



St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church

Heliopolis, Egypt



Commentary on The Epistle of James



*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
the One and Only God,
Amen.*

An exegetical study of the Holy Bible

"commentaries on the New Testament"

The Epistle of St. James

*prepared and published by priests and servants of
St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church
Heliopolis, Egypt*

*Translated by George Ishack, Ottawa, Canada, 2025
All biblical quotations are taken from the New King James version of the Holy Bible*

St-Takla.org



*His Holiness Pope Tawadros II
118th Pope of Alexandria
and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark*

Prelude

1. The author:

a- It is believed that this epistle was authored by St. James the Lord's brother, the son of Mary the holy virgin's sister and wife of Cleopas. Put differently, he was our Lord's cousin - in Jewish tradition, cousins were labelled as "brothers." However, identity of the epistle's author remains disputable.

b- James, the Lord's brother, was made the first bishop of Jerusalem. He chaired the first Church Council in 50 A.D. (see Acts 15). He is considered to be one of the Church's pillars.

c- He was righteous and characterized by frequent prayers and prostrations.

d- He was martyred by the Jews in 62 A.D.

2. The epistle's intended audience:

a- It was the first catholic epistle, sent to the entire world, rather to a specific person or nation.

b- It was also meant for the Jewish converts in diaspora, who had fled persecutions in Jerusalem, and who had founded churches in various parts of the world.

3. Timing of the epistle - where it was written:

It was written in Jerusalem around 60 A.D. after churches had been established in various parts of the world, and prior to the Jewish exodus from Jerusalem in 68 A.D. after which Jerusalem had been destroyed.

4. The epistle's purpose:

a- Steadfastness in the Faith amidst hardships.

b- Practical faith linked to spiritual struggle.

c- Alertness to sins of favouritism/partiality, the tongue, and evil desires.

d- Adherence to the Faith under all circumstances.

5. The epistle's features:

a- Simple and practical.

b- Similarities to the sermon on the mount and to Peter's first epistle.

c- Consistency with Paul's epistles, especially his epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, since James urged believers adhering to theoretical faith to focus on their spiritual struggle - hence similar to Paul's urging Jews to focus on the Faith, rather than on adherence to the law - he was not negating the importance of good deeds, stemming from faith, as a condition for salvation.

6. The epistle's setions:

- a- Enduring hardships and steadfastness in the Faith (Ch. 1).
- b- Faith and deeds (Ch. 2).
- c- The tongue (Ch. 3).
- d- Rejecting lusts (Ch. 4).
- e- Practical instructions for the rich, the tempted, the afflicted, and various other circumstances (Ch. 5).



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
The Epistle of St. James*

Chapter 1

Faith - temptations - God's children's prayers

1. Introduction and greetings - verses 1:

"James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings." (James 1:1)

Verse 1:

James introduces his epistle by referring to himself as ***"a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"*** thus accentuating the Divinity of our Lord Christ. Despite his label as "the Lord's brother," he humbly calls himself ***"a bondservant of....Christ."***

Since a bondservant had no authority over body, wife or children, James joyfully refers to himself as a bondservant, since he had submitted all his life and possessions to the Lord. That is analogous to the holy virgin's telling the angel, ***"Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word."*** (Luke 1:38) Her joy at becoming the mother of the incarnate Word of God did not overshadow her feeling that she was the Lord's servant.

"....scattered..." - Jewish converts to Christianity had scattered abroad after Stephen's martyrdom, because of persecutions. James wrote them this epistle to encourage them and strengthen their faith. The epistle is also addressed to all persecuted Christians living among Gentiles.

+ *Let us never forget that we are God's servants, and let us submit our lives to Him, despite our being favoured as His children.*

2. How we should endure hardships - verses 2 - 12:

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be

given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits. 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."
(James 1:2 - 12)

Verse 2:

"...when you fall into various trials..." - This refers to believers' experiencing trials/temptations without falling into sin. This type of hardship aims to test a believer, akin to God's testing of Abraham. God permits trials within the limits of a person's endurance. God will support anyone who falls then repents, thus profiting from the experience.

We should not be perturbed when experiencing God-permitted trials; rather, we should be confident in receiving all the ensuing blessings. Blessings arising from hardships will be enumerated in the following verses:

Verse 3:

a- Patience:

Patience constitutes the first step towards successful endurance of trials. Overcoming the pain leads to blessings.

Verse 4:

b- Spiritual deeds:

The second step is associating patience with spiritual deeds such as consistent prayers, fasting, prostrations and thanksgiving. These lead to Christian perfection, and a growth in our spiritual relationship with God.

Verse 5:

c- Wisdom:

We need wisdom to react appropriately to hardships. The apostle offers a simple solution, namely, faithfully seeking God's help Who, in turn, will readily grant wisdom, characterized by: abundance exceeding what we ask for, and fatherly love bearing no reproach for our shortcomings.

