



## James Chapter One

### Summary of Chapter One

James commences his letter by identifying himself and announcing that he is a servant of Jesus as the Christ, but makes no mention of being his brother as he fully submits to the lordship of Christ. He alludes to his readership as having a distinctive Jewish heritage or association at least.

After the inscription and salutation (v.1) believers are instructed as to how they should conduct themselves when under the Cross of Christ. Several graces and duties are recommended; and those who endure in their trials and afflictions, as James here directs, are pronounced blessed, being assured of a glorious reward (vv.2-12).

Those sins which bring sufferings, and the weakness and faults of men are chargeable to them. They are by no means to be imputed to God, who cannot be the author of sin, but is the author of all good (vv.13-18).

All aggressive passion, rash anger, and vile affections, need to be suppressed. The Word of God should become a believer's main focus in life; with what they hear and know of it being put into continuous practise, otherwise their faith will prove but a vain thing. A believer's faith is revealed in the practicality of their lifestyle choices and actions (vv.19-27).

### I James 1:1 - Greeting

Jesus chose 12 disciples to signify the twelve tribes of Israel and thus to identify the church as the new Israel. James reminds these Jewish Christians of their spiritual heritage as the people of God, gathered by Jesus the Messiah.

The tribes of Israel were scattered throughout the world by the Assyrians and Babylonians, as foretold by Moses: <<*In furious anger and in great wrath the Lord uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now*>> (Deuteronomy 29:28), and then spoken of by many of the prophets in later times. They looked forward to being brought back together again as a people: <<*Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a*

shepherd’>> (Jeremiah 31:10), and: <<Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms>> (Ezekiel 37:20-22). James implies that the true Israel is now also dispersed, away from the Promised Land, and oppressed, but assured of their final gathering to the Lord.

<sup>1</sup> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:  
Greetings.

Although he is the brother of Jesus, James identifies himself as his servant, Greek *doulos*, which means slave or bond servant, but here it is a title of great honour that acknowledges Jesus as Lord and Christ. He could easily have identified himself as an apostle as do Paul and Peter, or an elder of the church as does John, but he prefers to glory in the role of Christ’s servant. Jesus had taught on this subject on several occasions, including to his apostles at the Last Supper, when a debate had broken out among them over greatness: <<*Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves*>> (Luke 22:24-27). Those who serve the Son are also serving the Father who sent him: <<*Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him*>> (John 5:22-23).



A Statue of James in Liege, Belgium

### The twelve tribes.

As previously noted, James identifies his readership as Diaspora Jews, but does not identify their particular location, which could be almost anywhere in the Roman Empire, where the knowledge of Christ through the Gospel had spread. Some commentators have stated this refers to the Jewish Christians forced to flee from Jerusalem into the neighbouring parts of Palestine and Samaria, see Acts Chapter 8. However, this seems far too narrow a selection. Anyway, many of those brought to faith in Samaria were not of a true Jewish background, and would not have fitted with the tone of the introduction.

Therefore, most commentators hold that it would be mostly to those Jewish Christians in Asia Minor, but there had been Jews witnessing the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost several years earlier and who subsequently came to faith: <<*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galilæans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judæa and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”>> (Acts 2:1-12).*



The map shows the countries represented in Jerusalem at Pentecost

Greetings uses the Greek word *chairein*, which is literally joy be to you. Despite the persecution and suffering his readers are experiencing, as we will see as the letter unfolds, James calls them to live joyfully.

## II James 1:2-18 - Trials and Temptations

Trials come to all believers in order to test their faith and to make spiritual journeys complete. They are part of the: <<*good and perfect gifts*>> (v.17), which God gives to his people in order to make them whole. Trials and afflictions will come upon all believers, no matter what else they may have in their lives.

Sometimes, it comes with an option to apparently escape that suffering by a route that would not be pleasing to God and would thereby be sin. Such an option is to be denied by the believer, even though it prolongs or even increases the suffering.

## II.a James 1:2-4 - Joy in trials

Trials are designed to produce spiritual maturity and should therefore be counted as a blessing, endured with perseverance and accepted with holy or pure joy.

<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,

### James 1:2

Pure joy, or all joy in some translations, links in with the greeting to affirm that James did mean what he said in the opening address - <<**joy be to you**>> (v.1).

Trials are tests that challenge faith (vv.2-5). The Greek term peirasmos can refer to internal temptations but it is more likely that James is using the other key sense of this word for the external trials of suffering and adversity that Peter refers to: <<**Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you**>> (1 Peter 4:12). These are not single instances, but are diverse in their range and occur on various occasions, as James indicates by writing: whenever you face trials of many kinds.

