

and cleansing by the Word in a similar way.¹

What is meant by “double-minded?” The Greek is *δίψυχος* (*dipsukos*), literally “double-souled,” which portrays an inner conflict in the believer’s life. We who are truly born from above, and are the redeemed people of God through faith in Yeshua, have been given a new life, a life of becoming more and more like Yeshua so that He would be “the first born among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Yet though we are “new creatures in Yeshua” (2Cor 5:17), we nonetheless retain the sinful nature (often referred to in the Apostolic Scriptures as “the flesh”) and there continues to be a struggle for we are in the process of sanctification, a process which will be complete when “mortal puts on immortality” (1Cor 15:53).

Thus, the “double-minded” identifies that struggle between the flesh and the renewed person in Yeshua, a struggle in which the Spirit enables success as we yield to His leading and disciplines. Once again, the means to daily having victory in this arena is the consistent application of the means of grace: hiding God’s word in our hearts, being always active in prayer, and committing ourselves to being an active and regular part of the believing community.

9 – Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom.

In the previous context, James has admonished his readers and us to deal with sin in our lives. Being “double-minded” means seeking to have enjoyment and pleasure even if this means giving in to the wayward influences of the flesh. He has just admonished us to “cleanse our hands” and to “purify our hearts” (v. 8), that is, to recognize that being drawn toward the sin-laden world is contrary to our new life in Messiah. When we find ourselves being drawn to the deadening pleasures of the world, or giving in to the sinful flesh through pride and selfish desires, we must be spiritually awakened and take the necessary measures to turn from that which is evil to that which pleases our Lord and Redeemer.

Thus, in the inspired words of James, we are admonished to “be miserable and mourn and weep.” He is not teaching that the life of the believer is to be constantly characterized as mourning and weeping, but rather that if we find ourselves having compromised our commitment

1 Richardson, *New American Commentary*, vol. 36 (B&H Pub., 1997), p. 183.

to honor the Lord, to have sinned and not sought forgiveness and doing what is right to rectify the wrong, we should honestly admit to ourselves where we have grieved the Spirit, and rather than “going on our merry way,” to acknowledge our wrong and genuinely seek repentance.

This is what James means when he gives the command “Be miserable.” This Greek verb, *παλαιπωρέω* (*palaiipōreō*) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. It is regularly used in the Lxx to describe the calamity visited upon the people of Israel because of their going after false gods and engaging in idolatry.¹ As a result of their sin, the nation is taken into exile, experiencing the terrible consequences of their sin.

Here, however, rather than describing divine punishment upon the child of God for giving in to the sinful flesh, James calls upon us to induce such distress. To do so we must humbly admit our sinful desires and behavior, and confess how such ungodly behavior is not only contrary to who we are as children of God but also how it grieves the very One Who has redeemed us. When the Spirit works to discipline those who are His, and when we yield to His discipline, we experience true repentance, exhibited in genuine inward mourning and sorrow for having considered so lightly the infinite price Yeshua paid to save those who are His.

This brings us to “mourn and weep” (*πενθήσατε και κλαύσατε*) as the sign of recognizing our sin and turning from it. This corresponds to the words of Yeshua when He taught:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt 5:3–4)

...let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. – In this context it is clear that James is referring to “laughter” and “joy” in the context of sinful and selfish pleasures which may bring “laughter” and “joy” but a kind of happiness which does not last, for sin is the fountainhead of death, not life.

However, when the believer repents of sin and is committed to honoring the Lord in all aspects of life, the sorrow which sin brings is removed and true and lasting joy in the Spirit is once again experienced. For the promise of God is this:

1 Cf. Hos 10:2; Mic 2:4; Joel 1:10; Zech 11:2–3; Jer 4:13, 20; 9:18; 10:20; 12:12.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1Jn 1:9)

Thus, James is not teaching us here that sorrow, mourning, and weeping are those things that characterize the life of a true believer. Rather, he is teaching us this important truth: a true child of God cannot continue to have a life given over to sinful behavior. That which characterizes the true believer is, that when they may give in to the sinful nature, they will nevertheless inevitably seek and be granted repentance, for God has promised that of all those given to Yeshua, He would lose none (Jn 6:39), which means all those for whom Messiah died will be kept by God's omnipotent power and will be more and more conformed to the very image of Yeshua Himself.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (Rom 8:29)

Note as well Paul's teaching to the Corinthians:

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Cor 7:10)

And this is the very emphasis James gives us in the next verse.

