

Practical Day-To-Day Christianity

[As shown in the letter written by James]

Part 1

James 1:1 [NIV] *“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.”*

James introduces himself as the servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word translated “servant” is the Greek word “dōulōs” meaning bond slave, implying absolute obedience, absolute humility, absolute loyalty.

A person with responsibilities but no personal rights.

Although scripture confirms that James was an apostle he does **not** add this title to his introduction.

This letter is a general letter written to all the Jews who had been scattered throughout the world because of the persecution of Christians that was occurring at that time in history.

This letter is also a general letter to all Christians throughout history as how we should conduct our lives.

This letter is written to Christians who claim to know all the right answers to doctrine and Christian living but contradict the message they bring by the way they live.

James confronts us all head-on, saying that talking about Christian faith is **not** enough, we have to live it.

Professing to trust God and to be His people, we may still cling tightly to the world and what it values.

The proof of the reality of our faith is that our lives have changed.

James 1:2-4 [NIV] *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face **trials** of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops **perseverance**. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*

James reflects the warnings that Jesus Christ gave His disciples, that living a Christian life will **not** be easy.

The Greek word translated “temptations” or “trials” is “pēirasomōs” which is used widely for the testing the quality of the product.

This is a positive word expecting the outcome to be beneficial to the one being tested.

This is not being seduced to sin, but a strengthening and purification process.

We do not know the depth of our character until we see how we react when under pressure.

It is easy to be kind to other people when everything is going well in our lives, but can we be kind to others when they are treating us unfairly?

Matthew 5:44-45 [NIV] *“But I tell you: **Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**”*

The proof of our love is to continue to love those who oppose us.

We all will at some time experience the test of sorrows and disappointments, which seek to take away our faith and our trust in God our Father.

The whole point of these tests is **not** to cause us to fall but to make us soar.

These tests are not sent to defeat us, but that in defeating them we will become stronger and mature.

This is why we should look on them with joy.

Hebrews 12:2 [NIV] *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Jesus Christ faced His greatest trial [test] with joy, because He knew what that tribulation or test would accomplish. The end goal and accomplishment would be freedom from the penalty of sin for all humanity.

The end result of our testing

James uses an interesting word for this process of testing.

The Greek “*dōkimiōn*” used for sterling coinage, no added alloys, pure gold or silver.

This indicates that the testing will purge us of all impurity, burn out the dross of human character and leave us in the “*likeness*” of our Heavenly Father.

The words “*patience*” or “*perseverance*” are really too passive to express what is the product of this testing.

These trials are not simply to be born patiently but to be glorified.

The thing that amazed the heathen in the centuries of persecution was that the martyrs did not die grimly, they died singing praises to God.

We are to welcome these trials so we can vanquish them.

The effect of bearing trials rightly is the strength to bare still more and to conquer even harder battles.

The word translated “*complete*” is also used of an animal that is fit to be offered to God in sacrifice, entire and perfect without blemish in every part.

The same word is also used of a priest who is fit to serve God.

“*Lacking nothing*” is referring to unswerving constancy. One who is day-by-day reaching nearer to the standard that Jesus Christ set.

How is this accomplished?

Philippians 4:13 [Amplified] *“I have strength for all things in Christ who empowers me, I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me, I am selfsufficient in Christ’s sufficiency.”*

John 14:15-18 [NIV] *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”*

We receive this “Christ sufficiency” by allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through us.

James 1:5 [Good News Bible] *“But if any of you lacks wisdom, he should pray to God, who will give it to him, because God gives generously and graciously to all.”*

This translation rightly adds the word “but” which is in the Greek and is important because what has just been asked of us is not easily attained.

The Greek infers that it is more than lacking wisdom, we have to desire to have that wisdom.

James 1:5 [Living Bible] *“If you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him, and He will gladly tell you, for He is always ready to give a bountiful supply to all who ask Him, He will not resent this.”*

1 Kings 3:5-10 [NIV] *“At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. “Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. **So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?” The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.”***

God’s response to Solomon’s prayer for wisdom shows us what should be our attitude of mind as we approach God asking for wisdom.

1 Kings 3:11-14 [NIV] *“So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. **Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both riches and honour, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”***

God was generous to Solomon, giving him more than he asked for.

For James, a Christian teacher with a Jewish background, wisdom was a practical thing to be used in our day-to-day life, not just intellectual knowledge.

This is shown throughout this letter written by James and undoubtedly inspired by the Holy Spirit, the spirit of wisdom.

We have to ask in faith

James 1:6-8 [NIV] *“But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a **double-minded** man, unstable in all he does.”*

Faith has to be a part of every aspect of our relationship with God.