When trials occur, a believer should count it as pure joy – not meaning mere worldly, temporal happiness which has such a weak meaning, but rather spiritual, enduring, complete joy in the Lord, who is sovereign over all things, including trials.

Joy is an attribute that should mark out a true believer from the rest of the world, especially during times of suffering and affliction: <<**You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit**>> (1 Thessalonians 1:6), for: <<**Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty**>> (Job 5:17).

Happiness is a subjective state, whereas James is instructing his readers to make a more objective judgment when he says consider it pure joy. Happiness might encourage readers to expect a carefree life or a constantly cheerful mood. Neither of these is what James has in mind. He acknowledges the presence of extremely unhappy experiences in his readers' lives. At the same time, and with no perception of any contradiction, James counsels these readers to rejoice during those very experiences of hardship.

Philosophy may instruct men to be calm under their troubles; but Christianity teaches them to be joyful, because such exercises proceed from love of and not fury at God. In them we are conformable to Christ our head, and they become marks of our adoption. By suffering in the ways of righteousness, we are serving the interests of our Lord's kingdom among men, and edifying the body of Christ; and our trials will brighten our graces now and our crown at the end. Therefore, there is reason to count it all joy when trials and difficulties become our lot in the way of our duty to Christ.

<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

### James 1:3

Testing of your faith defines the meaning of a trial for the believer. Just as Jesus was tested in the wilderness, see Matthew 4:1-13, so too all believers are tested.

The Greek word used is dokimion and denotes a positive test intended to make one's faith genuine: <<*These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed*>> (1 Peter 1:7). The result is perseverance, a life of faithful endurance amid troubles and afflictions, with which Paul concurs: <<*Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance*>> (Romans 5:3). That the testing develops, or produces, perseverance is emphatic. It may be compared to v.20, where human anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Stoical apathy and Christian perseverance are very different: by the one, men become, in some measure, insensible of their sufferings; but by the other, they become triumphant in and over them. Perseverance also means patient endurance, which implies self-discipline, a key attribute in good discipleship.

These trials provide the opportunity for the testing that will develop this quality of faith. To stop trusting and start worrying, to cease ministering and start withdrawing, to interrupt godliness and start selfishness, just because of one's anxiety over the current trials, would be precisely the wrong course to take. The spiritual realities call for joy in the opportunity to learn perseverance.

<sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

### James 1:4

Perseverance leads ultimately to perfection, i.e. finish its work. Believers mature in holiness but are not yet made complete or perfected in it; such perfection will be realised only when Jesus returns. At that time a believer will not lack anything.

The writer to the Hebrews is in agreement: <<*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised*>> (Hebrews 10:36). It is a theme to which James later returns: <<*As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy*>> (James 5:11). It is a grace that Peter exhorts: <<*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love*>> (2 Peter 1:5-7).

This verse is something that so many disciples aspire to in the Christian journey; the position of spiritual maturity, without the fruit of the sinful nature such as impatience, envy, impulsiveness, self-pity, or selfishness that interrupts a fruitful and firm relationship with God. When believers are trapped in the cycle of such helplessness, the best thing is to cry out to God as King Jehoshaphat did when vast armies were amassing against Judah: <<*We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you*>> (2 Chronicles 20:12b).

## II.b James 1:5-8 - Wisdom from God for trials

Believers are to have an undivided faith, asking for wisdom from their ever-wise and all-generous God, as did King Solomon: <<*God said to Solomon, "Since this is your heart's desire and you have not asked for wealth, riches or honour, nor for the death of your enemies, and since you have not asked for a long life but for wisdom and knowledge to govern my people over whom I have made you king, therefore wisdom and knowledge will be given you. And I will also give you wealth, riches and honour, such as no king who was before you ever had and none after you will have"*>> (2 Chronicles 1:11-12). When trials and hardship come and a believer lacks the wisdom to know what to do, he needs to stand the test of faith by asking God for the wisdom he needs. As he prays for that wisdom, he must not fear his lack of wisdom but truly believe that God will give it to him.

Wisdom from God is a great gift. King Solomon is reputed to have been the wisest man who lived and yet his life unravelled because he never applied good judgement or discernment with regard to some of the decisions he made in life. Failing to take sound advice but instead listening to those who told him what he wanted to hear, and his lust for women, were two particular weaknesses he encountered, which cost Israel as a nation so dearly.

<sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

### James 1:5

James addresses the believer who lacks wisdom in handling trials. Wisdom, as in the OT, is a God-given and God-centred discernment regarding the practical issues in life. Wisdom comes from prayer for God's help: <<*Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place*>> (Psalm 51:6). When faced with such trials, a believer should ask God for the wisdom that is lacking. This is not to dismiss the problems with a simplistic solution, but it is to face the problems with a realistic solution: <<*So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you*>> (Luke 11:9).