Verses 6 - 8:

d- Faith:

God will grant us wisdom provided we have steadfast faith while being prepared to do His will. We should also be confident that any trial is for the overall good. On the other hand, a person with wavering faith, **"is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind."** Such a person will lead a constantly perturbed life, unable to make proper decisions. A disturbed mind will fail to perceive that the best way is the godly one.

"....a double-minded man...." - This refers to a man who wavers between relying on God versus relying on his own mind, on his abilities, and on the world's evil powers.

Verse 9:

e- Humility:

Upon being faced with a hardship, a spiritual person will recall his sins and repent, while praying sincerely; God will consequently relieve him of his anguish and comfort him, thus inducing him to thank God.

Verse 10:

f- Estrangement in the world:

Feeling estranged in the perishing world enables us to accept trials and material losses since, in our view, all is vanity. James likens this unto a flower which falls **"and its beautiful appearance perishes."** The rich, as well as each one of us, should feel that all our possessions will perish at some point; consequently, hardships should not disturb us, since the true treasure lies in the kingdom of heaven and fellowshiping with God. Those who rely on material possessions will wither along with them, will neither enjoy true happiness with God on earth, nor acquire anything in heaven.

Verses 11 & 12:

The apostle concludes his discourse about enduring hardships by reassuring those who endure them by following the means elaborated above, which lead to eternal enjoyment of life with God.

+ *Let us not be perturbed by hardships. Regardless of their severity, we must rest assured that God will never forsake us, and that God permitted them for the sake of advancing our spiritual life.*

3. Internally-generated temptations - God's righteousness - verses 13 - 18:

"Let no one say when he is tempted [upon falling into sin because of temptation], "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-

grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights [the source of all light and goodness], with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth [Christ], that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures." (James 1:13 - 18)

Verse 13:

St. James shifts to a different type of temptations, namely, those originating within a person's heart, whereby the heart interacts with evil, leading to sin. Under such circumstances, the person should never assume that God was the Creator of a sinful nature - or that God motivated him to sin; this is because God is all-holy, perfect and righteous, and cannot push anyone towards sin. By nature, God neither tends to darkness, nor tends to drive people towards darkness, aiming to lure them into sinfulness. Temptations referred to in earlier verses were intended to be Divine tests aiming to elevating a person to a more sublime level of thinking, leading to greater rewards.

Verse 14:

The underlying reason for falling to temptation, is the heart's succumbing to lustful desires planted through Satan's wiles. The result is falling into sin's bitterness, through its apparent allure.

Verse 15:

This verse outlines hazards associated with falling into sin, by positively responding to internal desires. Through evil, lustful, inclinations, a person is attracted to sin's temporal pleasures. Sin is likened unto a child delivered after pregnancy. The penalty for sin is death and eternal perdition. Persistence in sin leads to eternal condemnation. On the other hand, Joseph endured slavery in Potiphar's home, and endured suffering in jail - consequently, he acquired the reward of being ruler over Egypt. Those were external hardships that led to Joseph's reward.

+ *Eliminating evil thoughts saves from many sins. Satan shatters our power and weakens us through a multitude of thoughts, such that when, eventually, we are faced with sin, our fall becomes easy. Let us be wary of thoughts, scenes and words, to avoid falling into difficult temptations leading to perdition.*

Verse 16:

The apostle alerts us not to accuse God of being the cause of our sins and problems. Rather, as pointed out, our sins are caused by being attracted to evil through our desires. God, on the other hand, is righteous and the source of all blessings.

Verse 17:

"...with Whom there is no variation or shadow of turning..." - God is perfect and unchangeable, unlike planets which orbit and change location.

The apostle declares that God is the source of all blessings, bounties and talents. He is constant and consistent in giving, unlike humans: some may seem righteous, but may change and die....

Verse 18:

"....a kind of firstfruits of His creatures...." - In olden times, the Jews used to offer God the firstfruits of their harvest and cattle, thus sanctifying them and distinguishing them from the rest. Believers, therefore, are the world's firstfruits, so that many others might believe, and so that the Lord may bless the whole earth because of them.

+ *The greatest grace we acquired is the new birth through baptism. We became the children of Christ the Saviour, and the beginning of the Church that would encompass many other believers over the years.*

4. Conduct of God's children - verses 19 - 27:

"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:19 - 27)

Verses 19 & 20:

The apostle enumerates to believers, some of the important virtues they should strive to possess:

a- **"....swift to hear..."** - A person who listens attentively will develop more understanding, and will find an opportunity to ask the Lord for guidance to speak appropriately. His company would also be a source of comfort to others, enabling him to establish strong, loving, relationships. Such a person's speech would also be measured rather than impulsive -

as king Solomon said, **"Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."** (Proverbs 29:20) Therefore, should we be silent, or should we speak? Our forefathers say, "Speech for God's sake is good, and silence for God's sake is equally good."

b- **"....slow to wrath..."** - A genuine Christian does not express anger towards others. Rather, he would be likened unto his long-suffering heavenly Father, since, **"....the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."**

c- **"....Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness..."** - When speaking calmly to others, a person should be cognizant of repentance, and rejection of all uncleanness, evil thoughts and sights, ungodly expressions, and all acts of adultery and associated wickedness.

d- **"...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls...."** - Repentance imparts purity, inducing a person to accept, and submit humbly to, everything read in the holy Bible, and everything taught in church. The word of God is thus firmly planted in a person's heart, leading him down the path to salvation.

