

JAMES

FOR BEGINNERS

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

MIKE MAZZALONGO

bibleTalk^{TV}

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Research Commentary:

Commentary on the New Testament

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1. Christianity: More Than Ceremony

If you were to ask people to define or explain the word "religion" they would probably describe the organizations and ceremonies carried out by various church groups. This is probably why younger people say that they are spiritual but not religious, because they no longer relate to the various rituals and observances practiced by the large denominations in this country. By spiritual intuition they have guessed that Christianity is more than candles, processions, rituals and complex church hierarchies that dominate the Christian religion of our day.

Unfortunately, most people do not realize that biblical Christianity only has two observances that involve some type of ceremony or ritual:

1. **Baptism:** Where a repentant believer in Jesus Christ is immersed in water and at that moment, by faith, receives forgiveness of sin, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and is added by God to the church (Acts 2:36-42; Romans 6:3).
2. **Communion:** The church comes together on the Lord's Day (Sunday) to share the bread and wine (Luke 22:19)

in order to commemorate the death of Jesus and to witness its faith and hope in His return (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

These are the only two ceremonies given by God in the Bible for Christians to perform, and they both have to do with salvation. In baptism we experience salvation, in communion we remember it. Both these ceremonies are intertwined since only baptized believers can take the communion.

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" ³⁸ Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." ⁴⁰ And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" ⁴¹ So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- Acts 2:37-42

All other ceremonies and traditions have been added by men without God's authorization. The problem with these man-made ceremonies and traditions is that with time, they have become compulsory. Because of these unauthorized additions, Christianity has become a series of:

1. Festivals (Easter, Christmas, etc.)
2. Personalities (Pope, Cardinals, TV evangelists)
3. Denominations (groups who have their own distinctive ceremonies, language and brand)

Christianity, however, is more than a ceremony, a religious leader or a building. It is a way of life. For example, every farmer, regardless of the country or time has a similar lifestyle (get up early, work outside, deal with the weather, prices go up when there is a low harvest, down when there is a bumper crop). All farmers can relate to this lifestyle. In the same way, Christianity is defined by a certain lifestyle regardless of time or place. It is a way of life that is very different from that of others who are not Christians.

This, therefore, will be the purpose of our study, to learn about the Christian way of life (as explained in James) and how to adapt to it. It is interesting to note that the book of James does not contain the gospel message, does not mention baptism or communion, does not declare or explain Jesus' divinity or ministry, crucifixion or resurrection. It is, however, an extremely practical guide to living the Christian life in a way that pleases God, maintains order and peace in the church, and provides a clear Christian witness to those outside the church.

BOOK OF JAMES - 1:1

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

AUTHOR

In that era people signed letters at the beginning and put the greetings at the end. When studying this epistle there is always the question of authorship, which James wrote this letter? There are four people named James mentioned in the New Testament.

1. James, the brother of John (this James died too soon to have written this epistle, written 40-60 AD):

Going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them.

- Matthew 4:21

And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword.

- Acts 12:2

2. James, the son of Alphaeus, was an Apostle. He was referred to as James the Less, and was probably Jesus' cousin since his father was married to Mary, sister of Jesus' mother, who was also called Mary. There is no other mention of him in historical records as opposed to the author of the epistle of James who was well known in the early church.

Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus;

- Matthew 10:3

3. James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot). He also is not mentioned anywhere other than this passage.

Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

- Luke 6:16

4. James, the earthly brother of Jesus. By giving only his name he assumes that everyone knows who he is (unlike the previous two James'). He was not one of the twelve Apostles and does not claim this in his epistle (like Paul does in Galatians 1:1 and Philippians 1:1). The Lord's brother became a leader of the church in Jerusalem and thus had the authority to write such a letter. There are similarities in the style of the letter suggested by James sent to the brethren in Antioch (Acts 15:23-77), and the style of this epistle whose authorship is attributed to James. Both are short and to the point.

Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

- Matthew 13:55

¹² All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ After they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, "Brethren, listen to me.

- Acts 15:12-13

LIFE OF JAMES

The Lord's brother, James, did not believe in Him before Jesus' death and resurrection.

³ Therefore His brothers said to Him, "Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. ⁴ For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world."
⁵ For not even His brothers were believing in Him.
- John 7:3-5

He was married (1 Corinthians 9:5). He and the rest of the family thought Jesus was unbalanced and tried to bring Him home.

When His own people heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."
- Mark 3:21

Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection.

then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;
- 1 Corinthians 15:7

James was in the company of the Apostles in the upper room after Jesus' appearance (Acts 1:14).

Josephus, a Jewish historian, mentions him being killed in 62 AD by the Jews. He was stoned and then clubbed to death.

In his introductory verse, he refers to himself as a "bond servant" or lowly slave of Jesus, thus demonstrating his love, piety and humility.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

This epistle was written between 40-60 AD. It may even be earlier because there is no mention of the Gentile influx into the church after 45 AD. It contains little doctrine, no references to Jesus or the gospel. It is extremely practical in its approach and one half of the verses are "imperatives" (sentences written as orders or commands). It is a very short epistle (five chapters), but filled with practical teaching on how to successfully live the Christian life.

PURPOSE OF LETTER

The letter is intended for Jewish Christians living away from Israel in various parts of the Empire. During their history, the Jewish people were often conquered and subsequently dispersed to different countries. They were also a nation of traders and businessmen so they settled in many different nations.

During their Babylonian captivity (597 BC), the Jews, having no access to the temple in Jerusalem for worship, began to gather in homes and other places to pray, read Scripture, praise and enjoy fellowship. This was the beginning of the synagogue or house of prayer movement that started while they were in captivity, but continued even after their return to Judah 70 years later. Those Jews, dispersed for various reasons throughout the Roman Empire, would gather and build a synagogue for their weekly meetings. These local synagogues became the network that Paul used to preach to the Jews in his early mission work.

¹³ Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia; but John left them and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat

down. ¹⁵ After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it."

- Acts 13:13-15

It is to one of these groups that James is writing to with the hope that his letter will be copied and passed on to other Jewish Christians living abroad.

REASONS FOR THE LETTER

First, these Christian Jews are feeling alienated because of their faith:

- They are surrounded by a pagan, sinful and unsympathetic people.
- They are being influenced by the world's thinking and attitude.
- They have been rejected by their Hebrew countrymen, and even attacked for their faith. They have, however, defended their stand with Christ, but have done so at a high cost.

They were feeling alienated from their homeland, their former religion and their culture and now were drifting away from Christ. The way of the world seemed clearer and easy, so many were faltering under this kind of pressure.

This, then, is the historical background that influenced the writing of this letter, a letter that teaches how one can achieve "practical Christian living" in an unbelieving world.

SUMMARY

This epistle, therefore, is a valuable study for several reasons:

1. It explains, in easy to understand language, using simple examples, how one can live a practical Christian life.
2. It covers many critical ideas in five short chapters.
3. Christians often find themselves rejected by family or society because of their beliefs, and require similar encouragement.

James' message is timeless in the sense that it is as easily accessible to the modern reader as it was for the first century Christian.



2. Beyond the Trouble

JAMES 1:2-12

The author of this epistle is James, the earthly brother of Jesus, not the Apostle James.

then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles;
- I Corinthians 15:7

He was a leader in the church at Jerusalem and was writing to Christian Jews living outside of Jerusalem who were growing weak in their faith.

In this letter he explains that Christians have a particular way that they act and deal with life that sets them apart from others. They are not simply "church-goers" but are people who react differently to things that happen to them in this life. Differently, that is, than how unbelievers react to life.

HOW A CHRISTIAN REACTS TO THE TRIALS OF LIFE

Trials include a variety of things such as adversity, inconvenience, personal suffering and injustice, to name a few (it does not have to be great injustice to qualify as a trial, being cheated on your car repair is a form of injustice).

² Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James 1:2-4

James begins by describing how Christians should react to life's various trials and why they should have this reaction. He says that believers should see these trials as a cause for joy. An unbeliever's best possible reaction to trials can either be stoicism, resignation, bravery or acceptance, but it is rarely one of joy. Only Christians react in this way, and this is what makes them different.

James provides the reason for this unusual response to trials. He says that when there are trials in a Christian's life, the believer knows that specific things are happening to him, not just the trial. James describes several of these in his opening verses.

1. A person's faith is being examined. This is what is going on at the spiritual level. God does not normally send the trial, but He does use it as an opportunity to examine the quality of a person's faith. Faith is examined in three ways: storms (problems of all kinds), fire (temptation), time in the desert (loneliness/when God seems far away).

2. The testing of faith through the trials produces endurance. Endurance is the ability to remain steady under pressure and not quitting, complaining, getting angry or losing faith, hope or love. The virtue of endurance cannot be produced in any other way.
3. Endurance eventually produces stability in the face of trials. In the military they call this "bearing" where the military person remains steady despite the noise and chaos of combat. This "spiritual bearing" becomes a mark of the mature Christian.

