

Victory In The Church

1. Reaction and Action in Temptation — James 1:1-8

James 1:1 *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: greetings. Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.*

What an interesting opening to a letter. "Hi, be happy when you are tempted." It's really appropriate because this little book deals with all the various temptations that effect the individual believer or a whole church. So James got right to the point.

Your first reaction to temptation is emotional — let temptation (or trials) bring joy to your heart. That seems odd in that most temptation causes stress and distraction and possibly even defeat. But in verse 3 James gives the mental reaction — knowing that the trial process will produce endurance.

Notice that the thing being tested is your faith. God gives you faith to start with, you can't create it. Most of the time you end up mixing other things with your faith, things like common sense or personal experience. Now the faith is impure and prone to weakness. So God allows trials to come along and assay (prove) your faith. Peter spoke of the same thing:

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The trials seem to be fiery and painful but they are doing a special valuable work. They melt your faith down and reveal the dross which the goldsmith skims off of the top. This process may be repeated many times until the smith can see his reflection in the shimmering, now purified gold. Most of the time you can't tell what God is actually doing, nor can you measure any progress. When the trials repeat you get very frustrated, sad, or angry. This is a fiery process and flames can hurt really bad. God wants you to know that He is merely getting you ready for the day when Jesus is at last revealed and on that day your gleaming pure faith will shine like gold to His praise and honor. That's awesome and in the future.

The present benefit? Endurance. That's right, the ability to remain faithful while under extreme pressure. Only being stretched beyond your ability can produce this "abiding under pressure" character quality. It's just like building muscle. Only painful, uncomfortable work in the gym can build the body you see in the ads. No pain, no gain is true. So when trial or temptation comes, feel joy because you know what it's all about. By the way, temptation is simply any option to the will of God.

Now your will must get involved as you decide to reject the trial, get bitter and go down in flames . . . or, allow the whole process to move ahead with your cooperation. The trial produces the endurance which you embrace because when it is formed in you your life will be marked by maturity and completeness. So your reaction to trial is joyful awareness that something big is going to get accomplished in your life. Should you take any action?

Absolutely! Wisdom is God's point of view on life and when you are swamped by trial or temptation you will realize that you don't have His point of view clearly in mind. Take action and ask Him for His point of view. He is eager to abundantly pour out the answer you seek with just a couple of important details.

You must ask in faith, without doubting. Faith means seeing and obeying God's point of view for your life. Doubt means being in two minds at once. If you come to God asking for wisdom but leaving the back door open to reject it and do something else, you are double-minded and He won't give you the wisdom. You must commit yourself to obeying the wisdom before you even hear it.

Look finally at the explanation of wisdom. According to verses 9–11 it's pretty much opposite of human reasoning. The poor guy exalted, the rich guy humbled . . . that's not how we figure things. But God has a different value system than ours. James is saying that we shouldn't be shocked when the wisdom we seek is a little scary, or seems to make little sense. Decide ahead of time that you will handle it by faith and obey God. Don't fear trials, rejoice! Only good for time and eternity can result.

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2. Taking Action In Temptation — James 1:5-11

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Last time we talked about the usual reaction we have to temptation and how we need to move from reaction into positive action. The action to take when you are tempted is asking God for wisdom. Extraordinary temptation seems to come upon you when you have made some decisions about following Jesus. Greater commitment, bolder promises, higher expectations and then things happen that make you remember that you are at war — a war you feel that you may not win. When God called you to this new level of passion for Him, He didn't tell you a lot about what the enemy would do or even what your own flesh might do. So you feel pretty much blind-sided. Don't worry, hurry to the Throne and ask for wisdom. That is, God's point of view for the moment. You will win by His grace and your obedience.

Remember the great importance of throwing doubt out of your mind. You can't be in the mind of obeying God while simultaneously considering an alternate plan. God won't give wisdom to someone who is doubting. He wants you to unconditionally submit to His wisdom before you even know what it is.

Here are some observations about wisdom that will help you to accept it and not run and hide. First, it's God's point of view on your life, not yours. He sees everything at once while you only see your immediate perimeter. Second, it's probably opposite your best thinking and conclusions. James illustrated that by saying how the poor man should rejoice in being exalted and the rich man should rejoice in being humbled. Neither of these possibilities is natural or normal, but they point up the contrast between God's wisdom and man's.

God spoke through Isaiah about the superiority of His ways and thoughts:

***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8,9***

You will hear from God when you ask for wisdom, but you may find His answer unacceptable. Don't rebel against or reject His Word — submit and walk on in faith that He really does know best and has your best interest at heart. You will end up OK and without any guilt or regrets for having gone your own way.

So let's recap:

A temptation (option to the will of God) comes before you.

React

emotionally have joy

mentally know what it will accomplish

willfully allow it to have its perfect work

Act

ask for wisdom in faith with no doubting

understand wisdom even when it's hard to accept

Be sure to walk on in obedience to what God gives you. Decide now and forever that His point of view is the right point of view and submit to it no matter what is happening. James is going to put before us a dozen temptations we face in personal and church life. He will then state God's wisdom in each one. When followed, the wisdom brings about great victory.

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3. Understanding Temptation — James 1:12-18

James 1: *12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.*

This paragraph teaches three truths regarding temptation, truths that will give you overcoming strength. Remember, the Word of God is your source of strength, stamina, wisdom and victory. So meditate in it and let it continue to change your life.

1. Temptation is an opportunity for blessing

If you persevere (remain faithful while experiencing the pressure of temptation) under trial you are blessed. This probably won't be too easy. Some options to the will of God really hammer you as they try to turn you away from Him. In some cases your flesh (your humanity under sin's influence) will greatly agree with the temptation and produce a strong desire to disobey God and seek gratification through sinning. Victory at that moment comes through saying "NO!" while simultaneously calling on Jesus to answer the tempter and put him and his temptation out of your life. The hardest part is when you actually want to yield to the temptation on some level.

It is so vital to constantly spend much time and quality time in the Word so that it can give you power at the moment you need it. Getting strong in the Word is like working out physically. If you do the grunt work in the gym you'll be ready to do strong things all the time. If you don't work out you'll hurt yourself trying to do a strong thing when you're not really strong. As you deal with temptation you may find yourself on a roller coaster ride for awhile. You hate it, yet want it, then feel guilt and shame, then hate it . . . Sooner or later Jesus will form Himself into you to where you aren't turned by the temptation, but walk triumphantly in the Spirit. I think that is what James is calling "being approved". And approved person will receive the crown of life at the Bema Seat of Christ.

