

The Book of James

Chapter One: (Swift to Hear) “The Man Who Endures Temptation”

Key Verse: 1:12 “*Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.*”

Applications:

1. The man who endures (*hupomeno*—bears up under) temptation is blessed (*makarios*—to share God’s happiness, Mat. 5:3–12) in this life (cf. Mat. 6:10; Rom. 14:17).
2. This one will ultimately be approved (*dokimos*—to pass the test) at the Bema Seat of Jesus Christ (Rom. 14:10–12; 1 Co. 3:11–15; 2 Co. 5:10).
3. He will then receive the crown of life at the Bema/Judgment Seat (Rev. 2:10).

How Can We Endure?

1. We must understand the plan of God at work in our sufferings, verses 1–4.
 - A. Consider those “*scattered*,” verse 1; Act 8:1–4; Rom. 8:28.
 - B. If we “know” this, we can “*count it all joy*” (*hegeomai*—reckon, consider it a fact).
 - C. Trials test and purify our faith (1 Pe. 1:5–9), resulting in maturity (Rom. 5:1–5).
 - D. The ‘perfect work’ is conformity to Jesus Christ, (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4: 13; 2 Co. 3:18).
2. We must learn to ask for, and act on, the gift of divine wisdom, verses 5–8.
 - A. Trials reveal our lack (*leipomai*—to be found wanting) of wisdom (*sophia*), verse 5.
 - B. We are to ask our “always-giving” God for it, verse 5 (note verse 17).
 - C. The promise is that “It will be given,” a promise of certain future fulfillment.
 - D. If we doubt, are double-minded (*dipsychos*), we will receive nothing, verses 6–8.
3. We must learn to live life from our spiritual, not our social, position, verses 9–11.
 - A. The lowly believer is exalted in Christ, while the rich is humbled. Their standing in Christ is equal, but their orientation is opposite (Luk. 3:5; 14:11).
 - B. The pursuits of the rich (*poreia*—way, modus operandi) will fade (wither away).
4. We must be cognizant of the wiles of the devil and our own sin nature, verses 13–15.
 - A. God is never the author of temptation, only of testing (Gen. 22:1).
 - B. The real culprit is our own lust trends, “*desires for pleasure*” (Jam. 4:1, 1 Jo. 2:15–17).
 - C. Satan “fishes” (*deleazo*: present, middle-voice, participle) for a sinful response to his “bait” (temptation).
 - D. Temptation and lust unite to bear sin, and sin—when grown—bears death (Rom. 8:6, 13).
5. We must be firm on the truth of God’s nature and methods, verses 16–18.
 - A. The devil’s chief work is deception about the nature of God, verse 16; (Job 1:11, 2:4).
 - B. The truth is that God is infinite good and can only give good gifts (Psa. 25:8, 100:5).
 - C. The greatest proof is that He gave us new birth as His children (Luk. 19:10; Tit. 3:5).
6. We must learn the biblical way to meet and overcome trials, verses 19–21.
 - A. We must focus on God’s Word, restrain our tongue, and avoid angry response.
 - B. This is in essence the outline of the book, (1) chapters 1–2; (2) chapter 3; and (3) chapters 4–5.
 - C. We must cleanse the vessel of our souls, and then fill it with the implanted Word.
7. We must become “*doers of the Word and not hearers only*,” verses 22–27.
 - A. It is a deception (*paralogizomai*—to reason beside) to think hearing alone brings growth.
 - B. The ‘mirror’ of the Word reveals our true identity (*genesis*) in Christ Jesus by faith.
 - C. We must “*abide*” (Joh. 8:31) in the “law of liberty” (Rom. 8:2) to be changed, blessed.
 - D. The assumption of spirituality is useless without “*faith working through love*,” (Gal. 5:5–6).

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Chapter Two: (Swift to Hear) “The Doer Lives by the Law of Liberty”

Key Verse: 2:12–13 “*So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*”

Applications:

1. The Church-Age believer lives under the “*law of liberty*” (Jam. 1:25; Rom. 8:2; 2 Co. 3:17; Gal. 5:1, 13). This is the law of the indwelling Spirit of God who enables us to do the will of God from the heart.
2. It is the “*law of the Spirit of life in Christ*” (Rom. 8:2) by which we will be judged (2 Co. 5:10).
3. This judgment will determine what is rewardable from our life (1 Co. 3:11–15; Jam. 1:12).
4. The criteria of judgment is love, which is expressed in mercy (Mat. 9:13; Eph. 2:4–7).
5. Jesus said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*” (Mat. 5:7, Luk. 6:36–38).
6. The law of liberty, which is enablement to love and be merciful, should guide every word and deed.