Verses 21 & 22:

e- **"...be doers of the word..."** - A person who merely hears without acting, tricks himself into believing he is pious. Piety is measured by practical application of the commandments, rather than by mere knowledge.

Verses 23 & 24:

The apostle likens those who hear the word without applying it, as someone who sees his reflection in the mirror, then forgets his defects and turns away without attempting to correct them. A believer, on the other hand, should scrutinize the word of God which, in turn, is like a mirror revealing all shortcomings - those shortcomings should be humbly corrected, in quest of our heavenly Father's truth and perfection.

Verse 25:

The Mosaic covenant consisted of rules and observances that a person had to follow, like a slave who follows instructions, then promptly forgets them. Christ's commandments are quite different; they are the charter of liberty handed lovingly to His children. Christ's is labelled the "perfect law," because it guides man to perfection through grace and the work of the Holy Spirit. Steadfast adherence to God's word leads to prosperity, joy and peace.

Verse 26:

"...**bridle his tongue...**" - Without controlling our tongue, we cannot claim holiness or piety - that would be an illusion. Such a person would be tricking himself about knowing God, would express anger and abuse towards others, and would judge others believing that he was helping them.

Verse 27:

Mercy:

St. James summarizes the attributes of "**pure and undefiled religion**" as follows:

a- "**to visit orphans and widows in their trouble,**" - hence, to be compassionate towards those who have no one to care for them;

b- "**and to keep oneself unspotted from the world,**" - hence, to keep a pure and holy heart, and to obey God's commandments patiently, lovingly and joyfully.

Put differently, a believer must distance himself from all sources that risk defiling the senses, the soul, and the spirit.

+ Let us offer love to all around us. Let us be compassionate towards everyone. No one can escape some form of hardship. Let us pay special care for those who have no one caring for them, or those suffering from loneliness - let us rest assured that such compassion will fill our hearts with peace, will inundate us with God's mercies, and will gladden our hearts upon seeing a smile on the faces of those to whom we were merciful.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

*An exegetical study of
The Epistle of St. James*

Chapter 2

Love, Faith and Deeds

1. Partiality - verses 1 - 7:

"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?" (James 2:1 - 7)

Verse 1:

Believers become newborns through baptism, and they become brethren, members of the single body of Christ, with no partiality or prejudices. Genuine faith is linked to impartial love to all. This is because our Lord Christ glorifies all in heaven without prejudices. Each person is rewarded according to his deeds, regardless of earthly stature.

Verses 2 & 3:

"....your assembly..." - The apostle did not say "your church" because partiality is inappropriate in a church, since it would render the church akin to a Jewish synagogue.

The apostle rebukes their bias towards the rich, hence, ***"a man with gold rings, in fine apparel."*** They despised the "poor man in filthy clothes." The sin of partiality bears leads to two adverse attributes:

- Partiality is contrary to the Christian Faith, since it assumes that the rich are the Church's pillars - rather than God Who granted them wealth.

- Partiality humiliates the poor, who was created in God's image; it is even insulting to Christ Himself, Who impoverished Himself in order to enrich us - hence, they referred to Him as, ***"Is this not the carpenter's son?"*** (Matthew 13:55)
- Partiality lowers the stature of our brethren in the Faith, who are also members of the single body of Christ.

Verse 4:

Partiality is contrary to the fear of God, and originates from evil thoughts. The apostle is thus demanding that they purge their consciences and repent of such wicked thoughts.

Verse 5:

The apostle accentuates the fact that material wealth is unimportant to God, since many of the saints were poor; examples are Moses the shepherd, whom God called from the burning bush, and David the shepherd who was anointed to be king. Furthermore, most of Christ's disciples were poor fishermen - they inherited the kingdom of heaven that Christ had prepared for them. The importance of spiritual wealth, through Faith, on earth, is thus emphasized, since its focus is on inheriting the kingdom. Material wealth is insignificant in this respect.

This does not mean that wealth is evil; wickedness arises from forgetting God and being preoccupied with material issues, entailing pride.

Verses 6 & 7:

Believers were affected - in church - by wealth; this led them to honour the rich and despise the poor, forgetting that the evil rich use their wealth and affluence to abuse believers and to incite evil-doers against them (see Acts 19:25 - 29). The rich persevere in their wickedness thus abasing Christ's name that is called upon believers.

+ *Let us focus on God, Who stands before us; we should thus adhere to the truth without partiality, out of fear of reprisals, or out of expected favours. Let us honour rich and poor alike.*

2. Love - verses 8 - 13:

"If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, "Do not

commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty [this is love, hence, Christ's law]. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:8 - 13)

Verse 8:

"...the royal law..." - This refers to love, the law of Christ, the heavenly King.

