

Epistle of James – Outline

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Greetings 1:1

Introduction:

Walking in the Path of Perfection 1:2-27

- PW 1:2-18** *Walk with Wisdom in Trials*: Get your percepts right
- 1:2-4 Percept about trials: Trials is the path to perfection
 - 1:5-8 Percept about double-mindedness: Gets nothing from the single-minded God
 - 1:9-11 Percept about wealth and poverty: Reversal of position
 - 1:12-15 Percept about temptation: Temptation comes from one's imperfection
 - 1:16-18 Summary: Percept of God, self, and circumstances
- PO 1: 19-27** *Walk in Obedience to the Law*: Get your acts together
- 1:19-21 Response to the Word: Humility versus anger
 - 1:22-25 Acting in accordance to the Word that gives percept of self
- A, B, C 1:26-27** Summary proposition: True piety

Body of Content 2:1-5:6

I Three Manifestations of Imperfection:

- A 2:1-13** **Partiality against the poor: judgment and mercy**
- 2:1-4 A case of partiality: in seating the rich and the poor
 - 2:5-7 Unreasonable-ness of partiality against the poor
 - 2:8-13 Law of liberty: *Mercy over judgment*
- B 2:14-26** **Lack of Charity**: Faith and Works
- 2:14-17 Case: blessing but not helping the needy
 - 2:18-20 Hypothetical case of comparison: faith versus works
 - 2:21-26 Model of Abraham & Rahab: *Faith without works is dead*
- C 3:1-12** **Sinful speech**: Blessing and cursing

- 3:1-2 Case of sinful speech: the teacher
- 3:3-8 Metaphors illustrating the evil power of the tongue: bridle, rudder, and fire
- 3:9-12 Metaphor of fountain and tree: *Blessing is incompatible with cursing*

II Exhortation to the Perfection of Wisdom and Obedience

- PW 3:13-18** **True Wisdom**: humility and peace
- 3:13 Humility of true wisdom
 - 3:14-16 Earthly wisdom: breeds dissension and sinful speech
 - 3:17-18 7 characteristics of Wisdom from above
- PO 4:1-10** **True Obedience**: single-minded love of God
- 4:1-3 Dissension caused by sensual desire
 - 4:4-6 Jealous love of God: Love of the world = Sin of adultery
 - 4:7-10 Call to repentance: cleansing of the heart from double-ness

III Verdict against the imperfect:

- C' 4:11-12** Verdict against evil speech: slanderers
- B' 4:13-17** Verdict against lack of works of faith:
- 4:13 The merchant planning to get rich (versus charity)
 - 4:14-16 Arrogance of the rich reflects their ignorance
 - 4:17 Judgment pronounced
- A' 5:1-6** Verdict against the rich for oppression of the poor

Exhortation to persevere:

- 5:7-11** Persevere in hope
- 5:7-8 Persevere in anticipation: the day of the lord is near
- 5:9 Refrain from grumbling: lest one be judged
- 5:10-11 Model of the prophets and Job: God is compassionate

Epilogue:

- 5:12** Oath: stop swearing
- 5:13-18** Health: pray for healing as a community
- 5:19-20** Restoration in the community

1:1—The genre of James is understood as wisdom instruction in the literary form of a Greco-Roman epistle, employing techniques of exhortatory rhetorics. It demonstrates style, features and content of both contemporary Hellenistic paraenesis and Jewish wisdom instruction. The structure begins according to the format of a letter with an opening greeting, signifying the author, the addressee and the common greeting of peace.

1:2-27—The introduction gives an overarching preview to the main content. It touches on most of the topics discussed: faith, trials, rich and poor, double-mindedness, speech, works and charity. It points out two important ideas: “*Wisdom and Obedience*” which will be followed up in the same sequence in 3:13-4:10. The connecting concept is *Perfection*: 1:4 equates the perfect as lacking in nothing and goes directly into the lack of wisdom. 1:25 talks about true listening – in obedience, to the law that brings perfection. Therefore, the title for this section is “Walking in the Path of Perfection.” **PW** denotes the theme related to Wisdom and perfection. **PO** denotes the theme related to Perfection and Obedience. This section opens with a vocative statement: my bothers 1:2 and ends with a compact statement 1:26-27 that summarizes the whole introduction.