He should ask God. A believer should live a life centred on prayer: <<*By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life*>> (Psalm 42:8). He should come before God in all humility and with a sense of personal weakness that can only become strength through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God gives generously with single-minded liberality, i.e. without finding fault, and without reproach for he does not want anyone to hesitate to come to him. This is a

concept that demonstrates God's desire to extend his call for everyone to turn to him and live by faith in him alone.

**It will be given to him.** James not only understands the generosity of an awesome God, but knows that he will give what he has promised: *<<I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it>>* (John 14:12-14).

There are many commentators who accuse James of being too legalistic and relying on his Hebraic background, but it should not be overlooked what he is saying here. James is directing his readers toward the grace of God for their solution in times of trouble. This is a theme that underpins the whole epistle.

All believers should note that what Jesus had always been doing was His Father's will. Therefore, believers must also align themselves to the Father's will, through the Holy Spirit, in order to see prayers answered.

<sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

#### **James 1:6**

Faith is a settled trust and confidence in God, based on his character and promises as revealed in Scripture: *<<Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see>>* (Hebrews 11:1). We see an example of this between Peter and his Lord: *<<"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!">>* (Matthew 14:28-30). While Peter was focused on Jesus he could walk on the water, but as soon as doubt crept in, he was lost!

**But when he asks.** Christians are required to ask God for what they need even if he already knows what is required. Prayer is central to all things in life.

**He must believe and not doubt.** Doubt in a believer's mind opens the way for fear and worry. Believers who then fear the world, or worry about their trials and sufferings, start to waver and look for worldly solutions. This is despite a clear command not to worry: *<<Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?>>* (Luke 12:22-26).

People are not to take the warnings of Jesus and James against doubt superficially, believing that all it requires is a wilful suppression of mental doubts. People cannot manipulate God by their own power of positive thinking. This error has left many captive to fear, afraid of their own thoughts and afraid

of the God who might hold their doubts against them, and therefore not grant the wisdom needed. The result is that people's faith is crippled and perverts the truth that James is teaching - that God gives graciously and without finding fault.

Believers are sometimes led to place their faith in the strength of their own belief system, and then expect to avoid trials and suffering. What James is prescribing is something quite different: have faith in the grace of God, which enables faith to be exercised even within suffering and deprivation.

Doubt about any aspect of God leads to a believer vacillating between trusting God and trusting the world or one's own natural abilities. This makes a person like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind, a picture of instability and uncertainty. Paul explains that God gives certain people the Spiritual gifts to train other believers to avoid such pitfalls: *<<It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ>>* (Ephesians 4:11-15).

Jesus spoke about not doubting: *<<Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done>>* (Matthew 21:21).

<sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;  
<sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

### James 1:7-8

A person who doubts God's goodness dishonours him. Such a person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord, since he is unsure whether God is good or will do good. Nor can such a man place any real value on the gifts that God gives so graciously.

He is a double-minded man, that is, in two minds, torn between God and the world or their own self-reliance, and is therefore unstable in all he does. King David once praised God with the words: *<<I hate double-minded men, but I love your law>>* (Psalm 119:113). Instability in faith will lead to instability in many other aspects of life that will lead a person into the ways of the world that are unsuitable for a believer in Christ Jesus. Instead, they can become like those of whom the prophet spoke: *<<But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud>>* (Isaiah 57:20).

## II.c James 1:9-11 - The place of rich and poor before God

God welcomes all into his church that come by faith in Christ. A person's material status in this life has no influence on God, who judges all people according to their hearts. However, he expects all believers to use whatever gifts and possessions they have been given by him to advance the kingdom. Jesus had indicated there was a place for the poor in his church from the very outset of his earthly ministry, when he first taught in the synagogue in Nazareth: <<*The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"*>> (Luke 4:17-19). Good news indeed!

<sup>9</sup> The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. <sup>10</sup> But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. <sup>11</sup> For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

### James 1:9-11

Both poverty and riches bring enormous pressure on a person to focus on the world rather than on Christ. Even in today's society money is the cause of all sorts of problems. People become anxious as to how they will pay the mortgage, how to acquire the latest electronic gadgets, or simply have sufficient food to feed the children. These are perpetual problems that have been encountered by people throughout the generations, thus James exhorts the poor to boast or glory in their high status in Christ, i.e. the brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. The lowly brother will be exalted or vindicated by God. However, there is nothing wrong with being wealthy either as was Abraham, the Patriarch of all nations, either biologically or spiritually. He had material wealth, herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and many servants. He also had great faith in God and showed humility in the sight of God by the way he welcomed strangers into his presence. For example: <<*Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree"*>> (Genesis 18:2-4). It is how the rich use their resources and treat other people that matters to God, as Jesus has taught: <<*He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight"*>> (Luke 16:15). Those with money also face problems for it becomes a snare to them. Paul wrote: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs"*>> (1 Timothy 6:10).

