

Purpose and Outline

The primary purpose of James is to encourage his readers to faithfulness to God's Word (especially the command to love others) in the midst of their trials, to explain how God uses trials to develop endurance and grow them to maturity, and to explain the nature of the coming judgment of their works before the Lord Jesus Christ. Below is an outline of the epistle of James:

- I. GREETING (1:1)
- II. GOD USES TESTS AND TRIALS TO GROW US TO MATURITY (1:1-18)
 - a. Trials produce endurance leading to maturity (1:2-4)
 - b. Trials produce wisdom (1:5-11)
 - c. Trials produce happiness (1:12-18)
 - i. Trials lead to receiving the crown of life (1:12)
 - ii. Don't blame God when you sin and experience death (1:13-15)
 - iii. God gives good gifts, including eternal salvation (1:16-18)
- III. **CENTRAL EXHORTATION:** THE CHRISTIAN GROWING TO MATURITY IS QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO ANGER (1:19-20)
- IV. GOOD HEARERS HUMBLY EMBRACE GOD'S IMPLANTED WORD AND LIVE IT OUT TO THE SAVING OF THE SOUL-LIFE AT THE JUDGMENT (1:21-2:26)
 - a. **Key Principle About Being Swift to Hear:** Putting aside sin and humbly embracing God's Word can save your soul-life (1:21)
 - b. Knowing God's Word does is not the same as embracing and experiencing His Word (1:22-27)
 - i. The attitude toward God's Word of someone who does not embrace it and apply it to life (1:23-24)
 - ii. The attitude toward God's Word of someone who embraces it and applies the law of liberty to life (1:25)
 - iii. The empty religion and self-deception of the person who does not embrace God's Word is revealed by his or her uncontrolled speech (1:26)
 - iv. The authentic religion of the person who does embrace God's Word is revealed by his or her application of the law of liberty to life (1:27)
 - c. Our obedience to the law of liberty (royal law) will be approved at the judgment and save our soul-life (2:1-26)
 - i. A practical example – showing favoritism in the church based on wealth violates the law of liberty (royal law) (2:1-7)
 1. Favoring the wealthy reveals sinful motives (2:1-4)
 2. Favoring the wealthy ignores that it is the poor in the world that will inherit in the kingdom (2:5-7)
 - ii. Fulfilling the royal law will find approval at the judgment (2:8-13)
 1. The royal law is to love others (2:8)
 2. Favoritism violates the royal law and makes one a transgressor (2:9-11)
 3. The law of liberty is the standard applied at the judgment to our speech and actions (2:12-13)

- iii. Knowing and believing God's Word without also living it out will not profit us at the judgment (2:14-26)
 - 1. The first faith-works inclusio: a faith without works will not save your soul-life at the judgment (2:14-17)
 - 2. The diatribe against the hypothetical objector (2:18-19)
 - 3. The second faith-works inclusio: a faith without works is useless (2:20-26)
- V. BE SLOW TO SPEAK BECAUSE YOUR WORDS WILL BE JUDGED AND HOW YOU SPEAK REVEALS YOUR MATURITY AND THE WISDOM YOU LIVE BY (3:1-18)
 - a. **Key Principle About Being Slow to Speak**: Be wise about becoming a teacher of God's Word because you will be subject to a stricter judgment. (3:1)
 - b. Controlling our speech is a hallmark of spiritual maturity and indicates disciplined control over our entire body (works). (3:2-4)
 - i. Illustrated by the use of a small bit to control the entire horse's body. (3:3)
 - ii. Illustrated by the use of a small rudder to control the entire ship. (3:4)
 - iii. Negatively illustrated by a small fire that scorches an entire forest. (3:5)
 - iv. Lack of control of our speech will pollute our entire body (works). (3:6)
 - c. Our speech cannot be completely controlled. (3:7-12)
 - i. Contrasted with animals that can be tamed. (3:7)
 - ii. Our speech cannot be completely controlled because it is corrupted. (3:8-10)
 - iii. The incongruity of uncontrolled speech illustrated by a spring of water, a fig tree, and a grape vine. (3:11-12)
 - d. Our speech is a reflection of the wisdom we choose to live by. (3:13-18)
 - i. Our Christian works show we are living in humility that derives from heavenly wisdom. (3:13)
 - ii. But boasting and lying shows selfish ambition in our hearts that derives from worldly, demonic wisdom. (3:14-16)
 - iii. Heavenly wisdom lived out produces godly thinking and the fruit of righteousness and peace with one another. (3:17-18)
- VI. BE SLOW TO WRATH / ANGER (4:1-5:6)
 - a. **Key Principle About Being Slow to Wrath**: Your worldliness causes strife with other Christians and hostility toward God. (4:1-5)
 - i. Worldliness causes strife with other Christians. (4:1-2)
 - ii. Worldliness ruins your prayer life. (4:2-3)
 - iii. A love affair with the world creates hostility with God. (4:4-5)
 - b. Humble submission to God prevents the negative results of worldliness. (4:6-5:6)
 - i. Humility brings us closer to God and He exalts us. (4:6-10)
 - 1. God gives grace to the humble. (4:6)
 - 2. Submit to God and resist the devil. (4:7)
 - 3. Draw near to God with clean hands and pure hearts. (4:8)
 - 4. Mourn and weep over your sin. (4:9)
 - 5. Humble yourself before God and He will exalt you. (4:10)
 - ii. Humility prevents critical speech toward fellow Christians. (4:11-12)

1. Critical speech toward fellow Christians makes us judges of the royal law rather than doers of the royal law. (4:11)
 2. Only God has the right to judge. (4:12)
 - iii. Humility prevents us from leaving God out of our plans. (4:13-17)
 1. Illustrated by arrogant speech (plans) that leaves God out. (4:13)
 2. Humility recognizes that we are not guaranteed tomorrow. (4:14)
 3. Our speech (plans) should reflect our submission to God. (4:15)
 4. Boastful speech (plans) is sin. (4:16-17)
 - iv. Humility prevents us from acting like the wicked rich people who will be judged for oppressing the poor. (5:1-6)
 1. The rich oppressors are called upon to mourn their coming judgment. (5:1)
 2. Their ill-gotten wealth will stand witness against them. (5:2-4)
 3. They lived out worldly desires fattening their hearts for the coming judgment. (5:5)
 4. They murdered the righteous who did not resist. (5:6)
- VII. CLOSING EXHORTATIONS TO ENDURE IN TRIALS KNOWING THE LORD'S RETURN IS NEAR (5:7-11)
- a. Be patient and strengthen your hearts in the knowledge that the Lord's return is near. (5:7-8)
 - b. Don't fight with fellow Christians because the judge will soon return. (5:9)
 - c. Illustrated by the prophets who endured through suffering. (5:10)
 - d. Illustrated by the life of Job, which also shows the Lord's mercy. (5:11)
- VIII. CLOSING EXHORTATIONS ON SPEECH (5:12-20)
- a. Don't take oaths, but tell the truth. (5:12)
 - b. The suffering should pray and the merry should sing praises. (5:13)
 - c. The church elders should anoint and pray over the spiritually weary. (5:14-15)
 - d. Pray for one another knowing the effectiveness of the prayer of a righteous person. (5:16)
 - e. Illustrated in the prayers of Elijah. (5:17-18)
 - f. Share the truth to Christians caught up in false doctrine. (5:19-20)