

The Book of James Chapter 1

James has one theme "Perfection" which ties every word of it into a cohesive whole. This theme was stated at the outset in James 1:4, thus: "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." So in this first chapter we will be taught to be perfect in: (1) be joyful in trials (James 1:2-4); (2) in ignorance and uncertainties, let the Christian pray in faith without doubting (James 1:5-8); (3) in money matters the rich and the poor alike are to rejoice at their new status in Christ (James 1:9-11); (4) God is not to be blamed for temptations, but the source of temptation must be recognized as lying within Christians themselves; (5) anger and wrath are to be suppressed (James 1:19-20); and (6) it is not hearing God's word but the hearing and doing of it that lead to perfection (James 1:21-27). The writer of James is called by Paul and Josephus the brother of Jesus.

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

... a servant of God ... Paul, Timothy, Peter, Jude, and *E-pa-phras* were all called servant. The New Testament word for each being *dou-los*, meaning "one born into slavery"; thus every such usage of it indicates that such a servant was a "born again" Christian. The Old Testament Hebrew word for "servant" ~` *e-bed* was the title by which "the greatest ones of the Old Testament were known. "Moses, Caleb, Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Zechariah were all called "servants of God."

This letter is directed to "the Twelve Tribes of Israel

... scattered abroad ... a dedication which shows that it was designed for the instruction of Jewish Christians scattered abroad among the Gentile countries.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations,

... My brethren ... This expression occurs "sixteen times" in the book of James, absolutely demanding that the letter be accepted as Christian.

When James wrote, secular Israel had long ago hardened into hatred of Christ.

... Count it all joy ... Stumbling blocks can become stepping stones.

Acts 14: 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, [*and*] exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God

Did not Christ say cf:

Matthew 5:11-12 Blessed are ye, when [*men*] shall revile you, and persecute [*you*], and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [*is*] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

So ... Count it all joy ... Instead of murmuring over trials and temptations, rejoice in them. Maturity in Christ not age allows us to see our trials as a joy.

... divers temptations ... or manifold over and over again temptations. The word *pie-tras-mos* trials has two meanings: first, external adversities as it is used here, and second, inner impulse to evil, which we will deal with later in James 1:12-14.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

James 1:3 Knowing [*this*], that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

... the trying of your faith ... by persecution and temptation we are strengthened by trials we learn to overcome.

... the trying of your faith ... Trials puts our Christianity to the proof. The man that stands in such trials gives proof that his religion is for real, and the evidence that is given to his own mind helps him to greater faith and to take courage, to bear his trials, and patiently persevere to the end.

I Corinthians 10: 13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God [*is*] faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear [*it*].

James 1:4 But let patience have [*her*] perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

...let patience have her perfect work ... Let endurance work out its complete results, that nothing may be wanting in your lives

Continue faithfully, and your patience will be crowned with its full reward. For in this sense is (εργον) er-gon which we translate work, should be understood. It is gain from labor, a reward for services performed; the

... perfect work ... is the full reward.

...that ye may be perfect and entire ... Fully instructed, in every part of the teaching of God, and holiness may be complete.

Christians must do their very best to achieve whatever degree of perfection is possible, whatever is lacking to be made up by Christ himself

Colossians 1:28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

These expressions are taken from the Greek Olympic games: the man was τελειος, perfect, who in any of the athletic exercises had got the victory; he was ολοκληρος , entire, having everything complete, who had the victory in the pen-th-at-lon, in each of the five exercises.

The expressions are also used to describe the sacrifices under the law. A victim was τελειος , perfect, that was perfectly sound, having no disease; it was ολοκληρος , entire, if it had all its members, no abnormality. Be then to the Lord what he required his sacrifices to be; let your whole heart, your body, soul, and spirit, be sanctified to the Lord of hosts, that he may fill you with all his fullness.

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all [*men*] liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

... If any of you lack wisdom ... This may be one of the things we want. If so, go to God for it.

Wisdom signifies in general knowledge of the best end, and the best means of attaining it; but in Scripture it signifies the same as true religion, the thorough practical knowledge of God, of one's self, and of a Savior.

... Let him ask of God ... Because God is the only teacher of this wisdom.

...that giveth to all men liberally ... His people He will hear, and in answer to their requests He will giveth liberally, and He never upbraideth on account of their requests as men so often do.

God has his means for giving additional wisdom. This is his word. Wisdom does not come down out of the sky, we are not struck with it like lightning. God's Spirit instructs, enlightens, makes wise by means of the word.

II Timothy 3:15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus

II Timothy 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The ancient Greek maxim appears at first view strange, but it is literally true: -

“The knowledge of ignorance is the beginning of knowledge.”

