

***Bible Study of the Epistle of James***  
***By Fr. John Brown***

**Introduction to the book: Author**

The writer of the book identifies himself as “*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

James was a common name at the time, but is identified as James, the son of Alphaeus, often referred to as “the Brother of the Lord.”



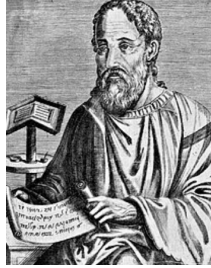
The English name “James” comes from the Greek word “Jacob” (Ἰάκωβος), which was translated from the Hebrew “Ya’akov” (יעקב).

This James should not be confused with James, the son of Zebedee. Both are listed as Apostles:

<sup>2</sup> Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; **James the son of Zebedee**, and John his brother; <sup>3</sup> Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; **James the son of Alphaeus**, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup> Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. (Matthew 10)

We know that the author of the Epistle of James is not James the son of Zebedee because he was killed very early on:

Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.  
<sup>2</sup> Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. (Acts 12:1-2)



The 4<sup>th</sup> century Church historian Eusebius writes:

*"This James, whom the people of old called the Just because of his outstanding virtue, was the first, as the record tells us, to be elected to the episcopal throne of the Jerusalem church. Other descriptions are "James the brother of the Lord, surnamed the Just," and "James the Righteous."*

James as a spiritual leader in Jerusalem is mentioned in book of Acts. After Peter miraculously escaped from prison, he knocked on the door of Mark's mother's home.

*<sup>16</sup> Now Peter continued knocking; and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. <sup>17</sup> But motioning to them with his hand to keep silent, he declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren." And he departed and went to another place. (Acts 12)*

In the first Council of Jerusalem, James had a pivotal role:

*<sup>13</sup> And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: <sup>14</sup> Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. <sup>15</sup> And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:*

*<sup>16</sup> 'After this I will return  
And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;  
I will rebuild its ruins,  
And I will set it up;*

*<sup>17</sup> So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,  
Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,  
Says the LORD who does all these things.'*

*<sup>18</sup> "Known to God from eternity are all His works. <sup>19</sup> Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. <sup>21</sup> For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath." (Acts 15)*

James the brother of the Lord was the first Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem. While all the other Apostles were sent throughout the known world, only James remained in Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul, after his miraculous conversion to Christianity, travelled to Jerusalem:

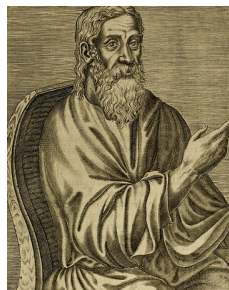
*<sup>18</sup> Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.  
<sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Galatians 1)*

Other early sources confirm James' episcopacy in Jerusalem:



Hegesippus (2nd century), in the fifth book of his Commentaries, mentions that James was made a bishop of Jerusalem but he does not mention by whom:

*"After the apostles, James the brother of the Lord surnamed the Just was made head of the Church at Jerusalem."*



Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd century) wrote in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes that James the Just was chosen as a bishop of Jerusalem by Peter, James (the Greater) and John:

*"For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Saviour, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just bishop of Jerusalem."*

According to Eusebius (3rd/4th century) James was named a bishop of Jerusalem by the apostles:

*"James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopal seat at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the apostles."*

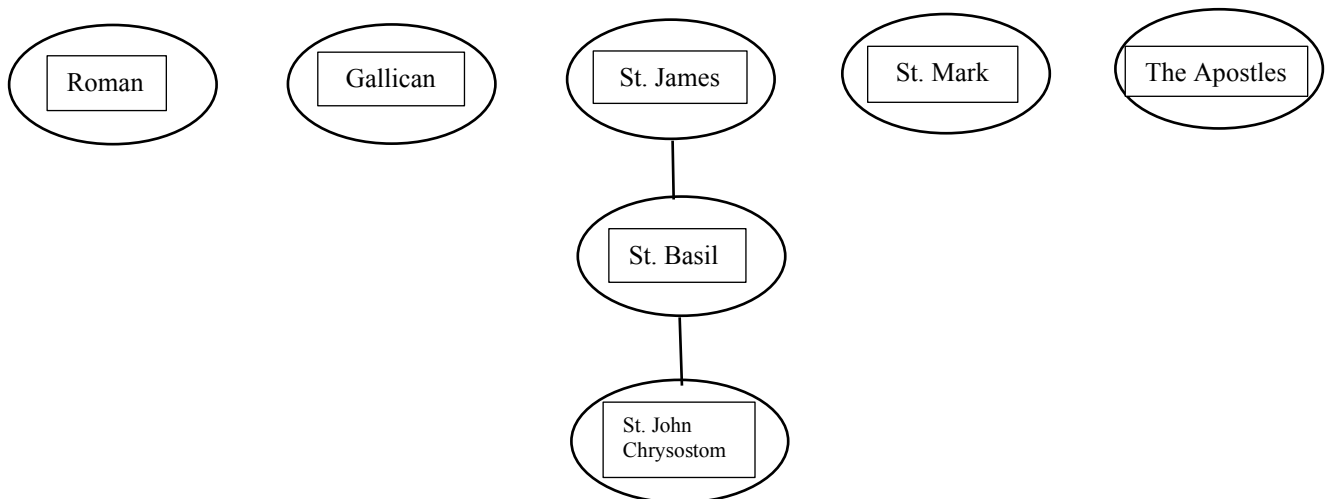


Jerome wrote the same:

*"James... after our Lord's passion... ordained by the apostles bishop of Jerusalem..."* and that James *"ruled the church of Jerusalem thirty years."*

The Liturgy of St. James

*Ancient Liturgies dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century*



The Death of James

James was martyred in Jerusalem. There are several early accounts of his death. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish historian Josephus writes:

*"Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned."*

Though a Jew, Josephus blamed the later Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem on the stoning of James:



*“These things happened to the Jews to avenge James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus, that is called the Christ. For the Jews slew him, although he was a most just man.”*

The 1<sup>st</sup> - 2nd century author Clement of Alexandria writes:

*"James was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and was beaten to death with a club."*

The 2nd century historian Hippolytus writes:

*“And James the son of Alphaeus, when preaching in Jerusalem was stoned to death by the Jews, and was buried there beside the temple.”*

### **Introduction to the book: Date of writing**

The date of the writing of the Epistle of James is certainly before the death of James around 62 AD.