Christ's law is love. This motivates us to love all around us, thus applying the commandment ***"...you shall love your neighbour as yourself..."*** (Leviticus 19:18). The apostle is thus extolling love towards everyone.

Verse 9:

Partiality is against love and Christianity's law, and is a significant sin.

Verse 10:

Do not justify yourselves by observing several commandments and church rites, while transgressing the most important principle, namely, love, which is the essence of Christ's law. In this way you will be transgressing Christ and all His commandments.

Verse 11:

Persistence in a given sin incurs the penalty of death. Hence, one should not persist in a life of murder, under the pretext of refraining from adultery. Mosaic law stipulates that a murderer must incur the death penalty, even if that person observed the rest of the law's ordinances.

Verse 12:

Likewise, in the New Testament we must adhere to all of its commandments, refraining from persisting in being partial - this leads to perdition.

Verse 13:

"...Mercy triumphs over judgment." - Just sentencing ensures rights are truthfully granted to those for whom they are due. In Christianity, mercy gives the needy more than their truthful rights. God will not show mercy towards a merciless person, biased towards the rich and against the poor; such a person will suffer eternal perdition. Christianity stipulates mercy - especially as God has mercifully redeemed us, and forgives us daily. This should motivate us to be merciful towards others.

+ God permits suffering for some, such as poverty or sickness; this, in turn, allows others to show compassion towards them. This strengthens the bond among members of Christ's single body, leading to joy and love, overshadowing all ailments. Therefore, let us be compassionate towards the needy around us.

3. Faith and deeds - verses 14 - 26:

"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe-and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:14 - 26)

Verse 14:

The apostle observed that the needy were dying of hunger, while the rich remained unmoved. Thus, he spoke of the futility of faith unaccompanied by deeds. This is consistent with St. Paul's epistle to the Romans: ***"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."*** (Romans 3:28) Paul was referring to the law's stipulations that were unnecessary for salvation - thus, he spoke of the necessity of faith being applied through deeds of love; he also mentioned the struggle coupled with service and giving. Again, this is consistent with St. James' assertion that deeds are the fruit of living faith.

In the subsequent verses, the apostle gives four examples demonstrating the importance of coupling good deeds with faith, as a prerequisite for a believer's salvation.

Verses 15 - 19:

First example:

The needs of a poor brother or sister will not be satisfied by merely telling them a few words of comfort.

Second example:

Faith without deeds is akin to a lifeless body. The body's spirit is the deeds which reflect living faith. Thus, faith without deeds is a dead, theoretical, faith which leads a believer to death.

Third example:

The importance of good deeds is accentuated through a dialogue between someone whose faith is unaccompanied with deeds, and another whose good deeds are a product of his faith. The latter says to the former, "If your faith were genuine, show it to me - since without deeds, faith cannot be demonstrated. But I will show you my true faith, through my good deeds."

Fourth example:

This example further emphasizes the futility of faith without deeds. A believer without good deeds is slated for perdition, akin to demons who, not only believe, but also tremble, yet continue in their wickedness. Theoretical faith not reinforced with good deeds leads to condemnation.

Verse 20:

Good deeds stemming from love are apparent in the life of a genuine believer. A "***foolish man,***" on the other hand, has no deeds substantiating his faith. Thus, "***faith without works is dead.***"

Verses 21 & 22:

The apostle refers to Abraham, the Jewish patriarch, as an example, whose flawless faith led him to offer his son Isaac on the altar, believing that God was capable of raising him from the dead (see Romans 4:3). Thus, Abraham perfected his faith through his deed - hence, by offering Isaac on the altar, fully believing in God's omnipotence.

Verses 23 & 24:

The fifth example:

Through his deeds - hence, offering Isaac on the altar - Abraham fulfilled the word of God: "***And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.***" (Genesis 15:6)

Hence, that was another example of justification being fulfilled through faith combined with deeds, not merely through faith alone.

Verses 25 & 26:

The sixth example:

Here, the apostle gives an example from the Gentiles, of someone combining their faith with deeds. Rahab, the harlot, believed in the power of the God of Israel, and hid the two spies - saving them from death - whom Joshua had sent (see Joshua 2:1 - 6). She bound a scarlet cord in her window (Joshua 2:21) signalling her faith. Thus, God saved her from perishing along with the rest of Jericho's inhabitants, because of her faith substantiated by deeds. Again, that was proof that faith without deeds is dead.

