

A PRIMER ON
PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

By: William E. Wright

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"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16.)

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JAMES

1 OVERVIEW

Martin Luther called James "an epistle of straw," expressing the view of Christians who have wrestled with the interpretation of this short book for centuries. Does The Epistle of James reveal a conflict between James and Paul about the means of salvation? For the Christian who believes that the Bible is the word of God, the answer to this question must be "no." How then, do we interpret such verses as James 2:17, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself"?

Recently, I read the entire book of James at one sitting, and then I read the book again. I saw a pattern in the flow of ideas that God was expressing through James. Though James is a short book of only five chapters and 108 verses, a teacher cannot cover it in one sermon or Sunday School lesson. Therefore, we study the book a verse or passage at a time and see it in a series of vignettes.

James covers many subjects and concerns in his short letter. We can easily see the book as a series of almost random thoughts. However, in this study, I will link James' subjects to a problem existing in the early church. When we relate difficult passages in the epistle to this common problem, Martin Luther's straw reverts to green grass and becomes digestible.

In this overview I will present a four-part framework for our study of the Epistle of James: James' target audience, the issue he presents, his style of writing, and the solution James teaches.

James' target audience: James is writing to Jewish believers. James 1:1 tells us they are Jewish. He calls them "brethren" a total of fifteen times, so we know that they are believers. James 2:1 emphasizes that they are believers by saying "your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." Since James was writing to believers, he did not reteach God's plan of salvation. He covered a subject of more immediate concern and practical use to his readers: their daily lives as Christians.

This short epistle touches on many subjects. I do not think that James picked these subjects at random. He chose his subjects because of specific problems he saw among the recipients of the letter. James 1:9 mentions "the brother of humble circumstances" and the next verse mentions "the rich-man." James uses these references to address not single individuals, but two groups who were antagonistic to each other. Throughout the epistle most of James' remarks can be applied to one or the other of the two groups. James addresses one group, and in the next few verses, he addresses the other group. Sometimes he names the group he is addressing. Most of the time he does not. I see the antagonism and fighting between the two groups, rich believers and the believers of humble circumstances, as the link tying together the apparently diverse subjects in this epistle.

James wrote this epistle to Jews who had already believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior. James did not write to unbelievers. The Pharisee, Nicodemus, came to Jesus who taught him in John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Paul and Silas were in prison because of their testimony about Jesus Christ. An earthquake forced all the doors of the cells open. In panic the jailer asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul and Silas answered: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." (Acts 16:30-31).

Paul wrote to the Romans in Rom. 5:8:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Have you believed in Jesus Christ as your own Savior?

Reread the verses above. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a substitute for us. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. God offers each of us eternal life with Himself if we will simply accept Jesus Christ, believing in Him as Savior. Believe in Jesus Christ, now.

Issue: Every person constantly faces difficulties and adversities. James speaks to the issue of difficulties and adversities in James 1:2. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." In Chapter Three, I will show how the word, "trials," actually refers to adversities. We face adversities every day. Most are minor, but sometimes major problems erupt about us. The issue of adversities underlies everything from James 1:2 all the way through to James 5:20.

Adversities do not just happen. Adversities often arise out of conflict. James looks at many facets of the conflict between the brothers of humble circumstances and the rich men. James 3:14 identifies two major sins from which the conflict between the rich believer and the poor believer arises. James 3:14 says:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

James writes to believers who are arrogant and guilty of lying against the truth of the word of God. The poor believers were guilty of bitter envy,¹ and the rich believers were guilty of selfish ambition.

James accuses his readers of many sins including anger, filthiness, wickedness, deceit, selfishness, blasphemy,

¹The *New International Version* of the Bible and *The New King James Bible* translate these words "bitter envy." The translation, "bitter jealousy," is equally correct. As we will see in Chapter 22, "envy" better describes the sins discussed by James than does "jealousy." Therefore, I will use "envy" as the translation throughout this book.

discrimination, murder, hypocrisy, quarreling, lust, fighting, being friends of the world and hostile toward God, criticism and judging others, boasting, cheating, complaining, and swearing. The sins of the rich believers arise from their selfish ambition and the sins of the poor believers from bitter envy.

James discusses difficulties and adversities due to the selfish ambition of the rich believers and the bitter envy of the poor believers. Believers, today, are also guilty of selfish ambition and bitter envy.

Style: The Epistle of James is not a deep theological book. James does refer briefly to such subjects as election, the rapture of the Church, judgment, indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and even the elements of salvation. James' readers already knew these theological concepts. He did not need to teach them again.

Often James gives a command and follows the command with teaching already familiar to his readers. James 1:2 gives the command, "Consider it all joy." Later in the sentence, James wrote, "knowing." James only had to remind his readers "that the testing of your faith produces endurance." Since his readers already knew this teaching, James does not reteach it in depth. They needed to apply what they had already learned.

Nine times James uses this same device, reminding his readers of teaching they already knew. He mentions a Biblical principle, but does not elaborate.

Solution: Since James was writing to believers, the solution to their problems was not eternal salvation through believing in Jesus Christ. James did not even need to again teach these believers God's word. They already knew the word well. However, they were lying against the truth by failing to apply God's word. The solution is obvious. James commands them, "Apply what you already know."

Among others, two familiar verses from the book of James teach this solution:

James 1:22:

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.

James 2:14a:

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works?

You may argue that since you are in the middle class and neither rich nor poor, James did not write this book for you. However, rich and poor are relative terms. Missionaries and others who have lived in third world countries have seen extreme poverty. At the other extreme are such people as Howard Hughes, Sam Walton, and Bill Gates who are obviously the true rich, leaving the rest of us in the middle or even "poor" classes. Therefore, as middle class citizens, we can find direct application in James' comments to both rich and poor believers.

James, however, did not leave the middle class out of his epistle. He addressed the rest of his audience directly when he wrote to the usher in the assembly,

"And you."

Look at James 2:3. The usher in the assembly showed deference to the well-dressed person and snubbed the beggar. At this point, James discussed discrimination.

James gave a brief glimpse of a third group of believers in the "righteous *man*" of James 5:6 and 5:16. He mentions the "righteous *man*" who did not resist the false accusations of the rich believers. The readers of James can contrast the non-resistance of the "righteous *man*" with the complaining of the poor believers in James 5:9. Then in James 5:16, compare the effectiveness of our prayer with the effective prayer of the righteous man.

James did not write this letter simply as a condemnation of the class struggle between rich and poor believers. The letter looks at interpersonal conflicts that we all experience and their solution.

I will often refer to this framework for understanding James as I discuss the epistle section by section. *James' target audience:* Believers and particularly the two feuding factions of rich believers and poor believers. *The issue:* Adversities arising out of the sins of bitter envy of the poor believers and selfish ambition of the rich believers. *James style:* A command followed by a Biblical principle his readers already knew but were not applying. *The solution:* Apply the word of God.

2 SALUTATION

1:1. *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.*

The first word in this epistle names the author, James, the Lord's half-brother. His father was Joseph and his mother was Mary. James became a believer after our Lord's crucifixion. He was a leader in the Jerusalem Church and ministered primarily to Jewish believers as Paul ministered primarily to Gentile believers.

Slave and bond-servant: James begins by calling himself a "bond-servant" or "servant." The Greek word is δούλος (doulos), which means "slave." James calls himself "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

To understand what James is saying about himself, let's consider the characteristics of a slave. First, a slave is completely subject to his master. A slave must obey his master. So as "a slave of God," James is saying that he is subject to the will and commands of God. Second, a slave has total security. A slave does not have to worry about the source of his food, shelter, clothing, or other needs. These are the responsibility of the master. Believers in Jesus Christ also have complete security. God provides for us in every situation. Paul expressed our security in Phil. 4:19:

And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Third, a slave cannot free himself. Only an act of his master or another third party can free him. The principle of redemption illustrates this characteristic. We are born into the slave market of sin. We are slaves to the desires of our flesh. We cannot free ourselves. Jesus Christ is that third party who offers us freedom. He paid the price to redeem us. Eph. 1:7:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

How did James become a slave and how do we become slaves of Jesus Christ? Like us, James was born a slave. Read what Jesus said in John 8:34. "Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin." All of us meet that criteria. We commit sin. Paul expressed his slavery in Rom 7:25 (*New International Version*).

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

We are born slaves to sin. Christ died on the cross to redeem us from our slavery to sin. Now, we are His slaves through His redeeming work on the cross. The question now is, are we obedient slaves to Jesus Christ, or are we disobedient? In the salutation to this letter James recognizes himself as a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is Lord: James calls himself "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." He refers to God and calls our Savior, Jesus Christ, by His full name and title. "God" and "Lord" are strong references to His Deity. Jesus Christ is Lord. We can do nothing to make Him any more Lord than He already is, and we can do nothing to deprive Him of His Lordship.

James' reference to the Lordship of Jesus Christ recognizes that He is the God of the universe. He is true Deity. Jesus Christ did not lose His Deity when He became human. He voluntarily surrendered the power of His Deity in taking upon Himself the "likeness of man" (Phil. 2:6-7). In this "likeness of man," He was completely human while still remaining God.

"Jesus" is the name for the humanity of Jesus Christ. During His life on earth, Jesus Christ lived as we live, except that He was not born with a sin nature. He was totally human, facing the same temptations and adversities that we face every day. Actually, in Matt. 4, He also faced greater temptations than we face. The point I want to emphasize though is that He faced the same pressures, difficulties, adversities, and temptations that we face. He met them and overcame them without sin. We have the same resources as He had in His humanity to overcome pressures, difficulties, adversities, and temptations: the word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, James adds His title, "Christ," that means "anointed" and refers to His Messiahship, His work on earth on our behalf. Christ came to die on the cross for our sins.

To the twelve tribes: "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad." James addresses Jewish believers who had fled Jerusalem because of the persecutions of Christians. Acts 8:1 describes the dispersion of the Jerusalem Church arising from the persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen.

And Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.

I Pet. 1:1 also refers to this dispersion of believers "throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia."

However, there is a mystery in James' reference to these dispersed Jews. James calls them "the twelve tribes." The Jews of Acts 8:1 belong to only two of the tribes of Israel. As a whole, the other ten tribes never returned from the Assyrian captivity and destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Why does James refer to "the twelve tribes?" James had a burden for all the Jewish people but could send his letter only to the Jews he knew. However, some individuals in the "ten lost tribes" did return to Judea, and therefore James includes them in his salutation.

In another sense, James' burden for the twelve tribes is similar to Paul's burden for the Jews expressed in Rom. 9:1-3.

I am telling the truth in Christ. I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

James believed God's promise of the future regathering of all twelve tribes. History may have lost track of the ten tribes, but God has not forgotten His promises to them. James recognized that he was writing Scripture. Future generations of believers, including all twelve tribes of Israel, would read and study this book.

Be happy: The last word in James 1:1 is "greetings." Unfortunately, translations cannot always convey the significance of a word. James uses the Greek word χαίρω (chairo), meaning "to rejoice, to be glad," as a greeting. This is a good translation. Now, note the use of "joy" in the next verse. The word translated "joy" is χαρά (chara). James' greeting in this letter is a wish for happiness and joy for the scattered Jewish believers. He follows his greeting with a command that they rejoice and be happy. The choice of two similar words is not coincidental. James wishes happiness to these believers and then commands them to be happy.

James goes from a simple, polite salutation to a command. He is saying, "I may wish you happiness, but your happiness is your decision." We may say to a person, "Have a good day," but have we done anything to help them have a good day? James does. He wrote, "greetings," "be happy." Then he writes 107 more verses telling them how to be happy. He begins with the command of the next verse, "Consider it all joy."

Final comments. We believers in Jesus Christ became His slaves at the moment of salvation when we placed our trust in Him. We should live as slaves obeying His commands and following His will within the security that He provides for us as His slaves.

3

TRIALS

The Theme of the Epistle

1:2-4. *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Immediately following the salutation, James 1:2-4 introduces the issue underlying the entire letter, the subject of trials. To understand the epistle, we must know what James means by "trials." We can then interpret the letter around the meaning of these "trials."

Definition: The lexicon defines the Greek word for "trials," πειρασμός (peirasmos), as "test, trial." The King James translation, "temptations," creates images of enticement to sin and immorality. Testing, however, has a larger scope than temptation to immorality or overt sin. "Adversities" aptly describes the situations in which James' brethren found themselves. They faced discrimination. They were victims of false charges in court. Their wages were inadequate, and sometimes they did not even receive pay for their work. They experienced violence and even murder. Some lived in poverty. They were victims of gossip, maligning, and criticism. Christian teachers were falsely condemning some of them in public. I have summarized the sins and adversities which James

described in boxes on pages 240 and 242. Their difficulties did not differ from our adversities today. That is why James is a practical book for the Christian life. James tells how to handle adversity. The solutions and Biblical principles James gives apply to all believers under any kind of pressure or adversity. The solutions are not limited just to the two groups James addresses.

The adversities existed because of a feud between two groups of believers. The rich believers set their highest priority on increasing their personal wealth and prestige. They paid their employees inadequately, made false accusations against others, and refused to help believers in need. On the other hand, the poor believers were vocal in condemning their oppression by the rich believers. Some of the poor believers were teaching in the church, openly condemning the rich believers. James points out the legitimate grievances that each side had against the other. Believers in both factions faced unfairness and adversities from the other faction.

James begins, however, without mentioning specific grievances and adversities. Using a style he repeats throughout the letter, James gives a command and follows the command with a principle the believers already know. To obey the command, believers need only to apply this principle.

Brethren: James begins verse 2, "my brethren." He uses this vocative fourteen more times in this letter. An understanding of the phrase "my brethren," will aid in the interpretation of the rest of the epistle. Paul also uses the term often in his epistles. When James and Paul use the vocative, "brethren," they refer to "brothers in Christ." The Holy Spirit, using human authors, wrote all the New Testament epistles to believers.

James does not address unbelievers, presenting the gospel and how to be saved. This epistle is not an evangelistic book. James wrote to believers, expressing concern for their daily lives.

Think: James begins by giving his brothers in Christ a command. The *King James Version* reads "count." Some

translations read "consider." Many times we read this verse without much thought. First, "count" is arcane, but "consider" comes across as a weak command. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines "consider" in its first two meanings, "To look at attentively; to examine"; and "To think on with care; to ponder; to study." Another meaning given is "To give thought to with a view to purchasing, *γ*." This latter meaning, common today, is the one that causes us to gloss over the command. "I considered buying a new hat today but decided the color wasn't quite right." That usage trivializes what James had in mind.

We can translate the Greek word "think," "deem," or "regard." Whenever we face an adversity, whether small or great, we are to study, ponder, and think about it with care. We do not simply consider it and then discard it to get to the next item on our agenda. Thinking, studying, pondering, examining, and regarding are mental activities. James is commanding his readers to approach adversity, not emotionally, but thoughtfully. The next two verses give Biblical teaching to apply to the adverse circumstance. We must know the word of God, however, before we can apply it to the adversity.

Another way to interpret this word is "to make an accounting." We add all the known facts. For a believer the known facts include Biblical teaching. We add the facts of Biblical teaching and reach a conclusion. The conclusion is that we can have joy in our soul under any adversity."

James' first command is far stronger than today's typical use of the word "consider." James discusses the adversities of his readers later in the letter. Here he gives the key command and the Biblical principle behind the command.

Next James gives the result that should follow this consideration, examination, study. Since this describes a mental process, I will translate this word "think." We can think of adversities as all joy by focusing on the goal in verses 3-4. We consider happiness and joy to be emotions. It is no fun when someone tells lies about us, but James tells us to "Think it all joy." He commands us to use our minds to control our emotions. Our

emotions are not to be subject to the whims of circumstances. When we let circumstances get us down—When we worry about whatever—When we lose our tempers because circumstances aren't going exactly as we would like them to go, we have disobeyed this command. Our emotions are out of control.

Worry: Worry is a common reaction to adversity. From time to time, every person will face a major difficulty. When you lose your job, do you stay awake all night worrying about where you will find a new one? Or perhaps someone is telling lies about you and you worry about what your friends are thinking. In times of adversity, we easily succumb to worry, but worry only makes us more miserable. This is the time to apply God's word and prove our faith. Most Christians can quote verses like I Pet. 5:7: "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." Many are familiar with the command of James 1:2: "Think it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various adversities." How often do we actually apply these verses?

A characteristic of human maturity is the ability to control the expression of our emotions. So it is with spiritual maturity. A spiritually mature believer is not going to question God when adversity comes his way. "Why did God let this happen to me?" He may not understand the "why" of what is happening to him from God's viewpoint, but the mature believer does know and apply Rom. 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, Y."

Worry, loss of temper, sometimes even depression are sin. The *King James Version* is not wrong in using the word "temptations" in this verse, but our use of the word has changed. Temptation creates images of enticement to immorality, lying, adultery, drunkenness, and crime. We say, "We're Christians. We don't do such things." Therefore, we gloss over this verse. "I considered this joy in temptation ideal, but it doesn't really apply to me. I'm a Christian. I lead a good life. I have overcome temptations in my life." This attitude overlooks the significance of what James

is saying and makes the interpretation of the rest of his epistle difficult.

Application: James starts with the command to "Think it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various adversities." Next, he mentions a Biblical principle that we can apply to find joy in adversity. This principle begins in verse 3 with the verb "knowing." James addressed believers who had already learned this principle. Therefore, James writes "knowing."

James is also saying that knowing is not enough. We must apply what we know. Falling into various trials forces us to apply what we have already learned. Already learned? What about the Christian who neglects the assembly together with other believers, the believer who does not attend church and therefore has not learned? What about the Christian who said "I don't believe that," when his pastor taught him the word of God? What about the believer who falls asleep during the sermon or allows his mind to drift off to think about other matters? Obviously, such believers are not learning the word of God. They are failing to develop the resources God is providing them for handling adversity.

James is not writing to ignorant believers but to prior recipients of Bible teaching. They already know the principle that James is about to repeat. Now is the time for them to apply God's word.

A COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF JAMES 1:3 AND 1 PETER 1:7

James 1:3	I Pet. 1:7
	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
testing of your faith	proof of your faith
	<i>King James Version</i>
trying of your faith	trial of your faith
	<i>New King James Bible</i>
testing of your faith	geniuneness of your faith
	<i>New International Version</i>
testing of your faith	your faith ... may be proved genuine
	<i>Today's English Version</i>
your faith succeeds in facing such trials	your faith is genuine
	<i>Williams</i>
what is genuine in your faith	geniuneness of your faith
	<i>Wuest</i>
various of your faith	various of your faith

Proving our faith: "The testing of your faith." We read "trials" in verse 2 and "testing" in verse 3, and we equate them. Do you know that the translators translated the exact same Greek phrase in I Pet. 1:7, "the proof of your faith?" Do the contexts of the two verses demand the different translations? The box at the top of the next page compares several translations of this statement.

There are enough mixing and matching in these translations that the contexts must not demand different translations. In fact, the contexts are similar. Peter is also writing to dispersed Jews. In I Pet. 1:6, he mentions "various trials."

James 1:2 also mentions trials. The "testing of your faith" in verse 3 is not the trials, but the believer's victory while he is under testing and adversity. Trials do not produce endurance, but the proof of the believer's faith produces endurance. *Today's English Version* says, "when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure."

Endurance: Verses 3-4 contain a progression, beginning with the testing of faith in adversity leading to endurance and then to something called "perfect and complete." We have several translations for "endurance" in the Bible: "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, and perseverance."

Paul wrote on the same subject in Rom. 5:3-5, giving a similar progression, but in more detail.

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character, and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Peter in II Pet. 1:5-7 provides another detailed progression.

Now for this very reason also, supplying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge; and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, and in *your* godliness; brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, *Christian* love.

Paul's apostolic prayer for the Colossians in Col. 1:9-12 speaks about steadfastness and patience (emphasis added).

For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding; so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all **steadfastness** and **patience**, joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

An athlete builds strength and athletic skills by exercise. He works out everyday. He practices and develops skills to excel in his sport. James says that when we apply the word of God to adversity, we build our spiritual strength and spiritual skills. Each time we apply the word to a difficult situation and do not fail the testing of our faith, we increase our spiritual strength. We improve our ability to deal with even greater adversities.

Testing: As we look at another verse on "temptation" ("peirasmos"), let's remember that the meaning of temptation is broader than enticement to immorality or overt sin. Temptation includes enticement to mental sins and verbal sins. Stress, worry, hatred, anger, lust, selfishness, and the desire to get even are all mental sins and result from temptation. Let's look at I Cor. 10:13.

No temptation [testing, adversity] has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted [tested] above what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way to escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

God always provides an escape hatch so we can avoid succumbing to temptation and becoming involved in sin. What is that escape hatch? James 1:2-3 gives us the answer. How did James begin verse 3? "Knowing." The escape hatch is our knowledge of the word of God.

Let's look at another verse from the Psalms. We must be on guard, since Bible verses can lose meaning because of their familiarity, the glib way we quote them, and overemphasis on tangential applications. Psal. 119:11 is a familiar verse. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (*King James Version*). Christians often use this verse to encourage the memorization of Scripture. The meaning we lose by emphasis on memorization is that we should hide the truth from the word of God in our hearts. Truth hidden in our hearts is available for application in every circumstance of our lives. Memorization by itself, while good for discipline and keeping our minds sharp, does not make verses usable. We must know the meaning of the memorized verse. Only then can we apply God's word, increasing our spiritual strength and endurance.

In I Cor. 10:13 God promises that He will not allow us to be tested beyond what we are able to endure. Why then do we fail and commit sin? The answer: We choose to sin. We refuse to apply the word of God to adversity and testing.

God's escape hatch in testing includes his provision of a church with a pastor that teaches His word. God may have provided a believer with an excellent pastor who teaches the word,

but the believer may not like the pastor's personality. He may disagree with the pastor's sermons and claim not to understand them. Maybe the harshness of the pastor's voice grates on his nerves. So, he tries another church where the pastor's physical characteristics and personality are more acceptable, but the pastor's Bible teaching less so.

Another believer chooses a church because of its social program. The nicest people go there, or the most influential people in town go there. He says, "I can get ahead in my career at this church because I will meet all the right people."

I have heard more than one person say they get more out of their Sunday School teacher's lessons than they do from their pastor's sermons. In one situation the Sunday School teacher was a seminary graduate and a former pastor. Other teachers may lack formal training. Some Christians may focus on the social aspect of Sunday School and the personality of the teacher and ignore their pastor's teaching of God's word. God provides each of us as believers with a church and a pastor. We must choose which church to attend and our choice will have a major bearing on our spiritual growth.

God provides the way of escape by which we can overcome testing and adversity. What do we do? We ignore it. We play the proverbial Sunday morning round of golf. We do our "worship" and "communing with God" by admiring His creation. I call this proverbial because we hear this as a joke sometimes. Even so, some people do use this excuse not to attend church. Significantly, golfers are not the only ones making flimsy excuses for missing church. For many people Saturday is "party night," and Sundays are for "sleeping in." Another example is the person who works ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. He says, "This is the only time I have to sleep late."

God also provides believers with encouragement from other believers in the church. Look at Heb. 3:13 and 10:25.

But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.
Y not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some,

but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day approaching.

We have it easy today. We have not experienced the pressure and adversity the Hebrew believers in Jerusalem experienced before the invasion of the Roman Army under Titus. Still, we need encouragement from other believers. God provides us with Christian friends who encourage us in the application of the word of God that we have already learned.

Perfection: We now come to James 1:4. Sometimes I think translators persist in using the word "perfect" so pastors can appear learned by explaining that the word means "perfect" in the sense of "completeness." Greek lexicons do give "perfect" as a translation, but Arndt and Gingrich² add, "having attained the end or purpose, complete." When adversity tests a believer's faith, he should apply the word of God in order not to slip into sin. As he does this time after time, his spiritual strength develops more spiritual muscles until he finally arrives at this perfection about which James writes: "Not sinless perfection, but attaining the end or purpose, that is spiritual maturity. He can handle any exigency of life. He does not let adversities cause him to sin."

The Greek word for "perfect" also occurs in I Cor. 14:20. Different translations of I Cor. 14:20 read "mature," "men," and "adults" rather than "perfect."

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature.

Spiritual maturity involves mental activity. Spiritual maturity comes from thought.

Paul discusses the giving of gifts for the benefit of believers in Eph. 4. He mentions the function of the gift of pastor and teacher in verse 12. In verse 13 he gives the purpose of this gift:

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature [the same word, but again translated

William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957).

'mature', not 'perfect'] man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

We achieve spiritual maturity through the "unity of the faith." Believers today are subject to widely differing viewpoints and interpretations of Scripture. Achieving this "unity of the faith" is difficult because where there are differing viewpoints, false teaching and apostasy exist. The Bible commands us to seek pastors who accurately teach the word.

After the "unity of the faith" comes "the knowledge of the Son of God." These lead "to a mature man." We develop spiritual maturity by coming to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through the word of God. James elaborates on this process with the application of God's word to adversity: developing our spiritual strength to the point of spiritual maturity.

James 1:4 describes spiritual maturity as becoming "perfect and complete," and "lacking in nothing." Again, we find a parallel in Paul's epistles. Phil. 4:11-12 says,

Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Paul says he had to learn this principle. Contentment does not come naturally. James says that through the continued testing of our faith, we come to the place where we lack nothing. When we build our spiritual strength to spiritual maturity, then we lack nothing.

II Cor. 9:8 states the same principle:

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.

Paul wrote "God making all grace abound to" us. James 4:6 phrases it, "But He gives a greater grace." As we grow spiritually, we benefit more and more from God's grace. God's grace is always available at the 100% level, but as spiritually immature believers, we do not avail ourselves of the full potential of grace. Heb. 12:15

admonishes us, "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God."

Spiritual sufficiency: The last phrase in James 1:4, "lacking in nothing" concerns the situation of the Jewish believers to whom he was writing. James uses the Greek verb translated "lacking" two other times focusing on specific needs of these believers. In the next verse James writes, "If any of you lacks wisdom." Then in James 2:15, he says, "If a brother or sister is γ in need of daily food." "In need" is the same Greek word as "lacking." So James writes to believers that lacked either wisdom or daily food and says that they could actually lack nothing.

These believers had to flee from Jerusalem because of persecution including unfair lawsuits and confiscation of all of their possessions. Some had nothing at all. They lacked everything, but James is telling them that they can lack nothing. James' point is that material possessions are unimportant in comparison to spiritual blessings. A believer can be destitute from a material standpoint and yet lack for nothing spiritually.

"Lacking in nothing" also has meaning for eternity. At the judgment seat of Christ believers will receive crowns based on the production of gold, silver, and precious stones in their lives. "Lacking in nothing" includes our future inheritance in heaven, a subject I will discuss more fully in a later chapter.

Final comments. We need to understand four important points James 1:2-4. First, we are to know the word of God, without which we cannot advance spiritually.

Second, we must apply the word of God. James commands us to have an attitude of joy when we face adversity. That is, we are to be happy when we face various adversities. Joy and happiness result from applying what we know from the word of God.

Third, by knowing and applying the word of God, we develop spiritual strength and move toward spiritual maturity.

Finally, in spiritual maturity we reach the point of contentment with our circumstances. We live under the grace of God. Indeed, our lives lack nothing despite the paucity or the abundance of our material possessions. In eternity we will lack nothing of the spiritual blessings God provides in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3).

4 PRAYER

1:5. *But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

The context: We don't neglect the Epistle of James as much as we misunderstand it. Years ago I went to a particular college exam feeling ill-prepared. I prayed for help with the exam and made a good grade. Later, I used James 1:5 in a testimony describing the situation and God's answer to my prayer. Wisdom in this verse, however, is not academic knowledge that can be tested by college examinations. Furthermore, I had quoted a verse out of context and, as a result, had misconstrued its meaning.

James 1:2-4 comes before verse 5. James follows a logical sequence of thought. In verses 2-4, he commands his readers to "think it all happiness when we encounter various adversities." He follows this command with teaching that his readers already knew. By applying this teaching, the Jewish believers fulfilled the command to be happy and joyful in adversity.

The final clause of verse 4, "lacking in nothing," uses the same verb as the opening clause of verse 5, "if any of you lacks wisdom." James goes from the spiritually mature believer who lacks nothing, to the more typical believer who may lack wisdom. He gives a solution for this believer's lack of wisdom.

Wisdom: "If any of you lack wisdom." The word "If" introduces a conditional clause called a first class condition, which says, "If and it is true." "If any of you lack wisdom and you do." He says that some of these believers do lack wisdom, but he has already said in verse 3 that they know something. Wisdom, then, must be something more than mere knowledge. In the Greek knowledge and wisdom are two separate words with different meanings.

In their lexicon, Arndt and Gingrich state that "wisdom" in this verse means "Good judgment in the face of the demands made by human and specifically by the Christian life, **(practical) wisdom.**" [Emphasis added] The ability to apply the word of God is wisdom. Wisdom does not exist in a vacuum, but requires that we already have knowledge. We can have knowledge without wisdom, but we cannot have wisdom without knowledge.

Consider a situation in which you are having a difficult time. You are not sure what to do. You are facing adversities such as James mentions in verse 2. Now is the time for prayer. In this verse³ James does not say, "Go to the ladies' prayer group and ask them to pray for you"; or "Tell the church prayer meeting you have an unspoken prayer request." James writes, "Let him ask of God." When we have been faithful in learning the word of God under God's provision for us, we do not need to turn to others for prayer. Our friends and family should already be praying for us without our even asking them, as we have been praying for them. James says that we are to go to God in prayer for ourselves, asking Him for wisdom to work out our own situations.

³James 5:14 covers the subject of requesting prayer by the elders of the church. Requesting prayer by others is legitimate and is a means of spreading the blessings of prayer among believers. However, James 1:5 looks at the individual believer and commands him, first of all, to pray himself for wisdom in his application of God's word.

Prayer for wisdom is asking God to show us how to apply His word to our adversities. These adversities may be minor as the bites of a mosquito, or they may be major as a buffalo stampede in the old West. Either way, God provides solutions for developing spiritual strength through the application of His word.

Can a believer have wisdom without knowing the word of God? No. Wisdom requires that we first learn principles from the word. Prayer for wisdom is not for the believer who avoids the teaching of the word or rejects what his pastor has been teaching.

Answered prayer: This verse contains a promise of answered prayer. Of course, God always answers prayer. Sometimes God does not give us what we ask because it is not in His perfect plan for our lives. Here He promises wisdom "to all men generously and without reproach." God does not give wisdom where the basic raw material of wisdom does not exist. Where the raw material, the knowledge of His word exists, God will give wisdom in response to the prayer for wisdom. He does not scold, condemn, or discipline us because we have to ask Him for wisdom. In fact, God was pleased when Solomon asked Him for wisdom in II Chron. 1:10-12.

Verse 6 contains a requirement for all prayer. The believer must have knowledge of the word of God as the foundation for wisdom. God requires that believers "ask in faith without any doubting." "Blind faith" is an oxymoron. Faith must have an object. We place our faith in something. The unsaved person needs to place his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. The believer needs to place his faith in the word of God to advance in his spiritual life and glorify God. When we pray as believers, we exercise our faith in what we have learned from the word of God. We need faith that God will answer our prayer for wisdom because James teaches that God answers such a prayer. Then we know that our adversity will result in greater spiritual strength when we meet the adversity with happiness. With faith we can go to God in prayer for wisdom to apply His word, and we can expect God to answer.

How does God answer a believer's prayer for wisdom, if the believer does not understand the required principles from God's word? God does not inject a believer with wisdom like a doctor gives a flu shot. In this case, God answers the believer's prayer by providing the raw material for wisdom, the teaching of His word. The believer then develops wisdom by applying Biblical principles and proving his faith.

Final comments. James 3:13-18 returns to the subject of wisdom, as we will see in Chapter 22 of this Bible study. In this later passage James describes wisdom and shows his readers' lack of wisdom, beginning with the rhetorical question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?"

The believer who has been consistent in learning the word of God may still have trouble applying the word in every adverse circumstance. This is as it should be. Adversity that is not a challenge is not a trial that proves our faith. God promises that when we pray for wisdom, He will give us wisdom to handle adversity. He then provides this wisdom generously and without any condemnation or discipline. On the other hand, the believer who becomes frustrated in applying God's word to a particular adversity and does not seek God's wisdom through prayer will face the alternative. This believer's failure to apply the word and his failure to ask God for wisdom results in reproach and the absence of blessing from God.

The normal situation for all believers facing adversity is the need for God's help in applying His word. The believer who has been faithful in following God's plan for his life and in learning the word of God at every opportunity will still experience testing. Applying the word of God in testing and adversity advances our spiritual growth. Applying the word is not easy. That is why God gives us this prayer promise. We all need to pray for wisdom frequently in our spiritual lives.

5 FAITH

1:6-8. *But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

Faith is a requirement for all prayer. Faith is the basic element of the Christian life. Without faith, there is no salvation. Without faith, we cannot live the Christian life. Unless we have faith, God does not answer our prayers positively.

Living by faith: The New Testament quotes Hab. 2:4 three times: Rom. 1:17, Gal. 3:11, and Heb. 10:38. "But the righteous man shall live by faith."

Let's look at two more verses:

Rom. 14:23.

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

I John 5:4.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

These verses, out of hundreds, teach the importance of faith for the believer in Jesus Christ. From the word "faith" we can

move to synonyms such as "believe," "obey," "knowing," "consider it all joy," and many more. Faith is central to Christianity, whether it be for salvation or for living the Christian life.

The book of James and faith: As we shall see later in our study, James does not downplay the importance of faith nor does he emphasize a combination of faith plus works for salvation. James is writing to Jews who are already believers in Jesus Christ. They already have faith.

James 1:6 shows the importance of faith. We must pray to God in faith. Jesus said in Matt. 21:22: "And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive." God provides positive answers to our prayers when we base our prayers on what we believe from the correct interpretation of the word of God.

What is this faith with which we pray? James describes faith, "without any doubting." He gives us both sides of the coin: The positive side, "ask in faith"; and the negative side, "without any doubting." We cannot mix faith and doubt any more than we can mix oil and water. If we have doubts or questions, we do not have faith.

Faith and prayer: A person who has tried everything else and finally turns to prayer will probably find prayer as useless as everything he has already tried. Do you believe that God's word is true? Prayer is the expression of that faith. Where there is doubt, faith does not exist. I Cor. 5:6:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven
leavens the whole lump *of dough*?

Doubt is like leaven. Where even the minutest bit of doubt exists, faith cannot exist.

Let's review the context. James commanded, "Think it all joy (happiness), when you encounter various adversities." He has followed this command with the principle that the proof of our faith produces spiritual strength leading to spiritual maturity. Next

James tells his readers that if they cannot apply God's word to adversity, they should ask God for wisdom to make the proper application. Therefore, we find two conditions for a prayer of faith. We will find a third condition in Paul's epistles. These three conditions enable us to pray with faith.

Prayer and the word: The first condition for a prayer of faith is that we must know appropriate Biblical principles upon which to base our prayer. The principle James gives here is that the testing of our faith produces spiritual strength. Increasing spiritual strength develops spiritual maturity. James even reminds his readers that they already know this.

All prayer must agree with the word of God. The fourth chapter of James gives a reason God does not answer prayer. God does not answer prayer when we pray with wrong motives. For example, do not expect God to answer a prayer for revenge.

I John 5:14-15 illustrates the importance of knowing the word of God when we pray.

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

We know God's will when we know the word of God. How can we ask God for anything according to His will when we do not know His will? God reveals His will to us through His word.

Prayer and spiritual maturity: The second condition for a prayer of faith is the Christian's level of spiritual maturity. Believers who have exercised faith in the past in prayer and received positive answers from God have increased their spiritual strength and maturity. This spiritual strength provides greater faith and confidence that God will answer prayer.

