

FAITH IN JAMES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR 21ST CENTURY DISCIPLESHIP

An Exposition of the Epistle of James

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Author: Most evangelical scholars accept James, the oldest half-brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3) and brother of Jude (Matt. 13:55), the author of the epistle of Jude (Jude 1), as the author of this epistle.

He had at first rejected Jesus as the Messiah (John 7:5), but later believed (1Cor. 15:7). Afterward, he became the Key-Leader in the Jerusalem Church (cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:12). He was one of the "Pillars of the Church," along with Peter and John (Gal. 2:9).

He was given the nick name of "**James the Just** because of his devotion to righteousness" (MacArthur Study Bible). Flavius Josephus, the Jewish Historian, says he was martyred around A.D. 62. (others say about 66 A.D.)

James' Audience/Recipients: The recipients of this book were most likely Jewish believers who were scattered, according to the reference, "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (1:1). They were most probably scattered as a result of the **persecution** that began with Stephen's martyrdom (Acts 7, c. A.D. 31-34) and continued by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12, c. A.D. 44).

Historical and Theological Themes: James is the "First Christian document that was given to the world, the earliest of all the New Testament Scripture..."; it is regarded similar to the book of *Proverbs* because of its direct, forceful statements on **wise living**. James stresses a **godly** behavior and a **complete** and practical obedience to God's Word.

Primary Distinctive of James (that which makes James stands out from other books): The book of James is called "The Book of Practical Christianity," "The Book of Christian Wisdom" and a "how-to book" on Christian living. James stresses how Christians should ACT within the Church and the Society, rather than what we say. Thus 2:14-26 calls our "Faith" a **dead** faith if it is not shown through *good works*—works that meet the needs of others.

James' emphasis on *action-faith* has caused a serious interpretive challenge, so that many great theologians, including the German theologian, Martin Luther, have interpreted it as teaching a "Justification [salvation] by works," and thus opposing Paul's "justification [salvation] by Faith" alone (Rom. 4:1-5:2; Gal. 2:11-21; Eph. 2:4-10).

Another section that has caused an interpretive challenge is James' promise of **healing** in 5:13-18. Two questions arise: (1) does this refer to **spiritual** healing, or (2) does this refer to **physical healing**? As we study through James, we shall attempt to address these theological challenges, by God's grace, and apply the message of the Book as would be necessary.

Key Word / Key Idea of James: A careful reading of the Book reveals that all that the author has said center around the “FAITH” of the Christian Disciple. What then is this “FAITH”?

Let’s now begin our study by defining “Faith” in James.

I. The Definition of the ‘Faith’ in James.

James seems to define “Faith” as being more than a mere “belief” in the existence of Jesus or God, because even the demons have such “faith” (2:19).

James’ “Faith” is the INWARD conviction of belongingness to Jesus, a compulsion to commitment to Him, a DIVINE expectation of MATURITY, an enablement to achieve this MATURITY, and an OUTWARD manifestation of this MATURITY. This expected, Mature “Faith” consists of several characteristics.

II. The Characteristics of the ‘Faith’ in James

1. It Requires Tests/ Trials of Various Kinds, 1:2-12; 5:7-11. Why does the believer’s ‘faith’ require tests/trials?

There are at least two reasons:

(1) *In order for it to develop Perseverance, 1:2-4.* Perseverance is “tirelessness,” “persistence,” “endurance,” “not giving up.” We must know that none of us is born with the natural ability to persevere against lasting difficult situations/circumstances. So, God uses “trials” / “tests” as a necessary instrument to develop this *perseverance*. It would interest you to know that the word that James uses here is *hupomonē*; it is more than the “Patience” that the KJV uses. Thus, the NIV and other translations translate it as “perseverance,” “steadfastness,” “endurance” and “patient endurance,” respectively. It really means “The capacity **to hold out or bear up** in the face of difficulty.” It is used in the NT with regard to affliction and or suffering of some kind. For instance, the author of Hebrews says of Jesus, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:2, 3). James reminded his audience about their knowledge of the benefits of “perseverance” (1:3, “because you **know** that the testing of your faith **develops** perseverance”).

For you who know your English well, the word, “Know,” is really a Present Participle {a verbal adjective} in the Active Voice {this means the subject/person being spoken of is acting, as well as his action is described}: “you are knowing....” (i.e. you are a knowing people).

The first benefit is :

1. The **Maturing** of the Believer’s Faith, 1:3, 4. Let us look at this from a mathematical point of view:

M = T X F X P

“M” is maturity; “T” is trials/tests; “F” is faith; “P” is perseverance.