+ *It is insufficient for us to appreciate others' needs and trials. Our feelings should be substantiated with deeds of love - however minor they may be. We should offer as much as we can, knowing that God holds such in very high regard - a glass of cold water has its reward.*



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

An exegetical study of
The Epistle of St. James

Chapter 3

The Tongue - Wisdom

1. **The tongue's significance - verses 1 - 8:**

"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:1 - 8)

Verse 1:

St. James the apostle was Jerusalem's bishop, and one of the Church's pillars. Nevertheless, he says humbly, ***"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers..."*** That was due to his perception that some were competing to acquire the appearance of "teacher and guide," thus incurring the following risks:

- a- They gave themselves the false impression of being better than others.
- b- Their pride should not induce them to acquire, forcibly, the gift of "teaching," which is a gift from the Holy Spirit.
- c- Teachers' condemnation is greater than others', since they are accountable for practising what they teach.
- d- More is required from whoever gives much (see Luke 12:48).
- e- Every teacher is liable to fall and, after succumbing, Satan disperses his flock. Such was the case with Arius, who was a renowned orator yet, after his fall, many followed suit.

Verse 2:

Everyone is liable to fall into sin. Christ is the only Perfect One Who can fully control His tongue. Whoever controls his tongue is capable of controlling all his senses, desires and thoughts. Since man usually struggles to control his tongue through the grace of God, we should take care to refrain from impetuously teaching others.

+ Let us regard everything we learn and teach with much care. Consequently, each person should have a wise confessor, who would be his guide along a spiritual lifestyle. Instead of teaching others, let us pay attention, first and foremost, to our own salvation, given that Satan's warfare is most intense against servants.

Verses 3 - 8:

St. James uses six analogies for the tongue:

First analogy:

The tongue is akin to "**bits in horses' mouths...**" which control the horse along the direction desired by the rider. The absence of such a controlling bit could lead to the horse's stumbling, and death of the rider. Similarly, the tongue controls a person's conduct, down the path of truth, shielding the body from desires, like a horse without the bit in its mouth.

+ Let us train ourselves to control our tongues, to enable us, through Christ's grace, of controlling our bodies' desires.

Second analogy:

The tongue is akin to a ship's rudder: using such a small component, the ship's captain can control a large ship, despite prevailing strong winds. Similarly, the tongue is a small member of the body, that should be treated with much care in every word we utter: "**For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.**" (Matthew 12:37) A tongue is capable of defiling the entire body, leading to our condemnation. On the other hand, the same tongue can guide us to safety, like the ship's rudder.

Third analogy:

The tongue is likened unto a small spark, capable of causing a huge fire. A small spark from the tongue can ignite a world of sin, leading to strife and hate. The tongue is proud of leading man to pride, thus defiling the whole body by attracting multiple sins - the body thus winds up in hell.

"Hell" - This word's origin is derived from a number of ancient languages, all of which mean "concealed place, the underworld."

Fourth analogy:

The tongue is likened unto poison: It is easy to train/tame wild animals, birds or reptiles - however, a tongue that is used to utter obscenities is hard to tame - only God can do this. Sometimes a person may utter words that strike listeners as a snake's venom, and whose adverse effects may ruin a relationship, requiring many years to rebuild. This is the reason behind the Psalmist's saying, "**Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.**" (Psalm 141:3)

+ Given that our tongue has the potential of affecting ourselves and our relationships to such an extent, let our words be measured, giving ourselves the chance to seek the Lord's guidance, to listen to others attentively, so that God may guide us to say the right thing.

2. The tongue is a blessing, and a curse - verses 9 - 12:

"With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh." (James 3:9 - 12)

Verses 9 - 12:

The apostle rebukes those who insult others. How can they possibly bless the Lord in their prayers, yet abuse people, created in God's image, through their nasty words?? Are they really blessing God or cursing Him?? Such an eventuality should never occur...

Fifth analogy:

The tongue is likened unto a water spring: it cannot produce both fresh and bitter water! This rhetorical statement implies impossibility - consequently blessings and curses cannot possibly emanate from the same tongue. We are thus called to repent and refrain from uttering abusive words.

Sixth analogy:

The tongue is likened unto a tree: a tree cannot possibly produce fruit other than its own kind - hence, a fig tree cannot possibly produce olives!! Similarly, the tongue of God's children must only utter blessings, either to God through prayers, or to people through kind words.

+ As God's children, our speech with others should consist of kind words, encouragement, or apologies for our errors. We should consistently express willingness to help, thus demonstrating God's love within us.

3. The tongue and wisdom - verses 13 - 18:

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." (James 3:13 - 18)

Verse 13:

The apostle exhorts believers, who desire to help others, to ensure they have sufficient knowledge and wisdom in order to discharge such a task; they should demonstrate their wisdom by:

- a- Exercising proper conduct under various circumstances - since they must lead by example.
- b- Being consistently meek, humble and calm.

Verses 14 - 16:

"...do not boast and lie against the truth..." - We should not assume we are wise teachers when, in fact, we are steeped in sin, and our knowledge and wisdom are far from God and the truth.

The apostle compares worldly, versus heavenly, wisdom. The earthly one is "**sensual**," stemming from selfishness and love of the world, and leads to money-driven strife between brethren; such teaching has an apparent religious and righteous format, and may lead to the soul's emotional response - but is devoid of any spirituality. A genuine saint will, like the prophet Isaiah, feel humbled and in need of repentance, whenever approaching the Divine Throne. Normally, a spiritual lifestyle would not experience strong leaps - rather, it grows gradually as a plant, or a child.