### **Introduction to the book: The Audience**

The Epistle of James is “Catholic” in that it is addressed to Christians throughout the world. In this way “Catholic” epistles differ from other apostolic epistles that were addressed to specific churches in specific places. For example, Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians was written specifically to the Church at Corinth, his Epistle to the Colossians was written specifically to the Church at Colosse, etc.

The world that Epistle of James was written to was overwhelmingly Greek and Roman. It was cosmopolitan, polytheistic and pagan. There were Jews spread out throughout that world, but outside Judea they were always very small minority. The Jewish faith that gave birth to Christianity was largely unknown. Even though James wrote to a pagan world, his Epistle has several Jewish moments. He opened his epistle by addressing it to “The Twelve Tribes in Dispersion.” He used Jewish phrases like “Lord of hosts” and “Gehenna.” He directly quotes the Old Testament five times:

James	The Old Testament
<i>“For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.” (James 1:11)</i>	<i>“My heart is stricken and withered like grass, So that I forget to eat my bread... My days are like a shadow that lengthens, And I wither away like grass.” (Psalm 102:4,11)</i>  <i>“All flesh is grass, And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, Because the breath of the LORD blows upon it;</i>

	<i>Surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.” (Isaiah 4:6-8)</i>
<i>“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well.” (James 2:8)</i>	<i>“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:18)</i>
<i>“For He who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.” (James 2:11)</i>	<i>“You shall not murder “You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:13-14)</i>
<i>“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.” (James 2:23)</i>	<i>“And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6)</i>
<i>“But He gives more grace. Therefore He says:  “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” (James 4:6)</i>	<i>“Surely He scorns the scornful, But gives grace to the humble”. (Proverbs 3:34)</i>

Remarkably, James only refers to Jesus by name twice. And he does not mention the Resurrection at all. However, James shows intimate knowledge of the teachings of Christ. Note the parallels:

James	Jesus
<i>“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)</i>	<i>“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:” (Matthew 7:24)</i>
<i>“Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.” (James 3:12)</i>	<i>“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?” (Matthew 7:16)</i>
<i>“Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5)</i>	<i>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)</i>
<i>“Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges</i>	<i>“There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another? (Matthew 5:3)</i>

<i>the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge". (James 4:11-12)</i>	<i>"Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matthew 7:1)</i>
<i>"Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten." (James 5:2)</i>	<i>"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal..." (Matthew 6:19)</i>
<i>"But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment". (James 5:12)</i>	<i>"But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (Matthew 5:34-37)</i>

### ***The Message of the Epistle of James***

***The central message of the Epistle of James is exhorting Christians to remain steadfast in their faith in adversity, and that we MUST put our faith into action. The Laws of God MUST be lived.***

The Epistle of James teaches that works are a necessary product of our faith and are a crucial part of our salvation. Its most famous verse is ***"faith without works is dead."*** This belief was simply accepted by all Christians until the Reformation, when it became controversial.

### ***The Protestant Reformers View of Salvation Regarding Faith and Works - Luther***



Martin Luther and the other Reformers were adamantly opposed to any connection between works and salvation. They quoted verses from other Epistles, especially from the Apostle Paul, which state,

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

*“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” (Romans 10:9)*

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:28)*

*“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4-6)*

Given his total commitment to salvation by “faith alone” (Latin: *Sola Fidei*), Luther was not fond of the book of James. Luther wrote:

*“Therefore St James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.” (Luther’s Works 35, 362)*

*“The epistle of James gives us much trouble, for the Papists embrace it alone and leave out all the rest...Accordingly, if they will not admit my interpretations, then I shall make rubble also of it. I almost feel like throwing Jimmy into the stove, as the priest in Kalenberg did.” (Luther’s Works 34, 317)*

*“We should throw the epistle of James out of this school [i.e. Wittenburg], for it doesn’t amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, ‘Wait a moment! I’ll oppose them and urge works alone.’ This he did.” (Luther’s Works 54, 424)*

These comments have been interpreted to mean Luther wanted to remove James from the New Testament. Thankfully, none of his followers or fellow-Reformers took such a radical step.

To Luther and the Reformers, doing good works were important, but not essential. To them, no human action contributed to salvation. Only faith contributed to salvation. Luther was so insistent that salvation excluded works that he edited his translation of the Bible to bolster his doctrine. He took the original text of Romans 3:28,

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:28)*

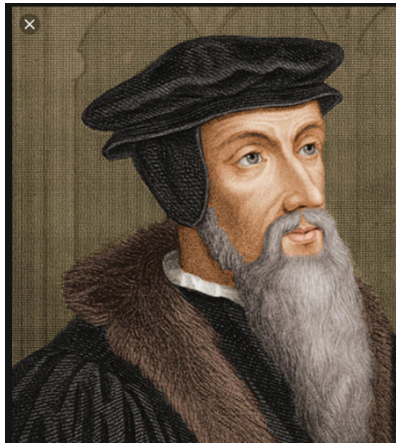
... and inserted the word “alone,” making it read,

*“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith **alone** apart from the deeds of the law.”*  
(Romans 3:28)

The word “alone” was not in the original Greek text.