The NLT says, “For when your faith is tested, your *endurance has a chance to grow*” (v. 4, italics added). God’s Word Translation says, “Endure until your testing is over. Then you will be mature and complete, and you won’t need anything” (v. 4). The statement, “When” or “whenever you face trials” (1:2) is important. The Conjunction “**when**” or “**whenever**” suggests an expectation. This word is used repeatedly during Israel’s journey to the Promised Land. I.e., Deut. 7:1-2 says, “**When** the LORD your God brings you into the land...and **when** the LORD your God gives them over to you....”

The phrase, “face trials” (NIV) or “fall into...temptations” (KJV) come from one Greek word “peripesēte”; it is a verb in the simple past tense (Aorist Tense), Subjunctive Mood. This mood of the verb speaks of a possibility or likelihood of something happening. It therefore strengthens the expectation of the Conjunction, “**when**” or “**whenever**.” The Aorist or Simple Past Tense in Greek speaks of an action at a definite point in time (i.e. instantaneous action). Combining the two means, we should expect some kind of trial at some point in time in our walk with God!

It is interesting to note that the imperative, “count it (“consider it”) used with “joy” is also in the Simple Past Tense. James is saying, “At the particular time trials come, the believer should accept them as a ground for “pure joy.” It agrees with the expectation of the Subjunctive Mood of the facing of trials.

21st Century Disciples of Jesus must expect trials or sufferings of various kinds to fall upon us as an ambush.

We discussed this morning that James speaks about the disciple of Jesus Christ making people see his/her faith in Jesus put to work. This “Faith” is expected to Mature/grow. In order for it to grow, God allow tests/trials of various kinds. These tests/trials of various kinds help to develop our perseverance/endurance, so that we remain faithful to the “Faith.” We ended with the first benefit of ‘perseverance’—The **Maturing** of the Believer’s Faith.

I feel for Christians who have been taught to believe and say, “May suffering not be my portion....” Listen to Bro. Paul, in Rom. 5:3, 4: “^{Ro 5:3} Not only so, but we also rejoice in our **sufferings**, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ^{Ro 5:4} perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

He says, in 2Tim. 3:10-12,

^{2Ti 3:10} You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, *endurance (hupomonē)*, ^{2Ti 3:11} persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured (i.e. I bore). Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ^{2Ti 3:12} In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted**” (NIV, emphasis added).

The words “will be persecuted” is in the Future Passive,” which means, someone or something will persecute those who desire living a godly life in Christ in this world. To prove that this will happen, Paul uses what grammarians call the “Predictive Future” (to predict is to say that something will happen for sure); this use of the Future Tense confirms “that an action will take place or that a state will be.”

Jesus Himself told His early disciples candidly that they will be hated by the world (John 15:18-25). Hear vv. 18-21 (Wuest Expanded New Testament):

¹⁸⁻²¹ **If, as is the case**, the world is hating you, you know by experience that me it has hated and still does before it hated you. If out of the world you were, the world in that case would be fond of that which is its own private possession. But because out of the world you are not but I selected you for myself out of the world, on this account the world hates you. Be remembering the word which I spoke to you, A slave is not greater than his master. Since me they persecuted, also you will they persecute. Assuming that they kept my word, also yours they will keep. But these things, all of them, they will do to you on account of all that I am in my Person, because they do not know the One who sent me.

Peter confirms what Jesus said to him and his colleagues earlier, in 1Peter 1:6-7:

^{1Pe 1:6} In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ^{1Pe 1:7} These have come **so that** (purpose) your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine (Present Participle Passive form of “dokimos”) and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (NIV). James uses this word in 1:3 (“...knowing that the testing of your faith...”). It means to be “approved by testing”; to be “genuine.” When a blacksmith faces a cutlass or ax, he must TEST it on some hard tress to find out whether it is fit for the purpose it was made for.

Paul uses the negative form of the world in 1Cor. 9:2 (see vv. 24-26 {“No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize”} KJV has “cast away”).

When we visit the OT, we will see that the “Faith” of our spiritual Father, Abraham, was tested severely when God requested him to offer up Isaac, his beloved son, as a ‘burnt offering’ {Gen. 22:1-8}). Beloved, know also that the Lord may decide to use unpleasant “tests” / “trials” to make us take part in His holiness and righteousness, according to the author of Hebrews: 12:5-11 (NIV):

^{Heb 12:5} And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ^{Heb 12:6} because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

^{Heb 12:7} Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? (“endure” is the vb. Form of “hupomonē” {hupomenete}). ^{Heb 12:8} If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate (bastard) children and not true sons. ^{Heb 12:9} Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!