How Shall We Live so as to Triumph in the Judgment?

1. Let us believe in, and act on, our essential unity in Christ above social distinctions, verses 1–7.
 - A. Partiality among Christians is a denial of our “one-ness” in Christ. “*Partiality*” (verse 1) is from two words combined to mean “to receive according to the face” or “to show regard based on one’s appearance.”
 - B. Judging according to appearance is based on “*evil thoughts*,” verse 4.
 - C. God chooses the “*poor in spirit*” (Mat. 5:3) who abound in faith.
2. Let us recognize the power and preeminence of the law of Christ, verses 8–11.

The “*royal law*” is the law of the kingdom (Lev. 19:18). To live up to it is to do “*well*” (honorable). But violation of one point of the old law is to break it all. The “old” law is our “*tutor*” to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:22-25). In Christ, we are called to a higher law, the law of liberty, which is “*the law of the Spirit of life in Christ*” (Rom. 8:2). It is this law believers will be judged by, and it is a law of love and mercy (cf. Mat. 5:43–48; Luk. 6:27–38; Rom.13:8–10; 1 Co. 13:4–8).
3. Let us live in the power of the Spirit of God who indwells us, verses 12–13.

Only as we are “*filled with the Spirit*” (Eph. 5:18) and “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16) do we obey the “law of liberty” (Rom. 8:2). Thus we “*walk by faith*” (2 Co. 5:7), living in the liberty of surrender to the Spirit of God (2 Co. 3:17–18). Only in this way are we enabled to show mercy (Jam. 3:17).
4. Let us be convicted that faith without works is dead, verses 14–17.

Many believers live lives of carnality. Saving faith is often not followed by living faith. They are believers, but not disciples. Living faith is moment-by-moment surrender and dependence on the Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). By faith we “yield” to God (Rom. 6:13), offering our life to Him (Rom. 12:1). Such a life of faith “works through love” (Gal. 5:6, 13), “*the fruit of the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:22–23). This faith will “save” us from failing to show love and mercy (verses 14–15).
5. Let us follow the example of the heroes of our faith, verses 18–26.

These examples show that James is not speaking of our faith at salvation. Both Abraham and Rahab were already saved by faith when they took these actions. Had either of them failed to take these actions, their faith would have been “dead” functionally. We call this “dead orthodoxy”—right belief without right action. James tells us that when we “live by faith” our “*works*” (Eph. 2:10) that result from faith actually lead to “perfection,” that is “maturity.” We are “justified” before God by faith alone, without works (Rom. 4:3–5; Eph. 2:8–9). But our profession of faith is “justified” before men (note “*you see*,” verses 22, 24) when faith produces works consistent with faith (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14). Such faith is profitable and useful (v.14, 16).

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Chapter Three: (Slow to Speak) “The Power of the Wisdom From Above”

Key Verse: 3:17-18 *“but the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

Application:

1. There is a wisdom that comes from above and a pseudo-wisdom from below.
2. The first mark of the wisdom that comes from God is personal purity.
3. The seven qualities of divine wisdom reflect God’s nature (Isa. 11:2–3; 2 Pe. 1:4).
4. The work of wisdom is becoming a “peacemaker” (Mat. 5:9), by sowing the seed of peace (the Gospel) and bearing the fruit of righteousness (Christ-conformity).
5. This wisdom is the “doing” of the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

How Can We Lay Hold of Wisdom?