James begins by saying that the Christian religion (a way of life/a way of thinking) considers trials a cause for joy because through them God matures, strengthens and perfects the individual believer. This maturing spiritual condition ultimately produces peace, confidence and a true experience of joy in the inner man (in one's soul).

GOD PROVIDES HELP TO FACE TRIALS

⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- James 1:5-8

James continues to talk about trials, but here he mentions the help that God provides Christians so they can successfully face those trials. We do not always find the "why" of suffering and trials, but

if we maintain faith, we eventually come to know Who is there with us and how He provides for us during these times.

In verse 5a, the word "wisdom" is used in connection with the trial itself. This is the ability (wisdom) of seeing the good and the truth within the situation we are experiencing, not just the pain and inconvenience. For example, we may perceive that the trial is actually pointing out our need for more dependence on God, or the destructiveness of sin, the quality of our friendship, the brevity or the value of life, etc. The wisdom is the ability to see and appreciate these things despite the pain we are experiencing. Whatever the insight, it requires wisdom from God to understand the true nature of what is happening to us aside from the trial, and God provides us with this wisdom.

In verse 5b, "prayer" is the next response that God provides. Prayer is the way that one actually gains wisdom and insight. God has provided Christ as our mediator so that we can come before God in prayer, and the Holy Spirit as our intercessor so that our prayers come before God in an acceptable manner (Romans 8:26).

In verses 6-8, James explains how we should pray:

- Without doubt that God hears us and is at work for us (because trials and sufferings cause us to doubt).
- Without changing our minds.
- Saying and doing things according to God's will.

Some pray by saying, "God, please help me" but think in their hearts that this is not really going to work, and do not follow up their prayer by doing what is right. This is the attitude that says, "I might as well pray, I have nothing to lose, it cannot hurt, etc." In difficult and unsure situations we often need to take a first step of

faith, even when we do not know what the second step will be. God rewards a first step of obedient faith which is usually an appeal to God in prayer.

Examples of Godly Wisdom

⁹But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.
- James 1:9-11

Here, James provides examples of the wisdom God provides for both the rich and poor man of faith and prayer.

1. **Wisdom Concerning Poverty:** Recognizing one's true wealth in Christ is the wisdom that helps the poor man, suffering in poverty, have hope.
2. **Wisdom Concerning Riches:** Recognizing our true position before God and need for Christ is the wisdom that humbles the wealthy man and prevents him from being blinded and hardened by his wealth. He understands that he cannot depend on his wealth for salvation.

The poor man sees how rich he is, and the rich man how poor he is because God has given wisdom to each. Both poor and wealthy Christians need to pray with faith in order to possess the wisdom to deal with their particular life circumstances. Without this

wisdom the poor might become discouraged and quit, and the rich might be blinded by wealth and lose his soul.

CONCLUSION

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

- James 1:12

James phrases the reward for enduring trials in the same way that the beatitudes were phrased in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-12). He says that the one who perseveres in trials will be blessed and happy for several reasons:

- He will be "approved," meaning that he will be considered genuine. The trials are used by God to separate the sheep from the goats. Persevering is like a "fact check" that verifies that one indeed is a true disciple, an approved and tested disciple.
- This blessedness or happiness is born from the realization that as an approved disciple one can look forward to the crown of life (eternal life) which is the reward promised to all who are approved.
- Happy also because endurance is a definite proof of our sincere love of Christ.

Blessed is the one who endures trials because his endurance is a witness of his faith, love and maturity in Christ, and a visible proof that there is a crown of eternal life waiting for him/her in heaven.

HAPPINESS VS. EXCITEMENT

I would like to highlight the difference between happiness (joy) and excitement (stimulation). Happiness is a much sought after state of being. There is nothing wrong with searching for happiness, but most people search for it in the wrong places and in the wrong manner. For example, you cannot obtain happiness by acquiring things, power, fame or pleasure, etc. Ask people who have acquired many things and they will tell you that neither the acquiring nor the possession of things have brought them lasting happiness. Acquiring and possessing provide stimulation (excitement), but do not create happiness. Gaining, winning, buying and shopping all provide excitement that demands repetition in order to maintain the stimulation. However, we must not confuse this process and the feelings that it generates (excitement/stimulation) with happiness (joy).

The difference between excitement and happiness is that excitement, while stimulating, does not last and is not satisfying. Actually, too much excitement can make you ill. Happiness, blessedness or joy, on the other hand, is a well-being within oneself that lasts and that no one can take away. It produces peace of mind and satisfaction that is the opposite of being obsessed. Obsession is a mark of unhappiness.

The happiness/blessedness that the Bible speaks of begins to take root when one becomes a Christian by confessing Christ, repenting of sin and being baptized in His name.

³⁶ Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified.”

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles,

“Brethren, what shall we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 2:36-38

At this point in time two things happen: sins are forgiven (eliminates guilt for past sins), and the Holy Spirit is given (guarantees spiritual growth and resurrection in the future). True happiness (joy) begins here. But happiness continues to grow as our faith is tested throughout our Christian lives. This is what we have just read about in James. He explains how trials produce happiness in the Christian. What is left unsaid is that we need to expect trials and be ready for them because they will eventually come into everyone's life whether they be believers or not.

This increasing happiness will be complete and permanent when Jesus comes to bring with Him to heaven those who have been faithful, despite the trials.

SUMMARY

When we examine ourselves, a good question to ask is, "Am I seeking happiness or excitement?" Another question to ask is, "Am I seeing trials as inconveniences and asking God to simply set me free, or am I seeing trials as something God is using for His purpose and my ultimate good?" Like the song says, "Don't worry, be happy!" James' translation of this upbeat song is, "Don't worry, when trials come, just be happy knowing that your faith is being tested and an opportunity for growth that will eventually produce happiness is at hand."



3. Dealing with the Dragon

JAMES 1:13-15

The book of James was written to Christian Jews in order to help them learn how to live the Christian life. The lessons here are easily transported to our lives today in helping us learn the Christian lifestyle as well.

In the previous chapter I said that one of the features of the Christian lifestyle was the way Christians dealt with life's trials. James teaches that believers meet these with joy because they realize that when God tests our faith through trials, and we are able to endure these patiently, it demonstrates that our faith is sincere. If our faith is found to be sincere it also proves that our love for God is true. This realization, in turn, produces greater assurance (hope) of our eternal reward.

James lays out the process that God uses to produce joy in the heart of a Christian:

TRIAL → ENDURANCE → GENUINENESS →
HOPE/ASSURANCE → JOY → GREATER FAITH

Faith eventually leads to trials, trials (if suffered with endurance) confirm the genuineness of our love which strengthens our hope/assurance which creates and increases our joy resulting in a stronger and deeper faith.

HOW A CHRISTIAN DEALS WITH TEMPTATION

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

- James 1:13

The word "temptation" can refer to two different things: to seduce, solicit or encourage to sin; or it can refer to an exam, to be tested. God allows us to be tempted by evil but it is not He that sends the evil. Why?

God is not subject to evil desire. For example, pride is the sin of thinking more of ourselves than we actually should. God is all powerful and eternal, so it is impossible for Him to think more highly of Himself because He already is in the highest possible position. Another example is the sin of greed. Greed manifests itself in constant dissatisfaction with what we already have causing us to always want more (this afflicts rich and poor alike). God created and owns everyone and everything, therefore it is impossible for Him to be dissatisfied or want more. He possesses all things.

God does not tempt anyone to evil with evil in order to test faith or prove loyalty. The devil tempts with evil to evil, and God permits it but does not originate it. Again, the question, "Why?"

The simple answer is that God is love (I John 4:8). He wants the best for us, and both sin and evil are not of love. Evil and sin destroy man. God is life and does not want man to die. Therefore, God does not tempt with evil because there is only good in Him, and He wants only what is good for us.

The point here is that when something evil is before you or you are involved in something immoral, something that looks bad, unclean or unholy, do not think or say that God is the One who put this situation before you. Also, do not claim that God is working things out in your life by sending this evil thing because God does not work in this way. He hates sin and does not tolerate evil.

The practical lesson to learn here is that when a Christian is confronted with evil and sin he has to realize that the enemy is near, not the Lord.

TEMPTATION LEADS TO SIN

¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

- James 1:14-15

The first thing to realize is that temptation is not sin. We should not feel guilty when tempted to steal, lie, cheat, take unfair advantage, have impure thoughts, boast, be lazy or violent, etc. We sometimes surprise ourselves with the shameful thoughts that cross our minds. We can be tempted to do, say or think all manner of sinful things so we should not be too proud or surprised when this happens. Remember, even Jesus was tested by the Devil to dishonor Himself and God the Father. We need to feel guilty when

temptation actually leads us to sin. The time we should feel guilty is when we actually disobey God.

HOW TEMPTATION LEADS TO SIN (SAME FOR ALL)

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

- James 1:14

"Carried away" means to be drawn to. To lure, as an animal is lured away from the safety of its haunt. Man is lured away from the safety of his self-restraint. This is what actually happens. The word "enticed" explains the method used to carry a person away from safety. The method is not by threat or reason, but by allurements.

