

JAMES 4:1—5:20

II. The results of their earthly wisdom are misery. The solution for their misery is recognition of their depravity and asking God for His wisdom (4:1--5:20).

A. The result of their earthly wisdom is misery (4:1-4).

1. The source of their conflicts and quarrels is the flesh and its selfish desires and thus they oppose God as enemies (4:1-4).

a. The source of their conflicts and quarrels is the flesh and its selfish desires (4:1).

What is the source of quarrels (lit.: wars) and conflicts among you? Is it not from here, your pleasures that wage war in your members?

Πόθεν πόλεμοι καὶ πόθεν μάχαι ἐν ὑμῖν; οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν, ἐκ τῶν ἡδονῶν ὑμῶν τῶν στρατευομένων ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν;

b. They lust for selfish purposes and obtain the desired results through worldly self-centered, destructive means, and they don't ask of God because they are satisfied with their human wisdom based in lusts (4:2).

You lust (lit.: covet) and do not have; you murder and you are jealous and are not able to obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask.

ἐπιθυμεῖτε καὶ οὐκ ἔχετε, φονεύετε καὶ ζηλοῦτε καὶ οὐ δύνασθε ἐπιτυχεῖν, μάχεσθε καὶ πολεμεῖτε, οὐκ ἔχετε διὰ τὸ μὴ αἰτεῖσθαι ὑμᾶς,

c. They ask¹ of God² (cf. 1:5), but they don't receive because their desires are the world's, not God's (4:3).

¹ Refer to the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 7:7-8.

² This is the same thing as was stated in 1:5-8. They ask for wisdom, but since they ask selfishly they do not receive. In other words, they are asking of God but are

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives (lit.: wickedly), in order that you might spend on your pleasures.

αἰτεῖτε καὶ οὐ λαμβάνετε διότι κακῶς αἰτεῖσθε, ἵνα ἐν ταῖς ἡδοναῖς ὑμῶν δαπανήσητε.

This is parallel to 1:5-6 where they ask “judging” (or doubting). Here is the play out of that concept. They are motivated to ask God for physical benefits so that they might elevate themselves before men.

- d. They are adulterers because they are married to God but are living with the world. They are not representing God, thus they are not friends³, but enemies. (4:4)

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

μοιχαλίδες, οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ἡ φιλία τοῦ κόσμου ἔχθρα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν; ὃς ἐὰν οὖν βουλευθῆ φίλος εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου, ἐχθρὸς τοῦ θεοῦ καθίσταται.

- B. Their humble repentance and subjection to God's wisdom will elevate them in God's eyes (4:5--5:6).
1. They need to humble themselves and seek God's wisdom, not the world's (4:5-10).
 - a. God placed⁴ His Spirit in us so that we would seek the Word and the wisdom of God (4:5).

Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He

requesting based on human desires, not God's desires. (They ask that they might be elevated in the world's view).

³ See 2:23 where Abraham was called the “friend” of God because he was listening to the revelation.

⁴ Notice the word “jealously” is used to contrast to human jealousy.

has made to dwell in us"?

ἢ δοκεῖτε ὅτι κενῶς⁵ ἡ γραφή λέγει· πρὸς φθόνον ἐπιποθεῖ τὸ πνεῦμα ὃ κατόκισεν ἐν ἡμῖν,

This goes back to chapter 1 where the believer was birthed by God, and now he talks about how God longs for His Spirit to dwell in man (effectively?). Thus, God desires for man to operate by His character desires. He even uses the word “jealously” and “desires” as a contrast to the antagonist’s fleshly desires and jealousy. It is as if God has the same motivational movements, but they are sourced from His character not man’s. Thus to long for and to be jealous are not bad characteristics as long as they come from God’s character.

b. God's Word reveals that humility is the way to God's blessing (4:6-10).

1) The O.T. shows that God hates proud people, but is gracious to those who humble themselves before Him (4:6).

*But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says,
"GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT
GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."*

μείζονα δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν; διὸ λέγει· ὁ θεὸς ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν.

The second part of the verse is a reference to Psalm 136:6 (or perhaps Proverbs 3:34) and again the major point of James, which reiterates itself throughout the epistle.

Probably the “greater grace” is equivalent to “more and more grace” simply meaning God is very generous, greater than man.

⁵ This is related to the “foolish fellow” word in 2:20 where he is “vain” and here is the same word, “empty” or “vain.”

- 2) Resist the world's wisdom and it will leave you, for God's wisdom will replace it in those who seek it (4:7-8).