2. Don't blame God when you are tempted

God cannot be tempted and He doesn't tempt anyone with evil. In fact it is personal lust that responds to and activates the temptation in your life. Lust says, "I must have it at once!" When you respond to that impulse sin will closely follow. You then succumb to the temptation, do something other than the will of God (that's sin) and death is the final result. Usually not physical death, but a sense of separation from God and people caused by shame and guilt. Your heart is marked by evil which you automatically hide and that reduces your capacity to love and be loved. Something is temporarily dead. When you come to your senses and repent God washes your heart in Jesus' blood, imparts His righteousness anew and you are restored. 1 John 1:9

3. Rely on God's faithfulness when you are tempted

Verse 17 says to trust God because He is constantly bestowing good and perfect gifts. Don't you think the enemy lies to you about God? Doesn't he talk to you like he talked to Eve? "God is holding out on you, you could do better than waiting on Him." That's a monster. The truth is that God loves you, takes joy in you, gives His best to you, and He has infinitely more to give. When temptation pops up look away to your True Source and begin to thank Him, then praise Him, let His amazingness dwarf the attraction of lust and sin.

Next in 17 rely on God because He is constant and consistent. There is no flickering or shifting shadow with God. He is pure and radiant light and He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. You don't ever have to wonder how He'll be today — He'll be the same as yesterday and tomorrow.

Verse 18 also gives two reasons to trust in God. First, your relationship with Him. You don't know God because of your will, but because of His. He brought you into life by His actions and He did it by His Word. The Word of Truth spoke life to you when you were dead. It spoke power to you when you were weak. It spoke hope to you when you were in despair. It spoke salvation when you were lost in sin.

The final reason to trust God is that you have a permanent place in His perfect, eternal plan. He brought you forth to be part of the first fruits (that is the preeminent and highest quality) among all of His creation. If you can just remember who you are in Christ you will be a lot harder to successfully tempt. You'll look at the potential sin and say, "That's beneath me. I'm a child of the King and I don't need any of that." Be strong my friend!

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4. Sin vs. the Word — James 1:19-21

1 Peter 2:19 *This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.*

Practicality is the hallmark of James' little book. So he now gets down to it pursuant to what he has taught about relationship with God, His wisdom and triumphing in temptation.

So for one thing, deal with anger. It hasn't to do with knowing God or being involved with what God is doing. Also be a good listener and a reluctant talker. I've always liked:

Proverbs 17:28 *Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.*

They can't tell just how smart you are or aren't until you start talking.

The anger issue can be huge. Anger is reflective of insufficient faith. It happens when a person feels threatened or shorted. Absolute faith prevents all anger because trust in God means protection and provision so nothing constitutes a threat. But when faith is missing, uncertainty grows and it becomes necessary to be defensive and sometimes even aggressive. Prolonged anger can result in bitterness and many people are adversely affected by it.

Other times anger stems from feeling that your rights have been violated. Faith enables a person to abandon their rights to God and wait on Him to return them as privileges. He calls that meekness and promises that the meek shall inherit the earth. To have that attitude, you really have to grasp the greatness, faithfulness, power, person and presence of God. It is natural to defend your rights — especially being American where personal rights are the definition of life. To abandon them to God is a supreme act of faith. If you do it your anger will dissipate as a spirit of calm and peace takes over.

This foundation will let you slow down on talking as well. God will give opportunity to communicate at the right moment, just wait on Him.

Verse 21 is equally practical. The bottom line promise is that the Word of God can work in a way that will save your soul. This is not the same as being saved from the guilt of sin and receiving eternal life in Jesus. This is the Word going on to save you from the practice of sin in moment by moment real life. Remember **Hebrews 4:12**?

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Notice that the Word is alive, active and sharp like a two-edged sword. That means it cuts going and coming. It pierces in a way that divides soul (mind, emotion, will — natural life) from spirit (the part of you where God lives and dispenses His life to you). This means that the Word differentiates between your thoughts and God's. It evaluates and assays your thoughts and motives. This is the start of its soul-saving work. From this analysis you learn what needs to change in your soul (heart). You begin to feel a sense of conviction that some things are wrong and will need to go. Or that some things are lacking and need to be started. The Holy Spirit will work with the Word of God in your life to slowly but surely bring you to the place of repentance or commitment and either one will change you as your salvation gets down where the rubber meets the road.

Notice that there are a couple things you have to do so that the Word is free to do its work in your life:

1. Put aside all filthiness.

This is a moral term that speaks of shame, obscenity, defilement and filthy talk. For most people entertainment is the venue where things like this are encountered. Sometimes the entertainment is so entertaining that filthiness is overlooked. Yet it still penetrates the heart and if stored up can keep the Word from doing its powerful work.

This is the circumstance in which people will invest much time in Bible study and yet make little progress in their Christian life. The filth has to go so the pure can come in.

2. Put aside all that remains of wickedness.

This is a word about conflict in relationships that flows out of a wicked heart. A person's private life can't stay private forever. If wickedness in morals, thoughts, and attitudes permeates the life it will eventually produce malice and malevolent behavior toward others. Again, the Word can't do its job if wickedness is present.

Once these things are gone you can approach the Word with humility and submit to the divine surgery that will implant it in your heart and save your soul. Implanting means grafting and that process brings a certain amount of discomfort with it, but oh how worth it when the Word becomes fruitful and you begin walking in total freedom.

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5. Learners vs. Doers of the Word — James 1:22-27

James 1:22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; **24** for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. **25** But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. **26** If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. **27** Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Fruitful Bible Study is life-changing. Information gathering that doesn't affect a person's lifestyle is pointless, and the person doing that is self-deluded. Don't you love James' illustration of that? You have walked around in public and seen people who definitely match his description. You've sort of smiled, wondering if that person even owns a mirror and concluded that if they do, they don't look in it. It's unfortunately possible to do that with the Word of God. Read it, talk about it, look up a bunch of stuff and go on living like nothing happened. You may have met someone like that and found them to be a little prideful and even judgmental.

Have you ever met someone who handled the Word like it was a magic something — just reading some verse or text like an incantation, yet you couldn't sense any spiritual reality in them? Seems like they reduce it to an incantation, but there is no sweetness of Jesus in their life.

James calls on professing Christians to be real, not play actors. Knowing Jesus isn't about doing stuff out of religious effort, it's about knowing HIM and surrendering to Him until He really begins to live the Christ life in you and through you. In the context of that reality the Word becomes Spirit and Life to you just like Jesus promised **John 6:63**.