Luther accepted baptism as being a part of our salvation. His simultaneous belief in salvation by faith alone AND baptismal regeneration has never been fully reconciled, even among his supporters. According to the Reformers Calvin and Zwingli, baptism and communion were among the works that did **not** contribute to salvation.

### **The Protestant Reformers View of Salvation Regarding Faith and Works - Calvin**



John Calvin, founder of the Reformed/Presbyterian Protestants, wrote:

*"Let us take as proof of this, Cornelius the centurion, who, having already received forgiveness of sins and the visible graces of the Holy Spirit, was nevertheless baptized. He did not seek an ampler forgiveness of sins through baptism, but a surer exercise of faith -- indeed, increase of assurance from a pledge. Perhaps someone will object: why, then, did Ananias tell Paul to wash away his sins through baptism if sins are not washed away by the power of baptism itself? I reply: we are said to receive, obtain, and acquire what, according as our faith is aware, is shown forth to us by the Lord, whether when he first testifies to it, or when he confirms more fully and more surely what has been attested, Ananias meant only this: **"To be assured, Paul, that your sins are forgiven, be baptized. For the Lord promises forgiveness of sins in baptism; receive it, and be secure."** . . . But from this sacrament, as from all others, we obtain only as much as we receive in faith."*

*"We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon us in the same way in which wine is drunk out of a cup, since the only office divinely assigned them is to attest and ratify the benevolence of the Lord towards us; and they avail no farther than accompanied by the Holy Spirit to open our*

*minds and hearts, and make us capable of receiving this testimony, in which various distinguished graces are clearly manifested."*

### **The Protestant Reformers View of Salvation Regarding Faith and Works - Zwingli**



Ulrich Zwingli, the founder of the Anabaptist Protestants, rejected the concept of sacraments entirely. To him, baptism and communion did not convey any grace. They were symbolic only.

*"In this matter of baptism — if I may be pardoned for saying it — I can only conclude that all the doctors have been in error from the time of the apostles. . . . All the doctors have ascribed to the water a power which it does not have and the holy apostles did not teach."*

*"I have no use for that notion of a real and true body that does not exist physically, definitely and distinctly in some place, and that sort of nonsense got up by word triflers."*

*"They are wrong, therefore, by the whole width of heaven who think that sacraments have any cleansing power."*

*"This was a vain invention; as if, forsooth, when a man is wet with the water something happens in him which he could not possibly have known unless water had been poured over him at the same time!"*

*"It is clearly frivolous to teach that . . . the sacraments can remit sins or confer blessings."*

*"Water-baptism cannot contribute in any way to the washing away of sin."*

*If someone is so strong that his assurance and certainty are independent of time, place, person and such like, then he has no need for sprinkling with water; but if he is a little stupid or thick-headed he needs some demonstration, so then that kind of believer is baptized because he is cleansed inwardly by faith in the same way as he is outwardly by water.*

*“Baptism is an initiatory sign or pledge initiating us to a lifelong mortification of the flesh and engaging or pledging us like the soldier at his enlistment.”*

*“Hence the meaning of the words ‘baptizing them’ is this: with this external sign you are to dedicate and pledge them to the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”*

This Zwinglian view of Baptism and Communion is the most widely held among American Protestants, and is almost universal among American evangelicals.

### **What does the Orthodox Church teach regarding the role of faith and works in salvation?**



In a nutshell, we believe that both faith and works are necessary for salvation, and the Sacraments are a vital form of the works by which God saves us.

The Apostle Paul was correct that faith is necessary for salvation. All his statements on this doctrine are absolutely true. His writings on this doctrine are included in the canonical Scriptures. The Orthodox Church believes every word he wrote on the subject, and would never minimize them. We believe that salvation is by grace – undeserved divine mercy. We agree that salvation is a gift of God. We agree that our own works, by themselves, without faith, could never attain salvation.

However, as much as the Church believes that salvation is “by faith, through grace, and is a gift of God,” we do not believe this is all the Bible says on the subject. We do not believe in salvation by grace through faith “alone.” That word is not in the Bible, and that is why Luther felt the need to put that word in where it was not. There is far more in the Bible on the role of works in salvation. All the places in the Bible states which state that works are essential to salvation are included in the same canonical Scriptures. The Orthodox Church believes them too. And no one should minimize or ignore them.

The Bible frequently defines works as an essential part of salvation. Some of those instances come from the writings of the Apostle Paul, who is usually cited by Protestants as teaching that works are not a part of salvation:

*“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:13)*

*“...for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” (Romans 2:13)*

*“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:27)*

*But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who “will render to each one according to his deeds”: **eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good** seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking **and do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath... (Romans 2:5-8)*

Christ also taught the importance of good works towards salvation:

*“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 7:19)*

The Bible includes many references of Baptism (a “work” according to Protestantism) as a normal part in salvation. At the Day of Pentecost:

*“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Men and brethren, **what shall we do?** Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and **let every one of you be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:37-38)*

*“**He who believes and is baptized** will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)*

*“There is also an antitype which now **saves** us—**baptism** (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”... (1 Peter 3:21)*

Christ emphatically identifies Holy Communion (another “work” according to Protestantism) as a normal part of our salvation:

*“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. **I am the living bread** which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”*

*Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.** For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.” (John 6:48-51, 53-56)*

The Bible also includes forgiveness (a “work” according to Protestantism) as a requirement of salvation:



*“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Matthew 18:35)*

*“Forgive us our trespasses, **as** we forgive those who trespass against us.”*

### ***Faith and Works in Judgement Day***



The Bible also includes generosity to the poor as a requirement of salvation. In Christ’s description of judgement day according to Matthew, this is God’s major criteria in judging humanity. Faith is not mentioned:

*“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’*

*“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ **And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’***

*“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’*

*“Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘**Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.**’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:34-46)*

John’s vision of Judgement Day in the Book of Revelation is similar:

*“And I saw a great white throne and the One sitting on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away, and a place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, having stood before the throne, and scrolls were opened, and another scroll was opened, which is [the Scroll] of Life. **And the dead were judged by the [things] having been written in the scrolls, according to their works.** And the sea gave up the dead, the [ones] in it, and death and the realm of the dead [Gr. hades] gave up the dead, the [ones] in them. **And they were judged, each one according to their works.**” (Revelation 20:11-13)*

The above passages depict Judgement Day highlight the tremendous importance of works in how we will be judged. Those who may have had faith, but did not express that faith towards the needy, were left out.