Submit therefore to God and resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse (your) hands, sinners; and purify (your) hearts, double-minded.

ὑποτάγητε οὖν τῷ θεῷ, ἀντίστητε δὲ τῷ διαβόλῳ καὶ φεύξεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν, ἐγγίσατε τῷ θεῷ καὶ ἐγγιεῖ ὑμῖν. Καθαρίσατε χεῖρας, ἁμαρτωλοί, καὶ ἀγνίσατε καρδίας, δίψυχοι.

The message here is for those who are lacking (poor, arrogant, enemies, etc.) to ask for the wisdom of God (1:5). The word for “submit” is pretty clear. It is the submission to an authority without questioning. The resisting of the devil is the resisting of human reasoning (lusts) and should include an “and” in the sentence so it is connected with the submission to God. The reference to “double-minded” recalls 1:6 where the one who looks at God through his evil character perception (judges) must purify his heart (by asking for imputed wisdom).

- 3) The enjoyment of the world must cease, one must realize his depravity and seek God, and then He will elevate one in His wisdom (4:9-10).

Endure hardship and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

ταλαιπωρήσατε καὶ πενθήσατε καὶ κλαύσατε. ὁ γέλως ὑμῶν εἰς πένθος μετατραπήτω καὶ ἡ χαρὰ εἰς κατήφειαν. ταπεινώθητε ἐνώπιον κυρίου καὶ ὑψώσει ὑμᾶς.

The reversal of literary irony is present here. James had called for joy in 1:2, yet to those who lack wisdom he calls for endurance of hardship and

mourning, etc. He desires that this is the process of repentance back to humility where they will ask for wisdom.

2. Do not show partiality to one's brother, it shows an improper perception of God's Word⁶ to yourself and your brother (4:11-12).

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Μὴ καταλαλεῖτε ἀλλήλων, ἀδελφοί. ὁ καταλαλῶν ἀδελφοῦ ἢ κρίνων τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ καταλαλεῖ νόμου καὶ κρίνει νόμον· εἰ δὲ νόμον κρίνεις, οὐκ εἶ ποιητῆς νόμου ἀλλὰ κριτῆς. εἷς ἐστὶν [ὁ] νομοθέτης καὶ κριτῆς ὁ δυνάμενος σῶσαι καὶ ἀπολέσαι· σὺ δὲ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων τὸν πλησίον;

These again go to the heart of the book and summarize what has gone on before. The one who judges a brother from his own perspective (human wisdom) is assessing his brother with respect to his own view. Thus the Law, which did judge the brother from God's perspective, is not the standard, but one's own perspective. Thus he elevates himself over the Law since he judges himself as perfect, and not as imperfect, by the Law. Thus he judges the Law as in 1:6 where one was to ask for wisdom (i.e., the wisdom of the Law, the character of God) nothing doubting (or judging). A doer of the Law was one who appropriated the character of God for himself. But this one does not, but uses his own perspective.

3. Do not be arrogant about your control of events,⁷ since it is God who controls events for his submissive representative (4:13-17).

⁶ When these people improperly judge their brother on the world's values they are improperly perceiving the Law, elevating themselves falsely, and thus the Law has submitted to them, since they improperly perceive it. They are judging from their own perspective and thus judging the Law. This is similar to 1:5, "nothing doubting (judging)" where they were to go to the wisdom of God without questioning it as valid and looking at things from God's perspective.

⁷ This, like 4:11-12, shows an elevation above God.

- a. The antagonist is warned not to be presumptuous against God's control, particularly in that he determines God's purpose is to be successful. (4:13).

Go now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will proceed to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and profit."

Ἄγε νῦν οἱ λέγοντες· σήμερον ἢ αὔριον
πορευσόμεθα εἰς τήνδε τὴν πόλιν καὶ ποιήσομεν
ἐκεῖ ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ ἐμπορευσόμεθα καὶ κερδήσομεν·

The hypothetical antagonist now speaks. His point is that he is going to determine his future based on his own ability and pursuits and his stated (godly) goal that he is going to have success. Now if one sees what James has been saying already he would identify certain problems with this.

1. He is assuming that he is in control of his future.
2. He is assuming he directs his path and pursuits.
3. [Important]: The goal of his pursuits is to profit or be successful.

All of these are presumptuous against the one who is to be humble before God. Particularly the last statement, however, makes the man's purpose to be successful. The implication is that he thinks that this is God's will (God's desire for him).