In contrast, James exhorts the rich to boast in their humiliation:

1. By realising that their wealth is temporary and that it brings them no advantage before God, nor should it do so within the church.
2. By identifying with the poor in their affliction. The church is to be a countercultural community, which reverses the values of the world: **<<Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, “Here’s a good seat for you,” but say to the poor man, “You stand there” or “Sit on the floor by my feet,” have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?>>** (James 2:2-4).

Given the context, James seems to be saying that the challenges of poverty and wealth may be one of the greatest trials for believers, as would be suggested by his immediate emphasis on the blessed status of those who remain steadfast under trial. James also echoes Jesus’ warning that: **<<“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”>>** (Luke 16:13). For the wealthy and even for many ordinary working people or those living on state benefits, money and possessions have become their god.

**But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower.** The silence of James on the humility in Christ’s suffering on the Cross and the construction of the sentence, leads many to assume that James is speaking about rich unbelievers rather than a wealthy brother, who will be brought low in the final accounting. Wealth may seem to bring security in this life, along with many other attractive trappings, but the wealthy unbeliever is certainly not to be envied; in fact, he should be pitied by the poor disciple. John Wesley once said, ‘When I have any money I get rid of it as quickly as possible, lest it find a way into my heart’. He later enhanced his message by stating, ‘Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can’.

**The sun rises with scorching heat.** Judæa had vast areas of barren land by the time of James and parts of it were quite inhospitable. In the same way that the sun would **wither the plant** that had no water, so too will a **rich man fade away even while he goes about his business.** Even in his prime, if his eyes are not firmly fixed on the Word of God, then such a man will wither in the searing heat of God’s wrath and he will die spiritually. David once wrote: **<<God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land>>** (Psalm 68:6). Riches in this world are just too uncertain and are only temporal, life is eternal!

**A rich man has much to rejoice: not so much in the providence of God, who provides such riches, but in his grace and mercy that provides the opportunity to be humble.**

## II.d **James 1:12 - Reward for those who endure**

There are many Scriptures which speak of reward for perseverance but none of them suggest that the reward should be the motivating factor, although there is nothing wrong with a believer having their heart set on achieving this end.

However, it is clear that the reward, the crown of life, is of far greater worth than the wealth James has so recently spoken of.

<sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

### James 1:12

In one excellent phrase, James summarises all the issues addressed in v.2-11. As already discussed, those who would follow Christ will at some point suffer for doing so and those that endure will receive their ultimate reward for their faith and faithfulness to God: <<*I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!*>> (Revelation 2:9a).

**Blessed.** Given its context in this verse, this reminds us of the beatitudes, especially: <<*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*>> (Matthew 5:11-12).

**Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial.** The theme of suffering continues: <<*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*>> (Mark 8:34). However, the believer’s cross is for but a moment, whereas his reward is eternal life in the presence of God.

**Crown of life** alludes not to the jewel encrusted ruler’s crown but to the laurel wreath given to victorious emperors and winners in athletic games, but again with a different motivating factor, for: <<*Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever*>> (1 Corinthians 9:25). Therefore, this is not a reward believers receive when they first believe but is the final reward given at the end. Peter and John write in similar fashion: <<*And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away*>> (1 Peter 5:4), and: <<*Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life*>> (Revelation 2:10). Since we can conclude that the ultimate goal on James’ mind is that of becoming mature and complete as a believer, not lacking anything, the crown must include fulfilment of that goal of true life.

The reward for faithful perseverance is eternal life, with all its abundant blessings. This has to worth far more than simply avoiding the trials and tests that a believer must undergo in order to attain it. If nothing else, suffering brings believers closer to God and forms an even stronger relational bond.

## II.e James 1:13-18 - The process of temptation

James turns to the other side of trials, namely, when testing becomes temptation. The weak in faith will be drawn by such temptations into sin. Now the issue is not so much what hurt is *being done* to the believer through their suffering and trials, but what hurt they are *doing* by giving in to such temptations.

<sup>13</sup> When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;

### James 1:13

God tests his people, so that their character is strengthened, but he never tempts, i.e. lures people into sin, as demonstrated when Jesus taught his disciples to pray: <<*And lead us not into temptation*>> (Luke 11:4c), and: <<*“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak”*>> (Matthew 26:41).

