. Finally you are “without hypocrisy”, which means that you do not pretend to be different than you are.

V18. You can show all of that in the world and practice that toward others. These seven features of the wisdom that is from above, are the fruit of righteousness. They come from righteousness. If they are practiced they are sown, as it were. These fruits can only be “sown in peace”. Peace is the motive to sow this fruit.

And what does this fruit deliver? Peace (Psa 85:10). If you make peace, if are a peace maker (Mt 5:9), you reap peace. You reap what you sow (Gal 6:7b). You are always sowing. All the words you speak and all the deeds you do are seeds sown by you.

If your words and deeds are inspired by the wisdom from above, you will reap a wonderful fruit, peace. Then you will now already be able to enjoy what will be present in the coming kingdom of peace all over the world.

Now read James 3:7-18 again.

Reflection: In what way can the wisdom from above be effective in your life?

## James 4

### **Jam 4:1-6 | Friendship With the World**

*1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; [so] you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; [so] you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend [it] on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore [it] says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."*

V1. What James says in these verses is contrary to the end of the previous chapter. There the issue is peace and here the issue is war and fights. James denounces this matter interrogatively. He does not say: 'There are "quarrels" and "conflicts" among you and it should not be like that', but asks where those quarrels and conflicts are coming from, what their source is. It is also significant that he speaks about "among you", thus among the members of God's people, that is, all those who by their confession count themselves as such, regardless of whether they are born again or not.

Literally it says: "From where wars and from where fightings?" That means that those wars are civil wars, for it is a war between citizens of the same kingdom, they are between citizens who belong to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus (Jam 2:5). Through internal fightings the powers are consumed. That causes that there is no power left for the fight of the gospel in the world to liberate people from the power of satan. If we have to deal with civil war, there will be no power left to fight together against false teachings, for the enemy knows how to use that situation for his benefit.

That James has to speak about “quarrels” or “wars” indicates that the disagreement lies deep. A situation of war does not start without any reason. Before a person starts a war he first has achieved deliberations and has determined strategies in utmost secrecy. Also during war deliberation still takes place. A war is also long-term by nature.

This is not the case regarding “conflicts” or “fightings”. Conflicts often suddenly break out and quickly quenches, although the fire can keep smoldering for a long time.

Quarrels and conflicts, however, have one thing in common and that is the source from which they come. We read that in the response of James to the question “what is the source”. They do not come from the wisdom that is from above (Jam 3:17), but from their “pleasures”. Their desires do not seek to be satisfied by what they have in the world of the Lord Jesus, but by the world around them.

In their “members”, which are the members of their body, the desires of pleasure are fighting to use these members as instruments of sin (cf. Rom 6:13; 7:23). The center of government is the heart, and the pleasures have taken possession of it. The pleasures have therefore taken control of the body. The result is that the body is seeking to enrich itself at the expense of others.

V2. But what does it yield? James points to the consequences. They lust, but they do not have. In spite of all their fightings to live prosperously and pleasantly they do not have it. They are occupied with wars and fightings. Those matters do not fill the deepest desires of a person, but they work out something different, namely murder and manslaughter.

James speaks with a strong speech. He explains to them that what they are doing is committing murder. That can refer to literally murder someone, but it also applies to committing character murder. In the latter case a lot of slander is spread about a person so that the person is not able to function normally anymore. He feels threatened and totally withdraws himself. A person who is a target of a smear campaign is being torn down. Such campaigns come from people who are envious of other people, they begrudge the other to have something because they want to have it themselves.

If you are not satisfied with what you have you are capable of acting in such a way. Do not let yourself be dragged down by feelings of dissatisfaction. Look at people who indeed let themselves be dragged down and you will draw the same conclusion James draws. These people cannot gain what they desire. They can be totally absorbed by quarrels and conflicts. He who wants to obtain something in that way only destroys things.

Then James makes clear that they do not have because they do not pray. Praying means that you are consciously dependent on God. As long as you go on with working out your own strategy to gain something, you will not succeed. Sometimes you seem to succeed, but still, the final result is that you are empty handed and especially empty hearted. Once you become aware of that you will surely start to pray.

V3. Now praying is supposed to be happening with the right mind. That means that if you pray, you surrender yourself to the will of the Lord. You make Him decide whether something is good for you or not. If your praying has got more to do with demanding than with asking then it is clear that your desires have got nothing to do with God's will, but with your own will and the fulfilling of your own pleasures.

If you want to pray in accordance with God's will and your wishes are not fulfilled, then you can also see that as a kindness of God. For if He would have given it to you, you would have only harmed yourself by that and even harm other people and in that way dishonor Him.

Therefore it is about testing the motives of your heart. God knows the hidden motives of your heart when you pray. He precisely knows the reason why you ask Him something. He labels your prayer as wrong when He sees that your prayer is prayed only out of selfishness. Then your only intention with what you are asking for is for your own use. In this context James does not speak about using or misusing, but about "spend [it] on your own pleasures". That indicates that there is no appreciation at all for what has been given. This is not the way God wants us to be dealing with what He gives and therefore He does not give it.

V4. Their total conduct is through and through worldly. James therefore justly addresses them as "adulteresses". You cannot pursue your own pleasures without getting entangled in the world. For the fulfillment of

pleasures without God can only be found in the world. Therefore if you seek the fulfillment of your pleasures in this world, you seek “friendship with the world”. But dealing with the world as a friend of the world is spiritual adultery. It is a denial of your relationship to God. Your life shows the contrary to what you confess as a Christian.