James 1:6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

... let him ask in faith ... Let him ask in faith. This is an essential condition to prevailing prayer.

Mark 11:23-26 For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. 24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive [*them*], and ye shall have [*them*]. 25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. Also Matt. 21:21ff.

I John 5:14 And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:

1:6 ... nothing wavering ... having no doubt concerning the truth of these principles. No man can believe too much good of God.

... Is like a wave of the sea ... The man who is not thoroughly persuaded that if he ask of God he shall receive, resembles a wave of the sea; he is in a state of continual agitation;

... driven by the wind, and tossed ... now rising by hope, then sinking by despair.

James 1:7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

... Let not that man think ... The man whose mind is divided, who is not properly persuaded either of his own need or God's ability to fill it. Such persons may pray, but having no faith, they can get no answer.

James 1:8 A double minded man [is] unstable in all his ways.

A double-minded man - Ανηρ διψυχος: The Greek is literally: The man of two souls, who has one for earth, and another for heaven; who wishes to secure both worlds; he will not give up earth, he is scared to let go of heaven and yet he can have but one or the other.

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Deuteronomy 26:17 Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice:

“Behold, the Scripture exhorts the Israelites, and tells them when they pray, lo yi-yeh la-hem she-tey le-ba-both , that they should not have two hearts, one for the holy blessed God, and one for something else.” A man of this character is continually distracted; he will neither let earth nor heaven go.

James 1:9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:

... Let the brother of low degree ... The poor, destitute Christian, this refers to the poor, the slave, the bottom of the social ladder; and the perfection which may be attained by any such disadvantaged person is achieved in his realization of his exalted status as a Christian. Christianity brings to every man what he needs ... the despised poor learn self-respect ... you may glory in the cross of Christ, and the blessed hope laid up for you as kings in heaven. Paul said of this paradox cf:

I Corinthians 7: 22 For he that is called in the Lord, [*being*] a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, [*being*] free, is Christ's servant.

James 1:10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.

... But the rich, in that he is made low ... Greek In his humiliation - in his being brought to the foot of the cross to receive, as a poor and miserable sinner,

redemption through the blood of the cross: and especially let him rejoice in this, because all outward glory is only as the flower of the field, will wither and perish.

James 1:11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

... For the sun is no sooner risen ... Just this quickly shall the glory of the rich man fade. All human things are temporary they rise and fall, or increase and decrease. The sun by its genial heat nourishes and supports all plants and animals; but when it arises with a burning heat, the vegetation withers and dies. Earthly possessions are subject to similar passing.

James 1:12 Blessed [is] the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ... He that endures and continues faithful shall have the crown.

The Jews say: "Blessed is the man she-ha-yah omed ben-is-yo-no who stands in his temptation" for there is no man whom God does not try. He tries the rich, to see if they will open their hands to the poor. He tries the poor, to see if they will receive affliction and not murmur. If, therefore, the rich stand in his temptation, and give alms to the poor, he shall enjoy his riches in this world, and his horn shall be exalted in the world to come, and the holy blessed God shall deliver him from the punishment of hell. If the poor stand in his temptation, and do not kick back, he shall have double in the world to come."

... he shall receive the crown of life ... again an allusion to the Grecian games. He was crowned who won and none else.

I Corinthians 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

... The crown of life ... that is promised here, of course, is eternal life and cannot be anything other than the "crown of righteousness" mentioned by Paul in II Timothy 4:8,

James 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

...Let no man say ... Some men when they fall try to throw the blame on God, as if God had tempted them. It is impossible that God be tempted of sin, nor does he ever tempt men to sin.

The word temptation has two meanings First: solicitation to sin, and Second: trial from provi-dential situation or circumstances.

James here is taking up the word in the sin sense. says:

... Let no man say, when he is tempted (solicited to sin), I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he (thus) any man ... In Genesis we see the fact of Adam's blaming Eve for his sin, with the implied element of blaming God also, "the woman thou gavest me"; and from that day until now, man has loved to blame the Creator for all of his troubles.

James 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

... But every man is tempted ... But every man is tempted when he allows his own lusts to lead and entice him.

There can be no temptation unless something within us causes a sinful desire.

We are successfully solicited to sin,

... when he is drawn away of his own lust ... These are primarily hunting and fishing words, used metaphorically here. It was the beauty of the forbidden fruit that acted as a lure for Eve, the bait, which caused her to be caught upon the hook of sin. Christians should learn to exercise skill in rejecting the alluring "bait" with which Satan baits his trap of enslavement to sin.

... drawn away by his own lust and enticed ... But In these words, in Greek there is a double metaphor:

The first referring to the dragging a fish out of the water by a hook which it had swallowed, because concealed by a bait;

The second, to the enticements of impure women, who draws away and snares a man to their own ruin.