Since God cannot be tempted by evil, and he is unreservedly good, he would never entice human beings into sin or seek to harm their faith: <<*Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness*>> (Psalm 29:2), and: <<*Let them praise your great and awesome name – he is holy*>> (Psalm 99:3). Therefore, those who do sin can and should never blame God. In fact, their best option is to accept that their sin was their own doing, come back to the foot of the Cross and ask for forgiveness, unlike Adam when he sinned: <<*And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it”*>> (Genesis 3:11-12). What Adam said was factual, but was it really truthful? It is always a temptation to look for someone else to blame, in Adam’s case he sought to blame God! If a believer does not accept responsibility for their actions, they can never repent of those actions and will therefore never be forgiven for the wrong they have done in God’s sight.

Tempted, the Greek word *peirazō*, is the verb form of the noun translated trial, Greek *peirasmos*, in v.12, but the context shows that different senses of the word are intended.

God brings trials in order to strengthen the Christian’s faith. He never tempts, however, because he never desires his people to sin.

Disciples of Christ should never blame God when they do wrong. In fact, they should never blame anyone but themselves, for even the devil cannot tempt a believer unless that person allows him to.

<sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

### James 1:14

Each one is tempted. This does not necessarily refer to a deliberate act by a third party but is due to a believer giving in to their sinful nature. There will always be a tension between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit that indwells a person. The

more that person gives themselves over to the Lordship of Christ, the less that tension becomes: <<***But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding***>> (Job 32:8). Once again, the responsibility is with the individual as Solomon alludes to: <<***If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer***>> (Proverbs 9:12).

**Dragged away and enticed.** Many translations have lure for dragged away, which is a fishing or hunting metaphor for drawing prey away from shelter in order to trap them with a deadly hook or snare. Here, it is the person's **own evil desire** that ensnares him: <<***Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings***>> (1 Peter 5:8-9), Peter demonstrates it is Satan who seeks to devour. Once again, sin is never God's fault, nor is it his will nor his desire for anyone. Just as holiness is in two parts: forsaking evil and holding on to what is of God, then sin is also in two parts - a reversal of that process. Just as faithfulness to God comes with a promise, so too unrepented sin has a promise attached: <<***but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die***>> (Genesis 2:17), for: <<***the wages of sin is death***>> (Romans 6:23a).

I always find it unhelpful when people quote just the first part of this verse as I have just done, for the important point it makes comes from reading it in its entirety: <<***For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord***>> (Romans 6:23).

<sup>15</sup> Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

### **James 1:15**

The picture changes to a **birth**/rebirth metaphor, as **full-grown desire** bears its own child - **sin**, which itself grows into maturity, i.e. **when it is full-grown**, and bears the grandchild, spiritual **death**. This dramatic depiction shows the terrible result when anyone gives in to temptation. Another way of looking at it would be a seed of evil planted in the sinful nature of a person, being allowed to grow until it becomes fully mature - too powerful to be resisted. Therefore, a believer must stay close to God through his Word and in prayer, to be vigilant of what is going on in their own heart, and to stay strong in the calling on their life. This again gives the image of the two stages of sin: that it is conceived, and then the outcome when it comes to maturity - the cost of that sin!

This is not a passage that suggests a true believer can lose his or her salvation as some may suggest. James is warning that genuine salvation comes through repentance of sin and faith in God through Jesus. The extremity of the warning simply shows how seriously James takes the lordship of Christ. He expects that true believers will not go on giving themselves over to sin. James is not so much worried about the harm being done to these persecuted believers but the harm they could do especially to themselves by being tempted back into sin.

<sup>16</sup> Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. <sup>17</sup> Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

### James 1:16-17

This is another pivotal passage. It may seem simplistic but in no way is it intended to undermine just how serious the trials are that believers are called to endure. Since every good gift comes from God, we know that evil and injustice does not. A believer does not have to suffer such things in silence and can resist such trials. Nor should a believer pretend that such suffering does not hurt, because it does.

Don't be deceived. Eve had allowed herself to be deceived by the smooth talk and half-truths of the serpent, with disastrous consequences for all mankind. Paul sees it happening all over again in the church: <<*But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 11:3).

James moves from evil temptations, which are not of God, to the observation that every good and perfect gift comes from God: <<*If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*>> (Luke 11:13).

As in v.5, James reminds the readers of God's goodness. In their trials, God is not tempting them to sin, but the difficulties in life are intended to strengthen and perfect them, and make them more like God. God's intentions for them are always for good: <<*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28).

There is nothing in this world that is truly good that has any other origin than from above, namely heaven, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, which refers to God as creator: <<*Yours is the day, yours also the night; you have established the heavenly lights and the sun*>> (Psalm 74:16 ESV), and: <<*who made the great lights – His love endures forever. The sun to govern the day, His love endures forever. The moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever*>> (Psalm 136:7-9), a prime example of his good gifts.