We become victims of sin because we allow ourselves to be drawn to the evil that we desire. Our flesh desires things, ideas, feelings and activities that are evil and immoral (made desirable because they are forbidden). Satan, through his agents in the world, offers these as bait to excite and stimulate the desire within us for these things.

Being a Christian does not mean that we do not experience evil desires and cannot be drawn to evil things. Adam's sin made us inheritors of a sinful (subject to enticement) flesh (I Corinthians 15:21). If you were to track falling into sin on a timeline, the point where the temptation takes place is not the point where sin takes place. The sin takes place at the point where we give in to sin. Temptation should serve as an alarm bell that sends us into spiritual action that includes:

1. Identifying clearly and honestly what is happening to us by calling it what it actually is. For example, I am being tempted to lie/cheat, to be unfaithful, to blame someone else for my mistake. I need to clearly admit to myself what it is I am being enticed to do.
2. Tell yourself no and why you must resist.
3. Pray for strength and wisdom to overcome because some temptations are subtle and complex.
4. Seek help from brethren, family or counselors.
5. Change the dynamics that seem to facilitate the temptation. For example, friends that continually get into trouble, places where temptation is often present.

Christians usually fall into sin when they fail to take action at the point of temptation.

Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.
- James 1:15

Sin takes place when we pursue the evil that is attracting us until it eventually possesses us. Sin will control us if we let it. James says that once sin possesses us, it produces death (separation from God). If we do not take action and allow the bait to draw us in, we will be caught in the trap of sin. The trap that sin has is its power to control us. A good example of this is the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:2-8.

² Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the

ground.³ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.⁴ Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering;⁵ but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell.

- Genesis 4:2-5

God accepted Abel's offering which indicated that He accepted Abel and the life he was leading. Conversely, His refusal of Cain's offering was the signal that He was also rejecting Cain's life and actions. In my opinion, the rejection was not about the nature of the offering (animal versus produce) but the nature of the lives of the men who were offering the sacrifices. We see that Cain transfers the anger and resentment he feels towards God (and possibly himself) to his brother who becomes the object of his rage.

⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

- Genesis 4:6-7

God appeals to him first: If you do right you will feel better and be blessed. Then He warns him: Sin (anger, jealousy, wrath) is tempting him and he has to take action. What action? Recognize and acknowledge that the problem was not God or his brother, it was him. Pray for wisdom and strength to overcome. Get help from parents, even Abel. Let go his anger and hostility before it draws him into violence. Change the things in his life that led to his rejection by God in the first place.

⁸ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

In verse 8, Cain does not deal with the temptation in this way, he is "carried away" by his resentment and anger. He would rather kill than admit wrong, this is how completely he is trapped in his sin. When his sin finally possesses him it produces its final result: murder. Not just the death of his brother but the death of his own soul. If we continue reading we see how this separation from God affected his life. He was separated from God, his brother, family, society, even the earth itself since he could no longer farm.

From Adam and Eve to Cain, all the way to the Jewish Christians that James was writing to, and even to ourselves today, sin causes death and separation. The ultimate goal of Satan is to separate us from God and each other. Enticement to sin is his method. Lying is his tool (i.e. he told Eve there would be no consequences for her disobedience to God - Genesis 3:1-4). He seduced Eve to disobey thus spoiling with sin the perfect human nature God created. He led Cain to kill Abel thinking he would thwart God's redemptive plan. Abel was righteous and called on God and was probably the one to carry the "promise" forward into the next generation.

SUMMARY

How does a Christian today deal with the dragon? Practical applications for our everyday Christian lives:

1. Recognize that when temptation is near it is not from God, and that the enemy (dragon) is present.
2. When tempted, Christians need to take action: pray for strength and wisdom, seek help, change course or run away.

¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

- I Timothy 6:10-11

3. If a Christian does sin, he still must take action, but a different kind. He needs to acknowledge the sin, repent of it, reject this type of behavior, and return to the safe place of self-restraint and obedience.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- I John 1:9

Remember, both King David and Peter the Apostle took action after they sinned, and were thus restored. Ananias and Sapphira, on the other hand, continued to lie and died (Acts 5:1-6).



4. The Bottom Line

JAMES 1:16-27

There has always been debate over various issues in the religious world. Our brotherhood is no different. Our journals and books are filled with passionate arguments over topics such as proper elements of worship, methods of evangelism and approaches to biblical interpretation. The early church was not free from this type of problem either. For example:

- Methodology versus responsibility: In Acts 6, a dispute over the distribution of food.
- Gospel of grace: In Acts 15, acceptance of Gentiles into the church.
- Freedom versus tradition: In I Corinthians, questions about the proper procedure in worship, and freedom in what people could and could not eat.

Does this not sound familiar? We should neither be surprised nor discouraged with debate and controversy in the church, it has always been and will always be until, "When the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (I Corinthians 13:8). I believe that

Paul not only refers to the full revelation of the Word here, but also the full accomplishment of everything in that Word. In other words, when all that is revealed in God's word fully matures (such as the coming of Christ) we will finally have the knowledge and insight that will bring us into perfect unity and harmony with each other. In the meantime, there is still a struggle in the kingdom, and a multiplicity of opinions on a variety of issues that require patience, love, continued prayer and study in order to maintain unity.

However, this does not mean that we cannot come to concrete conclusions about significant points. We are not agnostics who throw up their hands and say, "if we cannot have a uniform opinion on one point, there is no use in trying to agree on others" and then use this as an excuse to drift off into disbelief. This is irresponsible. The entire book of James is a testimony to the idea that despite the disputes, we can still get to a common understanding about different aspects of the Christian religion.

This next section in James' letter actually sets the tone for the rest of the epistle by clearly defining what type of thinking and behavior constitutes the "bottom line" in what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

BRIDGE — 1:16-18

Verses 16-18 of chapter 1 form a bridge between the discussion about the mechanics of temptation and sin in general to the specific thought and behavior indicative of the Christian way of life. Remember, our general theme is that Christianity is a way of life, not just religious observances, and James articulates this way of life in clear and unmistakable terms.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.
- James 1:16

A simple imperative statement that says, do not be fooled and do not let others lie to you. You need to be on guard so as not to become a victim of delusion.

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
- James 1:17

God sends good things. This is a reference to the previous passage where James teaches that God does not seduce anyone to do evil by enticing them with evil. James mentions some things that are not debatable:

1. That God is good and pure, and delights in righteousness is a sure and eternal principle.
2. There is never a compromise in His promises due to weakness or change of character (unlike the stars that change in brightness).
3. Blaming God for the evil and sin in life is a sign that one has believed a lie.

In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.
- James 1:18

On the contrary, God's will is not for evil or destruction but rather for good and life eternal. Through the Word we are born again,

this was God's will (preaching the gospel is what brings people to Christ). The Jews that James is talking to were among the first Christians, so James refers to them as first fruits (beginning harvest) of the new creation (those who are born again through faith in Christ).

Do not be fooled by the notion that evil desire and conduct comes from or is tolerated by God, God is good and He has saved you so that you can live a good and pure life.

THE BOTTOM LINE IN CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

1:19-26

The balance of the epistle is a series of exhortations clearly defining the bottom line insofar as Christian conduct is concerned. In this chapter, we will look at the primary trademark of the Christian life: our attitude towards God's word.

James has mentioned that our initial birth as new creatures was conceived by the Word of God which is the seed that produces the kingdom within us. Now he explains that the way we continue to respond to the Word will determine our growth as Christians. To summarize what James has said so far: God is good, sends good and wants you to be good. Being good is seen in your attitude (the way you live your life). A good attitude is seen in how you respond to the Word.

The proper response has two major elements:

THE WAY WE LISTEN - 1:19-21

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;
- James 1:19

In view of God's power we ought to be eager to hear what He has to say to us. Some are eager to be baptized for forgiveness, but not eager to hear about self-control, obedience, good deeds, giving, fidelity, worship, sacrifice, study, perseverance, etc. Slow to speak in the sense of talking back or rebelling against what God says to us (grumbling, complaining). Slow to anger at what the Word says. Many times we become angry at the teacher or preacher because he reveals our sins and calls us to change. This anger, however, is really anger directed at the Word.

for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.
- James 1:20

Responding to God in anger or doing His will with grumbling and complaining does not produce the right kind of works in His eyes. He wants us to do good, and to do good with a willing and humble heart. We must not have the "older brother" syndrome (parable of the Prodigal Son whose older brother resented his father's mercy towards his wayward younger brother - Luke 15:11-32) or the "first son" syndrome (Parable of two sons' response to a father's command. The first son said he would obey but in the end, did not - Matthew 21:29).

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word

implanted, which is able to save your souls.
- James 1:21

James suggests that the reason for back-talk and anger at God's word is the presence of sin in one's life. He tells his readers that they must first remove the sin in their lives in order to receive the Word in their hearts. Receiving the Word with meekness means that one is removing sin and receiving the Word in its stead. Only when this is done can the Word enter in to save and transform the person. We cannot receive the Word successfully without first removing sin. God provides insight and causes growth, but we are responsible for the removal of sin. Many times the reason that our faith is flat and we have no taste for God is because the sin in our lives will not allow the Word to enter in and revive us.