- b. The antagonist is told that God is in control of his destiny and his purpose and that successes that identify these lustful men will pass away since God is in control and will eliminate the worldly successful (4:14).

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little (while) and then vanishes away (lit.: is destroyed, is caused to disappear).

οἵτινες οὐκ ἐπίστασθε τὸ τῆς αὔριον ποία ἡ ζωὴ
ὑμῶν· ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστε ἢ πρὸς ὀλίγον φαινομένη,
ἔπειτα καὶ ἀφανιζομένη.

The issue that life is a vapor is a consistent Old Testament theme. It shows up in places like Psalm 144:4

and is a major point of Ecclesiastes (as in 1:2) where all is breath (vapor). Probably the most direct verse James is referencing is Proverbs 27:1.

Proverbs 27:1 Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.

- c. The antagonist is told that his statement of his future should be according to the wisdom of God's desires not his. (4:15).

Instead, you ought to say, "If (e.g., as) the Lord might desire, we will live and also do this or that."

ἀντὶ τοῦ λέγειν ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν ὁ κύριος θελήσῃ καὶ ζήσομεν καὶ ποιήσομεν τοῦτο ἢ ἐκεῖνο.

This verse has been used as an additive to a believer's statements of plans, and it is appropriate to do so since it grants one's plans to the sovereignty of God and is a designation of the man's humility.

However, it is much more in the context of James. Recall that God's wisdom is His desires. Thus the expression here is to do according to God's desires, His character ("If the Lord desires . . ."). Then the "this or that" makes the success or outcome a variable thing. In other words he will not "make a profit" but will do according to the wisdom of God and the outcome will be whatever it will be. This goes back to James 1:2 where endurance according to God's desire is the issue and the final outcome is simply to endure, not to be successful.

The first thing that might be granted according to God's desire is to "live." Now while this might be seen as simple "life," it is the definition of life under God's wisdom as "life" is used in James. So the prayer here is to live according to *hesed*, not just be alive. That would be a human wisdom wish (on one's own selfish pleasures) not a prayer for God's life, to be delivered.

Then the "this or that" is opposed to "make a profit" or "go to such and such a town." The town and the profit is now gone and the "this or that" remains. In other words,

one is to act on *hesed* and the outcome will be whatever it is . . . as God determines.

- d. The summary of this hypothetical example is that the antagonist is boasting of himself, his abilities, his pursuits and this is wisdom that is from below, demonic. (4:16).

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

νῦν δὲ καυχᾶσθε ἐν ταῖς ἀλαζονείαις ὑμῶν· πᾶσα καύχησις τοιαύτη πονηρά ἐστίν.

- e. When one knows that the Word of God is the proper source for wisdom, and ignores it for the world's wisdom, he is representing self, not God -- sin⁸ (4:17).

Therefore, to one who knows the good thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin⁹.

εἰδóτι οὖν καλὸν ποιεῖν καὶ μὴ ποιοῦντι, ἁμαρτία αὐτῷ ἐστίν.

Here again is the word “good” (*kalon*). This is the impact of a “doer” as opposed to a hearer. One identifies with the Word of God through Jesus (e.g., is saved), but does not appropriate the *hesed* of God.

This is not only a summary of the imperatives of the book, it is a fitting conclusion to the example just given. The man was approaching his future based on the assumption that he controlled his purpose and that purpose was success (profit). It was what he felt God wanted for him (double minded).

However, he was to know the wisdom of God (not just identify with it) and that would determine, not what the outcome was, but how he was to operate . . . with *hesed*.

⁸ Note that in 1:15ff. this leads to death.

⁹ This could be a reference to Cain, who in Genesis 4:7 was told by God to do it “right,” or *tov* (lit.: “good”). Here the word is *kalon*, which is also “good.”

5. The rich man (in the world's eyes) needs to repent and humble himself, for his riches are worthless in God's sight (5:1-6).
 - a. He should be miserable for what the world has led him into (5:1-3a).

Come now, you rich, weep, howling for your miseries, for those coming. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be to a witness to you and will consume your flesh like fire.

Ἄγε νῦν οἱ πλούσιοι, κλαύσατε ὀλολύζοντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις ὑμῶν ταῖς ἐπερχομέναις¹⁰. ὁ πλοῦτος ὑμῶν σέσηπεν¹¹ καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια ὑμῶν σητόβρωτα γέγονεν, ὁ χρυσὸς ὑμῶν καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος κατίωται¹² καὶ ὁ ἰδὸς αὐτῶν εἰς μαρτύριον ὑμῶν ἔσται καὶ φάγεται τὰς σάρκας ὑμῶν ὡς πῦρ.