When you look into the Word it shows you an accurate reflection of yourself. It's no "mirror, mirror on the wall" kind of encounter, no, it tells you the truth and then shows how you can let it change you until you start being the reflection of Christ. As you see and better understand what it is saying, your responsibility is to abide by it. That means to tell God that you want to obey it and then completely rely on Jesus to live His obedience through you. If you try to make yourself obey the Word using natural resources, you will fail and end up a futile information gatherer. But if you call on Jesus to live the Word through you, you will succeed and be blessed in what you do.

Next, James gives a couple scenarios that will help anybody discern what kind of an encounter they've been having with the Word. If you are properly receiving and processing the Word here are some results you will see in your life:

1. Tongue control. Someone who just hears the Word and doesn't do the Word will not be able to control his tongue because he has worthless religion. When we get to chapter 3 of James we will find out just how powerful the tongue really is. No one can do much about it through self-effort. It takes spiritual reality to handle the tongue. That is, the Christ life filling the person and expressing Jesus through them. That happens by hearing and doing the Word.

2. Visiting orphans and widows. This is the most practical and mundane test of faith that there could be. Orphans and widows are usually not in a position to give much back. They aren't likely to be a good stepping stone to bigger and more famous tasks. No, you will have to quietly and privately take time to give your resources and time and not have much expectation for personal gain. You might muster enough strength to do this once or twice on your own, but you will immediately grow tired and become irritable if you continue. It's only when the person and love of Jesus so fills you that you are receiving His supply in every moment that you will be able to engage in this ministry with your whole heart and keep it up over time. You'll quickly find out if you are really a hearer or a doer.

3. Keeping yourself unspotted from the world. Spots result from contact that leaves residuals behind. He isn't saying that you shouldn't know and communicate with people in the world — how else would you lead anybody to Christ? But, you shouldn't engage in the sinful behaviors of the pagans and come away soiled and stained from the experience. This is a very hard demand on your life. The world sets up its values and entertainments in a way that makes it all very attractive. There is always an certain amount of innocence or even good woven in with things that are also vile and offensive to God. Only if you are a genuine doer of the Word will you find the strength to keep yourself pure.

The Word of God is ready to give you godly desires and the power to live them out . . . just say "yes"!

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6. The Temptation to Favoritism — James 2:1-9

James 2: *1 My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool," 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

As we move into James 2 we begin applying the tools of chapter one to gaining victory over many temptations that face any church. You may recall the need to seek wisdom (God's point of view) when facing temptation. Also, to agree with God's value system when sorting things out. Then there was the identification of lust as the driving force that can lead to sinning. We found that it was so important to properly handle the Word so that it can save our soul. Finally, that true faith results in sacrificial acts on behalf of people who usually can't repay.

Now the first temptation is to show partiality or favoritism. Sure enough it comes up when money is involved. Someone who looks like money shows up and he automatically is directed to the best seat in the house. A guy who looks poor gets the seat behind the column where he can't even see. James challenges this behavior based on God's values. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of His kingdom which is promised to those who love Him.

Besides, think about how the rich people treat others. They're the ones with the lawyers and means to oppress and drag people into court. Often the nouveau rich who aren't quite as situated as they wish flaunt their goods, have a chip on their shoulder and treat other people badly. In any case, James says it makes no sense to treat people different ways based on how they look. The independence and pride that often go with riches lead to blaspheming God. Why should a person who does that receive preferential treatment in the church?

Rather, believers should be fulfilling the royal law which calls for loving other people the way you love yourself. Which seat would you want if you were visiting the church? Kathee and I once visited a church in Tucson, AZ and we arrived just before Sunday School got out so no one was around. We went in the auditorium and sat down. The room soon began to fill up and by the loud whispering of the older couple behind us, it was evident that we had unknowingly sat in their seats. They carried on for much of the service to where we felt pretty good about leaving. They of course didn't shake our faith or anything, we kind of just smiled. But a person needing Jesus could have been pretty discouraged.

A church we started in Clearwater, FL was visited one Sunday evening by a couple of pretty scruffy looking guys who needed somewhere to stay. Before anyone could react, one of our older couples offered to take them home for the night and help them as much as they could. Wow! What an act of love. In the small hours of the night I suddenly awoke wondering how things were going. You know how you suddenly remember a crime or a movie? Thankfully everything was OK.

Going out on a limb for people is tough because of the risk or even just discomfort, but the royal law leads us in that way. So often the people you try to help do steal from you, lie to you, con you, etc. Kathee and I brought a teenage girl home from the beach one night. She was a runaway and needed help. She agreed to the house rules (church, hours, etc) and was with us for a couple weeks. One Wednesday afternoon I was paid in rolled quarters for a cabinet job. \$500 in a small cardboard box. Suddenly that girl was sick and just had to stay home from church that night. We didn't fall for it, but she did take off a few days later with some of Kristen's clothes and Kathee's jewelry. The jewelry was an opal necklace that I bought her to replace the opal ring that Jeremy had accidentally flushed down the toilet a few years earlier. Oh well . . .

James calls his readers to faith all throughout his little letter. Faith enables you to live through the rip off's and disappointments without judging people on any criteria. Thus you avoid the sin of favoritism even as you love each person just how they are

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7. The Temptation to Excuse Sin — James 2:10-13

James 2:10 *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*

The term legalism means to collect a set of rules or laws that are used to measure relationship or fellowship with God. The legalist seems to select the rules he thinks he can keep while ignoring those he can't. The result is a false, prideful piety accompanied by a censorious judgmentalism. This attitude always reeks havoc in a church. When everyone has their own list by which they are measuring everyone else, defensiveness and division result.

James confronted the hypocrisy of handling the Law of God selectively. His premise was that even if you keep nearly the whole Law, yet break one commandment, you are guilty of breaking all of it. This shows the burden and impossibility of trying to develop a Christian life by law keeping. You can't define your spirituality by how you handle some of God's Law, it's all or nothing and no one can keep it all.

Avoiding the temptation of categorizing and excusing sin starts with agreeing with God that all commandments are equal. To excuse the disobedience of any is wrong. If breaking one of God's rules is a sin for someone else, it is also a sin for you.

The next and most important thing is to shift from the Old Testament Law to the perfect law of liberty. This law is not license to just live any way you want. It does not nullify any of the commandments. Rather it fulfills them by the power of the resurrected Christ. The same Jesus who continually conflicted with the religionists by how He handled the Sabbath (the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath), instructing newly healed people to carry their pallet on the Sabbath, His disciples picking and eating grain on the Sabbath ... He is in every believer ready to live out a Law keeping life. Not the life of a libertarian who is a law unto himself, but a Law fulfilling life of spiritual power, liberty, and reality accompanied by the ministry of His Holy Spirit.