Worldly wisdom is satanic: Satan insidiously introduces it to person, leading him to believe that he alone is wise - this leads to pride, inducing strife, divisiveness, polarization and partiality. Heresies are thus born under the guise of such wisdom.

Verses 17 & 18:

God grants heavenly wisdom to whoever seeks it faithfully and unpretentiously; such wisdom has the following attributes:

a- It is pure:

It has no hidden agenda and no partiality; the person is sincerely devout.

b- It is peaceful:

This is because the King of Peace is its source. It is not temporal as is worldly peace. It creates peace and diffuses peace and tranquility between man, his soul, his Creator, and others around him.

c- It is sympathetic:

It is sympathetic towards others' shortcomings tolerating them and offering encouragement for repentance - as Christ embraced Zacheaus the tax collector (Luke 19:1 - 10) and the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36 - 50).

d- It obeys:

It is obedient to the commandments and precepts of God, the Church and the parents, as mentioned in Luke 2:51, that Christ was obedient to His parents. It listens to others indiscriminately and rejects erroneous views.

e- It is filled with mercy and bears righteous fruit:

Supported by living faith, Divine wisdom yields the fruits of mercy and righteous deeds towards the weak, needy, poor, afflicted and fainthearted.

f- It is steadfast:

It has no doubts and does not waver in its love of God and faith in Him.

g- It is not hypocritical:

The tongue reflects what is in the heart in both conduct and speech.

h- It yields the fruits of righteousness:

Divine wisdom sows peace and yields the fruits of righteousness and good deeds.

+ Let us humble ourselves before God and men, and let us ask God for wisdom and knowledge as to how we should speak and conduct ourselves, while maintaining our purity and life of repentance. God will then continue to grant us wisdom through His Holy Spirit.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

An exegetical study of
The Epistle of St. James

Chapter 4

Evil desires

1. **Consequences of evil desires - verses 1 - 6:**

"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us [this refers to the Holy Spirit Who indwelt us through the Sacrament of Chrismation] **yearns jealously** [an expression of great love seeking us to turn away from Satan's wiles]"? **But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."**
(James 4:1 - 6)

Verse 1:

"....your desires for pleasure that war in your members...." - This refers to the evil desires which attract the body towards sin's pleasures.

Evil desires lead to significant consequences in a person's life, including:

a- **Problems:**

These cause people to rise up against each other, because such desires create selfishness which, in turn, leads to strife and bitter fights.

Verse 2:

"....because you do not ask...." - This means "You do not seek a spiritual, godly, lifestyle."

b- **Insufficiency** - evil desires create selfishness, leading to greed. A person would thus crave desires, and use all evil means - carnal sins, strife and even murder - but would never be satiated, rather, his craving increases. This is akin to chasing a mirage, leading to loss in the world's

wilderness. Seeking to satisfy material desires, rather than godly spirituality, leads to increasing hunger.

Verse 3:

c- Corruption of the relationship with God:

The apostle points out that indulgence in carnal desires corrupts the relationship with God. A person's prayers would thus be transformed into material requests, ignoring love of God and our neighbours. Consequently, such prayers would not be answered. Such a person would receive nothing, because of the evil petitions.

Verse 4:

d- Enmity with God:

The holy Bible presents the relationship between God and his congregation as the link between a groom and his bride - hence, a believer's love for the world is akin to spiritual adultery and, therefore, constitutes enmity with God. This is because, as a consequence, loving the world will distance man from God, and will occupy him with worldly issues whereas, in fact, the world is supposed to be a mere transitional stage ending with the heavenly wedding. God demands love with all our heart, as a Groom expects perfect love from His bride. In this regard, St. Paul says: ***"For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."*** (2 Corinthians 11:2) Put differently, each person has the freedom of choice: either love God and hate the world, or love the world and hate God.

Verse 5:

Love of the world and adherence to materialism is tantamount to enmity with God. The holy Bible proclaims God's great love for us. The Holy Spirit indwelling us through Chrismation jealously watches over us lest we should adhere to materialism and carnal desires. He will not stand against us, rather, He will lovingly return us to His fold, deliver us from Satan's grip, and grant us grace to resist Satan's wiles - then we will enjoy peace in His embrace.

Verse 6:

e- Pride:

Carnal desires lead to pride which fosters growth of such desires, a loss of God's grace, and even a resistance to God Who, in turn, resists the proud. On the other hand, God will deliver those who humble themselves before Him from their sins, leading them to enjoy fellowship with Him.

+ *If you are struggling against a certain carnal desire, humble yourself before God, in all repentance and humility, then He will lift it from you. Regardless of your fall, do not be perturbed - rather, persist in your struggle, and distance yourself from all sources of such desires.*

2. Repentance and the spiritual struggle - verses 7 - 12:

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (James 4:7 - 12)

Verse 7:

A believer should not fear Satan, since humility, submission to God, and obeying God's commandments, constitute strong support for resisting Satan's wars. In fact, fearing God's power, Satan distances himself from such a person.