THE WAY WE RESPOND - 1:22-27

The Christian life involves learning God's word properly and responding to it effectively as well.

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.
- James 1:22

There is another warning to not delude ourselves into thinking that simply understanding the Word is enough to create the spiritual transformation we desire. The only way that God's word has any impact for change and transformation is when we act upon it.

²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of

person he was. ²⁵ But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.

- James 1:23-25

James uses the illustration of a mirror to make his point. A man who hears but does not do is like a person who looks into a mirror, sees something that needs correction or change but does nothing and then walks away. The mirror has not helped him correct his problem and he remains unchanged. James then refers to the gospel (law of liberty: a law that frees us from sin, not the responsibility to do what is right and good) as a mirror in which a person can truly see himself for what he really is. Those who hear and do not do are like the people who see themselves in the mirror but change nothing about their appearance. Their experience was for nothing, useless and fruitless. The one who does act, however, on what he sees will be blessed in what he does. He has seen and changed, and is blessed because of it.

²⁶ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

- James 1:26-27

In these final verses James gives three examples of what the mirror can reveal and the proper response to each.

1. Control of the tongue
2. Benevolence

3. Purity of life

The proper response is present if a person, after hearing the Word, and seeing that gossip, coarse language, slander, lies or pride are part of his life, sees that a change needs to take place and makes that change. Or, if after hearing the Word, and seeing a need to improve or increase her quantity or quality of good works, makes the necessary changes. And, if after hearing the Word and recognizing that one's life is too full of worldliness and too little concerned with the kingdom of God, carries out the changes that will correct this attitude.

The bottom line in Christianity is that God's word has the power to not only bring us to salvation but also to transform us. This transformation can only take place, however, if we eagerly do what God tells us to do and not just fool ourselves into thinking that sitting in the pew is enough.



5. Michael Jackson and James

JAMES 2

In Michael Jackson's 1991 album, *Dangerous*, he sings a song entitled *Black or White*. In it he repeats the words, "It doesn't matter if you're black or white," promoting the idea that he did not want to judge or be judged based on skin color. These lyrics capture the spirit of what James is saying in the section of his epistle which we will be looking at in this chapter: in the church it does not matter if you are black or white, rich or poor, man or woman, Jew or Gentile, we treat everyone in the same way.

A good example of how people tend to judge others by external things appeared on an old TV show called *Candid Camera*. It was broadcast in the 1960's/70's and was hosted by Allen Funt. He was the first person to use a hidden camera in order to record people involved in humorous situations set up by the show. In an early segment they dressed one of the program's producers to look like a homeless panhandler who was simply trying to get a match to light his cigarette. The video showed that most of the people that he approached did not stop, avoided eye contact and walked around him to continue on their way.

This same man then cleaned up, put on a business suit and went back to the identical spot trying to get someone to light his cigarette. Not only did people stop and give him a light or their matches, some gave him a cigarette as well. One passer-by even gave him his entire package of smokes. Of course, attitudes about smoking are different today, but the point made was that society usually judges by appearances and treats people accordingly.

In the second chapter of his book, James says that Christians living the Christian way of life are different, they treat everyone in the same way. The point is that in Christ we can acknowledge our differences (black or white, etc.) because we respond to everyone in the same way.

CHRISTIANS TREAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN THE SAME WAY — 2:1-13

My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism.
- James 2:1

The command: do not regard some as more important than others.

² For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, ³ and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"
- James 2:2-3

The example: one's attitude towards rich and poor in church. The example can refer to all types of differences including gender, culture, etc. James compares and judges attitude, not differences.

have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?
- James 2:4

If you have a different attitude for different people, then this type of behavior is evil (an evil motive like pride or selfishness).

Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose 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

God is not partial, He loves everyone and proves it in the way He has offered salvation and blessings to everyone, even to the poorest.

⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? ⁷ Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?
- James 2:6-7

You are guilty of sin if you give honor to someone who dishonors God and refuse to honor someone who does honor God. For example, Christians who spend money on entertainers or sports figures who live godless lives and revel in public sin, but refuse to give a dime to help support the church's effort to assist the poor and the lost. Another example, Christians who love to be with other "successful" Christians but shy away from contact with brethren who are poor, have handicaps or other limitations.

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

- James 2:8

James reminds his readers of God's primary command when referring to human relationships: a right and loving attitude towards all. This, he says, guides our attitude in every situation.

⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

- James 2:9-13

God will not show mercy to those who are not themselves merciful. He compares two principles of Law to make his point: the Ten Commandments (judicial system) and the Law of Liberty (mercy system). Under the Ten Commandment system, if you failed in any one of the commands you were guilty of all (the point being that under this system if you broke one commandment you might as well have broken all of them as far as the consequences were concerned). Under the Law of Liberty (mercy system - salvation by grace through faith) God forgives our failures because Jesus paid the price for them on the cross. The requirement, however, is that to remain under the Law of Liberty we also must

be merciful towards others. This is an important part of the Law of Liberty (mercy system).

SUMMARY #1

To consider one brother more worthy of our love than another who is poor or different is unmerciful. This attitude removes us from the Law of Freedom and mercy for ourselves and puts us back under the Law of Judgment. If this is the way that we judge (based on wealth or performance) then this is how God will judge us, based on our performance.

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE — 2:14-26

We should only have one attitude for all and in the next verses James explains what this attitude ought to be.

¹⁴ What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

- James 2:14-17

Here he repeats the idea expressed in the last chapter (true religion consists of mercy to the less privileged). Sincere faith, the kind acceptable to God and thus the kind that saves us, manifests itself in good deeds. If the faith we have produces no good deeds, it is a sign that our faith is dead, and a dead faith has no power to save us. It is very much like a dead car battery. You know that the

car has a battery because you can touch it, feel its weight and see its connection to the car, but if it is dead it is useless since it will not power the car.

But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

- James 2:18

James answers an imaginary argument from a brother who might say, "I have faith." This brother displays all the knowledge he has about Christianity, his books, memory verses and the fact that he is a religious person. James responds, "You can show me your faith by explaining everything you know about Christ, but I will show you my faith by the good deeds that my faith provokes me to do in the name of Christ."

You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

- James 2:19

Mere knowledge of God's existence does not save us. The devil knows and believes in God as well, but this knowledge does not produce repentance or good works in him, only fear of the judgment to come. Therefore, this knowledge does not save him, he is condemned. It is not the knowledge of Christ that saves, it is faith in Christ that leads to salvation.

But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

- James 2:20

Saving faith does not simply understand the doctrines of Christianity, it obeys the teachings of the Christian religion. Yes,

we are saved by faith, but saving faith is authenticated by the good works that accompany it. This is why James says that faith without works is dead (dead in the sense that it has no power to save us).

In verses 21-25 James gives two examples of Old Testament characters whose faith was demonstrated to be sincere by their works, and as a result, received the promise originally made to their faith by God.

²¹ Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

²⁴ You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

- James 2:21-24

Abraham: God promised this patriarch that the foreign land where he lived would eventually belong to his many descendants. Abraham believed God's promise and because of this the Lord considered him to be acceptable in His sight. Abraham's original faith was manifested throughout his life in many ways but most especially when God asked him to sacrifice his favored son, Isaac. Abraham's faith was true because it produced good works. He did not have perfect obedience, only Jesus had this (I Peter 2:22), but he did have a willingness, desire and pattern of obedience over his lifetime.

Good works perfect (bring to fruition) faith. The only way faith becomes visible and tangible is through good works. We know faith is perfected when sin is being abandoned and good works are

done. This is how good works make faith complete, they render our faith visible and useful to God.

Are we saved by faith? Yes. But the faith that saves us is the kind that obeys God and is fruitful in good works, purity, perseverance and love. A faith that makes no distinctions (the point of this passage). Not the kind of faith that only talks about religion, or is interested in religious things, but a faith that responds in love because love makes no distinctions.

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?
- James 2:25

Rehab, the prostitute who had faith (no distinction with God), lived in Jericho and risked her life in order to hide Joshua's men who spied out the city before Joshua's capture of it. Both Rehab and Abraham were found to be acceptable before God because of their faith, and their faith was acceptable before the Lord because it was fruitful. In the end, both received the promises made to them.

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.
- James 2:26

Here, James describes a final image to underline his point. A body without breath (same word for spirit in the Greek) is a sign that the body is dead. In the same way, a faith without good works is a sign that this faith is dead, and therefore useless. Many people in this world have faith but their faith is useless because it does not produce any good deeds.

SUMMARY #2

It does not matter if you are black or white, a Christian does not distinguish between brothers and sisters, he treats everyone in the same way because God treats every brother and sister in the same way.

