

James



Prepared by
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Introduction

James has been called, and properly so, “The Gospel of Common Sense.” This letter wonderfully demonstrates that when the principles of Christianity, if they will be properly applied and brought into everyday life, can meet the needs of every generation.

I. Who Authored the letter?

Three possibilities have been suggested.

A. James, son of Zebedee, brother of John.

This James was put to death by the hand of Herod before the letter was written (Acts 12:1,2).

B. James, the son of Alphaeus.

Not much is known of this James. If this were the author of this letter however, he would have *probably* stated the fact that he was an apostle.

C. James, the Brother of Jesus and Jude (Mt. 13:55).

This is the most likely writer because of his leadership role in the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:12-29).

His death (Josephus, Antiquities 20.9.1): Ananus (the high priest appointed by Albinus, Procurator of Judea) . . . thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of the judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or some of his companions;] and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned.

II. Date:

James was killed in 60 or 62 A.D. so the only definite date that can be given is before 62.

The Church was still meeting in synagogues (v. 2:2) which means it was written very early and it seems as though the issue of Gentile admission into the Church had not arisen. The Jerusalem Council (48 A.D.) settled that question (James oversaw that meeting (Acts 15:13ff)). Therefore it is a wise assumption to place the date of this letter at 46 or 47 A.D.

III. Themes found in James:

A. Temptation and the Wisdom to deal with it. Endurance of temptations and trials is the way of life.

B. Do not try to be a Christian and a hypocrite at the same time. One must have a holistic faith.

C. Arrogance cannot be tolerated.

Chapter one

1:1

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (compare with Jude 1), to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad . . .

Question: Who are the dispersed twelve tribes?

James means all true Jews. As of the early writing of this letter, the Church was still predominantly Jewish, but his teaching and applications go beyond the scope of physical Jews. Compare with Rom. 2:25-29; 4:1-18; 8:6-8 & 14-17; 11:16-31; Gal. 3:26-29; 6:14-18; Phil. 3:2-4; Mt. 21:43; 23:37-38. Revelation 7 deals with 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel which is a symbolic picture meaning all of God's people.

The early Church had been dispersed because of persecution, beginning with the stoning of Stephen (Acts 6 & 7).

1:2-4

- A. The word James uses is "***when*** you encounter various trials . . ." not ***if***.
- B. vs. 2, ***Various*** literally means "many colored". Our trials and temptations often come to us in many different colors and degrees.
- C. vs. 4, Endurance's perfect result is that we become Complete (teleion; may also be translated as *perfect* or *mature*) and Whole (holokeros)

1:5-8

- A. vs. 5, Wisdom is not knowledge. Wisdom is what you do with the knowledge you have.
- B. vs. 6, Whichever way the wind blows is the direction the doubter goes.
- C. vs. 8, the double-minded man is Mr. Yes & No.

1:9-11

vv. 9 & 10 should be viewed as sarcasm.

- A. The poor man has nothing to draw his attention away from his service to God.
- B. Often times the things that a man possesses end up possessing the man. That is certainly a low position.

1:12-18

A. vs. 13, compare with I Corinthians 10:13 and II Peter 2:9.

B. vs. 14, Man is responsible for his own sin. The Devil did not make you do it.

C. vs. 17, Temptation does not come from God. However, God may use circumstances, as they are, to further His own glory.

Notice the two contrasts:

1. God has no variation yet there are various trials (vs. 2)
2. God is not a shifting shadow yet some are double-minded (vs. 8)

1:19-27

A. vs. 19, the first word is in the imperative; i.e., *Know this*, my beloved brethren. . .

B. vs. 21, “putting aside” literally means *stripping off*.

“Receive the word implanted” should put us in mind of the Parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:3 - 9; 18 - 23). Also see Col. 3:12-17.

chapter two

2:1-13

A. v. 2, both men are presumed to be Christian men. You cannot be a Christian and show partiality. Partiality is the absence of love. Partiality has to do with “what can he do for me?”

Apparently the early Church had ushers.

B. vv. 4 & 5, We cannot show partiality because it reverses the heavenly order.

The “evil motive” is the *what can he do for me* motive. God has not dishonored the poor man, you have.

C. v. 8, The “Royal Law” is one that does not discriminate. If you show partiality you are breaking this law.

D. v. 9 tells us of the seriousness of showing partiality.

E. v. 10, There is no such thing as a respectable sin.

F. v. 12, Where would humankind be if God had shown partiality. God does not love us because of what we can do for Him. We are to have the same kind of love.