1:2-18—The unity of this section is seen in two aspects: First, unity in the theme of Wisdom — although the term wisdom is only mentioned once in this section, the whole section is concerned with pointing out the right percepts about God, about oneself and about life’s circumstances: which is the trademark of Wisdom sayings. The following vocatives aim at correcting percepts in different areas:

- 1:1 “consider” it all joy Percept about trials
- 1:7 let not that man “suppose” Percept about double-mindedness
- 1:9 let the lowly brother “exult” Percept about wealth and poverty
- 1:13 let no one “say” Percept about temptation/ God / man’s desire
- 1:16 do not be “misled” Percept about God / self

The unity of this section comes from the theme of trials/temptations, which is mentioned, in parallel format in v.2 and v.12.

1:2-4—The flow of this section is knitted by the use of link words. It can be regarded as an opening Exordium in the style of rhetorical arrangement.

1:5-8—The word “lacking” provides the link between v.4 and v.5 although their contents seem disconnected.

1:9-11—It can be regarded as the context of the trials under discussion, and hence relates both to 1:2-4, and 1:12-15. It can be argued that these few verses refer to the variability of a person’s earthly economic status. Such variability is often the source of trials and temptations. Further evidence for this view is found in the quotation of the case of Job in the last chapter: the rich righteous man who lost all his wealth suddenly. The author admonished the addresses to put such external, variable status in perspective.

1:12-15—Together with 1:2-4 it forms an interesting contrast about trials and temptation: Trials is the path to perfection, temptation comes from one’s imperfection.

1:16-18—The use of the vocative together with a negative prohibition has special significance in the main body as indicating new section. Here, it acts as a summary to the teaching of the right perception. It summarizes how one should perceive God, self, and the circumstances in life.

1:19-27—(Refer notes on 1:2-27) the content of this section is concerned with appropriate action in response to hearing.

1:19-21—The author starts out with an aphorism to catch attention and set the scene for thoughts around the actions

of hearing and speaking, fastness and slowness in relation to emotional response. He then went on to teach about response to hearing. 1:21 transitions into the specific case of response to the implanted word.

1:22-25—Teaching with direct exhortation and metaphor concerning action in accordance to the law that brings perfection. A link with percept of self can be made between the metaphor here (looking in a mirror) and 1:14-15(percept of one’s sinful desire) 1:16-18 (percept of the first fruit status)

1:26-27—Summary of the whole introduction section. It introduces the themes that will be touched on in the main body: **A** partiality, **B** charity, and **C** speech. It can be regarded as the *Proposito* in rhetorical arrangement. It states that one should demonstrate true religious piety in actions related to the above three areas.

2:1-5:6—Body of content: this can be regarded as the *argumentatio* (arguments) in rhetorical arrangement. It discusses and argues the case in relation to the three areas stated in the *Proposito*. A chiastic structure is proposed here:

I Three Manifestations of Imperfection:

- A 2:1-13 Partiality against the poor: mercy over judgment
- B 2:14-26 Lack of Charity: Faith without Works is dead
- C 3:1-12 Sinful speech: Blessing incompatible with Cursing

II Exhortation to the Perfection of Wisdom and Obedience

- PW 3:13-18 True Wisdom: Humility and peace
- PO 4:1-10 True Obedience: Single-minded love of God

III Verdict against the imperfect:

- C’ 4:11-12 Verdict against evil speech: slanderers
- B’ 4:13-17 Verdict against lack of works of faith:
- A’ 5:1-6 Verdict against the rich for oppression of the poor

2:1-3:12 The unity of this passage can be observed by the style used. Each of the three sub-sections was opened

with a case for illustration. Then argument follows with aphorism as ending. The correspondence of the themes A, B, C with that described in the *propositio* (1:26-17) and that of section III (4:11-5:6) also adds weight to the argument for the unity of this passage.