Prayer and the Holy Spirit: The third condition for a prayer of faith is the function of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a part of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

This passage uses faithfulness in the sense of a life full of faith.

When we pray, we must allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives. Eph. 5:18 commands us to "be filled with the Spirit." Eph. 6:18 commands us to pray in the Holy Spirit.

With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Therefore God promises to give generously to all men who pray with the Holy Spirit controlling their lives through the word of God.⁴

Doubt: James describes the doubter as a person who "is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed about by the wind." Have you ever sat on the beach and watched the action of the waves? When the wind rises a little, the surf quickly becomes angry and rough. At times, our lives are like that. Everything appears peaceful and regular as the waves coming into the shore. Then a little adversity hits us, and like the sea changing with the direction and intensity of the wind, our lives become unstable and rough. James uses this apt description for the believer who lacks faith in the word of God.

Verse 7 summarizes the situation.

For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord.

God does not promise to answer the prayer of a person who has questions in his mind about whether the Lord will answer that prayer. Heb. 4:16 says:

draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

The Bible commands us to pray with confidence. A prayer of faith does not permit any doubt about God's answer.

⁴For a discussion of the filling of the Holy Spirit, see pages 67-71.

Double-minded: James 1:8 describes the believer with doubts as "a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." James is the only writer of Scripture who uses this word διψυχος (*dipsuchos*) translated "double-minded." The prefix δι- (*di-*) meaning "two" and the noun ψυχος (*psuchos*) meaning "soul" or "mind" make up this word. The English language derives "psychology" from the noun (*psuchos*). James calls a believer with doubts (a believer who is not strong in his faith) "double-minded," "unstable in all his ways."

James uses the word "double-minded" twice, once in this passage and again in James 4:8. Both times the meaning is the same. He refers to the instability of a believer who lacks faith in the word of God. The believer with doubts is unstable. He is double-minded. Double-mindedness reveals itself in many ways.

Paul wrote about the conflict between our flesh and our new spiritual nature in Rom. 7:14ff. Verses 14 and 15 say:

For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate.

In verse 19 he writes:

For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

In this sense, every believer is double-minded. He has fleshly desires that continually push him toward sin. To counterbalance the flesh, God gives the Holy Spirit to believers. The believer can choose to let the Holy Spirit control his life. The Bible calls this the filling of the Holy Spirit. James illustrates the conflict between our flesh and the filling of the Holy Spirit with the word "double-minded."

Bible teaching and double-mindedness: Paul mentions another type of double-mindedness. In Eph. 4:14-15 he uses a similar illustration: the waves of the sea tossing children around in the surf.

As a result, we are no longer to be children [childish or spiritually immature believers], tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ.

Spiritual maturity results from the teaching of truth, the word of God, in love. The immature believer hears one idea on the radio, another idea on television, a third idea from a special speaker at church or on a retreat, and on and on. Each time he hears new teaching, it sounds so good. He has never heard anything like it before. In his excitement, he decides to guide his life by this new and different teaching; that is, until he hears the next speaker.

In the context (Eph. 4:11) Paul mentions the gift of pastor-teacher. The idea here is the consistent teaching by a believer's pastor. Our pastors function with love for the Lord Jesus Christ and His word. This love is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), so their teaching is a result of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Personal gain that Paul describes as "trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" is not their motivation.

Paul warned believers in II Tim. 4 against dissatisfaction with the consistent teaching of the word of God by their pastors. He describes believers with "itching ears."

II Tim. 4:3 (*NIV*):

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

Paul warned in Phil. 3:17:

Brethren, join in following my example [the example Paul taught in his teaching], and observe those who walk according to the pattern [pattern of teaching] you have in us.

Then in Phil. 4:9 he wrote:

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me [Paul taught them the word of God], practice these things, and the God of peace shall be with you.

The word of God is the final arbitrator of the accuracy of the teaching we hear. God's word does not have contradictions. The mature believer knows what the Bible says and can discern correct teaching from what is false. On the other hand, false teachers toss the immature believer from one false idea to another. Immature believers are double-minded.

Mental instability and double-mindedness: The word "double-minded" also describes the stress of believers when they cannot handle adversity. James opens this message leading to the "double-minded man" with the command in verse 2 to "Think it all happiness when we encounter various adversities." He follows with a principle that believers can apply in obedience to this command. Then he gives us a prayer promise so we can pray for wisdom to apply the word of God to the adversity. Next, James describes the believer who fails to obey the command, as "double-minded." A double-minded believer is one who cannot properly deal with adversity. He is not happy under adversity. The believers to whom James is writing may not have prayed for wisdom, or doubt may have made their prayers ineffective.

The believer who does not properly handle adversity reacts with stress. His emotions are up and down. He bounces from one wrong solution to another. Adversity comes to this believer as outside pressure. His reaction to adversity becomes stress inside his soul. Stress appears as worry, frustration, depression, anger, loss of temper, or a desire to get even. Whatever form stress reaction takes, it is sin. This believer has failed the test. In the idiom of the late twentieth century, this believer is "stressed out." James calls him double-minded.

In James 4:8 we have the solution to double-mindedness. "Purify your hearts, you double-minded." We are commanded to remove the false teaching and false ideas, the worry, frustration, depression, and anger from our hearts and minds. This requires that we learn the word of God and apply it.

Final comments: James begins his letter in verse 2 with the subject of trials and adversities. The issue throughout the book of James is how to handle adversities. In verse 2 James commands us to meet adversities with joy from thinking about the end result of the tests. In verses 3-4 James reminds us of Bible teaching we should already know. The teaching is that believers grow spiritually through applying the word of God to adversities. Verse 5 tells us that if we do not know how to apply the word of God, we can ask God for wisdom.

James 1:6-8 emphasizes the importance of faith. Faith is not just the means of salvation, but the means by which a believer must live his life every day. The word of God provides the raw material upon which a believer builds his faith. Through learning the word and applying it, we grow stronger in our faith and overcome doubt. We are no longer unstable like the wind driven surf.

God answers our prayer of faith.

6

THE TWO FEUDING FACTIONS

1:9-11. *But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For 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.*

To glory: For the first time, James directly addresses the two feuding factions, the rich man and the poor man. He has a Biblical principle for each to apply and a command for each to obey. The command, "to glory," that James uses twice here and again in Chapter Four, appears in Paul's epistles about thirty-five times. None of the other writers of the New Testament use it. James 4:16 says, "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." The word translated "boast" in James 4:16 is the same word as "glory" in James 1:9.

In II Cor. 12:9, Paul writes about his thorn in the flesh:

And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

The Greek word for "boast" is the same word that the *New American Standard Bible* translates "glory" in James 1:9.

James is writing about our mental attitude as believers. He certainly is not telling us to go around and bore our friends and neighbors with braggadocio about our personal situations. God's

grace is sufficient. Whatever our particular thorn in the flesh is, God provides the necessary grace. In His infinite power God overcomes our weaknesses.

Therefore, James gives the same command to each of the two factions, the rich and the poor. Whatever our situation is, we are to focus on applicable Bible teaching, glorying in God's magnificent grace. God's grace provision for believers is something about which we can boast, not verbally, but in our mental attitudes.

The poor: Verse 9 calls the first faction, "the brother of humble circumstances." referring to a poor person. James calls him "brother," so we know that he is a believer. In referring to the poor believer in verse 9 James creates a contrast with the rich believer in verse 10.

James 4:6 again uses the word translated "humble."

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."

Besides James 4:6 the Greek word translated "humble" appears in other passages that shed light on its shades of meaning. Luke 1:52 is close to its usage in James 4:6.

He has brought down rulers from *their* throne,
And has exalted those who were humble.

In II Cor. 7:6 "depressed" is the translation of the same Greek word. "God who comforts the depressed." When the whole world goes against us and we find ourselves in "humble circumstances," God provides comfort for us in depression.

The Greek word translated "humble" has both positive and negative connotations (negative in the sense of depression and positive in the sense of humility. James 4:6 uses the word in its positive sense, while the use in James 1:9 is negative. These poor believers are depressed because of their circumstances.

The rich: Verse 10 mentions the second faction, "the rich man." We will see that James has a lot to say about these wealthy believers. Here he writes about their future humiliation. The Greek

word used for "humiliation" is another form of the word "humble" used in verse 9. James gives the same command to both the poor man and the rich man. They are to glory in God's provision and plan for their lives. They are not to be "hung up" on their personal situations that are subject to change.

The first command in this epistle is for the believer to be happy and joyful in adversities. James gives Biblical teaching for the believer to apply to reach this conclusion. Now he gives the command "to glory." He says, in effect, "Believers, be happy in adversity. Believers, whether you are rich or poor, have a mental attitude of boasting or glorying in the Lord."

Position: James commands the poor believer to "glory in his high position." He does not elaborate or go into detail. His readers knew the word of God. They understood their high position in Christ. This phrase might puzzle many believers today. "What high position?" "Isn't it terrible to be poor?" "I would not want to be in their shoes." We focus on our material possessions. We cannot fathom how a poor person can have a mental attitude of glorying about anything while he is in poverty.

Paul wrote in Eph. 1:3.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.

God has already blessed believers "in the heavenly places in Christ." Our high position is "in Christ." The believer living in humble circumstances and poverty has unimaginable blessings because of his high position in Christ. James commands poor believers to glory in their high position.

Priorities: What about the rich man? Doesn't he have this same high position? Of course, but his situation is different, and his problems and adversities are different. James also commands him to glory, but approaches glorying from a different viewpoint. The rich man is "riding high," so he is to glory in his humiliation. To put it colloquially, "Hey, rich man. You can't take it with you." God has blessed the rich believer with the same spiritual blessings

as the poor believer. These blessings are in the heavenly places in Christ for the rich believer as well as for the believer in poverty. The rich believer will not keep forever the earthly possessions he now considers important. James commands him to glory in his humiliation, in the future loss of his earthly possessions.

James touches on the rich man's priorities in James 1:11. "The rich man in his pursuits will fade away." He elaborates on the rich man's priorities in James 4:13-5:6. The rich man has given first priority to his material wealth and the pursuit of greater wealth. But material wealth is like a flower that blooms and then falls to the ground. It will disappear, leaving the rich man in humiliation. The first priority for all believers should be the glorification of Jesus Christ, through learning and applying His word.

The rich man's humiliation may not come until his death when he leaves all his precious earthly possessions behind and enters the presence of the Lord. Now he can glory in his heavenly riches as a believer. He may not receive the crown of life James mentions in verse 12. James goes on to say in 5:3 that all the treasure he has stored up on earth is destroyed. This is a different reference to the humiliation of the rich man, but still the riches of heaven are far better. Therefore, James gives the command to the rich man to glory in his humiliation.

The brother of humble circumstances also gives material possessions too high a priority. The poor believer, here, has focused on material possessions and needs to remember his high position in Christ.

Facing adversity: One lesson from these first verses of James is that each of us faces adversity in different ways. For the brother of humble circumstances, adversity is the lack of physical possessions and often the basic needs of life. James does not command him to apply for food stamps, to look for a better job or even to work harder. James' solution is for this poor believer to focus on the spiritual, that is, to "glory in his high position."

The rich believer also faces adversities. His humiliation can become a present reality in many ways, including family problems,

loss of health, recession and economic depression, natural disaster, and technological change. A builder once told me that he had made and lost five fortunes and was on his way up again. In James 5 we will see that the rich believer faces this potential for economic loss. James commands the rich man in James 1:10 to glory in his humiliation. Humiliation was coming to him in this life or the next with the loss and destruction of his material possessions.

Helping the poor: For believers the issue of a person's poverty or a person's wealth is false. If we were to find a way to distribute the food in this world equally so every one would have plenty to eat, what have we accomplished? Would every one be happy then? Would they live happily ever after and then cross over the river into a glorious eternity? Poverty is not the source of unhappiness and discontent.

Today many people have a concern for the poor and homeless. The Bible commands us to help those less fortunate than we are. When we do so, what is our motivation? Is it pity? Is it guilt because we have so much and they have so little? Is this the reason we help them?

For some people, helping others makes them feel good inside. This good feeling can arise from many different motivations. An arrogant person may help another to show how much better he is than the person he is helping. Another person has a different kind of arrogance. He has a poor self-image. By helping another person, he enhances his own self-image. Still another person may think that no one really likes him, and by helping another person he will earn his friendship.

Genetics plays a role in our lives. Some people have a natural and even a genetic bent toward helping others. Many doctors and nurses fall into this group.

The Bible commands all believers to help the poor. The motivation should come from the filling of the Holy Spirit and be an outflowing from the fruit of the Spirit. We should help from the motivation of love called the "royal law" in James 2:8. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." When the filling of the Holy Spirit

is our motivation, we know that the people we help have a higher need. More than food, shelter, and clothing, they need the gospel.

Spiritual issues come first: Here, in the first few verses of his epistle, James does not even mention that the rich man should help the brother of humble circumstances. James deals with the spiritual issues. "Think it all happiness, my brethren, when you encounter various adversities." Poverty is an adversity. "Let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position." "Let the rich man glory in his humiliation." James gives a command and provides teaching that the believer can apply to fulfill the command.

Final comments: James introduces two major factions that are at odds with each other. He gives each of them a different Biblical principle by which they are to obey the same command. They are to glory in their present circumstances.

Some translations of "glory" use "rejoice." In these three verses James expands on his first command, "Think it all joy." In the first command he gives a general principle to apply. Now he gives different principles applicable to the specific situation of the poor believers and the rich believers.

As believers, we should obey this command to glory in our present condition. It doesn't matter if we are rich or poor. God knows our situation. He has a plan for our lives and a future plan for us in eternity. True happiness comes not from removing adversities, but from living in obedience to God's commands. We overcome adversities through application of the word of God.

7

PERSEVERANCE

1:12. *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.*

In the first eleven verses of his epistle James does not mention sin. He focuses on adversity for which he gives three solutions. James commands believers in verse 2 to consider various adversities to be joy and happiness. Verses 5 and 6 say that we are to exercise our faith in God and His word through prayer. Verses 9 and 10 command us to glory in our situations by applying the word of God.

Perseverance: Now, in verse 12, James writes "Blessed [or happy] is the man who perseveres under trial [adversity]." In verse 3 we learned that we develop perseverance as we apply the word of God. Perseverance results from our growth toward spiritual maturity. The believer who has developed perseverance, which he uses to overcome the adversities in his life, is happy. Arndt and Gingrich give "blessed, fortunate, happy" as translations for this word translated "Blessed."

The previous chapter of this Bible study quoted Eph. 1:3:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ.

This verse in Ephesians is saying that God has already blessed us. God is holding these blessings in heaven, and they are "in Christ." Billions of years ago God developed a plan for our lives. That plan includes certain blessings.

James gives us another aspect of these blessings. The word "blessed" refers to our status on earth. Blessings can be ours, right now, while we are alive. They are ours when we persevere under adversity. Blessings from God are not just ours when we reach heaven. They are a part of the lives of believers who persevere under testing and advance toward spiritual maturity.

The blessings may not be material. We may be in humble circumstances before the blessings come, and we may continue to be in humble circumstances after they come. The result is the same in the life of the believer who is advancing toward spiritual maturity by persevering under adversity. In his mind and soul he is happy. He can say with Paul in Phil. 4:11-12:

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

Contentment in all circumstances does not come naturally. It doesn't just happen. Paul says, "I have learned." Believers must learn from the word of God "the secret of being filled and going hungry." Then they must apply what they have learned from the word.

We should ask ourselves, "Do I base my happiness on the quantity of my material possessions?" "Am I happy in difficulties and adversities?" The world offers happiness through material possessions, while the believer's happiness comes through knowing the word of God and applying it. Whether a believer is dying, has just seen a loved one die, is facing discrimination, has lost his job, or is in the hospital and will never recover from an automobile accident, he can be happy. Whatever the situation, even when everything is turning his way, the believer will not be happy until he learns and applies the word of God.

"Approved": We need to look at the statement, "for once he has been approved." The Greek word for "approved" comes from the same root as "testing" in James 1:3 and I Pet. 1:7. The *New American Standard Bible* translates the phrase in I Pet. 1:7, "the proof of your faith." James wrote in James 2:18b, "I will show you my faith by my works." In James 2:22 he wrote:

You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.

We can restate James 1:3-4:

knowing that the proof of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, \forall .

The "proof of our faith" is our works, our application of Bible teaching. When James wrote in James 1:12 "once he has been approved," he was referring to the proving of our faith. James is describing a believer who has persevered under testing. Perseverance is the proof of our faith.

Crown of life: James 1:12 gives another Biblical principle that the believer can apply to attain happiness. Happiness comes in persevering under adversity. Why be happy under adversity? Believers can be happy persevering under adversity, because the proof of their faith, makes them eligible to receive the crown of life. James 1:12 is the promise of a special blessing or reward in eternity. Not only can they be happy in all circumstances, but they can receive special blessing and reward in heaven.

The crown of life is more than the promise of eternal life. James teaches that the crown of life is for believers who persevere under trial and love the Lord. Therefore, God promises the crown of life as a special reward to believers who grow to spiritual maturity. John 3:16 gives the promise of eternal life in salvation:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John does not say anything about persevering under adversity to receive eternal life, nor does John say that God gives eternal life to those who love Him. The verse says that God gives eternal life to

those whom He loves. John tells the basis for receiving eternal life: "believe in Him" (Jesus Christ). James is telling believers that those who prove their faith through perseverance under adversity receive the crown of life.

Judgment Seat of Christ: Jesus Christ awards the crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ, where He judges believers according to their works. II Cor. 5:10 says:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Paul also writes about this judgment in I Cor. 3:12-15:

Now if any man builds upon the foundation [of Jesus Christ, see verse 11] with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

At the judgment seat of Christ, He will test our works by fire. Believers receive a reward when their work survives the fire. Even if all of a believer's works are wood, hay, and straw, and the fire burns up these works, the believer's salvation is secure. He has suffered loss, but he has not lost his salvation.

Why has he suffered loss? What does the believer have to lose? Remember Eph. 1:3? God has blessed us with "every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ." God has established a plan for our lives. This plan includes certain blessings in time and eternity, when we fulfill God's plan.

In Eph. 1:3 the word "blessed" is in the aorist tense (a past tense), instead of the present or future tense. God has already provided the blessings. But at the judgment seat of Christ, if all our works are burned up, we will never receive the blessings. We have lost the blessings that God provided for us, because we never matured spiritually. However, our salvation is secure. Paul wrote, "he himself shall be saved," so we still have eternal life. We have

lost the special blessings and rewards that James calls the crown of life.

Do you remember verse 10 where James wrote about the rich man and his humiliation? A believer appearing at the judgment seat of Christ will experience shame and humiliation as his works are destroyed by fire. Paul and John also wrote about this shame. I John 2:28 says:

And now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

In Phil. 3:19 Paul wrote about believers who were not living the Christian life:

whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

James writes that the rich man can glory in his humiliation at the judgment seat of Christ because even with the destruction of his works by fire and the loss of the crown of life, heaven is far better than all his earthly possessions.

In the context of the "proof of your faith" in I Pet. 1:7, Peter described the inheritance believers will receive in heaven. In I Pet. 1:3 he wrote that God "caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." This is our salvation, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life in heaven. Peter continued in the next verse:

to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

Our inheritance in heaven waits for us. This inheritance exists right now.

Look at how Peter describes the proof of our faith in verse 7. "More precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire." Paul wrote in I Cor. 3 about fire testing the "quality of each man's work." Fire destroys our wood and straw works, but the gold survives. Peter describes the proof of our faith as gold that survives the fire.

Our crown: We are studying James 1:12. When we persevere under testing, proving our faith, James says, we "will receive the crown of life."

The Greek word James uses for "crown" is στέφανος (*stephanos*). We derive the name "Stephen" from this word. It means "crown" or "wreath," referring to a wreath of olive leaves that a Roman general wore when he paraded through Rome after a military victory. In derision the Roman soldiers placed a crown or wreath of thorns on Jesus' head.

The winner in an athletic contest, such as the ancient Olympic games, received a victor's wreath, to which Paul refers in I Cor. 9:25.

And everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

Paul's analogy is obvious. We need discipline and self-control like the athlete who trains to compete in the Olympic games. Victors in the games today receive gold medals, but in Paul's day they received wreaths. The crowns the Lord Jesus Christ awards to victors in the Christian life, including the crown of life, are more than eternal life. The Romans awarded only a few victors' crowns. Every believer has eternal life, but not every believer will receive a crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ.

Crown in Revelation: In Rev. 4:4, twenty-four elders sit around the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ with golden crowns on their heads. Some say these elders are high-ranking angels. Others say they represent church age believers. Arndt and Gingrich call them "beings of high rank." What do these elders do with their crowns? In Rev. 4:10, they "cast their crowns before the throne." There is a saying, "Give credit where credit is due." The believer who receives a crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ can cast his crown in front of the throne of Jesus Christ, giving Christ the credit for the victory in the believer's life. Look again at what Peter wrote about the "proof of your faith" in I Pet. 1:7. "The proof of your faith *Y* may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at

the revelation of Jesus Christ." The believer without a crown will approach the throne without any gift for the King.

Rev. 14:14 describes Jesus Christ, "one like a son of man" as having a golden crown (*stephanos*, a victor's wreath) on His head. In Rev. 19:12, Jesus Christ also wears another type of crown, a *διάδημα* (*diadema*), transliterated "diadem." The meaning of "diadem" is more in line with what we think of as a crown, a crown worn by a ruler. Rev. 19:12 says:

And His eyes *are* a flame of fire, and upon His head *are* many diadems; and He has a name written *upon Him* which no one knows except Himself.

So Revelation pictures Jesus Christ as wearing a victor's wreath and wearing many crowns of rulership.

Rev. 2:10 mentions the "crown of life" again.

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.'

This verse pictures the undeserved suffering of unjustly imprisoned believers. The church in Smyrna receives the command to be faithful even to the point of martyrdom and death. Then Jesus Christ, the Judge, will give its members crowns of life. Again we see that the crown of life is a reward for believers who pass certain tests.

Believers in the church in Philadelphia, had already earned their crowns. Rev. 3:8 says that they have "a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name." They used the word of God and remained faithful through testing. Rev. 3:11 commands, "'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have in order that no one take your crown.'" A believer cannot lose his salvation, but he can lose his rewards and crowns.

Today many believers ignore the teaching of their pastor and neglect the word of God. When they face difficulties and adversities, they respond with a variety of human solutions instead of divine solutions. They become angry, blame other people and even God, or try to get even. These are just a few examples. What

they do not do is see a divine purpose in the difficulties and adversities. They fail to "think it all joy when they encounter various adversities."

Love: In the last clause of James 1:12, James elaborates on the crown of life, "which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Many people say "love" is the most common word and command in the Bible. Yet both believers and unbelievers often misunderstand and abuse the word "love."

A couple of examples will illustrate the problem. A young child asks his mother for a piece of candy. Although the child is overweight and prone to tooth decay, the mother gives him the candy. She knows if she doesn't, he will make a scene, and she is not up to handling a scene today. Another mother in the same situation of a child asking for candy may respond, "this is my child and I want to do something nice for him." So she gives him the candy. To the outside world the request of the children and the response of the two mothers was the same. However, one mother responded from a selfish motive and the other from love. To outside appearances both mothers were responding in love.

Another parent-child illustration has a disobedient child. In one case the parent responds in anger and spans the child. A second parent spans the child without anger, but in the same overt manner. A third parent says, "I don't believe in spanking. I discipline my child with love." Prov. 13:24 teaches:

He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

The Bible says that the parent who "disciplines his child with love" (sparing the rod), in reality hates his child. A parent who spans his child in anger also does not show love for the child.

A person who gives to the poor out of pity or a sense of duty or to impress other people is not responding in love. Yet from outward appearances, his actions do not differ from those of a person who gives to the poor in love.

The point is that love is an inward response to another person. Love proves itself only in the actions that it motivates. Yet other motives can and do produce the same actions.

Love for God: James 1:12 says that the Lord promises the crown of life to those who love Him. The crown of life is not a reference to eternal life for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. The Lord gives the crown of life to believers who persevere under trial and adversity. James describes the recipient of the crown of life as one who loves the Lord. A new believer in Jesus Christ, who has not grown sufficiently to develop his spiritual strength, cannot persevere. He must learn the word of God and apply it one step at a time to develop his perseverance.

Another promise to those who love God is Rom. 8:28.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

We can translate the words in the same way but stick closer to the word order of the Greek text:

And we know that to those who love God, He causes all things to work together for good, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

In the Greek text, the phrase "to those who love God" comes in a place of emphasis at the beginning of the sentence. God has called all believers according to His purpose, but not every believer lives in love with God.

Love and knowledge: Love is progressive. Phil. 1:9.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

Love abounds in knowledge and discernment. Discernment is the use of judgment, the application of knowledge to experience. Paul uses discernment here in Philippians in the sense of wisdom.

"Real knowledge" is one word in the Greek. The Bible has two similar Greek words for "knowledge." In Phil. 1:9, the word is *ἐπίγνωσις* (*epignosis*). The other Greek word for knowledge is

γνῶσις (*gnosis*). The Holy Spirit inspired the writing of the word of God, and the choice of words was not by chance. Epignosis is a stronger word than gnosis. Love abounds in epignosis, not in gnosis. Gnosis is mere academic understanding of a subject.

Epignosis is knowledge in which we have placed our faith. Knowledge that we apply in our lives. Kenneth S. Wuest, former teacher of New Testament Greek at The Moody Bible Institute, translates *epignosis* in Phil. 1:9, "accurate knowledge gained by experience." Academic understanding, *gnosis*, comes first. Then we must believe and apply what we have learned for *gnosis* to be useful. That is why James 1:3 says, "Knowing this" (*gnosis*), but then James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom." The believers to whom James was writing had an academic understanding of many Scriptural principles, but they were not applying them. They lacked wisdom. *Epignosis*. They had not proved by experience their faith in the Scriptural principles they had learned.

Love is not an emotion. Love may produce emotion, but love, itself, is a thought process. Our ability to think expands as we learn and apply the word of God and our love increases.

Final comments. The believer who maintains his faith under adversity and testing is happy. He has learned the word of God and applies it in his life. James describes him as loving the Lord and states that he will receive the crown of life at the judgment seat of Christ.

8

THE SOURCE OF TESTING

1:13-15. *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 any one. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

These three verses answer one of the enigmas of life that asks the question in one form or another: "If God created the world, did He also create sin?" James states clearly that God is not the origin of testing, temptation, adversity, or sin.

A four step process: James 1:13-15 presents a four step-process: lust, testing, sin, and death. Lust is the function of the flesh of man and the desires of the flesh. Each person is born of flesh ("That which is born of the flesh is flesh," John 3:6a). Paul lists the deeds of the flesh in Gal. 5:19-21. He said in Rom. 7:25 that with his mind he was serving the law of God, but in his flesh the law of sin.

Gal. 2:20 says:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me."

Believers have been born of the Spirit, "born again" or "from above" as John 3:7 says, but they still live in the flesh. The desires of our flesh that James calls "lust" are still part of our lives.

We have already seen how testing goes beyond temptation to sin and includes adversity. Testing, whether as temptation or as adversity, is not sin. Sin is the next step and occurs when we fail to persevere in our faith and succumb to the temptation. James says the believer is "enticed by his own lust." Our lust or flesh is the source of temptation and sin.

Death: The final step is death. For Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, death meant spiritual death, separation from God. No longer would God walk with them in the Garden in the evening. Sin broke their fellowship with God. However, God in His grace offered Adam and Eve the opportunity to reinstate that fellowship through faith in God for the forgiveness of their sins. God was their evangelist. Adam and Eve expressed their faith by giving up their fig leaves and wearing animal skins for clothes. The shedding of animal blood in this first sacrifice foreshadowed the death of Christ on the cross for our sins.

One key to understanding the epistle of James is to understand James' use of "death." James uses "death" or "dead" five times: in James 1:15, 2:17, twice in 2:26, and finally in James 5:20. Each of these references to death describes a similar condition. The two references in James 1 and James 5 involve sin. The references in James 2 do not mention sin, but discuss the absence of works. Death in James 1:15 is neither spiritual death, separation from God for eternity, nor physical death. The death in James 1:15 occurs during the believer's life on earth. When sin comes out on "top of the heap" in our lives, we are living under the control of our flesh. The Holy Spirit no longer controls our lives. We have lost the filling of the Holy Spirit⁵ commanded in Eph.

⁵I discuss the filling of the Holy Spirit in greater detail on pages 67-71.

5:18. According to the parallel passage in Col. 3:16, the word of Christ is not richly dwelling in us. James 1:21 mentions "the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." The fruit of the Spirit is absent from our lives. James describes the control of the believer's life by his flesh as "death."

God and temptation: "God cannot be tempted." How do we explain, then, Satan's temptation of Jesus Christ in the wilderness? Satan tempted the humanity of Jesus Christ. His humanity was temptable; but His Deity is not temptable. Heb. 4:15 also refers to the humanity of Christ.

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

Sometimes we hear the expression, "The devil is after me." The Bible gives a few examples of Satan tempting people. Three of the most familiar are the temptation of Adam and Eve, the testing of Job, and the temptations of Jesus Christ in the wilderness. Satan is not God. He is not an infinite being who can be everywhere simultaneously. He is not omnipresent, omnipotent, nor does he possess any of the other characteristics of God. Satan follows good management practice and concentrates his efforts where he can achieve the best results. Hence, Satan tempted Adam and Eve, Job, and the humanity of Jesus Christ. The average believer is not a target for Satan's temptations. Therefore, the expression, "The devil is after me" is contrary to the idea of Satan as a finite being. On the other hand, Satan can appoint one of his millions of demons to go after us as he did with Paul in II Cor. 12:7. Most of the time, even this is not necessary. Our own flesh does the work for him. Satan can send his demons after much bigger "fish."

Final comments. We learn from this passage that the source of temptation is our own flesh. Temptation is not sin, but to succumb to temptation is. When we fail to persevere under

THE SOURCE OF TESTING

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temptation and testing, we sin. We are "dead" in the sense that the Holy Spirit no longer controls our lives. We are living under the control of our flesh. Death is an apt description, since our lives are now no different from the lives of unbelievers. James will give the solution in verse 21:

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

"Filthiness" and "wickedness" describe functions of our flesh. God commands us to put them aside and to receive the teaching of His word.

9

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

1:16-18. *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.*

False teaching: False teaching existed in James day as it does today. He issued a warning against false teaching and a command for believers. "Do not be deceived, my brethren." The Greek construction of this command means that the readers are to stop letting false teachers deceive them.

Following the pattern of the previous commands, he reminds his readers of Bible teaching they have already learned. Specifically, he reminds them that "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above." God the Father is the believer's source of blessings.

While James' readers had already learned "Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above," they were also hearing false ideas from other teachers who claimed that God is the source of testing and temptation. James refutes this idea and states that the source of testing is the flesh of each believer that he

describes as "lust" in James 1:14-15. Now, James gives the explicit command, "Do not be deceived" by false teachers.

False ideas inundate believers today. They come at us from every direction. We hear false ideas at school. Our employers and bosses apply them. Radio, television, and newspapers present additional false ideas. The false ideas we hear from the pulpits of God's churches may be the most damaging. James' concern was not so much what believers were hearing from the world. His concern was what they were hearing from their own spiritual leaders. Believers need to find a pastor who is accurate in teaching the word of God and to listen consistently to his teaching.

Many passages of Scripture command us to avoid false teaching. Phil. 3:1-3 says:

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things *again* is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Paul had to repeat what he had already taught the Philippians. False teachers had confused them by teaching that salvation was by faith plus circumcision.

Examples: In his book, *So Great Salvation*, Dr. Charles C. Ryrie lists a sampling of expressions of the gospel taken from tracts, sermons, books, and radio and TV messages. Dr. Ryrie's sampling contains fifteen different statements of the gospel:⁶

(1) Repent, believe, confess your sin to God, and confess Him before men and you will be saved.

(2) The clearest statement of the Gospel in the New Testament is found in Luke 9:23: "If any man wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

(3) Perhaps the most comprehensive invitation to salvation in the epistles comes in James 4:7-10: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your

⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation. What It Means to Believe In Jesus Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), pp 23-24.

hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you."

(4) May the Lord reveal to the sinners that the only way for them to be saved from their sins is to repent with a godly sorrow in their hearts to the Lord.

(5) Utter the prayer of the prodigal son: Ask Jesus to be your Lord and Master.

(6) Come forward and follow Christ in Baptism.

(7) Place your hand in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus.

(8) Find Christ by praying through to Him.

(9) Believe in Him, trust Him, accept Him, commit your life to Him.

(10) We have the warning of Christ that He will not receive us into His kingdom until we are ready to give up all, until we are ready to turn from all sin in our lives.

(11) God offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to Him in humble, repentant faith.

(12) Do we literally have to give away everything we own to become Christians? No, but we do have to be willing to forsake all.

(13) Matt. 7:13-14 is pure Gospel: "enter by the narrow gate. Y"

(14) No one can receive Christ as his Savior while he rejects Him as his Lord.

(15) Give your heart to Christ.

Dr. Ryrie says,

Not all these statements are incorrect or equally good or bad. But they are not all saying the same thing. They are not expressing the same truth only in different words.

On page 26 of his book, Dr. Ryrie expresses the gospel by quoting two passages:

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures and Y He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

"These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

I Tim. 6:3-4a also warns against false teaching.

If any one advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; Y

I Pet. 2:1-2.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

In this passage, Peter describes false teaching as malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. He calls accurate teaching of the word of God "the pure milk of the word." These are descriptions not only of the content of the teaching, but also of the motivations of both teacher and hearer. Hypocrisy and envy can motivate both listeners and teachers.

Heb. 2:1 describes a gradual drift away from the truth. One speaker's interpretation may sound good, but it ignores the context. We may accept his interpretation. The next week on television we hear another nuance of the same interpretation and we drift a little farther from the truth.

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away *from it*.

II Cor. and false teaching: The entire eleventh chapter of II Corinthians warns us against false teachers. Read this chapter thoughtfully to understand fully what Paul is saying. I will touch on a few of the high points. Verse three describes Satan's basic attack: deceit, craftiness, lies, and false teaching.

But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

II Cor. 11:4 aptly describes the diversity of Christianity today. Even today, the readiness with which believers in Paul's day welcomed false teachers, called "a different spirit," still exists.

"You bear *this* [false teaching] beautifully."

For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.

Listen to Paul's sarcasm in II Cor. 11:5.

For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles.

These "most eminent apostles" to whom Paul refers were not apostles at all, as Paul makes clear in II Cor. 11:13. They were merely false teachers making self-serving claims to apostleship. II Cor. 11:13 says:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

In verse 6a Paul warns believers against deception by contrasting himself to fast talking and smooth talking preachers. But even if I am unskilled in speech, yet I am not so in knowledge; Y

In verses 7 and 8 Paul sets a high standard that we seldom follow today.

Or did I commit a sin Y because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you;

Paul does not sound like today's tele-evangelists. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and send money so we can continue these broadcasts." "If you would like a tape of today's broadcast please send \$5.00 to Y" Paul did not seek support from those to whom he was preaching the gospel.

Not only were the false apostles and deceitful workers guilty of false teaching in preaching "another Jesus," by implication from II Cor. 11:7-12, they were collecting money for their false preaching. The Bible commands us, as believers, to give for the support of the ministry. Pastors and evangelists have a right to receive financial support from believers. In this passage Paul describes the abuse of Christian giving by false teachers and evangelists seeking monetary gain.

Satan's servants appear as servants of righteousness according to II Cor. 11:14-15. Satan has his own counterfeit evangelists and pastor-teachers.

In the remainder of the chapter Paul proceeds to make comparisons, including the rhetorical question of verse 23:

Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so.