As a Christian you say that you said goodbye to the world, that you belong to God and that you want to serve Him faithfully, but in your life you enjoy the things of the world. Through your worldly behavior you show that you are a friend of the world. The way the world goes on with and for itself still appeals to you and you follow it. The world loves that and acknowledges you as a friend. The appreciation from the side of the world is in itself very alarming already.

The flipside of this black medal is even more alarming, for it says that it is “hostility toward God”. The one is inextricably connected to the other, make no mistake. James is clear about it.

He speaks so radically about it because in these cases each compromise is an insult to God. Just think about it. You formerly belonged to the world. You have experienced what the world is, how empty and how full of enmity against God it is too. That enmity has become visible at the most in the rejection and the murder of the Lord Jesus of Whom you say that you owe your life to Him. If that reality is true for you, how could you still make friends with people who are still haters of the Lord Jesus? Toward such people you can only testify of what you have found in Him yourself and pray that they also may get to know Him.

But such a testimony is out of the question if you still cooperate with the world. How could you ever speak credibly about God’s judgment on the world, if it appears from your life that you walk according to the world and that you enjoy the world very much? It comes down to whether you live for the world and therefore you are an enemy of God or you live for God and therefore you do not want to have anything to do with the world. There is no neutrality possible. Light and darkness cannot go together (2Cor 6:14).

V5. To underline his strong message James refers to the speaking of the Scripture and to the yearning of the Spirit. From the Scripture there comes

a statement that cannot be explained but in one way. Wherever you read in the Scripture, you will encounter the testimony that everything that is from God cannot possibly be connected to the sinful man. Everywhere in the Scripture we find that God's people are warned not to be involved with the world. Or do you think that the Scripture says that "to no purpose" or "in vain"? By no means. The Scripture does not speak about that in vain, except then for people who ignore the Scripture. No, the Scripture speaks clearly to those who have ears to hear.

By then also pointing out the work of the Spirit, James shows to which extent the Word and the Spirit cooperate. The Darby Translation of the second part of the verse helps to understand the meaning better: "Does the Spirit which has taken his abode in us desire enviously?" What is strange to the Scripture is also strange to the Spirit. That also goes the other way around. Just as you cannot discover any relationship between God and sin anywhere in the Scripture, it is neither possible that "the Spirit which has taken his abode in us" causes you to "desire enviously". The Spirit Who dwells in you does not cause quarrels and conflicts. Quarrels and conflicts happen in the world and unfortunately also can happen among believers.

V6. The Spirit Who dwells in you wants to lift you up far beyond that, by giving you "a greater grace". That greater grace is given to you by Him to enable you not to participate in that and to live for the other person and to the honor of God.

Then it is necessary for you to take the place of humility. The flesh, the world and the devil may have great power, the grace that God gives is much greater. He, however, gives that grace only to the "humble".

Now read James 4:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which aspects in your life do you still need to label as 'friendship toward the world'?

**Jam 4:7-10 | Orders**

*7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

V7. To receive the grace of God it is necessary to have the right mind, that of humbleness. You can show that by submitting to God. That is the motive of James' call. You will always need to be reminded of this call. The point is that you are not in control anymore over the desires of your heart and your whole life, but that you let go of everything and lay everything in God's hand. Without doubt you will then experience His grace to be living out of that consciousness.

Don't think that you can therefore easily lean back and think that everything will run smoothly for the rest of your life. Absolutely not. You can be sure that the devil comes into action when you allow the Spirit, Who dwells in you, also to work in you. To stop his activities you have to resist him. The devil is all about making you act independently of God again. If you submit yourself to God you will surely be able to resist him. In this way the devil does not encounter a weak person, but the almighty God and this will surely make him run.

The Lord Jesus is the perfect example of submission to God. There was nothing that He had to submit Himself to, for His whole life has been full submission to God. That submission led Him into the wilderness. There you see how He resisted the devil, when he approached Him to tempt Him (Mt 4:1-11). You learn from the Lord Jesus that you are able to resist the devil by the Word of God. You see the resistance also in the life of Abraham, when the king of Sodom comes to him with his trick (Gen 14:21-24).

V8. To be able to resist the devil you need to be in the sanctuary. There you see the greatness and power of God. Therefore you are exhorted to draw near to God. It is indeed important that you draw near in faith (Heb 11:6). If you do that you experience that God is drawing near to you. He will make you aware that He is defending you against the power of the enemy. To be in the presence of God demands a practice that is in accordance with

God's holiness. Your submission to God must be seen in your deeds. Your hands show that. Your hands show to the people around you what you are doing.

It is good to realize that your actions come from your heart. Your heart prompts your hands to act. To be in God's presence and to experience His protection, your hands are to be clean. That means that you need to remove from your life what does not belong there. You cannot draw near to God while there are things in your life of which you know that God is speaking to you about those things. Rather, it will be that certain evil practices you still maintain deprive you of the desire to draw near to God.

Because man is able to draw near to God in a wrong mind (Lk 18:10-12), James also points to the mind of the heart. Your heart should be purified from ulterior motives. James already talked about praying in a wrong way, meaning that you can pray with wrong intentions (verse 3). Now he appeals to you to purify your heart from those wrong intentions. God desires "truth in the innermost being" (Psa 51:6). You can purify your heart from wrong intentions by praying: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way" (Psa 139:23-24).