^{Heb 12:10} Our fathers **disciplined** us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may *share in his holiness*. ^{Heb 12:11} No discipline seems pleasant at the

time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of **righteousness** and *peace* for those who have been **trained** by it. You see, discipline really trains!

The word, “punishes” of v.6 of the NIV is “scourge” in the KJV. “Scourge” is a severe beating done with a whip. In biblical times, this whip was up of several coils or ropes joined together, sometimes with metals/pieces of iron or bones attached to them to inflict serious pains and injury. It was used on Jesus and Paul. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, know today that He wants you to “share in His holiness,” and that He might deal harshly and painfully with you to accomplish this. Trials / tests are for all believers—rich or poor (1:9-11):

The first benefit of trials/tests is “The **Maturing** of the Believer’s Faith.”

The second benefit is,

2. The Receiving of the Crown of Life, 1:12 (“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”).

“Perseveres” is the verb form for “hupomonē,” which we discussed earlier. “Stood the test” (NIV; ESV) or “once he has been approved” (NASB) comes from the Greek word dokimos that we have already discussed {word in in James 1:3 & 1Cor. 9:27}. Paul also uses “dokimos” in 2Tim. 2:15, when he says, “Be diligent (some translations say, “Do your best”) to be **approved** (our word) before God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed....” Beloved, it is not studying the Bible or even memorizing it, as suggested by the KJV, that will make us approved before God. Instead, it is by our making of every effort to be reliable {v. 2}, to please our Commanding Officer {vv. 3, 4}, to Keep His Rules {v. 5}, to cleanse ourselves and be a golden vessel of honor {vv. 20-21} and to flee all evil desires {v. 22}.

Yes, God does approve those who remain faithful under the tests/trials that He brings or allows; He will reward them with the CROWN OF (**eternal**) LIFE.” James did **endure** his trial up to his death by the priestly authorities around A.D. 62, according to Flavius Josephus and others; he certainly received his “Crown of Life.”

The ‘Faith’ in James **requires tests/trials of various kinds** in order for it to develop **perseverance**.

Yesterday we said that “Faith” in James “...Requires Tests/ Trials of Various Kinds”; we also said that there were at least two basic reasons for this: the first one that we discussed was *In order for (our faith) to develop Perseverance*. There is another reason why the “Faith” of Jesus Christ’s disciples must be tested or tried is,

(2) In order for it to Gain Wisdom, 1:5; 3:13-18. James’ statement of v. 4 that after perseverance has finished its work, the believer will be “complete, not lacking anything,” includes gaining wisdom: the sense here is having the knowledge and ability to make the right judgment. However, there are many of us who, while undergoing trials, do lack wisdom and do not make the right decision.

This is why James uses the “if” of FACT at the start of v. 5. *The Wuest Expanded New Testament* translates this well. It says, “And if, as is the case, anyone of you [when undergoing these trials] is deficient in wisdom....” This is the “if” that Satan used in Matt. 4:4 [“If you are the son of God”] and Zacchaeus used in Luke 19:8 [“If I have cheated anybody...”]. Both Satan and Zacchaeus spoke factually.

While undergoing trials and we can’t think right or make the proper decision, it suggests we lack wisdom. We should then ask God who gives freely habitually. However, we should continue to “ask” until God answers us! This is seen in James’ use of the Present Active Imperative Mood.

It is important for 21st disciples of Jesus to know this manner of asking from God because some of us have been taught that when we continue to pray for one thing then we do not have faith in God. Beloved, it is our repeated praying that assures God of our confidence in Him.

I am sure most of us, if not all of us, know Matt. 7:7-8:

Mt 7:7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.
Mt 7:8 For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

The speaker is Jesus Christ. It would interest you to know that the three commands (in v. 7) are in the Present Active Imperative, while the three verbs (in v. 8) are in the Present continuous tense in the active voice! Jesus commands that the disciple with a need **continue** to ask, seek and knock, because the one who asks, seeks and knocks until God answers, will receive his/her answer. James agrees, in vv. 6-8:

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. ^{Jas 1:7} That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ^{Jas 1:8} he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. (NIV)

By the way, this was exactly how Daniel, the Prayer Warrior, prayed when he needed an answer from God (Dan. 9-10). 10:12-14 reveals that he prayed for 21 days (three weeks) before his answer arrived.

Two kinds of “Wisdom,” according to 3:13-18:

1. **The one from Satan**, vv. 14-16. This “wisdom” shows itself in setting selfish goals, envy and evil practice; these cause people to become corrupt. This is why people with this wisdom carefully and cleverly plan ways to get what they want and do everything to get them, even at the damage or destruction of other people’s character, property and lives. To them, they are “smart.”