Father of the heavenly lights. God the creator had brought us the original heavenly lights but the world became dark until the coming of His Son: <<*The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world*>> (John 1:9), although not everyone wanted the scrutiny of the light: <<*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God*>> (John 3:19-21). The idea of the stars and planets also gives the allusion of looking heavenward for all good things, in the same way a beautifully ornate ceiling in a church building draws worshippers' eyes upwards.

God does not change in his character and therefore in his giving of good, unlike the variation of the night changing to day or the shifting shadow caused by the sun

or moon.

<sup>18</sup> He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

### James 1:18

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth speaks of spiritual salvation, with us meaning believers, and the word of truth being the Gospel, as confirmed by Jesus: <<*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth*>> (John 17:17). Paul confirms this with great eloquence: <<*Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel*>> (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Give us birth, that is, from the womb, is a metaphor for the new spiritual birth: <<*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit"*>> (John 3:5), and: <<*For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God*>> (1 Peter 1:23).

We might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. Initially, Christ: <<*But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him*>> (1 Corinthians 15:23), and then others that have chosen to follow him faithfully into eternal reward: <<*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*>> (Romans 8:23).

The firstfruits of the harvest are the pioneer believers: <<*Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord. Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast. The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning. Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk*>> (Exodus 23:16-19), and: <<*The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the Lord a lamb a year old without defect, together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil – an offering made to the Lord by fire, a pleasing aroma – and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live*>> (Leviticus 23:9-14). As pioneer believers they are a prelude to further conversions yet to come: <<*Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia*>> (Romans 16:5), and: <<*You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints*>> (1 Corinthians 16:15a).

### III James 1:19-27 - Listening and Doing

The central theme of this section is practical Christianity, mandated by the word of truth, which is the Gospel, and characterised by both truly hearing and then resolutely doing the truth of God's Word. Obedience is the hallmark of the true child of God.

#### III.a James 1:19-21 - Hearers of the word

James encourages the church to pursue hearing the word, and to avoid hasty speech and unrighteous anger.

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

#### James 1:19

My dear brothers again shows that James is speaking as their equal in Christ and not as their church leader or apostle. He practices what he preaches.

Take note of this links the following back to the word of truth from the preceding passage and alerts the readers that what follows is of importance to them.

Slow to speak. It is always important, especially when disputed issues are being discussed, to take time to reflect on those issues before speaking out. Hastily spoken words can never be withdrawn.

James echoes Jewish Wisdom tradition on the misuse of the tongue and the anger that can result: <<*When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise*>> (Proverbs 10:19), <<*A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbour, but a man of understanding holds his tongue*>> (Proverbs 11:12), <<*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*>> (Proverbs 15:1), and: <<*Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue*>> (Proverbs 17:28).

Quick to listen. Lack of listening, combined with lack of restraint in speech, leads to ill-tempered action and hastily spoken words that can cause so much damage and indeed pain.

Slow to become angry does not mean that all human anger is sinful: <<*In your anger do not sin*>>: *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*>> (Ephesians 4:26), but the quick-tempered, selfish anger of the world: <<*man's anger*>> (v.20), betrays lack of trust in God and lack of love for a neighbour.

Later on, James will address some serious issues of dissention within the church groups. Adhering to the advice in this verse will go a long way to resolving issues between disputing individuals or parties. This is something that remains true in the church today, where we now have many instances where churches have split into smaller groups, thus dividing resources and causing much heartache, and where the divisive issues could so easily have been resolved to mutual satisfaction and without compromising God's word, reputation or holy name.

<sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

### James 1:20

The self-reliant anger of man, even when directed against some wrongdoing, fails to recognise that mere human reproach cannot change another person's heart, and thus it does not produce the righteous life that God desires for his children, a righteousness to match his own; nor indeed is such anger fully righteous itself. God is holy and righteous, requiring that his people emulate his righteous character: <<Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy'>> (Leviticus 19:2), <<Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect>> (Matthew 5:48), and: <<for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy">> (1 Peter 1:16).

Righteous life here is not Pauline legal or forensic righteousness proclaimed in God's court of law, but is closer to the usage of the OT: <<and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour>> (Isaiah 61:3), and Jesus: <<Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled>> (Matthew 5:6), and: <<For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him>> (Matthew 21:32), in the sense of conducting one's life by the will of God, according to his standards.

The righteous life that God desires describes the active obedience desired by God rather than a static standard of righteousness. This is diametrically opposed to man's anger.

<sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

### James 1:21

Get rid of all moral filth pictures cleaning up bodily waste and fluids: <<Then you will defile your idols overlaid with silver and your images covered with gold; you will throw them away like a menstrual cloth and say to them, "Away with you!">> (Isaiah 30:22), or the stripping off of soiled clothing: <<The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light>> (Romans 13:12), <<You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires>> (Ephesians 4:22), <<But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips>> (Colossians 3:8), <<Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good>> (1 Peter 2:1-3), and: <<Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and

*save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh>>* (Jude 22-23), based on a desire to have nothing to do with the dirt, here moral filth, ever again. In place of filthy behaviour, the implanted word must take root in God's people.

This idea of God planting his revealed truth reflects Deuteronomy 30:14 <<*No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it>>*, and especially the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:33 <<*This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people>>*.

Which can save you, or save your souls, refers here to progressive sanctification and ultimately the completion of God's saving work on the last day.

This passage is really advising believers to prepare their hearts to be right before they come to the Word of God, whether they intend to meditate on it in solitude or are going to attend a meeting, where they anticipate receiving a message based on the Word, for as Paul says, it is the power of God: <<*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile>>* (Romans 1:16), and: <<*So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God>>* (2 Timothy 1:8).

Although this has been part of a different section, the thematic content shows the coherence in James' writing. His letter is not just a collection of random thoughts as some would depict it. James is saying that the persecuted Christians have plenty of opportunity for anger in their trials. The one who desperately needs wisdom in his difficult circumstances (v.5), and the brother who needs help in his deprived economic conditions (v.9), are both urged by James to hold steady focus on the goal of real value: becoming mature and complete. Therefore they are to see their anger as tempting them to do evil and to recognise that such temptation is neither originating from God's will (v.13), nor achieving anything for God's will.

### III.b James 1:22-25 - Doers of the word

Hearing the Word without action is self-deceptive, while hearing that results in doing the Word is a blessing. Doing the Word is not just the practical application through deeds that manifest themselves as a result of faith, but the need for a believer to change aspects within himself that come to light as a result of hearing or reading the Word.

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

#### James 1:22

It is not surprising, given James' background as a devout Jew, that he should refer to OT Scripture as the Word. However, throughout the letter so far, James has frequently addressed issues with solutions that are closely linked to the Sermon on

the Mount, indicating that his view of Scripture, as a Christian, has changed and he now accepts the teachings of Christ as being equally authoritative, and indeed part of Scripture itself, even though it was not in written format at that time.

Being doers of the Word, and not hearers only, is the only proper response to the Word of God, which is not only the Gospel but the entirety of Scripture, allowing it to take root in a believer's life (v.21).

Deceive yourselves uses the Greek word *paralogizomenoi*, which indicates a person having an internal sophisticated debate over what they have heard and then convince themselves that it is sufficiently dealt with. Such self-deception is common, especially for those who conclude that what is being taught is not applicable to their own personal situation.

<sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

#### James 1:23-24

Looking intently at his natural face in a mirror and then forgetting what he looks like demonstrates the folly of examining oneself in God's mirror of the implanted word of v.21, and then doing nothing about it (v.22). When one sees imperfections, as most of us do when looking in a mirror, common sense says something should be done about it, and that does not imply mere cosmetic surgery.

In the Greek, there is a distinctive break between what we have as v.23 and v.24, indicated in some translations with a semicolon. The point is that the man does not need to keep thinking about his appearance; he can forget his appearance, because it is useless to him once he has finished looking. It speaks of the ordinariness of what the man is seeing; he doesn't need to think further about his appearance. His reflection in the mirror is useless for him in going about his daily business of life. This makes the application clear. If he hears the Word of God but does not do what it says, he is treating the Word as if it were useless. He is deceiving himself about the very nature and purpose of the Word of God.

<sup>25</sup> But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does.

#### James 1:25

The man who looks intently is the one who will take the Word to heart, identifying the issues of his sinful nature that still plague him, and bring them before God. The Berean Jews did exactly that when Paul first brought the Gospel to them: *<<Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true>>* (Acts 17:11). The Word, like the Law, helps a believer to identify such issues: *<<Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died>>* (Romans 7:9). Frequently, a believer will be convicted by the Word

during a church meeting, will resolve to deal with the issue it has raised in their heart, but then immediately forgets all about it by the time he has gone to speak with his friends over a cup of tea! This may sound comical but James clearly states a believer is to continue to look intently into God's Word and then, not forgetting what he has heard, put it into practice, i.e. doing it. The blessings then follow!

The perfect law that gives freedom. In James, the law and the Word are two different ways of describing the same reality. The Word, including the teachings of Jesus, is perfect in its original language form, and therefore nothing can be added to it, and nothing can be taken away from it. As with the mirror analogy, the Word offers a true reflection of how a believer should live, and they will only live in true freedom if they become doers and keepers of the Word of God. Just as Paul will say a man must keep the whole law if he becomes circumcised, so too a believer must live by the whole of God's Word, and not just the selective parts that suit them - discarding the rest!