10 - Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Repentance is the fruit of humility, and being humbled before the Lord in view of our own sin is surely a gift of His love. For as we are enabled to submit to the Spirit Who grieves when we sin, we grow in our love for God and gain spiritual strength to become more and more obedient to the Scriptures.

The truth of this assertion ties back to James' quote of Prov 3:34 which declares that God "gives grace to the humble." But here we have that promise taken even further, for these inspired words of James give us this promise: that the ultimate outcome of the present time of repentance and suffering will be glory.

And Yeshua is the prime example of this truth that "God gives grace to the humble," as Paul makes clear in his letter to the Philippians, for first, He made Himself nothing ... He humbled himself and became obedient to death ... on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him ... and gave

Him the name that is above every name" (Phil 2:5–11).

James, in our text, is simply reiterating what he learned from the very words of Yeshua Himself:

Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. (Matt 23:12)

Indeed, the desire to humble oneself is the fruit of the Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Gal 5:22–23)

The NASB translation utilizes "gentleness" to translate the Greek *πραΰτης* (*prautēs*), but this term surely encompasses the sense of "being humble." A primary lexicon of New Testament Greek gives this definition for the word *prautēs*:

...the quality of not being overly impressed by a sense of one's self-importance, gentleness, humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness.¹

If, therefore, we have been brought to new life by the Spirit of God, we must strive to live by the power the Spirit gives (Gal 5:25). Such power and strength is the ability to refuse to give in to the sinful flesh and rather to live to honor the One Who has saved us.

...walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (Gal 5:16)

But how is the believer to "walk/live by the Spirit?" Note that James admonishes us to humble ourselves "in the presence of the Lord." Here we see the personal, close relationship that the believer has with the living and reigning King, Yeshua Himself. For through the oneness of the Father, Son, and Spirit, we are to live in the awareness that our Lord is with us, and thus is always the One before and by Whom we "live and move and exist" (Acts 17:28). To "walk by the Spirit" means to have the word of God, empowered by the Ruach, to be life's "road map" by which we navigate our path in order to walk in the footsteps of our Messiah. What is more, rather than having our primary goal be

1 BDAG, "πραΰτης," p. 861.

to receive the applause of others, we rather commit ourselves to seeking the approval of the King Himself, for He is always with us. Thus, to “humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord” emphasizes that fact that all of our lives are lived directly before Him and He is with us at all times and in every aspect of our lives.

One commentator sums up v. 10 with these words:

It reminds us that we gain spiritual vitality and victory not through our own strength or effort but through giving ourselves completely to the Lord. When we try to “exalt ourselves” by relying on our own abilities, status, or money, we meet with inevitable failure and even condemnation — God humbles us. James makes this same basic point earlier in his letter when he encourages the “humble” brother to boast in his “exaltation” and the rich brother to boast in his “humiliation” (1:9–10).¹

11 – Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it.

There are numbers of ways by which people seek to “exult themselves.” One way is to do something special so that people will give the appropriate applause, but another way is to seek to diminish the character of others in hopes of making oneself appear better than those being slandered. It is to this very tendency in fallen humanity that James now addresses, and in doing so, builds on what he has already taught in regard to the tongue, that when wrongly used proves the slanderer to have a worthless religion (1:26), to put himself in a position in which he will be shown no mercy (2:13), and acts contrary to what should characterize the true believer (3:10).

Do not speak against one another, brethren. – The Greek verb translated by the NASB as “speak against” is *καταλαλέω* (*katalalēō*) and is found three times in this verse. Twice James identifies the primary aspect he intends for this word to convey by adding the word “to judge” (*κρίνω*, *krinō*). To “speak against” is therefore slander, that is, causing someone or something to be diminished and even disdained in the eyes of the one being addressed by judging that person as having defects in their character and actions.