The other “wisdom” is,

2. **The one from God**, vv. 17-18. It expresses itself in purity (“free from defilement”), mercy, submission, consideration of others and peaceful, loving relationship with others. Additionally, it is sincere and impartial in all its dealings and interactions with others; it is “full of good fruit” (NIV).

This is the “wisdom” that trials/tests are intended to give instead of the first, because God is the giver of “good and perfect gifts” (1:17). The person who asks for God’s wisdom must believe, unconditionally,

that he/she will get it ; otherwise, he/she will not get it (1:6-8). To doubt (1:6, 7) is to have a divided mind and thus a divided loyalty. It is true that some Christians do have divided loyalty to Jesus and to the work He has called them to do! Are you one of those with divided loyalty?

Such doubting is the result of “double-mindedness” (v. 8). This literally means having “two souls,” whereby “one part of a person is set on God and the other is set on this world.” This causes inner conflict. Jesus warns against this divided loyalty in Matt. 6:24 (“No one 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”).

Do you need ‘Wisdom’ from the Lord to handle your present situation? Ask Him, believing Him to give it to you.

The first characteristic of “Faith” in James is that **It Requires Tests/ Trials of various kinds**. Secondly, it

II. **It Reaches out to the Needy**, 1:27; 2:14-26; 5:1-6; cf. 1John 3:17, 18; 4:20, 21. A reading of 1:27; 2:1-9,14-26; 5:1-6 indicates James was addressing people who were **doing** or **not doing** external acts and ceremonies that were displeasing to God. James speaks of a couple of acts or the lack of them that please or displease God:

(1) God is pleased when well-to do Christians look **“after orphans and widows in their distress,”** 1:27 (“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...”).

Pure or faultless religion here is not the issue of being true or false, but being inwardly and outwardly holy (last part of v. 27 {“and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”—i.e. holy in intention and practice, so that our actions and reactions to the less fortunate in the society might be holy and faultless. Adam Clarke compares this with a diamond or precious stone that is free from flaws.

Widow and Orphans did not have “direct means of support or automatic legal defenders “ in James’ day. This is why they needed help of God’s people. They still need the help of God’s people today.

Sadly, some “Christians” have enriched themselves on their account rather than helping them. i.e. there are those who have taken the pictures of needed children and sent them abroad with the pretense to set up orphanages, but never did! Those who with the ‘Faith’ that James speaks about will never do this.

(1) God is pleased when well-to-do Christians look **“after orphans and widows in their distress.”**
Also,

(2) God is pleased when well-to-do Christians supply the needs of their helpless brethren, 2:14-26; 5:1-6; cf. 1John 3:16,17; 4:20, 21.

In 2:14-26, James speaks of biblical ‘faith’ differently from Paul, yet they do not contradict each other. James argues that the ‘Faith’ of Jesus’ disciples “...Must be Lived Out,” rather than merely spoken.

Spoken, “actionless” ‘Faith’ is just like that of demons who also believe in the oneness and sovereign rule of God, and yet do not worship Him or serve Him (2:19). James says, “If you have been saved by putting your ‘faith’ in Jesus, then prove it by your actions, particularly by supplying the needs of the poor!

The German Reformer, Martin Luther, had a serious problem with this section of James. To him, it conflicted with Paul’s teaching of “A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:11-21). He really misunderstood James, because James does not say a person is justified by works; instead, he says, “faith produces good works,” and that the “faith that does not do so is DEAD! “Faith” is meant to produce FRUIT just as fruit tree is expected to bear fruit. James addressed persons who believed their faith in Jesus was all they needed for right standing with God; on the other hand, Paul addressed people who were still placing their “faith” in the Law of Moses.

One commentator says, “Faith brings a person to salvation, and works bring that person to faithfulness.”

To James, a vital way to demonstrate this ‘Faith’ is to **FEED** the hungry and **CLOTHE** the naked, instead of just **praying** for God’s blessing upon them (vv. 15-16). Palestine does have Winter (a very cold season), during which the poor suffer severe cold because they do not have Winter clothes. How could a disciple of Jesus only pray for such person and send him/her away with a mere word of blessing?

God commanded the Israelites to meet the needs of their poor brothers and sisters (Deut. 15:7-8):

^{Dt 15:7} If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the

LORD your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. ^{Dt 15:8} Rather be openhanded and freely lend him whatever he needs. A mean, heartless Christian might even lack Saving ‘Faith,’ because those Jesus’ followers will live and do as He did (1Jn. 2:6: **“Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Christ did”**, NLT).