Jesus' warning: Jesus issued a warning against false prophets in a passage that contains a verse Christians often quote out of context. Matt. 7:20, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know

them" (*KJV*). Without looking at Matt. 7, can you answer the question, "Whose fruit?" Jesus began the paragraph in verse 15, "Beware of false prophets." He is still talking about false prophets in verse 22 when he said, "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?'" We are to identify true and false prophets by their fruit.

Now answer another question. "What is the fruit of a prophet?" The fruit of a prophet is prophecies that may be either predictions of the future or declarations of a message from God. Both the predictions and the declarations arise from a direct revelation from God. As I Cor. 13:8 says, "but if *there are gifts of* prophecy, they shall be done away." We have the completed canon of Scripture today. God does not make direct revelations to man. Therefore, as I Cor. teaches, prophecy no longer exists.

Since prophecy does not exist today, Jesus' message in Matt. 7 was meant for the Age of Israel, not for the Church Age. Once we properly interpret the passage, however, we can make application. The closest thing we have to prophecy today is the preaching and teaching of God's word. How many times have you heard a person comment on a preacher's message and quote "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them?" If you are like me, not often. Christians apply this verse most often to another person's actions and alleged sins. What kind of fruit do believers produce when they take this verse out of context and misapply it? However, misapplication of Scripture by believers is not what Jesus was talking about when He said "by their fruits ye shall know them." Of course, a believer who quotes this verse out of context to encourage another believer to alter his actions, is stepping into the role of a judge and comes under the warning of Matt. 7:1-6. He sees the speck in his brother's eye and misses the log of misapplication and false interpretation of Scripture in his own eye.

Deut. 18:20-22 discusses false prophets.

'But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, γ , that prophet shall die.' γ "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken."

"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." The "fruit" here refers to the prophecies and teachings of prophets. Are their prophecies 100% accurate? If not, they are not from God. The Old Testament Law required the execution of false prophets. How about their teaching? Does it agree with the word of God? We do not have laws today for the execution of false teachers, but how long should we listen to their teaching?

James begins verse 16, "Do not be deceived." "Don't let false teachers of the word of God deceive you." James reminds his readers that they have already learned the truth. They needed to recall what they knew, so that false teachers would not confuse and deceive them. The false teachers erroneously described the character of God. James refutes their descriptions in James 1:17:

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation or
shifting shadow.

IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

We know from God's immutability that God has fulfilled or will fulfill every one of His promises. We know that the entire Word of God is as true today as it was 2,000 or 5,000 or even fifteen billion years ago.

Peter believed God would fulfill his promises. II Pet. 3:3-4 warns us against false teachers who claim otherwise.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

Peter saw mockers and deceivers who denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, because He did not overthrow the Romans and set Himself on David's throne. These false teachers were so anxious for the second advent of Jesus Christ that they completely ignored His first advent. Peter had not forgotten God's promises. Peter knew that God was unchangeable and would keep His promises.

Phil. 1:6b, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus," teaches God's immutability. At the time of our salvation, God begins His good work in us, and He will finish that work. There is nothing that anyone, including ourselves, can do to interrupt the completion of God's plan for our lives. We cannot lose our salvation. God is not an "Indian giver" who gives us salvation and then takes it back because we change our minds and reject our faith. We are born again into His family when we believe in Jesus Christ. We learn from God's immutability that even if we leave home as prodigal sons, God does not reject us as members of His family.

Immutability: James 1:16-18 also teaches the character of God. First, God is unchanging. Verse 16 says, "with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow." Heb. 13:8 teaches, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." God's character is unchangeable and immutable. The immutability of God is further described in the box above.

The sovereignty of God: The next characteristic of God we find in this passage is His sovereignty. Verse 18 begins, "In the exercise of His will." "His will" describes the sovereignty of God. By His sovereign will God chose us for salvation.

Salvation is the work of God. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins. Rom. 5:8.

But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for us. God offers to forgive us, but from man's point of view we must accept this forgiveness. We must believe in Jesus Christ. John 1:12.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe on His name.

The Holy Spirit works our salvation through His convicting ministry. John 16:8-11.

And He, when He comes will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

We often misunderstand this passage. Does "sin" in John 16:8 describe personal sins or does it describe rejection of Jesus Christ as Saviour? If we answer personal sins, then we are ignoring the explanation of sin in the next verse, "concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me." The Holy Spirit convicts us of the sin of not believing in Jesus Christ. Why? Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross as a substitute for us. Our sins, for which Jesus Christ died, are not the issue in our salvation. The issue is the sin of rejection of Jesus Christ as our Savior. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

The Holy Spirit also convicts us of righteousness. Whose righteousness? He convicts us of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, because He has gone to the Father and is no longer on earth for us to see. Our own righteousness does not measure up to Jesus' perfect righteousness. Our righteousness is inadequate to be acceptable to God for salvation. We do not earn or deserve salvation. Therefore, when we believe in Jesus Christ, God imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. The Holy Spirit convicts man that man's righteousness is not equal to the righteousness of Christ.

Finally, the Holy Spirit convicts us of judgment because God has judged Satan, the ruler of this world. If God has judged Satan, He also will judge unbelievers.

James 1:18, "In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth," refers to regeneration. We are born again by a willful act of God. Every birth, whether the physical birth of a

newborn baby or the spiritual birth of a believer in Jesus Christ, requires the creative work of God.

II Tim. 1:8-9 says,

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

These verses in II Timothy tell us that salvation is the work of God. He saved us and called us, "according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." The Bible commands us to believe in Jesus Christ, but only the grace of God makes faith possible for us. We hear the gospel, but the Holy Spirit makes it understandable. We believe in Jesus Christ, but only the work of the Holy Spirit, makes faith possible for us. Salvation is the work of all three members of the Trinity from beginning to end. James says, "He brought us forth by the word of truth."

James clearly says that God creates the new birth through the agency of the word of truth. All the false teaching in the world will not help anyone come to know God and receive eternal life. Sincerity is not an issue. A person sincere in his erroneous beliefs will spend eternity in Hell. Do you think that God was not sincere when He said in John 3:18, "he who does not believe has been judged already?" Was God not sincere when He said in I John 5:12, "he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life?" When we witness to unbelievers, the Holy Spirit uses only the truth of God's word to bring the unbeliever to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. The gospel message in its most succinct form in Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved." **"Believe on the Lord Jesus."** This is the gospel in five words. When we add conditions to this simple message, we are sidetracked on irrelevant issues, or worse yet, presenting a false gospel.

Final comments. James 1:16-18 emphasizes the importance of accurate teaching of the word of God. Verse 16 commands us,

"Do not be deceived." Verse 18 reminds us that we have received salvation by the act of God through the word of truth. False teaching of the word can deceive believers. Unbelievers cannot receive salvation unless they first hear an accurate presentation of the gospel.

10 GOOD LISTENING AND ANGER DO NOT MIX

1:19-21. *This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.*

A command! The word "know" is a command in the imperative mood. Williams⁷ translates the verb, "You must understand this."

Did James write the command of verse 19 simply to define a great principle or did he write because he saw a failure in his readers? In James 1:9-11 we saw the feud between the two factions of Jewish believers. This feud grew to such proportions that it interfered with spiritual growth. James' readers were so busy thinking about their problems that they never heard a word that their pastor was teaching. They were speaking out in church about their grievances.

Listening: Rev. A. M. Fausset has this to say about James 1:19-21:⁸

⁷Charles B. Williams, *The New Testament, A Private Translation in the Language of the People*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1953.

⁸Robert Jamieson, D.D., A. R. Fausset, A.M., and David Brown, D.D., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. (New York: S. S. Scranton and Company, 1875), Vol. II, page 485.

"But (consequently) let every man be swift to hear," i.e., docile in receiving "the word of truth" (v. 18,21). Υ Slow to speak authoritatively as a master or teacher of others (cf. church. 3. 1): a common Jewish fault: slow also to speak such hasty things of God, as in v. 13. Υ **slow to wrath** Υ TITTMANN thinks not so much "wrath" is meant, as an *indignant* feeling of *fretfulness* under the calamities to which the whole of human life is exposed: this accords with the "divers temptations" in v. 2. Hastiness of temper hinders hearing God's word: Υ

James goes straight to the issue. "But let every one be quick to hear." Listen to what your pastor is preaching. Put your problems on the "back burner" of your mind. Concentrate on what your pastor is teaching from the word of God.

Speaking: "Slow to speak." James will return to this subject in 3:1. "Let not many of you become teachers." James wrote to some believers, particularly those of humble circumstances, who thought they had all the answers. They were anxious to stand in front of the congregation and present instant solutions. James commands them to be "quick to hear, slow to speak." He tells them to "back off" and not let their problems cause them to neglect the teaching of the word of God.

Maybe some were even taking the Lord's name in vain, standing in front of the congregation and saying something equivalent to, "The Lord spoke to me last night. He told me that the church should do thus and so."

James had the believers of humble circumstances in mind when he wrote these three verses. The poor believers were bitterly envious and outspoken in their complaints against the rich believers. The rich believers were too busy pursuing their selfish ambitions to waste time bellyaching about their poorer rivals. James does not specifically address the poor believers, however, because the teaching in these verses applies to every believer. How do we react to personal conflicts? Do we speak too loudly and too soon to defend ourselves or to get even?

Anger: "Slow to anger." The rich members of the congregation were maltreating the believers of humble circumstances, who reacted with the emotional sin of anger. James reminds us "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." As a sin, anger is the antithesis of God's righteousness. A person who is angry is not controlled by the Holy Spirit. The lusts of his flesh dominate his life. An angry believer is unable to please God. An angry believer does not listen to the teaching of the word.

When your pastor's sermon points out a sin or failing in your life, do you react in anger? Do you welcome the teaching of God's word and the opportunity to learn more about the Christian life only as long as the pastor preaches about someone else's sins?

Anger may show itself in the believer's speaking during the worship service. This speaking may be a whisper, or a passed note during the pastor's message, or maybe he gives a testimony, announces a rally where the poor can stand up for their rights, or teaches a Sunday School class. However he expresses his anger, the Holy Spirit does not control his life. The angry believer is not listening to the teaching of the word. Instead he is speaking himself, when he should be listening.

The filling of the Holy Spirit: I refer often to the filling of the Holy Spirit and a believer letting the Holy Spirit control his life. What do these phrases mean? Believers talk about the filling of the Holy Spirit much more than the Bible does. Only once does the Bible command believers to "be filled with the Spirit." Eph. 5:18.

Peter uses the same Greek word for "filled" in his condemnation of Ananias in Acts 5:3, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" Ananias was a believer. He was not Satan-possessed. Peter did not condemn Satan. He condemned Ananias. Peter did not exorcize, cast out, or bind Satan. By Peter's reference to Satan, we know that Satan had influenced Ananias. In Acts 5:4, Peter continued his condemnation

COMMENT

Comment [1]: The discussion on the filling of the Holy Spirit begins here.

of Ananias adding, "Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?" Ananias had decided himself to allow Satan to influence his life.

The word "filled" in Eph. 5:18 and Acts 5:3 conveys the idea of the control or domination of a Christian's life by the influence of the Holy Spirit or Satan. He or she allows this control to occur. Satan cannot force His will over ours, and the Holy Spirit does not force His will upon us. Therefore, the command "be filled with the Spirit" is an appeal to our volition to let the Holy Spirit control our lives.

In his gospel and in the book of Acts, Luke refers other times to the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 1:15,41,67 and Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; and 13:9.) However, Luke uses a different Greek word for "filled" from the word Paul uses in Eph. 5:18. Are Paul and Luke both talking about the same filling of the Holy Spirit? We jump to the conclusion that they describe similar manifestations of the Spirit because our English translations all translate the two Greek words, "fill."

In Eph. 5:19-22 Paul follows his command to "be filled with the Spirit" with these words describing the filling of the Spirit:

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Now, look at Col. 3:16b-18.

teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

The similarity between the two passages is unmistakable. Does Col. 3 describe the filling of the Holy Spirit? Paul only mentions the Holy Spirit once in the epistle of Colossians near the beginning of the first chapter. How does Paul lead up to these verses beginning "teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *Y*?" Col. 3:16 begins, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing *Y*"

COMMENT

Comment [2]: I ask a question, but where do I answer the question?

Being "filled with the Spirit" and letting "the word of Christ richly dwell within you" produce the same result. Could we apply a mathematical principle at this point? Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other.

The context of Eph. 5:18: Let's look at some verses in the context leading to Eph. 5:18, beginning with Eph. 4:13-15.

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ.

These verses warn against false teaching called "every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." They also teach that we attain spiritual maturity through "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God." Spiritual children (immature believers) are "tossed here and there, and carried about by every wind of doctrine." We grow spiritually when the truth is spoken (taught) in love.

Eph. 4:17.

This I say, therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind.

The word, "Gentiles," describes unbelievers. They walk in the futility or emptiness of their mind. Verse 18 says that their understanding is darkened, and mentions "the ignorance that is in them." Why are unbelievers this way? "Because of the hardness of their heart." They do not want to believe in Jesus Christ.

Verse 20 talks about our learning Christ. In verse 21, we "have heard Him, and have been taught in Him." Verse 23 says, "and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind."

In verse 25, Paul is still on the subject of false teaching.

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH, EACH ONE, *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members one of another.

In verse 14, Paul opened the discussion on false teaching by warning believers against being "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming." Now he commands them to "lay aside falsehood" and to "speak truth." He goes on in Eph. 4:29-30a to say:

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.

Does Paul's reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 30a mark a change to a new subject, or is there a relationship between speaking unwholesome words and grieving the Holy Spirit? Eph. 4:15 tells us to speak "the truth in love." In verse 17 we are not to walk as the Gentiles "walk, in the futility of their mind." Now, look at Eph. 5:2a. "And walk in love." Paul has not moved on to a new subject. There is continuity of thought throughout this passage.

Contrast the speaking of a "*word* as is good for edification" in Eph. 4:29 with "silly talk" and "coarse jesting" in Eph. 5:4.

and *there must be no* filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

The Ephesians knew the word of God. Eph. 5:5a says, "For this you know."

In Eph. 5:6, Paul again warns against false teaching.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

Eph. 5:10. "Trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."

Eph. 5:15. "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise." Paul tells us not to walk as the Gentiles "walk, in their futility [emptiness] of their mind" (4:17), but to speak "the truth in love" (4:15) to "walk in love" (5:2). We are to walk as wise men, not as unwise (5:15).

Eph. 5:17 commands us to "understand what the will of the Lord is."

These verses in Eph. 4 and 5 precede Paul's command to "be filled with the Spirit." I have cited these verses to show that Paul is writing about the importance of the word of God in the believer's life. We are not to let false teaching deceive us. We cannot grow spiritually unless we learn the truth.

The results that Paul assigns to the filling of the Spirit in Eph. 5:18ff are substantially similar to the results in Col. 3:16ff ("letting the word of Christ richly dwell within you"). Paul goes to great lengths in Eph. 4-5 to warn against false teaching and encourage growing in the word. Then he commands, "be filled with the Spirit." He even tells us that learning Christ (4:20) is being "renewed in the spirit of your mind (4:23)." The filling of the Holy Spirit is synonymous with "letting the word of Christ richly dwell within" us. The filling of the Holy Spirit commanded in Eph. 5:17 means the control of our lives by the Holy Spirit as opposed to control by the lusts of our flesh. How does the Spirit control? He controls through the God's word that we have learned.

Paul's prayer: Listen to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and, by application, for us in Eph. 3:16-19. Notice the relationship between the power of the Spirit in our lives (faith, love, comprehension) and knowledge.

that he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through **faith**; and that you, being rooted and grounded in **love**, may be able to **comprehend** with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the **love** of Christ which surpasses **knowledge**, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God. [Emphasis added.]

The Greek word for "knowledge" is *gnosis*. Earlier, I discussed that *epignosis* is experienced knowledge (see page 50), knowledge that the believer applies in his own life. "To know the love of Christ which surpasses" *gnosis* is to have experienced knowledge. We are "strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner man."

The filling of the Holy Spirit and applied knowledge of the word of God are inseparable. Without accurate knowledge of the

word, the believer is unable to yield his life to the control of the Holy Spirit.

Paul's prayer in Eph. 3:16-19 has a sequence.

- ◁ First, we are "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man."
- ◁ Next, "Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith." Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we cannot be saved. The Holy Spirit must make the gospel clear and understandable to us, and then He gives us the faith to believe in Jesus Christ. Spiritual growth occurs through the same process. The Holy Spirit builds on each bit of Bible teaching we know, strengthening us with His power. Through this work of the Holy Spirit, "Christ dwells in our hearts through faith." Faith in what? Faith in the accurate knowledge of God's word.
- ◁ The next step in the sequence: "rooted and grounded in love." This describes the foundation on which the Holy Spirit builds our spiritual maturity.
- ◁ Next, we are able to comprehend. We build on the foundation of love to learn the full extent of the love of Christ. This comprehension of the love of Christ is not mere academic knowledge (*gnosis*) but experienced knowledge (*epignosis*).
- ◁ Finally, we are "filled up to all the fulness of God." "Filled" and "fulness" are the same Greek word and word stem that Paul uses in the command in Eph. 5:18, "be filled with the Spirit."

Again, we can see from Paul's prayer, the inseparability of the filling of the Holy Spirit with letting "the word of Christ richly dwell within" us.

Christians, today, have more than one theology built around interpretations of the filling of the Holy Spirit. Some of these theologies focus the entire Christian life on the filling of the Spirit. Generally, the theologies do not distinguish between the Greek word for "filling" used by Luke in his gospel and in Acts and the different word used by Paul in Eph. 5:18 where we have the only time Scripture commands us to be filled with the Spirit. The Bible

only has to give a command once. However, when we study the command in its context and compare it with the parallel passage in Col. 3, the significance of the command takes on a radically different image from many of the theologies of the Christian life built around the command.

What does this discussion of the filling of the Holy Spirit have to do with James 1? Verse 19 commands us to be "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." Then verse 20 commands, "putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted." "Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness" is rejecting the domination of our lives by the lusts of our flesh. Receiving "the word implanted" is letting "the word of Christ *richly* dwell within us." James is describing the filling of the Holy Spirit. We turn control of our lives over to the Holy Spirit who works through the word of God. Our pastor implants or teaches us the word of God.

Submit to God: James 4:7 tells us to "Submit therefore to God." "Submit" is the same imperative verb that Paul uses in Eph. 5 and Col. 3. We submit by obeying God's word. We cannot be filled with the Spirit apart from obedience to the word of God. We cannot obey the word of God without knowing what the word of God says.

Anger: In verse 21 James commands us to put "aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness." To what is James referring? "Filthiness" and "wickedness," are adjectives that we associate today with certain obvious sins. The terms as James uses them are a generalized description of any sin. Specifically, the sin he has mentioned in the preceding two verses is the believer's anger. Anger is so commonplace that we often do not identify it with filthiness and wickedness.

Arndt and Gingrich translate "filthiness" as "*dirt, filth*," figuratively, in the ethical field *moral uncleanness, vulgarity*." In Rev. 22:11, John uses two similar words: "let the one who is filthy, still be filthy." From the context the word "filthy" is a general

description of sin rather than a specific sin. James 2:2 uses the same noun translated "filthy" in Rev. 22:11 saying "and there also comes in a poor man in dirty [filthy] clothes." Anger can pollute our lives and often motivates additional sins. "Wickedness" describes the evil character of the sin of anger. Anger prevents believers from growing spiritually. Furthermore, continued anger can lead to additional sins.

James wrote to believers who needed to put aside their anger and be controlled by the Holy Spirit. The next step was to "receive the word implanted." Their pastor was doing the planting by teaching the word. The emotional sin of anger rendered them unable to receive the word. The word for "receive" is in the imperative mood. James 1:21 commands them to receive the implanted word.

James 1:21 applies to Christians today. We should not neglect the teaching of the word of God, but seek a church that teaches the word. What is the sin that pollutes my life? Anger was polluting the lives of some believers to whom James was writing. If anger or any other sin is polluting my life and preventing me from growing spiritually through the teaching of God's word, then I should put the sin aside.

Save your soul: Finally, the last clause of James 1:21 tells us the result of receiving "the word implanted." "The word implanted" "is able to save your souls." Five times James uses the Greek word σωζω (*sozo*) translated "save." In none of these times does "save" refer to eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. James is writing to those who already had eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. He is not writing "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved." He tells believers to put aside the sin and receive the teaching of the word of God. The solution to the adversities and problems of life is the deliverance that his readers need now. James is telling them that solutions can only come through living their lives filled with the Holy Spirit. This believer grows spiritually by learning and applying the word of God. The

salvation that James says is able to "save your souls" is not the relief of their physical suffering, but spiritual relief through the application of God's word. Do you remember the first command in this epistle? "Think it all happiness, my brethren, when you encounter various adversities."

The believers of humble circumstances were trying to solve their problems through various human solutions. They were angry. They were criticizing the rich believers who were treating them unfairly. They were outspoken in the church on the subject. If they had lived in the latter half of the twentieth century, they would picket the places of business of these rich men. They would promote boycotts of the rich men's products.

While the command in verse 21, "putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted," is for all believers, there was a specific application to the believers of humble circumstances. Put aside your anger, this filthiness and all your evil strategizing. Listen to the teaching of the word of God.

Paul wrote in Phil. 2:12:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Like James, Paul is not using the word "salvation" here in the sense of eternal salvation from the penalty of sin, but in the sense of solving problems arising from daily pressures and adversities.

James commands, "receive the word implanted in humility." We can only learn the word of God when we are humble. We have to be teachable. If our attitude is "I know all that" or "I've heard that before" or "I don't need all that Bible stuff," we will be unable to learn anything from the pastor's message.

By contrast, James wrote to believers who were "all tied up in knots" inside. They were angry. They were not listening to the word of God. Many of them were talking themselves instead of listening. Their anger, inability to hear, and constant talking

COMMENT

Comment [3]: This word not in the dictionary.

reflected not humility, but arrogance and pride. "How dare these rich men do this to me!" "I'll show them!"

I have already described anger as an emotional sin. Now we see that anger is also a sin of arrogance and pride.

"Save your souls" also has a future meaning. When believers apply the implanted word in their lives, they produce spiritual fruit that appears at the judgment seat of Christ as gold, silver, and precious stones. The implanted word, therefore, also saves our souls in the sense of delivering our inheritance to us at the judgment seat of Christ.

Final comments. We all face situations of unfair treatment or perceived unfairness arising from personal conflicts. We need to continue to listen and apply the teaching of the Word of God. James commands us to be good listeners. We won't learn anything from the pastor's message when we are "all tied up in knots" with anger. God commands us to put our anger aside and listen to the teaching of the word of God in humility. In this way we will learn and can apply God's solutions to adversities and difficulties that arise from personal conflicts.

11 DOERS OF THE WORD

1:22-25. *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 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 shall be blessed in what he does.*

Believers often quote the first verse of this passage out of context. We hear, "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only." The person glibly quoting this verse often tries to downgrade the importance of the teaching of the word of God.

Too much learning: Some people warn against becoming "stagnant Christians," always taking in the word of God. They say that when we are always learning the word, we become like the Dead Sea. The water flows in, but never flows out and we become saltier and saltier.

Let's compare this analogy with another illustration. A Christian who constantly learns the word of God is like a cup into which the Lord is pouring knowledge of His word. Psa. 23 describes an overflowing cup. The analogy follows that as a believer fills the cup of his soul with the word of God, eventually it overflows in application of the word. Isa. 55:11 says:

So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
 It shall not return to Me empty,
 Without accomplishing what I desire,
 And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it.

A believer's learning of the word of God is never empty. God has commanded us to learn His word. God has a purpose for us in learning His word. God always accomplishes His purposes.

Even in the Dead Sea analogy, the water may not flow out, but it does leave. It evaporates. If it did not evaporate, eventually even the Dead Sea would overflow. The evaporation of water from the Dead Sea is a natural phenomenon fulfilling the purpose of God. As such, evaporation represents application of the word and accomplishes the purpose of God.

People who toss James 1:22 around and imply that a believer can learn too much of the word of God misunderstand James' message. The command in James 1:2-3 sets the style by which James follows a command with teaching from the God's word that the believer already knows. He mentions the teaching briefly but does not elaborate. Elaboration is unnecessary because the believer is already familiar with the principle. The command that James gives is an application from God's word. James repeats this style in James 1:9 and James 1:10-11 and at least six more times in the epistle.

James 1:16 warns us about deception by false teaching. James 1:19 commands us to listen to the teaching of the word of God. Then verse 20 gives a Biblical principle, the basis of the command, repeating the style of James 1:2-3 again. Finally, verse 20 commands us to receive the word implanted.

Not enough doing: After references to Biblical principles that James' readers already know and to commands to apply these principles, James commands in verse 22, "But prove yourselves doers of the word." No question about it, these believers were negligent in applying the word of God. That is why James needed to write not only this verse, but the entire epistle. He is not saying that they should stop learning the word of God or even slow down

COMMENT

Comment [4]: James uses this device apparently 9 times: 1:3, 1:9, 1:10, 1:16-17, 1:19, 2:5, 3:1, 4:4, 5:8. Perhaps oftener.

their learning. Look at the next clause, "and not merely hearers." We can be hearers and also doers. In fact, that is the normal status for believers. However, we cannot be doers without also being hearers.

A person who is a hearer but not a doer of the word deludes himself. When we listen to Bible teaching, but fail to apply it, we delude ourselves by thinking that we have pleased God. There is no spiritual benefit to just hearing the teaching of the word of God and then failing to do anything about it.

This verse emphasizes the need for a balance in the believer's life. A believer needs to hear and learn the word of God. Then he can apply what he has learned.

The word translated "prove" is a common Greek word. The *King James Version* translates it "be." "Become" is the standard Greek vocabulary translation. Wuest translates the verb, "keep on becoming." We are to keep on becoming doers of the word. As we learn the word of God, we are to keep on applying the word. Do not separate the two. Learn the word. Apply the word. This verb is a command "keep on becoming doers of the word."

"Keep on becoming" is in the middle voice. In English, we have both the active voice and the passive voice referring to whether the subject of the verb does the action (active voice) or the subject receives the action of the verb (passive voice). In the Greek middle voice, the subject does the action but also participates in the result of the action. Since this is an imperative mood, the subject is an implied "you." "You (believers) keep becoming doers of the word and not merely hearers." The middle voice tells us that when we become doers of the word, we are not only doing the action, but we also participate in the results of the action. By applying the word, the poor Jewish believers were delivering their souls from adversity. Although adversity still physically existed, the implanted word of verse 21 delivered their souls, not their bodies. The application of God's word relieved the stress in their souls that revealed itself in anger and their inability to be quick to hear Bible teaching.

If the poor believers had been applying the word, they would not have been angry. If the rich believers had been applying the word, they would not have created the problems about which the poor believers were complaining. Ask yourself, "What personal conflict is causing me to be angry?" Or, "Is another believer angry with me because of some conflict between us?"

Looking at mirrors: In verse 23 James uses a mirror as a metaphor. We all know what a mirror is. In James' day, mirrors did not give the "mirror perfect" reflections that mirrors give today. They gave imperfect reflections. I Cor. 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror dimly."

James' illustration has a person looking at an image of himself in a mirror. He sees his outward appearance, but ignores the inner self. He disregards his soul and the spiritual aspects of his life. He goes through the motions of hearing for the sake of outward appearances. Once he is out of the pastor's sight, he completely forgets everything he has heard.

The law of liberty: Verse 25 describes the word of God as the "perfect law, the *law* of liberty." The adjective "perfect" describes the completeness of the word of God. God's word needs no additions. Also, the perfect law does not contain superfluous material. The entire Bible benefits us. We shouldn't ignore the book of Revelation because it is too hard to understand. We should not neglect the Old Testament because God gave it to the Jews. We should not focus only on the Psalms (the favorite of many people), or the gospels, or the letters of Paul, or another favorite part of the Bible. God has given us the entire sixty-six books of the Bible, that, in their entirety, contain His perfect law.

The concept that the word of God is perfect and complete implies that we do not need outside sources to interpret what the Bible says. There is not a "third testament" that gives us an additional revelation from God. We do not need a *Book of Mormon* or a *Science and Health with the Key to the Scriptures*. We do not

need a papal encyclical or a body of church tradition to interpret the Bible. We do not need a society of men in Brooklyn that watches for the correct interpretation of God's message to man. The Bible, as written more than 1900 years ago and as we have it today, is perfect and complete.

Liberty: James calls "the perfect law, the *law* of liberty." Too often, we gloss over this idea of liberty for a believer. We miss an important point of the word of God when we do so. Jesus said in John 8:32, "and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The Jews who heard Jesus reacted immediately, "We are Abraham's offspring, and have never yet been enslaved to anyone." Jesus then says, "every one who commits sin is the slave of sin."

James' reference to "the perfect law, the *law* of liberty" is further evidence that he is writing to believers. Unbelievers do not have freedom. They remain slaves of sin and to their sinful flesh.

Paul wrote in Rom. 6:16-18.

Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

As unbelievers, we were slaves to sin. As Heb. 11:6 says, "without faith it is impossible to please *Him*." The prophet Isaiah wrote in Isa. 64:6, "all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment." Unbelievers do not have a choice. As slaves of sin, they are unable to please God.

Gal. 5:1 clearly states the principle.

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

In contrast to unbelievers, believers do have freedom. Jesus Christ has redeemed them from slavery to their sinful flesh, but they still live in the flesh. They can choose to utilize the power of the Holy

Spirit to live lives pleasing to God or they can live under the domination of the lusts of their flesh.

When James writes "the perfect law, the *law* of liberty," he is looking at the specific problem of the rich believers mentioned in James 1:10. At the time James wrote this epistle, rich believers were the ones who could afford mirrors. Outward appearances were important to the rich believers. The rich believer made a show of attending church, but once he was outside the doors, he forgot everything that the pastor said. The rich believer kept the law while other people were watching. Remember, he considered outward appearances important. Hypocrites make a show of outward appearances: "hypocrite" describes the rich believer well.

Today, some believers still fail in the same way. They overtly keep the law but nothing more. Others see their large contributions to the church, the United Way, and other good causes. They attend church regularly. Their public prayers are beautiful. They are friendly, respectable, and above all they are successful in business. They abide by all the traditions, taboos, rituals, and visible signs of Christianity. However, they are still failing to fulfill the standard of the "*law* of liberty."

James uses the term "*law* of liberty" to create a contrast with the keeping of the Mosaic Law. The Jews rigidly obeyed the Mosaic Law as the means of salvation and pleasing God. In the same way, today, a believer may abide by all the traditions, taboos, rituals, and outward appearances that his church expects of him, but he is still not abiding in the "*law* of liberty." The "*law* of liberty" goes beyond the explicit detailing of traditions, taboos, and rituals. The Christian life involves abiding voluntarily by faith in the word of God. James uses the word "liberty" to emphasize that the believer is voluntarily obeying the commands of the Lord. He does not obey God's commands to make a good appearance before others.

Rom. 14:23 states, "and whatever is not from faith is sin."
Heb. 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please *Him*."
An unbeliever does not have a choice. He cannot please God,

COMMENT

Comment [5]: Unger's Bible dictionary does not confirm that mirrors were owned only by the rich and Dr. Clark questioned it!

except by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. The believer lives under the "*law* of liberty." He has a choice. The believer can live his life in a manner pleasing to the Lord or he can turn against the Lord in his life.

The unbeliever may try to please the Lord by baptism, keeping the ten commandments, giving to good causes, attending church, and following other rules set by his church, but because he lacks faith in Jesus Christ, there is no blessing in what he does. The "*law* of liberty" does not apply. The only choice the unbeliever has for pleasing God is to place his trust in Jesus Christ.

James states the principle that anyone looking
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
shall be blessed in what he does.

He writes specifically to the rich believers who could afford the luxury of mirrors. They emphasized the outward appearance and ignored the inner self. They made a show of hearing the word of God but immediately forgot the teaching.

Blessing: The last clause in this passage is a promise. "This man shall be blessed in what he does." God blesses the believer who not only hears Bible teaching, but also becomes an effective doer through application of the Bible teaching he has learned. God blesses him both in eternity and in the present life. In eternity such a believer receives blessing at the judgment seat of Christ. Such a believer is blessed during the present life through application of God's word. Application of God's word delivers him through adversities and pressures. He rejoices in the testings, pressures, adversities, and difficulties of life because of his faith in God through Jesus Christ.

Final comments. While James had the rich Jewish believers in mind when he wrote verses 22-25, the truth applies to each of us. Not only does God concern Himself with what we do, but also with the motivation behind what we do. The rich believers were going through all the motions. They came to hear the word of God

COMMENT

Comment [6]: Another reference that mirrors were owned by the rich. Unger does not mention and Dr. Clark questioned.

to impress other people in the church. As soon as the pastor said, "Amen" they forgot everything they had heard and went out to fulfill their ambitions.

Is fulfilling the perfect law of liberty something we do only when others are watching? Do we fulfill the perfect law under the freedom and liberty that God gave to apply His word? Do we keep the law because it is God's word, not because we want to make a good impression? The effective doer of the word applies the word of God when someone is watching and when no one is watching. We have God's promise of blessing for faithful obedience to the teaching of His word.

12 TRUE RELIGION

1:26-27. *If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

Religion in the Bible: A person might think that the word "religion" occurs often in the Bible. This is not so. James refers to "religion" in these two verses and Paul uses the word twice. In his testimony before Agrippa in Acts 26:5, Paul said that he "lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion." In Col. 2:18 Paul uses the same Greek word referring to "the worship of angels." Paul wrote:

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind.

Hence, the Bible uses the word "religion" in the sense of worship, either of God or of another entity such as angels.

Since James is addressing believers when he writes "If any one thinks himself to be religious," he is writing about the worship of God. The word "If" in verse 26 is a conjunction introducing what Greek scholars call a first class condition. The first class condition means "If, and it is true." James is writing to believers

who considered themselves religious, but they were not controlling their tongues.

The voice of worthless religion: In verse 26, James switches his focus from the rich believers to the believers of humble circumstances, who were angry. Their anger overflowed to the point where they were not listening in church, but were speaking out themselves. They were complaining about their treatment by the rich believers. Every one heard their criticism and condemnation of the rich believers. These angry believers were not controlling what they were saying. James writes "and yet does not bridle his tongue."

What is James' conclusion in verse 26? "That man's religion is worthless." The lexicon gives the following synonyms or alternate translations for the word translated "worthless": "idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, lacking truth." The *King James Version* uses "vain" or "vanity."

Every person faces situations of personal conflict. "Our boss doesn't treat me as well as he treats another employee." "Another student in school hates me." "I'm a victim of sexual harassment." The possible conflicts are unlimited, but each of them is an opportunity to prove the value of our worship of God.

How easy it is for us to complain and to criticize others. Complaints and criticism are so common that, today, society does not see complaining and criticism as sins. James says they are. Still, many church members are positive that no one can be a Christian if he commits certain other sins. Yet, they never say, "A person can't complain and criticize and still be a Christian." A church will kick their pastor out and run him out of town if he is guilty of adultery. On the other hand, his congregation allows him to freely criticize other men of God with whom he disagrees. James writes that a person who does not bridle or control his tongue has an empty and worthless religion. He is politely saying, "Unless a believer controls his tongue, he cannot worship God."

True religion helps others: Still using the context of religion, James moves his attention in verse 27 to a failure of the rich believers. When my wife finds weevils in her flour, she throws the whole bag of flour away. The bag was "pure and undefiled" before the weevils got into it. "Pure and undefiled religion" is worship that human ideas and goals have not corrupted.

Of what were the rich believers guilty? Here, James does not mention any overt sin they were committing. He points out what they were omitting in their drive to get ahead. In verses 23 and 24, we saw that the rich believers maintained an appearance of respectability. They went through the proper motions in their worship of God. Every time the church opened its doors, they were there. In James Chapter Two, we will see that they sat in the most prominent seats where everybody would be sure to see them. However, we saw in verse 24 that as soon as the pastor finished speaking, they left and forgot everything they had heard.