James addresses his readers as "double-minded". Does he have to address you like that? Literally, a double-minded person means a person with a 'double soul'. It indicates that a person is limping on two divided opinions when he has to choose between two choices. Then you are tossed to and fro between both choices, while you inwardly know what the good choice is.

You find a good illustration of that in the history of Elijah on mount Carmel. Led by Ahab and Jezebel the people find themselves in the realm and power of worshipping idols, while Elijah serves the true God. When Elijah challenges Ahab to a confrontation between God and the idols he called the people and the false prophets on Mount Carmel together. When then the people draw near to Elijah he says: "How long [will] you hesitate between two opinions?" (1Kgs 18:21).

Have you already made your final choice, or do you still limping between two thoughts? Submit yourself to the authority of James and make a clean

sweep with your life if there are things of which you know that they hinder your service for God.

As you have read in the first verses of this letter, James writes to the whole of God's old people, the twelve tribes. Of this people many have not been born again. He tells the people as a whole that they should be miserable and have to weep and mourn. It is a miscalculation that has fatal consequences if a person thinks he shares the blessings of God's people automatically, simply because of the fact that he is an Israelite by birth.

It is a miscalculation of the highest order that you also see in professing Christianity. A lot of people count themselves to be a member of God's people and claim to be Christians, simply and only because they belong to a church by their baptism or because they have Christian parents. What applies to these people is the word of the Lord Jesus that they are wretched and miserable, blind and naked (Rev 3:17).

V9. It is crucial that such people realize the tragedy of their situation. He who gets the true picture of the world will surely become aware of his tragedy. The world is a system that functions as a fun fair. There is fun for everyone, but it is a fun fair of death. God will judge that. He who ponders on it just for a moment, must feel the emptiness. As long as a person remains in the world among his so-called friends, he will give the impression that everything is all right. He laughs and drinks together with them as if life is one big party. But at home in his room he finds himself deeply miserable. He is overwhelmed by loneliness.

If he could and would only want to take up the courage and be honest about the life he is living, he would then definitely come to the conclusion that he doesn't want to be part of it any longer. He will certainly come to realize that God must judge that. He also will realize that God will judge him too. After all, his life is a tragedy, full of disgusted deeds. Rightfully, fear of God's judgment arises.

V10. The moment that he acknowledges that, the path to blessing is set. That path begins with admitting his own hopeless situation without having any possibility to liberate himself from it (Lk 15:14-20). Then that will be the end of the laughing with which he fooled himself as if it was all fun. He who learns to see himself in the light of God cannot but weep and

mourn. There comes repentance and a desire for forgiveness. The empty fun of the world, the laughing without real happiness changes into weeping and sorrow. In this way the sinner humbles himself before the Lord.

Once he comes to that point, he gets the assurance that the Lord will lift him up. It is an exceptional promise for a sorrowful sinner. He will share in the exaltation of the Lord Jesus, Who has freely humbled Himself. God will deal with the sorrowful sinner in the same way He has done to the Lord Jesus – exalt Him –, when the sinner does what the Lord Jesus has done – humbled Himself.

The call applies not only to the unconverted sinner but also to those who have been born again. The situation around you gives you absolutely no reason to express joy, but rather to express sadness. For those who have lost the sense to do that, the same exhortation applies as to the sinner who fully lives in such a situation.

In the so-called beatitudes the Lord Jesus speaks out a particular ‘blessed’ about those ‘who mourn’ (Mt 5:4). These are His followers who sense how everything in the world is in rebellion against Him. They share in His feelings about the rebellion of the world and the resistance against everything that is His. In return He wants to give them His joy (Jn 15:11). That is a joy that has its origin in that other world of which He is the center. You experience this joy if you share with others what you have found in the Lord Jesus (1Jn 1:3-4).

If you live in the world you sometimes share something with others, but you always lose what you share. Everything you share in the world of the Lord Jesus with others, enriches your spiritual life. Whatever you share you will not lose and you will never lose the profit. It can only increase.

Now read James 4:7-10 again.

Reflection: Which orders (these are not kind requests!) does James give in these verses? Which of them apply to you?

## Jam 4:11-17 | Against Judging and Boasting

*11 Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge [of it]. 12 There is [only] one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are [just] a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, [you ought] to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows [the] right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

V11. At the beginning of this chapter James had to speak about quarrels and conflicts. These are outbreaks of disputes whereby parties openly stand against one another and are hostile to each another. In the section you have now read he mentions another evil that is found among them. He addresses his readers on speaking evil of one another. That seems to be less serious than having quarrels and conflicts. Quarrels and conflicts are immediately visible. Speaking evil, however, can happen while you are enjoying a cup of coffee with another person and with an expression of concern on your face.

Of course in reality there is no mention of real concern. Real concern for the brother or sister of whom you are speaking evil, would be that you yourself address him or her about that evil. Then I assume that the things you discuss really are evil. Speaking evil does not have to indicate that you speak untruth. It is about identified malpractices or statements.

Nevertheless, James prohibits speaking evil of one another. If you speak evil of a brother you put him in a bad light and you exalt yourself above him. Evil is evil and you need to label it as that too, but *speaking* evil is a demonic action. If you see or hear something that is evil you should first consult the Lord about it and then speak with the person in question.

To speak against a brother is both speaking against the law and judging the law that condemns the evil (Lev 19:16). The law has to condemn the

evil, but due to your slander it has no chance to do that. You keep the right to yourself and you arrogate yourself as a judge of the evil. By keeping the law outside the evil and making your own judgment on the evil, you speak evil of the law and you exalt yourself as a judge. You judge the law as not being able to judge and in that way you contempt the law of God. Then you accept, instead of obeying the law, a self-made law as a standard for the judgment of the evil.