James illustrates his argument of **“Action-Faith”** with “Rahab the prostitute’s action of hiding the Hebrew spies and sending them by another road” (2:25). Abraham **proved** his faith by almost offering up his “only son {of promise} as a burnt offering, had God not stopped him (Gen. 22:1-12). In vv. 12, 16, God promised to bless Abraham abundantly because he had not **withheld** his son from Him. What does this suggest? Of course, that Abraham could have **withheld** his son!

Demonstrating our ‘Faith’ through meeting the needs of the poor is strongly supported by John in 1Jn. 3:16,17; 4:20, 21:

^{1Jn 3:16} This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ^{1Jn 3:17} If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

The question at the end of v. 17 is known grammatically as a rhetorical question. It strengthens a speaker’s words more than a mere statement; the answer of such question is known to the speaker and his/her audience.

Two Bible translations have translated this verse as John intended it:

“If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear” (*THE MESSAGE: The Bible in Contemporary Language*)

“Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person” (*New Century Version*)

John says, helping needy Christians is following in the steps of Jesus who denied Himself and laid down His life for us (v. 16). John seems to be arguing against well-to-do Christians waiting for their needy brethren to come begging them before helping them! They should open their eyes and see them (v. 17). John says, explicitly that sharing with the needy is a show way of proving that the God of Love is residing in us (you see, God's love cannot be in us without His presence in us, because He is Love {4:8}).

It would interest you to know that Moses made similar statement in Deut. 15:7-11:

⁷ This is what you must do whenever there are poor Israelites in one of your cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ⁸ Be generous to these poor people, and freely lend them as much as they need. Never be hard-hearted and tight-fisted with them... Be careful not to think these worthless thoughts. The poor will complain to the Lord about you, and you will be condemned for your sin. ¹⁰ Be sure to give to them without any hesitation. When you do this, the Lord your God will bless you in everything you work for and set out to do. ¹¹ There will always be poor people in the land. That's why I command you to be generous to other Israelites who are **poor** and **needy**. (*GOD'S WORD TRANSLATION*).

Jesus almost quoted v. 11 in His statement: “You will always have the poor with you” (Matt. 26:11; Mk. 24:7; Jn. 12:8). This mocks those who wrongly translate 2Cor. 8:9 by saying all Christians are RICH because Jesus “became poor so that we might become RICH. Be careful, Christians!

The compulsion to help needy brethren cannot be overemphasized, beloved. It really verifies our love for God, according to 4:20, 21:

^{1Jn 4:19} We love because he first loved us. ^{1Jn 4:20} If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. ^{1Jn 4:21} And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (NIV)

In James' day, there were well-to-do Christians who were oppressing the poor rather than helping them; they were not paying those who worked for them, and they murdered others (5:1-6).

Like these evil people, there are Christians in positions of authority who do likewise in this 21st Century. Know that God will not let your acts go unnoticed (v. 4).

“Faith in James has several characteristics. We have discussed two of them: (1) It Requires Tests/Trials of Various Kinds; (2) It Reaches out to the Needy.

A third characteristic is that

- III. **It Requires Self-Control**, 3:1-12; 4:11-12. That is, the possessor of this “Faith” has the spiritual, emotional and mental ability to exercise self-control. There are several areas of our lives that demand “self-control.” E.g., our feeling, our attitude, our action and our words.

In this text, James is concerned about our words, even though the way we feel can affect our attitude, words and actions. James reminds us that sinning through our words is common (vv. 2-9); in fact, it seems difficult to not to sin by our words (vv. 2-9). Notwithstanding, it is possible to control our tongue, so that we control our words (vv. 10-12):

^{Jas 3:10} Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. ^{Jas 3:11}
Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ^{Jas 3:12} My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water. (NIV)

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If our mouths are able to speak praise, and that “salt water and fresh water should not flow from the same body of water, and that a tree should not bear the fruit of another, THEN the tongue may be controlled. Controlling our tongue means we should stop speaking evil of one another (4:11: “Brothers, do not slander one another”). Anyone one speaks evil (lies) against a fellow believer “speaks against the law and judges it” (4:11), and the person who judges the law does not keep it (4:11).

Such speech includes criticizing another person harshly or rudely to that person’s downfall or destruction. Some years ago, one of my church members said to me, “Pastor Toga, my own I don’t keep anything in my heart. When I see or hear something wrong I speak out to clear my chest.” I answered, “Yes, it’s good to ‘clear your chest,’ but the way you say it matters. Kind speech, even when rebuking or correcting another person is the act of love. The Disciple of Jesus who controls his/her tongue is perfect/complete.