In verse 27 James describes the true worship of God as including the visitation of orphans and widows in their distress. I used the word "including" because Jesus described worship to the Samaritan woman in John 4:24 when He said:

God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

The rich believers were failing to worship in either spirit or truth. First, selfish ambition, instead of the Holy Spirit, filled them. If the Holy Spirit filled these believers, they would not neglect widows and orphans.

Second, they were not worshipping in the truth. Although the rich believers sat in the most prominent seats, they didn't care one whit about the truth that the pastor was teaching. When the pastor had finished teaching, the rich believers left. They immediately forgot what kind of people they were.

Although the rich believers had power to help widows and orphans, they were not doing so. The clause "to visit orphans and widows in their distress" does not mean simply to call upon the orphans and widows saying, "Good morning, Widow Brown. How

are the kids today?" The Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon says the clause means to "look after the orphans and widows." "Their distress" refers to their need, difficult circumstances, oppression, affliction. The love that is a part of the fruit of the Spirit should express itself in the rich believer's care for orphans and widows.

Religion is not worldly: True religion includes keeping oneself unstained by the world. Here the world influences the rich man in his ambition to gain greater wealth. Helping widows and orphans is a distraction to the fulfillment of his ambition. Ambition controls this rich man's life. This verse describes ambition as the viewpoint of the world rather than God's viewpoint from the implanted word of verse 21. The rich man has allowed the world's viewpoint to control his thinking, so that he cannot worship God. Isn't this a description of worldliness? The rich man said, "Widows and orphans aren't my responsibility. Let some government agency take care of them or let the church take care of them. I do my part by paying my taxes, and look at my large contributions to the church."

Final comments. James continually switches back and forth, directing his attention first to the believers of humble circumstances and then to rich believers. James shows first how the poor believers were failing to worship God. Then he shows the failure of the rich believers' worship. He points out that the poor believers could not worship God and be guilty of anger, complaining, criticism or any uncontrolled use of the tongue. Also, the rich believers were not worshipping God, because of their neglect of the orphans and widows in the congregation. These two illustrations point out that any sin in the life interferes with the true worship of God.

COMMENT

Comment [7]: I originally wrote "be guilty of sinning by what he says." Betty also suggested using "be guilty of an uncontrolled tongue."

13 DISCRIMINATION

2:1-4. *My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 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, 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," have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?*

Assembly: The word "assembly" in verse 2 is important to understanding this passage. The Greek is συναγωγή (sunagoge), a word sometimes transliterated "synagogue." "A place of assembly for Jews" is the most common use of this word. Arndt and Gingrich, however, give its usage here in James 2:2 as a Christian assembly place.

If the Jewish believers whom James is addressing were still joining with unbelieving Jews in Sabbath worship in the local synagogue, then the rich man in this passage could refer to an unbeliever. On the other hand, if this is an assembly of Christian believers, then the rich man in this passage is a believer.

Believing brethren: The people James is addressing, however, are believers. Therefore, I will follow Arndt and Gingrich's interpretation. That is, this is an assembly of believers.

In James 2:1, James addresses his readers as "My brethren." He goes on to confirm that they are believers by giving the command "do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism."

Charlie Christian: James' readers are ordinary, everyday, middle class Christians. We may call one of them "Charlie Christian." Charlie Christian takes his turn regularly as an usher during the Sunday morning worship service. He has held this position for a while and knows exactly where everybody prefers to sit. Mr. Von Skinner is the largest employer in town and Charlie Christian's boss. Mr. Von Skinner never misses a Sunday. With his custom-made suit and six-foot-four-inch frame, he presents an imposing figure. He always arrives at church just before the service begins and walks down the aisle with his fashionable blond wife followed by his five children in stair-step order. When Charlie Christian serves as usher, he makes sure that no one takes the Von Skinners' favorite pew. Charlie also knows the best place to seat the occasional homeless beggar who happens into the church. There is an inconspicuous place in the right rear of the church where he would be least likely to disturb the other worshipers.

This facetious story illustrates the situation James is describing. James' comments apply to the Charlie Christians of this world, typical everyday believers in Jesus Christ. They always do their part in serving the Lord around the church. Do we treat certain people in the church differently from others? Let's look beyond the usher's job and seating in the worship service. How about in Sunday School? Do you wish certain Sunday School students were not in your class? In the choir, do you avoid sitting beside certain singers because they occasionally miss a note? How about the people you avoid because you don't understand their accent?

Partiality: James commands us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to show personal favoritism for one believer over another. Differences of dress, singing, speaking, personality differences and economic differences are inconsequential.

James sums up the challenge in verse 4:

have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?

While the gist of what James is saying is obvious, the translation is apparently difficult. Arndt and Gingrich suggest an interesting approach to the last phrase, "judges who give corrupt decisions." To reserve the choice pew for the Von Skinner family and to seat the homeless beggar in an inconspicuous seat in the rear reflects a corrupt decision by Charlie Christian.

Wuest's *Expanded Translation* translates the first clause and adds a parenthetical comment: "are you not divided in your own mind [expressing a doubt as to the requirements of the faith you have in the Lord Jesus]?" Are we confused about what it takes to become a Christian or about what it takes to be a good Christian?

When I was growing up in Texas, my family attended a large church of a popular denomination. I remember asking my father about the absence of black people in the church. I was old enough to understand that the gospel was for everyone. "Does the church have a rule against black people attending?" My father said "No." "What would happen if a black person tried to join the church?" My father thought that the pastor would recommend that the black person should go to another church where the members were black. Today the color barrier is down in the churches of my hometown, but have we solved the problem of discrimination? To God our efforts to eliminate discrimination must be laughable. We gerrymander voting districts to elect minority candidates. We bus students to achieve a racial balance. Employers try to right the wrong of past discrimination by using a second wrong called affirmative action. We pass laws forbidding discrimination. God's solution is spiritual—changed lives through faith in Jesus Christ.

Eternal distinctives: The issue in salvation is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," not superficial matters such as the way a person dresses or the color of his skin. The issue about whether another person is a good or a bad Christian is not for us to decide. We should leave that judgment in God's hands. He has all the facts.

Forming opinions about the spiritual condition of another person reflects evil thoughts. Why do we think we are better than someone else? Our own arrogance produces these evil thoughts and opinions.

The approach of Arndt and Gingrich is also valid. Our decisions are corrupt, when we decide that one person is worthy of the best treatment and another person is not as worthy.

James 2:1-4 continues the interplay between the rich man and the poor man. Before going into the poor man/rich man feud in more detail, James wants to emphasize his point that we are not to discriminate in our dealings with either the rich or the poor. Though James finds fault with each of them, we are to treat both the rich and the poor equally as believers and as brothers in Jesus Christ.

Final comments. Believers are not to show partiality or favoritism to any person. We should not judge the spiritual condition of other believers from superficial appearances. A person's physical characteristics or how he dresses or his economic status does not determine his spiritual situation.

James 2:1-4 illustrates the conflict between rich believers and believers of humble circumstances and serves as a model for all personal conflict situations. Whether a believer is a victim or a perpetrator of unfair and unjust treatment, the epistle of James provides solutions.

Can we legislate solutions to hatred and discrimination? God provides believers with a spiritual solution through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His word.

14

RICH MAN, POOR MAN

2:5-7. *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? But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?*

How inconsistent we are. In the previous chapter we saw how Charlie Christian treated the rich man with deference and snubbed the poor man. Charlie was only trying to make a good impression on the rich man, so the rich man's selfish ambition to get ahead would not trample Charlie. Charlie Christian let the rich man intimidate him. Now James raises the issue of whether the rich man deserved the special treatment. The rich man was continually looking for ways to improve his circumstances. He sought opportunities to take others to court so he could confiscate the few assets the defendant might have. Charlie made sure that he treated the rich man "with kid gloves," so that he wouldn't become the rich man's next victim. James points out the inconsistency of this attitude.

James 2:5 begins with the word "Listen." James presents an important principle. We need to listen and learn. We can't apply what we have not heard and do not know. Before we can apply the word of God, we must listen to its teaching.

God's choice: "Did not God choose?" We are believers because God has chosen us.

Verse 5 looks specifically at a particular group of believers that God has chosen. "Did not God choose the poor of this world?" James is not saying that God only saves the poor. He says that God chooses the poor for salvation as well as the rich. Remember how Charlie Christian treated the homeless beggar in James 2:2-3? "Good ole Charlie." From the way he treated the homeless beggar, you would think that the beggar was not a Christian. Not so. God chooses the poor and the rich.

A spiritual analogy lurks under the surface of this verse. Every person whom God chooses is poor in spiritual possessions. Many people think that they can do something to receive the blessing of God. They say, "I live a good life. I am sincere in what I believe. God will bless me." While these people are spiritually poor, they do not think so. These are not the "poor of this world" whom God chooses in James 2:5.

When God chooses us, we do not arrogantly think we do not need Him. God's action in choosing also involves the work of the Holy Spirit in giving us the realization of how hopelessly helpless we are to make ourselves acceptable to God. How many times have you heard someone say, "God helps those who help themselves?" Not so! God helps the helpless. This is the sense in which God chooses the "poor of this world."

Rev. 3:17 associates the material wealth of certain believers with spiritual poverty.

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.'

God chooses the "poor of this world to be rich in faith." Through the Holy Spirit these people realize that they are spiritually destitute. Their works are totally inadequate to please God. They recognize that not only are they sinners, but that

everything they do, comes short of the glory of God. Rom. 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

"Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith?" These are the poor of this world, not in relationship to material possessions, but because the Holy Spirit has convinced them that their good deeds will never measure up to the perfect righteousness that God demands. God chooses unbelievers, who through the Holy Spirit, know that they are spiritually destitute. These are the poor of the world. Through God's choice they now become rich in faith.

Heirs: James also teaches that God chose us to become "heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him." Many passages teach about the believer's inheritance. Peter wrote in I Pet. 1:3-4:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

We are "born again to a living hope," our eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. Peter goes on, "to obtain an inheritance." Our inheritance is more than eternal life. In James 1:12 we read "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Now James says that God has promised that those who love Him will be heirs of the kingdom.

A couple verses later in I Peter, Peter uses the same language James uses in James 1:3, "proof of your faith" or "testing of your faith." I Pet. 1:7.

that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The proving of our faith determines our inheritance in heaven. I have discussed this subject in Chapter Seven entitled

"Perseverance" where James 1:12 describes believers who prove their faith as "those who love Him."

Fair treatment: James worded verse five as a question. The question begins with the command, "Listen." James already knew the answer to the question, and he also knew that his readers knew the answer. He reminds them of spiritual teaching they already knew. Time after time he follows the same procedure. He does not explain the teaching in detail, but merely points out the principles to his readers. He tells his readers that now is the time to apply what they know. Here the immediate and direct application is that they should not treat the poor shabbily nor discriminate against them.

James 2:6a returns to the poor man who comes into the assembly. "But you have dishonored the poor man." The word "dishonor" means to treat shamefully or to insult. We need another look at James 2:5. We have seen the spiritual analogy and have also seen that God chose the poor man to be rich in faith. Charlie Christian, you have treated the rich man with honor, but the poor man, a believer also, you have treated shamefully. Therefore, we have the command of James 2:1, "Do not hold your faith *Y* with an attitude of personal favoritism."

Oppression: At this point (James 2:6b-7), James directs his discussion to the oppressions of the rich believer.

Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

Charlie Christian dishonored the poor man and honored the rich man. What does Charlie Christian receive in return for his treatment of the rich man? The rich man oppresses Charlie Christian. The rich man even sues Charlie Christian. In James 2:7 we learn that rich men then blasphemed the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many people conclude that the rich man was not a believer. But if he were not a believer, why did he come into the

assembly of believers in James 2:2? Being a Christian and attending church were not the "in thing" during the first century. James specifically mentions the rich man three times (James 1:10-11, this passage, and 5:1-6) and several other times by implication. The descriptions are derogatory. Yet James does not tell the rich man that he needs to believe in Jesus Christ. If the rich man were an unbeliever, why doesn't James give him a gospel message? Instead, James gives the solution for the rich believer as he does for the poor man's problems and for Charlie Christian's. "Believer, get serious about what you have learned." "Believer, apply what you know."

The description of the rich man's life differs from what we consider the Christian life to be. James' message to the rich man, however, is a message to believers. In James 1:10, he is to "glory in his humiliation." Even the flow of thought in the early verses of James applies equally to the "brother of humble circumstances" in James 1:9 and the rich man in James 1:10.

In James 2:1-7, if the rich man is an unbeliever, why is not the poor man an unbeliever? Are we to assume that the "poor man in dirty clothes" of James 2:2 is a believer simply because he lacks material possessions and that the rich man is an unbeliever because of his sins described in James 2:6-7? Such an assumption would mean that a person can be saved by taking a vow of poverty or that a person cannot be saved unless he lives a life of sinless perfection.

If the assembly in James 2:2 is the assembly of Christian believers, then the rich man, poor man, and Charlie Christian profess to be believers. If the assembly is the Jewish synagogue, there is no reason to assume that either the rich man or the poor man of James 2 are believers. If the rich man and the poor man were unbelievers, then James would not keep mentioning them in this epistle. The rich man and the poor man are in view throughout the letter. James gives only brief glimpses of other believers: Charlie Christian in James 2, the righteous man of James 5:6 and 5:16, and the "one" in "one turns him back" (James 5:20).

The courtroom: Is there a relationship between the court actions of the rich man and his blasphemy? In James 5:12a, James commands:

But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath.

Is the taking of a false oath in court blasphemy? Yes, the person who lies under oath is blaspheming God. James has the courtroom in view in James 2:6-7. We are not blaspheming when we swear to tell the truth and then tell the truth. The rich men were going to court, swearing to tell the truth and then lying. This is blasphemy.

The rich: James 1:11 says that the "rich man in his pursuits will fade away." This is the first mention of the rich man. James described his ambition by its outward appearance, "his pursuits."

In James 1:27, James describes pure and undefiled religion as helping orphans and widows and keeping oneself unstained by the world. Sharing with the helpless and the homeless did not interest the rich man. In his selfish ambition, he wanted to keep all he had and even to get more.

I can picture James looking right at the rich man when he wrote James 2:15-16.

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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?

The rich man had the means to help the needy Christian brother or sister. He limited himself to a few "clucking noises." "Things will work out." "Go in peace, y" "Have a nice day."

In one breath, James hits upon the problems of both the rich man and the poor man in James 3:13-14.

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy (*NIV* - envy) and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

The poor man was guilty of bitter envy. The rich man had "selfish ambition." James 3:14 expands on the rich man's pursuits of James

1:11, calling them, "selfish ambition." Ambition is not a sin, but James describes that ambition as "selfish ambition."

Again, James has the rich man in view in James 4:13-15.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 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. Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

Business planning and profit making are not sins. The sin is in selfish ambition to get ahead.

In the fifth chapter James vividly describes the perversity to which ambition has driven the rich man. (James 5:4-6).

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. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you.

Priorities: James is talking about "priorities." James' description of the rich man is not praiseworthy, and we want to deny its application to ourselves. Most believers do not ignore the poor and the widows and orphans. We all do a little something to help the less fortunate. Obviously, we do not overtly cheat others. Many of us, if a store clerk gives too much change when we purchase something, will tell the clerk and return the excess. If we don't, no one else knows, and no one will miss a meal because the clerk gave us a quarter instead of a nickel.

We aren't too sure what James means when he describes the rich man: "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, *Y*." However, we often preface statements about our plans with "If the Lord wills" or "The Lord willing." Therefore, we are not like this rich believer, are we?

The rich man's error was one of priorities, a subject that affects every believer. In the rich man's driving ambition to get

ahead and to accumulate more material wealth, he did not give to widows and orphans. He was always looking for ways to cut expenses by reducing the wages of his workers. If a wagon rolled into the ditch during the harvest, he deducted damages from the driver's wages. The rich man was alert to every opportunity to sue and collect damages. If he lived in the late twentieth century, he would file many lawsuits seeking punitive and treble damages.

The Lord Jesus Christ should have first priority in our lives. We attend church not to meet people or to be seen. We attend church to worship the Lord Jesus Christ through learning about Him. Even while we are not at church, we still put the Lord Jesus Christ first. We apply what we have learned from the word of God in our lives daily. The rich man's reason for attending church was not the Lord Jesus Christ and applying the word of God. His priority was to make as much money as he could at whatever cost. James 1:23-24 describes him very well:

He is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

Final comments. Salvation is the work of God from beginning to end. The Holy Spirit makes the gospel clear to the unbeliever and provides saving faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ without any contribution of works, such as, feeling sorry for sins, baptism, walking an aisle, raising hands, joining a church, taking the sacraments, or living lives of good works.

We reviewed the driving ambition of the rich man. The rich man in this passage has his priorities topsy-turvy. He goes through the motions of attending church, but in his daily life, he is oblivious to his pastor's teaching. Jesus Christ and His word are at the bottom of his scale of values. The rich man charges ahead in this life, no matter what the cost.

15 THE LAW

2:8-11. *If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 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.*

The royal law: James 2:8 refers to the teaching of Jesus in Matt. 22:38-39 where Jesus quoted Lev. 19:18.

Matt. 22:38-39:

"This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'"

Lev. 19:18:

'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

James is still addressing Charlie Christian who showed favoritism toward the rich man. The word "if" in verse 8 is a first class condition and means, "If, and it is true" or "Since." To make his point, James assumes that Charlie Christian is keeping the royal law. "All right, Charlie Christian, I will assume that you keep the royal law. You're doing well." He was fulfilling the royal law with respect to the rich believers, when he gave the rich men the best seats in the assembly.

James 2:9 also contains a first class condition: "But if you show partiality." Charlie Christian was failing to apply the royal law in his seating of the poor man. James does not gloss over this failure of Charlie Christian. However, in verse 8 James emphasizes that Charlie Christian is correct to apply the royal law to the rich man. In the next verse James points out the inconsistency of his treatment of the poor man.

James calls this commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," the royal law because the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, quotes this law in Matt. 22:37-39. Jesus quoted the great commandment first:

"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

Next, Jesus quotes the second greatest commandment that James calls the royal law. Matthew's gospel focuses on the kingdom aspect of Jesus' ministry. So, there is a corollary sense in which this commandment is the royal law. The title, royal law, shows that this law applies in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The greatest two commandments summarize the Ten Commandments. We fulfill the great commandment by keeping the first four of the Ten Commandments. We fulfill the royal law when we obey the last six of the Ten Commandments. Jesus described these two commandments in Matt. 22:40.

"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Love: Everybody is familiar with love. However, we bandy the word "love" about in so many ways that we often miss the true meaning of the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

An attractive girl walks down the hall at school and a teenage boy perks up. He has "fallen in love." Never mind that two minutes later he will have forgotten all about this girl when another walks by.

A large part of the entertainment industry today equates love with sexual activity.

If a parent sharply reprimands a child, an onlooker may comment that the parent is not treating the child with love. One erroneous school of thought says that a parent can discipline a child by love without the need to ever spank him.

We interpret pity and other forms of emotion as love. Charitable organizations ask for donations using photographs of starving children. The pictures stir emotions and money comes in, but the response may not have been the result of love. The pictures create guilt feelings that threaten the prospective donors if they do not give. Furthermore, when they do give, they feel good about doing their part to help.

God's love: Rom. 5:8 describes God's love:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

In essence, God says, "I love you." This is not the same as a response to "the best looking girl in class." The Bible says, "while we were yet sinners." As sinners, we are not attractive to God. God's love depends on His character, not our worthiness. We do not deserve God's love. His love is unconditional.

A person expressing "puppy love" may say "I love you," but his focus is on the object. His love is conditional upon the attractiveness of the object. Six months from now the words will be the same, but the object will be someone else.

Do you see the significance of the command "You shall love your neighbor as yourself?" The command is not to love your neighbor because he is a good person. This command has nothing to do with whether the neighbor is a good neighbor, worthy of love. "God demonstrates His own love toward us" because of who and what He is, not because we are worthy of love. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Unconditional love arises from good qualities in our own character. We develop these qualities only through growth to spiritual maturity and allowing the Holy Spirit to control our lives.

Human reactions: Charlie Christian did not seek revenge against the rich man because of the rich man's oppressions. He didn't snub the rich believer. He gave him the best seat in the house.

Have you ever sought revenge?

Do you avoid certain people because you don't like them?

Do you avoid other people because you think they do not like you?

Have you spoken in anger to someone who insulted you or injured you in some way?

Obviously, these are loaded questions. Every person has failed in some of these points at one time or other. By these failures, we show a lack of love for the other person. This is the opposite of what God did for us. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Seeking revenge, avoiding people, and speaking in anger are examples of failing to keep the royal law, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

When we do something we know to be foolish—say, we cut a finger with a sharp knife, do we try to take revenge on ourselves? Do we reason, "My right hand was holding the knife and cut my left hand? I'll get even by putting the knife in my left hand and then cutting my right hand." Of course not. We don't think less of ourselves after doing something foolish than we thought about ourselves before the incident.

Love is not static. Love can grow or decline. Paul's prayer in Phil. 1:9 shows this.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

Love increases with knowledge and with discernment.

Discernment is the wise use of knowledge, the application of our knowledge of God's word. This verse also shows that love is a mental activity, not an emotion. Therefore, love is what we think, not any particular action. It motivates action and produces emotion.

A parent can discipline a child in love. The same parent also can discipline a child in anger. A parent who fails to discipline a child is not showing love for that child. Yet a bystander might interpret this failure to discipline the child as an act of love.

Both love and lust can motivate sexual activity. Psychologists say that sometimes even hatred can motivate sexual activity.

The box on the next page discusses giving and the motivation of love.

COMMENT

Comment [8]: I replaced the word "Love" at the beginning of this sentence with "It." Did this weaken the thought?

GIVING AND THE MOTIVATION OF LOVE

Fund-raisers prey upon many different motivations to raise money for charities. Love, typically, is not one of those motivations. Fund-raisers pull money out of potential donors by arousing pity, guilt, and peer pressure. People feel guilty about having so much when others have little. Therefore, they respond to an appeal with their gifts.

The United Way exploits peer pressure and uses other pressure tactics to the maximum. It recruits business executives into various volunteer positions. This solicitation of donations places subtle pressure to give on other executives who conduct business with the volunteers. The idea of 100% companies pressures employees to give. Employees will also give to impress their supervisors.

Churches use some of the same techniques to meet their budgets. Pledge days place peer pressure on members to make pledges to give during the next year. Some pledge days include a service with the atmosphere of a live auction. Person after person stands up and says "I pledge \$25 per week." The next person, "\$30." Then \$40, \$50, and so on.

A church may even employ an outside fund-raising company. The company manages the efforts to raise the necessary money for a new building fund or whatever. Of course, the church has to pay this outside consultant, often a percentage of the amount collected. The outside consultant proves his worth by raising more money from a congregation than the church could raise without his professional help.

However, these efforts take churches far away from the Biblical perspective of giving taught in II Cor. 9:7.

Let each one *do* just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

This verse teaches the New Testament standard for giving. The New Testament does not command believers to bring their "tithes into the storehouse". In the New Testament tithes are mentioned in historical references to the practice in the Old Testament. Long ago, churches adopted tithing as a money raising device. Churches that teach tithing, however, do not follow the Old Testament commands on tithes. The Mosaic Law required the Israelites to give two tithes every year. That's twenty percent, not ten! In addition, every third year the Law required a third tithe to support the poor.

Are we cheerful givers, giving on the basis of grace, or do we give on the basis of the Old Testament Law? Do we give to the church on the basis of love, or do we give because we believe that the tithe belongs to the Lord? Do we give because the appeal "touches our heart," that is, the appeal played upon our emotions?

Conditional and unconditional love: I have mentioned two approaches to love, describing them as conditional love and unconditional love. Unconditional love is independent of any merit or attractiveness of the object. Unconditional love does not have conditions or strings tied to it. A husband loves his wife even when she burns the toast or has her hair in curlers. Paul wrote about God's unconditional love in Rom. 5:8:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

John 3:16 describes God's unconditional love for us.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.

Unconditional love means that the lover loves without regard to any particular quality or merit of the object of his love. When a husband and a wife share unconditional love, there are no quarrels, spats, or fights. One spouse accepts the other for who and what he or she is. They married each other for better or for worse. Husband, why do you now want to change your wife? Wife, why do you now want to change your husband? If you each have unconditional love for the other, then you would love your spouse as he or she is.

Does your spouse have certain mannerisms or sayings that irritate you? Have you ever been angry with your spouse? Did you ever try to change your spouse's mind? Did you ever wish your spouse would change in some way? These are all signs of a lack of unconditional love.

In contrast, our love for God can and should be the other way around. God is perfect. He is worthy of love. He is unchangeable. We can and should love Him because of who and what He is. Only God is worthy of conditional love, because His character is perfect. Whatever the merit or attractiveness of other people, they will do something to disillusion or disappoint us. Can we continue to love them? Disappointment and disillusion lead to a loss or diminishment of conditional love. Therefore, the Biblical commands to love our neighbor talk about unconditional love. We love our neighbors not because they are attractive and loveable, but because of our loving character. As Phil. 1:9 says, we love in "real knowledge and all discernment."

Partiality: James has not finished discussing Charlie Christian's partiality to the rich man and his shabby treatment of the poor man in the assembly. In James 2:9 he uses another first class conditional clause: "Since you show partiality." James has just pointed out that Charlie Christian treated the rich man well, though the rich man was not a lovable person. Yet Charlie Christian did not treat the poor man in the same way. Although Charlie Christian may have presented an outward appearance of

love in his treatment of the rich man, his true motivation may have been fear of retaliation. Partiality toward the rich man and discrimination against the poor man are sins. James wrote this nearly two thousand years ago. Today we err in the same way. The young discriminate against the old and vice-versa. We see discrimination among races, blacks against whites and whites against blacks. Overweight people don't move ahead in business as rapidly as do those who weigh less. We have passed laws to end the more visible forms of discrimination, but we have not changed the sinfulness of man's flesh. Discrimination still exists. Human laws cannot change human lusts. Victory over the flesh comes only through the power of the word of God and the Holy Spirit.

Sin under the Law: Think about James 2:10.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

If we keep every part of the Mosaic Law except one, we are as guilty as if we had not kept even one point of the Law. People think of sin in various strata. At the worst extreme is a group of sins that we would never consider committing. We think that any person committing such sins cannot possibly be a Christian. James mentions two of these in verse 11: murder and adultery. If we commit sexual sins and acts of criminality, our friends in church will quickly ostracize us. Sexual sins and criminal actions, however, are only a part of the Law. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stated the standard. Matt. 5:27-28 says:

You have heard that it was said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY"; but I say to you, that every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

A few years ago, a professed Christian successfully ran for President. During his campaign he confessed that he was guilty of mental adultery. In a later campaign, another person dropped his candidacy for the Presidency after a disclosure of adultery. The Bible says that both were guilty of adultery. From our human viewpoint, however, we condemn overt actions while we condone thoughts. Isn't this a form of discrimination to condemn a person

for a sin he overtly commits and to ignore the same sin in another person because he only thought or talked about it?

James makes this point. A believer who fails to keep the royal law by discriminating against another person is as guilty before God as the person who commits murder or adultery.

After nearly two thousand years, misconceptions among believers have not changed. One Christian may say that a believer cannot commit murder or adultery. Another says that a person who does commit murder or adultery must not be a believer. We forget King David who committed adultery with Bathsheba and gave her husband, Uriah, an order resulting in his death. When we read in James that the rich man is a murderer, why do we conclude that he is not a believer? James' readers were positive that a person cannot be a believer and commit adultery and murder. James says to Charlie Christian that his partiality is as sinful as adultery or murder.

Keeping the Law: Another misconception among believers is that the Ten Commandments describe the Christian life, but does keeping the Ten Commandments make a believer spiritual? The Mosaic Law included much more than the Ten Commandments. It included dietary laws and animal sacrifices. The Mosaic Law included capital punishment for many violations including murder and adultery. The royal law, quoted in James 2:8, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is a summary of the principle underlying the Mosaic Law. We "cherry pick" our way through the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Mosaic Law. No one argues that animal sacrifices do not apply today. Dietary laws distinguished Israel from their neighbors and as a result presented a witness for God. This unique witness is unnecessary today. Capital punishment sounds extreme for adultery. So we "cherry pick" parts of the Mosaic Law that we want to follow and reject the rest as outmoded. When we finish picking, the Ten Commandments and the royal law remain.

Let me ask you, when was the last time that you kept the fourth commandment? The fourth commandment originally given in Exo. 20:8, says "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." "Oh," you say, "I go to church every Sunday." Wait a minute. The Sabbath day was the last day of the week beginning then, as it still does, at sundown on Friday and continuing until sundown on Saturday. So you who keep the Ten Commandments for spirituality are still "cherry picking." You really only keep nine, but you throw in the royal law for good measure.

Listen to what James wrote. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." If you are going to keep the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law for spirituality, you can't pick and choose. You must follow the entire Law, including the sacrifices, capital punishment, three tithes, the seventh day Sabbath, etc.

Differences: The New Testament gives guidance by reiterating portions of the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law. James 2:11 repeats the commandment forbidding adultery and murder. This reference to murder in the *New American Standard Bible* clarifies the King James translation of Exo. 20:13, "Thou shalt not kill." Many erroneously believe that "Thou shalt not kill" includes a prohibition against capital punishment and killing in war. Some people even carry it as far as a prohibition against killing animals. The *New American Standard Bible*, *New International Version* and others correctly translate the fifth commandment as, "You shall not murder." The Mosaic Law requires capital punishment and recognizes the killing of animals both for food and in animal sacrifices. It clearly commands capital punishment. We disobey the Mosaic Law when we do not punish certain crimes by executing the criminal. Furthermore, the Mosaic Law does not prohibit killing the enemy in wartime.

The New Testament does not teach tithing as the standard for Christian giving. It does not command Christians to keep the

Sabbath. We find a related New Testament command in Heb. 10:25:

Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Believers today do not have a one day per week standard. We may need to assemble more often than once a week.

Some Christians cite I Cor. 16:2 as the basis for Sunday replacing the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.

On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

The early church remembered the resurrection of Jesus by worshiping on the first day of the week. I Cor. 16:2 refers to this practice in passing, but Christian giving is the subject. We worship God through Christian giving. The point is not that we should worship on Sunday, but how we should give as part of our worship. Christian giving is regular giving. Paul does not exclude special fund-raising drives. If Christians gave regularly as the Bible commands, however, a special collection when Paul came would not have been necessary.

I Cor. 16:2 makes another point: Christian giving is according to ability. Paul never mentions tithing as Christian giving. He says, "as he may prosper." Those that have prospered greatly should give more. Some that are not prospering, maybe, should not give at all. Furthermore, "as he may prosper" means that the believer's giving is not strictly a once a week, every week, ritual. He is to give out of each paycheck, whether it be weekly or annually or any other interval.

The assembly of believers in Heb. 10:25 reflects a different slant from the "first day of every week" implied in I Cor. 16:2. In I Cor. 16:2, the command is to give, not to assemble. In Heb. 10:25 the frequency of our assembly is based on need. As the destruction of Jerusalem approached, the oftener the Hebrews were to assemble. For believers today, the nearness of the rapture and the Great Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, determine the frequency of assembly. "And all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

The closer we come to the rapture and the Great Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, the more often we are to assemble as believers. Once a week may not be enough.

So we see there is a reason the New Testament does not command believers to keep the Sabbath. The ritual of keeping the Sabbath once a week is inadequate for the entire Church Age. As the end of the Church Age nears, believers need to assemble more often. Are you a Christian who thinks he is keeping the Sabbath by attending church for one hour every Sunday morning? If you are, you are saying that the rapture of the church is still a long way away. You may be right. The Church Age may still have another 2,000 or more years to go. The Bible says "No man knows the day or the hour." However, the rapture could occur any time, even today.

Final comments. This chapter differentiates between two types of love: unconditional love and conditional love. We can have conditional love for God because He is perfect and possesses perfect righteousness and faithfulness. He alone is worthy of love, and our love for God will never be disappointed. However, we love our neighbor with unconditional love, realizing that at some time he may appear unworthy of love. We should attach no strings to our love for our neighbor. If we have strings or conditions attached to our love for our neighbor and at some time he violates the conditions of our love, we will lose love for our neighbor. Therefore, the Bible commands believers to love other people unconditionally.

God loved us as sinners with His perfect unconditional love. We were sinners, unworthy of God's love, and He sent His Son to die for us. Rom. 5:8 describes His unconditional love.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Love is a mental attitude. Our love grows as we grow in the real knowledge of the word of God and our ability to apply it. Phil. 1:9 calls this ability to apply the word, "discernment."

God rejects all sin. A person who breaks one commandment is guilty of breaking all. God does not overlook even minor infractions.

The person who discriminates against another is as guilty as the person who commits murder or adultery. Charlie Christian followed local custom in giving the poor man the worst seat in the assembly. Charlie Christian would never want to sit in that seat himself. Yet the royal law says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

16

THE LAW OF LIBERTY

2:12-13. *So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Freedom: James writes now for the second time about the law of liberty. James 1:25 calls the law of liberty "the perfect law." We have seen that this word "perfect" means "complete." The word of God is the law by which the believer lives his life. The word of God is complete. God has left nothing that we need to know out of the Bible, and it does not contain extraneous matter.

In James 1:25 the law of liberty emphasizes that James' readers were forgetful hearers of the word of God. James 2 points out that Charlie Christian discriminated against the poor man while favoring the rich man and only half fulfilling the Law. This half fulfillment is no fulfillment.

James 2:8 quotes the royal law, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." The royal law is the underlying principle behind the last six of the Ten Commandments, summarizing our relationship to other people. Now, in verse 12, James again mentions the law of liberty. James is not introducing another law, but is continuing his discussion of the royal law. The law of liberty describes the royal law in terms of the freedom believers have to apply the word of God. Verses 12 and 13 also teach that God judges how well believers apply the word.

The law of liberty is similar to Paul's teaching in the epistle to Galatians. Gal. 5:1,13:

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. √ For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do* not *turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Gal. 5:13 gives a clue to understanding James' reference to the law of liberty. In Christ, we have freedom. We are no longer slaves of our sin natures. Under the law of liberty, therefore, we apply the royal law.

Living the life: Many churches impose a rigid set of rules or taboos on their members. To the taboos they add a list of good works, such as: tithing, attending church, keeping the Ten Commandments, and working around the church. Unfortunately, the Christian life is more than rules and taboos. Look at Gal. 5:1 again.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free; therefore keep standing firm (stand firm in the teaching of the word of God) and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

James addresses Jewish believers who had been strict in keeping of the Law. They would never think of committing adultery or overt murder. Yet, James will accuse them of murder. James also will show how their actions and their speech reveal a failure to apply the word of God. To outward appearances, these believers were respectable Christians, but they sought approval of their speech and their actions, by men, not by God. They impressed everyone with their sincerity and consistency. However, speech and actions should reflect not just the literal overt keeping of a set of rules, but application of the entire word of God.

"So speak and so act." Our thoughts and actions are to reflect our application of the law of liberty. When we are mistreated, we leave the matter in God's hands. We do not retaliate and try to get even. As James 1:2-4 says, we look with joy at the outcome of

adversity in our lives. Both our adversaries and we ourselves will be judged by the law of liberty. Have we used our freedom in Christ to glorify God?

Mercy: James 2:13 teaches that God judges believers who fail to show mercy. Mercy is helping anyone in need. Mercy is application of the royal law reflecting the believer's wisdom. James also mentions mercy in James 3:17:

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

Believers who don't help others in need are not applying the word of God.

Application of the law of liberty: The "law of liberty" also contrasts God's gracious gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to the legalistic distortion of the Old Testament Law. The Jews thought they could attain salvation by keeping the Mosaic Law, but we cannot save ourselves by keeping the Law. We receive God's salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Obedience to God's commandments and applying His word are choices we make, not the means of salvation.