Illicit sexual sin the writer has clearly in mind and every word that he uses refers to something of this nature, as the following verse shows.

James 1:15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

This is one of the boldest and most dramatic metaphors in the Bible. Restated, it means lust has a child named sin; and sin, as soon as it grows up, has a baby named death! The word here translated `bringeth forth' is an animal word for birth; and it means that sin spawns death.

James 1:16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

... Do not err ... Either about the source of sin.

By supposing that God is the author of sin, or that he impels any man to commit sin.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above ... All gifts that truly bless us are God's gifts.

... Father of lights ... God, the Creator of every light of the material world, and the source of all moral and spiritual light.

... With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning....

God is unchangeable, always the same, nor does he cast a shadow of turning like the sun. The allusion is to the constantly changing shadows of objects in the sunlight caused by the movement, of the earth not the sun. But

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

... Of his own will begat he us ... we are not an accident, but our birth as children of God was due to His eternal will. God had a plan before the foundation of the world.

... begat he us with the word of truth ... the word of the truth of the Gospel, is the means which God uses to convert souls.

Colossians 1:5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

... a kind of first fruits ... These early Christians were called first fruits because they were a guarantee of many more Christians to come.

... of His creatures ... we are here to understand the Gentiles, and by first fruits the Jews, to whom the Gospel was first sent; and those of them that believed were the first fruits of that astonishing harvest which God has since reaped over the whole Gentile world.

James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:

... Swift to hear ... Let each saint hear and learn, but be careful not to speak rashly, and especially in anger.

**Talk little and work much, is a rabbinical saying:
The righteous speak little, and do much;
the wicked speak much, and do nothing.**

... Slow to wrath ... "There are four kinds of dispositions," say the Jews: First, Those who are easily angry, and easily pacified; these gain on one hand, and lose on the other. Secondly, Those who are not easily angered, but are difficult to be appeased; these lose on the one hand, and gain on the other. Thirdly, Those who are difficult to be angry, and are easily appeased; these are the good. Fourthly, Those who are easily angered, and difficult to be appeased; these are the wicked." Those who are hasty in speech are generally of a peevish or angry disposition. A person who is careful to consider what he says, is not likely to be soon angry.

James 1:20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

The wrath of man ... An angry man will show forth something very different from God's righteousness.

James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

... All filthiness ... This word in the Greek signifies any impurity that cleaves to the body; but applied to the mind, it implies all impure and unholy affections, such as those spoken of James 1:15, which pollute the soul.

... Superfluity of naughtiness ... The Greek clause means overflowing of wickedness.

The ingrafted word ... In the parable of the sower Jesus said:

Luke 8:11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

That is the teaching of N.T. Christianity which has been planted in your heart.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

James 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

... But be ye doers of the word ... He who is only a hearer deceiveth himself.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

... and not hearers only, ... They had heard this doctrine; they had believed it; but they had put it to no practical use. They were downright lazy and lukewarm who had a sort of stupid do nothing, inactive faith in the place of serving God and others. This will be evident in the second chapter.

... Deceiving your own selves ... Imposing on your own selves by sophisticated arguments; this is the meaning of the words. They had reasoned themselves into a state of worldly carnal “eternal security of the saints”, and the object of James is, to awake them up out of their sleep.

James 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

... Beholding his natural face in a glass ... This metaphor is very simple. A man wishes to see his own face, and how he looks. So he looks into a mirror, by which his real face with all its warts is seen. He is affected with his own appearance; he sees spots, dirt, and impurities, that might be removed. While he continues to look into the mirror he is affected, and decides to clean himself up and forms the desire of doing what he can to clean himself up.

But on going away he soon forgets how dirty of person he was, because the mirror is now removed, and his face is no longer reflected to himself; and he no longer remembers how bad he appeared.

James 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

The point of the comparison is this: Like a man who looks in the glass and soon forgets the impression, so the impression of the word on such a man is soon forgotten. The word must be impressed by the doing of it.

James 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth [therein], he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

... But whoso looketh into the perfect law ... The word which we translate looketh into, is very emphatic, and signifies that deep and attentive consideration given to a thing or subject which a man cannot bring up to his eyes, and therefore must bend his back and neck, stooping down, that he may see it better.

... The perfect law of liberty ... must mean the Gospel; it is a law, for it imposes obligations from God, and prescribes a rule of life; and it punishes transgressors, and rewards the obedient.

... And continueth ... Takes time to see and examine the state of his soul, the grace of his God, the extent of his duty, and the height of the promised glory. The metaphor here is taken from those Ladies who spend much time at their mirror, in order that they may decorate themselves to the greatest advantage, and not leave one hair, or the smallest ornament, out of its place.

