

In That He Is Made Low
James 1:9-11

James 1:9-11 reads, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

Again we take note that the Holy Spirit inspired purpose for this epistle is to provide pastoral counsel for a spiritually mature walk in the believer’s life. **James 1:9-11** presents the second paragraph of the epistle. This paragraph gives counsel concerning the contrasting subjects of humble maturity and worldly materialism. The contextual situation and setting for the paragraph is established through the closing line of the paragraph at the end of **verse 11** -- “So also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.” This contextual situation primarily concerns the materialistic ways of the rich.

Brethren, we all will face the temptation to the sin of worldly materialism. For those believers who lack material wealth, the temptation will be to set the focus of their heart and energy upon obtaining material wealth, to covet the material wealth of others around them, and to be discontent with their lack of material wealth, and even be discouraged thereby. For those believers who possess material wealth, the temptation will be to set the focus of their heart and energy upon protecting their material wealth, and even upon obtaining more, to look down with pride upon those around them who possess less material wealth, and to depend upon the power of their material wealth to provide, to deliver, and to influence.

Even so, **verse 9** provides an instruction of encouragement to the lowly. This instruction is intended to encourage lowly believers in their lack of material wealth. Then, closely connected to **verse 9** in its grammatical construction, **verse 10** provides an instruction of exhortation to the rich. This instruction is intended to exhort rich believers not to focus upon their material wealth. Finally, flowing out of the closing thought of **verse 10**, **verse 11** provides an illustration of admonition to the rich. This illustration is intended to warn all believers away from the ways of materialism. Overall, this paragraph presents two primary truths concerning the contrast between humble maturity and worldly materialism.

I. We must *glory in the ways of humble maturity*.

Grammatically, **verses 9-10** are connected together as a single, compound sentence. This compound sentence is governed by a single verb of command. This verb of command is the word “rejoice” found in **verse 9**. This word “rejoice” is translated from a Greek word that means, not simply to express joy and gladness, but to express exultation and glory. Herein we are commanded by the Lord our God to glory in a particular matter. So then, in what are we required to glory? In this passage two distinct and contrasting categories of believers are specified, and each category is instructed to glory in a different matter.

The first category of believers is mentioned in **verse 9**. This category is “the brother of low degree.” The second category of believers is mentioned in **verse 10**. This category is “the rich.” Since the word “brother” is employed in **verse 9**, and since both categories are grammatically connected in a single sentence under a single verb of command, it is to be understood that both categories refer to fellow believers. Both categories refer to God’s dear children, to brothers and sisters within the family of God. Clearly the category of “the rich” refers to believers who have been blessed with material wealth in the things of this world. In contrast, the category of those “of low degree” refers to believers who are poor and lowly in the circumstances of this life. Yet they are not specifically described as the *poor*. Rather, they are specifically described as the *lowly*. This indicates that these believers were not simply poor in their condition, but had also learned some level of lowliness and humility in spirit thereby.

So then, in what is each of these categories instructed to glory? In **verse 9** “the brother of low degree” is instructed to glory “in that he is exalted.” The believer who is poor in the circumstances of this life and who has learned a spirit of lowliness and humility thereby is instructed to glory in *the promise of exaltation*. He is instructed by the Lord our God to glory in our Lord’s sure promise of exaltation for the humble. In **James 4:10** the promise is given, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” Again in **1 Peter 5:6** the promise is given, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” “The brother of low degree” is not to seek after the possessions of this life, but to glory in the promise of the Lord. He is not to be covetous after the life of materialism, but to be dependent upon the Lord of promise.

On the other hand, in **verse 10** “the rich” believer is instructed to glory “in that he is made low.” The believer who is blessed with material wealth in the things of this world is instructed to glory in *the lessons of humility*. He is instructed by the Lord our God to glory in anything, including any trial, trouble, or tribulation, that might teach him the spiritual characteristic of humility. He is not to glory in the ways of worldly materialism, but to delight in his growth in humble maturity. He is not to set his affection and dependence upon his material wealth in this life. Rather, he is to set his attention and pursuit upon his humble walk before the Lord.

Overall, the principle truth of **James 1:9-10** is that we must glory in the ways of humble maturity. We must set the burden of our heart, the focus of our attention, and the pursuit of our life upon growing in humility before the Lord. On the one hand, since “the rich” believer is in a high position in this world, he will be tempted thereby to exalt himself in the ways of materialism. Therefore, our Lord instructs and exhorts him rather to glory in those troubles that teach him the spiritual characteristic of humility. On the other hand, since “the brother of low degree” is in a low condition in this world, he will be tempted thereby to be discouraged in his service for the Lord. Therefore, our Lord instructs and encourages him rather to glory in the Lord’s promise that he will be exalted in due time.

II. We must *guard against* the ways of *worldly materialism*.

Yet there is a second primary truth presented in the paragraph of **James 1:9-11**. This second primary truth is that we must guard against the ways of worldly materialism. In order to motivate “the rich” believer to glory in the lessons of humility, a warning is given at the end of **verse 10** concerning the ways of materialism. Concerning the one who is materialistically minded, the closing portion of **verse 10** states, “Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” This warning is further emphasized and explained in **verse 11** through the form of a picturesque illustration -- “For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.”

From the Biblical perspective, materialism can be defined as placing a greater affection and attention upon the possession and pleasures of material wealth, than upon the fellowship and service of our Lord. In **Matthew 6:19-21** our Lord Jesus Christ preached against such materialism, saying, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” To this He added the truth in **verse 24**, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon [material wealth].”

Clearly then, the pursuits and ways of materialism are directly contrary to the love and service of the Lord our God. We cannot pursue after both the ways of materialism and the service of the Lord. We cannot love and serve both material things and the Lord our God. If we love and hold to the one, material things, then we must hate and despise the other, the Lord our God. There is no possible compromise in this matter. Therefore, **James 1:11** warns us that the materialistically minded individual will fade and pass away in his ways, just as the grass and the flower of the grass is withered and consumed by the heat of the sun. By nature the things of this world do not last. Furthermore, the Lord our God will pour out the burning heat of His chastening wrath against any of His children who pursue after the ways of materialism. Thus the admonition of **James 1:10-11** is intended to motivate us to guard our hearts and lives against any of the ways of worldly materialism. We must not lay up for ourselves treasures upon the earth. We must not serve the material things of this life. We must glory in the ways of humble maturity, but we must guard ourselves against the ways of worldly materialism.