The question rises up here once more as to what James is indicating will happen to this rich man? James speaks in reference to those who have not repented or become humble according to 1:10 or according to 4:9-10. In other words, James is speaking to the rich man who has not repented and is relying on his riches as his identity.

The use of the verbs here indicates that the riches have been in the past, and continue to be, worthless. However, James shifts to a future tense in the middle voice

¹⁰ This is a present middle participle that would indicate that the person is bringing them about through his own actions. So, it is not likely at this point he is talking about a final judgment, but more likely the process described in 1:13-15, which is spiritual death. The question of physical death or sickness is also a possibility here as will be seen in the following context.

¹¹ This is a perfect tense indicating that the decay, etc., has happened and is continuing to happen to the person.

¹² The verbs here are future middle referencing the gold and the silver. Thus the rusting here will be a testimony against them and will “eat” their flesh. Now that this is a future tense, the question is when this will occur since it apparently has not as yet. Is it a future eschatological judgment, or a physical judgment in life? The answer appears to be both, that is, it will affect them sanctificationally now and perhaps physically now, and most assuredly when the Judge appears.

when he speaks of them testifying against the man which ends up consuming his flesh like fire.

Obviously, a Christian's flesh would not be consumed in the eschaton since he will get a new body at the resurrection. And while James does not speak of the resurrection body in the book, the clarity of that in the rest of Scripture insists that this be talking about the present life (or the unbeliever's future life). There is no indication generally that unbelievers fall under the judgment of God for being rich. Thus this would have to be the chastisement of a rich believer. It is remotely possible that James is talking about the rich unbeliever and exhorting him to get saved. The difficulty with this is that there is no place in the book where he does not reference the reader as a believer (cf. 2:1).

Thus, this would most likely be the physical judgment on a believer referenced throughout the New Testament, foundational in Matthew 18, but exercised in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.¹³ That warning is followed by implementation in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 where Paul tells them to excommunicate the incestuous man for the "destruction of his flesh." Paul refers to it as well in 1 Corinthians 11:30 with the abuses at the Lord's Supper where he declares, "for this reason many of you are weak and sickly, and many sleep." He finishes this with a warning that judgment could fall on them for further abuses (11:34).

In the next verses it is clear that the rich man is oppressing the poor believer and gaining profits at the cost of the poor man. Thus this judgment seems to be coming as God defends this man who oppresses, but more importantly spreads his doctrine of self-righteousness to others.

¹³ Paul refers to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 as a temple in the sense of a body of believers. He points out, as Matthew 18 that the destruction of the believers in the church is of serious consequence and will be dealt with harshly.

¹⁶ *Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?* ¹⁷ *If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*

Thus it could be physical ailments as will be seen in the following verses about the sick man being anointed. But, it could be worse, and that is that the man becomes dead sanctificationally and loses his present tense relationship with God (not eternal relationship), which would include lack of rewards (see the reward of the crown of life in 1:13).

- b. In the last days¹⁴ when spiritual concerns are the only value, he has stored up worldly values. (5:3b-4).

It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! ⁴ Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

ἐθησαυρίσατε ἐν ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις. ἰδοὺ ὁ μισθὸς τῶν ἐργατῶν τῶν ἀμησάντων τὰς χώρας ὑμῶν ὁ ἀπεστερημένος ἀφ' ὑμῶν κρᾶζει, καὶ αἱ βοαὶ τῶν θερισάντων εἰς τὰ ὄτα κυρίου σαβαὼθ εἰσεληλύθασιν.

First of all, James points out how foolish this rich man is. The “Last Days” are the days following the appearance of the Christ when righteousness is given to believers in the full measure. This period of time, while in the last days, is a period when Satan is still ruling and the believer is suffering under the world’s persecution. Thus this believer, who has need of food, is suffering, not at the hands of the world, but at the hands of a man who should be helping out his fellow man to endure as in the example in 2:15-16. In addition, worldly goods will pass away prior to the new earth and all this man’s hoarding will be gone.

The second part of this comes from Deuteronomy 24:15, a passage that warns against this practice with dire consequences. The issue was that the man was to be a

¹⁴ The “last days” are the days following the first coming of God in the Messiah. These are the fullness of times. The Old Testament showed (in partials) the condemnation of mankind, thus the ability of man to do anything but be self-centered has been shown. Now that Jesus has appeared the present worldly values are gone, and one waits for the new life in the Kingdom. Thus one who stores up goods for this age is much worse than one who did it in the Old Testament. For this age will perish.