James 2:12 warns the poor man to use the law of liberty to temper his speech and actions.

Verse 13 speaks to the rich man who is failing to show mercy. Throughout his epistle James switches back and forth between the rich man and the poor man.

Every person has specific weaknesses and strengths. Our application of the word of God reflects these strengths and weaknesses. We can't imitate someone else in his application of the word of God. His strengths and weaknesses are different from ours. His application is different. To apply the word of God properly, we must know what the word of God says. Correct and accurate teaching of the word is essential. Once we understand what the Bible teaches, we can apply it.

Judgment: James 2:12-13 emphasizes judgment. The idea of a final or last judgment for all of people is a common misconception. The Bible refers to several judgments. Look at John 3:18.

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There is no judgment for those who are in Christ Jesus, but the unbeliever is judged.

Rom. 8:1 approaches the issue from the standpoint of an absence of a judicial decision against believers.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

These two verses tell us that not only is there no punitive decision or condemnation of believers arising out of God's judgment, but that we will not even be in a judgment with unbelievers.

However, believers are judged. II Cor. 5:10 refers to the judgment for church age believers that Paul calls the judgment seat of Christ.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Rom. 14:10 and I Cor. 3:12-15 also refer to the judgment seat of Christ. In keeping with the promise of Rom. 8:1, the outcome of the judgment seat of Christ is not condemnation, but rewards (or lack of reward). James 1:12 says:

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.

God's decision at the judgment seat of Christ is limited to awards for the believer. There is no judgment for believers resulting in punishment or condemnation.

James 2:12-13 also refers to the judgment seat of Christ. Verse 13 is a warning to rich believers who fail to show mercy by visiting widows and orphans in their distress (James 1:27). He says, in effect, "You fail to show mercy. Don't expect God to be

merciful at the judgment seat of Christ. Your crowns will remain in the vaults of heaven."

The believer who does show mercy, fulfilling the royal law, "triumphs over judgment." He looks forward to judgment. He exults over the prospect of judgment. Judgment is a victory celebration for the spiritually mature believer who has shown mercy to others. The judgment seat of Christ becomes the believer's award ceremony. All these attitudes are different shades of meaning of the word translated "triumph."

James mentions judgment in other verses. James 3:1:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

Also in James 4:11-12:

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*. There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor.

Then again in James 5:9:

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

James had the judgment seat of Christ in mind when he wrote each of these verses. The teacher of the word will come under stricter judgment because of his teaching. In the fourth chapter James says that the believer who acts as judge and jury over his fellow believers is not a doer of the law. Finally, in the last chapter of James, the complaining believer faces the judgment of God. Again, the issue of the judgment seat of Christ is not the believer's eternal salvation from sin, but rather his rewards in heaven.

Final comments. Believers have the promise of Rom. 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

In James 2:12,13 we see three types of sins that come under judgment. The word "speak" refers to the first type of sin, sins of

the tongue, such as: complaining (James 5:9), criticism (James 4:11-12), lying (James 5:12), false teaching (James 3:14), and gossip. Many Christians overlook sins of the tongue.

"Act" is overt sin, the second type of sin, including adultery, murder, fighting and quarreling (James 4:1) and stealing. Keep in mind, however, that breaking traffic laws is as much a sin as adultery, murder, and stealing.

In verse 13, "who has shown no mercy" is the motivational sin behind our failure to act. Besides the lack of mercy, motivational sins include arrogance (James 1:21; 3:14; 4:10), jealousy (James 3:16), bitterness, worry, anger (James 1:19), hate, and lust for revenge. These are hidden sins involving our thoughts. Often they show up as a lack of action. If they showed up in action, we would recognize them immediately as overt sins.

17

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

2:14-18. *What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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? Even so faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself. 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."*

Salvation: This part of the book of James gives Christians more trouble than any other part of the epistle. The problem is to reconcile salvation by faith with James rhetorical question, "Can that faith save you?"

Versions of James 2:14

New American Standard Bible, American Standard Version, The New English Bible, and Today's English Version
Can that faith save him?

King James Version
Can faith save him?

New International Version
Can such faith save him?

Williams
Such faith cannot save him, can it?

Wuest
The aforementioned faith [namely, that faith which does not result in good works] is not able to save him, is it?

The New King James Version
That faith cannot save him, can it?

Amplified Bible
Can [such] faith save [his soul]?

Phillips
Could that sort of faith save anyone's soul?

We can see the difficulty this passage presents by looking at the ways various translations handle the last question of verse 14. The box on the next page shows eleven translations and paraphrases. Except for the *King James Version*, each of these place a modifier ("that," "such," "aforementioned," "that sort of") in front of the word "faith." The *Amplified Bible* places "such" in brackets showing that it has added this word to the text. The *King James Version* is the only translation that translates the Greek without a modifier, "Can faith save him?"

The translators apparently looked upon "save" in this question as a reference to eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. They knew that eternal salvation from the penalty of sin was by faith. Therefore, James must be writing about a special, ineffective type of faith. They added the modifying words rather than translating the Greek literally.

James 2:14 is not talking about eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. "Save" has the same meaning here as it does in James 1:21, 5:15, and 5:20. In Chapter Ten, I discussed James 1:21 that says "Receive the word implanted which is able to save your souls." James uses the word translated "save" in the sense of deliverance, not eternal salvation. In discussing James 1:21, I pointed out that the deliverance was twofold. First faith, as application of God's word (the testing or proof of our faith), delivers from the adversities and problems of life. The deliverance was not physical, but spiritual, since faith and application of the implanted word is able to save our souls. Second, application of our faith brings deliverance to us at the judgment seat of Christ where God delivers a believer's inheritance to him.⁹

The context: The subject of James 2:12-13 is judgment. Our words and actions reflect our application of the law of liberty. We do not retaliate against those who mistreat us. Judgment belongs to God. Specifically, the judgment is the judgment seat of Christ.

James 2:14 moves immediately from judgment to "Can faith save him?" Again, James does not use the Greek word "sozo" (save) in the sense of eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. James wrote to believers who needed deliverance from adversity. He tells them to put their faith into action with works. Apply the

⁹*Vines Expository Dictionary* includes nine separate uses for the word "save" in the Bible. Vines describes five of these uses with the word "deliver" or "deliverance" including the first definition, "of material and temporal deliverance from danger, suffering, ..., from sickness." Two other definitions Vines gives are "of the present experience of God's power to deliver from the bondage of sin" and "of the individual believer, who, though losing his reward at the judgment seat of Christ hereafter, will not lose his salvation."

word of God. Faith and application of the word of God will not deliver us **from** adversity, but it will deliver us **through** difficulties and adversities. We will consider ourselves happy in adversity. We will glory in our circumstances, whatever they are. Faith that applies God's word to difficult circumstances provides a present spiritual deliverance through difficulties and a future deliverance of the believer's inheritance, crowns, and rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.

James addresses the feud between the rich believers and the poor believers. The feud resulted from their failure to apply what they had learned from God's word. The feud and the failure to apply the word made these believers "double-minded" and unstable in all their ways (James 1:8). Pressures, difficulties, and adversities in the midst of various trials left them frustrated and unhappy. To paraphrase James 2:14, "Christian brothers, what good is it, if a person says that he has faith, but he does not apply that faith? Can unapplied faith deliver him from adversities?"

Definitions: Faith requires the teaching of the word of God. As the believer comes to understand a passage, he believes it. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, both in the teacher and the hearer. Once a believer has heard and believed what the word of God says, he must apply it. To apply the word of God, the believer submits to its teaching under the power of the Holy Spirit. He fulfills the command of Eph. 5:18: "Be filled with the Spirit." The alternative is the control of our lives by the lusts of our flesh. James 1:21 commands, "putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls."

In James 2:14, "works" refers to production. All production results from application of what we have believed from the word of God, by yielding control of our lives to the Holy Spirit.

Applications: James directs verses 15 and 16 to rich men motivated by selfish ambition. The increase in material wealth so occupies these rich men that they fail to show mercy by helping

those in need. They know the right words to say, but they don't follow through by providing help.

James 2:17 reads, "Even so faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself." This verse does not say that the faith does not exist. Neither does it say that a person with faith, but no works, is unsaved. This verse says that faith without works is a faith that is functionally or experientially dead, lacking in production. The believer who has faith without works does not produce fruit. True production is not a matter of what we do, but a matter of the motivation behind our actions.

When we put money in the offering plate, is it because of the work of the Holy Spirit directing us to apply II Cor. 9:7?

Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

Much Christian giving comes under the compulsion of trying to meet a tithing standard erroneously imposed upon them. At other times we may try to match or beat what someone else is giving. At the judgment seat of Christ our offerings will show up either as gold, silver, and precious stones or as wood, hay, and straw. Do we let the Holy Spirit motivate our giving as we apply II Cor. 9:7, or do we yield to external forces such as emotional appeals, tithing, or keeping up with "Brother Jones?"

Giving is not the only means of production in the Christian life. Is our language different at work than when we attend church functions? If so, our manner of speech in both situations reflects worldliness, since our motivation is to make ourselves acceptable to others in this world. This is worldliness, even if those others are born again believers. In this situation motivation comes from neither the filling of the Spirit nor from faith in the word of God.

We can help people in many ways that are not sin. In this passage James has written about a brother or sister "without clothing and in need of daily food." A believer who is able should help these people, but the Bible requires faith as the correct motivation for helping others. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Obedience to God's commands through faith is the proper motivation.

We can have other motivations. A person may say, "I volunteer for the United Way every year to help raise funds during the annual drive. It gives me the opportunity to meet many community leaders. My boss expects me to do this. I am sure that my promotion to vice-president last year was a direct result of my work with the United Way." To a greater or less extent, this describes the driving force behind many people's help of the needy. In God's eyes this is wood, hay, and straw that will be burned at the judgment seat of Christ.

James is specific in his example of Christians in need. He calls them a "brother or sister." He writes specifically about helping believers who are in need. When we help others in need, we have three circles of responsibility. In the first circle are our own families. We should not give to others, if by so doing, we are unable to pay our own bills or provide our own families with their needs. The next circle includes the group in James 2:15-16, other believers in need. The third circle includes our neighbors and unbelievers.

James 2:18.

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."

The Christian life is a spiritual life. Only God can see or know the motivations of our spirit. Yet, as human beings, we constantly strive to measure other people's spirituality. Our only standard of measurement is overt actions and words. Salvation is through faith. Our spiritual life begins with faith and grows with faith. "The just shall live by faith." Yet we can neither see nor measure faith itself. Therefore James writes, "I will show you my faith by my works." Only when a believer applies his faith does that faith become visible to others. This is the truth James is teaching.

Final comments. Failure to apply the word means that a believer has no spiritual fruit, production, or works in his life. In this situation his faith cannot deliver him from the difficulties and

adversity in life. Application of the word of God by faith delivers us through difficulties in life and produces gold, silver, and precious stones for the judgment seat of Christ.

Just because we know the right words to say is not a substitute for helping other believers who are in need. Are we so wrapped up in getting ahead that we neglect to help others? James wrote to believers who were not helping others.

The Holy Spirit motivates true Christian giving. When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, we produce fruit. Part of the production of our spiritual lives is giving to those in need.

18 DEMONS WHO BELIEVE

2:19. *You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.*

Believing that God is one: Everything that we know about angels and demons comes from the Bible. As the Jewish believers to whom James was writing believed, so the demons believe that God is one. Deut. 6:4 says:

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!"

Not only do the demons believe, but they also tremble.

James does not state the obvious. The demons may believe, but they do not have eternal salvation. Since we understand that demons do not have eternal salvation, we read this verse about the devils believing there is one God and we erroneously conclude that something more than believing must be necessary for salvation.

This is exactly what James is **not** saying. Demons cannot now avoid the Lake of Fire by believing in God. Long before God created man, the demons followed Satan rather than God. As John 16:11 says, God has already judged Satan, as the ruler of this world. Satan and his demons are now waiting for the execution of their sentences. Rev. 20:10 says:

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

So we see that demons have good reason to shudder and tremble.

Context: We often hear James 2:19 quoted alone without its context. This verse is in the middle of the second chapter. Its meaning is dependent on what James wrote in the rest of the epistle. We have already studied the first one and a half chapters of James. We will look at the rest of the epistle of James in succeeding chapters of this book. Anytime we read and study the Bible, we must know the context of the passage. James is not an exception to this Bible study principle. James does not read as we think it should. False interpretations of the word of God arise when we read James or any other part of the Bible without understanding the context and following what the author is saying.

So, what is James saying in the context of James 2:19? James has just finished writing in verse 18, "I will show you my faith by my works." Now he gives an illustration. Even the demons have faith, and do you know how we know that? We know that the demons have faith because they apply their faith. They shudder and tremble. Works accompanies their faith.

James is not writing to Jewish believers about how they can be saved. God has already saved them. They are not new believers that have not learned many spiritual principles from the word of God. They need to apply the principles they know. It is time that their faith began producing fruit. For an illustration, James turns to the most unlikely source of a productive faith. He turns to the demons; and yes, their faith produces the fruit of shuddering.

Final comments. James 2:19 brings us to the most basic message of the book of James. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to apply what the word of God teaches.

COMMENT

Comment [9]: Dr. Clark says "poor logic." I don't know for sure why Dr. Clark says this. How do we know the demons shudder and tremble and therefore produce works as a result of their faith. This passage says so. But to be an illustration, of the James 2:14 principle, we should be able to see the demons working out their faith in shuddering and trembling from other sources. See Jer. 2:12.

COMMENT

Comment [10]: Dr. Clark says, "No!" I was saying "their faith does produce fruit." I changed it to read "their faith produces the fruit of shuddering."

19

THE SINNER AND THE PROSTITUTE

2:20-26. *But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 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. You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. And 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? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

Useless faith: What does James mean in verse 20 when he calls faith without works useless? "Unemployed" or "idle" are two other ways to translate "useless." Unemployed presents a different picture than saying that something is dead, as the *King James Version* translates this word.¹⁰ This is unemployed faith that still has the potential for employment. Faith without works may be like a faith that is dead, but it is not beyond hope. The believer simply has not exercised his faith.

¹⁰"Dead" and "useless" are not alternative renditions of the same Greek word, but are translations of different words from the different Greek texts used by the *King James Version* and the *New American Standard Bible*. "Dead" is used in the context of both Greek texts in James 2:17 and James 2:26. The older text upon which the *New American Standard Bible* is based, describes "faith without works" as "useless." "Useless" tells us what James means when he says "faith without works is dead."

Peter uses the same word in II Pet. 1:8.

For if these *qualities* are yours, and are increasing, they render you neither **useless** nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [boldface emphasis added]

The "qualities" to which Peter refers are a progression listed in verses 5-7: applying all diligence, faith, moral excellence, knowledge ("gnosis"), self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, *Christian* love. The progression begins with faith and ends in spiritual maturity called "*Christian* love." In verse 8, the Greek word translated "true knowledge" is "epignosis," experiential knowledge. The believer who diligently applies his faith and increases in moral excellence, knowledge ("gnosis"), self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and Christian love produces fruit in the experiential ("epignosis") "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

James is not saying that a person who has faith without works is unsaved. James is challenging us, believers, to put our faith to work. He commands us not to let our faith languish unemployed, but to apply our faith.

Abraham: Now James moves to Abraham and Rahab as illustrations of the principle of faith with works. Again, his illustration of Abraham and Isaac can confuse us, because he uses a technical theological term non-theologically. James uses the word "justified" three times in James 2:21,24,25. Justification is one of many gifts to believers at the time of salvation. In salvation "justified" is a technical theological term. However, Paul did not invent the word. Other writers, like James, used the word before Paul gave it a technical meaning. James uses the word "justified" in its non-theological meaning. The context tells us that "justified" does not refer to eternal salvation. James 2:23 quotes Gen. 15:6.

Then He believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

The significance about James quoting this verse is that it deals with God's prophecy to Abraham that Abraham would have a son. Gen. 15:6 says that Abraham was saved by believing in the Lord, when God promised Abraham that he would have a son. Abraham was

saved before Isaac was even born, not when Abraham obeyed God by preparing to sacrifice Isaac.

If Abraham had disobeyed the Lord about the sacrifice of Isaac, would Abraham have lost his salvation? Definitely not. God had already imputed His perfect righteousness to Abraham. No failure on Abraham's part could have made any difference in Abraham's eternal salvation, much less in the promises that God made to Abraham.

Abraham did not fail when he offered Isaac as a sacrifice, but the Bible describes two major failures of Abraham between Gen. 15:6 and the offering of Isaac. He tried to help God fulfill God's promise of a son by having a son by Hagar. Gen. 20 tells us about the second failure. Abraham lied to Abimelech, saying that Sarah was his sister. Both times Abraham's faith lacked works.

What does James mean, then, when he asks, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" James says that Abraham proved his faith by obedience to the command of God. Look at the promises that God gave Abraham. In Gen. 15:4 Abraham's heir will be one who shall come forth from his own body. In Gen. 18 Abraham hears the promise of the birth of his heir, Isaac. Now, in Gen. 22, God wants Abraham to offer Isaac on an altar! Abraham has a mature faith that believes that God knows what He is doing. Even if Abraham should offer Isaac as a sacrifice, Isaac will still be Abraham's heir and the father of a large progeny.

Works, then, are the outward visible manifestation of a person's faith. When we apply faith to real life situations, we find that God has already made provision for us. As Abraham said to Isaac, "God will provide the sacrifice." The justification of which James is writing is not the divine justification of sinners that believe in Jesus Christ, but the visible justification or proof of the believer's faith.

Justification: What is justification in its technical, theological meaning? Some people have described it with the

phrase "Just as if I had never sinned." That sounds good, but the indictment of Rom. 3:23 is twofold.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

If justification only removed our sins as in "just as if we had never sinned," we would still come short of the glory of God. We saw in James 2:10 that to stumble in one part of the law makes us guilty of all the law. Just one sin, in God's eyes, leaves us bankrupt.

However, remove sin and we are still broke. We may not have any liabilities, but we still do not have any assets. So what does God do? God imputes His perfect righteousness to us. Let's look at the context of Rom. 3:23. Verse 21:

But apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested.

Verse 22:

even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.

Finally, in verse 24, Paul mentions justification:

being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Justification takes us from bankruptcy to the infinite riches of the righteousness of God. Justification does far more than treat us "just as if we had never sinned." It provides us with the perfect righteousness of God. A justified believer no longer falls short of the glory of God, because justification has imputed God's perfect righteousness to him.

Perfecting faith: In James 2:22, we read,

You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.

Here we have the interdependency of faith and works. Faith works with works, and works perfects faith. Look again at James 1:3-4:

Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Without faith, the Christian life is not productive. We have already explored this concept. We perfect our faith when we apply

it through works. Work strengthens our faith. This is the twofold aspect of spiritual growth. First, we must have faith to hear and believe the teaching of the word of God. Second, we must apply what we believe. The combination of hearing, believing, and applying the word perfects our faith.

Abraham and Rahab: Heb. 11 might be called the "hall of faith" of Old Testament believers. Heb. 11:2 says, "For by it [faith] the men of old gained approval." The word "approval" means a good testimony. The "hall of faith" describes Abraham in Heb. 11:17-19. Verse 19 says specifically that Abraham "considered that God is able to raise *men* even from the dead." Abraham had an astounding level of faith.

Heb. 11:31 describes Rahab.

By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

The faith of these Old Testament believers in the Heb. 11 "hall of faith," produced works that were visible to others, resulting in a good testimony to other men and also receiving approval from God. God had already saved these Old Testament saints, when they showed faith in God's promises.

Death: James 2:26 summarizes with an analogy from two kinds of death. When he says "the body without *the* spirit is dead," James refers to physical death. The word for "spirit" also means "breath." We cannot live without breathing. "The body without breath is dead."

James completes the analogy by referring to experiential death in a believer's spiritual life. James writes, "So also faith without works is dead." He refers to a believer whose life is dominated by his flesh rather than controlled by the filling of the Holy Spirit. Physical death occurs when our bodies lack breath. Experiential death of a believer occurs when we do not let the Holy Spirit control our lives through the implanted word.¹¹

¹¹The relationship of the filling of the Holy Spirit and the word of God is discussed on pages 67-71.

Experiential death in James results from the believer's failure to apply the word of God. An example of experiential death is Abraham's lie to Abimelech. Another example is Charlie Christian's discrimination against the poor man. The smooth-talking rich man provides a third example when he says, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," but does nothing to lessen the suffering of another believer in need. A final example of experiential death in failing to apply the word is a believer who heard what the rich man just said and then comments, "Oh, sure. That's easy to say. He owns half this town, but I have never seen him lift a finger to help a poor widow or her children."

Life is not easy. There are times when we all face difficulty, hardship, adversity, or pressure. How do we react to these normal occurrences? Do we spend a sleepless night staying awake worrying about what is happening? James' message is that we don't have to. One of my favorite verses is Rom. 8:31-32.

What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who is against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

Final comments. We have finished looking at the first two chapters of James. We see that James is hammering home one central idea. Believers, fellow Christians, beloved brethren, it is not enough to hear the word of God and believe it. Faith is not the final goal. God gives us faith to apply in our lives. Whatever the difficulties, adversity, personal conflicts, hardships or other problems we face, God provides us with the solution. Believers grow spiritually when they couple their faith with works. Spiritual growth comes through faith plus application.

20

WARNING TO TEACHERS

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

At least eight other times James followed his commands with Biblical principles that his readers already knew. The word "knowing" here, connotes understanding. James wrote to believers who knew and understood what he was saying.

James directed his comments to believers who wished to become teachers. "Let not many of youC." He did not write to the believer in the pew, Charlie Christian, saying, "Don't let these people try to teach you." James' approach was not the removal of unqualified teachers by the judgment of members of the congregation. James issues his warning to teachers and to prospective teachers. Charlie Christian should be concerned with the accuracy of Bible teaching he hears. Many times, such as, James 1:16, I Cor. 6:9, Gal. 6:7, Eph. 5:6, Col. 2:8, and I John 3:7, the Bible warns, "Do not be deceived." James was not looking at the situation from that standpoint, but from the standpoint of the teachers themselves.

Stricter judgment: Let's look at two verses in Chapters Four and Five of James' epistle. James 4:11:

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

James 5:9:

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

Both verses command us not to judge and criticize other believers. The believers in James 3:1 wanted to become teachers, so that they could use the pulpit to condemn other believers. As teachers, they would "incur a stricter judgment." Stricter than what? Stricter than the judgments they would make in their teaching.

Restoration: Let's look at Jesus' teaching in Matt. 7:1-5.

"Do not judge lest you be judged *yourselves*. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly *enough* to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

While the passage begins, "Do not judge," later it says, "take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly *enough* to take the speck out of your brother's eye." When you have applied the word of God in your own life so you are not subject to criticism yourself, then you can judge others.

James approaches the subject of judging other believers differently from Matt. 7. James 4:11 is an absolute command not to "speak against one another." In Matt. 7 Jesus says to straighten out your own life before you try to straighten out someone else. James wrote to two groups of feuding believers. The poor believers wanted to be teachers, a position from which they could publicly condemn and judge the rich believers. Matt. 7 sets the standards and general principles for the ministry of restoration developed in the epistles. Under the ministry of restoration, a spiritually mature believer helps a sinning believer restore his spiritual life.

Gal. 6:1 is another passage on the ministry of restoration.

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, **you who are spiritual**, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; ^Y [Boldface emphasis added.]

This passage limits the ministry of restoration to believers who are spiritual. There is another limitation. Reread James 3:1, 4:11, 5:9 and Gal. 6:1. The Bible addresses each of these verses to "brethren." This ministry of restoration is to other believers who are caught in a sin. The evidence of the sin is obvious. These passages do not refer to a sin that someone else told us about. Furthermore, the Bible does not teach us to impose our Christian standards on unbelievers. We are to give the gospel to unbelievers, not tell them to change their lives. Finally, only spiritually mature believers are to exercise the ministry of restoration.

In Matt. 7:1-5 the believer who can help another believer remove a speck from his eye is the believer who has removed the log from his own eye. The believer who has removed the log from his eye is the mature Christian who has proved his faith many times.

Judging and criticism are contagious. A criticized person often defends himself by criticizing the other person. Judging and criticism are signs of arrogance. A person who judges and criticizes another is saying, "Look how much better I am than you are. I don't do these things that you do." The criticized person then defends himself by criticizing the person who criticized him. Judgment, criticism, and condemnation of others are prevalent today, violating Jesus' command in Matt. 7:1.

Gal. 6:1 not only restricts the ministry of restoration to those "who are spiritual," but also commands them to restore the person caught in sin in a "spirit of gentleness." The word "gentleness" means humility. The *King James Version* translates the word "meekness."

Then Jesus added Matt. 7:6.

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Jesus has not finished the subject he began in verse 1, "Do not judge, lest you be judged *yourselves*." Verse 6 tells us not to give

unwanted advice. If we speak pearls of wisdom to people with closed minds, they will trample these pearls under their feet. Unbelievers cannot understand the Bible. Don't try to teach unbelievers ("dogs" in Jesus' illustration) spiritual truth that God intended for believers. Give unbelievers the gospel that they can understand through the power of the Holy Spirit, but do not try to reform their lives.

Matt. 7:6 also explains how judgment and criticism find their way back to the judge and critic. The condemned person looks for the chink in the judge's armor and lashes out with his own criticism. "Lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces."

Becoming teachers: We are studying James 3:1.

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

James was writing to believers who wanted to stand up and set the congregation right. Too many rich men in the congregation were not showing mercy to the poor, were defrauding their employees, and even suing other believers in court. James warns that the would-be teachers were not qualified to be teachers. They had not removed the logs from their own eyes. They had not reached spiritual maturity. As teachers, they would come under the stricter judgment of fellow believers and of God.

James moves from the command "Let not many of you become teachers" to the teaching that forms the basis for the command. "Knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment." We saw from Matt. 7 that when we judge and criticize others, they react by judging us. Matt. 7:6 uses a vivid metaphor, "lest they (the victims of your criticism) trample them (the criticisms) under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (with criticism)." The stricter judgment not only includes these human reactions, but also loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ. God has special blessing at the judgment seat of Christ for pastors who faithfully minister to their congregations, but He also holds

them to a higher standard James calls "a stricter judgment." God expects pastors to practice what they preach.

The higher standard also applies to the content of the pastor's message. Recently, I visited a church whose pastor said that he did not understand the subject of angels. Other pastors admit that they do not understand prophecy. Still other pastors may be uncertain about other Biblical subjects. Are these pastors telling their congregations that the subject of angels or prophecy or whatever is superfluous and that God did not need to include those subjects in His word? These pastors are being honest. They admit that they do not understand some theological subjects, but their lack of understanding limits their ability to teach God's word.

False teachers: What about pastors who teach the word incorrectly? Paul warned us about these false teachers. I Tim. 4:1-3:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage and *advocate* abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

The "deceitful spirits" in this passage are false teachers. They teach the "doctrines of demons." These false teachers have convinced themselves of the truth of what they are teaching. They have been "Seared in their own conscience." The issues of celibacy or food taboos do not trouble us today, but we do have a complete panorama of religious opinions from which to choose. Consider baptism, for example. Is baptism necessary for salvation? Some churches insist on baptism by immersion. Others just sprinkle water on a person's head, while still others pour on a little more. What is the significance of baptism of babies? Why do some churches not baptize babies? Some churches baptize immediately after a person professes faith in Jesus Christ. Other churches wait

until after the new believer has been through a series of classes before baptizing him. Some churches do not even baptize at all.

Choose any theological subject, and you will find diverse opinions and interpretations. Think about the significance of James' warning and command in James 3:1.

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

Before a person stands in front of a congregation to teach the word of God, he needs adequate preparation. He needs to know and understand the major principles of the word. Then he experiences the truth of these Biblical principles by their application. With preparation and application a teacher can accurately teach the Bible.

I Tim. 4:1-3 refers to "deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." Jesus described Satan as a liar in John 8:44. The preachers Paul describes as "deceitful spirits" are lying like Satan. They are sincere in their beliefs with false teachings seared in their consciences. Paul goes on to call their teaching the "doctrines of demons." Satan and his demons love to take Scripture and twist its meaning. The direct and indirect influence of Satan and his demons is common today. For example, our schools teach the use of contraceptives, instead of abstinence. For another example, bumper stickers tell us to "visualize world peace." Jesus said in John 14:27:

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

Does "visualize world peace" mean the same thing that Jesus meant when he said, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives," or is the idea of world peace no more war? Satan tries to involve Christians in improving this world that he rules, rather than in advancing the kingdom of God through witnessing and growing to spiritual maturity.

The crown of glory: In James 3:1, the stricter judgment also refers to the higher standard to which God holds a pastor. Pastors can expect divine discipline to be both quicker and more severe than that of members of their congregations. Pastors, therefore, must be diligent to apply what they are teaching. In addition, pastors must continue to study the Bible using skills they learned in college and seminary for accurate teaching of the word. At the judgment seat of Christ each faithful pastor will receive a crown of glory. Peter wrote about this crown in I Pet. 5:4:

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

The preceding two verses (verses 2-3) in I Peter give us the basis for this crown of glory:

shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of* God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

In Phil. 4:1, Paul mentions "his crown":

Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Paul also writes in I Thess. 2:19-20:

For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.

These passages tell us that pastors will receive the crown of glory at the appearing of the Chief Shepherd. The Lord Jesus Christ will appear in the air, and all believers will be caught up together to meet Him. I Thess. 4:16-17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

In keeping with the promise of a greater award, the crown of glory, at the judgment seat of Christ, James 3:1 tells us that pastor-teachers will incur a stricter judgment. God holds pastors to a higher standard than other believers.

Jesus Christ awards the crown of glory, as Peter says, to a pastor for shepherding his congregation voluntarily, eagerly, neither in arrogance, nor to make a lot of money. The pastor sets an example for his congregation with his life setting the pattern for the lives of those in the congregation. He, himself, has advanced to spiritual maturity through studying, learning and applying the word of God, and now his congregation can do the same.

Final comments. James 3:1 is a strong warning to anyone who wants to be a teacher of the word of God. Are you properly prepared to teach the Bible? Have you reached the point of spiritual maturity where you are applying the word of God yourself? Can you be accurate in your teaching, "rightly dividing the word of truth?"

21

THE TONGUE IS A FIRE

3:2-12. *For we all stumble in many ways. If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Behold, 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. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 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. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh.*

Background: James wrote to the poor believers in James 1:19, "Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." The poor believers were trying to right the wrongs and the unfair treatment by the rich believers. They were speaking out at every opportunity about the rich believers' selfish ambition and unfairness. Now, in James Chapter Three, he writes to the poor believers about the use of their tongues. In verse one James warns the poor believers of the stricter judgment they would receive as teachers.

Now James moves from the warning to aspiring teachers in James 3:1 to the principal tool of the teacher's profession, the tongue. The stricter judgment of teachers provides a strong warning against the abuse and misuse of the teachers' tongues. Teachers not only must accurately teach the word of God, but they must also be accurate in application of the word.

Pastor-teachers not only have the ability to study the word of God, but they also have the public speaking skills necessary to teach the word. This passage describes the misuse of these public speaking skills.

James 3:2 begins with a principle that James' readers knew well. "For we all stumble in many *ways*." We are all sinners. After salvation, we continue to sin. When we fail to let the Holy Spirit control our lives, we sin. We sin when our flesh controls our thoughts, words and actions. Believers' sins include overt sins such as stealing, adultery, immorality, and actions of revenge. They include sins of the mind or thinking, such as coveting, lust, hate, desire for revenge, envy, selfishness, bitterness, and jealousy. Finally, believers' sins include sins of the tongue such as lying, gossiping, criticizing, and false teaching.

Sins of the tongue: This section of James focuses on the third group of sins, the sins of the tongue. He says, "If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." How does a person measure his spiritual

maturity? James tells us to listen to what we say. Are our tongues under control?

Lying is an obvious sin. Do you differentiate between lies, and "little white lies?" Do you excuse little white lies because they do not hurt anyone? Do you think they are a necessary part of the social situation and polite society? Do you say? "Oh, Clementine! What a pretty new purple polka-dotted dress you are wearing," when you truly do not like her dress. Some people become adroit in telling lies. They know just when and how to lie and not get caught. Others lie so often that they lose credibility. Their friends never know when to believe them. James shows astute insight in his statement that a mature believer does not stumble in what he says.

Gossip: How many sermons have you heard on gossip? Everybody knows that lying is a sin. Our parents taught us that from early childhood. In contrast, we rarely consider gossip a serious sin. Look at these verses from the Bible:

II Cor. 12:20

For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there may be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, **gossip**, arrogance, disturbances;

Rom. 1:28-32

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, malice; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are* **gossips**, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.

I have highlighted "gossip" in these two lists of sins. Man is a "social animal." We love to talk about people, including ourselves. When a person tells us about himself, what do we do? We tell

someone else. That someone else tells a third person who tells a fourth. Of course, each telling may inadvertently include its own alterations and embellishments, so that by the fifth or sixth repetition, the story bears little resemblance to the original.

Read again II Cor. 12:20. The verse treats gossip the same as arrogance, jealousy, and loss of temper. Now, reread Rom. 1:28-32. Gossip is in the same list with greed, murder, hating God, and arrogance. Rom. 1:32 says that those who gossip are "worthy of death!"

The ninth commandment deals with sins of the tongue. The commandment is "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This is the prohibition against lying, perjury, and gossip that spreads false rumors about others.

Don't stumble over your tongue: Sins of the tongue are widespread, but believers often ignore sins of the tongue. As we study this passage in James, we should keep in mind that if teachers and public speakers can sin in what and how they speak, so can we.

James 3:2:

For we all stumble in many *ways*. If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

The believer who does not fail in what he says has reached spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity enables the believer, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome the flesh in other areas. James said, "able to bridle the whole body."

Illustrations: The illustrations of James 3:3-4 compare the bit in the horse's mouth and the rudder on a ship to the tongue. Both the bit and the rudder are small in comparison to the horse and the ship that they control.

James 3:5-6:

So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and *yet* it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small

fire! 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.

Fire: The Greek word translated "hell" is "Gehenna." Gehenna was the name of Jerusalem's garbage dump. The fire at Gehenna burned continually to destroy the garbage. II Kings called this place Hinnom. When the Jews turned to the false religion of the Canaanites, they made burnt offerings of their children to Molech at Hinnom described in II Kings 23:10.

He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech.

The priests and prophets of Molech must have been extraordinary public speakers. They led many Israelites astray and persuaded them to worship false gods in orgies and child sacrifices.

"And the tongue is a fire." Our civilization does not practice child sacrifice, but all of us have heard the fiery oratory of public speakers. Evangelists preach "fire and brimstone." We can easily understand the dual meaning of this description of the tongue, describing both the style and the content of the evangelists' message. Public speaking is a powerful skill. This is why James goes on to call the tongue "the very world of iniquity." Public speakers can incite riots. Public speakers can convince people of either correct ideas or false ideas. By properly using his tongue, an evangelist can lead many people to believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Satan's program: Satan has his own evangelists. Satan's evangelists do not always espouse overt and obvious sins such as murder, rape, adultery, criminal behavior, and hate. The lusts of our flesh lead us into these overt sins all too easily. Satan's evangelists often have programs that sound far better. Satan knows that Jesus Christ has promised to rule a perfect world, known

theologically as the Millennium. If Satan can produce a perfect world on his own, then he thinks he will have proved that he is as good as God is and that God's promises are empty and false.

In contrast to the gospel that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ, Satan's evangelists preach about ways to make this world a better place in which to live. They may claim, "There is enough food in the world to feed everyone. Food is just poorly distributed. Let's redistribute the food and end hunger in the world." This message has a strong appeal when we look at the food we waste everyday and see photographs of starving children. After all, the Bible commands Christians to help those in need. Didn't James write in James 2:15-17?