... He being not a forgetful hearer ... This seems to be a reference to

Deuteronomy 4:9 Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

... Shall be blessed in his deed ...

it is said: "There are four kinds of men who visit the synagogues,

- 1.He who enters but does not work - an indifferent character**
- 2.He who works but does not enter - an indifferent character**
- 3.He who enters and works - the righteous man**

4.He who neither enters nor works - wholly evil.

James 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion [*/s*] vain.

... Seem to be religious ... It is clear from this that James was addressing this letter to self-deceived people who in some manner had accepted the proposition that they were saved without the doing or practice of true Christianity. What was their fallacy? It could well have been that of imagining that they were "saved through faith only." That they were indeed believers is perfectly clear from the fact that they thought they were religious and were deceived into thinking that their conduct was unrelated to their salvation.

... "If anyone says he is a Christian, but doesn't control his sharp tongue, he is just fooling himself, and his religion isn't worth much

The words which we translate religious and religion, are used both to signify true religion, and superstitious false religion.

... Bridleth not his tongue ... He who speaks not according to the oracles of God, whatever pretenses he makes to religion, only shows, by his lacking of scriptural knowledge, that his

... religion is vain ... false, or empty of solid truth, of no profit to others, and no good to himself. Such a person should bridle his tongue, put the bit in his mouth; and particularly if he be a professed teacher of religion; no matter where he has studied, or what else he has learned, if he has not learned the Gospel, the faith and New Testament Christianity he can never teach it.

And pure religion true Christianity is of such a nature that no man can learn it but by experience; he who does not feel the doctrine of God to be the power of God to the salvation of his soul, can neither teach religion, nor act according to its dictates, because he is an unconverted, un-renewed man.

If he be old, let him retire to the desert, and pray to God for light; if he be in the prime of life, let him turn his attention to some honest calling; if he be young, let him tarry at a real Church of Christ till his beard grows.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, [*and*] to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Pure religion, and undefiled ... Combining pure hearts and pure outward lives.

James' definition refers to the effects of pure religion than to its nature. The life of God in the soul of man, producing love to God and man, will show itself in the acts which James mentions here.

Matthew 22:35-40 Then one of them, [*which was*] a lawyer, asked [*him a question*], tempting him, and saying, 36 Master, which [*is*] the great commandment in the law? 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second [*is*] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

... pure and undefiled ... In the Greek are supposed to have reference to a diamond or precious stone, whose perfection consists in its being free from flaws; not cloudy, but like pure clear water.

True religion is the ornament of the soul, and its effects, the ornament of the life.

... To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction ... this is an synecdoche. James did not here limit true religion to concern for the fatherless and the widows, but he made these two to be a figure including the totality of the Christian obligation.

Works of Love, charity and mercy are the proper fruits of religion; and none are more especially the objects of charity and mercy than the orphans and widows.

False religion may perform acts of mercy and charity; but its motives not being pure, and its principle being defiled, the flesh, self, and hypocrisy, spot the man, and spot his acts. True religion does not merely give something for the relief of the distressed, but it visits them, it takes the oversight of them, it takes them under its care; so επισκεπτεσθαι means.

Matthew 25:31-36 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [*his*] sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

When King James authorized his translation of the Bible in 1611 he insisted the translators keep the Catholic words such as "bishop" Greek: "episkopos." To understand the real meaning of an elder or bishop all we need do is look at how "episkopos" is translated when it is not talking about an elder or bishop. Every time the translators translate the word as "visit" or "visited" There are many more examples but to quote a few: "I was sick and ye VISITED (episkopos) me Matthew 25:36; "and in prison and ye VISITED (episkopos) me not" Matthew 25:43

This is the very nature of God "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel for He hath VISITED (episkopos) and redeemed His people." Luke 1:68 also Luke 1:78 & 7:16; Would it do any good for such an "elder or bishop" to half way practice his duties as an elder or bishop such as: James 1:27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the father is this, to VISIT (episkopos) the fatherless and widows in their affliction ..."

It visits them in hospitals and prisons ... and speaks to their hearts; it relieves their wants, sympathizes with them in their distresses, instructs them in Divine things and recommends them to God. And all this it does for the Lord's sake. This is the religion of Christ.

The religion that does not prove itself by works of charity and mercy is not of God.

According to his promise, we look for a new heaven and a new earth; a fixed, permanent, and endless state of things; an everlasting sabbath to all the works of God.

... [*and*] to keep himself unspotted from the world ... means to be free from the vices commonly practiced by mankind."ⁱ

Sources: theWord.com for the KJV Bible, B. W. Johnson's Peoples New Testament Commentary, Clarke's Commentary & Coffman's Commentaries.