Covenant Blessor, a steward of God, yet he was not only not helping out, he was withholding for his own selfish benefit against the benefit of the poor man. The cry to the Lord and the sin means that he has now fallen into the judgment of God. The man cried to God for God to settle the injustice and God will do that. Thus the man is in trouble for defrauding his brother and God will seek the justice due.

¹⁵ *"You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.*

- c. He has enjoyed the fruits of the world's wisdom, selfish living at the expense of the poor and righteous (5:5-6).

You lived¹⁵ for pleasure (reveled, caroused) on the earth and lived self-indulgently; you fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter¹⁶. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

ἐτροφήσατε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσπαταλήσατε, ἐθρέψατε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ σφαγῆς, κατεδικάσατε, ἐφονεύσατε τὸν δίκαιον, οὐκ ἀντιτάσσεται ὑμῖν.

The verb here indicates a self-indulgent one who is living by the wisdom of this world, bitter jealousy and selfish ambition (3:16) to glorify himself in strict rebellion against the wisdom of God. The day of slaughter appears to be the same reference as the "last days," except that this is the period where the righteous suffer at the hands of the unbelievers (cf. 2:6) and thus the believer should be helping the brother not oppressing him as the unbelievers are.

¹⁵ These verbs are all aorist tenses.

¹⁶ The slaughter here is likely Psalm 44:23, quoted in Romans 8:36.

"But for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

James now pronounces the theology that this man is violating. He is judging from his own perspective. He is executing what he considers to be just judgment on the poor man (thinking himself to be righteous). It states that he has put to death the righteous. This appears to be a figure of speech since not paying him would not be literally putting him to death. So it is likely that he is saying that the righteous man is alive in the sense that he is walking with God. Yet in the condemnation of this righteous man he has pronounced him unrighteous and undeserving. Thus he is declaring him “dead” towards God and himself alive, simply on the basis of riches.

The poor righteous man is not resisting. In other words, this is the slap on the other cheek from Matthew 5. The righteous man is not fighting back in the same way that the rich man is fighting. He is not condemning or judging the rich man (executing judgment).

6. Be patient, not complaining, even in suffering, for the reward is coming (5:7-11).

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

⁷ Μακροθυμήσατε οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἕως τῆς παρουσίας τοῦ κυρίου. ἰδοὺ ὁ γεωργὸς ἐκδέχεται τὸν τίμιον καρπὸν τῆς γῆς μακροθυμῶν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ ἕως λάβῃ πρόϊμον καὶ ὄψιμον. ⁸ μακροθυμήσατε καὶ ὑμεῖς, στηρίζετε τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν, ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ κυρίου ἤγγικεν. ⁹ μὴ στενάζετε, ἀδελφοί, κατ’ ἀλλήλων ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε· ἰδοὺ ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἔστηκεν. ¹⁰ ὑπόδειγμα λάβετε, ἀδελφοί, τῆς κακοπαθίας καὶ τῆς μακροθυμίας τοῦ προφήτου οἱ ἐλάλησαν ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι κυρίου. ¹¹ ἰδοὺ μακαρίζομεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας· τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰωβ ἠκούσατε καὶ τὸ τέλος

κυρίου εἶδετε, ὅτι πολὺσπλαγγνός ἐστιν ὁ κύριος καὶ οἰκτίρμων.

The point of these verses is clearly patience, endurance, faithfulness until the end through all kinds of suffering and unreasonableness. The result is not in this life but at the end when the Judge appears. It will be then that the Lord will give His compassion and mercy to the one who has endured on His behalf (cf. 1:12, 2:13)

There are two imperatives (other than those which ask for patience) in all these examples. One is to “strengthen your hearts” and the other is “do not complain.” The one is fulfilled by the seeking of wisdom (1:5), so as to endure, and the other is an inward groan or even a sigh to oneself. In other words it is the opposite of “consider it all joy” (1:2).

7. One should be submissive in his language in reference to God.¹⁷

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

Πρὸ πάντων δέ, ἀδελφοί μου, μὴ ὀμνύετε μήτε τὸν οὐρανὸν μήτε τὴν γῆν μήτε ἄλλον τινὰ ὄρκον· ἦτω δὲ ὑμῶν τὸ ναὶ ναὶ καὶ τὸ οὐ οὐ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπὸ κρίσιν πέσητε.