The entire Book of Galatians explains the difference between the fleshly attempt to achieve righteousness by works of the Law vs. the righteousness that comes by the person of Christ. The summary point is in Galatians 5:1 — ***It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.***

Paul also said to cast out the bondwoman of dead works and come into the reality of righteousness by faith. The Christian life cannot be realized through striving, legislating, or anything less than the power of the Spirit of God. **Galatians 5:16 - 18** ***But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.***

The person who tries to be spiritual through the works of the Law or the flesh has to live in denial. They are not ever for a moment able to keep the whole Law. But, wanting to appear spiritual, they make a presentation that is false. John talked about this in his first chapter. **1 John 1:5 - 7** ***This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.***

God is light and doesn't have a shadow of darkness about Him. Saying you have fellowship when in fact you are walking in darkness is to lie. But to humble yourself and walk with Jesus in His light provides true fellowship and constant cleansing. No bragging or judging, just reality.

1 John 1:8 - 10 ***If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.***

The one operating in the flesh may say that he has no sin — that is self-deception. The one who will confess his sins and be forgiven again comes humbly into reality with no hypocrisy. But the legalist will declare that he hasn't even sinned and make God a liar and prove His word is not present.

The only way you can stand righteous before God is by the substitutionary ministry of Jesus. Only when you will admit that you have no righteousness of your own and instead are relying on His do you come into the law of liberty and know real freedom. In that place of grace you can freely admit your mistakes or failures. You also can look beyond the mistakes and failures of others and extend grace to people which will bring them into righteousness and liberty as well.

Some people want to stay on the bench of judgment. They will be harshly judged for harshly judging. Those who walk in mercy and love will be shown mercy and love.

How rich is a church fellowship that walks in the law of liberty. People are free to be grown up by God. If they are wrong on some point on some day, everyone knows the day is coming when God will make them right. Let's have faith that doesn't just say things, but really lives in truth!

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8. The Temptation to Invalid Faith — James 2:14-26

James 2: *14 What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

What use is it? What's the point? What good does it do to say that you have faith if you don't have the actions to back up your claim?

For instance . . . you see a person who has insufficient clothing and no food. If your faith generates a pat on the back and a cheery, "God bless you!", but no food or clothes it's hollow and meaningless.

Faith that doesn't have works is dead — lifeless and valueless. If you are to demonstrate authentic faith it will be by what you do, not just what you say. Demons even have a sort of faith. They believe enough in God that it makes them shudder and that's more than a faith talker who isn't a faith walker will do.

James had an even stronger stance as he illustrated real faith in the life of Abraham. He first declared that works are what justified Abraham. Now that gives some people heartburn. Martin Luther was one. He was saved out of Catholicism and his emphasis on grace and not works was so strong that he called the Book of James "an epistle of straw". I think he stopped reading too soon. Verse 22 explains that real faith works with real works not helping with salvation, but validating it as time passes. Abraham's obedience (a work that flowed out of faith) proved that he really had believed God for many years and now offering Isaac was an authenticating act of faith. The faith saved Abraham, the works proved he was saved.

The sense in which works complete salvation is that they prove to observing people what God already knows — this person is truly saved by faith and the evidence provides complete justification.

Would Abraham have been considered a believer if he had refused to offer Isaac? Was offering Isaac part two of a salvation process that depends in part on faith and in part on works? He was already declared simply by his faith — completely and totally. The Isaac thing was an opportunity to live out what God had already put in him. Refusing to offer Isaac would have cast a cloud and question over his faith. He wouldn't have lost faith and its salvation, but might have discovered that he didn't really have saving faith.

So he could look at his own life and realize, "Wow, I really am a believer! There have been some up's and down's, but in the end I have done the works of a true believer."

Rahab is the second example. She took the Hebrew spies into her home and then protected them from the Canaanites. She professed her desire to know and believe in God. They told her that she would have to have a scarlet rope hanging from her window the day Israel attacked. It would prove that she really did believe and wanted to honor Jehovah God. She did it and was saved along with all the family members she in her house that day.

James opposed a faith that is built on words. If faith doesn't produce something tangible in a life, it's not real. A body with no one living in it is dead. It won't grow or flourish, it will decompose and disintegrate. Faith with no works will fail and distract.

Walking by faith is much like walking by the Spirit. Abundant life filling and overflowing with gracious expressions that bless everyone. Reject the temptation to settle for less.

Victory In The Church

9. The Temptation of the Tongue — James 3:1-12

James 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

From all the biblical cautions about the tongue you have to conclude that it has great power. That is really true. The tongue can sabotage:

your faith *Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.* The tongue can speak the doubt of sin and wreck everything.

your family *Ephesians 5:3 But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* Your human family can be torn up by an out of control tongue. So can your spiritual family. Church suffers when tongues wag.

your fun - it can produce feelings of guilt, conflict or suspicion *Matthew 15:18 But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man.* Tongue control starts with maintaining a pure heart. When the wrong stuff takes root the tongue will reveal it and sorrow sets in.

remember, it's really a heart issue *Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.* Jesus drove the point home — guard your heart and thus guard your tongue.

Has your tongue ever gotten you in trouble? Words are powerful and cannot be taken back once spoken. James cautions that teachers are more highly scrutinized because of words. He also stresses that a person who can avoid stumbling because of what he says is perfect and able to control his whole body.

The power of the tongue is illustrated in several metaphors. It's like a bit in a horses' mouth. That small piece of iron can control a half-ton sized animal. The rudder, a relatively small part of a huge ship, steers it with precision. Fire is the most powerful picture of an out of control tongue.

This year we have seen more destruction and havoc because of wild fires than ever before. Some fires are started with a massive bolt of lightening. But many start with a little cigarette butt. Sometimes a glowing ember in a fire pit is all it takes. When the fire gets going it consumes everything in its path. Sadly, property, possessions, and even lives are lost to wild fires.

The tongue starts wild fires. It can defile the rest of your body. It can ignite conflicts and cause destruction because its fire source is hell. Imagine, we all have a direct link to hell living within us! Our tongue is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

Ironically the same tongue that slams other people is used to praise God, the One who created them. This idea of sweet and bitter coming from the same source is unacceptable. Salt and fresh water cannot come from the same fountain. A fig tree can't grow olives nor can a vine grow figs. So how can a tongue be so good and so bad? And, can anything be done about it?

The tongue is bad because it has supernatural backing. If we try to fight it with natural elements we fail. Spiritual power must deal with spiritual forces. The answer is in being filled with the Holy Spirit. When He is in control good things happen.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; 21 and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Notice the first two results of being yielded to the Holy Spirit:

1. Speaking psalms and hymns
2. Giving (speaking) thanks for everything

To be filled with the Spirit you simply need to tell Him that you are surrendering everything to Him and inviting Him to control everything about you — especially your tongue. Ask Him to fill your heart with Himself and His perfect qualities.