Paul agrees with James that the tongue CAN BE controlled, whereby the disciple of Jesus can use good, acceptable speech.

- Eph. 4:29, 30: **Do not** let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ^{Eph 4:30} And **do not** grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NIV).

The two “Do Not” of vv. 29, 30 are a combination of the Present Imperative Mood and the Negative. This use off the negative **stops an action that is in progress**. Paul uses this prohibition in Rom. 6:12, 13 (“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ^{Ro 6:13} Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness...”).

Another passage that suggests that Christians are able to use our tongues properly is,

- Col. 4:6: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know **how to answer** everyone” (NIV).

Jesus speaks about the possibility of His disciples using good words in this life, in Matt. 12:35-37:

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ^{Mt 12:36} But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. ^{Mt 12:37} For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

It is sad, that many 21st Century Christians use their tongues that they praise God with to curse people, deceive people, spread evil reports about people, light up fire between best of friends through evil gossip (Rom. 3:13, 14; James 3:9-10). James says this should never be done, just as “both fresh water and salt water” **cannot** flow from the same spring, or a fig tree bearing olives, or a grapevine bearing figs (3:11-12).

Beloved, if we can control our tongue, we can control everything else, someone has said. A big test of self-control is being “slow to become angry” (James 3:19). Anger is dangerous to the Christian disciple’s relationship to himself/herself; it has a couple of bad results: (1) it closes our minds to God’s truth; (2) it closes our minds to other people’s words, even if they speak or suggest the truth; (3) it might result in fight; (4) it might result into destruction of properties; and (5) it might result into death of persons.

The “Faith” in James **(1) requires tests/trials of various kinds, (2) It Reaches out to the needy, and (3) It requires self-control.**

“Self-control” is not only exercised in the use of our tongues. It is exercised in our desires for earthly/worldly pleasures, possessions and powers (4:1-4):

Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you. ² You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it. ³ And when you ask, you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures. ⁴ Unfaithful people! Don't you know that to be the world's friend means to be God's enemy? Whoever wants to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy. (Today’s English Version)

The disciple who has become “mature” in the “Faith” of Jesus will control his/her desires for earthly pleasures, possessions and powers, and will avoid the evil of destroying others.

The fourth Characteristic of ‘Faith’ in James is that,

- IV. **It Relies on God Instead of Self**, 4:13-17;cf. Prov. 3:5, 6; Luke 12:16-21. James speaks to business people in this section who depended upon their own business plans without involving

God. In this text, they have a well-laid plan: (1) “go to this or that city”; (2) “spend a year there”; (3) “carry on business”; (4) “make money.”

You would notice that they have no plans for unforeseen conditions and circumstances that might be ahead of them. They take God out of the picture all together, even though they do not know what will happen the next day, concerning their own lives!

James illustrates this well by comparing their lives with a Mist (what we know as “dew” or “fog”); it appears heavily in the morning, but disappears even before the afternoon. This reminds me about the story of “The Rich Fool” that Jesus talks about in Luke 12:16-21. His farm had produced so much that his storeroom became small to keep his produce. So, he planned to build a new storeroom, and thereafter he would say to himself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.” His plans were very good; but he did not say, “If God is willing,” or “By God’s grace I shall do this or that.” As the result, “God said to him, ‘You **fool!** This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’” There are some 21st Century Disciples of Jesus who are like the “Rich Fool” or the Business people of James’ day, who do not commit your plans to God. If there is anyone here like these, know today that God is unhappy with you. The author of Proverbs puts us on our guide saying, we should trust in the LORD with **all** our hearts and lean not on our own understanding; instead, we should acknowledge Him in **ALL** our ways, so that He will **make our paths straight** (3:5, 6).

We have discussed four characteristics of “Faith” in James: (1) It requires tests/trials of various kinds; know today that God is unhappy with you. The author of Proverbs puts us on our guide saying, we should trust in the LORD with **all** our hearts and lean not on our own understanding; instead, we should acknowledge Him in **ALL** our ways, so that He will **make our paths straight** (3:5, 6).

We have discussed four characteristics of “Faith” in James: (1) It requires tests/trials of various kinds; (2) It Reaches out to the needy; (3) It requires self-control; and (4) It Relies on God Instead of Self. A fifth characteristic of the “Faith” in James is that

V. It Resists Satan, 4:7-8. These verses read,

Jas 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. *Jas 4:8* Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

There are two powers operating in this passage to which James’ audience have to respond: **God** and **Satan**. They have been in battle for the souls of humans from the time Lucifer rebelled against God. However, the entire Bible instructs God’s people about which of them to submit to and serve.