Taking of oaths in this case is presumption or arrogance. It is the statement that is similar to the man in 4:13. Thus this one is placing himself above God and making God subject to him. The believer is supposed to be patient and waiting for God, not presumptuous about what he will do, or who he is. Of course, the one is to be submissive the God’s will, not his own, not to force God to act on his behalf, but to submit to endurance.

8. If one finds himself suffering trials then he should ask for wisdom to endure (5:13-15).
- a. If one is enduring hardship for a spiritual cause¹⁸ at the hands of the world, his prayer for wisdom will be answered

¹⁷ The Sermon on the Mount virtually said the same thing indicating that man is submissive to God and should indicate such by not calling on things beyond him in oaths (Matthew 5:37). This sets man up as the superior in control, and that should not be. It is similar to 4:13.

and will help him endure. If his courage on the basis of that knowledge is elated,¹⁹ on the other hand, then he should sing praises because he understands his position (5:13).

Here there are two options. One is either under persecution or trial (cf. 1:2) and needs to pray for wisdom, that is, how to act to follow God's character, or one is walking and dealing with the trials joyfully and is cheerful (cf. 1:2, consider it joy), then they need to sing praises of God since they are acting righteously and are confronting the trial as a representative of Jesus Christ.

¹³ *Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises.*

Κακοπαθεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσευχέσθω· εὐθυμεῖ τις, ψαλλέτω·

9. If one finds himself under judgment for sinning against a brother (anger, boasting, self-righteousness, partiality) in the church thus advocating self-righteousness, then he should repent to the offended parties (5:14-20).²⁰
 - a. If one is physically sick²¹ from aligning with the world for his solution, then he should humble himself, calling for the

¹⁸ This word (κακοπαθεῖ) shows up only in two other places, where it is used in a positive manner for enduring hardship (for God) by Paul (2 Tim. 2:9, 4:5).

¹⁹ The imperative of this word (εὐθυμεῖ) shows up in Acts 27:22,25 and is translated “take courage”. Its sense is that one is able to overcome the hardships through the knowledge of wisdom. Thus, he understands and should sing praises to God for that knowledge. Refer to the response is “joy” in 1:2.

²⁰ This section introduces, what appears to be, a new slant. Previously the sinning individual was always to repent (“ask”, 1:5) on his own. Now there are elders who are to pray on his behalf, and in context, this would be for the forgiveness of his sin and restoration. However, this is actually very much in context. The problem is that brothers have been striking out against other brothers, especially if they are poor or oppressed (1:19, 2:3, 3:9, 4:1-2, 4:11, 5:6). Now they are exhorted to forgive and restore the humbled brother (for God does).

²¹ The word here (ασθενεῖ) normally indicates a physical weakness. Its use in 1 Corinthians 11:30 indicates a sickness from a spiritual cause, (i.e., chastisement by God for abuse of the Lord's supper).

elders,²² anointing him with oil,²³ to confess his sin against the church (brother), and they will pray for his understanding²⁴ and he will be delivered to live for God²⁵ once more, and he (weary in soul)²⁶ will be elevated²⁷ by God (5:14-15).

Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over

²² “Calling for the elders” appears difficult since most of the exhortations in the book appear to be individual and not to involve others as mediators. However if one refers to the gospels (from which era James pulls much of his material), then one could surmise that this man has sinned (i.e., responds in a worldly manner to temptation) against a brother (for which there is a lot of context here in the book) and must repent therefore to the elders. (cf. Matt. 18:16 where a brother did not repent to the offended brother and thus is given the opportunity to repent to two or three witnesses). In Matthew 18 whatever the elders bind shall have been bound in heaven. Thus the church discipline (somewhat like a curse) or restoration (healing) would be assigned to the elders.

²³ This phrase is very problematic since it seems to be part of the process of the healing. However, the phrase occurs in Mark 6:13 when the disciples are sent out in Jesus power to cast out demons and heal. There they anoint with oil and heal the sick. In Mark 6:13 the ‘anointing with oil’ that the disciples do seems to be parallel to the ‘laying on of hands’ that Jesus does in Mark 6:15. One would never say that the ‘laying on of hands’ actually conferred any special physical process and that it would be symbolic so that a message was conferred that was visible (authority, power, being transferred). Thus also the ‘anointing with oil’ would be symbolic for a visible manifestation of what was happening in a spiritual sense. In addition, in Mark the success of healing appears to be hand-in-hand with their faith in Jesus to be able to heal. This would be similar in James. The faith of the believer in his failure to perceive, and in the word to revive, would be essential.

