

Excerpts from Life-study of James, Message 2
PRACTICAL VIRTUES OF CHRISTIAN
PERFECTION (2)

Bible Verses:

James 1:3-5 **Knowing that the proving of your faith works out endurance. But if any one of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him.**

In 1:2 James exhorts us to count it all joy whenever we fall into various trials. In verse 3 he goes on to say, “Knowing that the proving of your faith produces endurance.” Faith here is the Christian faith given by God in Christ (2:1; Eph. 2:8).

James says in verse 3 that the proving of our faith, the trying and testing of our faith, produces endurance. I can testify that my endurance has increased as a result of opposition and trial. The testing that we suffer produce endurance.

Endurance is different from patience. It is possible to be patient without having much endurance. Our patience may be fragile. What we need is an enduring patience. This enduring patience is endurance.

When you are mistreated by someone, you may first exercise patience. But you will learn that patience alone is not adequate, because in the suffering of trials you also need endurance. Endurance comes out of the proving, the trying, the testing, of our faith.

In verse 4 James continues, “And let endurance have its complete work, that you may be complete and entire, lacking in nothing.”

When James’ writing touches the matter of practical Christian perfection, it is very descriptive and also detailed. On the one hand, this perfection must be complete, with every item present; on the other hand, it must be a whole, an entirety.

In verse 5 James says, “But if anyone of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and does not reproach, and it will be given to him.”

In verse 5 James tells us that if we lack wisdom, we should ask God for it. In order to be perfect in our behavior, the basic need is for wisdom. A foolish person cannot be perfect. But if we are full of wisdom, then in every activity of our daily life we shall behave perfectly. This indicates that perfection is mainly carried out through wisdom. A wise person can be

perfect. However, if we lack wisdom, we may offend others by our foolish talk. Our speaking may indicate that we do not have adequate wisdom. When we are short of wisdom, we should ask God for it.

Without wisdom, our behavior as Christians cannot be perfect. In order to be perfect and, in particular, to endure trials, we need wisdom. If we would endure trials, the first thing we need to do is pray that the Lord would give us wisdom. Of course, this prayer must be in faith.

Second, if we would endure trials, we should not have any confidence in our environment, for it can change. Whether we are uplifted or brought low, our attitude toward the environment should be the same.

James says that the man who endures trials is blessed because, having become approved, he will receive the crown of life.

We have seen that James was a godly man, a man who knew God and loved the Lord. Furthermore, James was a man of wisdom, a man of prayer and faith, a man who understood the real situation of human life, and also a man who was able and willing to endure sufferings with joy. However, it is possible for even such a godly man to lack a clear vision concerning

God's economy. Throughout the centuries, there have been a great many believers who were godly people like James. But one after another was lacking a clear vision concerning God's economy. There may be thousands of believers like this today. Some Christians may think that it is sufficient to be godly like James. They think it is adequate to know God, to love God, to be a man of prayer and faith, and to be able to endure trials with joy. But we would say that it is not adequate to be such a godly person, for even such a man as James may lack the proper view regarding God's move in the various dispensations.

The reason I appreciate the book of James is that this Epistle points out the possibility that we may be those who know God, who love God, and who are full of wisdom and faith, yet do not have a clear view of God's economy. We all need to know what the Lord's recovery is. The Lord's recovery is simply the recovery of God's economy.

Many believers are godly like James. They love God, they trust God, and they pray in faith. But they do not know anything about God's economy. These believers cannot satisfy God's desire. The desire of God's heart can be fulfilled only by those who know

God and are godly and who, like Paul, also have a clear view concerning God's economy in this age.

Read the verses online: [James](#)

Read the complete message online: [Life-study of James](#)

Note: This version is not intended to be printed as material for pursuit during the small group gathering. Instead, it is to be used as additional reference for brothers and sisters who want to prepare in advance for fellowship on the message. We include here notes from the commentaries of the brothers in the life-study radio program. The points from these commentaries can help enrich our understanding and, eventually, our fellowship with the saints on the selected portions of the life-study message. We still recommend that, if possible, the saints still listen to the [audio message](#) in addition to reading the [life-study message](#) for personal pursuit and for preparation for small group gatherings. We also wish to point out that these notes have not been fully polished.

Commentary:

Introduction

[CW:] Perhaps the most important contribution that the Epistle of James makes to the New Testament is in the area of practical Christian perfection. Some people may not understand the usage of the word, ‘perfection’, in this context. James actually uses it in verse 4 chapter 1. Let me read beginning at verse 2 to give it its proper context. “Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you fall into various trials, knowing that the proving of your faith works out endurance. And let endurance have its perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing.” What is it to let endurance have its perfect work that we may be perfect? We’ll look into this in today’s program, and Bob Danker has joined us for this Life-Study. Bob, let’s talk about this word, ‘perfect’, here. I believe it’s the Greek word, *τέλειος*. I happened to look in one of the better word studies or expository dictionaries, and that’s Vine’s, and he had to find it this way: the word *τέλειος* that we’ve translated, ‘perfect’, here, means finished or complete, signifies ‘having reached its end’. I know you’re involved in the editorial work at Living Stream. Help us understand this word in its right context and its right meaning.