1 Douglas Moo, *James*, p. 196.

We should note that James is referring specifically to slandering someone within the believing community, for he adds “brethren” (ἀδελφοί, *adelphoi*). Consider the picture: Here is Yeshua, dwelling in the midst of His people for whom He gave His life, and who are therefore all equally sinners saved by His grace, all bought with the same infinite price of His blood, and one of them is slandering another who likewise was brought into the family of God through the sacrificial work of Yeshua. Given this picture, to slander another member of God’s family is likewise to attempt to diminish the saving value of Yeshua’s life-giving work. For all who are in the family of God have come in only by means of the work of Yeshua in His death, resurrection, ascension and intercession. To diminish the value of one’s brother or sister in the Lord therefore also is to diminish the supreme work of salvation accomplished by Yeshua for all who are His.

What is more, to speak against a fellow believer because one deems his or her life to be less than what it should be would indicate that the slanderer does not believe that Yeshua’s intercession on behalf of all who are His is effectual. When the Scriptures teach us that Yeshua “always lives to make intercession” in order to secure the eternal lives of all who are His, to slander those for whom Yeshua intercedes is to act as though His intercession is not effectual.

Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:25)

... speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. – Here again, James uses the same term, “to speak against” as he did in the opening of our verse, and as note above, this means to “slander” which is made even more clear by the addition of “judges.” To “speak against the law is to judge the law as unfair, unrighteous, and therefore as having no authority.

We know that when James uses the Greek νόμος (*nomos*), translated here as “law,” he is referring to the Torah, for the Hebrew word תּוֹרָה (*torah*) is found 220 times in the Masoretic Text of the Tanach, and 196 times the Lxx translates *torah* with the Greek word *nomos*. Thus, when James teaches us that when one slanders another believer he is slandering the “law,” he is referring to the Torah given to Moses by God at Sinai.

It is clear, then, that James is referring to the Torah, and this is even more certain when we remember that in 2:8 he refers to Lev 19:18,

“...you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” as “the royal law of liberty.” In our text he most likely has Lev 19:16 in mind, which comes just prior to the “royal law” of loving one’s neighbor as oneself.” In fact, Lev 19:16–18 appears to form the primary basis upon which James builds his case, that to slander one’s brother is likewise to slander the Torah.

You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD. (Lev 19:16–18)

Thus, to “hate your fellow countryman” is taken by James to apply likewise to the body of Messiah, not by way of ethnic unity, but by all believers being sons and daughters in the family of God. Thus, to slander one’s fellow believer is likewise to consider the Torah of God to have no jurisdiction over the believer in Yeshua.

Interestingly, one wonders how the traditional Christian Church understands the argument of James in our text, since if the argument is made (as some do) that God abolished the “Old Testament Law” through Yeshua’s death on the cross, it would likewise follow that the cogency of James’ argument here is likewise abolished. If the “Law” (Torah) has been abolished, it no longer has any authority. Feeling this tension, one commentator offers this explanation.

The *law* is probably the OT law, especially since there may be an allusion here to Lev. 19:16 ... But, as we have noted in our interpretation of 1:25 and 2:8, James implies a new covenant context for the love command and its related exhortations. When James speaks of the law here, then, we are probably justified in thinking that he refers to the OT law insofar as it has been taken up into the “law of the kingdom” that Jesus laid upon his followers.¹

It surely was not the perspective of James that the very word of God, which abides and endures forever, could cease to exist. Likewise Peter states:

BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you. (1Pet 1:25, quoting Is 40:8)

1 Douglas Moo, *James*, p. 198.

12 – There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?

Now James adds additional insights as to why the sin of slander is so very egregious. The one who slanders or gossips within the local assembly of believers is one and the same with “spreading strife among brothers,” which is the very sin which concludes the list of things God hates:

There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers. (Prov 6:16–19)

Note also Psalm 101:5 where similar expressions are used.

Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy;
No one who has a haughty look and an arrogant heart will I
endure. (Ps 101:5)

The poetic parallelism in this wisdom-saying of Solomon in Prov 6:16–19 is obvious:

- a. Haughty eyes
 - b. a lying tongue
 - c. hands that shed innocent blood

- a¹. a heart that devises wicked plans
 - b¹. feet that run rapidly to evil
 - c¹. one who spreads strife among the brothers.

The selfish person is characterized as being self-centered and thus having “haughty eyes” (עֵינַיִם רְמוֹת, *einaim ramot*), that is, one who is constantly “raising eyebrows” in the sense of looking down upon others. This is paralleled with “feet that run rapidly to evil.” The person who is self-centered is quick to put himself before others and thus to seek to put himself in a position of superiority by finding ways to make others appear as beneath him.