²⁴ Refer to 1:5, where the request for wisdom will be answered by God if offered in faith (based on knowing that God alone has the solution in His word.)

²⁵ The word here for “restore” is σωσει (root: σωζω) normally translated “save” or “deliver”. Past uses of this word in the book indicate “deliverance” to life, or the ability to represent God through actions.

²⁶ The word here (καμνησθη) is used in Hebrews 12:3 to indicate one who is simply grown weary. The choice of the world’s wisdom has oppressed him so that he does not have joy (1:2), but is miserable (3:14--4:2).

²⁷ This result has been promised throughout the book for the one who humbles himself before the word of God and asks for it instead of pursuing the world’s actions and wisdom (1:9, 4:10).

him, anointing him with oil²⁸ in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore (lit.: save) the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and although²⁹ he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

ἀσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου. καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· κὰν ἁμαρτίας ἢ πεποικώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ.

The past verse dealt with someone who needed wisdom to face the trials or was facing a trial with joy as instructed in 1:2. However, the case now intensifies to someone who is sick. This relates back to the issue in 5:3 where the “flesh is consumed like fire.” Since this is to a believer, and his flesh is consumed, then this is a present judgment brought on the believer by God. While the elders (Matt. 18) are the ones who were to confront the believer and execute church discipline on the errant one, it is clear from 1 Corinthians that it is God who executes it, and may do it apart from the elders of the church (1 Cor. 11:30). This case does not say whether the elders were involved in bringing the discipline, but in any case according to Matthew 18, they are going to witness his repentance.

The word used here, *asthenei*, is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 11:30 for “weak.” This one has been struck with sickness as a judgment for advocating his self-righteous behavior in the church, more specifically since he has even taken advantage of the righteous poor man and his case has been brought before the Lord of the Sabbath (5:4).

The reason they are called is the same as in Matthew 18. They are the two or three witnesses that are called on to witness, not his deed (as that has already been

²⁸ Mark 6:13 is the only New Testament passage that relates anointing with oil to the healing of the sick.

²⁹ This is what is known as a “concessive clause” and should be translated “although he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

established), but his confession of sin. The elders are to be sure that it is a confession according to the Scriptures and not something else. Having done that the elders will pray over him, asking for wisdom for him (1:5) and that the judgment will be removed. The elders are requesting that the judgment be removed based on his confession. Thus they are mediating for him. However, the prayer of faith appears to be a prayer by the penitent one for wisdom for himself (1:5). This prayer of humility for wisdom will definitely raise him up as has been mentioned throughout the epistle. His sickness is removed, as that was the reason that it was on him, was his sin. The “If he has sins . . . “ is indicating that this sickness that was on him was related to his sins, then they will be taken care of in forgiveness and restoration. The “if” should be translated “although.”

The word here for “restore” is actually “save” and indicates a restoration to God and life, not necessarily physical as well. However, in this case since the sickness is related to the spiritual condition, then it will also happen. The point is that he is not just being healed of some sickness but that he is being restored to God and the sickness, which was symptomatic, is being removed as well.

Note that the word for “sick” is the word for “weary.” Thus this man is not just sick with some illness, but is worn out sick.

- b. The love of the brother (impartiality, mercy) indicates that one (here the elders) should pray for his brother (not be angry with him) that he might follow the word and that one should recognize his offenses (unmerciful, partial, angry) before his brother (here the elders) and confess them to the elders so that they can remove the judgment they have placed on him (5:16).

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man strengthens, working out much.

ἐξομολογεῖσθε οὓν ἀλλήλοις τὰς ἀμαρτίας καὶ εὔχεσθε ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων ὅπως ἰαθῆτε. Πολὺ ἰσχύει δέησις δικαίου ἐνεργουμένη.

The “therefore” (*oun*) is significant. The point of this verse is making a principle about the event that just occurred with the confession of the sick person’s sins to the elders so that he could be restored to relationship with God and his brothers. This confession is to relate to those involved, i.e., those offended, whether the church as a whole or individuals. This is a practice that is found throughout the Scriptures and is based in reconciliation the character of God. This is not confession to anyone not directly affected by the offense. Beyond that (private confession to one who has been offended) is simply akin to gossiping, drawing attention to oneself and one’s depravity rather than one’s redemption as this book advocates.