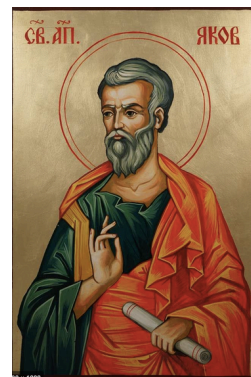
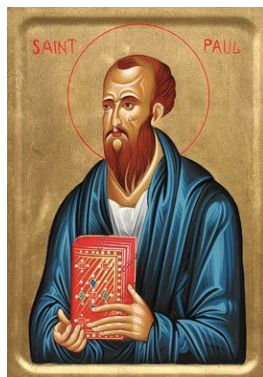
However, Christ also says,

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father** in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matthew 7:21-23)*

In this description of Judgement Day, it is whether we had a relationship with Christ through faith (“I never knew you”), and not works (casting out demons, doing wonders) that will determine our destiny. Those who did good works, but had no faith, were left out. Works, by themselves, are never enough to save.

These two descriptions of Judgement Day depict two criteria by which we will be judged: one by our relationship with Christ through faith, and the other by who we acted on our faith towards those in need. Both these are true. This presents us with a balance which we must remember when studying the book of James.

### **The Orthodox Balance of Salvation Through Faith and Works And the Importance of The Book of James to that Balance**



**Faith**  
**(Mostly Paul)**

**Works**  
**(Mostly James)**



The Book of James is important because it provides a vital balance in a complete Orthodox view of salvation.

If we only read Paul, it would be too easy to believe that salvation is by grace through faith, but no works are required.

If we only read James, it would be too easy to believe that salvation is by grace through works, but little faith is required.

To arrive at the full truth, we must pay equal attention to both Paul and James. If we ignore either Paul or James, we are missing something important. Their messages are not mutually exclusive, but mutually complimentary.

This why both books were included in the Bible, by the Wisdom of God. This is why the Orthodox Church believes the message of both, and has for 2,000 years. We have never set them at odds with each other or ignored one or the other.

### **The Text of the Epistle of St. James**

*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*

James begins by referring to himself simply as “a bondservant of God.” The Greek word is *doulos* (δοῦλος).

*STRONGS NT 1401: δοῦλος*

*δοῦλος, δούλη, δούλον (derived by most from δέω, to tie, bind; to ensnare, capture)*

*a. a slave, bondman, man of servile condition;*

*b. metaphorically, α. one who gives himself up wholly to another's will;*

c. a servant, attendant, (Synonym: see διάκονος.)

d. devoted to another to the disregard of one's own interests

James' description of himself in this way conveys great humility. He was, after all, an Apostle. He was a close follower of Jesus Christ, an eyewitness to Christ's Resurrection, and one of the original Twelve whom Christ sent out to preach the Gospel to the entire world. As an Apostle, he possessed extraordinary authority to govern the Church, especially in conjunction with the other Apostles. At the first Council of Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, James figures prominently;

<sup>13</sup> *And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me...*

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, <sup>20</sup> but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.*

<sup>22</sup> *Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church...*

Despite the dignity of his office, James begins his epistle only referring to himself as a "bond servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

<i>To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings. (James 1:1)</i>
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There are two possible ways to understand what James meant when he addressed his readers using the explicitly Jewish term, "*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.*"

The first possibility is that James was addressing his fellow Jewish Christians. Jews were the earliest Christians, and were already represented in the new Christian churches sprouting across the Roman world. It was the custom of the Apostle Paul that whenever he entered a city to proclaim the Gospel, he started by going to the synagogue. He attempted to show the Jews that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah according to their own Hebrew Scriptures. Some Jews believed and followed him, but most did not. Only after Paul preached to the Jews would he then preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and gather both Jews and Gentiles to form the church. Maybe by addressing "*The twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,*" James was following Paul's custom.

The second possibility is that James was addressing all Christians, intentionally calling them ALL "*the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad*" – including the Gentile Christians. The early Christians began to see themselves as "the New Israel" early on. God's Old Testament chosen people – the Jews – had now been expanded to include people of all nationalities. Paul wrote,

*" There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And **if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.**" (Galatians 3:28-29)*

The Epistle to the Hebrews wrote:

*“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**— not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt... In that He says, “A new covenant,” **He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away**” (Hebrews 8:7-9, 11)*

According to this possibility, when James addressed his Epistle to “*the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad*,” he was writing to all Christians because all Christians were now the new Jews.

*“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” (James 1:2-5)*

Note that James is saying that trials and testing are a normal part of our life in Christ. We are often tempted to see our difficulties in life as being an aberration, and somehow NOT a part of our life in Christ. It is actually the opposite. Our trials and testing are vital to our life in Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived his life in perfect harmony with the will of the Father. Yet that perfect will required him to suffer and die on a cross.



It was precisely by his triumphing over the Cross and death that we can be saved. We cannot have a resurrection without having carried our own crosses.

*Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. (Luke 9:23)*

James now addresses a specific spiritual problem among the churches – treating wealthy members better than poor members:

*2 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. <sup>2</sup> For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, <sup>3</sup> and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” <sup>4</sup> have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? <sup>7</sup> Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?*



God has always rejected favoritism based on wealth. In the Old Testament:

*“For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, **who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.**” (Deuteronomy 10:17)*

*“You shall **not show partiality** to a poor man in his dispute.” (Exodus 23:3)*

Christ’s followers observed that he showed no favoritism:

*“Then they asked Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that You say and teach rightly, and **You do not show personal favoritism**, but teach the way of God in truth...’” (Luke 20:21)*

The other Epistles also forbid favoritism:

*For there is **no partiality** with God. (Romans 2:11)*

*And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, **and there is no partiality with Him.** (Ephesians 6:9)*



Do you think partiality towards the wealthy and against the poor can still be a problem for the Church today?

<sup>8</sup> *If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; <sup>9</sup> but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

In stating, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself...*” James is first quoting Leviticus 19:18,

*“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”*

But James is also remembering one of Christ’s greatest statements:

<sup>35</sup> *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”*

<sup>37</sup> *Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> **And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’** <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22)*

Christ says that “loving your neighbor as yourself” is one of the two greatest of all the commandments. No wonder James calls this “the Royal Law” in 2:8. Further, if we only love the wealthy among us, but we do not love the poor among us, then we are violating this royal law. Finally, if we violate this Royal Law, then we can expect judgement for it:

<sup>12</sup> *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.*

James now summarizes the central message of his epistle:

<sup>14</sup> *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup> **Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.***

<sup>18</sup> *But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

Faith without works is worthless. These are words of an Apostle equal in rank to Paul. These are words that are enshrined in the canonical Scriptures just as much Paul’s epistles to the Romans and Galatians, which are used by some to claim faith is sufficient without works.

There are many possible good works to be done, such as truth-telling, industriousness, obeying God's Word, and many more. But of all the possible good works that we should be doing, James singles out one particular good work here: giving to those need food and clothing.



This compassion for the needy is expressed throughout the Scriptures:

*There need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. (Deuteronomy 15:4-5)*

*If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8)*

*Give generously to [the poor] and do so without a grudging heart, then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land. (Deuteronomy 15:10-11)*

*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)*

*Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life. (Proverbs 22:22-23)*

*It is a sin to despise one's neighbor, but blessed is the one who is kind to the needy. (Proverbs 14:21)*

*Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God. (Proverbs 14:31)*

*Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done. (Proverbs 19:17)*



*The generous will themselves be blessed, for they share their food with the poor. (Proverbs 22:9)*

*Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses. (Proverbs 28:27)*

*Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:17)*

*Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? (Isaiah 10:1-3)*

*And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: This is what the Lord Almighty said: "Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other." (Zechariah 7:8-10)*

*Looking at his disciples, [Jesus] said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." (Luke 6:20-21)*

*If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:17)*

Perhaps the most sobering instance of the importance of compassion for the needy is Christ's description of Judgement Day:

<sup>31</sup> "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

<sup>37</sup> "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? <sup>38</sup> When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? <sup>39</sup> Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

<sup>41</sup> "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: <sup>42</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me no

*food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*

<sup>44</sup> *"Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'" <sup>45</sup> Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'* (Matthew 25)

So when James states that actual works of compassion for the poor are essential, he does so with tremendous biblical precedent.

James next exposes the folly of the idea of salvation by faith alone and without works.

*<sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*



Some people believe that all we have to do is believe that there was a Jesus, and he was the Son of God, and he died on a cross, and he rose from the dead. They believe that if we simply accept those historical events are true, then we are saved. If that were true, James tells us that the demons would all be saved. They all know that Jesus is the Son of God. They often begrudgingly expressed their “faith”:

<sup>27</sup> *And when He stepped out on the land, there met Him a certain man from the city who had demons for a long time. And he wore no clothes, nor did he live in a house but in the tombs.*

<sup>28</sup> *When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, “What have I to do with **You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?** I beg You, do not torment me!”* (Luke 8)

<sup>23</sup> *Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, <sup>24</sup> saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? **I know who You are—the Holy One of God!**”* (Mark 1)

<sup>16</sup> *Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. <sup>17</sup> This girl followed*

*Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “**These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.**” <sup>18</sup> And this she did for many days. (Acts 16)*

The demons also know the works of Christ:

<sup>13</sup> *“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches...<sup>15</sup> And the evil spirit answered and said, “**Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?**” <sup>16</sup> Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19)*

James is saying that if all it takes to be saved is believing certain facts about Christ, then Satan and the demons would be saved.

<sup>19</sup> *You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!*

But Satan and the demons do not do good works of any kind. In fact they strive to hinder all good works. The word “Satan” means “the one who resists” or “adversary.” Their “faith” does not save them or us.

<sup>26</sup> *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

Now, James addresses his next subject, the power of the tongue:



<sup>3:1</sup> *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

This is a valuable point for clergy preachers and lay teachers. When preachers and teachers use their tongues to communicate God’s truth to people, we are accountable to God to actually preach and teach God’s truth. We must do our homework. We must teach from the most reliable sources (e.g. the Bible, the Fathers). We must not rely upon our own personal thinking. If we fail to do this, then we run the risk of preaching and teaching something other than God’s truth. If we teach something other than God’s truth, then we send away people who are inclined to live according to falsehoods. This verse says that God will hold preachers and teachers responsible for multiplying falsehoods.

*<sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*

Here, James is implying that only a perfect man can control his tongue, therefore there is no such thing as a person who fully controls his tongue, or is able to bridle all the passions of his body. We all fall short of this perfection. (See verse 8 below.)