V12. You not only set aside the law of God and take the place of the law, but you even take the place of God as the “Lawgiver and Judge”. That is a far-reaching arrogance. After all, God is sovereign (cf. Rom 9:11), for only He is able to save and to destroy. He saves on the basis of the work of His Son, but He will also destroy everyone who rejects His Son. That is the context in which you should see the question: “Who are you who judge your neighbor?” Therefore every arrogance to judge one’s fellow man must shrivel in the face of the majesty of God as Lawgiver and Judge and as Savior and Destroyer.

It is also important to consider that it is not about judging public evil. The point here is judging *one another* and speaking evil of *one another*. Besides, we also cannot and are even not supposed to judge the *motivations* of one another (1Cor 4:5; Mt 7:1). What James is saying is not in contrast to judging the evil in the church. There we are supposed to judge public evil (1Cor 5:12-13).

V13. In view of others, James admonished not to speak evil and not to judge. In that way he rebukes the wrong attitude of his readers as people who always arrogate themselves to know best. With this attitude they reveal a spirit of exaltation above others. That independent spirit also expresses itself in another way in their life and that is in their own life with regard to the plans they make. They make plans to which city or cities they will travel to do business and of course to make profit as much as they possibly could.

Jews always have been a trading people. They always seek for profit. Therefore they travel from city to city. Trading and making profit are not wrong in themselves. In an allegory the Lord Jesus uses trading, doing business, as an occupation that happens for His sake (Lk 19:13). Therefore

it cannot be wrong. The wrong thing about it is making plans for the future in the spirit of independence, thus without specifically involving God's will in our plans. That is what James is telling his Jewish readers whom in such a way were driven by their trading spirit, that they forgot their dependence on the Lord.

V14. James warns against the arrogant illusion that we ourselves control the future. We even do not have the next second at our disposal. We are to be aware that life is ephemeral and fragile. It has to be a sobering lesson to people, who think to have control over their life, when James compares their life with a vapor. A vapor you see a short moment, but then it has disappeared, dissolved. There is nothing left that has the slightest meaning. That is the significance of the life of the people of the world and also of those who confess to belong to God's people, but without considering the will of the Lord.

If you heed the will of the Lord, your life is not a vapor. The life of the Lord Jesus was not a vapor and also the life of God's children is not a vapor, at least if they behave themselves as children of God. If you heed the will of the Lord, you are engaged with the works the Lord has for you (Eph 2:10). These works will follow you through all eternity (Rev 14:13). By heeding the will of the Lord you will sow the seed now of which you will find the fruit again in eternity.

But life is short. Moses speaks about life as if it is a sleep (Psa 90:4-5). When we sleep the morning comes quickly. David speaks about life as a shadow that lengthens (Psa 102:11). Down in the East it gets dark quickly. To Job life is equal to a swift turning weaver's shuttle (Job 7:6). Peter compares life to grass that today is on the field and tomorrow is thrown in an oven (1Pet 1:24-25).

We can live our short life on earth only once. The big question we could ask ourselves is: what do we do with it, who do we live for? If we realize that our 'service time' is that short, it will be an encouragement to do what is good for the Lord (1Cor 7:29-31).

V15. It is not wrong to make plans. The only thing is whether they are plans made with the thought that the Lord can go along with them. You are surely allowed to make plans to travel to a certain city, only, you should

do that in the awareness that it can only happen if the Lord gives you the strength and preservation to do that. In making these plans we should always consider: "If the Lord wills."

You see that James presents it positively. He doesn't say that we should be thinking: 'If the Lord doesn't want it, then He will surely not allow it to happen.' We have a Lord Who wants to reveal His will to us, also with regard to doing business and to daily life. That also goes for making plans on behalf of the work for the Lord. You see that with Paul when he visited the church at Ephesus and then departed. When he said goodbye he said that he would come back to them, though with the addition: "If God wills" (Acts 18:21).

V16. James reprimands his readers for boasting in their "arrogance". He is saying that it is in fact pride if they do not take God's will into consideration. There is no consideration for unexpected changes in the plans that have been made; there is a short-sightedness regarding their own capacities. While assuming to having control over everything, there is blindness as to their own limitations and weaknesses. Boasting in your own abilities is therefore evil for two reasons. With regard to yourself it is pride and with regard to God it is a denial of His sovereignty.

V17. In the previous verses James rebuked his readers for their wrong attitude toward one another and toward God. They now know how not to do it and can draw from that the conclusion of how to do it. Because they know how to do good they will be accountable for sinning if they neglect to do good. A person who knows how to do good but refuses to do so, makes himself guilty of the sin of negligence (cf. Lev 5:1). The negligence of doing good, while you know that you should do it, proves that there is a lack of grace and that your own will works. The life of the Christian does not consist of a lot of things that he is not allowed to do, but of doing good.

The only way to be able to do good is by the power of the new life, in being conscious of the grace we have received and in which we are led by the Spirit. A Christian is not a kind of scout who is satisfied with committing just one good deed a day. In such a case you may wonder what he is doing the rest of the day. No, doing good is what a Christian is continuously occupied with.

If we know what is good, but block the new life, which causes that it does not express itself, it is sin. This principle also applies to unbelievers. Many people do know that they have to repent, but they don't do it. Each person, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever, is responsible for what he knows. That is what God will hold against him and He surely will speak with him about it on His day. Let that be an exhortation for you, if you know to do something which is good, to do so indeed.