A “lying tongue” is the manner in which the self-centered person seeks to present himself as superior by spreading lies about those he wants to surpass. His “feet run rapidly to evil,” i.e., he is quick to tell

lies about others. These outright lies are the pathway to slander.

Finally, “hands that shed innocent blood” uses the metaphor of “murder,” not in pertaining only to physical murder but also to describe “character assassination.” Thus in the parallelism of the Hebrew poetic lines this is coupled with “one who spreads strife among the brothers.” To degrade another person by slander and gossip may well create a situation of hatred that cannot be controlled or stopped. Even physically murdering a person always begins with the seed of hatred which can be encouraged and enlarged through listening to slander.

James’ point in our verse is that to act as the ultimate judge of one’s neighbor is, in a practical sense, to attempt to usurp the very seat of judgment which belongs only to God. That is, the ultimate application of God’s law is in the hands of the Law giver Himself. To condemn one’s neighbor by declaring him “guilty” through degrading his character by slander, is to act as though one comprises both “the judge and the jury.” One cannot act as the one appointed to enact the penalty of the law by transgressing the very law they pretend to uphold.

God who is the Lord of the law and the Lord of all the world
is, as the conclusion of the verse shows, contrasted with the
person who outrageously violates the authority of the law.¹

The Greek of the opening phrase of our verse, “There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge” (εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ νομοθέτης καὶ κριτῆς) has the definite article attached to “Lawgiver,” (“one is the Lawgiver and Judge”).² As such, this forms a recognized rule of Koine Greek which emphasizes that the “Lawgiver and “Judge” apply to the same person, in this case, God Himself.³ If, however, the definite article is not original but added later, the emphasis would be on the fact that the word “one” (εἷς, *heis*) is put first in the clause and thus emphasizing the uniqueness of one being both Lawgiver and Judge. Thus the NASB, “only one Lawgiver and Judge.”

Interestingly, the Greek noun “νομοθέτης” (*nomothetēs*), “Lawgiver,” is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and only once in the Lxx (Ps 9:21, MT & Lxx, v. 20 English) where the Hebrew “Put them in fear,

1 Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* in *Hermeneia NT* (Fortress Press, 1975), Vol. 20, p. 229.

2 There is a textual variant here, in which some manuscripts do not contain the definite article “the.” The manuscript evidence seems to be evenly balanced between whether the definite article here is original or not.

3 This is referred to as the Grandville Sharp construction.

O LORD” is rendered by the LXX as “Appoint, O LORD, a lawgiver over them.”

...*the One who is able to save and to destroy* – Here James is referring to the ultimate judgment of God, that which determines the eternal destiny of an individual. Thus, for a person to judge another person as beyond the ability of God to redeem by slandering their character as unworthy of God’s love, is to diminish not only the sovereignty which God alone possesses, but also to diminish the infinite nature of His saving love in Yeshua. It is, then, to put one’s self in the place of authority which God alone possesses.

How could any human creature then exercise such judgment? God’s judgment is not moral judgment of the conscience but the final judgment of the obedient and disobedient, the merciful and the unmerciful. Like the act of creation by the one God, only God can make a judgment by which He eternally saves or destroys the human creature.¹

...*but who are you who judge your neighbor?* – Thus, James calls upon his readers and us to do a proper self-evaluation. The order of the Greek in this phrase is interesting: σὺ δὲ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων τὸν πλησίον, literally: “You, and who are *you* who is judging the neighbor.” That the pronoun “you” (σὺ, *su*) is put first in the clause is to invite an answer. We could understand it as akin to our modern phrase: “Who do you think you are?!” James’ answer is clear: to treat one’s neighbor as though he or she is unworthy of your love is to put oneself in the position as Judge, a position which is rightfully God’s and God’s alone.

That is, what a distance there is between you and God! What a sorry judge you are compared with him! ... It is good to shame pride with the consideration of God’s glory and our own baseness. He is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you... ?²

1 Richardson, *James in The New American Commentary*, p. 197.

2 Thomas Manton, *Epistle of James in The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (Maranatha Pub., n.d.), vol. 4, p. 386.