These two verses contain five (5) important action words: *Submit*, *Resist*, *Come near* (some translations: “Draw near”), *Wash*, and *Purify*. Spiritual victory of Jesus’ disciples are dependent upon them. These five verbs are in the Simple Past (Aorist) Tense and Imperative Mood.

This means these actions must be taken at some definite point in time (punctiliar action). To “Submit” is to make oneself a subordinate (lesser, lower, inferior) to another. It is used passively in this verse, meaning the disciple should “be subject to” to God” (i.e. lay himself/herself opened to God). “Submission is not the same as obedience. Submission is the surrender of one’s will, which in turn leads to obedience.”

“Resist” is from a word “anthistēmi” that means, “to oppose”, “to rebel” (against), “to withstand.” Paul used the very word in Gal. 2:11 of withstanding Peter in the Face when he (Peter) acted deceitfully (Gal. 2:11 {“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong”}). Satan CAN and SHOULD be **withstood** by all 21st Century Disciples also; we should tell him boldly, “NO, I do not agree with you, I will not obey you; you and I have got nothing in common!”

The third action word is: “Wash” (καθαρίζω, “katharizō” {KJV; ASV; NRSV}). It is a washing that makes something truly clean. Washing our hands is making our conduct pure and clean. The fourth word is “Purify” (hagnizō). Purifying our hearts is making our thoughts and motives pure. If our thoughts are pure, then our actions will be pure (Matt. 15:19-20). Our fifth word is “Come near” / “Draw near.” This command suggests that these believers had gone far from God.

There are several causes for God’s children going away from Him, according to vv. 7, 8:

- Refusing to Submit to Him, v. 7.
- Refusing to Resist Satan, v. 7.
- Having Dirty Hands (i.e. dirty conduct), v. 8
- Having Dirty Hearts (i.e. unclean thoughts and motives), v. 8.

Beloved, God’s grace moves Him always to welcome back to Himself His children who backslide (i.e. story of “Prodigal Son” {Luke 15:11-32}).

In order for Him to welcome a child back home, that child must carry out a couple of responsibilities:

➤ He / She Must be Ready to Confess his/her Sins, v. 18; Joel 2:13a. 1John 1:9 (“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”). The word translated “confess” (homologeō) means to “agree with.” The prodigal son did it (vv. 18, 21). King David also did so in Psalm 51:3, 4: “For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

The second responsibility is that

➤ He / She Must be Ready to Repent from his/her Sins, vv. 17, 20 (“When he came to his senses...so he got up and went to his father,” NIV) cf. Joel 2:13-14. *Repentance* is an indispensable requirement *for* and *of* salvation; without it genuine, biblical conversion/regeneration and spiritual growth cannot occur (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:36-38; 17:30, 31; 2Corinthians 7:10). Without it NO ONE should dare to serve the Lord (cf. Zachariah 3:3-7). *Turning from* one’s former (evil) ways is a repeated NT call to potential candidates for the Kingdom of Heaven. For instance, John the Baptist commanded Israel to

repent so that their sins might be remitted (Luke 3:3). The ways they could do so were to *start sharing* with their needy brothers and sisters (v. 11; cf. Luke 19:7-9), to *stop extorting money* from their brothers and sisters (vv.13, 14), to *stop accusing* their brothers and sisters falsely (v. 14), and to *start being satisfied* with their wages (v. 14).

Also, Jesus warned His audience to *repent* or perish (Luke 13:3; cf. Revelation 3:19). Peter too ended his Pentecostal message with a call to his audience to “*repent...for the forgiveness of (their) sins*” (Acts 2:38, NIV, emphasis added). In his epistle, he commanded his audience to *stop* conforming “to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). Paul adds that God commands “people everywhere to *repent*” (Acts 17:30, NIV, emphasis added). John Calvin saw repentance as **wholly** turning to God that springs “from real and solemn fear of God” (Lane and Osborne 1987:153).

I wish to add that unrepentant Christians cannot even become worthy Muslims, because Islam requires that sinners “Resolve ***never*** to do the sin again...” (Emerick 2002:32, 33, italics added).

Beloved, since we claim to have “Faith” in Jesus and therefore belong to Him, we cannot but be a **REPENTANT** people!

Beloved, our ability to “resist” Satan lies in coming near / drawing near to God; when we do, God enables us wash our hands and purify our hearts. If we must resist Satan, we must have clean conduct (behavior) and clean thoughts and motives, because no one with impure conduct, thoughts and motives can resist him!