Now read James 4:11-17 again.

Reflection: Which are the two aspects of life that James is dealing with in these verses? What speaks to you?

## James 5

### **Jam 5:1-6 | Warning For the Rich**

*1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, [and] which has been withheld by you, cries out [against you]; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous [man]; he does not resist you.*

V1. James is addressing the rich people in sharp terms. That was necessary because of their behavior. They reveal themselves as opponents to the poor in whom we can recognize the believing remnant of God's people. They drag the poor to court (Jam 2:6). The rich are exerting power over the poor who are dependent on them. When the poor for example were not able to pay the rent of their houses, the rich sued them. Of course they have the judges on their side, for they are corruptible.

The rich cling to their wealth, they rely on it. That's the cause of the separation between them and God. However, what they are trusting in will be taken away from them. They will be struck by the judgment of God. With a view to that James is calling on the rich to become aware of what is waiting for them. That should make them weep and howl as an expression of repentance about the sins they have committed. If they finally repent, this weeping and howling will be of temporal nature. If they do not repent they will weep and howl forever and ever.

V2. James doesn't address them as 'brethren'. These rich people are unbelievers who have gained their riches in a crooked way. The riches that they have are corrupted riches and the nice-looking garments they wear (Jam 2:2) with which they show off, expose traces that they were eaten

by moths. Rotten riches are riches that offer no support at all. Moth-eaten garments are garments that do not give any warmth.

This rebuke of James in the direction of the rich must have sounded strange to his readers, who belong to the twelve tribes. After all, wealth in the Old Testament is generally an evidence of God's favor. Didn't He promise them that He would bless them if they were faithful (Deu 28:1-14)? But that promise regarded a national blessing that the people would receive *as a whole* if the people as a whole would obey God. But the people as a whole awfully disobeyed God very much with the low point the rejection of the Lord Jesus. Due to that things turned out differently and therefore the case can be that a faithful believer is poor and an ungodly person rich. That is the situation among the twelve tribes to whom James addresses this letter.

V3. The rich are fooling themselves that their gold and silver can make them to enjoy life without limits. James completely overturned that false security. The glitter of these materials, that are so precious for the rich, has not only faded away, but has changed to rust. James is presenting the ultimate result. Just as corruption and moths can decompose and consume materials, rust is a condition that makes materials totally useless. Rust is a process that ends up in total destruction. Everything that these rich people have gained will testify against them. God will show them the uselessness of the treasures they have gathered. These will deliver the proof of their wicked life. Then they will receive the wages that they deserve in the eternal fire (Rev 20:11-15).

As an additional reproach, James says that they have been busy gathering treasures "in the last days". It already is foolish for a person to heap up treasures for himself, but it is even more foolish to do that in the last days. He who lives like that is not only selfish and insensitive for the need of others, but also short-sighted and blind for the threatening judgment that will strike him and his possessions.

It applies also as a warning to you as a believer. Don't let yourself be dragged in the struggle for having more and more. The call of the Christian is not collecting, but giving. A Christian shows Who God is, and God is a Giver.

When James speaks about the last days, how much more should that apply to us. It has never been God's purpose that a Christian should heap up treasures on earth. Just look at the great Example, the Lord Jesus. You read of Him that He, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might become (spiritually) rich (2Cor 8:9).

The servant of Elisha, Gehazi, is a striking example of how it should not be done. Gehazi had been heaping up treasures through lies and deceit. He got to learn that it was not time yet for that (2Kgs 5:26). He did not have to send back his wealth to Naaman, but the leprosy of Naaman was added to him. The greed for wealth makes a person to become a leper, meaning that it causes a disease that ends up in death. The rich who lives for his wealth walks with death in his shoes.

V4. How did these rich people gain their treasures? They gained them in a most unfair way. They simply kept back the pay of the laborers whom they hired to work on their fields. They profited from the harvest of the work of the laborers and they also had pleasure in the thought that they kept the wages of their laborers in their own pocket. They thought themselves rich, for they thought to be doubling their profit.

James rebukes them by telling them that they were making a miscalculation. They calculate without "the Lord of Sabaoth". The Lord of Sabaoth is Yahweh of the hosts. It is God in His majestic greatness as the Captain of all heavenly and earthly armies.

The rich close their ears to the cry of the poor, the ones who have been disadvantaged by them, but the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth are not closed. His ears hear two things. The wages that the rich have kept back unjustly are crying out to the Lord and also the cries of the mowers are reaching His ears. The wages that were unjustly kept back are testifying in God's sight against them. By committing these actions they make themselves violators of the law (Lev 19:13; Deu 24:14-15) and they will be judged as such. God will vindicate the complainers who have called on Him and also make sure that they will be reimbursed.

V5. The rich have excessively fed themselves with all luxury and wanton pleasure that the earth can possibly offer. They did that to the detriment of the poor. There was nothing in their heart that could stop them from living

such a life. They “have fattened” their “hearts”. They wholeheartedly gave themselves to this depraved life. That only proves that they have become totally numb. Their conscience does not function anymore.

They gorged like swine. Every day was “a day of slaughter” for them, a day with an abundance of meat. Instead of sharing that with others, they pounced on it and stuffed their fat bodies with it more and more. Their god is their appetite, literally belly (Phil 3:19).

It is also a possibility that James uses the word ‘day of slaughter’ as an allusion to the risk of the judgment looming menacingly over their heads. For an animal, a day of slaughter means the end of its life. These people get to learn that, while the slaughter of the judgment is near, they happily continue to feast. They refuse to consider the judgment.