When you are filled, your speech will prove it and people will be blest by your company. Here's hope!

Victory In The Church

10. God's Wisdom vs. Man's Wisdom — James 3:13-18

James 3: *13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

You can live according to any wisdom you want to, and you will quickly notice its fruit in your life. God's wisdom enables you to live wisely with understanding. As you do you will live a life style of good deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

If your heart is already full of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition it will bring you into worldly wisdom which is earthly, natural and demonic.

Bitter jealousy makes you look with contempt and disdain on other people. You to be who they are or to have what they have, you are not living by faith at that moment so you are not trusting God to do the right thing with your life. You fantasize about having someone else's life and in time become bitter toward God and people.

Selfish ambition flows out of a soul that is under the control of sin. Sin makes you self-seeking instead of self-giving. You know what you want and know a lot about to pursue it. You also are aggressive in your quest — aggressive enough to not care who gets hurt, just so long as you are making progress in your selfish effort.

Both of these things can make you prideful and willing to intentionally misinterpret God's word so as to eliminate your guilt and clear the way for all that you are seeking. One person caught in this trap can disrupt everything, a bunch of people like this can destroy a family, a business, a church . . . just about anything. The fundamental problem is that earthly, natural, demonic wisdom has a hellish grip on everyone who lives this way and that kind of wisdom produces disorder and every form of evil. It's very conflicting and difficult to live near a person who is operating in human wisdom.

The wonderful good news is that you can live according to a much different wisdom, wisdom that is the exact opposite of worldly wisdom. That is the Wisdom of heaven. Notice its qualities:

Pure — free from defilements or impurities.

Peaceable — disposed to peace. Healthful, wholesome, quiet and harmonious.

Gentle — Fitting, appropriate, suitable, proper, to be lenient, yielding, unassertive.

Reasonable — denoting calmness in life, easily persuaded, compliant.

Full of mercy — to show mercy to, to have compassion on, to go the extra mile.

Good Fruits — a life of advantage, profit, utility. The fruit of the Spirit.

Unwavering — making no partial distinctions, free from partial regards

Without hypocrisy — one without pretense. Unfeigned, genuine, real, true, sincere.

These qualities are formed into the person who receives wisdom from God. This heavenly wisdom turns its adherents into peace makers; people whose agenda is to advance the Kingdom of God and to bless the people in it. To be this person requires much quiet time with God and His word. Also, asking Him to form Christ in you because He has been made wisdom to us **1 Corinthians 1:30**.

When you are full of heavenly wisdom you go around planting seed that will bear the fruit of righteousness. You do this in a peaceful way while encouraging people to live in peace individually and in their relationships.

The temptation of worldly wisdom is great because it appeals to the sin that lives in you. It will provide an avenue for selfish expression and advancement. Following it always leads to conflict because it operates on the exact opposite of the qualities listed above.

Victory comes through the cross and the life of Christ living through you. Come to the cross and repent of worldly wisdom. Then ask God to form the Lord Jesus into you and submit to His wisdom in every moment.

This is the way to be a wise and understanding person and that's the person to be!

Victory In The Church

11. The Temptation of Worldliness — James 4:1-4

James 4:1 *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 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.*

James laid a good foundation for understanding victory in the church. Then he showed how those basic principles work out in specific temptations. God's people have always struggled with the draw of the world and its system of thought. It is only natural to want to belong to the crowd that is having all the fun, and from a distance than crowd is certainly the world.

The term **world** is *cosmos* and is defined as the system of thought that promotes the desire to indulge, acquire, and impress **1 John 2:15-17**. It is orchestrated by satan the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience **Ephesians 2:1-3**. It is interesting to note that Jesus created the cosmos, but it became corrupted by sin and turned on Him as a rabid enemy.

Now allegiance to it constitutes one of the greatest threats to Christians. God has been calling believers out of the world and unto Himself for all of time.

2 Corinthians 6

14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. 17 Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. 18 And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me," says the Lord Almighty.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be distinct from the world.

John 17

14 "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

James asserts that fellowship with the world causes problems in the church. Look at the sequence —

1. You quarrel because you are having personal conflict over lustful pleasures that wage war in your soul and body.
2. You desire these pleasures more than the glory of God but can't fulfill the desires so you murder in the sense of hate.
3. You show up at a church gathering frustrated by your lack of fulfillment in the world so you fight and quarrel.
4. You don't have the satisfaction you seek because you forget to pray about it.
5. When you do pray you pray with selfish motives still trying to satisfy lusts, so you get nothing from God either.
6. You forget that friendship with the world and its philosophy is spiritual adultery and makes you an enemy of God.

This is no small issue. The world system is profoundly attractive to the flesh. Its entertainments, possessions, and attitudes fuel pride and selfishness. There is enough gratification in living a prideful, selfish life that everyone wants it, yet it always leads to guilt and emptiness and the pursuit of such things ruins fellowship with the church and with God.

Proverbs 14

12 There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

God does not want His people to have covenant or contract relationships with unbelievers. God wants His people to be separate from the world to the degree that they don't even touch what is unclean.

1 Peter 2

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

Let's decide right now to surrender to Jesus and His Spirit and reject worldliness . . . we'll all be glad for each other.

Victory In The Church

12. The Key To Grace James 4:5,6

James 4:5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Grace is the epitome of divine enablement. When God dispenses the super-abundant supply of Himself to you for the need of the moment, you are suddenly equipped and enabled for whatever you are facing.

The caution of Hebrews 12:15,16 — **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal.** Indicates that three serious problems threaten someone who lives short of grace.

A *root of bitterness* will sprout and grow where there is no grace. Bitterness is a strange thing. It generally begins with an unforgiven offense. The wronged person begins to nurture anger and resentment toward the one who wronged and grace is excluded by the anger which turns into bitter hatred. It's odd how not all offenses have the same result. Depending on the person and circumstance sometimes it's easy to forgive or at least forget. When grace is at work forgiveness is easy and full.

If bitterness is allowed to stay it will pollute the environment and many innocent people will be adversely affected.

Colossians 3:19 specifically instructs husbands to love their wives and not be bitter towards them. Think of the families that live under a dark cloud because the husband harbors anger and bitterness toward his wife. This needs to quickly be resolved by honest and direct communication, assuming personal responsibility, giving and seeking forgiveness and taking hold of grace.