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

The program to end hunger seeks to change the world, but it does not seek to change the people in the world. To achieve an even distribution of food in the world means taking food from those that have it and giving it to those who do not have enough. Even if we could be successful in ending hunger, we have only relieved one area of suffering. We have not brought about any change in the people themselves. Millions will still not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. They will still die and spend eternity in hell. Yet we gave them a few days or years without hunger.

In Medieval times the Crusades had the purpose of freeing Jerusalem from Islam. Today people immerse themselves in crusades of many kinds. Besides the crusade to end hunger, we have crusades for the environment, crusades for world peace, crusades for racial equality, crusades for women's rights, crusades for homosexual and Lesbian rights, right-to-life crusades, and countless others. Although there often is a degree of self-interest in these crusades, the object is to make the world a better place. Crusades fail to solve the basic problem, described in Jer. 17:9:

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?

Crusades do not solve the problem of man's deceitful and desperately sick heart. Only God can do that. Faith in Jesus Christ is the solution to the deceitful heart of man.

When Christians march in front of abortion clinics and push their "right-to-life" crusades, the witness is not "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." In the "right-to-life" crusades, the world sees Christians in the same light as race rioters and those who crusade for homosexual and Lesbian rights. The world sees Christians as saying that they are above the law. When Pilate tried Jesus, Pilate found no fault in our Savior. Jesus did not advocate breaking the law and did not break the law Himself. Do believers have the right to defy the law?

Christians think of worldliness as living a life of immorality. However, worldliness can also include participation in crusades to improve the world. Crusades can distract us from presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unsaved and from learning and applying the word of God ourselves. Eloquent speakers promote crusades to improve our world. So James 3:6 reminds us:

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.

The fiery speech of proponents of causes and crusades sets our lives on fire. By wanting to change the world, making it a better place, we are fulfilling Satan's commission, not the Great Commission. Satan wants to turn the world into his own paradise so he can say to God, "You're not so great. Look what I have done with the world? Isn't this a great place for man to live?" Behind the fiery oratory of many crusaders are Satan's demons. These demons are the authors of the ideas and sometimes even possess the orators so that it is the demons who are speaking.

Our mission: In the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20, Jesus Christ commanded His disciples to go to the people of the world, not for the purpose of improving the world, but to make

disciples, baptize, and teach. The command does not say to heal the sick, relieve suffering, feed the hungry, or improve economic conditions or the environment.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Taming animals, but not the tongue: James 3:7 tells of man's domination over all the animals, birds, and fish.

For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race.

Look at verse 8:

But no one can tame the tongue; *it is* a restless evil and full of deadly poison.

From the petty lies and idle gossip of Charlie and Charlene Christian to the fiery oratory of political demagogues and religious charlatans, the tongue produces its restless evil and spreads deadly poison. Christians condemn adultery, drinking and drunkenness, abortion, and many other actual and alleged sins, but they too often condone and overlook the sins of the tongue.

The function of our tongues: James 3:9-10:

With it [the tongue] we bless *our* Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.

What a dichotomy of expression we produce with our tongues. The pastor-teacher must be accurate in his teaching of the word of God. How many churches draft Sunday School teachers under the guise of serving the Lord without regard to their qualifications and the subject matter they will teach? When a teacher is inaccurate, does this glorify the Lord?

Are Christians, who speak for a good cause, promoting God's work on earth, or are they abetting Satan's plan to build a utopia without God?

Charlie Christian, when you repeat a story you have heard about another person, what important points of the story have you forgotten? Did you place your own shade of emphasis on the story? Was repeating the story necessary? How many other times and to how many other people will your listeners repeat the story? Would you be telling the story if the subject of the story were present to hear you tell it? Perhaps you prefaced your story with, "Don't tell anyone I told you, but Y!"

I would like to see all prayer chains run in circles. The last person in the chain should call the first person in the chain and repeat the prayer request. Is the request the same as the original? How has the request changed as it was passed from person to person in the chain?

Fruit: James completes this discussion of the sins of the tongue with a couple illustrations. James 3:11-12:

Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither *can* salt water produce fresh.

These illustrations describe production in the lives of believers. A believer filled with the Holy Spirit does not produce both fresh and bitter water. Fresh water is comparable to divine good called "gold, silver, precious stones" in I Cor. 3:12. Similarly, bitter water is comparable to evil, called "wood, hay, straw" in the same passage. Bitter water ("wood, hay, and straw") is the production of the lusts of our flesh. Fresh water (gold, silver, and precious stones) is the production of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

False teaching, lying, gossip, taking the Lord's name in vain, and worldliness (including crusades to improve the devil's world) are all functions of the believer who has rejected the filling of the Holy Spirit and is living under the domination of his flesh.

Final Comments: The sins of the tongue are the forgotten sins of mankind. James devotes twelve verses in the middle of his epistle emphasizing their destructive power. We have only touched the surface of the subject, but even so, we can see how pervasive and hidden these sins are in the lives of Christians.

In the second chapter of his epistle James directed many of his comments to the rich man and the failure of his faith to produce works. The rich man was quick to encourage another believer dressed in rags, by saying, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," but he did nothing to help the believer in need.

In the third chapter, however, James turned his attention to the poor man who was verbally condemning the rich man. The poor man desired to become a teacher. James had him in mind when he wrote, "Let not many of you become teachers."

22

WISDOM, ENVY, AND SELFISH
AMBITION

3:13-18. *Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

This passage summarizes the sins of the rich believer and the poor believer. James discusses and provides the solution to the problem of both the rich man and the brother of humble circumstances. The poor brother was guilty of bitter envy, while the motivation of the rich believer was selfish ambition.

Understanding: James 3:13 begins by asking a rhetorical question: "Who among you is wise and understanding?" If the question were not rhetorical, every person in the church would raise his hand to avoid embarrassment.

The New Testament uses the Greek word translated "understanding" only once. The Septuagint uses the same word a few times in the translation of the Old Testament. Arndt and Gingrich give the meaning as "those who are experts in their own estimation." The translation of the Greek word in Isa. 5:21 illustrates this meaning well, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight!"

James asks his readers if they know what the Bible teaches. He says, "You think you are experts in understanding the word of God, but does your behavior and application of the word reveal your wisdom?" Show us by your good behavior your "deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."

Gentleness and humility: James 3:13 says "gentleness." James 1:21 translates the same Greek word "humility:" "In humility receive the word implanted." In Gal. 5:23, the same word, "gentleness," is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

James says, "Apply the word of God, but not with a 'holier than thou' attitude." Certain sins do not appeal to me. If I think that someone who commits one of these sins is not a Christian or, at least, not a very good Christian, then I am not showing my good behavior with deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. James is discussing mental attitudes. Our overt actions can be free of sin, while our minds are full of mental sins. We need to accompany good behavior and deeds with the gentleness and humility of wisdom.

All of us have some sins that are more difficult to overcome than others. Each person is prone to different sins. We understand people who fail in the same way we do, but we condemn those who fail in ways in which we would never fail.

Wisdom: "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." This command is about more than just good behavior and good deeds. We are to obey the word of God "in the gentleness of wisdom." Gentleness and humility describe wisdom and the application of the word of God.

Jealousy and envy: James wants to make sure that we understand this point. So in the next verse (James 3:14) he says:
 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.

We need to discuss the word "jealousy" here. In their Greek-English Lexicon, Arndt and Gingrich give the translation as "envy" or "jealousy." Envy and jealousy are not exact synonyms. I found the following definitions in an English dictionary:¹²

JEALOUSY. "1. suspicion; apprehensive of rivalry; as her husband was jealous of the other man."

ENVY. "1. a feeling of discontent and ill will because of another's advantages, possessions, etc.; resentful dislike of another who has something desirable. 2. desire for some advantage or possession belonging to another."

Both the *American Standard Version* and the *New American Standard Bible* give us the translation, "bitter jealousy." The *King James Version* says, "bitter envying" and the *New International Version* and the *New King James Version* read "bitter envy." The *New American Standard Bible* translates the same Greek word in James 4:2 as "envious," not "jealous."

What was James writing about? Was he concerned about suspicions and apprehension of rivalry, or did he see discontent and ill will arising out of a desire to have the same advantages and possessions that others had? I believe the latter definition fits the context better. Discontent and ill will describe the attitude of the brothers of humble circumstances toward their more affluent brothers in Christ. Remember what James wrote in James 1:9: "But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position." The poor believers were to focus on their riches in glory from their high position in Jesus Christ. James gave the solution before he discussed the problem. The problem? They had bitter envy of the

¹²*Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language*, Unabridged. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, Second Edition.)

advantages and material possessions of the rich believers. Therefore, I will use the word "envy" instead of "jealousy" in this discussion.

Arrogance: James uses "bitter envy and selfish ambition" in contrast to "the gentleness of wisdom." Then he rephrases the command of verse 13. He moves from a positive command (do this) to a negative command (do not do something), "do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." It is easy to miss James' reference to humility in the phrase "gentleness of wisdom." If we read verses 13 and 14 together, however, the humility issue is more apparent. Verse 13: "show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness (humility) of wisdom." Verse 14: "do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

The *New American Standard Bible* translates the word for "arrogant" as "triumphs" in James 2:13. The *King James Version* translates the word "glory" in James 3:14 and "rejoice" in 2:13 and 4:16. The *New International Version* renders the word "boast." The idea is an arrogant boasting or bragging about what great deeds a believer is doing for the Lord.

Do you remember how James began Chapter Three? "Let not many of you become teachers." In verse 13 he asks the rhetorical question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Everybody in the church wanted to answer this question, "I am." James wrote this letter to believers who thought they were wise and understanding, but he proves them wrong in verses 13 through 18. Their lack of wisdom and understanding disqualified them from being teachers.

Throughout his epistle James refers to spiritual principles that his readers already knew. They thought they had a deep understanding of the word of God. Undoubtedly, they thought that they were applying all the word they needed to apply. Their good deeds and good behavior proved it, but arrogance and self-righteousness were proving that they were mistaken. They lacked "gentleness of wisdom." They were not guilty of adultery or murder (James 2:11), but they were guilty of partiality (James 2:9).

As believers, we can obey the Ten Commandments. We can live fine, moral lives. We can be outstanding citizens of the community and pillars of the church. Nevertheless, if we lack humility, our lives are nothing but lies against the truth of God's word.

In this verse James summarizes the sins of the poor brothers and the rich believers and describes all the sins and failures in the epistle of James. The tree on the cover of this book illustrates the bitter envy, selfish ambition, and the other sins that James mentions. When we look at a tree, we see the trunk, branches, and leaves. The root system is hidden. Yet without the roots, the tree would not exist. The root system is often as extensive as the visible part of the tree. Arrogant boasting and the lying against the truth mentioned in James 3:14 are like this root system. Both the rich and the poor believers were guilty of arrogant boasting and lying against the truth. The tree on the cover splits into two trunks. One trunk represents bitter envy and the other trunk represents selfish ambition. The poor believers were guilty of bitter envy. The rich believers were guilty of selfish ambition. The branches and leaves of the tree represent other sins resulting either from the bitter envy of the poor believer or from the selfish ambition of the rich believer.

James is tough with both factions. James 3:14 begins, "But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart." "If" introduces a first class condition in the Greek. The meaning is not "maybe you do and maybe you don't," but "since you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts." "Bitter envy," which was the sin of the "brother of humble circumstances," consists of two sins, bitterness and envy. The poor believers were bitter because they did not have the material wealth of the rich men. Then, on top of their bitterness, they were guilty of envy.

Selfish ambition: The rich men, on the other hand, were guilty of "selfish ambition." Aristotle used this word in the sense of the self-seeking pursuit of political office by unfair means. The rich believers pursued material riches by every means possible. In

COMMENT

Comment [11]: Tree illustration.

COMMENT

Comment [12]: Betty points out that here is not fruit on the tree--Believers with these sins dominating their lives cannot produce fruit.

selfishness they would say the right words to the brothers of humble circumstances, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," but the rich men would not share any of their wealth with their needy brothers. On top of this selfishness, the rich men had a drive to get ahead and to increase their material wealth, even at the expense of anyone getting in their way.

Paul used the Greek word for "selfish ambition" both in lists of sins (translated "disputes"), such as, in II Cor. 12:20 and Gal. 5:20 and as a categorical description of sins. Rom. 2:8 and Phil. 2:3 are examples of the latter use. Phil. 2:3 reads:

Do nothing from selfishness [selfish ambition] or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself.

I once heard a Sunday School teacher say that ambition is a sin. However, this verse does not condemn all ambition, only selfish ambition. Ambition is a view toward an improved situation, a vision of the future driving us forward toward a goal. Many characters in Jesus' parables were ambitious, but Jesus did not condemn their ambition.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares in Matt. 13:24-30, Jesus told of a man who sowed good seed in his field. Would he have sowed the wheat without the ambition of a successful harvest? Then when his enemies came and sowed tares in his wheat field, he did not give up. He developed a plan to achieve his goal of a profitable harvest.

The parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matt. 20:1-16 also illustrates ambition. The landowner's ambition of a profitable harvest motivated him to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. Obviously, he had not heard of the idea of equal pay for equal work that we hear today. The landowner paid those that worked one hour the same daily wage as those who worked twelve hours. Jesus did not condemn the landowner for the unequal pay. Neither did He mention that this landowner, already well off and able to hire many laborers, continued to cultivate his vineyard with the ambition of further increasing his wealth.

Coveting: Not all the Ten Commandments are prohibitions against overt sins such as stealing and murder. The tenth commandment forbids a mental attitude sin, coveting. Both bitter envy and selfish ambition involve the sin of covetousness. The poor believer with bitter envy is coveting the rich man's wealth. The rich person with selfish ambition covets greater wealth.

In one sentence James brings together the sinful failures of both antagonists in this epistle. Both the rich man, through his selfish ambition, and the poor believer with bitter envy arrogantly boast and lie against the truth of God's word.

Wisdom: James 3:15 begins, "This wisdom," referring to the assertion in verse 13 that a person is "wise and understanding," when in reality he has bitter envy or selfish ambition. Wisdom that shows itself in bitter envy or selfish ambition is not wisdom at all, but arrogance.

When James first mentioned wisdom in James 1:5, he did not define the term. Instead, he said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, γ , and it will be given to you." By using a first class condition in James 1:5, James wrote, "Since you lack wisdom." He then gave the solution, "Let him ask of God." However, James knew that his readers were not ready to accept the simple solution. These readers considered themselves wise. So James continued through two and a half more chapters pointing out their failures.

- ◁ "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers." (1:22)
- ◁ "If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue, γ , this man's religion is worthless." (1:26)
- ◁ "This is pure and undefiled religion γ , to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (1:27)
- ◁ "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin." (2:9)
- ◁ "If a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" (2:14)

- ◁ "Let not many of you become teachers." (3:1)
- ◁ "from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing."
(3:10)

Now that James has stepped on a few toes, maybe he can get his readers' attention on the subject of wisdom. James 3:13 says in effect, "So you think that you understand the word of God and have wisdom from it. You know how to apply the Bible to your everyday life." After a two and a half chapter litany of sins that James summarizes as "bitter envy and selfish ambition," maybe some believers would listen to James' description of wisdom.

"This wisdomC" "Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."

"This wisdomC" You have "bitter envy and selfish ambition," rather than the gentleness of wisdom. Bitter envy and selfish ambition are the results of arrogance and show themselves in boasts and lies against the truth.

"This wisdomC" Again, in verse 15, James says, "This wisdomC" Bitter envy and selfish ambition are "not that which comes down from above." You claim to have wisdom, but it is not the wisdom of God. Instead of wisdom, you have bitter envy and selfish ambition that are lies against the truth and are not that which comes down from above." Wisdom can only result from a correct understanding of the word of God.

Human wisdom: Indeed some of these believers wanted to be teachers. Their lack of wisdom and understanding would appear as arrogant boasting and lies against the truth of the word of God when they stood up to teach. Not only does James call them arrogant boasters, liars against the truth, but he adds that their wisdom is "earthly, natural, demonic."

"Earthly" means belonging to the earth as opposed to belonging to heaven. We might call it worldly, but the term worldly has connotations today that the Bible does not always support. Earthly or worldly wisdom is the result of misplaced priorities. Paul wrote in Col. 3:2, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Many believers think of

worldliness in terms of activities, such as, sexual sins, drinking, wearing cosmetics, watching movies, or dancing. In reality, worldliness simply means a mind set upon earthly matters. This mind-set may include overt sins like drunkenness and sexual sins, but it also involves much more. James was writing to worldly believers concerned with material wealth. The poor believers were envious, to the point of bitterness, of the rich believers in the church. Selfish ambition in the rich believers gave them an insatiable appetite for even more wealth. The earthly materialism of both factions blinded them to the spiritual truth they knew.

"Natural" means "soulish" or "derived from the flesh." Their wisdom was natural or soulish. The poor believers were criticizing the rich believers, grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit. The lusts of their flesh dominated their lives. They were not growing spiritually.

The rich believers were always planning how to increase their profit margins by one more percentage point. When they were successful in increasing their profit margins, they looked for ways to increase sales. When their employees became too vocal in their protests, the rich believers would take them to court or reduce their pay. The rich men constantly had their eyes open for new markets in which to sell their products. They attended church out of duty or to be seen sitting in the best seats, but they did not take their pastor's teaching seriously. Their attitude was, "What does the pastor know about increasing sales and profit margins?" The rich men knew the right words to say, such as, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled." They let words relieve them of any duty to open their wallets and use their own resources to help others. Like the poor believers, the rich men were grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit. The lusts of their flesh controlled their lives.

The flesh: When James calls wisdom natural or soulish, he refers to the domination of a believer's life by his fleshly lusts. He gives the solution in James 1:21:

Therefore putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

I John 1:9 presents the solution in another way:

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

Paul states the principle in Rom. 6:12-13:

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness to God.

Believers have a choice. We can let our flesh control our lives, or we can live under the control of the Holy Spirit. This process continues as long as we live. When we fail by submitting to the temptations of the lust of our flesh, then we must confess the sins, presenting ourselves "to God as those alive from the dead."

Demonic: "Demonic" refers to the wisdom of Satan and his demons. James alludes to demonic wisdom in James 3:6.

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 4:7 tells us how to handle the demonic.

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

In the Old Testament, when the nation Israel faced an army more powerful than its own, God promised them in II Chron. 20:17.

"You *need* not fight in this *battle*; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the LORD is with you."

When we face enemies more powerful than we are, we are not to take the offensive against them. Let the Lord handle the situation. "Submit to God." We need to place ourselves under God's authority. We "resist the devil" and his demons defensively. Submitting to God is defensive action. How do we submit? Obedience to God's commands is to "submit to God."

Disorder: James writes in the next verse, James 3:16,

For where envy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

What does he mean by disorder? The Greek word appears only a few times in the Bible. I Cor. 14:33 gives us an idea of what disorder is not.

for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

Both the *King James Version* and the *New American Standard Bible* translate the word "confusion" rather than "disorder" and contrasts it with peace. "Disorder" or "confusion" is not peace.

Luke 21:9 presents another view of disorder.

"And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end *does not follow* immediately."

The *NASB* translates "disorder" as "disturbances." The verse links "disturbances" and "wars." Envy and selfish ambition do not produce peace, but wars. James is leading his readers to another question in James 4:1: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Disorder means quarrels and conflicts between believers. Back in James 3:16, where bitter envy and selfish ambition exist, there is "disorder and every evil thing." Envy and selfish ambition do not stop with disorder, disturbances, confusion, and wars, but produce every evil thing.

Fruit of wisdom: In verse 17 James contrasts the production of envy and selfish ambition with the production of God's wisdom.

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

James chose his words carefully. Notice the contrasts:

- ◁ "Pure" versus "every evil thing" of verse 16.
- ◁ "Peaceable" versus "disorder" of verse 16.
- ◁ "Gentle" refers to "gentleness of wisdom" of verse 13.
- ◁ "Reasonable." Arndt and Gingrich translate this as "obedient, compliant." This is the only time the Bible uses the Greek word for "reasonable." James has touched on the subject of obedience in James 1:22: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers." Again in James 2:10 he wrote,

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all."

- ◁ "Full of mercy and good fruits" versus the rich man's failure, "to visit orphans and widows in their distress" in James 1:27.
- ◁ "Unwavering" versus "being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" of James 1:8.
- ◁ "Without hypocrisy" versus "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" (James 2:16). Today, we often say, "Have a nice day."

The third chapter of James began with a warning: "Let not many of you become teachers." The chapter ends with a statement about the attitude and the result that comes from good teaching: "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness." "Seed" refers to the word of God. The "fruit," spiritual production, the result of sound teaching of the word, is "righteousness."

Peace: "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Sowing of the seed is the teaching the word of God. The Holy Spirit teaches the God's word through pastors "in peace." James wrote about the tongue being a fire. Now, he describes pastors teaching the word of God in peace. James is not describing fiery preaching and the public condemnation and embarrassment of the congregation when he writes, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace."

Those who make peace are to teach the word of God. As we read James, we must constantly keep in mind that James was not writing to peaceful believers. These were fighting believers divided into two warring camps. The third chapter of James looks at one side, the poor believers, who wanted to become pastor-teachers. What an opportunity they would have, as teachers, to "grind their axes!" Would their teaching make peace? Making peace was not their intent. They were intent on winning the battle. They were going to stand in front of the congregation condemning

the rich believers and stating how great they, the brothers of humble circumstances, were. Can't you just hear their fiery oratory and convincing sermons by which they intended to achieve their goals?

"Wherefore by their fruitsY:" In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that a prophet is known by his fruit. Matt. 7:20. "So then, you will know them by their fruits." I discuss this passage on page 60. This is one of those short and simple verses that believers often quote out of context and misapply. Jesus simply reiterates the principle of the Mosaic law when He said, "You will know them (prophets) by their fruits." Are the prophets accurate in their prophecies? If not, then they are false prophets.

Now James writes about the fruit of Bible teaching in James 3:18. "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Correct teaching of the word of God will produce righteousness in those who hear and apply the word.

We have come to the end of the third chapter of James. Bible teachers usually divide this chapter into two paragraphs. James' sequence of thoughts in these two paragraphs is logical. James did not change the subject when he wrote the second paragraph, verses 13-18. James 3:1 begins, "Let not many of you become teachers." In twelve verses he writes about the power of the tongue the teacher uses. He ends the paragraph with an analogy between words spoken by the tongue and fruit: figs and olives. James begins the second paragraph by asking the question, "Who among you is wise and understanding?" Teachers need to be wise and understanding. The teacher shows good behavior by the gentleness of wisdom. The teacher with bitter envy and selfish ambition speaks with boastful arrogance and lies against the truth. In verse 13 James wrote, "the gentleness of wisdom." In verse 15, he wrote "This wisdom." Then in verse 17, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, Y" In the final verse, James summarizes, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

James makes the point that a teacher of the word of God must be wise and understanding. As a teacher, he does not come to the pulpit with an axe to grind and the intent of winning battles, but of winning peace. He sows seed that produces the fruit of righteousness.

Final comments: The third chapter of James focuses on teachers of the word of God. Teachers should apply the word. God holds teachers to a higher standard in His judgment, both in their lives and in the content of their teaching. James wrote in this chapter about the power of the tongue to control and motivate. Satan and his demons readily use this power of the tongue.

James then discusses and contrasts wisdom. He describes both the wisdom that results from the application of the word of God and a kind of "pseudo-wisdom" that believers have.

Finally, James brings the subject around to peace. Those who teach the word in peace make peace. James wrote to some believers who wanted to become teachers to enhance their own positions. The believers of humble circumstances, as teachers, could present their case against the rich believers to the entire congregation. Would this make peace? No. Pastors make peace by accurately teaching the word of God. Bible teaching needs to be objective. Pastors should emphasize all the sins taught in the Bible, not just the sins that happen to bother them.

What is your particular situation? You may not be facing the antagonisms that James discusses, but personal conflicts of many kinds always exist between people. The solutions about which James writes apply to all disputes and antagonistic situations.

As James 3:18 states, good teaching of the word does not stir up discord among groups in the congregation. Good teaching presents truths of the word of God impartially and without discrimination. Each person can then objectively learn where he falls short in his spiritual life and apply the word without feeling condemned or having to justify himself. The pastor teaches peacefully and the congregation reacts in peace.

23

THE ENEMY OF GOD

4:1-4. *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Quarrels and conflicts: James begins to "turn the heat up" in Chapter Four of his letter. Until now, he has soft-pedaled his discussion. Now James writes about "quarrels," "conflicts," "war in your members," and "murder." These words are in sharp contrast to "gentleness" and "peace" in the previous chapter.

James 3:13 commands each believer to "show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."

James 3:17 teaches, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

Then James 3:18 says, "And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Chapter Three describes wisdom, the application of the word of God, as "gentleness," "reasonableness," "unwavering," and "peace." Now in contrast, James asks a rhetorical question: "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?"

After reading James 3:13-18, James' readers cannot say that their quarrels and conflicts come from wisdom and understanding of the Bible. Understanding the word of God and using wisdom in its application produce gentleness and peace, not quarrels and conflicts.

James goes on in the second half of the first verse to answer his first question with another question. "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"

The New Testament uses the Greek word translated "pleasures," ἡδονή (hedone), only four times. In Tit. 3:3 "pleasures" appears in a list of the functions of the lusts of our flesh.

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

War in our flesh: As James wrote that the source of quarrels and conflicts is "your pleasures that wage war in your members," so Paul also wrote about members and waging war. "Members" do not refer to members of the church, but to members of our physical bodies. Look at what Paul wrote in Rom. 7:15,17,19,23,25:

For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. √ So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. √ For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. √ but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. √ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

Both James and Paul use the same imagery of war in our members. Their epistles support each other. James did not write to

refute Paul's teachings, and Paul did not write to contradict James' teaching.

"Our members" refers to the parts of our physical bodies. Paul and James wrote about pleasures that wage war in our members describing the conflict between the lusts of the flesh and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The source of quarrels and conflicts among believers is the pleasures that wage war in their members. Pleasure and having fun are not sin. We have not even sinned when our flesh tempts us through the pleasure drive called lust. Sin occurs when we say "yes" to lusts and temptations. We find gossiping, criticizing, and judging other believers easy. Furthermore, we become so involved in this "rat race" called life that we ignore the teaching and application of the word of God.

Lust: James 4:2 uses the word "lust," the same word that Paul paired with "pleasures" in Tit. 3:3. "You lust and do not have." In the middle of the verse James wrote, "And you are envious and cannot obtain." James points his finger at the rich man and then at the brother of humble circumstances. Rich man, "you lust and do not have." Poor man, "you are envious and cannot obtain." We can see the material aspect of these two statements. The rich man's selfish ambition produces an insatiable desire or lust to increase his fortune. The poor man's envy wants a better life by getting his hands on only a small part of the rich man's fortune.

James points out another insufficiency in the lives of both the rich believer and poor believer when he tells them that they cannot obtain. Ignatian used the Greek word for "obtain" in a phrase translated "attain to God," referring to martyrdom as a direct way to God. The rich man's lust and the poor man's envy prevent them from growing to spiritual maturity. Sins hinder their spiritual lives. Although God has saved them, they do not have God and cannot attain to God while they continue in these sins. The bitter envy of

the poor believer and the selfish ambition of the rich believer have quenched the Holy Spirit.

We can learn even more from the statements, "and cannot obtain" and "You do not have." We have seen that James 1:21 says "which is able to save your souls" and James 2:14, "Can faith save him?" What did these believers want to obtain, and what did they not have? They wanted the happiness and joy that James 1:2 commands us to have. Bitter envy and selfish ambition were preventing the deliverance of their souls from the adversities and pressures of life.

James' comments do not end there. Rich man, "You lust and do not have; so you commit murder." James 5:5-6 elaborates on this accusation against the rich believers:

You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

James 4:2 goes on to say, Poor man, "You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel." We think of murder as a more serious sin than fighting and quarreling and petty squabbling. James 2:10-11a says, "Not so."

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all. For he who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER."

Before God, the brother of humble circumstances who covets the rich believer's wealth is as guilty as the person who commits murder or any other sin. The poor believer, with his bitter envy, is guilty of coveting. The mental sin of coveting and bitter envy erupts into fighting and quarreling.

Happiness: Stop and think a minute. What does the rich man seek with his selfish ambition? What does the poor believer with bitter envy seek? Are they not both seeking material wealth? Why?

What do they think material wealth will do for them? The first century was not different from the twentieth century. We have the same mistaken idea today that material wealth will bring us happiness. Do you remember James' first command? "Think it all joy (happiness) when you encounter various trials." For the believer, happiness comes from knowing and applying the word of God, not from material wealth.

Man's categorization of sins differs from God's. We all agree that murder is a serious sin and a crime. We are quick to condemn those guilty of sexual sins or drunkenness or criminal acts, but we overlook lying, gossip, or a stirring up trouble in the church. Proverbs calls troublemaking one of the seven sins that are an abomination to God when it says, "spreads strife among brothers" (Prov. 6:16-19). How many churches split because some troublemaker starts complaining, criticizing, gossiping, or judging?

Prayer: The second command in James is to pray. James 1:5:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach.

James 4:2c-3 comments on the futility of the prayer life of his readers.

You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

These believers are allowing their flesh to control their lives. With their flesh in control, they fail to pray. James writes about their prayer lives: "You do not have because you do not ask." They simply did not pray. What good is the promise of James 1:5 to a believer who never prays?

Another type of believer in James 4:3 does pray. He may even pray constantly. To this believer, prayer is a kind of Aladdin's lamp. If he can find out how to rub God the right way in prayer, then God will answer his prayer and solve all his problems. This

believer's life, however, is full of bitter envy or selfish ambition. The lusts of his flesh control his life. The Psalmist wrote in Psa. 66:18, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." James wrote:

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

The verb "spend" connotes wasteful spending. If God gave this believer what he asked, he would be squandering the power of prayer on lustful pleasures. He has wrong motives arising from his flesh.

Spiritual adultery: James 4:4 begins, "You adulteresses." "Adulteresses" is a feminine plural noun. James is not accusing some believers of being prostitutes or even being unfaithful to their husbands. He is comparing marital infidelity to being unfaithful to God. The believers to whom James is writing, both male and female, are guilty of spiritual adultery. How? "Friendship with the world is hostility toward God." Does God come first in your life? Or are you more concerned with material wealth than you are about your spiritual life? The bitter envy and selfish ambition of these believers show a greater concern with the material than with the spiritual. James has this to say about them: "therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." James calls these believers enemies of God.

Paul used a similar description in Phil. 3:18-19:

For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Believers who live as the enemies of God have a destiny with destruction—not eternal judgment, but destruction of their life on earth and destruction of their works at the judgment seat of Christ. They will die physically under the sin unto death. Although, as believers, they will spend eternity in heaven, they will lose their eternal inheritance, their crown.

"Whose god is their appetite." Paul uses this word "appetite" to describe a believer's emotions and lusts. The emotions of these believers control their lives. "If it feels good, do it." They are "free spirits." They are oblivious to any authority and especially to the authority of the word of God.

Worldliness: "Who set their minds on earthly things." This statement brings us right back to James, "friendship with the world." Remember also James 3:15: "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic."

Worldliness is not a pattern of sinful activities, but what we think. Worldliness fills our minds with earthly thoughts. James describes believers with bitter envy and selfish ambition as worldly. They were going through the proper motions at church, but their first priority was to improve their material situation on this earth. Every Sunday, they were in church. Although some of them were in a position of leadership and were teaching the congregation, James calls them "enemies of God."

Do you have a concern for making this world a better place to live? The world is full of movements working to improve our lives. There are movements to rehabilitate criminals, control guns, feed the hungry, pro-life and pro-choice, save the environment, save the spotted owl or save lumber industry jobs in northwest forests, provide universal health care, bring democracy to the world, protect human rights in the third world, and on and on. All these movements have one thing in common. They focus on the here and now and making the world a better place to live. They are not concerned with the spiritual.

We can improve the quality of our lives by protecting an owl or a central Texas warbler and vireo from extinction, but what does this improved quality of life do for an unbeliever in eternity? We may protect the life of an unborn fetus by picketing an abortion clinic, but what have we done to tell the mother or her yet-to-be-born baby about Jesus Christ?

Believers who involve themselves in movements to improve the world and ignore the spiritual are worldly. James calls them enemies of God. Paul calls them "enemies of the cross of Christ."

Final comments: James uses strong language. We read this passage and think, "I'm not a murderer." "I'm civilized." "I don't involve myself in fights and quarrels." "I'm not an adulteress or a prostitute."

What would you do if, in a sermon, your pastor called you and others in the congregation murderers, guilty of fighting and quarreling, and adulteresses? Some churches would appoint a pulpit committee before the Sunday dinner dishes were washed and put away.

James was writing to believers who did not think any differently of themselves than we think of ourselves. Believers in today's churches are guilty of the same sins as the believers to whom James wrote. God would not have placed the epistle of James in the canon of Scripture if it did not have meaning for believers today.

24

ENVY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

4:5. *Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against jealousy? The Spirit who permanently indwells us pursues us with love.* [Translation by Col. R. B. Thieme, Jr.]

A problem: James 4:5 is the hardest verse to understand in the epistle of James. In most translations this verse includes a quotation. The *King James Version* reads:

Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

The problem is that the apparent quotation in this verse is not from the Old Testament or in any other literature extant from the first century. Have we lost part of the Old Testament? Such an idea is contrary to the teaching of the inspiration of Scripture. God inspired the writing of the word of God. Furthermore, He preserves the Bible so we have His entire message to mankind.

A second problem with the interpretation of this verse is that the typical translation ascribes envy and lust to the Holy Spirit. While the Bible often describes divine actions as human emotions and feelings, including describing God as a jealous God, what does James mean by the Spirit's lust, envy, or jealous desires?

A solution: The translation at the beginning of this chapter integrates the verse with the context. Jealousy or envy in James

COMMENT

Comment [13]: I am in trouble with this verse. Col. Thieme translates it with the word "jealousy." "Envy" is needed to be consistent with by analysis. Arndt and Gingrich give both translations "envy" and "jealousy."

3:14 and in James 4:2 categorically describe the sins of the brother of humble circumstances. The Old Testament Scriptures often speak against envy. So James refers to verses that forbid envy rather than quoting a specific passage.

The second half of the verse refers to the indwelling of every believer by the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit plays an important role in the life of a believer who rejects the power of the Spirit and lets the lusts of his flesh dominate his life. Believers with bitter envy and selfish ambition are not controlled by the Spirit. However, the Spirit still indwells them. From His indwelling position, the Holy Spirit, then, pursues them in love to bring them back under His control.

The translation of the individual Greek words written by James is not in question. The difficulty is in the word order of the translation. In his translation Col. Thieme uses a word order that fits this verse into its context and does not conflict with other passages of the Bible. Therefore, I have used Col. Thieme's translation of James 4:5 in this chapter, with the substitution of the word "envy" for "jealousy" as explained on pages 153-154.

Envy: "Do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain?" We have an easy time seeing the faults of others, while remaining blind to our own faults. The brother of humble circumstances was quick to complain and criticize the selfish ambition of the rich believer. Compared to all the sins that the ambitious rich believer committed, wasn't the poor believer's envy just a minor peccadillo? "Not so," says James and he challenges us, "Do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy?"

The Old Testament prohibited the sin of envy in the tenth commandment forbidding coveting. Exo. 20:17:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

How many people who claim to keep the Ten Commandments, only refer to the overt commandments among the

ten? They don't murder, commit adultery, or steal. They go to church on Sunday and worship God. They don't use profanity. They are honest and don't bear false witness about anything that matters against their neighbors. The tenth commandment, however, concerns a sin that is not overt. Coveting is a thinking sin. Coveting is a sin of the mental attitude.