Verse 8:

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you..." - Draw near to God through prayers, reading His holy words, and partaking of the holy communion. You will then feel closer to Him, since He is always close and, being closer, constitutes a positive response to His love - overall, drawing closer to God increases enjoyment of His care.

"Cleanse your hands, you sinners..." - Cleanse them through repentance of your sins which are apparent through your conduct and deeds, referred to as ***"hands."***

"...purify your hearts, you double-minded..." - This is aimed at those who alternate between loving the world and loving God. The apostle calls for rejection of the love of the world and focusing on the love of God. Again, this would be achieved through repentance, prayers and reading the word of God.

Verse 9:

The apostle exhorts believers to repent sincerely, by tearful supplications rejecting sin, rather than being immersed in worldly evil desires.

Verse 10:

By sensing the enormity of their sins, believers should humbly repent, seeking God's aid and forgiveness. God's positive response and blessings will be proportional to the extent and sincerity of supplications.

Verse 11:

The apostle warns against being judgmental, since judging others contravenes the law which requires loving our neighbour. Whoever judges others not only breaks the law, but also incurs condemnation.

Verse 12:

God is the Author of the law; God alone will judge the whole world. How, then, can man audaciously judge others?? By judging others, a person forcibly replaces God the Judge and, consequently, exposes himself to condemnation and God's punishment. Our merciful God is capable of leading all the fallen towards salvation. Persistence in judging others leads to perdition.

+ Let us focus on our repentance, and let us seek excuses for those who wrong us. God's mercies will abound in proportion to our humility. Let us struggle against the sins in which others have fallen, and let us pray for them seeking God's mercy.

3. Submission to God - verses 13 - 17:

"Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." (James 4:13 - 17)

Verse 13:

The apostle rebukes those depending on their power while being preoccupied with amassing wealth. They travel from one place to another seeking commercial deals and profits, without relying on God. Whereas commerce is not sinful per se, unreliance on God is.

Verse 14:

Life is short, and no one knows when their life will end. Thus, life is like a puff of vapour that quickly disappears. Thus, we should seize life's opportunity to repent and seek our soul's salvation, rather than amassing wealth. Life's sole goal should be reliance on God.

Verse 15:

The apostle accentuates the importance of correctly seeking God's guidance, through prayer, prior to undertaking any decisions or commercial activities.

Verse 16:

The apostle rebukes the proud who boast of their own power and wealth. Such pride incurs God's wrath.

Verse 17:

No one should be complacent or too lazy to work. The apostle alerts us to the importance of carrying out all our good deeds/duties, since all good and useful deeds must be realized, both in the material and spiritual domains. Everything must be effected in full submission to God. Life is very short, and every opportunity to do good must be seized. Why ignore the opportunities to do good deeds that the Lord has given us?? Work is a blessing, since it is for the Lord - it is not an arduous task. Wasting chances to work is sinful and accountable to God.

+ Let us take care not only to distance ourselves from evil, but also to do good, and to seize every opportunity to support and encourage those around us. We should repent for all instances of carelessness or negligence, and follow that by seizing every opportunity to do good.



*"Interpretation of the holy Bible - the New Testament"
taken from the series: "Patristic expositions and meditations"*

An exegetical study of
The Epistle of St. James

Chapter 5

Asceticism - Patience - Prayer - Service

1. Consequences of loving money - verses 1 - 6:

"Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you [eternal torment]! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you." (James 5:1 - 6)

Verses 1 - 3:

St. James calls on the rich, who rely on their wealth, to lament, since their punishment was approaching. They had been preoccupied by amassing worldly wealth and loving perishables more than God. Their riches would be obliterated, their rich apparel would rot, and their precious metals would tarnish. All this would be a testimony against them, and cause for their eternal perdition in hell fire, since they failed to give the poor and needy. Even during the final days of their lives, rather than focus on the heavenly treasure, they focused on perishing worldly treasures; thus, they not only lost everything, on earth and in heaven, but also their very souls.

Verse 4:

The love of money leads to selfishness and harshness. Hence, the wealthy have unfairly withheld the wages of the labourers who sowed and harvested in their fields. The omnipotent God, "**the Lord of Sabaoth,**" hears the cries of, and defends, the oppressed.

Verse 5:

Wealthy people's luxurious lifestyle feeds their sin-hardened hearts, as though in preparation for slaughter, akin to preparing livestock for slaughter. Worms feed on the fattened flesh as the holy Bible says: "**But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives.**" (1 Timothy 5:6)

Verse 6:

The wealthy have **"condemned,....murdered the just; he does not resist you."**

+ St. James underscores a practical lesson, namely, worldly treasures perish - thus, we should build treasures in heaven, as our Lord said in Matthew 6:19. Therefore, we should seize every opportunity to do good and to help the poor. These are God-given, unrecurrent, precious opportunities.