Immorality is the next big issue that arises out of a lack of grace. Grace always calls you to holiness and with a call that is more powerful than the call of temptation. But in its absence a person may suddenly fall into moral lapse that shocks everyone. Other times great moral temptation suddenly comes from no where and severe pressure to fall seems irresistible. Often the person experiencing this sudden onslaught isn't aware that grace is missing. Life has just been going on like always when wham!

The third issue when a person is short of grace is *temporal values*. Esau was immoral and godless and willing to exchange the priceless spiritual value of the birthright for a bowl of chili. Being the firstborn son, he had a special place in God's plan that he should have embraced, valued and guarded. Instead he allowed his scheming brother Jacob to snatch it from him. Later he came to his senses and tried to repent of his sin and foolishness, but it was too little too late.

A person living outside of God's grace will seek gratification from tangible things. They will love stuff and lust after it even to a point of harm to themselves or their relationships.

In **1 John 2:15-17** we are cautioned — **15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**

This command is impossible to obey outside of the supply of God's grace. The desires to indulge, acquire, and impress are more powerful than human will or determination.

So how can you be sure you have the flow of grace going on in your life?

First, understand the role of the Holy Spirit. The best rendering of **James 4:5** is . . . **the Spirit He has made to dwell in us jealously desires to control us.** Just like the teaching of **Ephesians 5:18**, we are exhorted to be filled with and controlled by the Spirit of God. It only takes surrender to Him for filling to happen.

Then God promises a greater grace. That is, greater all the time, ready to match the need of the moment. Sufficient grace. Grace that won't fail you or leave you stranded. There is only one way to get this greater grace.

Humility. You must be in subjection to God, not resisting Him on any point. Starting with your attitude toward yourself and extending to every event of your life you must bow before Him with thanksgiving and praise. Praise for how He made you, the family He put you in, the place you live, the people in authority over you. When you say "thank you Lord" for everything instead of resenting things He will pour out grace in your life. When someone wrongs you, you can just trust God to take care of it instead of getting defensive, angry and bitter. When morally tempted, just lay it before God. When you are feeling compelled to grasp things, bow before Him and receive grace.

Grace is the best place to live, divine opposition the worst.

Victory In The Church

13. The Victorious Life James 4:7-10

James 4:7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. **8** Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9** Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. **10** Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Notice how the paragraph begins and ends — humility is always the key to advancement. Submission to God also puts you on solid ground for resisting the devil and when you do he will run like the coward he is. You are empowered when you are yielded to God and His Word.

Is submission ever hard for you? Sometimes you just want things to go your way and be your way. You end up serving your idea of God and His will instead of serving Him. The power you need for victory flows when you lay your will down and embrace what God is doing in the way He is doing it. If you won't do that you can end up aligned with the enemy in the pride that cost him everything. Victory starts with surrender to God.

Then, like Jesus, you can reply to satan's ideas with the Word of God and repel him at every turn. Consider Peter's words:

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. 1 Peter 5:8-9

Peter is saying to pay attention or you may get gummed to death by your toothless foe. Resisting him from the basis of firm faith will protect you every step of the way, just as it does fellow-believers.

It is vital to be close to God if you are going to experience His victories. Quiet time with Him in prayer and meditating on His Word will bring you close. Hearing from God is a skill you have to hone. When you submit to Him you prepare yourself for communication. You will find yourself saying "Speak Lord" in every circumstance and you will recognize His voice more easily all the time. As He responds by moving closer to you your strength rises along with your joy and peace.

Being close with God means that His light will shine more brightly on you and you will discover a need for cleansing. The high-def picture is amazing in its resolution, but also reveals any flaws. Public media contains pictures of people that are so air-brushed they don't quite resemble the person. God doesn't air-brush, He cleanses and removes every sin and stain.

The cleansing process is strenuous and a bit painful. Soiled hands must be cleaned up and then the heart can be purified. Double-mindedness is the issue. Jeremiah noted the deceitfulness of the human heart **Jeremiah 17:9**. It sometimes seems impossible to have a completely pure heart. If there is a truth God has brought into your life and you have not obeyed it, you are immediately double-minded. In one mind you are wanting to serve and honor God, but in the other you are still doing things your way.

At that point let the cleansing go deeper. Let God shine His light deeply into you until your sin starts to produce a godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it — for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while — I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

James indicates a total interruption of life as happiness and joy are replaced with mourning and gloom. The accompanying sense of misery will ignite a repentance which will bring you into full intimacy with God. Now you are ready to really humble yourself in the presence of the Lord — you have had your independent streak removed and your will is subject to God. He is in control and calling the shots. What does He call? Exaltation. He has made you ready for a new assignment. He has proven and purified you and knows He can trust with more than ever before.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. 1 Peter 5:6,7

God is in charge of exalting anyone. He alone knows the right timing because it is intertwined in other peoples' lives and all the things God is doing in the universe. Waiting on Him is one of the hardest things. If you are harboring one little bit of independence and strong will you will struggle. That's probably the reason for verse 7: the pace of the process will produce anxiety in most of us, so Peter says to roll that over on God while trusting Him to care for everything.

All you have to do is remember Joseph and the countless setbacks he endured while God got everything ready for him to take his place on the throne next to Pharaoh. If Joseph could have somehow jumped the gun and been released from prison when he wanted he would have missed everything. Wait on God, He will never make a mistake. Live a victorious life held in the hollow of His hand.

Victory In The Church

14. The Temptation of Naturalism James 4:11-17

James 4: *11 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. 12 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? 13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 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. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that." 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

Naturalism is a philosophy that excludes God from His creation and sees the universe as a closed cause and effect system where everyone does what he thinks is right without accountability. James points out three consequences of this pagan thinking:

1. Judgmentalism — taking God out of the equation and yourself in His place. When someone speaks against another person with censorious condemnation they are usurping the law of God while disobeying it themselves. God, the One who is able to save or destroy, is the only one qualified to pass judgment on anyone.

People can't see hearts or read minds or discern motives. But judging calls for all of those. God is the only One who can judge. The way He is dealing with humanity right now is in grace and mercy. Even when He judges He stops short of condemning.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. John 3:16,17

Jesus confronts sin and sinners, but never with contempt. Well, unless they're religious prigs using their religion to push people around. He was never fond of that.

If you are thinking correctly, you are keenly aware of God's presence and ability to work in people's lives so you don't judge anyone. You may find a way to encourage someone to consider a different path than the one they are taking, but you come nowhere near condemnation.

Only in God's absence does judging develop. Naturalism.

2. Independent planning — Thinking, talking and acting as if you are actually in control of your life. "Yes, I'll be going there and doing these things and in a year I'll have made a tidy profit." Really? What makes you so sure of all this. You may not make it past tomorrow. Your life is pictured as a little vapor cloud. Maybe it comes in an open window and then drifts across the room and out another window. The time between the windows — that's your life. You could have a medical condition you don't know about today that will call you out next month.