James calls coveting envy. James 3:14 describes poor believers with bitter envy. They coveted the wealth, prestige, honor, luxuries, and ease of their wealthier brothers in Christ. The poor believers were not guilty of the overt and obvious sins of which the rich believers were guilty. God the Holy Spirit saw their bitter envy. The Holy Spirit inspired James to write: "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy?" The bitter envy of the poor believers was as sinful as the rich believers' selfish ambition. This selfish ambition resulted in callousness to the needs of the poor and even in murder.

Two of the Old Testament passages on envy that are appropriate to the issues James confronts are Ezek. 35:11 and Micah 2:1-2:

"therefore, as I live," declares the Lord GOD, "I will deal *with you* according to your anger and according to your envy which you showed because of your hatred against them; so I will make Myself known among them when I judge you."
(Ezek. 35:11.)

Woe to those who scheme iniquity,
Who work out evil on their beds!
When morning comes, they do it,
For it is in the power of their hands.
They covet fields and then seize *them*,
And houses, and take *them* away.
They rob a man and his house,
A man and his inheritance. (Micah 2:1-2.)

Therefore, we have the translation: "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy," referring to prohibitions against coveting and envy in the Old Testament rather than quoting a specific passage.

Indwelling of the Holy Spirit: James refers to a theological principle again in the second half of James 4:5 by mentioning the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He does not go into detail because his readers knew it well.

In John 14:16-17 Jesus prophesied that the Holy Spirit would indwell believers in the Church Age:

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you."

The prophecy in John 14:16 also teaches that the Holy Spirit will indwell believers forever. Therefore, the translation in James 4:5 is, "The Spirit who permanently indwells us."

The Holy Spirit abided **with** the disciples while Jesus Christ was living on the earth, but Jesus promised that the relationship with the Holy Spirit would be different in the future. Jesus said that in the future (the Church Age) the Spirit of Truth would not simply abide **with** us, but would be **in** us.

Paul wrote about the indwelling of the Spirit in I Cor. 6:19:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own.

Again, in I Cor. 3:16 he wrote:

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?

Paul also refers to the Spirit's indwelling in Rom. 8:11:

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.

In John 14:16-17 Jesus prophesied the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, while in Rom. 8:11, I Cor. 3:16, and I Cor. 6:19 Paul wrote about the actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul did not prophecy that the Holy Spirit would indwell believers because Paul

was writing during the Church Age, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was then a reality.

The Bible differentiates between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the filling of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is always present with believers during the Church Age. On the other hand, the Bible commands believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Eph. 5:18 says:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

The Bible never commands believers to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.¹³

James 4:5b gives a function of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers. "The Spirit who dwells in us pursues us with love." When the Holy Spirit fills the believer's life, the Holy Spirit is in control of his life. This filling or control works through the word of Christ richly dwelling within believers (Col. 3:16). When a believer is not filled with the Holy Spirit, the lusts of the believer's flesh dominate his life. This is when the Holy Spirit pursues us. Notice that this pursuit is an "inside job." The indwelling of believers by the Holy Spirit enables the Holy Spirit to pursue us from the inside. Through love, the Holy Spirit pursues the believer whose life is dominated by the lusts of his flesh.

Final comments: In this verse we see the perversity of believers who live under the domination of their flesh. They reject the teaching of Scripture. They think that the references to envy in the Bible do not refer to them. But even if a believer is not guilty of envy, he will be guilty of other sins. We are quick to see other people's faults and sins, but we ignore our own. When we read this sentence, we should ask ourselves a question. "What are our sins? Then we can substitute those sins for the word "envy." If we are

¹³Many times in this book I refer to the filling of the Holy Spirit or to the Holy Spirit controlling a believer's life. I discuss this issue in greater length on pages 67-71.

envious of the wealth or success of other people, of course, we would continue to read this verse as "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against envy?"

If God and the Lord Jesus Christ play "second fiddle" in our lives to advancement in our career and making money, then we can read: "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against selfish ambition?"

If we have a problem with gossip, then the application of this verse might be: "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against gossip?"

If our problem is lying, we would say, "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against lying?"

Do we take office supplies home for our own use? "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against stealing?"

Whatever our sins are, the lusts of our flesh influence us to reject the Biblical references to these sins and to say that these references do not apply to us. James challenges us to measure our lives against the word of God. We must not rationalize our actions to justify what the Bible condemns.

Finally, we should listen to the Holy Spirit who indwells us and pursues us in love to bring our lives back under His control.

25 HUMILITY

4:6-10. *But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.*

Greater grace: "But He gives a greater grace." Like God, God's grace is eternal, unchangeable, and unlimited. God saved us by His grace. Eph. 2:8:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God.

Now, James tells us that God gives us a greater grace. Let's look at Rom. 8:32:

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

The word "grace" does not appear in this verse in Romans, but grace is visible. That God "did not spare His own Son" describes God's grace to us in salvation. The verse goes on to ask the question, "Will He [God] not also with His Son freely give us all things?" The "all things" of Rom. 8:32 encompasses the "greater

grace" of James 4:6. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God provides all things necessary for our life on earth and for all eternity.

God gives "a greater grace" to us. I see three aspects to God's "greater grace" for believers. At salvation, God could have called us home to be with Him, but He did not do so. God has a purpose for us to remain on this earth. His purpose is to show His power and grace through us. Every demonstration of God's grace glorifies Him. We cannot glorify God by what we do. God is glorified by what He does.

"Greater grace," then, is more than the grace God gives us at salvation. "Greater grace" continues with us throughout our life on this earth, and then on into eternity.

James wrote about "greater grace" to believers living sinful lives of bitter envy and selfish ambition. Christ died on the cross for their sins, and they had believed in Him. He forgave their sins. Not only did He forgive the sins they committed in the past, but He also forgave the bitter envy and selfish ambition that they would later commit as believers. These believers received salvation by grace when they believed in Jesus Christ, and now they have an even "greater grace." They still have salvation in spite of their bitter envy and selfish ambition. This is the first aspect of God's "greater grace."

In this passage God gives greater grace in an even more specific way. In three verses, James gives ten commands to his readers. The believers of humble circumstances were guilty of bitter envy, but the Holy Spirit was pursuing them in love. They deserved divine discipline, but God gave them "a greater grace." God was giving them the opportunity to "Submit to God." James 4:8 commands them to "Cleanse your hands," and to "Purify your hearts." These are commands to allow the Holy Spirit to fill and control their lives. Believers obey the command to "cleanse their hands" by submitting to God. Col. 3:16 is a parallel passage to Eph. 5:18. Eph. 5:18 says, "Be filled with the Spirit" and the first passage says "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." The

Holy Spirit controls our lives when we learn and apply the word of God.

Were the rich believers with selfish ambition and the poor believers with bitter envy too proud to acknowledge their sin and to submit to God? If so, James writes that God opposes them. If, on the other hand, they put aside their arrogance and confessed their sin, then God would give grace to them in their humility. The Holy Spirit pursued them in love. James commands them to submit to God. Submission to God sounds abstract, but we submit to God by recognizing His authority and obeying His commandments. The second aspect of God's "greater grace" is the Holy Spirit's pursuit of sinful believers.

God provides "a greater grace" in still a third way. As we advance toward spiritual maturity, God provides greater blessings to us. The greater blessings are "greater grace" from God. Believers who advance to spiritual maturity will receive rewards at the judgment seat of Christ, the third aspect of God's "greater grace."

Humility: The immediate context of James 4:6a, focuses on two of the aspects of God's "greater grace." First from James 4:5, in love the Holy Spirit pursues the envious believer. Second, God gives grace to the humble believer in James 4:6b.

James 4:6b quotes a verse from Proverbs that Peter also quotes in I Pet. 5:5. "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." According to James 3:14 these believers were arrogantly boasting in bitter envy and selfish ambition. In Chapter Four James emphasizes God's opposition to pride and arrogance.

The humble, on the other hand, receive grace from God. We learn humility as we grow spiritually. James wrote to believers who were learning the word of God but not applying it. In this way, they stunted their spiritual growth. They were arrogant and proud. God opposed them. If they had been humble and applying what they were learning, God would have given them blessings from His grace.

Both times in which the New Testament quotes "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble," the context contains the command, "Resist the devil." James 4:7 says, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." The repetition of the command to "Resist the devil" in the context of both quotations is not an accident. Arrogance was the first sin of Satan. Satan's rebellion against God and divine authority came from arrogance. A believer who is not humble can neither worship God, nor can he serve God.

Submit and resist: James 4:7 gives two commands. In reality these commands are flip sides of the same coin. He commands us to "Submit therefore to God" and to "Resist the devil." We obey these commands by bringing our lives under the control of the filling of the Holy Spirit rather than under the domination of our flesh. Both verbs are in the imperative mood. They are also in the aorist tense that does not have a counterpart in English. While the aorist tense has many uses, these uses generally refer to instantaneous, not continuous actions.

We have an example of a verb of continuous action in I John 2:6.

the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Both verbs, "abides" and "walk," are in the present tense. They refer to the continuous action of a believer's life controlled by the Holy Spirit. He abides and walks with the Lord. A step represents an instantaneous action. Walking consists of many steps, hence a continuous action. Sin interrupts a believer's continuous walk. The believer can succumb to temptation arising from the lusts of his flesh. When our flesh takes control of our lives, James says we must "Submit therefore to God." Submit is an instantaneous action, comparable to each step in our walk.

The spiritual function of submitting to God often appears in the Bible. Rom. 6:12-13 is an example:

Therefore do not let sin reign (continuous action of the lusts of the flesh dominating our lives) in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting (more continuous action) the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present (instantaneous action) yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Another is Rom. 12:1-2:

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present (instantaneous action) your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed (continuous action) to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Sometimes the command appears as a continuous order, as in Eph. 5:18:

And do not get drunk with wine for this is dissipation, but be filled (continuous action) with the Spirit.

Paul tells us to live our lives continuously under the control of the Holy Spirit.

James 1:21 mentions this issue:

Therefore putting aside (instantaneous action) all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

We are to put aside filthiness and wickedness, rejecting the flesh and its control of our lives. We are to live under the power of the Holy Spirit by being filled with the Spirit. Then we are to receive the "word implanted," the teaching of the word of God.

James 4:7 commands us to "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." How do we submit to God? Submission to God is obedience to God, putting aside filthiness and wickedness that arise out of the lusts of our flesh. In response to the Holy Spirit's loving pursuit, we let Him fill our lives and take control. These commands describe the same spiritual function.

Resist the devil: How do we resist the devil? Jesus Christ gave a demonstration when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. Our Lord used Scripture to overcome each temptation.

Paul also paints a detailed picture of how to resist the devil in Eph. 6:10,14-17.

Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. √ Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, AND HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having SHOD YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take the HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Paul uses the armor of a Roman soldier to describe our fight against the devil and his "world forces of this darkness" (Eph. 4:12). Every item in armor is strictly for defense except the sword. The sword, which can be used either defensively or offensively, has a defensive purpose in Eph. 6. Paul says "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Jesus used the word of God to overcome the temptations of Satan. The believer's strength is in the word of God.

Peter quotes Prov. 3:34 in I Pet. 5:5, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." Then in verses 8-9 he commands us to resist the devil: 3:34:

Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist Him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

The word "sober" is broader than just a person who avoids drunkenness. "Sober" describes a person who is "self-disciplined." We are to discipline ourselves and be alert to the devil. I Pet. 5:9 commands us to resist the devil. Peter tells us how to resist the devil when he writes, "firm in your faith." Our faith in the word of God is our resistance to overcome Satan. Therefore the command in James 4:7 to "resist the devil" requires us to apply our faith in the word of God. Then the devil will flee from us.

Draw near: James gives us additional commands in verse 8. "Draw near to God." We draw near to God through learning and applying His word. "And He will draw near to you." God draws

COMMENT

Comment [14]: Do I show the significant parallel between I Pet. 5:5 and James 4:6? they both quote the same have verse in Proverbs.

near to us through the grace provision of His Holy Spirit. An arrogant believer is too proud to let the Holy Spirit control his life. The arrogant believer knows how he is going to live his life, and, as it were, stands aloof from God. God will not draw near to such a believer.

Cleansing: "Cleanse your hands, you sinners." In John 13:10 Jesus said to Peter:

"He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all *of you*."

In salvation, we are washed completely clean, but periodically we need to wash our feet or cleanse our hands. James refers to believers in James 4:8 as "sinners" and commands them to cleanse their hands.

Similarly Paul wrote in II Cor. 7:1:

Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

In John 13 Jesus washed the disciples feet. In I John 1:9 we confess our sins and God does the cleansing. The commands in II Cor. 7:1 and James 4:8 are to believers who are to cleanse themselves and cleanse their hands. From God's standpoint commands are not options, but for believers they are a matter of our choice. We decide whether we will cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit. As sinners we cleanse our hands by choosing to remove sin from our lives. When we fail, God in His grace has given us I John 1:9. We confess or name our sins to God, and He cleanses us.

Heb. 12:1b gives similar commands:

Y let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Again, the choice is ours whether we lay aside the entanglements of sin in our lives or we continue to sin.

Double-mindedness: James gives a third command in James 4:8: "Purify your hearts, you double-minded." We have already discussed the word "double-minded" beginning on page 31 of this

COMMENT

Comment [15]: This section on confession and cleansing sounds a lot like Col. Thieme's teaching.

COMMENT

Comment [16]: The solution to double-minded is to purify our hearts. We have to purge the alternative thoughts that make us double-minded Have I made this clear?

book. James' command to "purify our hearts" gives the solution to double-mindedness. We purify our hearts with the truth of God's word. When we know the truth and apply it, we will no longer swing back and forth and appear double-minded. That is James' message.

The alternatives: What happens to the believer who does not heed the commands of James 4:8? In verse 9, James writes,

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

The believer who fails to draw near to God, to cleanse his hands of sin, and to purify his heart with the word of God must face the alternative—to be miserable, to mourn, and to weep—natural consequences of their failures. Sometimes we call these natural consequences divine discipline.

You are laughing now and have "joy" in your life. Why do you need to confess your sin of envy? Why do you need to confess your sin of selfish ambition? Bitter envy and selfish ambition are indicators of a dissatisfaction, an unhappiness, with life. Your laughter will turn to mourning and your joy into gloom. That is why. That is the message of James 4:9.

Humble ourselves: James 4:10 gives another command and a promise. "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord." We humble ourselves by the confession of sin. A proud person does not want to confess that he is envious. A proud person does not want to confess his sin of selfish ambition. Yet James says, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord."

Exaltation: Then James gives the promise, "And He will exalt you." All the efforts of the poor believers to whom James was writing were futile. They were trying to make their way in this life on their own. They were refusing to humble themselves before God and confess their envy. They thought they could improve their difficult lives by themselves, but James 4:10 says to humble

yourselves and God will exalt you. We cannot improve our lives by ourselves. Look back at James 1:17.

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

Not only does God exalt and bless us, but He alone can bless us. We cannot improve our lives without God.

The rich believers, similarly, were charging ahead on their own. If they had been familiar with the modern day idiom of the "self-made man," they would have considered themselves the epitome of self-made men. They were blind to the arrogance of their selfish ambition. They were not about to humble themselves by confessing their sin of selfish ambition. Yet James gives this promise to the rich believers also. "Humble yourselves and God will exalt you."

Let's review the ten commands of James 4:7-10.

1. "Submit to God." Obey God and His word.
2. "Resist the devil." We are to stand firm in our obedience to God. We must follow Jesus' example in using Scripture to resist the devil.
3. "Draw near to God." "No man comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6) The only way to draw near to God is through faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His word.
4. "Cleanse your hands." We are to remove sin from our lives and, when necessary, confess our sin to God.
5. "Purify your hearts." Learn the word of God so we can use divine viewpoint in our thinking.
- 6,7,8. "Be miserable and mourn and weep." The alternative to the first five commands is the misery of divine discipline.
9. "Let your laughter be turned into mourning." More divine discipline.
10. "Humble yourselves." James gives the summary command. A humble person obeys God. A humble

person names his sin to God. A humble person is teachable, eagerly learning the word of God so that he can conform his life to God's commands.

Final comments: If ambition or envy is not your sin, what is your sin? We are all prone to sin in certain areas of our lives. I John 1:10 says,

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

We all are guilty of sin throughout our lives. The solution is always the same. Confess that sin to God. We should not kid ourselves and lie to God that we are Christians and therefore do not sin. We need to humble ourselves, recognize our sins, and acknowledge them.

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CRITICISM

4:11-12. *Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?*

Judging others: James 4:11-12 points to the brothers of humble circumstances. James 4:13-17 focuses on the rich believers. We have seen how James follows this pattern throughout the epistle. His comments go back and forth between the rich believers and the poor believers.

This is not the first time that James has condemned criticism and judgment of other believers. He wrote in James 1:19:

This you know, my beloved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger.

As believers we are to be slow to speak. We are not to criticize others.

James 1:26:

If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

James 2:12:

So speak and act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty.

James devotes the first half of the third chapter of James to the sins of the tongue. James 3:1:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.

Teachers use their voices to teach others. At times, teachers abuse their position of authority by expressing criticism or passing judgment on others.

James 3:2,6.

For we all stumble in many ways. If any one does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. √ 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 5:9.

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

James condemns criticism and judging in each chapter of his epistle. At least seventeen out of 108 verses (one-sixth of the book) discuss verbal sins. Do you get the idea that James considers what a person says about another person is important?

The law: "Do not speak against one another, brethren." James addresses this command to believers whom he calls "brethren." Do not defame or slander or speak evil of another believer. In today's idiom, the believers of humble circumstances were "badmouthing" their rich brothers in Christ. A believer who defames, slanders, or speaks evil "badmouths" another believer places himself above the law. He is not a doer of the law. He is not applying the word of God, but has set himself up as a judge of the law.

James identified the law in James 2:8 as the royal law, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Judging and criticizing others is disobedience to the royal law. We don't love our neighbor by criticizing him and judging him.

In verse 12 James reminds us who the Lawgiver and Judge is. "There is *only* one Lawgiver and Judge." God is the Lawgiver and He is the Judge. God is "the One who is able to save and to destroy." At the judgment seat of Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ will test the quality of the works of every believer. Fire will destroy the works of wood, hay, straw. Works of gold, silver, precious stones will remain. Salvation, a believer's crowns at the judgment seat of Christ or lack of them, and eternal judgment are issues decided by God.

Apparently, the poor believers were saying that the rich believers could not really be saved and commit the sins they were committing. Today we may hear a person say, "Do you remember Jimmy? He used to be such a good Christian. He was at church every Sunday. He prayed beautifully. Well, he has fallen for this girl and they're living together. I heard that she even had an abortion. I guess Jimmy never was saved at all."

We hear some variation of this story too often in Christian circles. James writes, "Who are you who judge your neighbor?"

James 4:11 says, "But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*." The person who judges another person is not keeping the law. Read again what James 2:10 says:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

A believer can attend church every time the doors are open, live up to the highest moral standards, and yet be guilty of breaking the entire law of God by a "small innocuous" criticism of another person.

Final comments: Arrogance lures us into the trap of criticizing and judging others. We find it easy to see flaws in another person. Then, without even thinking, we tell someone else what we have seen. Of course, the flaws we see in someone else are often flaws we have overcome or have never had. We titillate our egos thinking that we are better than someone else who has some flaw we do not have. Criticism always works this way. In

CRITICISM

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reality the person who is critical has fallen into the trap of arrogance.

27

PRIORITIES AND THE RICH MAN

4:13-17. *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." 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. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that." But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.*

Business plans: James shifts his attention again from the poor man to the rich man. He begins with a basic function of good business, the business plan. All businesses and business managers must plan. Sometimes a manager carries an informal plan around in his head. Other times he prepares a written plan for approval by various committees or by the board of directors. Is James saying that it is wrong for a manager to plan ahead? Is it wrong for any person to plan for the future? Even an appointment calendar is a form of planning. A person writes his appointments down so he will not plan conflicting appointments or forget an appointment.

James illustrates with a businessman planning an expansion of his business to another city. The plan covers the next year. Most

businesses develop a detailed budget for the next year as a part of their planning process. Is James saying that Christians should not engage in such basic and often routine business functions?

Tomorrow: Listen to what James says in the next verse. "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." Then in verse 15, James says, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'"

Has James turned a common, everyday business function into a sin? Is he saying that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you do not need to study business in college?

The context: Before we get too far afield, let's step back and see what James is truly saying. In this chapter my comments focus on only five verses, James 4:13-17. This is the way most people look at this passage. These five verses form a paragraph. The previous paragraph talked about slandering and judging another believer. The next paragraph warns of judgment to come to the rich believers. However, the epistle of James is not a series of random disconnected thoughts. James examines all aspects of a running dispute among the brothers of humble circumstances and the rich men.

James describes the arrogant business planner in terms similar to those he used to describe the rich man in James 1:11.

For 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 describes the businessman in James 4:14a.

You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

This applies to every person, not just the wealthy, but James focuses on the rich businessman who thinks he is self-sufficient. This rich believer's selfish ambition ignores James 1:17.

Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

With selfish ambition and self-sufficiency, this believer's priority is to make more money. James 4:16 says, "You boast in your arrogance."

James 3:14 has already described the rich believer's selfish ambition as boastful, triumphal arrogance. Now, he makes the issue clear. "All such boasting is evil." Arrogance is the underlying sin and motive behind the business planning in James 4:13. The bitter envy of the poor believers and the selfish ambition of the rich believers included arrogant boasting.

Selfish ambition: The selfish ambition of the rich believers produces the business plan of James 4:13:

Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.

They have a singleness of mind that drives them toward one goal: the maximization of their wealth. The rich believers used church attendance to boost their accumulation of wealth. The worship of God through learning and applying His word was not as important to them as making money.

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount speak to this issue. Matt. 6:19-21.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

James wrote to rich believers who focused their entire lives on increasing earthly treasure. Their inheritance in heaven and the promise of a crown of life did not concern them. Jesus tells us where their heart was. Their heart was where their treasure was, on earth. These rich believers, highly respected in the church, were worldly.

An eternal inheritance: Look at what Paul wrote in I Tim. 6:17-19.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Paul warns the rich not to be conceited, high-minded, arrogant, or haughty. Is our security in the material possessions of this world, or does our security rest with God? We are to store up for the future. We are to build our eternal inheritance. How? "To do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share." God provides material wealth to believers for sharing with others.

Paul finishes these verses with a result clause. "So that they may take hold of that which is life indeed." This not only refers to eternal life, but also to our life, right now, on earth. We are to fix our hope "on God who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." In modern day parlance, Paul is talking about the quality of our life on earth, not living as if we were in a rat race. Paul also writes "the treasure of a good foundation for the future," referring to the believer's inheritance beyond eternal life in heaven. Our inheritance is the "gold, silver, precious stones" that are not burned at the judgment seat of Christ. Our inheritance is the crowns we cast down in heaven before the throne of God.

Our transitory life: James 4:14 begins with a reality of life and our limitations as human beings. "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." We have seen automobile accidents and other catastrophes snuff out lives prematurely. We may have seen friends develop fatal illnesses and die within a short time of a few days or weeks. Business situations can quickly turn adverse. "You do not know what your life will be like tomorrow." Yet, as believers, we often brazenly plan what we will do tomorrow and the next day and the day after, without asking what the Lord would have us do.

In the second half of James 4:14, James gives us a metaphor: "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then

vanishes away." James reemphasizes what he has taught in James 1:10-11.

and *let* the rich man *glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For 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.

This is an indictment of believers who store riches on earth and ignore their eternal future. James follows his comments by emphasizing in James 1:12 "the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." Are we believers primarily concerned with increasing our material wealth on earth? Or is our first concern glorifying Jesus Christ, for which we will receive a crown of life in eternity?

When compared to eternity, our life on earth is short. The length of our lives is a matter of the sovereignty of God. Therefore, James continues in verse 15, "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'" Many Christians who are familiar with this verse say, "God willing, I am going to do" such and such. They recite the phrase, "God willing," or an equivalent, like a magic incantation. Their attitude is "If I, as a believer, don't preface the statement of my plans with these two words, then I am not a good Christian"; and when I do say "God willing," then God will bless those plans. This attitude misses James' point. We do not impress God with mere verbalizations such as "God willing" or "If the Lord wills." God looks at the attitude and the thinking that lies behind the statement. When we make plans for the next day, month, or year are we controlled by the Holy Spirit? Or are we making plans under the influence of the lusts of our flesh and letting selfish ambition or envy motivate us?

Motivation: Selfish ambition motivated the rich believers to whom James was writing. They had their priorities reversed. Their first priority was to amass a fortune on earth. Other than making an appearance at church, they were ignoring the word of God and its

teaching. When the rich men made their future plans, they did not consider what the Lord's will might be.

James 4:16 is clear. "But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." We are arrogant when we ignore the Lord in our planning. When we plan using our own strength and ignore the Lord and His teaching, we are arrogant. Our plan is evil. Plans are evil when we leave the Lord out of the planning process. Solomon wrote in Psa. 127:1:

Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain.

James states a conclusion in the next verse.

Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.

James refers to a sin of cognizance. There are sins of ignorance, but James does not discuss them here. The rich believers knew Bible teaching. They knew they should be doers of the word and not hearers only. In their quest for the riches of the world, they deliberately ignored God's word.

Final comments: James' command is not to repeat ritualistically, "If the Lord wills." He commands us, as believers, to set correct priorities in our thinking and planning by making Jesus Christ Number One in our lives. James 4:17 commands us to exercise our faith through obedience.

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INDICTMENT OF THE RICH MAN

5:1-6. *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and 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! 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. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.*

Context: Chapter breaks and verse divisions are not a part of divine inspiration of the Bible. Long after God inspired the Scripture writers, scholars added these divisions for our convenience. When we look at the context of a passage of Scripture, we should look beyond these chapter and verse divisions.

James does begin a new paragraph with James 5:1, but we need to understand the continuity with Chapter Four. Both James 5:1 and James 4:13 begin paragraphs with the same words, "Come now." James 5:1 refers to the rich. While James 4:13-17 does not mention the rich specifically, it still focuses on their actions.

The subject of James 4:5 is the envy of the poor believers. James continues this train of thought to James 4:9 where he refers to the consequences or divine discipline of the believer's envy by writing, "Be miserable and mourn and weep." The picture is similar in James 5:1, but the subject is the rich man. "Weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you."

In James 3:14 he refers to the bitter envy of the poor believers and the selfish ambition of the rich believers. Then, he commands them both to stop their arrogant boasting. He develops the subject of the poor believer's envy in the early part of James 4. James 4:9 describes the divine discipline or consequences for the envious believer as weeping and mourning in misery. James then moves to selfish ambition in the final verses of Chapter Four. Now in Chapter Five, he describes the consequences and discipline of the rich believers' selfish ambition.

Murder: Some people teach that James 5:1-6 does not refer to believers. James 5:6 does refer to the murder of the righteous man by rich men. Did you know that a believer can be a murderer? In reality, a person does not have to actually murder someone to be guilty of murder in God's eyes. Remember Matt. 5:21-22:

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the hell of fire."

These are strong words by our Lord Jesus Christ. What person has not been angry with another person at some time? Jesus said that the angry person is guilty of murder. How often have we spoken out in anger or heard someone exclaim? "I wish you were dead!" "Oh, go to hell!" or "I could kill you!" or "Well, you get the idea."

Just because James describes the rich man, here, as guilty of murder does not mean that the rich man is not a believer. David murdered Uriah the Hittite when he ordered Uriah to lead the

attack in a suicide mission. Jesus said to one of the thieves crucified with Him, "Today you shall be with Me in paradise." This was no petty thief, but a well-known criminal. When he stole, he also murdered his victims. At the time of Jesus' arrest, do you think Peter was trying to knight the Roman soldier? Absolutely not, Peter intended to split the soldier's head in half. Peter missed, and, as a result, only cut off the soldier's ear. Is Peter not saved because he attempted to kill the Roman soldier?

Murder is not the unforgivable sin. On the cross Jesus Christ paid the penalty for the sin of murder as he did for our other sins. The sins of the rich men in James 5:1-6 do not provide a basis for calling these men unbelievers.

Fire: Does James' description, "will consume your flesh like fire," mean that these rich men would spend eternity in hell? No. James prophesies the destruction of the works of their flesh. The flesh is consumed like fire. In contrast, God will cast unbelievers into hell to burn with everlasting fire.

Discipline: James 5:1, then, begins by describing the rich men under divine discipline for their sins. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you." James 4:9 contains a similar description for the impending divine discipline of the poor believer for his envy. "Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom."

James groups together the sins of the poor believers as "bitter envy" and the sins of the rich men as "selfish ambition." Both bitter envy and selfish ambition show an inner dissatisfaction of these believers with their present situation. They are unhappy with their positions. They want to improve their status in life. They are using all their effort and every human device to achieve this improvement. Their dissatisfaction will continue as long as they ignore the Lord.

COMMENT

Comment [17]: Is there a verse that says that unbelievers in hell burn forever without being destroyed? See Matt. 18:8; 25:41.

We can contrast the misery of divine discipline with joy in the first command in the book of James. The first command in James 1:2, "Consider [Think] it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." What a contrast this makes with James' description of divine discipline: "Weep and howl for your miseries" and "Be miserable and mourn and weep."

James has carried us from joy to weeping. Between James 1:2 and James 5:1 he has instructed us in how to avoid the weeping (See the chart on this page), and how to think it all joy when we fall into various testings and trials.

We have already discussed each of these commands. They provide the solution to avoid the divine discipline that both the poor believers and the rich believers will soon be facing.

Natural consequences: Discipline varies in intensity. The first level is the natural consequences of our actions. God has set up natural laws. We suffer natural consequences by disobeying these God given laws and natural functions.

The bitter envy and selfish ambition of James' original readers could not satisfy their desires. Envy did not solve the problem of the poor believers' lack of material desires. They complained and criticized in their envy, but they were not any happier. The complaints and criticisms did not produce any change. In their envy they did not think their situation to be all joy, nor did they glory in their high position in Christ. To envy is not to persevere under testing. Envy unbridled their tongues, making their religion worthless. The believers' envy of their more affluent brothers in Christ brought them only more dissatisfaction, bitterness, unhappiness, and more envy. Dissatisfaction, bitterness, and unhappiness flowed naturally out of envy as a form of natural consequences.

Similarly, for the rich believer, his selfish ambition did not bring him satisfaction or happiness. No sooner had he closed the books on one profitable project than his ambition drove him on to

JAMES' INSTRUCTIONS ON AVOIDING WEEPING

James 1:3-4: we are to know that the proof of our faith produces spiritual maturity.

James 1:5-6: if we lack wisdom in how to apply the Word of God, we are to pray in faith.

James 1:19: we are to be quick to hear the Word of God taught, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

James 1:21: we are to put aside our sin natures and listen with humility to the Word of God.

James 1:22: we are to apply the word in our lives, becoming doers and not merely hearers.

James 1:26: we are to bridle our tongues.

James 1:27: we are to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep ourselves unstained by the world.

James 2:1: we are not to discriminate.

James 3:1: unqualified believers are not to be teachers.

James 3:13: we prove our wisdom through good behavior.

James 4:7: submit to God. Resist the devil.

James 4:8: draw near to God, cleanse our hands, purify our hearts.

James 4:10: humble ourselves.

James 4:11: do not speak against one another.

COMMENT

Comment [18]: Betty points out that I talk in the previous paragraph about poor believers (plural) and in this paragraph about a rich man (singular). She then decided it would be too much work to change everything in this paragraph.

the next project. The rich believer heard the complaints and criticisms of the poor believers. He saw and heard the pleas of the orphans and widows for help, but his selfish ambition drove him continuously. He ignored the complaints and pleas of the orphans and widows. His ambition blinded him to applications of the word of God in his own life. The rich believer's ambition made the accumulation of wealth his primary goal. The more complaints and criticisms he heard, the more he reacted. He sued the poor man for damages. When the courts condemned the righteous poor man to death because of the rich man's charges, they also rewarded his accuser with the few possessions the poor man had. (James 2:6 and 5:6). In James 5:4 the rich man withheld wages from his employees. Was he docking their pay for talking too much and for complaining too much? All the rich man's success did not bring satisfaction and happiness. The natural consequences of his selfish ambition brought only greater unrest and dissatisfaction.

Natural consequences occur not only with mental sins, such as envy and selfish ambition, but they also result from overt sins. We break the speed laws or other traffic laws and either have an accident or receive a ticket. We might consider the imprisonment of criminals a form of natural consequences for their crimes. Sexual promiscuity and homosexuality carry the risk of unwanted pregnancy or disease as natural consequences. When we criticize someone, the natural reaction of the person we are criticizing is to defend himself. Sometimes this defense includes criticism of the first critic.

Natural consequences and divine discipline are warning devices, God uses in his training program for believers. Every mother uses a thermometer to take her child's temperature. Why? Because if the child is running a temperature above normal, he has an infection and is sick. If everything appears to go wrong in our lives, it is time to sit back and take our spiritual temperature. Maybe bad decisions have resulted in a series of natural consequences. Are we ignoring the Lord? Are we failing to apply the word? Possibly, we have rejected the teaching of the word, or we have not attended church recently.

Warnings to the self-sufficient: Read again the warning James 5:1-3 gives the rich men.

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 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!

First, James warns the rich men that they face financial setbacks: "Weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you." This is a warning of divine discipline of their selfish ambition. Rev. 3:19-20 also describes divine discipline:

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.

The lukewarm believers of the church at Laodicea did not differ from the believers to whom James was writing. Typically, a person does not purposely apply a little heat to make lukewarm water. Water becomes lukewarm when it cools after being hot. The believers in Laodicea had once been "red hot" for the Lord, but now they were saying in Rev. 3:17, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing." Like the rich men James describes, the Laodiceans were self-sufficient.

Rev. 3:19 warns that God reproves and disciplines those whom He loves. The verse also has a command to repent. Remember, repent means to change the mind. The Laodiceans are already believers. They had once been hot. If they were cold, they would simply be unbelievers. Then they could repent of their rejection of Jesus Christ, and God would save them. Now, as believers, they need to change their minds about their self-sufficiency. "I have need of nothing." They must confess their sin of arrogance and self-sufficiency.

Many believers erroneously apply Rev. 3:20 to salvation. In reality, this verse is a warning of divine discipline and an invitation for believers to give the Lord first place in their lives. Jesus Christ is knocking in discipline at the believer's door. He says, "Behold, I

stand at the door and knock." The believer needs to listen to the voice of the Lord and open the door, confess his sin so he can enjoy his fellowship with Jesus Christ.

James continues in James 5:2 and the first part of verse 3:

Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.
Your gold and your silver have rusted.

These descriptions are metaphors with a twofold meaning. First, these rich believers face discipline that will leave their mansions rotting and their clothes moth-eaten. Their fancy cars will rust. The Rolex 7 watches and jewelry that they do not lose, will become tarnished. These metaphors refer first to financial reverses arising out of divine discipline.

Judgment seat of Christ: James 5:3 also is prophetic:

Your gold and 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!

"The last days" refers to the Church Age. James was writing during the Church Age to believers in the Church Age. The next prophetic event to which James looked forward is the same event to which we look forward, the rapture of the church. Following the rapture is the judgment seat of Christ in heaven and the Great Tribulation on earth.

We can paraphrase James' message to the rich believers.

"You are building your treasure here on earth. When Christ returns to the clouds and you meet Him in the air, your earthly treasures will remain behind. Then your riches will rot, your garments become moth-eaten, and your gold and silver will rust. What have you achieved with your driving ambition?"

James also uses another Bible metaphor, fire. To paraphrase James 5:3, "The rust of your gold and silver will be a witness against you at the judgment seat of Christ and will consume your flesh like fire."

I Cor. 3:15 uses the fire metaphor in the description of the judgment seat of Christ:

If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

All the wealth reaped through your selfish ambition will be a witness against you when fire destroys it at the judgment seat of Christ. You can forget about receiving a crown of life.