Now James uses two metaphors to describe the power of the human tongue to influence our entire lives. The first metaphor is a horse's bit:

*<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.*

<https://youtu.be/cRtprEijHbU>

The second metaphor for the power of the tongue to influence our lives is a ship's rudder.

*<sup>4</sup> Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. <sup>5</sup>*

<https://youtu.be/TN7BjeRad2I>

*Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.*

Just as the horse's bit and ship's rudder can move things much larger than themselves, the tongue has the ability to cause tremendous damage:

*See how great a forest a little fire kindles! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*

<https://youtu.be/h24vEiloKp4>

*<sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup> But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

The tongue is capable of moving our lives, and is capable of causing great destruction. This one small organ is capable of both harm and good. And if we let it, the tongue can do both:

*<sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.*

James is exhorting us to do the difficult work to make sure our tongues are only used for good. James describes what will happen to us if we fail to control our tongue and use it for both evil and good. Notice the list of negative adjectives:

*<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have **bitter envy** and **self-seeking** in your hearts, do not **boast** and **lie against the truth**. <sup>15</sup> This wisdom does not descend from above, but is **earthly, sensual, demonic**. <sup>16</sup> For where **envy** and **self-seeking** exist, confusion and **every evil thing** are there.*

By contrast, look at the list of positive adjectives that describes a person who controls their tongue:

*<sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that is from above is first **pure**, then **peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy**. <sup>18</sup> Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Which would we rather be?

Now James explores what we would today call “root causes” of our individual and societal problems. We all easily recognize problems such as war, lust, murder, greed, etc.



*Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?*

Most people recognize the existence of these individual and societal problems. Many attribute these problems to forces outside us, especially poverty and lack of education. The idea is that if everyone had a certain amount of money and sufficient education, then war, murder and greed would disappear. According to this theory, man is perfectible apart from God. Perfecting humanity is essentially an economic and educational task.

Christianity tells that humanity’s greatest problems come from within. The roots of our problems that, as James says in the above verse, are from “desires for pleasure” that are “in our members.” Orthodoxy calls these desires for pleasure in our members” as “the passions.” These passions include gluttony, greed, lust for sex, lust for power, lust for beauty, lust for status, lust for fame, etc. All these passions are normal human needs that have been allowed to run amok. We cannot

fully control these passions on our own. The passions can only be tamed by us cooperating with the healing power of God in our lives.

One of the most insidious aspects of the passions is they cultivate powerful appetites within us, but those appetites can never be satisfied. They only multiply. This is modern American culture we live in.

<sup>2</sup> *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.* <sup>3</sup> *You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*

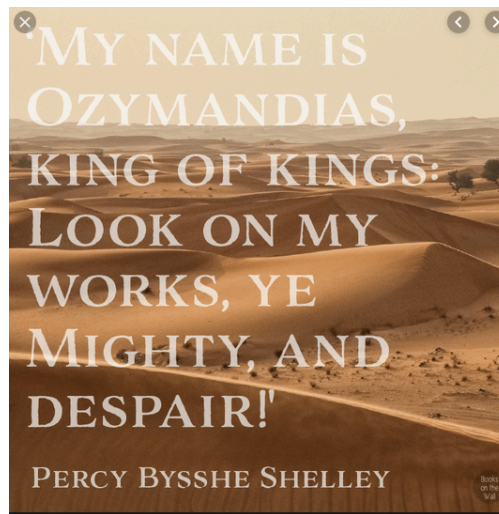
How often have we said to ourselves:

“If I just made \$10,000 more a year, I would be happy” and then that amount keeps going up.

“If I just had a bigger house, I would be happy,” then we get a bigger house, and we want an even bigger house, and with nicer furniture.

“If I just had a regular boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife” I would be happy, then we get a significant other, and it not only fails to make us happy, we soon find ourselves less happy.

“If I just had a new car/clothes/jewelry/big screen tv/promotion/diet/furniture/place to live/award” and none of them actually make us happy.



More examples?

No matter how hard we try to find things to make us happy, they never do. Yet that rarely stops us from trying again, over and over, forever. That is a sign that our passions are out of control and we need God’s help to reign them back in.

*<sup>4</sup> Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

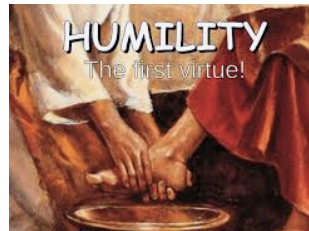
But God is not content to leave us in this condition:

<https://www.heaven4sure.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Hamster-GIF.gif>

*<sup>5</sup> Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”?*

*<sup>6</sup> But He gives more grace.*

God yearns jealously to help deliver us from our own personal rat race. James gives us a path out of the endless cycle of covetousness, dissatisfaction, repeat. The first task to cultivate is humility before God:



*Therefore He says:*

*“God resists the proud,  
But gives grace to the humble.”*

*<sup>7</sup> Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you... <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

How does humility correct the passions? If we were truly humble, and close to God:

We would not want to wage war or fight. We would be happy to put our grievances in God’s hands and let Him deal with it.

We would not care so much about making a lot more money, but we would be content with the money we make.

We would not care so much about a bigger house, but we would appreciate the house we have.

We would not care so much about having a boyfriend/girlfriend/wife/husband, but would enjoy singlehood until we find the right person.

We would not want so much about entertainment, but would embrace simple rest, good books,



walks, talking with friends and family, etc.

We would not care so much about prideful status symbols like cars/jewelry/titles/awards. We would also no longer be enslaved to achieving and maintaining them.

Humility also prevents us from being judgmental:

*<sup>11</sup> Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?*

A humble person does not dare to assume God's role as judge of other people.