1. It begins by recognizing that we lack it, and asking God to give it to us, Jam. 1:5.
2. Then it requires receiving the Word in faith, that it may be engrafted in us, Jam. 1:21.
3. Conformity to Christ then makes us “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath.”
4. The control of the tongue is the test of true spirituality, verses 1–12 (Mat. 12:34).
 - A. The position of “teacher” is not to be sought. Teachers are “God-gifted.”
 - B. Only under the control of the Spirit is the tongue rightly guided, verses 2–4.
 - C. Apart from the Spirits’ control the tongue unleashes hell on earth, verses 5–8.
 - D. The sinful tongue reveals the duplicity of the carnal soul, verses 9–12.
5. The tongue reveals the wisdom, or pseudo-wisdom, that is in the heart, verses 13–18.
 - A. Genuine wisdom is revealed by gracious word and humble conduct, verse 13. Compare passages such as Jam. 2:12; Luk. 14:34; Col. 4:6; Rom. 8:9–14.
 - B. Pseudo-wisdom is notable for its self exaltation, envy, boasting, etc., verses 14–16. Throughout James, the contrast is between the “hearer only” and the “doer.” The hearer loves to assume an air of spiritual superiority. This is used as a cover for lack of true maturity.
6. Since the tongue cannot be tamed by man (verse 8), it can only speak true wisdom when the Spirit is in control (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16). This wisdom is the gift of God (Jam. 1:5) and is characterized by Christ-conformity, verses 17–18.
 - A. First, it is pure. The word *hagnos* implies spiritual integrity, not duplicitous.
 - B. “Peaceable” is *eirenike*, meaning “peace-promoting” (Mat. 5:9; 2 Co. 5:20).
 - C. “Gentle” is *epieikes*, submitting to injustice, trusting God (Phi. 4:5; 2 Co. 10:1).
 - D. “Willing to yield” is *eupeithes*, surrendered to God, pliable, compliant.
 - E. “Full of mercy and good fruits” is the idea of amplitude, bounty in merciful and Christ-like deeds. (cf. Mat. 5:43–48; Luk. 6:27–38 and Eph. 4:32).
 - F. Finally, two negatives: (1) wisdom is not duplicitous; and (2) it does not show partiality, nor is it hypocritical. There is integrity or agreement between one’s words and one’s actions.
7. Finally, true wisdom is occupied in sowing the Gospel, ministering reconciliation, and edifying fellow believers. This is the “peacemaker” of Mat. 5:9, the “ambassador” of 2 Co. 5:18–20, and faith working through love as in Gal. 5:6, 13 and 1 Co. 13:4–8.

“He who wins souls is wise,” (Pro. 11:30).
“Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

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Chapter Four: (Slow to Wrath) “The Path of Recovery From a Life of Hypocrisy”

Key Verse: 4:17 *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it to him it is sin.”*

Applications:

1. The Epistle of James sets in clear contrast the doer of the Word versus the hearer.
2. The hearer knows the Scripture and assumes spiritual maturity on that fact.
3. However, the “hearer only” is not being transformed into the likeness of Christ.
4. The word “knows” is from *oida*—a full and complete knowledge (well instructed).
5. “Good” here is *kalon*—that which is noble, honorable, useful, and beautiful.
6. The “doer of the Word” is one who “adorns the doctrine of God,” (Tit. 2:10).
7. To live by the truth is to walk in *“the beauty of holiness”* (Psa. 29:2; 96:9).

How Can We Escape the Hypocrisy of Dead-Orthodoxy?

1. Recognize the principle: No man *“can serve two masters,”* verses 1–4 (Mat. 6:24).
Your life cannot be ruled by Christ and self at the same time. The phrase *“desires for pleasure”* is *hedone* from which we get “hedonism”—the exaltation of pleasure. Selfish ambition creates strife, slander, and hatred (Jam. 3:16, 4:1-2). Our prayer life goes out the window, as we conform to the world in our pursuits (Rom. 12:2; 1 Jo. 2:15–17). Remember Lot and his wife (Luk. 17:32; 2 Pe. 2:8).
2. Be willing to submit to the Spirit in genuine repentance, verses 5–10.
This is one of the most comprehensive illustrations of repentance and recovery from carnality in the Bible. It parallels the experience of the prodigal son (Luk. 15:17–24). The “greater grace” is the abundance of grace above and beyond salvation (Rom. 5:17, 20). Arrogance is the root of all sin (Isa. 14:13–14), and God wars against the proud (verse 4; Rom. 8:7). Let’s illustrate the process.
 - A. Step One: The decision to let go of pride, and humble one’s self so as to receive grace.
 - B. Step Two: Submission to God, accompanied by resistance to the devil. (Since surrender brings dependence on the Spirit, we are enabled to resist.
 - C. Step Three: As we begin to draw near to God, we find Him meeting us over half way. Remember how the Father of the prodigal ran to meet his son?
 - D. Step Four: Cleansing takes place in the heart by confession (1 Jo. 1:9), and in the hands by correction (see Eph. 4:20–32, another illustration of this process).
 - E. Step Five: As we “let” Him work, the Holy Spirit turns previous carnal delights into cause for mourning (Mat.5:4). Our “want to” (will) is changed from the inside out (Phi. 2:12–13).
 - F. The end result of genuine repentance is a right and “humble” stance in His presence, resulting in His sure and promised blessing and elevation (Job 22:29; Psa. 113:7; Luk. 1:53).
3. Leave all judgment in the hands of Jesus Christ, the only true Judge, verses 11–12.
When we malign and slander others, we are assuming the status of a judge (Jam. 2:4). Since the judge must have all the facts in the case, we assume an attitude of omniscience. We make ourselves above the law. But even the law of Moses condemned tale-bearing (Lev. 19:16), and false witness (Exo. 20:16). Christ alone is a true and just Judge, He alone can “save and destroy.”
4. Live in humble submission to the will of God for your life, verses 13-17.
Our plans all too often ignore the will of God. We make our “five-year plan” without seeking His will. Whereas verse 13 shows meticulous planning, verses 14–15 reveal the spiritual flaw. When we plan without prayer, we boast in our arrogance. We know we should submit all plans to God, but don’t do it. Thus, again, the “hearer only” knows, but does not “do,” and this is evil.