V6. As the high point, or better said, the nadir, of their selfish life style James accuses the rich for making themselves guilty of the death of righteous compatriots, who did not resist against it. James is able to speak of this accusation, because the spirit of the rich is the same spirit that brought the Lord Jesus to the cross. In a life that puts their own honor and satisfaction in the center there is no room for Him. Wherever He appears in such a life to offer something that really gives joy, He is condemned and murdered, even though He may have done only good.

The selfish person does not tolerate kindness, which proves how bad and evil he is. He does not want to be confronted with it and therefore he will try to eliminate everything that tries to do that. He even does that with people who only come to ask him the wages they are entitled to. He cannot stand such righteous people.

That especially applies to the true Just. James seems to be thinking primarily of Him. The last phrase, “he does not resist you”, seems to confirm this. The Lord Jesus has not resisted those, who are rich in might and honor and wealth in the expression of all their evil. He did not open His mouth, but let Himself be led to the slaughter like a lamb (Isa 53:7). He endured all injustice and did not resist at all. He surrendered everything to Him Who judges righteously (1Pet 2:23). He suffered as the Just for the unjust, that He may bring to God anyone who acknowledges that (1Pet 3:18). Toward

all evil of man His perfection shines in everything. His example may be an encouragement for you when you have to suffer injustice.

Now read James 5:1-6 again.

Reflection: Which warning(s) does this portion contain for you?

**Jam 5:7-12 | Patience**

*7 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and [is] merciful. 12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.*

V7. James connects his exhortation to be patient with the previous verse. There you saw that the Lord Jesus has patiently endured the suffering. Patience is something we can learn from Him. In verses 7-10 the word “patience (patient, patiently)” appears four times. That shows how important it is to be patient, for how easily feelings of impatience can arise. Patience is needed in circumstances where you are treated unjustly and/or when you have no prospect in your circumstances. Patience is always rewarded when it means waiting on the Lord.

Being patient until the coming of the Lord here refers to His coming to the earth to do justice, to exert justice and to reign justly and to reward everything that was done for Him. As a member of the church of God you may also look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus when He will catch up all the believers to be with Him (1Thes 4:14-18). That coming will precede the coming of the Lord to the earth.

You may also look forward to the coming of the Lord in the sense of a coming into the circumstances wherein you find yourself (cf. Phil 4:5b). That is not so much the point here, but you may surely draw consolation from it. You can be sure that the Lord wants to be involved in your circumstances, to support you That will keep you from getting caught up in the injustice that has been done to you all and to which you seem to be at the mercy of.

Sometimes you have to accept that things will not change. Then you can be sure that the Lord will come to you to strengthen you. In that sense Paul had also experienced that the Lord came to Him and encouraged him (Acts 18:9). If you have a vivid thought about the coming of the Lord, you will experience that He is with you.

The thing with patience is the same as the farmer who has sown. The only thing that is left for him to do, which he does after he has finished sowing, is to patiently wait until the delicious fruit of the land comes. For the growing of the seed and the ultimate fruit he is dependent on the rain from heaven (Deu 11:11,14). He expects that from God.

Your life is a field in which God has sown the seed of His Word. His desire is that fruit will come out of that. He does not accelerate the process of growing, but He waters the soil with His Word and His Spirit. His Word is like rain (Deu 32:2). He wants to have delicious fruit for Himself out of your life.

That also applies to professing Christianity as a whole. At the beginning there was the “early” rain. You can apply that to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). That is how the church has come into existence which was purposed by God to be bearing fruit for Him.

After the rapture of the church, there will be another outpouring of the Holy Spirit and that will be over the remnant of Israel (Joel 2:28-29). That is the application of the “latter” rain. When the remnant has received the latter rain, it will then surely produce delicious fruit for God.

V8. The patience to wait is the opposite of the immediate satisfaction of need to which the rich deliver themselves. They want to have something and they want it right now. Such an attitude is inappropriate for a child of God. A child of God is not supposed to expect that his desires will be directly fulfilled. He needs to learn to be patient. Therefore James, after the example of the farmer, repeats his exhortation to be patient.

He adds to that to strengthen their hearts and passes on the means of strengthening: the coming of the Lord. For the second time he refers to the coming of the Lord. The believer will only be satisfied in his desires when the Lord comes. And His coming is near. That thought gives the

heart courage to persevere in the path of faith. As soon as you lose sight of the coming of the Lord, you will make an effort to make your life on earth as pleasant as possible. When the Israelites were tired of waiting on Moses, they demanded a gold calf to be made and therefore they fell into idolatry (Exo 32:1). In a parable the Lord Jesus shows that the same danger is threatening the Christians (Mt 24:48-49).

V9. Looking forward to the coming of the Lord will therefore be a guarantee that we do not trouble one another, but on the contrary encourage and comfort one another with the view to that coming. How easily it occurs that we complain against one another about the injustice we suffer. If we complain against each other we quickly say things that are not appropriate or that are even untrue. It is possible that we accuse those who make our life difficult of much more than they in fact do. It is even possible that we blame God for our difficulties. We will then be judged for that at the coming of Him Who is on the edge of coming as Judge.

The coming of the Lord is not only a comforting event, through which there comes an end to all injustice that is done to us. The coming of the Lord also has the result that each person, you and I included, will have to give account of himself (2Cor 5:10).