Humble people also have a realistic understanding of his/her place in the flow of time:

*<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; <sup>14</sup> whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*

We are all prone to the delusion that we can change the span of our lives. We (especially young people) tend to think that we will "live forever." A mark of a humble person is that they know our lives are actually quite short, and they will end sooner than we imagine. A wise person knows that time is one of our most valuable resources, and should not be wasted. Christ also mentioned this theme:

*<sup>16</sup> Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. <sup>17</sup> And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' <sup>18</sup> So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I will say to my soul, "**Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.**" ' <sup>20</sup> But God said to him, '**Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?**' (Luke 12)*

...and...

*<sup>4</sup> I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." (John 9)*

*<sup>15</sup> **Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."** <sup>16</sup> But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.*

This is the mindset James calls us to embrace: that God controls the length of our lives. We do not. All our future plans are conditional upon the will of the Father. When we speak of a future event by saying, "Lord willing," we are reinforcing that truth in our own minds and towards others. A similar thought is expressed elsewhere in the Bible. The book of Hebrews states:



<sup>3</sup> *And this we will do if God permits. (Hebrews 6)*

Christ best expresses the conditionality of the future upon the will of the Father:

*“Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42)*

James now changes his focus upon human wealth, and its misuse:

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! <sup>2</sup> Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.*

The first problem with having great wealth is it can be taken from us in a moment. Remember this?...

<https://youtu.be/0ljG9g3pZ4A>

For those who were putting all their life's priorities in accumulating earthly wealth, that was a horrible time. But for those who placed their life's priorities on God, it was much less traumatic.

<sup>31</sup> *“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> **But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.** (Matthew 6)*

The second problem with great wealth is, if we actually attain it, then it can easily seduce us. It can easily cause us to put all our hopes and trust and dreams in it, and not in God. It has been said that “the problem is not how much money you have, it's how much money has of you.” That may be why God gives great wealth to relatively few – because few of us can handle the temptations that great wealth can cause. Many Christians have acquired great wealth, but instead of lavishing it on themselves, they have used it to help feed the hungry, pay for medical care for the sick, house the homeless, finance the building of churches, etc. Such people deserve our respect and gratitude.

Christ said similar things about how great wealth can seduce us away from God:

<sup>21</sup> *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6)*

<sup>23</sup> *Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, “How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10)*

The passage continues. James writes:

*You have **heaped up treasure** in the last days.*

Christ used this same language:

<sup>19</sup> “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> **but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6)

For those people who think, “I don’t have a lot of money. Therefore, this doesn’t apply to me.” But this verse tells us that even for those of us of average means can be “rich” in heaven. When we take a small part of our earthly treasure and devote it to God’s earthly kingdom, we have a “treasure” awaiting us in God’s heavenly kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8)

A third problem with accumulating great wealth is, we can become so addicted to it that we resort to criminality in order to keep it:

<sup>4</sup> Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, **which you kept back by fraud**, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned, **you have murdered the just**; he does not resist you.

Here is a modern example of “keeping wages back by fraud”:

<https://youtu.be/IlFdZT275Ak>

Here is a modern example of “murdering the just” to hold onto great wealth:

<https://youtu.be/rQIeQ8nkPf4>

The next passage from James calls for patience:

<sup>7</sup> Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. <sup>8</sup> You also be patient.

Patience is not a typical American trait...

*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand... Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!*



James believed the coming of the Lord could happen at any time. Peter also believed this:

*But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. (1 Peter 4:7)*

John also believed this:

*Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. (1 John 2:18)*

Paul believed this:

*<sup>15</sup> For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that **we** who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:15)*

That belief in the possibility of the Lord's return in our lifetime is still present in the Orthodox Church:

*"And He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end..."*

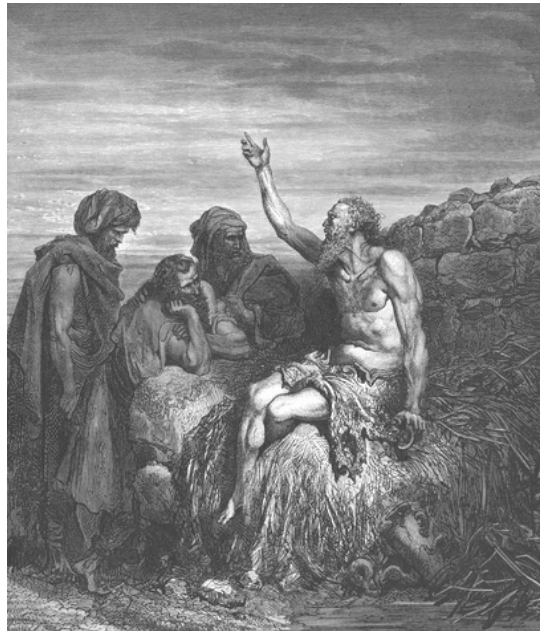
Even if Christ's Second Coming to earth does not happen in our lifetimes, we know that He is coming for us at the end of our lifetimes. Each of us will experience our own personal Second Coming. Based on this awareness, we must live our lives in a state of personal watchfulness and readiness. As we pray in the Liturgy,

*"For a Christian end to our lives, painless, blameless and peaceful, and for a good defense before the dread Judgement Seat of Christ, let us ask the Lord. Lord have mercy."*

If we learned that we were going to die in exactly one year, what changes would we make in our lives? Whatever those changes are, we should make them now, and therefore be prepared whenever our time comes.

Now James calls us to persevere in our faith:

*<sup>9</sup> Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! <sup>10</sup> My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. <sup>11</sup> Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the **perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord**—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.*



Job is the preeminent example of suffering in the Old Testament. He lost his wealth, his health, and his children. His own wife and friends criticized him instead of comforting him. He questioned God but never lost his faith in God. And in the end, God restored Job's wealth, health, and children before he died.