**The Bible is not just a book of stories, it is not just there to provide emotional support in times of suffering and hardship, and it is certainly not a lucky charm that will bring good fortune if read often enough. It is a manual for life and should be acted out on a daily basis. The teachings of Jesus support this view: <<“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete”>> (Luke 6:46-49).**

Earlier: <<*the word of truth*>> (v.18) is the Gospel of Christ, and the law here refers not so much to the OT law, as it has been interpreted and fulfilled in Christ. For in Galatians or Romans, Paul would later write about the law as an avenue by which a person might attempt to attain a standing of righteousness before the holy God. In this respect, law would have to be treated in contrast to faith, as Paul explains. James, however, is speaking here of God's moral law, as the deeds of the righteous life that God desires. Although the OT law was: <<*holy, righteous and good*>> (Romans 7:12b), it had no power by itself to enable sinful people to conform to it. Thus, the OT law did not liberate God's people but enslaved them by highlighting their sinful nature, just as Paul teaches, see Galatians 3:10-4:7, Romans 2:1-3:20, 5:20, 6:14-15, and 7:1-25.

David concurs with James on the perfection of God's law: <<*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the Lord are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward*>> (Psalm 19:7-11).

But the law is one of freedom when it comes along with the word of the Gospel, faith in Christ: <<*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*>> (John

8:36), and the power of the Holy Spirit to change hearts. See also comments made on James 2:12.

He will be blessed in what he does. God is faithful to those who are faithful to him, and to others as well: <<*Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered*>> (Psalm 32:1), and: <<*Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself*>> (2 Timothy 2:11-13), although some commentators believe James had Psalm 1 in mind.

We should take care to note that James is saying that we are blessed in what we do, not blessed for what we do, which is not contradicted by Jesus words as some may claim: <<*Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them*>> (John 13:17), for Jesus to is alluding to the blessing being in the doing of what he taught and not because of the deeds themselves.

### III.c James 1:26-27 - True, practical religion

Believers in Jesus as the Christ were never meant to be passive church-goers but to actively live out the reality of their own salvation in everyday life, in whatever way that the Holy Spirit may lead them in.

<sup>26</sup> If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.

<sup>27</sup> Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

#### James 1:26-27

This section on obedience (vv.19-27) concludes with three characteristics of the one whose religion is pure and undefiled or faultless, that is, one who is a doer the Word. First, he refuses self-deception and bridles his tongue, which means he keeps a tight rein on his speech like a bridle controlling a horse. This is in reference to those who have a bad habit of either gossiping in church or deriding the work of others in an attempt to make themselves look better. In addition, there are those who are always complaining about what the church leaders are or are not doing.

Secondly, he shows mercy and love to the oppressed. Orphans and widows were frequent OT examples of this: <<*He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing*>> (Deuteronomy 10:18), <<*learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow*>> (Isaiah 1:17), and: <<*If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever*>> (Jeremiah 7:5-7), because of their particularly helpless state.

Providing for widows was an important role for the church from its earliest

days, see Acts Chapter 6. The primary concern in Paul's teaching (1 Timothy 5:3-16), is to identify which widows should be provided for by the church. There are two key indicators: not having other family; and godliness. Along the way, the duty of caring for one's family and the propriety of younger widows remarrying are emphasised by Paul.

Although James mentions specifically orphans and widows, the church must not neglect other needy groups of people, such as the homeless, poor, sick and socially marginalised. But the primary group that needs the church are those who do not know the love of God or have his eternal salvation for themselves.

Thirdly, he remains unstained from the world; James uses the sacrificial language of the lamb without blemish or defect, see Exodus 12:5, which has further apostolic confirmation: <<***but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect***>> (1 Peter 1:19), to describe the pure religious person.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. This verse clearly identifies those who wish to make a show of their faith for the sole purpose of drawing attention on themselves. Such people hold their faith in vain, as did some of the religious leaders that Jesus warned his followers about: <<***As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the marketplaces, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely"***>> (Mark 12:38-40), and such people remain in evidence in the church today. The Puritan clergyman Dr Thomas Manton wrote: 'Our religion is not adorned with ceremonies, but purity and charity'.

His religion is worthless if he does not hold to the teachings of God and show the outworkings of it: <<***This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother***>> (1 John 3:10).

Polluted by the world. Those who are drawn to the ungodliness of the world will become polluted by it. However, a believer has to live in the world and indeed interact with it, otherwise they will not be able to interact with non-believers who may then come to faith through the believer's witness to them. Believers are called to be morally distinct from others in the world, the Greek term kosmos, used five times by James and each time with a negative connotation. See also James 2:5, 3:6, and twice in James 4:4.