If one's faith is alive he will be active in good works, especially works of kindness and mercy towards his brethren. He will treat them in the way that God treats him. When we realize how badly we must seem before God, who sees all, it should move us to never again make distinctions between others. If our faith does not produce obedience to God, mercy towards our brethren, and a witness concerning the Lord and the gospel to the world, then it is a dead faith and will not save us in the end.

The best way to test your faith (alive or dead) is to take the "say and do" test (does what you say match what you do?).

7 SAY AND DO'S:

1. We say that we love God - Do we obey and trust Him?
2. We say that we believe the gospel - Do we obey it ourselves and share it with others?
3. We say that we love the church - Do we serve the brethren who are in need?
4. We say that we want the church to grow - Do we promote its growth in our giving and service?

5. We say that we want to grow in Christ - Do we attend all the services and make time for personal Bible study and prayer?
6. We say that we want our children to become Christians - Do we discuss the Bible with them or bring them to Sunday School?
7. We say that we want to go to heaven - Do we eliminate sinful habits and strive to live pure lives in Christ?

Is our faith alive or dead? As our faith is, so we are.



6. Teaching Teachers' Tongues

JAMES 3:1-8

In his letter, James is describing the Christian lifestyle and what type of attitude and conduct believers should have in various situations. Therefore, you have profited from this book so far if, as a Christian:

- You have faced recent trials with patience and joy knowing that God is maturing your faith through these.
- You have faced and responded to temptation with Christian action that includes:
 - Recognizing that you are being tempted.
 - Praying for the wisdom needed to face various temptations and trials.
- Changing your ways according to God's will and Word.

- You have decided to not only listen to the Word but actually do what it says.
- You have begun to treat others with equal regard, not making distinctions based on race, wealth or other differences.
- You have demonstrated the sincerity of your faith by doing good works.

In chapter 3, James specifically addresses those in the church who want to teach. He reviews what qualifications they should have and the fruit they need to produce if they are to successfully serve in this ministry.

QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHERS

PRUDENT

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.
- James 3:1

Responsibility brings accountability. God will examine you more closely as one who teaches others (remember the Pharisees). This warning should be a sobering reminder to consider the consequences as well as the rewards for those who seek this role in the church.

CONTROL OF THE TONGUE

² For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. ³ Now if we put the bits

into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. ⁴ Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires.
- James 3:2-4

It is very easy to sin with the tongue. However, control of the tongue points to one who possesses overall maturity and self-control. James gives as examples for this the rider who controls his horse by pulling on the small bit in the animal's mouth, and the command that the captain has of a large ship by simply turning its rudder. The point that James makes is that the mature Christian directs his entire body by controlling his tongue. This is the kind of teacher who will be acceptable before God and a blessing to the church.

It is necessary to do this because an uncontrolled tongue is very dangerous and can cause great destruction.

⁵ So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.
- James 3:5-6

A small spark can cause a great fire, and in the same way an evil tongue can send one to hell. James warns us that no other part of the body can get us into more kinds of sin. The tongue helps to plan sin, encourages it, joins in it, defends it and spreads it to others. In addition to this, the tongue is a danger because it is

naturally hard to control (i.e. the animal kingdom can be tamed but not the tongue).

⁷ For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. ⁸ But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

- James 3:7-8

Not only does the tongue produce evil, but the evil it begins cannot be easily stopped (gossip, insults or lies). It can also destroy our Christian witness since we, as believers, are moved to both bless and curse with the same tongue.

⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; ¹⁰from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. ¹¹Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Nor can salt water produce fresh.

- James 3:9-12

People will judge you as evil if evil comes out of your mouth. A person who cannot control the tongue, therefore, is not fit to teach anyone anything, and usually causes more harm than good in the church.

James has mentioned some of the necessary qualifications that teachers must possess (prudence and control of the tongue) in order to have the privilege of teaching God's people. Now he describes the fruit that good teachers need to produce in the lives of those they teach.

Christian Teachers Must Produce Fruit

You can tell a tree by its fruit, this same principle applies to teachers. Their fruit will be a witness for them.

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.

- James 3:13

James begins by listing three important virtues needed by those who aspire to teach. First, one must demonstrate high morals in his behavior. Added to this is faith's witness of good deeds done in humility. Finally, he mentions the source of this type of behavior which is wisdom. James then develops this notion by describing the two types of wisdom that exist and the kind necessary to be a teacher in the Lord's assembly.

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

- James 3:14-16

There is the type of wisdom that comes from below. It is earthly (the sphere from which it originates), natural (appeals to the flesh) and demonic (a reference to who controls this type of wisdom). Earthly wisdom from below has a certain intelligence, but its fruit is destructive. It produces bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance and a type of religious zeal based in pride that leads to bitterness, disorder and evil action, not joy or peace which should be the natural fruit produced by those claiming Christ as

Lord. Where these things are present, there is sin, and the source of this sin is usually the wisdom from below. The final result of this kind of wisdom is a witness against the gospel, not for it.

The other kind of wisdom that James mentions is the wisdom that comes from above.

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

- James 3:17

Wisdom from above comes from the heavenly sphere and is spiritual in nature because its source is God's word, and it is controlled by God. Its fruit is pure (you see it as such), peaceful (produces peace in others and preaches peace), meek and reasonable (not interested in its own way, not manipulative), merciful (kind, compassionate), sure (exact, clear, unchanging) and sincere (not hypocritical). Good teachers demonstrate this kind of wisdom.

EXHORTATION

James has given us the qualifications necessary to be a teacher of God's people (prudent/tongue control) and the type of fruit that they must produce (heavenly wisdom). Solomon adds to this instruction by showing how one can become a wise teacher.

1. Listen Carefully

⁵ A wise man will hear and increase in learning,
And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel,
⁶ To understand a proverb and a figure,

The words of the wise and their riddles.

⁷ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction.

- Proverbs 1:5-7

Listen carefully when receiving instructions from God's word, this is the first step. The flesh does not want to hear the wisdom from above so it will offer up many distractions in order to sabotage your learning. If you want to be a wise teacher, you have to pay attention to what God is teaching you.

2. Respond Immediately

¹³The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

When you hear something that requires a change, an effort or some kind of repentance in your life, do it right away. The Word is only effective if you put it into practice. The longer you refuse to obey, the harder it becomes to obey. Listening with the intention of doing, this is "fear of the Lord." Listening without the intention of doing is hypocrisy, and obeying without carefully listening is foolishness.

3. Control Your Tongue Diligently

When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable,

But he who restrains his lips is wise.
- Proverbs 10:19

A person cannot become wise without tongue-control. Here are some practical exercises that help develop that control:

a) Learn to apologize

A man's pride will bring him low,
But a humble spirit will obtain honor.
- Proverbs 29:23

If you sin with your tongue, repent with it. This is the best way to cultivate humility. Learn to say, "I am sorry" and "Please forgive me."

b) Learn to hold your tongue

Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise;
When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.
- Proverbs 17:28

There is not much left to say if we eliminate what is untrue, exaggerated, distorted, unnecessary, coarse, repetitious and stupid. We do not always have to say everything that passes through our mind (this is from pride).

A fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his own mind.
- Proverbs 18:2

c) Learn to filter what we say

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

- Philippians 4:8

d) Learn to say the right things at the right time

The wise in heart will be called understanding,
And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

- Proverbs 16:21

Like apples of gold in settings of silver
Is a word spoken in right circumstances.

- Proverbs 25:11

God has given us speech in order to praise Him, bless one another, communicate and express ourselves. We need to learn to do these things in a gracious, wise and heavenly way, not a foolish, insincere or coarse earthly way. Heavenly wisdom comes from wise teachers and we can all become wise teachers of our children, brethren or others in the church if we learn to listen carefully, respond immediately and control our tongues.

SUMMARY

James is talking to teachers about teaching and in verse 18 he summarizes the entire matter.

And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- James 3:18

The teaching (seed) that changes the hearers for the good will be brought by a truly wise teacher. You will know this person because he will already bear the fruit of his teaching in his own life (he will be pure, peaceful, meek, self-controlled, etc.) and he will, with his teaching, produce these things in others.

Who are the wise teachers? They are the ones who are able to promote in you the heavenly things you already see in them.



7. Prescription for Worldliness

JAMES 4:1-10

After having taught his readers how to discern between good and bad teachers (good teachers produce good things in their students by drawing upon heavenly wisdom already evident in their own lives), James leaves off speaking about teachers and does a spiritual check-up of his readers. After reviewing their symptoms and diagnosing their illness, he gives not only a prognosis for the future for those exhibiting spiritual illness, he also provides them with a spiritual prescription to bring healing.

THE SYMPTOMS

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?

- James 4:1^a

James describes what the wisdom from below that they have been feeding on is producing in them, the symptoms of an unhealthy body. The right teaching with the right motives and a sincere

response produce a different result. However, when reviewing the symptoms of his readers, James notes that the fruit of their conduct is negative and destructive (quarrels and conflict). In the next section he goes on to diagnose the problem.

Diagnosis

Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?