You would be way further ahead to acknowledge God and believe that your times are in His hands and that He is accomplishing all that concerns you. Submit your plans to Him and follow His direction as you go.

Proverbs 16:1 The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

Proverbs 16:3 Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established.

Proverbs 16:9 The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.

Boasting is on the way to death. Submission to God is a spring of life.

3. Disobedience — You know what is the right thing to do, but intentionally don't do it. That's called practical atheism — you insist that you believe in God, but you live as if He doesn't even exist. Knowing what's right and not doing it is sin; knowing what's wrong and going ahead and doing it is sin.

In both cases practicing the presence of God would make all the difference. Knowing and loving God is all about accountability and enjoying His constant presence.

Supernaturalism is better than naturalism.

Victory In The Church

15. The Temptation of Ungodly Wealth James 5:1-6

***James 5:1** Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. **2** Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. **3** Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. 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. **5** You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. **6** You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.*

It's OK to be rich, God has intentionally blessed many different people with riches. Job, Abraham, Jacob and some New Testament believers as well. **Proverbs 10:22** says that the blessing of the Lord is what makes a man rich and God adds no sorrow to it. The problem is that some people's riches aren't because of God's blessing. **Proverbs 10:2** says that ill-gotten gains do not profit. **Proverbs 20:17 Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.**

The rich people addressed in James 5 didn't get rich from God's blessing. Their riches have soured and rotted brought great misery upon them.

Money is an interesting thing. We're always amazed to hear of people who have a windfall and then their great riches are followed by conflict and sorrow that destroys their family and even their life. Money seems to have a powerful dynamic connected with it that can be life-altering. Jesus said that your money will control your heart, so you'd best be careful to invest it in heaven. Loving money can bring all sorts of evil into your life — so don't love it!

If you study the book of Proverbs you will discover that loving and pursuing wisdom will bring riches into your life. Long life, too. But if you take a glance at riches or try to grasp them you can lose everything, starting with your sanity.

3 John 1:2 Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.

Your soul prospers because of the supply of Jesus to you. If you prosper in all respects for the same reason everything will be fine. You will be walking in faith and in the Spirit, you will not be striving and stressing trying to amass a fortune, but simply waiting on God who is always faithful.

These rich people in James held on to ill-gotten gains. They hired people and then didn't pay them. With the withheld wages they lived luxurious lives of wanton pleasure. Now their riches are being devalued by rust and moths and the very things satisfied their lusts are now consuming them like fire.

They have also used their wealth as a powerful influence in court. They have condemned and executed righteous people who didn't have the means to defend themselves. If you have ever been on the receiving end of a rich man's oppression you know how helpless you can feel. You felt appalled at the callous treatment you received. You didn't get justice, you were put away by a system that only a lot of money could influence.

Well the good news is that money doesn't buy everything including an escape from the judgment of God. He is watching and recording everything and will repay every man's works back on him. It may be in eternity that accounts are finally settled, but settled they will be.

Remember the rich man and Lazarus? After they died the rich man envied Lazarus' place in Paradise. Abraham told him that he had all the good things on earth while Lazarus had nothing, but now for eternity they have a proper reward, and the rich man couldn't get out of hell's fire. God makes no mistakes!

Remember that the heart determines the nature of the riches. A pure heart that is after God's heart will enjoy lasting and satisfying wealth. The perverse, sin-laced heart will have ungodly riches that will eventually bring destruction.

Seek God, seek wisdom, obey both of them and you'll be all right!

Victory In The Church

16. Steadfast To The End — James 5:7-12

James 5:7 *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. 12 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.*

Sooner or later you face the temptation to give up and quit. Of course there are times in life when moving on to something new is the right thing to do. But when it comes to involvement in church and relationships, patience is the key. The word emphasizes the idea of being long-suffering rather than hastily getting angry or losing faith. There is another Greek word that speaks of perseverance under circumstances, James brought the idea to relationships as he gives some foundations for endurance.

First, the coming of the Lord. He said to have it in view because it is near. Wow, he said that well over 2000 years ago and Jesus hasn't come yet — what does "near" mean? Primarily it means *imminent* as in looking for and expecting it in every minute.. For another thing, remember that to God a day and a thousand years are interchangeable. You want to finish well and the key to that is being like the farmer who plants in the fall or spring and then must patiently wait for the early and late rains. To my knowledge and experience farmers are very patient people. They prepare the soil with extreme care and finally plant the seed. They don't come around pestering it, but wait for the moisture to trigger germination and then watch over it while the plants mature all summer. So many factors threaten the crop. Weather, disease, bugs — all kinds of destroyers come around. The farmer doesn't quit, he patiently waits and finally the late rain and harvest time. James said to get your eyes on Jesus' return, strengthen your heart, and live a patient with other people sort of life.

Second, get a grip on what endurance means. No complaining against other people now, that will result in judgment. Just think of ancient prophets who spoke in the Name of the Lord even while passing through great suffering. Their words mean much today. A great example of them is Job. God taunted the devil about Job's great faithfulness and that launched a hellish satanic assault on Job that stripped him of everything but his wife, his life, and three worthless friends. He endured under the pressure of both circumstances that he couldn't understand and a wife and friends who constantly gave him poor counsel. Job's faithfulness and patience ultimately paid off. He interceded for his friends and God restored to him four times what he had lost. Job is proof that you can through a lot with people while patience maintains your sanity. God's compassion and mercy will sustain you.

Third, be true to yourself while maintaining integrity. You don't need to take oaths or swear by anything if you simply speak the truth. Have you ever known someone who verbally over-compensated as they told you of their love and loyalty and ended up betraying you? Often the loudest declarations of commitment belie the back stab that's coming. How much better for people to stay on an even keel and simply back up simple words with genuine deeds

James was concerned about *Victory In The Church*. He wrote about the various temptations and distractions that can thwart genuine fellowship. He urged the people then and urges us now to not settle for something good when we should have the best. And to really make sure there is no hypocrisy which saps the reality right out of fellowship with Jesus and each other.

Accomplish all that you set out to do in the Kingdom — don't quit until you do.

Victory In The Church

17. Divine Healing — James 5:13-16

James 5:13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

Suffering calls for prayer, cheerfulness for singing, what about sickness? I grew up with the cessationist teaching that "sign gifts" had gone away with the completion of the Bible. The teaching allowed for God to heal if He wanted to, but He probably didn't and wouldn't. The only appropriate prayer for the sick included "If it be Thy will". This text in James was just left in the confusion file. If anything else was emphasized from it, it was that a sickness caused by sin could maybe be healed with enough repentance.