V10. Instead of grumbling and complaining about our circumstances, we have to look at the prophets and follow their example. Haven't they tolerated many who grumbled about them; not to mention the injustice that they had to suffer? They had the thankless task from God to reprimand the people for their sins. That was not something for which the people were grateful. On the contrary, the people mocked, despised and ridiculed them (2Chr 36:15-16). What a lot of patience these prophets have shown. The people refused to listen, but they still went on to preach in the Name of the Lord.

V11. If we notice endurance, a sense of admiration arises from our hearts. People who endure show character. They also achieve something. That definitely goes for us also when it comes down to the faith. Those who endure in faith, show that they possess something that is worthy of holding on to, right through all adversities. That is what the prophets have shown.

James points at another remarkable example of endurance and that is Job. What this man has shown in terms of endurance, can indeed be called unique. Consider all the sufferings he had to endure. All his possessions were taken away from him in a short time. He lost all his children and also his health. When he got into that situation he was even deprived from his wife's support. As his help she should have been pointing him to God, but instead she encouraged him to say goodbye to God. From being a very wealthy and blessed man, Job in a short time turned into the most pitiable man on earth (Job 1:1-3,12-19; 2:7-9,11-13).

The readers of this letter are familiar with the matchless suffering of Job. James, however, does not write about the *suffering* of Job, but about the *endurance* of Job. They have heard about that and that had to be an encouragement for them. If Job has endured, shouldn't they, who had to suffer to a lesser extent, also endure?

James adds another important detail. He does not tell us how gloriously Job overcame the tough afflictions. He writes about "the outcome of the Lord", meaning the final result of the *Lord's* purposes with Job (Job 42:7-17). In this way James emphasizes that the Lord has achieved His goal with Job.

All the time of Job's suffering, also caused by the accusations of his friends, the Lord was "full of compassion and merciful" toward Job (cf. Exo 34:6). It can be of comfort to us that if we feel rejected and lonely and that we have failed, to be reminded that the Lord is with us with His compassion and mercy.

V12. After the examples of patience James also exhorts to be patient with the tongue. He sees the abuse of the tongue as the greatest danger, for he says that they "above all" should not swear. If someone is facing a suffering which seems to last endlessly, and if waiting for an answer becomes very hard, he is in great danger to swear. A person then may for instance promise to do things as long as the pain gets lighter or as long as the difficulty disappears. Also revenge can be sworn toward the person who is seen as the cause of this suffering or that problem.

Such expressions of the tongue show the mind of a heart that is not subjected to God. That heart does not strengthen itself in God or in grace, but

gives in to impatience. The Lord and His majesty are forgotten and heaven or earth or other things are called upon to empower the own will. That is bad and judgment must come on that.

James speaks a lot about judgment. That's because he approaches the Christian life practically and he calls the Christian to account for his responsibility. He often points at the tongue. Instead of using powerful terms we are to express ourselves by common words like 'yes' and 'no'. We should not be ambiguous about these words. God and men must be able to rely on our words.

Now read James 5:7-12 again.

Reflection: What makes you to be quickly impatient? How realistic is the coming of the Lord to you?

### **Jam 5:13-20 | Prayer**

*13 Is anyone among you suffering? [Then] he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? [Then] he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. 19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 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.*

V13. In verses 13-14a you see three situations in which someone can find himself:

1. he can suffer,
2. he can be cheerful and
3. he can be sick.

These are situations that may trigger those who are in such a situation, to respond in a certain way. The point is:

1. in what way they respond to suffering,
2. how feelings of joy are dealt with and
3. how do people go through sickness.

The world tries to escape suffering, it loudly expresses its feelings of joy and it goes through sickness by grinding its teeth. The believer can respond to that totally differently. It is wonderful to see that in each of the three situations James refers to God as the refuge of the believer:

1. He who suffers can go to God with his suffering by praying. In that way he will find comfort (2Cor 1:3-7).

2. He who lives in prosperity and is not plagued by adversities, can sing out his thanks to God. In that way he acknowledges God as the source of his prosperity and is prevented from forgetting God, due to prosperity. We are often willing to bring our sufferings to God, but we often forget to share our joy with Him.

3. V14. He who is sick can tell that to the elders of the church. That doesn't mean that God is not involved here and that the sick person expects his healing from people (cf. 2Chr 16:12), but this is the way that God shows. The elders are as it were His representatives.

That doesn't mean that for each sickness the elders of the church should be called for. Timothy doesn't get the advice to call the elders of Ephesus to pray for him and make him healthy. Paul gives him the simple advice to use a little wine (1Tim 5:23).

What follows here makes it clear that it is about a serious sickness that also may possibly be the consequence of certain sins. If that is the case, the sickness has revealed the sin. It is not enough that the sick keeps his sins between himself and God. The sickness is not a little flu. The word 'sick' that James uses, indicates that the sick is weak, without any power. It is also clear that the sick is not able to join the meetings, for he has to call for the elders. Another aspect that you find in the expression "the Lord will raise him up", is that it is about someone who is bedridden, or housebound, while he lacks the power to arise.

When the sick has called for the elders, *they* are to pray over him. The sick is not supposed to pray. The elders must also anoint "him with oil in the name of the Lord". A lot has been written and said about the effect of the oil or what it represents. Some possibilities that have appealed to me, I pass on to you for your consideration.

One possibility is that the oil is simply a medication (cf. Isa 1:6; Jer 8:22; Lk 10:34). No miraculous effects should be attributed to that oil, any more than the fig cake that Hezekiah had to take to apply it to the boil (Isa 38:21). The Lord must bless the means. That is the reason why His Name is connected to it. The use of oil by elders may be a medical act that serves to give the sick person some relief in pain, without concluding that he will be healed. There is no question of a religious ritual.