- James 4:1b

James begins by noting that it is a pleasure for the flesh to want its own way and thus continue the quarreling and division among the members in order to obtain it, no matter what the damage or cost. People fight over worldly things using worldly tactics and in the end the situation is usually worse, no matter who wins.

You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.
You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

- James 4:2a

He explains how wars/quarrels begin and continue: you desire but cannot obtain (your way), you war but cannot obtain (your way), so you argue and divide.

^{2b} You do not have because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

- James 4:2b-3

The quarrels, wars and divisions begin and continue because the things desired are worldly things (power, honor among men,

selfish ambition). These things appeal to the flesh, not the spirit. James tells them that they do not receive spiritual blessings because they do not ask for these. They would rather fight over worldly things, things that God will not give them even if they asked for them.

People rarely argue and compete over spiritual matters. For example, I have never seen a debate over the mop. No one competes over who will get to the building first on Saturday morning to mop the floors in the bathrooms. In the same way, I have never seen brethren fighting over who will go visit the sick and shut-ins. There has never been a debate or fierce competition over who will give more for the offering. We rarely struggle to see who excels at personal purity, service to the church, preaching or teaching the Word. No, we devour each other over things from below (personal honor, privilege, power, etc.), and we pursue these fleshly things with methods and tactics from below because these satisfy that part of our nature which is also from below (pride, lust for control, selfishness).

PROGNOSIS

Let us briefly review what we have so far:

1. Symptoms: Quarreling and division.
2. Diagnosis: Desire for things from below and using tactics from below to acquire these.

In the following verses James will give a prognosis or opinion as to what the outcome of this problem will be if not corrected.

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?

- James 4:4^a

He compares this conduct to adultery. The idea is that these Christians are unfaithful to Christ when they act in this way.

Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

- James 4:4b

This behavior is a sign of increasing friendship with the world. Whoever identifies himself as a friend of the world in this way, makes himself an enemy of God.

Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

- James 4:5

God is serious about what He says in the Scriptures. The Spirit of God within us is jealous when we make friends with the world instead of pursuing our friendship with God.

³⁰ Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

- Ephesians 4:30-31

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

- James 4:6

God, however, through this same Spirit, rewards with grace and blessings those who resist these fleshly temptations to pride, selfishness and ambition. Those who resist these things by humbling themselves before God and their brethren will be lifted up by God and respected by their brethren.

The point here, and James' prognosis, is that a Christian cannot be friends with the world (desiring worldly things and acquiring them using worldly tactics) and friends with God (desiring spiritual things and obtaining them through spiritual methods) at the same time. James' final opinion, based on this diagnosis, is that division, arguing, unbridled ambition and constant criticism of each other are the definite marks of a worldly church, not one belonging to Christ.

THE CURE FOR WORLDLINESS AND WAR

Here James prescribes three things that must be done in order to become friends with God and cure the sin of worldliness.

1. Make Your Choice

Submit therefore to God.
- James 4:7a

Christians in trouble, who are in a slide away from Christ and into division and conflict, need to choose. The choice or decision they need to make is to come under God's rule, once and for all. For non-Christians this means a full response to the gospel for salvation that includes:

1. Hearing and believing that Jesus is the divine Son of God (Mark 16:16).

2. Repenting or turning away from things that come from below and focusing on the things that are above (Luke 24:47).
3. Acknowledging (confessing) faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32).
4. Being baptized (immersed) in the name of Jesus to receive the forgiveness of sin and the gift (indwelling) of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-38).

For the non-Christian, the first mark of submission to God is to obey all of these (confess Christ, repent of sin, be baptized). Neglecting one voids the rest because we have refused to submit completely to God's word about salvation. For Christians, the choice is a daily decision to persevere in faith (no matter what the situation, I always put myself back into God's hands). Christians need to do this because the temptation to return to worldly habits, things and tactics is always present and it is easy to fall.

In the cure for worldliness, therefore, James prescribes that we make a choice, once and for all, of who we are. If we choose to be Christians, then we should act like Christians with the wisdom and the conduct that comes from above.

2. Make a Stand

Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
- James 4:7b

Make a stand or defense against the devil. Many people fall or are led away because:

- They play around with sin. They are curious about what it would be like or what would happen if, etc.
- They take their time with sin. They delude themselves with rationalizations like, "Just this once. If it gets worse I'll stop. I won't get caught. It's a problem but I will deal with it tomorrow, or when I feel like it or when the time is right."
- They mistakenly believe that God does not think that their sin is really serious or will not actually punish them for it.

The devil will remain near and continue to find ways to entice you, give you reasons to give in, offer you promises of pleasure and satisfaction until you do one of two things: Give in (or give in again), or make a stand (resist, say no). He only flees when you make a stand to resist him. Otherwise he works away at your indecision until you succumb to him.

3. Draw Near to God

⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.
- James 4:8-10

If we make a stand against the devil, it will become a first step in drawing closer to God. James mentions additional steps that one can take in order to do this.

Cleanse Your Hands

This is a metaphor that pictures a spiritual cleansing. We deal directly with our sins when we ask God to help us overcome the sins that we know about and reveal to us the ones that we are not aware of yet. Every sin we discard and overcome enables us to be one step closer to God.

Purify Your Hearts

James has dealt with the visible outcome (impurity, lust, pride, violence, etc.) that sin causes. Now he focuses on the source of sin (one's heart) and the need to cultivate purity, wholeness and integrity in the inner person. He is saying, "Make up your mind once and for all. Who will you serve, God or the world? Do not be double minded. If you are going to be a Christian, do not hold back or change your mind." This is the decision that the inner person (heart) needs to make in order to succeed as a person of faith.

Sincere Repentance

James reminds his readers that it is their sins that caused Christ's death and their own condemnation, therefore, they need to wake up to its danger. Sometimes we have greater regret over letting go our sins than sorrow over the damage they have caused in our lives and in the sufferings of Christ. Mature Christians should not be nostalgic about their former sinful lives. If God hates and forbids sin, we are wise to get rid of it and stay rid of it.

In verse 10 he summarizes the cure for worldliness in our lives and in the church:

- Draw near to God through faith, repentance and obedience.

- God will draw near to you by giving you pardon because of your faith, and this pardon will create joy in your heart. He will also draw near to you by giving you protection from the evil one which, in turn, will give you peace of mind.
- Finally, God will draw near to you by restoring His relationship with you as you become His child and He your Father, and this will create zeal in your spirit to serve Him.

Such are the rewards given to those who draw near to God.

SUMMARY

James teaches that the cause of conflicts within ourselves, our families and the church is excessive worldliness and the desire for the satisfaction of fleshly things like pride, power, recognition and selfish ambition. Christians, therefore, need to be careful because friendliness with the world is a sign that one is gradually becoming an enemy of God. The cure that James proposes for this malady is threefold:

1. Take your position with God.
2. Stand firm against the devil.
3. Continually do the things that will serve to draw you nearer to God and further away from the world.

If you feel that God is far away from you, it is because you have drifted away from Him.



8.

Who Do You Think You Are?

JAMES 4:11-12

Nothing destroys a Christian's faith faster than his own tongue. James, therefore, spends two out of the five chapters of his epistle dealing with the sins of the tongue and the damage created by these. Before, he talked about teachers and the heavenly or earthly source of the wisdom that guided their speech. Now, in chapter 4, he will address the sin of gossip that affects everyone, not only teachers.

DO NOT SPEAK BADLY ABOUT OTHERS

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;
- James 4:11a

There are many forms of gossip and speaking against another that take place in the church. For example, when we share our opinion with others about someone's perceived failings based on our

particular assessment of their conduct. We notice, point this out and share this weakness with as many who will listen and agree. Sometimes it may be even be an imaginary thing that we assume they do, think, say or have overheard about them.

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

- Luke 6:45

This sin is called slander or gossip. The real problem here is not with our tongues but with our hearts.

There are other versions of this evil. For example, when someone else is better than average (or better than we are) at something (more money, looks, opportunity, education, spiritual zeal, etc.) it can trigger a kind of passive-aggressive response where we deliberately reserve our praise, and choose instead to notice a weakness or negative thing which is secondary, and repeat this to others, or we remind everyone how undeserving the other is of their good fortune. Our own pride makes us afraid to admit that they may be better than we are, and so we elevate our personal worth by attempting to lower theirs. Jealousy makes us afraid that they will receive more love than we will because of their superiority in some thing. The antidote to all of this is, of course, love because as the Bible says, "perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18). The practice of love negates any fear of not receiving love and dissipates any feelings of jealousy and pride.

SPEAKING AGAINST A BROTHER DOES TWO THINGS

but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law
but a judge of it.
- James 4:11b

James declares that if you speak against or judge your brother (same thing) you are speaking and judging the Law itself. He is not referring to civil law or the Ten Commandments here but rather the law of liberty and grace that protects all sinners who rely on Christ for forgiveness and righteousness (James 1:25). This law says that we must love our brothers and forgive them 70 times 7 if necessary (Matthew 18:22). If you speak evil against brothers you speak against this law which protects this brother. You violate this law of love with your judgment.