Hebrews 11:6 [NIV] *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”*

Faith, trust in God providing all we need, is the only way we can please God.

“Double minded” – the Greek literally means *“two spirited”*.

Which *“spirit”* is asking for this wisdom?

Is it our own selfish human spirit or the Holy Spirit working in and through us?

James 4:3 [NIV] *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*

It is the wrong spirit in us that fails to receive the answer to our prayers.

A mind that wavers is not completely convinced that God’s way is best. A person who is not committed, treats God’s Word like any human advice, and they retain the option to disobey.

The only way to stabilise a wavering mind is to be totally committed to God, trusting in Him to guide us in every part of our life.

James 1:9-11 [NIV] *“The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.”*

The person who is without status in this world, nor the wealth that is so important to this society in which we live, should be glad.

Why?

In God’s eyes riches mean nothing.

What the world thinks is valuable is nothing to God the Creator of all things.

True status and wealth in God’s eyes is what is eternal.

That is character.

God is **not** in the status or wealth-giving game, what He desires is children created in His *“likeness”* that is His character.

Physical wealth can soon be lost and status in the eyes of society can be lost overnight.

James 1:12 [NIV] *“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”*

James is referring back to the outcome of this testing mentioned in verse 3.

The final outcome, when we come to the end of our physical life, is the crown of eternal life.

In the ancient world the crown had several associations in life.

A crown of flowers was worn at times of joy, weddings or feasts.

The crown was the mark of authority and royalty.

The crown was the mark of honour and of dignity.

Proverbs 1:8-9 [NIV] *“Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.”*

Obedying the instructions of our parents would bring a crown of grace.

Proverbs 4:9 [NIV] *“She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendour.”*

Wisdom provides a person with a crown of glory.

Lamentations 5:16 [NIV] *“The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned!”*

In a time of disaster or of dishonour the crown is lost.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 [NIV] *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but **we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.**”*

The victor’s crown in a race.

James 1:13-17 [NIV] *“When tempted, no-one should say, “God is tempting me.” For **God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. Don’t be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**”*

We have to study all these verses as one statement to understand what James is saying. When we judge what is said in the light of verse 17, we can understand the verses that led up to this statement.

James 1:13-17 [Living Bible] *“And remember, when someone wants to do wrong it is never God who is tempting him, for **God never wants to do wrong and never tempts anyone else to do it. Temptation is the pull of man’s own evil thoughts and wishes. These evil thoughts lead to evil actions and afterwards to the death penalty from God. So don’t be misled, dear brothers.**”*

Genesis 3:9-13 [NIV] *“But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*

Right from the beginning human nature likes to blame others for their own sin.

Temptation to do evil comes from inside us, our human nature, not from God.

All sin begins with a thought, then when we dwell on that thought we allow it to become an action.

Like a snowball rolling downhill, sin becomes more destructive the more we let it have its way.

Best time to stop a temptation is at the thought stage before it becomes too strong for us to resist.

Philippians 4:8 [NIV] *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, **think about such things.**”*

Substitute the thoughts that lead to sin by thoughts that lead to praising God.

Job 2:1-7 [NIV] *“On another day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. And the LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it.” Then the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.” “Skin for skin!” Satan replied. “A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.” The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.” So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head.”*

God does allow Satan to tempt us, through trials but this is to refine our faith and to help us to turn to Him for strength to resist sins.

1 Corinthians 10:13 [NIV] *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And **God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”***

God knows just how far to allow Satan to tempt us without our giving in to that temptation and sinning.

A Christian always accepts the responsibility for their own actions and never tries to put the blame on others.

James 1:18 [NIV] *“He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we **might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.**”*

God has never changed from His original purpose for humanity.

For a Christian the important birth is the re-birth as a child of God.

The word of truth is referring to the gospel message that becoming born-again is only possible through what God has done for all humanity. By the birth, life, death and resurrection of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 [NIV] *“**But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: **Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.**”*

Jesus Christ is, in respect to the resurrection, the firstfruits of all believers.

Also in respect to regeneration, our being born again.

The sacrifice of the firstborn to God is familiar to the Jews who are being addressed by James.

The firstborn in the family or cattle and fruits of the field.

This was a place of the ultimate regeneration of all creation.

Romans 8:18-23 [NIV] *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in*

the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

The Holy Spirit is the divine agent through whom this regeneration takes place.

Romans 8:11 [NIV] *“And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”*

It was the Holy Spirit who resurrected Jesus Christ the Son of Man to be the first of the firstfruits.

Only if the Holy Spirit lives in us will we be regenerated, resurrected to eternal life.

James 1:19 [NIV] *“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,”*

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think that our ideas are far more important than theirs.

James is wisely advising us to reverse this process, to put a mental stopwatch on our conversations to keep track on how much we talk and how much we listen.