[BD:] Well, here, Chris, it seems that James realizes that we need some experience of suffering and trials in our environment, so that some qualities in our character can be built up, right? That we may be more godly, more according to what God wants us to be. We are not perfect, with many flaws and defects, so James comes in and tells us that through the sufferings of various kinds of trials, our faith is proved, and we learn to endure these trials. And this endurance has a kind of perfect work in us, that perfects us and causes us to lack in nothing. That means we are lacking in certain qualities and certain aspects of our Christian life, and so James is concerned about this. We could even say this is one of the main subjects or main points in James’s epistle.

[CW:] It’s certainly, without a question, one of the strong points or points that recommend and his contribution. In our view, this book is useful in a number of ways, one of which may seem kind of negative, and that is that it helps us to see the contrast. In some regards, it seems at least puzzling that James is using Old Testament language, and it’s obviously conveying Old Testament thought even though he’s addressing New Testament believers. There does seem to be a contrast here, doesn’t there in James?

[BD:] There really does, Chris. And when we read through this epistle, we find definite references to Old Testament matters. Even in the first verse, he refers to the twelve tribes in dispersion. Of course these were the ones to whom he addresses his epistle. But actually, in the New Testament, God’s people are no longer the twelve tribes. Among the twelve tribes, even the Jewish believers were counted as members of the Body of Christ, and members of the One New Man with the Gentiles in a sense, in a very real sense. Through the cross, Christ abolished the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles, and brought them all together in Himself to have a New Man. They were all one entity in Christ. So, James seems to still have the concept that the Jewish believers still belong to the twelve tribes. Humanly, they did, but in the divine sense, they did not. They no longer were among the twelve tribes. They were God’s New Testament people. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, gives us three clear categories: Jews, Greeks or Gentiles, and the Church. And once we believed, regardless of which of those original two categories we come from, whether its Jew or Gentile, once we’ve believed, we’ve been transferred out of either category and into the third one, the church. So, that’s the point, isn’t it?

That the church is a composition of Jewish believers, Gentile believers, all men of various backgrounds... If we believe, we're all the one Body of Christ, the church, and as you said, the New Man.

[CW:] Alright Bob, we've read these verses in James chapter 1, verses 2 through 4, let's join Witness Lee with this first segment today...

Part 1

[CW:] Bob, this is a very practical Christian instruction here in help, let's just take it in that level. I have a son who is married now and has his family that's growing, and he has a very responsible job, and he is suffering a lot right now. It's a kind of trial for him. I'm talking purely humanly. And he is calling me, and you know, I can tell, he just wants to run away, in a sense. I just tell him, "you know, this is gonna benefit you. This is gonna help you." In a sense, what I am saying that the benefit of this is this is gonna create a kind of endurance. Sometimes, the only way that endurance can be worked into our being is through trial and suffering, isn't it?

[BD:] That's exactly right, Chris. And that is why James speaks of counting it all joy when we fall into various temptations, trials, sufferings of all kinds, because God uses these environmental sufferings to build up a quality in us, which is a quality of endurance. Now, Brother Lee, here, distinguished between patience and endurance. We may be patient. To be patient is to be able to wait. But to endure is to be able to suffer some kind of discomfort or even persecution, or some kind of trial for a long time. It's enduring. And nothing can produce this quality in us except sufferings and trials. We don't have it in our natural constitution, our natural man. Only certain amount of environmental sufferings can allow the Lord to work in us to produce in us this very necessary quality. And the New Testament speaks of this quite much – the matter of our need to endure until the end as if we're running on a long race. And the farther we run, the more our body is in pain, our muscles are aching, yet we must continue to run, in spite of the pain and the sufferings. Well, this is a matter of endurance, until we cross the finish line, until we reach the goal.

[CW:] Seems like on this level, Bob, James, you know, had very good utterance. And, he's really able to give some very practical kind of help. Of course, as we'll see, not only as today's program develops, but as this entire Life-Study unfolds, we're really talking about a realm that's important, is necessary but is still somewhat superficial. We're working on the vessel, here, and not really getting to the content. And of course, in this Life-Study, we're always talking about the content, the cargo, what's inside the vessel, and that is our main focus. But this book has been divinely placed in the New Testament, in the canonized Scripture, and its contribution is very valuable. And so, we don't want to minimize that.

[BD:] That's right, Chris.

[CW:] Okay, let's stay with James. He's gonna add now in verse 5, "But if anyone of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all liberally and does not reproach, and it will be given to him." Then if you jump ahead to verse 12, we see a kind of a conclusion here to this line of thought, "blessed is the man who endures trial because when he has become approved by testing, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who love Him." Seems like, James now is back into the New Testament, at least for a time. Here's Witness Lee with our next portion.