In other words, you do not do what the law says (love your brother), you have decided to become a judge of the law (you do not agree with this law, you question it and change it), and in so doing remove the grace that protects the other.

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is
able to save and to destroy;
- James 4:12^a

If you become a judge of the Law you have now taken a position as a lawgiver yourself. James says that you have no right to take this position, only God can be judge over the Law, and here is why:

1. Only He has all the facts about a person's history and heart, which gives Him the wisdom to judge.
2. Only He is without sin and thus has a right to judge.

3. Only He has the power to punish justly and to save eternally.

EXHORTATION

but who are you who judge your neighbor?
- James 4:12b

Who do you think you are? God? Gossip is a terrible sin because:

- It destroys fellowship, produces arguments and division. Also, it is hard to have fellowship with someone you are speaking against to others.
- It destroys reputations: yours and the other's. Remember that whoever speaks to you against someone else will eventually speak against you to a third party.
- It destroys salvation. We are digging our own graves with our tongues when we gossip and slander.

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

Gossip is a difficult problem and we are all guilty of this sin at some time or another.

GOSSIP SOLUTIONS

A. LEARN TO HELP

If you see legitimate sin or weakness in your brother, love is your plan of action, not gossip. Do not be shocked, do not quit the church, do not snicker and gloat, do not talk against him or her to the others. Follow the biblical plan for dealing with a brother who has stumbled into sin: learn how to help. Paul shows the way in his letter to the Galatians.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness;

- Galatians 6:1a

Paul advises that we should help (not gossip against) those who have fallen into sin by restoring them to their original position (of faithfulness and obedience) with gentleness, and without pride or self-righteousness on our part. The word "restore" here is used in a medical sense like the setting of a broken bone. There is no idea of judgment or punishment. There is a time and place to correct, discipline and even rebuke those in sin because of their refusal to repent (refusal to repent is what draws the rebuke), not the fact that they have stumbled into sin. Our first impulse should be to restore gently one who is caught in a trap (i.e. one has been seduced into sinfulness [the trap] and you are gently opening the trap in order to release them).

each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

- Galatians 6:1b

Paul also warns the one who is helping by telling him to keep an eye on his own weakness so that he will avoid the temptation to judge rather than provide assistance. Acknowledging our own weakness gives us the right spirit to deal with another who is caught in sin.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

- Galatians 6:2

Find out what you can do to make your brother's load lighter. It is usually easy to see where a person went wrong, what is needed is a solution not a confirmation of failure. Avoid the "I told you so" temptation since this provides no comfort or help. When you decide that you are going to see brother so-and-so about his problem, make sure you bring along your desire to help as well. Instead of thinking and saying, "here is what you need to do" arrive with the words, "what can I do to help?"

³ For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another. ⁵ For each one will bear his own load.

- Galatians 6:3-5

When you do make a judgment call make sure that you compare yourself to Christ and not to the other person. Compare your work to Christ's work. Compare your righteousness to His. When you do this you will find that you have no reason to boast or be proud, and no reason to despise anyone else for their weakness. Actually, this comparison stimulates thanksgiving and a desire to help others.

All of this does not mean that we cannot correct one who is caught in sin. When this is the situation we must go in order to save their souls. But we should be ready to go with the right attitude, otherwise we do better to remain quiet and mind our own business because we end up doing more harm than good.

When dealing with sinful brothers, instead of slandering them, learn to help them and...

B. LEARN HOW TO BE LIFTED UP

If you humble yourself, God will exalt you and you will not have to do it by speaking against others. Much evil communication is the result of frustration. We do not like ourselves, our progress, etc. and so we bring others down to a point where we actually start to look good in comparison to them. When we get in the habit of lifting others up through gracious words and kind acts, we will like ourselves more and be less tempted to speak against others.

C. LEARN TO BE LIKE JESUS

When offended, gossiped against and unjustly treated, say nothing and leave the judgment and condemnation to God.

²¹ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²² who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³ and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;
- I Peter 2:21-23

This exhortation does not mean that when we are improperly treated or spoken against that we walk off in a huff or refuse to interact with the other (silent treatment). The Christ-like response is to say or do nothing evil, and continue to do and say good things to the other person. You will either win them over in this world or provide a sure witness for their guilt in the next.

SUMMARY

Talking against brethren is a major problem in the church. We sin when we do this because we refuse to put God's law of love and forgiveness into practice, and substitute our law of judgment and condemnation for it. The solution to overcome this problem:

1. Learn how to approach a person who is in sin with a gentle, humble and empathetic attitude.
2. Learn to raise our own self-esteem through love and service rather than through criticism. Gossip and constant criticism produces a vicious cycle where the more you criticize, the less you love, and the less you love, the more you criticize, etc.
3. Learn to say nothing, and continue to do good when persecuted, slighted or humiliated, as Jesus did.

David reminds us of how wonderful good fellowship among the brethren can be:

¹ Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together in unity!
² It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard,
Even Aaron's beard,

Coming down upon the edge of his robes.

³ It is like the dew of Hermon

Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;

For there the Lord commanded the blessing—life
forever.

- Psalm 133:1-3

Peace among brethren is not only a delight but a sign of total blessedness within the assembly. It is like a perfume that fills the body at every point so that wherever you are and whoever you are with, you can sense its gentle fragrance. Do not, therefore, be the one to spoil the peace within the body through evil communication and criticism. Let there be peace, unity and brotherly love among us at all times and in every place.



9. Who's the Boss?

JAMES 4:13-5:6

Ever notice that we always take God into consideration when we are sick or have trouble in our relationships but rarely consider His sovereignty in our business affairs? We pray over meals, for the sick and the poor but when was the last time we saw a prayer offered over a business deal? In his epistle, James tells us that failure to consider Him as Lord over our financial affairs will lead to three main dangers.

ARROGANCE

Arrogance is a feeling of superiority, the making of great claims about ourselves or boasting of our worth without regard to God.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

- James 4:13

Making plans for the future without considering God is arrogant because who knows, or can guarantee the future except God?

James says that these business people plan as if they had control over the future.

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.
- James 4:14

In reality there is no "sure thing" in life. James compares life to a vapor, something very fragile and short lived - here today, gone tomorrow and forgotten two days later.

Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."
- James 4:15

What we do, we do because God permits us another day of life, and He does so in order to store up for His eventual vengeance or blessings.

But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.
- James 4:16

Pretending that one has control of the future to the extent of boasting about what one will do with it is evil indeed, says James.

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.
- James 4:17

To know these things and yet to ignore them is sinful.

The Christian needs to know that the future is in God's hands and his plans for the future need to be put there. Whether our business fails or succeeds is not the point. What determines our guilt or innocence in this area before God is not success or failure, it is whether we have put the matter into His hands or not. Not to do so is a sign of arrogance.

GREED

Greed occurs when we seek satisfaction through the act of acquisition rather than through the cultivation of contentment. The problem with this approach and the reason that it is sinful is that one cannot find satisfaction by acquiring more (of anything), and to seek it in this way keeps our focus strictly on material things to the exclusion of spiritual things (where contentment and salvation reside). Greed, therefore, is the failure to control the natural desire to acquire and the pleasure that comes with it (one becomes addicted to the pleasure that acquisition generates to the point where how much we have no longer satisfies, only having more brings us a measure of satisfaction). The Christian needs to be wary of greed in his business dealings because the greedy will be punished (1 Corinthians 6:10). At the judgment, people will not be condemned for being rich, they will be punished because of greed. The irony here is that the greedy person is actually settling for less (more and more earthly stuff that can't satisfy in any quantity) and misses out on the greater value of heavenly riches that provide contentment here, and eternal value and joy in heaven.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries
which are coming upon you.
- James 5:1

James warns the greedy rich of the judgment that is coming and if they knew this, they would begin to weep now.

² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!

- James 5:2-3

In these verses he describes the danger of greed. The true condition of earthly wealth is that it is already rotting away and one day will be destroyed forever. Greed has a way of tying us to wealth and thus keeps us prisoners of things. The point is that those who are tied to things will ultimately be destroyed along with their things (II Peter 3:10).

When Christ appears in order to reveal the glory of heavenly and eternal things, the emptiness of earthly treasures will be revealed and this revelation will be a testimony/accusation against the greedy rich. They have set their hearts on worthless things and have demonstrated the worthlessness of their own hopes by doing so. In the end, James says, they will be destroyed along with their wealth.

INJUSTICE

Arrogance and greed are the basic attitudes to watch out for in money and business matters. Injustice is the overt sin that one does against another because of arrogance and greed.

Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did

the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

- James 5:4

There will be a judgment against those who become rich by depriving others of what is their due by cheating, lying, extortion and manipulation. James pictures a rich farmer holding back some of the salary of his poor laborers on some pretext. He says that the wages themselves cry out to God for justice and will be a voice condemning the guilty at judgment. The Lord of Sabaoth means Lord of Hosts or Armies. The idea here is that the One who leads the armies of heaven is capable of punishing and exacting justice on the mighty and wealthy here on earth.

You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.