Another possibility is that the use of the oil has a symbolic meaning. The anointing then has the meaning in the sense of honoring a person. You can also read about the anointing of the feet of the Lord (Jn 12:3) and the body of the Lord (Mk 16:1). The Lord rebukes Simon for holding back the proof of courtesy by not anointing Him (Lk 7:46).

This meaning of anointing is also plausible. It will make the sick, who may possibly be wondering whether God still cares about him, feel better by experiencing this anointing. In connection with Mark 6 (Mk 6:13) the oil perhaps can also be seen as a symbol of power or authority of the elders to pray the prayer for healing.

V15. In any case, prayer and prayer alone produces blessing from God for the sick believers and the use of oil is in no way an essential part that would be necessary to receive that blessing. It is not the oil that works healing, but the prayer of the faith of the elders. That this prayer of faith is answered by the Lord, can be seen in the fact that He raises up the sick.

To the raising up of the sick forgiveness is connected in case the sick has sinned. Then there can be no blessing of healing without confession. Therefore confession must have preceded, for sins are only forgiven if they have been confessed. Here it is about the forgiveness by the elders. The sick will have had confessed his sins already to God and will have received forgiveness from God (1Jn 1:9). It is also important that the elders speak out the forgiveness (cf. Jn 20:23; Mt 18:18). As a result to that there is also a public restoration of fellowship with the believers.

V16. The situation of the 'sickbed prayer' makes James underline the necessity of the confession of sins to one another, also if there is no mention of sickness. Confessing sins to one another has got nothing to do with the penance, as it is taught and practiced by the roman-catholic church. In that penance a person confesses his sins to a person who has nothing whatever to do with it and who arrogates the status of mediator between the sinner and God.

The call of James refers to situations in which we have sinned to one another. Sin always hinders the blessing of God. That hindrance is taken away by confession. When sin is confessed, blessing can flow freely again, and in case of sickness, healing and health can also come.

By the way, it is not wrong for a person to confess sins to a person against whom he has not sinned in case of pastoral counseling. A person may be tortured by a sin, but doesn't know how to confess. It may possibly be the case that this person for instance has sinned against a person who does not live any more. Then it is a good thing that this person confesses the sin together with a confidential counselor and that the counselor also ensures him that forgiveness by God is certain and clear, because God has said that in His Word.

The power of prayer is awesome. The condition, however, is that it is prayed by a righteous person. By "a righteous man" James does not mean someone who through faith is righteous before God, but someone who lives righteously. If such a man comes to God with a fervent prayer God can and will surely hear it. He does not need to speak first with the one who prays about things that are not right in his life. A righteous man is associated with God, he is accustomed to it and that causes him to know the will of God.

You can be a righteous man. That is not a status that you achieve by living righteously, but you are that if, as far as you know, your life is pure before God. God wants to have your prayer involved in His actions. He listens to it and uses it to realize His plans.

V17. As an example of a righteous man who prays an effective, fervent prayer James presents Elijah. Elijah is close to you and not above you, although you certainly will look up to him. At least I do. He truly is a man of God. Elijah also has had his weak moments. For that reason it is written here that he was "a man with a nature like ours". Therefore you can also learn a lot from him. He was able to stand fearlessly before Ahab because he was aware that he was not standing before Ahab, but before God (1Kgs 17:1). There he made known that there would be no rain for years. In that announcement you do not read about a prayer. That's what you read here. James is telling that a prayer preceded that announcement.

How could Elijah pray such a prayer which in fact is a judgment? He knew God's thoughts and that's why he prayed this remarkable prayer (Deu 11:16-17). He loved God's people and he loved God. God wanted His people to turn back to Him and the only way to realize that was through the

judgment of drought. It is a prayer to the Lord *not* to bless us, so that we may feel that we have turned away from Him. The prayer of Elijah was answered.

V18. After a course of time he prayed again and this time he prayed for the rain to fall. He understood that the time of blessing had come because he had offered the offering and the people had spoken out the confession that Yahweh is God (1Kgs 18:38-39).

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is, especially in the last days, to pray. We are in need of people who know the will of God and who are convinced of the power of prayer. I hope that you may become a man of prayer. You do not need to have a gift for that, neither do you need to follow a training for that. You simply have got to do it. Think again about this prayer of Elijah and resolve to pray more often and also more fervently.

V19. James concludes his letter with two verses about bringing back someone who has strayed from the truth. That is in line with Elijah. Elijah was also a restorer. By his prayer he brought back the people to God. You also can bring back someone to God by prayer. Do you know people, believers, who first were faithful in their service for the Lord, but now have a rather casual attitude to the truth? If they continue to do so they will end up in death. You may bring back such a person from that path of error by praying for him. If you pray in such a way for the straying one, the Lord can also make clear to you whether you should visit him and how to address him.

V20. If you bring him back you save him from death and you also cover a multitude of sins. He will repent and confess his path of error. Then he may learn again that all his sins are forgiven, that they have been cast into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19). By bringing back the straying one you also prevent him from being drawn further into the power of sin. Also in that sense you have made sure that a multitude of sins has been covered, for he is prevented to commit them. I sincerely hope that you have the desire that strayed believers will turn back to God.

Now read James 5:13-20 again.

Reflection: Commit yourself to pray for the restoration of deviated believers.

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