Few of us suffer as much as Job, but all of us are called to endure suffering in this world to some degree. Christ led a life full of suffering. Isaiah prophetically described Him as “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” (Isaiah 53:3) Christ's earthly ministry ended in the excruciating physical pain of a Roman crucifixion. But at His resurrection, He was comforted, restored and glorified:

*And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every***

*tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8-11)*

It is the same with us. We are called to suffer in this world. But James 5:9-11 reminds us that if we endure our suffering in this life, we will be comforted and rewarded in the next, just like Job.

*<sup>12</sup> But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment.*

Here James is quoting the words he heard Christ say:

*<sup>33</sup> “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ <sup>34</sup> But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; <sup>35</sup> nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. <sup>37</sup> But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. (Matthew 5)*

It was common in the ancient world to make boastful oaths, invoking creation and pagan deities. One good example of this is seen when the evil Queen Jezebel:

*And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1 Kings 19)*

Another example of boastful oaths is seen in King Herod:

*<sup>6</sup> But when Herod’s birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod. <sup>7</sup> Therefore he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. <sup>8</sup> So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, “Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.” <sup>9</sup> And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded it to be given to her (Matthew 14)*

James points out that such boasting and making oaths is an evil practice. The early Church Fathers say the same thing:

*“What is needed but a simple yes and no? An oath adds nothing to these... An oath is a form of excess” (John Chrysostom)*

*“Let the witness of our life be stronger than an oath... James forbids us to swear by heaven or by earth for this reason, that we should not give the creation more value than it has by deifying it. (Cyril of Alexandria).*

Next, James gives us several helpful tips on living the Christian life. In so doing, he also describes the sacrament of Holy Unction:

*<sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

Note that this sacrament is entrusted to “the elders.” The Greek word translated into English as “elders” is πρεσβυτέρους, “presbyters.” This is a synonym for “priests” as used throughout the Greek Orthodox Church. For example:



Also note that this sacrament is not just symbolic. Through the prayers of the presbyter and anointing of Holy Unction, the soul (and sometimes also the ailing body) of the sick is “raised up” and their sins are forgiven. Holy Unction is supernatural and powerful.

Next James addresses another Sacrament, closely related to Holy Unction – Confession:

*<sup>16</sup> Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

These verses teach us several vital points:

We are called first to confess our sins to the person we have wronged (“to one another”) whenever possible. When we know that we have offended someone, we must be honest, humble and repentant enough to go to them and say we are sorry. This is a critical habit in maintaining any healthy relationship. This is also an essential first step before taking our genuine honesty, humility and repentance to sacramental Confession. If we go to sacramental Confession without doing this, then our Father confessor should immediately direct us to complete this first step. As Christ said,

*<sup>23</sup> Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5)*

“Confessing our trespasses to each other,” as James says here, is related to the Sacrament of Confession, which is witnessed by a priest. In this context of being forgiven of our sins, James relates this gift to the work of the Prophet Elijah:

*<sup>17</sup> 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 land for three years and six months. <sup>18</sup> And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

This gift of being authorized to hear confessions and pronouncing Christ’s absolution of sins, which was foreshadowed by Elijah, was specifically given by Christ to His Apostles:

*So Jesus said to them [the Apostles] again, “Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20: 21-23)*

...and...

*“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you [the Apostles] bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)*

That gift has been transmitted ever since to the successors to the Apostles – the Bishops and their local representatives, the Priests.

Also, note how these verses from the book of James describe forgiveness of sins: “*that you may be healed.*” This summarizes the general Orthodox view of sin and salvation: that sin is a sickness, and forgiveness of sins is being healed from that sickness. This Orthodox understanding is a significant contrast with the Western view: that sin is primarily a violation of God’s law, and forgiveness is a judicial verdict of not guilty. Western theology tends to see salvation as judicial. Orthodox theology, as in this verse, tends to see salvation as therapeutic.

The phrase “*The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” is important. All of us want our sins to be answered. But if we truly want to improve our chances of having our prayers answered, then this verse says our prayers must be both “fervent” and from a “righteous man” or “woman.” If we perceive that our prayers are not being answered, then we should examine ourselves to see if our prayers are not “fervent.” Maybe we are not praying seriously and consistently. We must examine ourselves to see if we are not “righteous” because something in our lives is undermining our relationship with God.

Moreover, this principle of “*The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much*” explains the entire concept of intercession in the Orthodox prayer life. When we are facing difficulty in our lives, it is common for us to ask someone else to pray for us and our struggles. When we do this, we would never consider going to a person who we believe to be far from God and ask them to pray for us. We instinctively go to a person we believe is righteous because we implicitly know that a person who is close **to** God is more likely to be answered **by** God.

This is also the underlying principle behind our prayers to the saints. Just as we instinctively ask people on earth to pray for us because we perceive them as “righteous,” we also ask the saints to pray for us because we know that they are close to God, and are especially so now that they are in His presence in heaven. For example, who is closer to Christ, and is more likely to have her requests granted by Him than His mother, the Theotokos? Than James, his step-brother? Than John the Baptist, His Forerunner? Than Andrew, His first-called? And so it is with all the saints. As James says, “*The fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*”

*<sup>19</sup> Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, <sup>20</sup> let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.*

It is a sad occasion when a person wanders from the Faith. We have all seen it, and many of us have done it ourselves. This verse deputizes all of us to “be our brother’s keeper.” Christ spoke at length what to do when someone wanders from the faith. Our attitude should be one of kindness and love. Christ said,

*<sup>11</sup> For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. <sup>12</sup> “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? <sup>13</sup> And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. (Matthew 18:11-13)*

This verse teaches us that bringing a lost sheep back to the faith is greatly prized in God’s Kingdom. By cooperating with God’s desire to bring His wandering sheep back to the fold, James says we will not only save their souls from death, but our own sins will also be forgiven.