“Faith” in James:

- I. Requires tests/trials of various kinds,
- II. Reaches out to the Needy,
- III. Requires Self-Control,
- IV. Relies on God Instead of Self,
- V. Resists Satan.

A sixth characteristic of the “Faith” in James is,

- VI. **It Restores a Backslidden Brother to the ‘Faith’**, 5:19-20; cf. Gal. 6:1. The text reads,

¹⁹ My brothers and sisters, if one of you wanders away from the truth, and someone helps that person come back, ²⁰ remember this: Anyone who brings a sinner back from the wrong way will save that sinner's soul from death and will cause many sins to be forgiven. (NCV)

Paul expresses a similar concern in Gal. 6:1a (“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently...”). Restoring a backslidden brother/sister involves two conditions:

- The backslidden brother/sister should be ready to return to the “Faith” (implied in the two passages).
- The restoring brother/sister should be spiritually mature, Gal. 6:1. Spiritual maturity humbles the restorer and prevents him/her from condemning the sinning brother/sister, as well as from spreading that person’s sin and name publicly. Spiritual maturity causes the restorer to both feel sorry for and puts himself/herself in the “shoes” of the one to be restored (Rom. 15:1 {“We who are strong ought to bear with the failing of the weak and not to please ourselves”}).

The final characteristic of the “Faith” in James is,

VII. It Requests for Healing, 5:14-18:

^{Jas 5:14} Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ^{Jas 5:15} And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ^{Jas 5:16} Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ^{Jas 5:17} Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ^{Jas 5:18} Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (NIV).

These verses seem to be speaking about **two** kinds of healing: **physical** (vv. 14-15c) and **spiritual** (v. 15d-v. 16).

Greek literature uses two main words (verbs) for “Anoint.” One (*aleipsō*) is commonly used to describe medicinal anointing (i.e. the oil with medicine in it), while the other (*chriō*) refers to sacramental (spiritual) anointing. The one used for medicine was rubbed on the sick just as what the Samaritan did on the injured man in Luke 10:34. This is the one that James refers to in vv. 14, 15. Mark 6:13 say, “So they went out and preached that *people* should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed *them*.”

John uses the sacramental healing in 1Jn. 2:20, 27 to refer to the Holy Spirit as the believer’s “anointing” Who teaches us. People and things were “anointed” for special services/uses in the OT.

- *High Priests*: Ex. 29:7, 29.
- *Priests*: Ex. 28:41.
- *Kings* (David, 1 Sam. 16:3, 12, 13).
- *Prophets*: 1 Kin. 19:16.
- *The Tabernacle*: Ex. 30:26; 40:9.

James seems to instruct his first audience to combine medicinal oil with the “prayer of faith” to heal the sick. His reference to sick believers being forgiven and healed after confessing their sins to one

another, suggests that some sicknesses were due to sin (i.e. in Mk. 2:5 Jesus forgave the sin of the paralyzed man; in John 5:14, He told the man whom He healed from a 38 year sickness, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you”). Of course, every sickness was not the result of sin (cf. Man born blind was not blind because he or his parents sinned {v. 3}).

In order to prove that God will answer the prayers of His people in every age, James illustrated with Elijah’s prayers being answered, who was a man as we are (vv. 17-18).

Beloved, prayer is crucial to our existence and usefulness in this world. John Bunyan, on his dying bed said, *“The spirit of prayer is more precious than treasure of gold and silver. Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge for Satan.”* (Morgan, R. J. 2000, c1997, in Libronix Digital Library System, Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville).

While praying for healing all other needs, however, we should leave the time and the manner in which they are answered to the Lord; they are His prerogative (cf. 2Cor. 12:7-10).

We have spent considerable time defining and discussing the characteristics of the “Faith” used in James. What then are its “Implications for 21st Century Discipleship”?

Implications of James’ Faith for 21st Century Discipleship

Having learned that “James” is a practical book that speaks about “how-to-live the Christian life,” we may derive One Primary implication for 21st Century Discipleship:

Maturing in the Faith is Compulsory, not Optional, for all Disciples of Jesus Christ!

- The Equipment for this Maturity is Various Kinds of Trials/Tests.
- The Evidence of this Maturity is our Worthy Relationships with God and our Fellow-Man, expressed in Deeds, not words.
- 1:21-25 says,

^{Jas 1:21} So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls. ^{Jas 1:22} And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself. ^{Jas 1:23} For if you just listen and don’t obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. ^{Jas 1:24} You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. ^{Jas 1:25} But if you keep looking steadily into God’s perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

Let us draw near to God and have cleans hands and pure hearts, so that we might have an inward compulsion to commit to God unconditionally and undividedly.

God bless us all and make us blessings in His might hands!