In this modern world one of the great atrocities that occurs is when men read modern psychology into the Scriptures and claim it to be God’s word. Or they also read some quick methodology into the Word that guarantees some results. One of these abhorrent practices is the secular psychological method called “transparency.” Seeking private, trusting, counsel for one troubled who needs to confide so one can help him/her with the Word of God is not the issue here. But complete openness to others is not recommended in the Bible, nor is it even mentioned, except to warn against it. Discretion is Biblical. In other words, the guiding principle is not openness, but looking out for the brother’s benefit. However, I digress, since this is not my object here to discuss. Thus much of what is so-called transparency, is simply the lust of the flesh, e.g., it makes one feel less bad if people know, or less bad if others have done similar (or worse) things. That is not Biblical but fleshly. This is not what this verse is saying. Note that if this verse is saying this it does not have a corresponding verse anywhere in the Bible. Thus to make one verse a prime method of sanctification is without any context. This verse is all about confessing sins, either to the one offended (individually or church as a whole) or to the elders as in the case presented. Using this verse to teach the principle of broad unbounded transparency, indicates exactly what James is teaching against, that is, combining the world’s wisdom with God’s wisdom.

The use of the verb “strengthens” as a normal indicative active indicates the strengthening of the heart, which is what the prayer for wisdom does. It helps it endure. This verse is now going to be illustrated by Elijah from the Old Testament, where he, like the elders, prayed for judgment on Ahab, and then prayed to have it removed after the repentance.

- c. Illustration from the Old Testament: Elijah prays for discipline on Ahab and then prays for him to be restored following repentance.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours³⁰, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months³¹. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Ἡλίας ἄνθρωπος ἦν ὁμοιοπαθῆς ἡμῖν, καὶ προσευχῆ προσηύξατο τοῦ μὴ βρέξαι, καὶ οὐκ ἔβρεξεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἑνιαυτοὺς τρεῖς καὶ μῆνας ἕξ· καὶ πάλιν προσηύξατο, καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς ὑετὸν ἔδωκεν καὶ ἡ γῆ ἐβλάστησεν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτῆς.

Elijah requested judgment (no rain) on Israel based on the promise of God in Deuteronomy 28 and God granted it. Then he requested that the rain return based on repentance and God again granted it. The point is that while judgment had come on the brother here for his errant ways, now the elders as representatives of God were calling for restoration (to spiritual and physical health) for the repentant brother.³² Thus, one should confess their sins and ask for wisdom in order to avoid judgment for self-

³⁰ This is likely referring to the new nature referenced in 1:18 and most certainly not the old nature (wisdom from below). Thus one is operating from God’s character on the basis of what is good for their brother.

³¹ The text of 1 Kings 18:1 only references 3 years (“in the third year). However, Jesus also states the 3 years and 6 months. The question of where one got the additional knowledge is an interesting one since the Old Testament was apparently rounding off saying only that it was in the third year, while Jesus apparently knew more specifically.

³² See Matthew 18, which is what James is following here where the elders act on behalf of God in exercising judgment on the sinning brother.

righteousness in the church or towards a brother. Elders should exercise church discipline as representatives of God who lovingly disciplines his children, even to the removal of some who are affecting the body negatively.

The word used for “poured forth” is “gave” which is likely alluding to the fact that God is a generous God who gives (1:6) rain and it produces fruit is probably also an allusion to his use of fruit at the end of chapter 3 where one’s wisdom from above produces the fruits in line with *hesed*.

- d. The love of brother extends to praying for him, giving him the true Word of God so that he will stop living by the wisdom of the world (sin - death) and represent God's wisdom (life) (5:19-20).

¹⁹ My brethren, if someone among you is led astray from the truth and someone might return (or “repent”) himself (perhaps “him”) back,²⁰ let him know that he who turned (or “repented”) a sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Ἀδελφοί μου, ἐάν τις ἐν ὑμῖν πλανηθῆ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ τις αὐτόν, γινωσκέτω ὅτι ὁ ἐπιστρέψας ἁμαρτωλὸν ἐκ πλάνης ὁδοῦ αὐτοῦ σώσει ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου καὶ καλύψει πλῆθος ἁμαρτιῶν.

This is an interesting sentence. The “strays” is a subjunctive passive meaning the “someone” is led astray by someone else (passive). The second part is a subjunctive active meaning, the someone (whether the same or a different one is difficult) returns (active) him or himself. The death here is clearly spiritual and may also be physical (1 Cor. 11:30). The multitude of sins is those that are forgiven by the brother and God as well, that separated the sinner from God and his brother. Note here that the verse could refer to only one person, the sinner and not the brother who is turning him, but the sinner himself who returns himself.