This love:

1. Seeks the best for the one loved, not for the one doing the loving.
2. Does not die in the absence of appreciation or even response on the part of the one loved.
3. Does not depend upon the loveliness of the one loved.
4. Is a love that is all of these three because God has so loved us through Jesus Christ. All of us, rich and poor alike, are lost sinners condemned to Hell without the love of Jesus Christ.

2:14-26

A. v. 14, James here takes us into the gap between Dynamic Faith and Theoretical Religion. That which we know and believe and that which we actually do. Being religious in our mind is easy, living it is the hard part. He asks a rhetorical question in which he answers in vv. 17, 20, and 26.

One of the probable reasons this letter was written is because of the problem the Church has always had to struggle with: i.e., Orthodoxy (thinking correctly) and Orthopraxis (behaving correctly). Gnostic dualism was already beginning to show itself in the Church.

B. The Demons (v. 19) demonstrate negatively what Rahab (v. 25) and Abraham (v. 21) demonstrate positively: i.e., God requires a holistic response of what we believe and what we do.

C. v. 19, This is faith THAT. . .

Hebrews 11:6 “. . . he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” Abraham is used as the great model of Faith because of the Content and Quality of his faith (cf., Heb. 11:17-19 & Rom. 4). Abraham’s faith was a faith that believed that life could come from a dead womb and that God could give life back to his sacrificed son.

D. v. 20, 21, This is a faith IN . . .

Abraham put all he had on the altar. He was called the friend of God.

E. vv. 23 - 26, we stand in the gap every day and must decide between dynamic faith or theoretical religion.

chapter three

3:1-12

This chapter is primarily about the responsibilities of teachers.

A. vs. 1, teachers: The ministry of the teacher is the spoken word. It should be entered into very seriously.

B. vs. 2, When a teacher stumbles it affects the whole Church; *vis a vis*, the blind leading the blind.

“perfect” = complete or mature. A man who can control his tongue is complete, in that he has control over his whole body.

B. vv. 9 - 12, He is not here speaking about swearing, but the inconsistent use of the tongue.

3:13-18

A. vs. 13, wisdom is seeing things from God’s point of view.

“Let him show . . .” goes back to 2:18.

chapter four

Worldliness versus Godliness

4:1-10

A. v. 1, What is the source of quarrels (lit. wars) and conflicts (lit. battles) among you?

B. v. 4, compare with I John 2:15

C. v. 6, This is quoted from Psalm 138:6.

D. The road to Godliness is outlined in 7-10

1. v. 7, Submit to God. Obey God. Do what God says to do, if for no other reason, just because God said to do it. His saying so is good reason enough (Heb. 5:8-9).

There are four basic ways to disobey God:

- a. Flat Refusal. John 5:39, 40; Mt. 23:37
- b. Add to (i.e., amend the commandment): Rev. 22:18
- c. Take away: Rev. 22:19; Deut. 4:1, 2
- d. Art of Substitution: Is. 5:20

There are four ways to disobey God but only *one* way to obey Him: Do what He says, the way He said to do it, in the spirit which He says to do it. Solomon learned this: “Fear God and keep His commandments.” Ecc. 12:13

2. v. 7, Resist the Devil and the promise is that he will flee. The Devil does not make us do anything we do not want to. If Satan is not fleeing, it is because somebody is not resisting.

3. v. 8, Repentance: Drawing near to God. Note: We must remember that James is writing to the Church who needs to repent, not to unbelievers. Repentance is the required process by which we are sanctified. It is only by the continual act of repentance that sanctification takes place (See Rom. 12:1, 2). The word “Repentance” (Gr. metanoew-metanoeo) literally means to have a changed or a different mind.

“Cleanse your hands . . . Purify your hearts” means we are to cleanse ourselves both outwardly and inwardly. We cannot be godly and worldly at the same time. We see again Mr. Yes and No. This should also remind us of the dualism of chapter two.

4. v. 9, The joy of forgiveness only comes after the sorrow and tears of repentance. The fundamental message of the Gospel is not “Be Happy”, it is “BE HOLY!” We are not in a position to rejoice until we have repented and obeyed the Gospel.

Roger Chambers: “The time comes to rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins, when God declares us righteous, and Jesus Christ in regard to the guilt of our sin, only if we repent of the practice of our sin. Repentance is a condition of our salvation; a condition for forgiveness.”

We Christians do not blush anymore at sin because we are no longer ashamed (Jer. 6:15).

James 4:9 ought to cause us to be sober and realize that sin is personal (we must resist the devil), that sin is deadly, sin hurts God, that sin is something not to be laughed aside, that sin is something to be wept over.

5. v. 10, God gives grace to the humble (4:6) and will exalt him.