2. Patience - refraining from swearing - verses 7 - 12:

"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth [this refers to the eternal reward], waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 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. But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment." (James 5:7 - 12)

Verses 7 & 8:

"....the early....rain..." - This refers to the Fall rain, irrigating the fields for the winter; it symbolizes the Holy Spirit's work, through the Sacrament of Baptism, encouraging believers' initial spiritual struggle.

"....the latter....rain..." - This refers to the Spring rain, irrigating the fields for the winter, shortly before harvest; it symbolizes the Holy Spirit's help, throughout believers' entire lives.

The apostle calls on the poor and oppressed to maintain, patiently, steadfastness in their faith, following the example of farmers, who irrigate and till the land, patiently awaiting the early Fall, and late Spring, rains respectively. He exhorts them to wait for the Lord's salvation, and His coming, during which He will reward them in eternity. Suffering is endured through expectation of Christ's coming.

Verse 9:

The apostle warns the poor and oppressed to refrain from rebelling against each other, from judging one another, and from seeking revenge.

This is because while rebellion incurs condemnation, the rich deserve pity, for being held captive in Satan's hand. He reminds them that Christ, the Judge, will give each one according to their deeds (Matthew 7:1) at His second coming.

Verse 10:

The apostle calls for patience while awaiting the Lord's salvation, since the Lord will not permit trials to exceed a person's endurance. The example of all the prophets' endurance should be followed.

Verse 11:

"Job" is given as the ultimate example for endurance and patience. God rewarded him for enduring his sons' death, poverty and mockery. God praised him, and compensated him with twofold of his earlier possessions.

Verse 12:

The holy Bible prohibits swearing - since we should not swear by something we do not own....Everything we own belongs to God, and we are merely God's stewards. Being consistently truthful develops trust by others - since a truthful tongue will only utter untainted truths. In Matthew 5:34 our Lord instructs us **"But I say to you, do not swear at all..."** It should also be noted that swearing by God, or by anything at all, is inappropriate, since Satan exploits swearing (or making an oath) in moments of anger, such as what had driven Herod to murder John the Baptist (Matthew 14:7).

3. Prayer - Sacrament of Unction of the Sick - verses 13 - 18:

"Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders [priests] of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit." (James 5:13 - 18)

Verse 13:

Those experiencing trials and hardships should raise their hearts to God, Who feels for them, and Who suffered for their sake on the Cross. God will support and comfort them, wiping away their anguish.

Having received God's bounties, they should express their joy in a spiritual manner, rather than wickedly as the world does. Spiritual joy can be expressed through lauds and hymns, organized by the Church.

Verse 14:

St. James indicates that Sacrament of Unction of the Sick had been practised during the apostolic era. He exhorts believers to invite priests to administer this Sacrament at the home of any afflicted person. That person would then be anointed by oil sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 15:

Furthermore, the apostle emphasizes the importance of faith, and its link to that Sacrament: this is faith of the priests as well as those around them. Additionally, repentance and confession are necessary during administration of this Sacrament. This would lead to healing of the sick person, as well as forgiveness of his sins.

Verse 16:

"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

The apostle continues to exhort all present to pray with one heart and one accord, hence, ***"The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much."*** This also emphasizes the belief, held since the early Church, that fervent prayers and intercessions of the saints can produce significant results. God is pleased with all who humble themselves before Him with ardent prayers.

Verses 17 & 18:

The apostle accentuates further the importance of fervent prayer, giving the example of the prophet Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:1) who prayed faithfully that the heavens withhold rain for three and one half years, so that people would repent and turn from idolatry. Elijah was a human being exposed, like all of us, to hardships. He prayed a second time and the rains fell, irrigating the land, producing a harvest that eliminated the famine which had prevailed due to the lack of rain.

+ *The power of prayer moves the entire world, and unleashes God's mercies, especially if prayers emanated from a pure, contrite, heart, supplicating God in sincere faith. Let us hasten, without delay, seeking God's help in all our needs, and persisting in our petitions, regardless of their significance, and fully confident of His love and compassion.*

4. **Reaching out to the stray - verses 19 & 20:**

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19 & 20)

Verses 19 & 20:

The apostles requests believers to care for each other, such that if any stray from the right path - whether away from the faith, or immersion in significant sins - they should hasten to steer him back to repentance through love and humility. They would thus be saving him from eternal perdition, and he would return to being a productive member of the Church.

The significance of service is thus accentuated. God is our Saviour, but He delights in our spiritual service, and He blesses and perfects it.

St. Gregory commented on this aspect saying, *"Given that a person saving another from physical death merits a reward, how much more should a person be rewarded for saving another from eternal death...?"*

St. Paul confirms the above saying, ***"Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."*** (Hebrews 10:38) Also, ***"....work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."*** (Philippians 2:12) And ***"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ..."*** (Philippians 3:18)

+ *Pay much attention to the salvation of those around you, especially members of your household, your relatives and your friends. If they reject your guidance, then offer them love and pray for them.*