Once I got really sick with some sort of flesh eating something and I lost 73 pounds and seemingly nearly died. It went on over a period of months during which I came across a list of books for sale including Andrew Murray's Divine Healing. I ordered it and read it as fast as I could. In this collection of essays on various specific healing-related topics Murray summed everything up with **Psalm 103:3 Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases** . . . He asked the question, "Do you believe God pardons all our iniquities?" "Do you have to say 'If it be Thy Will'?" Then why do you make the second half of the same verse conditional if the first half isn't? Doesn't the same God who unconditionally forgives heal as well? He said that if God intends to heal you in heaven it's still healing and He'll lead you to pray in accordance. Otherwise stand on Psalm 103:3 and believe that as surely as God forgives you, He heals you. Murray went on that sometimes you have to believe for quite awhile before the healing comes. During that time you should say, "Lord Jesus, I receive my healing" every time you feel a symptom; and when someone asks, "How ARE you?" you say, "I'm being healed!" In my case I learned and said those phrases for months, and then one day God touched me and I was instantly healed.

Since that time I have prayed the prayer of faith over many people, anointing them with oil, and seen God heal some on the spot, some over time, and some waiting for Glory. Sometimes people have been healed and then given pills or potions the credit after awhile. They died very soon after the erroneous confession.

I don't understand exactly how God works or why, His timing is His. But I don know that standing on His Word is the only thing to do.

So James said that if you are sick you call for the elders who come and anoint you with oil, pray the prayer of faith (Psalm 103:3), and God will raise you up. Additionally if sin is involved it will be forgiven. So confess your sins to someone, pray for each other and healing will come. This confession probably is limited to the circle of people that the sin impacted. Eliminating the sin establishes the righteousness and righteous person can pray with great effectiveness.

If you or someone you know is struggling with being healed, don't struggle. Just receive the Word of Psalm 103:3, combine it with faith in your heart and then confess it. Make a habit of saying Andrew Murray's phrases and just wait patiently on God. Keep yourself in the place of faith and at the right moment God will touch you. By the way, Kathee and I have a few physical conditions that we are believing God to heal and they have gone on quite awhile. God is able!

Victory In The Church

18. Effective Prayer — James 5:17,18

James 5: *17 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 earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.*

James started this little paragraph at a very important point — the man being talked about was not a super hero. He was a regular guy just like you and me. He did great things for God through his praying. The full story is in 1 Kings 17:1 – 18:46. Most of the time Elijah prayed things back to God that God had said to him. He was moving in sync with God and therefore was very bold and intrepid in his manner and communication with the wicked King Ahab. There are so many interesting things about his prayers. For one thing, when he prayed for drought he prayed something that would touch him as well as Ahab.

God sent Elijah to the Brook Cherith and had ravens bring him food (roadkill?). Not long after settling in the brook dried up. So God sent him to Zarephath where he discovered a destitute widow lady with who he was to stay. Not great housing arrangements — this woman had enough oil and flour that she was out gathering a couple sticks to heat the oven and make the final meal for her and her son. Elijah told her to feed him first! She did and never ran out of flour or oil while he was there. Again he spoke on the authority of the Word of God. That was good but then her son got sick and died. Remember, we are talking an ordinary man with an extraordinary prayer life. He first confronted God about the death but then prayed for the boy, God heard and raised him up.

Soon after God told Elijah it was time to confront Ahab again and bring rain back to the earth. Elijah called for a contest on Mt. Carmel between him and the prophets of Baal. The issue was to see who could call fire from heaven. The Baal boys tried everything all day; they even mutilated themselves, all to no avail. Then Elijah repaired the altar of God, arranged his sacrifice, had them soak it down with 12 pitchers of water and then prayed. One simple prayer and God answered with a fire that consumed everything, altar and all. The people rejoiced in Jehovah God and Elijah saw to the killing of 450 prophets of Baal. He then told Ahab to run because a monsoon was coming.

Then he and his servant went up on the mountain and Elijah crouched down and prayed for rain. He had his servant check the sky for a cloud and there was none. He did this seven times and finally the servant said that there was a cloud the size of a man's hand. Elijah gathered up his robes and began to run for cover, passing Ahab's chariot. The rain came — what a victory!

Ahab went home and told his wife Jezebel all that had happened and she issued a warrant for Elijah's destruction. Oddly enough this man of power and victory fled into the wilderness at the threat of one crummy woman. He was a man just like us after all.

One obvious question — why did he have to pray seven times before one little cloud appeared on the day that God had already said the rain would fall? Because God likes to hear from His children and the devil doesn't like it when He does. Elijah merely demonstrated the triumphant faith that is involved in seeing God does His best moves. We often miss out on what God wants to do because we shut down the prayer time too soon. Don't be absent from the dock the day your ship comes in.

Victory In The Church

19. Restoring A Brother or Sister — James 5:19,20

James 5: *19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

How fitting for James to conclude his letter with emphasis on restoration and care of each other. Really everything he has talked about has in some way pertained to body life and relationships as well as personal issues. Victory can't be complete in the context of leaving the wounded behind. That happens way too often in church life — someone slips and falls and everyone else walks around them or even crosses the street. Believers can make mistakes such as believing erroneous teaching or even falling into sinful behavior. To harshly judge a fallen brother and leave him in the weakened state is totally outside of the grace of God.

So the clear focus is on taking responsibility for each other and when someone is in trouble doing what is necessary to recover them. Truth is the issue and it needs to be handled in love. The Pharisee outlook is to censure and condemn. The godly approach is to turn the person's heart back to truth. This usually isn't a deep theological or doctrinal presentation, it's more about respect and acceptance expressed with genuine kindness. Even if doctrinal error is the issue not much will be accomplished through argument and conflict. Rather it's like with God and the sinner — it's His kindness that brings about repentance.

There is great two-fold value in being a rescuer. You save the fallen one's soul from death. This isn't referring to hell, but from probably premature death of a Christian. John spoke of a sin unto death and it can be prevented. Second, a multitude of sin is kept out of the place where it could discourage and distract. Sin is an insidious pollutant and the more times it can be eliminated without spreading the better. This isn't a cover up but rather a containment. The sinner is turning (repenting) from his error and the fallout is prevented even as a life is spared.

This all reminds of 1 John 2 where John said that his writing was meant to prevent sin, but if sin happened there was a remedy in the advocacy of Christ. James addressed all the temptations and sins that could disturb a church hoping to prevent them. But in the end if the sin happened there was still a solution. That is certainly the grace of God!

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. **2** Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.