4:11-12

James returns to the subject of improperly using the tongue. The one who speaks against a brother sets himself up as judge and jury. This is pure arrogance, which is the opposite of love.

4:13-17

A. v. 14, Life is short.

B. v. 15, Planning without God is a waste of time. Be careful of how you say things.

Rush Limbaugh: “Words mean things.”

C. v. 16, Such carelessness in speech is arrogance.

D. v. 17, If you know these things yet ignore them, it is sin; the sin of omission.

chapter five

5:1-6

When times get rough, it must be remembered that the unrighteous will receive their just rewards. Verses 1-6 is the prologue for the “therefore” of verse 7.

5:7-12

A. v. 7, when times are hard Christians need to be patient. Analogy: the farmer is patient, putting up with the hardships of the soil until the first and last rains.

B. vs. 12, “above all” = this is important. This verse deals with swearing and profanity. Compare with Mt. 5:33 - 37. Again James hearkens back to improper use of the tongue.

5:13-18

A. vs. 13, “suffering” = suffering misfortune, i.e., sickness or bad circumstances. If anyone is suffering in this way he is to pray.

“cheerful” literally = feeling good; this is a contrast to suffering. If you feel good, sing praises (literally Psallo = sing with a harp).

B. vs. 14, “sick” (Gr. = asthenei = weak) This word means weak and is used in various ways throughout Scripture (see Addendum)

1. I Corinthians 11:30 - spiritually weak
2. Romans 4:19 - weak in the faith
3. Acts 20:35 - financially weak

The word often means physically weak but the context of the passage must determine what *kind* of weakness is meant.

It is the opinion of this teacher that James is referring to a spiritually weak brother; a backslider. If a spiritually weak person calls for the elders, this is a sign of repentance. Therefore the elders should pray for restoration.

“anointing”: two words are used in Scripture that mean to anoint.

1. aleiphein: to anoint for comfort; a mundane, cleansing, often medicinal use of oil.
2. chrio: an official ceremonial anointing.

James uses the word aleiphein.

C. vs. 15, “restore” (Gr. = sosei = save)

“sick”: in verse 14 the word asthenei (weak) is used. James now uses a different word, kamnonta, and it means *weary*. This word is only used three times in Scripture: here, Hebrews 12:3 and Revelation 2:3.

Summary of this section: If a person has given in to the various trials of life and now desires to straighten his spiritual life out, he should call for the elders of the Church, together they pray while the elders comfort the backslider. They pray for this persons sins and for his restoration. Because of his repentant heart, his sins are forgiven for prayer accomplishes a great deal, just look at Elijah.

5:19-20

A. vs. 19, this verse should reinforce the teaching of verse 14.

Addendum
James 5:13-20

by

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Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 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. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be restored. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 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. (James 5:13-20 NASB)

On Sunday evening November 8, 1992, at five minutes before 7 p.m., Edgar Gray died of cancer. Ed had been an elder for many years. It had only been a few weeks before that he was informed about his cancer and that it was throughout his body.

Shortly after Ed's funeral I received a telephone call from one of our other two elders wanting to know why it happened. What I didn't know at the time was that the two elders had obeyed James 5:13-20 to the letter and expected Ed to regain his health within the next few days of their visit. The phone call lasted a couple of hours and I was quite frustrated because I had no good answers to give to the questions put before me. Questions like "Why does God tell us these things ("and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick") if He does not respond to them?" and "If we can't trust the Bible here, where else should we not trust it?"

The only answer I could think of at the time was that since James was one of the earliest letters to be written¹, possibly this had reference to the apostolic age and therefore was not for us, even though there is no suggestion of that in the text. This was the beginning of a long study for me.

I believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God. However, translations of that inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God are not inspired, inerrant, nor infallible; which is where my problem stemmed.

A key to understanding this section of Scripture is paying close attention to the word *sick*. What follows is a phrase by phrase analysis of the text at hand.

¹46 AD.

Is anyone among you suffering? The word kakopathei² generally means suffering misfortune. This may be a bad circumstance, an injury or an illness; any physical or emotional problem. **Let him pray.** If you are suffering, sick or hurt, you yourself need to pray concerning the circumstance.

Is anyone cheerful (literally feeling good)? **Let him sing praises.** Psallo is used here. It literally means to sing with a harp.

Is anyone among you weak? Although this word gets translated as *sick* in most translations, a cursory study of other passages with the same word will give you a slightly different meaning. The Greek word used is asthenes and it is used quite often in the New Testament. Here are three prime examples:

I Cor. 11:30 - For this reason many among you are weak (asthenes) and sick (arrostoi) and a number sleep.

Rom. 4:19 - And without becoming weak (astheneo) in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old...