- James 5:5

A rancher feeds an animal to fatten it up looking towards the day he will slaughter it. The beast does not know what is going to happen, it is merely content to keep on feeding. James notes that in the same way the arrogant rich who feed themselves on luxury at the expense of the poor are unknowingly preparing themselves for their own slaughter at judgment.

You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

- James 5:6

Their ultimate sin of injustice is the death of the innocent who are unable to defend themselves. The helpless poor are sacrificed in order to preserve the wealth of the greedy rich.

This is the ultimate injustice caused by arrogance and greed. Just like murder is the ultimate sin of anger and resentment, and adultery is the ultimate sin of lust; death of the poor is the ultimate injustice caused by greed and arrogance. History is full of examples of the poor being trampled underfoot by greedy and arrogant wealth.

SUMMARY

James warns those who are involved in business to be careful in their affairs because they are always in danger of falling into the sins of arrogance, greed and injustice. These, he says, will be punished by God.

EXHORTATION

As Christians involved in business, what should our attitude be?

1. Bring all matters, including business matters, before God in prayer. Realize that He alone holds the future in His hands. This is the mark of a wise and humble man. Prayer is always the businessman's first step. Businessmen and women should be people of prayer. In business, God is the boss.
2. Recognize that God distributes wealth as a tool for service towards others, not as something to hoard for our own security and pleasure.

⁶ Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for

God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;⁹ as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."

¹⁰ Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;¹¹ you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

- II Corinthians 9:6-11

God gives us abundance so we can provide not only for ourselves but for others as well. This gives glory to Him because those you help will bless God based on the generosity of His children. This attitude protects Christians against greed and selfishness.

John Wesley (1703-1791), died with only \$200 in his bank account. In his lifetime, however, he donated a total of \$5 million in order to start orphanages and other benevolent works (worth 50 million in today's dollars). He was a dynamic businessman and a powerful champion for good works (also served as an Anglican minister). Someone once asked him what his secret for success was. He replied, "I throw money out of my hands as quickly as possible lest it finds its way into my heart."

I pray that when it comes to business, we will allow Jesus to control our hearts, and not the insatiable desire for more.



10.

Four PS's from James

JAMES 5:7-20

In this final chapter I would like to review what we have covered in this book so far and then examine the last verses where James himself leaves his readers with some things that they need to remember after finishing his letter.

First, the review. The Jews to whom James was writing were discouraged because of the alienation they were suffering as a result of their surroundings. As a culture they were isolated because of Jewish custom and practice which made them very different than the Gentile community that surrounded them. As Christians they were alienated because their moral code and spiritual aspirations were so much higher and nobler than the

pagans with whom they lived. Many of them began to realize that Christianity was not just some sort of doctrinal adjustment or an appendage to the Jewish tradition, it represented a radical change of attitude and activity in one's life; a change that was absolutely necessary if they were to survive their persecution and isolation.

If we were to summarize this book, we could say that James explains the six ways that Christians are different or have changed in order to reflect the sincerity of their faith and thus survive in a world of disbelief. Because you see, if there is no change, there is no survival.

SIX WAYS CHRISTIANS ARE DIFFERENT

1. Christians rejoice when there are problems, knowing that perseverance through trials brings spiritual growth (James 1:1-11). People in the world may resign themselves and become angry or depressed at adversity, but Christians respond to trials with joy, knowing that when trouble is near, so is the Lord.
2. Christians respond to temptation by taking action against sin, not succumbing to sin (James 1:12-18; 4:1-10). Godly people expect temptation and deal with it through prayer, self-control and knowledge of God's word, not by rationalizing unrighteous behavior.
3. Christians not only hear the Word, they do what the Word teaches them to do (James 1:19-27; 2:14-26). Where much of the New Testament focuses on explaining what Christians believe, James zeros in on what Christians ought to do in order to demonstrate their beliefs. According to James, the sincerity of your faith is seen in your walk, not just your talk.

4. Christians are not prejudice (James 2:1-13; 4:11-12). Unlike the world around them, disciples of Jesus are exclusive in matters of faith but inclusive in matters of love. In other words, we believe that only Christians are saved, but Christians themselves ought to love everyone regardless of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds.
5. Christians have control over their tongues (James 3:1-18). If faith is evidenced by works, then no works bear greater testimony to faith than those generated by our speech. James says that the control of the tongue is the key to controlling the whole person: mind, body and soul. More churches are destroyed by slander than by false doctrine.
6. Christians consider God first in all of their affairs, especially financial affairs (James 4:13-5:6). Nothing is dearer to us than our pocketbooks, therefore to honor God with our pocketbooks is to honor Him indeed.

James finishes his letter with a couple of postscripts in order to remind these brethren what they needed to do in order to finish the Christian race. They needed to change in order to stay in the race and needed the following in order to finish it.

FOUR PS'S FROM JAMES

1. PATIENCE - 5:7-11

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early

and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

The Lord is coming and when He does, He will reward those who have done good and judge those who have done evil. The farmer does not worry about the harvest, he knows that there is a period of time between planting and reaping and is ready to wait. In the same way, Christians should not be discouraged when they notice that their growth is not as fast as they would like, and others who are doing wrong seem to be escaping punishment or, as believers, they are suffering and no end seems in sight. The Lord is near (He hears, sees and will help). This is not a reference to the end of time (the Lord is near) but rather a practical encouragement that God is present and aware of our difficulties.

⁹ Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. ¹⁰ As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Do not complain about each other (God is watching what you do). If you are complaining about a brother, stop. Let God be the judge, your job is to love, not to judge (we judge sin, not people). Job suffered greatly and eventually God blessed him with more than he had before his trials (Job 42:10; 12). He did not receive this because he was good, he was blessed because he was patient.

2. PURITY OF HEART - 5:12

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment.

This is the same exhortation as the one given by Jesus in Matthew 5:37. Sincerity in what you say (your heart matches your mouth). Some say yes to Jesus with their mouths but say no with their actions. Many are yes/no Christians: yes to Christ when it suits them, no to Christ when He interferes with their comfort, routine, traditions, money, pleasures, friends or habits.

¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

¹⁵ 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

- Revelation 3:14-16

Yes/no Christians are not Christians. Real Christians are yes with their lips as well as their actions. This is an exhortation to say what you mean and do what you say.

3. PRAYER - 5:13-18

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the

church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord;

In the world, when people are happy they celebrate, when sad they cry and sometimes become depressed because they can't celebrate. In Christ, Christians react differently. When they are happy they praise God in song and prayer, when sad they pray to God for comfort and wisdom, when sick they pray to God for strength and restoration. They do this because they know that prayer has power.

¹⁵ and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. ¹⁷ 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 earth for three years and six months.

¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

God answers prayer in healing (every healing is God's work, whether man recognizes it or not). God answers prayer in forgiving sin. Christians who sin ask for forgiveness in prayer (I John 1:7-9). Non-Christians ask through baptism (I Peter 3:21). God answers prayer for all of our physical needs (Elijah asked for rain).

The Christian life is one of prayer when happy, when sad, when sick, when in need. Paul says, "Pray always" (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

4. PAUSE FOR SERIOUS REFLECTION - 5:19-20

¹⁹ My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back,

It is possible to be saved, be in Christ and then be lost again (Hebrews 6:4-8). How does this happen? We lose our way and then refuse to change once we have fallen. We continue to add one sin to another instead of stopping, acknowledging that we are in error, turning around and finding our way back to where we lost our way in the first place.

A good way to tell how far away from God you are is to examine how near you are to His word (obedience to/knowledge of); to His will (condition of conscience); to His people (church involvement).

²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

It is possible to be lost so we should be on guard to help each other find our way back. If you see your brother letting go, help him gently to return. If you neglect to do so who will go and get you when/if you begin to fall? Do not be angry or defensive. Do not go away mad at the preacher, or brother, or the church if you are corrected in some error or fault. You will make mistakes so expect that someday, somehow, someone will have to correct you. Be happy and humble yourself realizing that your soul is being saved from death and that you are being preserved from going further into sin and darkness.

SUMMARY

James closes his letter with four PSs that are applicable to our situation today as well.

1. Persevere

The Lord is near you. Whatever the hardship, load or discouragement, do not give up following Him and obeying Him. The crown is for the one who finishes faithfully. It does not matter how fast you run, it's if you finish or not that is important.

2. Pure in heart

Be firm in your commitment. Be a "yes" Christian, even if it costs you something. After all, it cost Jesus His life in order for you to be a Christian in the first place. Why do you complain if being His disciple costs you something?

3. Pray

For everything, always. If Elijah asked for it to stop raining and God answered his prayer, can He not find you work, happiness, a solution to your problem? Pray with faith, brethren.

4. Pause

Be careful, you could lose your way. It has happened to others. If you do, thank God for the person who has the love and courage to correct you and bring you back again.

EXHORTATION

I add a fifth PS:

5. Put this teaching into action.

Don't just hear it and understand the ideas contained in the pages of this book. They will only profit you if you do them.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’

- Matthew 7:21-23



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