Proverbs is full of the perils of too much and too hasty speech.

Proverbs 10:19 [NIV] *“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”*

Proverbs 13:3 [NIV] *“He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin.”*

Proverbs 17:28 [NIV] *“Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”*

Proverbs 29:20 [NIV] *“Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.”*

A tribute was once given to a great linguist that he could be silent in seven different languages!

When people talk to us do they feel that their viewpoints and ideas have value?

The anger referred to in this verse is the anger that erupts when our egos are bruised, when our opinions are not being heard.

Only anger when injustice or sin are involved, when others are being hurt is good.

We should **not** be angry when we fail to win an argument or when we feel offended or neglected.

Selfish anger is always wrong and never helps anyone.

James 1:20 [NIV] *“for man’s anger does **not** bring about the righteous life that God desires.”*

Selfish anger does not lead to righteousness.

James 3:18 [NIV] *“Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”*

It is the peacemaker who leads people to righteousness.

James 1:21 [NIV] *“Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and **humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.**”*

“Therefore” – as a result of what has just been discussed.

“Get rid of” – the Greek word used is literally used to “strip off our cloths” as if they are soiled garments.

Isaiah 64:6 [NIV] *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and **all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.**”*

All our self-righteousness is seen by God as soiled garments that should be cast aside.

1 Peter 5:5 [NIV] *“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, **clothe yourselves with humility towards one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**”*

Rather we need to be clothed in humility that will help us avoid the pride that leads to all kinds of sin.

It is only the humble mind and spirit that can accept the gospel message, which tells us of our total dependency on what God has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ.

We are to humbly accept the gospel message, [**James 1:21**].

We accept it as the stock plant receives the graft, so that the fruit which is produced is **not** according to the nature of our sour stock but according to the grafted gospel message. That is the message of the love of God **not** the selfish pride of human nature.

James 1:22-24 [NIV] *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.”*

It is referring to the person who goes to the church meeting, listens to and reads the scriptures, even makes notes on how the preacher expounds the scriptures but this does not change their life in any way.

Such a person deceives themselves by thinking this hearing makes them a Christian.

The fact is that such a person is less than half way towards becoming a Christian.

James 1:25 [NIV] *“But the man who looks intently into the **perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.**”*

What is the perfect law that gives us freedom?

James 2:8, 10-12 [NIV] *“If you really keep the **royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,”** you are doing right.” ... “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a law-breaker. **Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,**”*

The Old Covenant laws do **not** give us freedom from sin.

John 8:31-36 [NIV] *“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and **the truth will set you free.**” They answered him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we*

*shall be set free?” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it for ever. **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**”*

The teaching of Jesus is the truth and this gives us freedom, through what He did to cleanse us from sin.

Galatians 5:1, 13-14 [NIV] *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” ... “You, my brothers, were called to be free. **But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”**”*

This one command of Jesus sums up the entire Old Covenant laws.

1 Peter 2:16 [NIV] *“Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.”*

Instead of being slaves to the sin of our old nature, become slaves to our Saviour Jesus Christ who has set us free to serve Him. We will find Jesus to be the very best of Masters.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.**”*

In Jesus Christ we are freed from trying to keep a set of rules to receive salvation. However, out of gratitude for what Jesus Christ has done for us we submit our lives totally to Him.

John 14:27 [NIV] *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*

This peace of mind comes from the freedom from the guilt of sin that accepting Christ’s sacrifice brings us.

If we are relying on law-keeping for salvation we will never know if we have done this perfectly so will never have the freedom that comes from Jesus that gives us His peace of mind.

Jesus kept the law of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant perfectly for us.

James 1:26 [NIV] *“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.”*

If we think we are a true worshipper of God and yet do **not** control our tongue, our worship is useless.

Romans 12:1-2 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to **offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.** Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

True worship is the surrender of our whole life, body, brain and “human” spirit [**Job 32:8**] to God.

That is when we allow the Holy Spirit to work with, in and through us, by surrendering our will to His our life will change.

This change will start inside us, not what we do with our body, but what happens in our brain and “human” spirit.

This change is what God desires, this is fulfilling His desire that every human being will be reflecting his “likeness”, His character.

James 1:27 [NIV] “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Note:- the ones we are to serve and those who will not be able to repay us.

To keep ourselves from being polluted by the society around us we need to spend time with God on a daily basis.

We are **not** to adapt our life to the world’s value system, which is based on money, power and pleasure.

All through history humans have tried to make ritual and liturgy a substitute for sacrifice and service.

Humans have made church buildings splendid at the expense of the physical, mental and spiritual need of the people outside of the church and its buildings.

God is not pleased with such a way of trying to worship Him.