Acts 20:35 - In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak (astheneo) and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

In these three examples we see asthenes used referring to spiritual weakness, weakness in faith, and financial weakness, respectively. The word means weakness in general, so the context of the passage must determine the kind of weakness that is being discussed. It may indeed mean bodily weakness, and often does, but the context must determine what kind of weakness it is. In First Corinthians 11:30 we see a word that more generally means sick: arrostoi³ and it is not used in the James 5 passage (it is used in Mt. 14:14; Mk. 6:5, 13; 16:18). Another word that means sick or feeling bad is the word used in verse 13; kokos. What James seems to be dealing with in verse 14 is a spiritually weak brother; a backslider. Possibly someone who has yielded to the temptations James spoke of in chapter 1. If anyone has become weak in this way, **Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him,**

If you have a physical problem (kokos), you pray. If you have a spiritual problem, you call for the elders and have them pray for you. The elders are the overseers and shepherds (pastors) of the church. It is their responsibility to deal with the spiritual problems of the individual members of the church. That's all part of shepherding. Also, if a spiritually weakened person calls for the elders, this is an indication of repentance. Therefore the elders should pray for restoration.

Understanding this also reinforces the fact that the elders are to be the spiritual leaders of the church. Too many times the elders spend too much of their time concerned with the leak in the roof that they never notice the spiritual growth, or the lack thereof, of those within their flock. Elders need to be (1) men of prayer, for prayer is what brings us to the throne of God and (2) men of concern for those they shepherd, for what kind of shepherd would allow their sheep to roam and not do anything while watching over them? People need to know their elders are concerned

² 3rd person, singular, present indicative of kakopatheo; a verb form of kokos

³ nominative, plural, masculine of arrostos

for them before they will call them for help. And elders need to be (3) men of priorities; how many times have we majored in minors and minored in majors. I dare say that the majority of time in the last elders' meeting, in most of our churches, was spent on the mundane things of everyday church life rather than whether Bro. Joe Schmoe was developing into the Christian he ought to be.

annointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; There are two words used for annointing in the New Testament. The first is chrio which is the official ceremonial annointing (see Lk. 4:18, Acts 4:27; 10:38, II Cor. 1:21, Heb. 1:9). This is what Samuel did with Saul and David. However, this is not the word James uses. He uses the word aleiphein which would be the annointing a person might get when he visits someone's home or the kind of annointing that might be used to clean a wound or to clean someone's hair.⁴

and the prayer offered in faith will save the weary one, the word translated as *save* is the word sosei⁵ which means *save* (which is how the KJV translates it). The NASB translates it as *restore* which is acceptable because it fits the context of the passage. The word *weary* however is translated as *sick* in both the NASB and KJV as well as most other translations. The word used here is not arrostos nor is it asthenes, but is a word used only three times in the New Testament: kamno. The word James uses is kamnonta⁶. Here are the other two passages:

Heb. 12:3 - For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary (kamete: second person, plural, second aorist, subjective of kamno) and lose heart.

Rev. 2:3 - and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary (kekopiakes: second person, singular, perfect, indicative, active of kamno).

The only other use of the word kamno in the New Testament is in James 5:15 and for some reason is translated as *sick* when it should be translated as *weary*. If we place the word *sick* in either of the other two passages that “weary” (kamno) is used, it loses all meaning.

The rest of the book of James deals with restoring a backslider, which is only natural for that is what he has been dealing with since verse 14.

and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. A backslider certainly has sins to repent of and now he has the elders of the church to help him in his repentance and also to pray with him and for him.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, It's hard to backslide when you confess to someone else and they know your sins and also what it is that tempts you.

so that you may be healed. This word *healed* could also be translated as *delivered* or *restored*. It is often translated in the Gospels as *healed* meaning restored to health.

The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, Elijah was not super-human, he was tempted by his circumstances, tempted in many ways to backslide ***and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.*** James says all this to demonstrate the power of prayer,

⁴ The ancients used olive oil to clean their hair. They would put the oil in the hair and use a fine-toothed comb to remove the oil as well as any dirt that might come with it.

⁵ third person, singular, future, indicative, active of sozo

⁶ accusative, singular, masculine, present participle of kamno

for it is prayer and repentance that restores the backslider. *And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins. James concludes his short letter by telling of the nobility of trying to restore the backslider. He does not give us some magic formula for healing a person on their deathbed. He instead tells us how to deal with a person who is headed for eternal death because they have given up on the God of life.

If the church is to regain her backsliders and see continued growth, instead of constantly trying to replace the people we lose, we need Biblical elders who know the power of prayer, the people they lead, and what's important as opposed to what's not.