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Chapter Five: (Slow to Wrath) “The Path of Patience Reinforced”

Key verse: 5:11 *“Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.”*

Applications:

1. James reminds us that faith-endurance results in blessing (cf. Jam. 1:12; Mat. 5:1–12).
2. The idea of “patience” in this section speaks of what we call “faith-rest.” James uses two words (*makrothumeo*, verses 7–10 and; *hupomeno*, verse 11) to illustrate control of the temper and endurance under pressure.
3. The “blessing” returns to the promise of Jam. 1:12, and the path of endurance is outlined in the Beatitudes of Mat. 5:1–12 (the way of discipleship, not of salvation).
4. Again, both Job and James are the earliest books of their respective Testaments. Both deal with the problem of suffering and the providence of God.
5. The first six verses complete the “slow to wrath” section; verse 7 onward is the summary or conclusion of the argument.

The End of the “Hearer Only”: Chapter 5:1-6

1. The book of James follows an ancient teaching method, very obvious in Proverbs, of setting before us two paths: the path of blessing and the path of cursing.
2. In James, the path of blessing is that of the “doer of the Word”; the path of cursing is that of the “hearer only.” The book is dealing primarily with believers.
3. Because the “hearer only” is a “friend of the world” (Jam. 4:4), he makes himself an “enemy of God,” bringing divine discipline and self-induced cursing on himself.
4. As a “friend of the world,” the “hearer only” lives in the pursuit of wealth and pleasure, bringing on himself the self-induced miseries of verses 1–6 (cf. 1 Ti. 6:9, 17 with Jam. 1:10–11; Luk. 6:24, 12:21). Mat. 6:33 gives the perspective of the “doer.”
5. Note that in verses 1–6, the rich man *“also will fade away in his pursuits”* (Jam. 1:11). The phrase *“come now”* (Jam. 4:13, 5:1) in both cases addresses “hearer only” believers.
6. The “love of money is a root of all evil” (1 Ti. 6:10), and we *“cannot serve God and mammon”* (Mat. 6:24). Money is a great slave but a terrible master!
7. These verses are a warning to believers in America who have come to believe that we are blessed with prosperity because we “deserve it.” The suffering saints of the third world are in a far better spiritual condition than we are.

Let this be a call to each of us to evaluate our priorities!

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Summary: Chapter 5:7–20: Final Exhortation to be “Doers of the Word”

1. Follow the example of the farmer, verses 7–8.
 - A. Keep the “harvest” in view, the coming of the Lord (Tit. 2:13–14; 1 Jo. 2:28–29). Live in light of His return (2 Ti. 4:7–8, Tit. 2:11–14).
 - B. The word “*patient*” is *makrothumeo*, and suggests control over the temper.
 - C. To “*establish*” (*sterizo*) our hearts implies the stabilizing effect of reliance on the power of God’s Word while under the control of the Holy Spirit (Joh. 6:63; Rom. 8:9–11; 2 Co. 3:17–18).

2. Follow the example of the prophets, verses 9–12.

James stresses judging as evidence of carnality (Jam. 2:4, 4:11). Rather, we should imitate Job, who endured without sinning with his tongue (Job 1:22, 2:10). “*Patience*” here means the ability to “suffer-long.” Patience—not “grumbling” and “swearing”—will bring “*the end intended by the Lord.*”

3. Utilize the power of prayer to become a doer of the Word, verses 13–20.

Prayer is mentioned seven times in this section. It is implied in both the “singing” (verse 13b) and the “saving” of verse 20. The example of verses 14–16 shows the “power” of prayer (verse 16b–18), and how we may “save” a fellow believer from “death,” whether functional (Jam. 2:17, 26) or physical (Act 5:5, 10; 1 Co. 5:5; 1 Jo. 5:16). Thus James proves his initial point, “*the implanted Word which is able to save your souls*” (Jam. 1:21). The focus of this epistle is not evangelism, but spiritual Christian living.

The exhortation of Book of James is to be a Doer of the Word and not a Hearer only!