2:1-13 The vocative with a negative imperative signifies beginning of a new section. Verse one can be regarded as a *propositio* for this section of argument. The hypothetical life illustration goes from 2:2-4 ending with a question about partiality in judgment. Another vocative starts the sub-section from 2:5-7. This section lays out plain facts that illustrate how unreasonable it is to be honoring the rich while insulting the poor. 2:8-13 concerns the law, judgment and mercy. It starts a new argument separated from 2:5-7 and appeals to the acknowledged commitment of the audience to the whole law. The concept of obeying the “whole” law can be related to perfection, not lacking in any thing/ not violating any law. Hence, partiality is one of the manifestations of Imperfection.

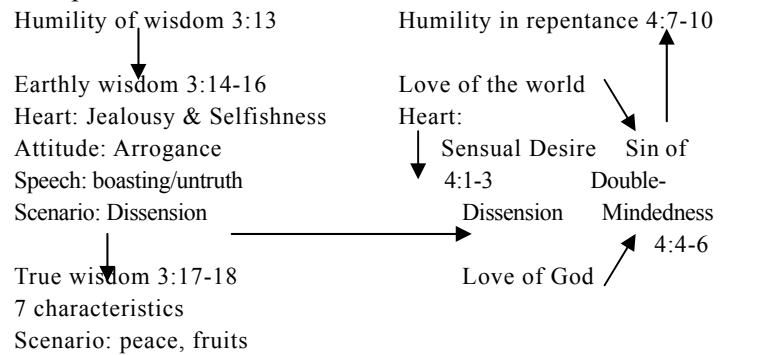
2:14-26 This section starts with a vocative and a hypothetical question that serves to states the *propositio* for this sub-section. 2:15-17 illustrates with a hypothetical life situation that ends with a concluding statement 2:17. 2:18-20 is another hypothetical case illustration that ends with the same concluding statement (2:20, cf. 2:17) The last sub-section uses two moral examples: Abraham and Rahab. The finale is an aphorism that ends the whole section and echoes with the previous concluding statements. (2:26, cf 2:17,20). Faith without works is dead as compared to faith that brings forth perfection when tried (1:2). Hence faith without works, illustrated as lack of charity here, is a manifestation of imperfection.

3:1-12 This section begins with the vocative plus negative imperative. It starts with a *propositio* that contains an illustration and a statement (3:1-2). It states the manifestation of perfection as being faultless in speech

(3:2). It then illustrates with 3 metaphors in 3:3-8 about the power (bridle, rudder, fire) and uncontrollable evil (fire) of the tongue. The last sub-section of 3:9-12 uses 2 metaphors to illustrate the how unacceptability of evil speech. The idea of double-ness is again touched on.

3:13-4:10 The unity of this section can be argued from the two themes of Wisdom and Obedience echoing chapter 1. It is also presented in two sections both opening with a question : 3:13 —Who....in you? 4:1—Wherefrom....in you? The style of this section is clearly different from the previous. The previous section 2:1-12, as described above, contains 3 sets arguments with a similar style and pattern, using a lot of metaphors and hypothetical illustration. None of that is present in this section. It's flow of idea from the previous section: after discussing the manifestations of imperfection, this section point to the way to perfection.