Part 2

[CW:] You know, Bob, just looking back in our own lives, our own experience over so many years, you know, eventually, you do kinda come to this point where you realize, you know, whether my outward circumstance is good or not that good, it's all about the same. God is using both, and that's what really is of merit, and of value, and that is a kind of wisdom, isn't it?

[BD:] It is... To see our lives in this way, we realize that whatever our environment or whatever we are going through, or whatever trial we may be enduring, the Lord is working in it. It does seem, however, that James

spoke of wisdom in relation to the enduring of trials and in relation to practical Christian perfection. And there is a little contrast, I think, if we would compare James's speaking with Paul's speaking for instance, concerning the matter of wisdom. Paul did mention the matter of wisdom in First Corinthians chapter 1. There he said that Christ is the Wisdom of God, and that God has placed us in Christ, and has made Christ, Wisdom to us: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption. And this is a, I would say, another level to wisdom. This is wisdom according to God's economy. And here wisdom is not something that we receive from God by asking, but it's something related to Christ. It's not on a human level, but rather on a divine level. And Christ becomes wisdom to us so that God may carry out His eternal plan to dispense Himself into our being in Christ, and to fill us with Christ to make us the same as Christ, to mingle Christ with us to carry out God's economy until our whole being is saturated with Christ. This is what we see, very prominently, if we read Paul's epistles. But it's not as clear in James's epistle.

[CW:] Yeah, it seems the concept here of wisdom that James is presenting is almost closer to that Old Testament example when Solomon asked God for wisdom and God granted his request; He gave him a kind of wisdom. But when you read those words of Paul in First Corinthians chapter 1 verse 30, that sense that wisdom there is not just a gift from God, it's a Person. It is Christ Himself, isn't it? That's another, as you've said, level of wisdom.

[BD:] Right, and we need Christ as our wisdom to be our righteousness that we may be justified by God, in spite of our sinful past. We need Christ to be our sanctification so that we may be saturated with the holy nature of God. And we need Christ, ultimately, to be our redemption, our hope of glory, so that our bodies of humiliation, which are in the old creation, can be glorified. Then, we will be really perfect, not just in a human sense or even, I would say, a sense that is in keeping with the law of Moses, kind of a perfect in our conduct, but we'll be perfect in our very being. We would be perfect and Christ Himself is our Perfection.

[CW:] It's not something we work up, or can attain to, or achieve. It's really apprehending and laying hold of Christ in a very substantial and real way to where He actually becomes that very perfection. Bob, this contrast, I think, will get highlighted a bit more in this final section. Here's Witness Lee once again.

Part 3

[CW:] Bob, I think it's important to point out: we don't say with absolute certainty, I mean in a sense there's some speculation here, but in addition to these practical items of Christian perfection – they help with our character, etc. that we get from James – perhaps, one reason that he's included in the New Testament record is to give us this kind of contrast and to let us see a man, so full of all these qualities, so godly, so pious, so full of prayer, and all these things, and yet, apparently, short of the clear vision. It's possible to be such a man, and to think that we're fulfilling God's goal and desire, but if you read the rest of the New Testament, particularly Paul, you just can't get there from here, can you?

[BD:] You can't. It's somewhat striking, I would say. You read the Epistle of James carefully, and then, it's best if you have immersed yourself in Paul's epistles, there is a definite contrast between James and Paul. James is pious. James is godly. James is wise. He's a man of faith and a man of prayer. It's hard to imagine a better Christian than James. But if we read his epistle, we get the impression that he lacks something, he lacked the clear vision of God's economy. And I would say, this is indicated mainly by his mixing the law of the Old Testament dispensation with the New Testament dispensation. If we read Paul's epistles, for instance, we see Paul strongly telling the believers that they're no longer under the law, and that they've been crucified with Christ. They're whole, entire, old man has been terminated, and now they are in Christ and Christ lives in them. And you know, they need Christ to make His home in their hearts and to be formed in them, and to live in them. This is God's economy. God's economy is not a matter of our keeping the law of the Old Testament, and being pious and being perfect in that sense. God's economy is to have Christ living in us, growing in us unto maturity. So that we become mature sons of God and members of the Body of Christ.

There's no hint in James's epistle that the goal of God's economy is to build up a Body to express Christ. But in Paul's epistles, we see this quite clearly. So, we have to admit there is a... quite a contrast here.

[CW:] Yeah. Sometimes, it takes a contrast to be able to see the thing clearly. And again, we're not presuming to know God's mind exactly. But, we're just... to the best we can, and to the light the Lord has granted us, this is what it seems, as we touch this epistle. You know, Bob, we do have this good utterance in verse 1, where he mentions that he's a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ... of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But beyond that verse, not that much emphasis on Christ. You don't see him talk that much about the Spirit and this conveyance of, you know, the Person of Christ into the believer that you see in Paul.

[BD:] Just a different emphasis.

[CW:] Okay, Bob, good fellowship today.