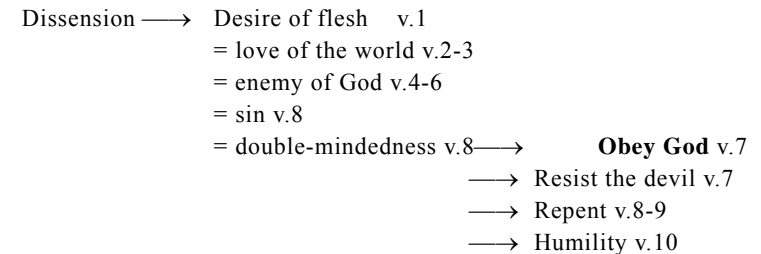
The argument of the whole section is a complete circle starting from humility of Wisdom and ends with humility in repentance:



3:13-18 This section is clearly on the topic of Wisdom. It states the proposition regarding manifestation of Wisdom in humility (3:13) It distinguishes two kinds of wisdoms (3:14-16 versus 3:17-18) and admonishes the audience to go for the one from above. **PW** Hence the title: True

Wisdom (under the larger section heading: Exhortation to Perfection of Wisdom and Obedience) All the three kinds of manifestations of imperfection is contrasted by true wisdom in 3:17— **A**: Partiality versus not making partial judgment. **B**:Lack of charity/ faith without works versus mercy and good fruits, not hypocritical. **C**: Evil speech of dissension versus chastity and peace.

4:1-10 This section parallels and continues the argument of the previous one. It can be viewed as the climax of the whole epistle. Here the author gives the diagnosis for the cause of imperfection: Double-mindedness and points to the way out: repentance from double-mindedness: The following shows the flow:



The logical flow of this section provides the unity of it. The connecting idea of dissension comes from the section above where dissension is the sign of earthly Wisdom.

4:11-5:6 This sections opens with a vocative plus a negative imperative, signaling a break from the previous section. The unity of this section as a whole is argued from its content: Three sections with themes (**C'**, **B'**, **A'**) echoing 2:1-3:12 in reverse order (**A,B,C**). Of course any chiasmic structure is artificial. While it captures some pattern, it invariably has to neglect others. However, I feel that this proposal helps to give a new dimensional to the book of James. These two sections concerned with A,B,C themes sandwich and highlights the section in

between 3:13-4:10 which is concerned with a deeper level of the matter: the heart of true piety which is the wisdom of humility and the single-ness of love for God. And they are actually connected by a perception of our own hearts: the recognition of our own double-mindedness that brings humility in repentance. If this is the case, the author emerges out from the depth of the heart (previous section) into matters at hand. He announces the verdict for the imperfect. I propose that this section concerns with actual circumstances in the community/ society.

4:11-12 The evil speech, angry words, words of untruth and boasting mentioned in the previous paragraphs refers to the words of judgment and criticism among brothers. The author speaks in authority against such behaviors.

4:13-17 The accusation of lack of charity above is reflected in the obsession of the rich in the community/ society with their own business and wealth. And hence their sin is in neglecting the need of others.

5:1-6 The sin of the rich is not only that of neglect, it is the active oppression of the poor that is present in the community/ society.

5:7-11 This section echoes with the opening introduction in the theme of trials and endurance in trials. It starts off with a double vocative (1:8 *2) that echoes with 1:2, and 1:12. The admonition against grumbling is couple with the introduction of the warning and hope of judgment (5:9). The eschatological theme gives the unity of this section. The citation of a moral example- Job, further confirms the parallel between this section and the first in which the change of status of poor and rich is mentioned (1:9-11).

5:12-20 This section contains typical topics at the end of a Greek letter: oath, health wish. It also gives a concluding statement to the whole argument above.

5:12 The author shows the characteristics of Jewish wisdom literature. It counteracts and challenges contemporary wisdom. Instead of the usual way of confirming the truthfulness of the content of the letter by

an oath, he stated that one should stop swearing. It also echoes the theme of truthful speech.

5:13-18 In contrast to the usual admonition that addresses should take care of their own health, the author brings out the responsibility of the community to each others' health: that the community can effect the health of their members by praying, anointing and forgiving each other.

5:19 The concluding statement brings out the community's responsibility in restoration. It echoes with the theme of judgment and mercy in 2:13.

5:13 and 5:19 both starts with "anyone....in you", referring to suffering and erring. It can be said to be a summary of the effects of trials and temptation. The author's end remarks echoes with the theme in chapter 1.