Why does James write "like fire" when Paul said in I Cor. 3:13, "revealed by fire?" Paul describes man's work as "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw" in I Corinthians. James uses gold and silver here non-metaphorically as actual wealth. Gold and silver do not burn. So James writes "like fire," showing that fire will destroy the gold and silver gathered by the fleshly activities of selfish ambition just as fire burns wood, hay, and straw.

Both James and Paul describe the evidence at the judgment seat of Christ. I Cor. 3:13 says "each man's work will become evident." James 5:3 says "their rust will be a witness against you." Our spiritual production is the evidence determining our crowns or lack of crowns in heaven.

Specified sins: James is being tough. In the next three verses, he points out specific sins of the rich believers, but he gives the tough warning first. God uses many ways to show a sinning believer his need to return to Him. The indwelling Holy Spirit pursues us with love (James 4:5). The Lord Jesus Christ knocks on the door in discipline (Rev. 3:20). James 5:1 reflects a more intense level of discipline with "weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you."

James 5:4-6 gives specifics about the overt sins of the rich.

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.

The rich believers were cheating their employees. What subterfuges did they use? Did they dock their employees' pay for damage to their tools or for spending too much time talking and not working? James does not give us the basis, if the rich men even bothered with one, for which they withheld the pay. Whatever the basis or excuse was for withholding the pay of the workers, it was

unfair. The Lord had heard the cry and the prayers of these workers.

A silent minority: Now, for the third time, James mentions prayer in 5:4b:

and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.

James' first reference to prayer (James 1:5-6a) commands believers to pray in faith. The second reference (James 4:2b-3) gives a reason God does not answer our prayers. This third reference to prayer says that God heard the prayers of the unfairly treated employees of the ambitious rich men.

James has written:

- ◁ quick to hear, slow to speak (1:19)
- ◁ If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue (1:26)
- ◁ The tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity. (3:6)

These prayers in James 5:4 (called "outcry") must come from a different group of believers from the "brothers of humble circumstances." I would like to think that this different group was the silent majority. However, more probably, they were a silent minority. They voiced their outcry to God, not to the church, nor to their neighbors or friends. These believers were applying God's word. About this same time Peter wrote I Pet. 5:7: "casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." They regularly applied the Biblical principle that Paul would later write in Phil. 4:6:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

These believers were not rioting in the streets for their rights. They were not picketing their employers for higher wages and better working conditions. Instead, these believers were using prayer to present their case to God. God was not pleased with the

fiery oratory James condemned in Chapter Three, but God heard the outcries of these "silent" believers.

Self-indulgence: James 4:5 says, "You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure." On the surface this verse may appear to condemn wealth. When we view this verse in the light of the last few verses of Chapter Four of James, we see that the condemnation arises because the rich believers have misplaced priorities. Accumulation of wealth was their first priority. The Lord Jesus Christ and His commandments were low on their scale of values.

The *New International Version* translates "wanton pleasure" as "self-indulgence." We can see how the selfish ambition of the rich believer is self-indulgence. James describes this self-indulgence by saying, "You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."

Murder: James leads us into the next verse where he accuses the rich believers. "You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*."

The rich believers in their selfish ambition (withholding pay from their employees, refusing to help brothers or sisters without clothing and in need of daily food) are letting people starve or die of exposure to the elements. That isn't all. They oppressed others and personally dragged innocent victims, called, "the righteous *man*," into court to stand trial. The actions of these rich believers resulted in the condemnation and execution of innocent people.

Non-resistance: Continuing in verse 6b: "He does not resist you." These may be the forgotten five words in the epistle of James. James 5:6 is not a verse Christians memorize in Sunday School or in Bible memory programs. If we hear the verse quoted out of context, would we even recognize it as coming from the Bible? How many pastors would devote a sermon to this verse?

When someone criticizes us, what do we do? We explain our position. We make excuses. "Officer, I'm sorry I ran that red light. You see, I am late for a meeting."

James refers to a "righteous *man*," a person who does not resist false accusations and mistreatment. Nowhere else does James mention a person in such a complimentary manner.

The "righteous *man*" is not engaging in a form of "passive resistance." The Bible clearly states, "He does not resist you." The description here is of a believer who is "slow to speak and slow to anger." The rich man has taken this righteous man to court on a false charge, and what does the righteous man do? The righteous man leaves the case in God's courtroom. He does not answer the lies of the rich man or the false witnesses whom the rich man has brought into the courtroom.

Other verses come to mind that are similar to this statement, "He does not resist you." Isa. 53:7 prophesies about the trial and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:39:

"But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your cheek, turn to him the other also."

Paul wrote in Rom. 12:17-19,

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of *God*, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," SAYS THE LORD."

The words of Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, and James are all the same. They do not leave room for the complaints, criticisms, and verbal

abuse that the believers of humble circumstances were heaping on the rich believers who were mistreating them.

Final comments: How do we handle unjust treatment? Do we try to get even? Do we react and complain? Do we tell every one we can about what has happened to us?

The message in the Bible is clear, "Leave unfair and unjust treatment in the Lord's hands."

29 PATIENCE

5:7-11. *Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, 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.*

Patience: James shifts his focus from the rich believers to the believers of humble circumstances. The command to the poor believers is to "Be patient." We are to wait patiently, something that we do not like to do in the rush of today's economy.

Various translations of the Bible render two different Greek words "patient" or "patience." This passage has both Greek words. The first is *makrothumia*. Verses 7 and 8 command the brethren to "Be patient." In verse 10, James uses the suffering and patience of the prophets as an example. The *King James Version* translates *makrothumia* as "longsuffering" in Gal. 5:22. The word describes patient waiting. When we visit a doctor's office we allow extra

time because we know that an emergency may put the doctor behind in his schedule of appointments. We know that the doctor will eventually see us. In James' example the farmer waits patiently for the early and late rains that he knows will come. As believers we wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. This is a word for confident expectation, a word of faith. Longsuffering and patience are part of the fruit of the Spirit resulting from the application of the word of God we have learned.

Hupomone is the second Greek word that the *King James Version* translates "patience." Arndt and Gingrich translate *Hupomone* as "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, and perseverance." In the idiom of today this is "hanging in there" and "stick-to-it-iveness." James uses *hupomone* in James 1:3.

"Knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." He uses this word also when he refers to the "endurance or patience of Job" in James 5:11. This is the believer who maintains his faith and continues to apply the word of God in the roughest of adversities.

The rapture: "Be patient (*makrothumia*, longsuffering), therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." The "coming" refers to the rapture of the church when believers will leave the earth and the Lord will bring us into His presence.

James illustrates with the patience of a farmer who must wait for his crops to ripen. The farmer plants, fertilizes, and weeds, but still he must wait. Crops require rain, both early rains and late rains. Early rains come in the fall, the time of the Jewish new year. Late rains came later in the Jewish year. The farmer knows that he cannot speed up the time of harvest. He waits patiently, knowing that the time of harvest will come as part of God's plan of the seasons. He sows, cultivates, fertilizes, and he waits patiently for the harvest.

So James writes in verse 8, "You too be patient," but he does not end his statement there. He gives an additional command and a reason. The reason ties directly back to the farmer of verse 7. "For the coming of the Lord is at hand." After the late rains have fallen

on the farmer's crop, the farmer still can do nothing except wait for the crop to ripen. The same principle holds true for believers in the Church Age. There is no prophecy for God to fulfill before the rapture of the Church. James' statement, "the coming of the Lord is at hand" is unequivocal. There is not a single great apostasy that will precede the rapture of the church. If there were, then James would have commanded us to wait patiently for the great apostasy after which the coming of the Lord would occur.

Apostasy does occur throughout the Church Age, and a harvest of souls who believe in Jesus Christ also occurs. Neither widespread apostasy nor the current harvest of new believers represent the fulfillment of a prophecy that must occur before the rapture of the church. Neither is the prophecy of the regathering of Israel nor the signing of a Middle East peace treaty a prophetic event that must occur before the rapture of the Church. Yes, there will be a future regathering of Israel and a future Middle East peace treaty, but these will occur before the second advent of Christ and after the rapture.

If God had another prophecy to fulfill before the rapture of the Church, then James would have mentioned it at this point. He would not have said, "for the coming of the Lord is at hand." He would have had to write "the regathering of Israel is at hand, and after that, the Lord will come."

Spiritual strength: James gives a second command in verse 8. While we patiently wait for the coming of the Lord, we are to "strengthen our hearts." We call "strengthening our hearts," today, spiritual growth. We grow spiritually through learning and applying the word of God. While we wait patiently for the rapture of the Church, when we will meet Jesus Christ in the air, we are to continue to study and apply the word of God. Even with the early and late rains, would the farmer have a crop to harvest if he did not sow and cultivate those crops? So, as believers, we continue to learn and apply the word until the Lord comes.

Complaining: In James 5:9, James continues to look at the principal sin of the believer of humble circumstances.

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

James did not make an issue of the reason for the poor believers' complaints. These valid complaints arose from the selfish ambition of the rich believers. James does not soften his comments by telling these believers that he understands the validity of their complaints. James states simply, "Do not complain against one another."

We all have been the victims of unfair treatment, and we will surely receive unfair treatment in the future. We are not to complain. We are to keep quiet. God knows. He can handle the matter.

Most Christians remember I Peter 5:7 well. "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." Do we cast our cares on Him, or do we stand around complaining?

Judgment: James 5:9 continues with God's discipline of complaining. "That you yourselves may not be judged." The poor believers had not received fair treatment. They worked all day in the fields and did not receive pay. The rich believers were suing them in court, making false allegations. Now, because they spoke up in their own defense, will they receive judgment? That is correct. That is what the Bible says. "Do not complain against one another." Look at James 5:6, "the righteous *man*; he does not resist you." Rom. 12:19 says,

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY, SAYS THE LORD."

The judgment to which James refers in James 5:9, is neither the judgment seat of Christ nor the final judgment at the great white throne. Modern translations of the Bible capitalize the "J" in "Judge" identifying God as the Judge. God as "The Judge" is

COMMENT

Comment [19]: Discipline or the JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

omnipresent: "standing right at the door." John also used the "door" analogy for divine discipline in Rev. 3:20:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.

In James 4:5 the Holy Spirit pursues sinning believers in love. Now, Jesus Christ is the Judge standing at the door and knocking. The knocking is a mild form of discipline: warning discipline, as it were. Believers must make a choice. They can live a life of sin (including the sin of complaining), or they can live in obedience to God's will and enjoy fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. John gave the solution in Rev. 3:19a, "be zealous therefore, and repent." "Zealous" describes our motivation. We are neither lukewarm nor cold (see Rev. 3:15-16), but hot. We eagerly learn and apply God's word. We repent, turning our backs on sin. We name our sins to God, forget them, and move ahead in our Christian lives by letting the Holy Spirit take control.

James 5:9 also expands on Jesus' words of Matt. 7:1. "Do not judge, lest you be judged *yourselves*." How do other people respond when we complain about them? The natural response is to defend themselves. Often they do this by justifying their actions with a criticism of the one who criticized them first. We may think that the object of our complaints is unaware of what we are saying. However, often word will get back to him, as if he had been "standing right at the door."

Again we see that God uses natural consequences to discipline believers. Yes, God is the Judge, standing at the door and seeing everything we do. He can use the natural consequences of our decisions and actions as a part of His discipline and training program for us as believers. He does not always have to step in with specific discipline or the sin unto death. He also sees our bad decisions and sinful actions that will be burned at the judgment seat of Christ.

Biblical examples: James uses the prophets and Job as examples.

As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, 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.

The Old Testament prophets often preached to deaf ears. The Israelites refused to believe the prophets. They persecuted and even killed them. Despite their suffering, the prophets continued to preach with patience, waiting for the Lord.

James begins verse 11 with a statement that takes us all the way back to the beginning of the epistle. "We count those blessed who endured." James 1:2 commands us, "Think it to be all joy when you encounter various testings," and in James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under testing." Now James writes "We count those blessed who endured" suffering. Substitute the word "happy" for the word "blessed" and the phrase is easier to understand. "Happy is the man who perseveres under testing." "We count those happy who endured" suffering.

James' reference to his opening thoughts at the end of the letter is not an accident. The Lord had a single-minded purpose when He inspired James to write this epistle. One basic issue underlies the entire five chapters—the dispute between the rich believers and the poor believers. The epistle constantly emphasizes one solution: apply what you know from God's word. In James 5:11, James' reference to the happiness of those who endure suffering simply wraps up the subject of endurance from James 1:3, and the subject of happiness found in James 1:2 and 1:12.

Job's endurance: James gives one last example of endurance in the patience of Job.

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.

Job, a faithful servant of God, suffered under the hand of Satan. He received bad advice from his friends. His wife told him to "Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Job, himself, went through a period of self doubt, but kept his faith. He said in Job 19:25:

And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.

In the end Job confessed his sin in Job 42:3,

"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

Job's friends were sure that Job was guilty of some hidden sin and that Job was suffering divine discipline. Job knew he was righteous, but he could not explain the reason for his suffering. He tried to justify himself. He ran the gamut of doubt. Job 42:2 tells us part of what Job learned about God:

"I know that Thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."

We don't know all the intricacies of God's plan for our lives, but the plan is still there. The message to the believers of humble circumstances applies to us today. The poor believers needed to confess their sins of complaining and criticizing. They needed to realize that God knew their situation. God was in control. "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you."

In the end God richly blessed Job. On the other hand, God disciplined Job's friends, who had been so free with their bad advice. James writes, "the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful."

Final comments: "I know that my Redeemer lives and at the end He will take His stand on the earth." We have a description of our Lord Jesus Christ in Job, the oldest book of the Bible. God redeems man from sin. In the end, at some time in the future, our Redeemer will take His stand on the earth. This is not a prophecy of the rapture that was unknown in the Old Testament, but a prophecy of the second coming of Christ. Notice in Job's prophecy

that our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, stands on the earth. At the rapture, believers meet Jesus Christ in the air.

The message is the same for believers. James commands us to "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." Old Testament and Tribulational believers have God's promise that Jesus Christ will reign on earth on the throne of David. We, as New Testament believers, have the promise of Jesus Christ's return to the air and our rapture from the earth to meet Him in the air.

"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

30 SWEARING

5:12. *But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment.*

In a courtroom: James 5:12 is like a ship that appears suddenly on a foggy night. What is this verse on swearing doing here? It does not appear to fit with the context. It is as if James had a sudden random thought, and he threw this verse in at the last moment in his rush to finish the letter. Not so. James 5:12 is a part of the total picture of the epistle of James. This verse appears out of place in James 5, only if we do not understand the flow of ideas and the complete unity of the epistle. This command neither forbids the use of certain expletives in our speech, nor does it prohibit a person from swearing to tell the truth in today's courtrooms. However, it did involve courtroom procedure in the first century and applies to us daily in and out of courtrooms.

Twice before, James has mentioned the first century courts.
James 2:6b-7:

Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

Also, James 5:6,

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

In the style that James has followed throughout this epistle, he turns from comments to poor believers to comments to rich believers. James commands, "Do not swear." The rich believers were using the courts to make false accusations against others and to enrich themselves. Because the accusations were false, the rich believers were cloaking them in authenticity with various oaths. They were swearing by heaven and by earth, and even on "stacks of Bibles," to influence the courts to believe them. James says, as it were, "Just speak the truth." "Let your yes be yes, and your no, no." A believer should neither have to embellish his testimony nor his everyday conversation with oaths. A believer should have a reputation for honesty, so that when he speaks, other people will accept his word as the truth.

The righteous man: Look at the response of the righteous man. The sworn testimony of the rich believer resulted in the righteous man's condemnation and death. James 5:6 says, "the righteous *man*, he does not resist you." When someone unjustly accuses us of some sin or crime, we do not need to respond in any way other than a simple statement of the truth. We do not have to get even. We should not counter with accusations against our accusers. As James says, we let our "yes be yes," and our "no, no." If we are in court, we can follow the courtroom procedure and answer under oath. Whatever the circumstances, we speak the truth.

Again, James issues the warning, "so that you may not fall under judgment." God does discipline believers who sin verbally. In this verse the verbal sin is slander, lying, and perjury, sins that James has already discussed.

James 5:12 also repeats the command Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 5:34-37.

Final comments: James 5:12 warns believers of judgment and divine discipline that result from false swearing under oath. He commands them to speak the truth.

31 HEALING THE WEAK

5:13-18. *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, 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. Therefore, confess your sin to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.*

Suffering: "Is any among you suffering? Let him pray."

Believers can suffer from the negative consequences of their bad decisions. At other times they can suffer undeservedly. Job went through extreme suffering at the hand of Satan, but his suffering was not discipline. God does not promise us a life of ease after we believe in Jesus Christ.

"Is any among you suffering?" Remember James 1:2: "Think it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various testings." Suffering and testing are opportunities to apply the word of God. They are an integral part of the cycle of spiritual growth for believers. We learn the word of God, but we must apply it. God

showed the effectiveness of the application of His word to the Israelites in II Chron. 20:17:

"You need not fight in this *battle*; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the Lord is with you."

Once we have applied God's word to testing and suffering and have experienced God's deliverance, we are ready to repeat the cycle again. We must continually study God's word and continuously apply it. This is the spiritual growth cycle.

After James asks the question, "Is any among you suffering?" he commands, "Let him pray." Look back at James 1:5 where James first mentions prayer:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

We can pray for wisdom to apply the word of God to our suffering, but prayer is also an application of the word. When we are under great pressure, we can apply I Pet. 5:7, "casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you." Prayer is a means by which we cast our anxieties on the Lord. We use prayer to claim the promises of Scripture.

Cheerful believers: "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises." Yes, some believers do apply the word of God and deem their testing to be joy. James describes these believers as cheerful. Luke is the only other New Testament writer who used this Greek word for "cheerful." Luke wrote Acts 27:22,25 describing Paul's encouragement of his shipmates during a storm on the Mediterranean saying, "keep up your courage." This is the word James uses in James 5:13. In Acts 27:36, Paul used the noun form of this word in a predicate nominative, "And all of them were encouraged." Believers under suffering, pressure, and adversity keep up their courage and sing praises.

The two groups of believers are not mutually exclusive. A believer can suffer and still keep up his courage. A mature believer under extreme pressure and suffering receives courage by applying the word. He sings praises to God for his deliverance. Remember

the time Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi. Acts 16:25 says "about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God." Paul and Silas applied both commands of James 5:13.

Sick believers: In James 5:14, however, James recognizes that the rich believers and the believers of humble circumstances are not ready to obey the commands of James 5:13. They are suffering, but they are not facing adversity with courage. They may be discouraged by the apparent ineffectiveness of their prayers. He asks the question, "Is anyone among you sick?" James uses the word "sick" in contrast to "cheerful."

Does James 5:14-15 refer to physical sickness? The sick believers are to call for the elders of the church, and the elders are to pray for them. Verse 15 explains the result of the elders' prayer offered in faith. The sick believer is restored. This is the fourth time that James uses the Greek verb *sozo*, "save." The translation "restored" appears to convey the idea of healing the sick. If we believe that these two verses are God's prescription for curing sick believers, then we would never call a doctor. We would call the elders of the church. The elders would pray for us. If we were not healed, then the elders do not have enough faith and we would look for faithful elders. If James is writing about physical sickness, then we may interpret these verses in this way; but is there another way to understand what James is saying?

First, let's remember that Paul uses the word "sick" in contrast to "cheerful." The Greek word for "sick" in verse 14 is *astheneo*. This word means physical sickness in several passages including: Matt. 25:39, Luke 7:10 (*King James Version*), John 4:46, Phil. 2:26, and II Tim. 4:20. The same Greek word, however, has a different meaning in other passages. In II Cor. 12:9-10, Paul called his thorn in the flesh "weakness" and concluded, "when I am weak (*astheneo*), then I am strong." The translators used the word "weak," not "sick."

In II Cor. 13:3 Paul described Jesus Christ as not being "weak (*astheneo*) toward you, but mighty in you." This verse does not make sense if Christ is "physically sick towards us."

In Rom. 8:3 is the Law sick or "weak?"

In II Cor. 11:21 Paul uses the same word in contrast to "boldness." Are "sick" and "bold" opposites, or is the translator correct in using "weak" in the sense of being "faint-hearted" as the opposite of "bold?"

Does Paul give a prescription for healing from physical sickness in Rom. 14:2?

One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*.

Should doctors prescribe vegetarian diets to cure sickness, or is Paul referring to the spiritually weak believer who has not yet given up his dietary taboos?

Dietary taboos are the subject of I Cor. 8:11. Paul describes immature believers who follow manmade taboos as "weak." Paul does not call these believers "sick."

In Rom. 4:19-20, Paul refers to the sexual death of Abraham and Sarah. In the face of the physical impossibility of having children, Abraham did not become "weak in faith" but grew strong in faith. To translate *astheneo* "sick" in this verse rather than "weak" is nonsensical.

Weary believers: Back in James 5:13, we have the prayer of believers suffering under adversity. They sing praises with joy, happiness, cheerfulness and encouragement from God's promises. James 5:14-15 presents the spiritually weak, not physically sick, believer. In contrast to the cheerful believer who keeps up his courage, this spiritually weak believer is discouraged. James makes this clear by using a different word, *kamno*, for "sick" in verse 15. The New Testament uses "kamno" only three times. The other two passages translate this word "weary." Heb. 12:3 says,

For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.

In Rev. 2:3 the translators again use the word "weary."

and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake,
and have not grown weary.

In James 5:15, *kamno* describes a believer under intense testing, adversity, suffering, and pressure. He lacks the spiritual strength to continue. He is weak and weary/discouraged. Interpreting "sick" in verse 14 as "weak" and as "weary" in verse 15 provides a valid contrast with the word "cheerful" in verse 13.

Solution: James gives the solution for the weary believer. The weary believer is to call for the elders of the church. The elders are to pray for him, providing spiritual refreshment. They will encourage the weary believer with appropriate passages of Scripture.

Anointing with oil was a polite social custom of the ancient world. A host showed respect and honor by anointing his guest. In this situation, the anointing with oil encourages and refreshes the spiritually worn and discouraged believer.

Save and restore: God promises restoration to this weary believer. The meaning of the Greek word *sozo*, "will restore," is similar, here, to its use in James 1:21 and James 2:14. James is writing to believers. Over and over again he calls them "brethren." God has already saved them from the penalty of sin. Now they need deliverance from pressure, adversity, and testing. The believers of humble circumstances are tired of unfair treatment by the rich believers. The rich believers are weary from the "badmouthing" and bickering of the poor believers. They want deliverance from their adversities.

The deliverance, called restoration, enables the discouraged believers to fulfill the commands of James 5:13.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful?
Let him sing praises.

The words in James 5:14 are plural: "elders," "let them pray," and "anointing." In verse 15 the words are singular: "the prayer offered in faith," "will raise him up," and "he has committed sins."

"The prayer offered in faith" of verse 15 is not the prayers of the elders in verse 14. "The prayer offered in faith" is that of the discouraged believer who now fulfills the first command of James 5:13. He is suffering and he prays. With the help and prayers of the elders, the weak believer is now able to apply God's word for himself.

Confession: In the final clause of verse 15, James uses terminology similar to that of I John 1:9. He writes, "and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." Maybe this believer has committed sins, and maybe he hasn't. If he has committed sins, his prayer of faith will include confession of those sins to God. In confessing his sins, he experiences the joy of God's forgiveness.

James 5:16 expresses a command and a conclusion based on the previous verse.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

"Therefore" tells us that James has reached a conclusion. James is not commanding believers to confess all their sins to others. I John 1:9 tells us to confess our sins to God. James writes about a specific situation that demands more than confessing sin to God. Open antagonism and sin abounded between the two factions. The dirty linen is already hanging in the air. The situation demands that the two factions get together and work out their differences. To work out their differences both sides must first acknowledge their errors. So James commands, "confess your sins to one another."

James' command to "confess your sins to one another" is contrary to the way our flesh works. When we have a fight with another person, we don't tell them what we did wrong. We tell the other person what they are doing wrong. We try to convince them that they should change to please us. Of course, they respond in a like fashion, telling us what we are doing wrong and why we should change.

Jesus described these situations in Matt. 7:1: "Do not judge lest you be judged *yourselves*." When we try to correct another person, he responds by trying to correct us.

James 3:6 describes the tongue.

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 5:16 gives us God's prescription for settling disputes. "Therefore confess your sin to one another, and pray for one another." Jesus said in Matt. 5:44, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you." You cannot pray for another person when you are fighting with him and telling him everything he did wrong.

James was writing to two groups of believers who were fighting among themselves. He points out the errors and sins on each side. Now, he tells them how to settle their differences. He does not tell the poor believers to give the rich men a copy of James' epistle and make sure they read it. He does not tell the rich believers to make sure the poor believers understand the viciousness of their sharp tongues. James says, "Confess your sin to one another."

Marital problems: Probably marital problems are the most common area of interpersonal difficulties today. What is involved when you fight with your spouse? The fight may begin as a battle of words. Your wife tells you something that you did that she does not like. You respond with something she did that you do not like. Maybe the husband starts the fight and the wife reacts with her own complaints. From a few angry words the battle escalates. What is the purpose of the complaints and criticisms? The purpose is that you want your spouse to change to suit you. Many marriage ceremonies still contain the words, "for better or for worse." Husbands, if you married her "for better or for worse," why do you want to change her? What is the solution to marital problems? "Confess your sin to one another, and pray for one another."

Marital problems are not solved when you confess your spouse's sins to him or her. You have to confess your own sin to your spouse. What about the husband or wife who does admit they are wrong and their spouse responds with a triumphant smirk and a "I told you so?" Peter gave us the answer in I Pet. 3:1-2.

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any *of them* are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

Again, we have a problem with a "buzz word" in these verses. We read "won" and think this husband is an unbeliever. Not necessarily so. Peter writes that he is "disobedient to the word." Peter does not limit this passage to unbelieving spouses. The wife (or husband) who confesses her sin to her spouse can now pray for that spouse. Her life of obedience to the word is an example that can lead to her spouse obeying God's commands. "Without a word" does not describe a shouting match.

Resolving disputes: So even one-sided confession works to resolve disputes, but James' prescription is mutual confession. "Confess your sin to one another." James served as the mediator or counselor by writing this letter. He pointed out the sins on both sides. Now he says, "Don't focus on how the other side has wronged you. You confess your own sins to each other."

Once the two factions have restored peace through the confession of their sin to each other, they can "pray for one another." There is no use in praying for one another while the fighting is going on. Psalms 66:18 says, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear." So believers must first confess their sins to God. Then they can discuss their differences in what James calls "Confess your sin to one another." Finally, they can pray for one another.

Again, James gives the promise, "so that you may be healed." The Greek word can mean physical healing from sickness or deliverance from many kinds of ills. Bitter envy in the believers of humble circumstances and selfish ambition in the rich believers

produce strife and break down the relationship between these two groups. The mutual confession of sins restores this relationship.

Prayer: Various translations of the final sentence in James 5:16 muddy the interpretation and our understanding of what James is saying. The *New International Version* of the Bible translates this sentence simply and clearly: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

First, who is the "righteous man?" James mentions "the righteous *man*" earlier in James 5:6:

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

In the context of James, the righteous man is a believer without bitter envy or selfish ambition. In a broader view, the "righteous man" is a spiritually mature believer or at least a believer growing toward spiritual maturity.

James 5:16 teaches "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." Mature believers receive positive answers to their prayers. When we studied James 1:5 we looked at the requirements for receiving positive answers to prayer. We need to know the will of God and pray in the will of God. We need to pray with faith. Faith demands that we know the word of God. We must heed the warning of Psa. 66:18, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear," by confessing our known sin to God. Therefore, we see the appropriateness of the description, "righteous man."

James 5:17-18 uses Elijah as an example of the power and effectiveness of the prayer of a righteous man.

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Elijah had "a nature like ours." He lived in the flesh with its lusts as we do. Yet Elijah had faith in God. Elijah knew the Lord's will. Therefore, Elijah's prayers were powerful and effective.

Final comments: James 5:13-18 spawns many interpretations and provides a basis for more than one cult. My approach has been to derive the meaning of these verses from an integrated approach to the context of the entire book of James as well as to compare the use of key Greek words with their use elsewhere in the Bible. There is a relationship between the suffering believer in James 5:13 and the sick believer in James 5:14 and the various trials James mentions in the second verse of his epistle.

Believers who fail to apply the word of God to the difficulties and problems of every day life experience frustration and discouragement. James calls their faith "dead." They do not enjoy the abundant life promised by God. Eventually, they reach the point where they must seek outside help. James tells us that when a believer reaches this point, he should call for the elders of the church. The elders can pray and provide spiritual encouragement to stabilize the life of the weary believer. The life of the sick/weary believer is restored by the weary believer's prayers and application of God's word.

James shows the use of mutual confession to settle disputes between individuals and groups. How many divorces could be prevented and marriages saved by applying James 5:16?

32

THE MINISTRY OF RESTORATION

5:19-20. *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 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.*

James' concluding remarks: We have arrived at the last two verses of James. If we understand what James is saying in his epistle, then the interpretation of these last two verses is simple. These verses, however, spawn many different interpretations because believers fail to see the unity and homogeneity of this epistle.

In James 5:19-20, James uses the word "save" for the fifth and last time. He mentions "death" again. James has already discussed in detail the sins of the rich and poor believers. So we know what he means when he refers to "sins." Several times James refers to spiritual truth his readers knew, as well as mentioning the "implanted word." Therefore, his reference to "truth" in 5:19 is not a new subject. Nowhere in his letter does James address unbelievers and give a gospel message. So, by "sinner," he must mean a sinning believer. These two verses are an apt conclusion to what James has covered in this epistle.

"My brethren." James addresses his readers as believers for the last time. "If any among you." "Among you," means among you, my brethrenCbelievers.

Spiritual strays: "If any among you strays from the truth." "If" introduces a third class condition, meaning maybe you do and maybe you don't. Some recipients of James' epistle had rejected their pastor's teaching. They were not "quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger." They were not receiving the implanted word. They were "merely hearers" of the word, not "doers of the word." These believers were straying from the truth by failing to apply the word.

"And one turns him back" refers to working with believers who have refused to apply God's word. Paul wrote about this ministry in Gal. 6:1:

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.

James 5:14 encourages the depressed and weary believer to call for the elders of the church. Now James looks at the results of the ministry of the elders and other spiritual believers in assisting the spiritually sick and weary believer. He writes,

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

He covers a multitude of sins because when "he turns a sinner from the error of his way," the believing sinner is now applying the word of God. I Pet. 4:8 teaches the same principle:

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

Peter is saying that love prevents a multitude of sins. James says that turning a straying believer back to the truth prevents a multitude of sins.

An immoral believer: In I Cor. 5 Paul speaks harshly to the Corinthians about a member of their church who was living incestuously with his stepmother. The Corinthians were ignoring the situation and continuing to fellowship with the errant brother. Paul says, in I Cor. 5:3 that he has already judged the sinning believer. Verse 5 gives the reason for Paul's judgment, "that his

spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Paul's purpose is that this man will be saved (not eternal salvation from the penalty of sin, but his rewards) at the judgment seat of Christ that Paul calls here "the day of the Lord Jesus." The purpose is restoration, not punishment.

What about this man's stepmother? Wasn't she a willing partner? Paul says nothing about her. She was not a believer and therefore not a member of the Corinthian church. Paul was not writing about her.

Another point is that this sin of incest was blatant and apparently undisputed. Paul learned about it although he was in another place. This man's guilt was verified among many witnesses. Paul, as a leader of the church, could hear the evidence from the witnesses and render a decision. According to verse 3, Paul had already rendered his decision.

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

Separation: I Cor. 5:9-12 discusses separation from sinners. The Corinthians had misconstrued Paul's instructions in a previous letter about separating themselves from sinners. Paul clarifies his instructions that the separation was from sinning believers. The list of sins is more than just the sexual immorality illustrated by incest and includes coveting, idolatry, reviling (slander and complaining), drunkenness, and swindling (cheating). Paul says in verse 13, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." Later in this chapter we will look at the procedure Jesus specified for doing this in Matt. 18.

In I Cor. 5:12 Paul tells the Corinthians to judge those in the church, not outsiders. The incestuous believer was a case in point. In I Cor. 6, Paul picks up on the sin of swindling and cheating other believers that he included in the list of sins from which we should separate. I Cor. 6:1 says, "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous?" I Cor. 5:13 makes clear that the reference to

"neighbor" is another believer. This is a dispute between two believers, not a believer and an unbeliever. Disputes between believers are never to be handled in civil courts.

Resolving differences between believers: I Cor. 6:1-2 is another reference to the rewards believers will receive at the judgment seat of Christ. Some believers will be judges and rulers during the Millennium. Some will even judge angels.

Read I Cor. 6:7.

Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

Have you been defrauded, cheated, swindled by another believer? Jesus said, "Turn the other cheek." Paul wrote, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?" Don't take another believer to a court of law and air your differences to the world of unbelievers. If you have witnesses, you can follow the procedure Jesus gave in Matt. 18 and eventually present the issue to the church. This passage in I Corinthians does not mention punishment. The purpose is the settling of the dispute and restoration of the erring believer(s).

What is the procedure that Jesus gave in Matt. 18? Matt. 18:15 sets the stage with a dispute arising between two believers. First, the injured believer is to go to the offending believer privately and try to resolve the issues.

If the private meeting does not succeed in resolving the complaint, then the injured believer is to bring one or two more witnesses (verse 16). Witnesses are those with a first hand knowledge of the facts. Witnesses are not those who have only heard about this problem through the church grapevine.

Finally, if the issue is not resolved, the injured believer can bring it to the church (verse 17). What is the outcome of the church's decision? "Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer." Paul phrased the decision in I Cor. 5:13, "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves." The purpose again is not punishment but restoration.

Accusing an elder: Paul, in the pastoral epistles, discusses primarily how the church should handle sinning elders and false teachers. With respect to a sinning elder, I Tim. 5:19-20 summarizes the procedure from Matt. 18.

Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of *sinning*.

II Thess. 3:6-15 begins with the command: "keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." "Unruly" is a military term meaning to break rank, to be insubordinate. Paul defines what he means in the following verses. In verses 7-8, "follow our example because we did not act in an undisciplined [unruly] manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it." In verse 10b, he wrote, "if anyone will not work, neither let him eat." Verse 11 gives the "punch line": "some among you are leading an undisciplined [unruly] life, doing no work at all, but acting as busybodies." The busybodies were teaching other believers and contradicting Paul's teaching (see II Thess. 2:2). Not only had they broken rank with Paul's teaching, but they were allowing the church to support them, rather than working themselves. Paul calls them "busybodies" in a play on words in the Greek with the word "work."

II Tim. 3:6-15 is another passage written to warn believers about false teachers. Paul was harsh in his condemnation of the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Alexander in I Tim. 1:20. He commanded Timothy to avoid false teaching in II Tim. 2:16-18 again naming Hymenaeus and including Philetus.

Two passages, Rom. 16:17-18 and Tit. 3:9-10, refer to false teachers who cause dissensions and factions. Today, dissensions and factions result in church splits. Paul commands Titus to reject the false teachers after giving them warning. This time Paul refers to a procedure of a first and second warning, but he does not go into detail. The gospel of Matthew had already established the procedure in detail.

Death: Now in James 5:20, James writes, "will save his soul from death." He is neither writing about spiritual death for eternity, nor physical death. James uses death, here, in the same sense he used it in James 1:15, 2:17, and 2:26. The believer of James 1:15 with sin in his life is dead. A believer may have faith, but if he does not also have works, he is dead. This is experiential death of a believer. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that they might have life, and might have *it* abundantly." "Think it all happiness when you encounter testings." Are we like the "surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind?" Are we "double-minded," "unstable in all our ways?" How do we handle injustice and unfairness? How do we handle the pressure of physical suffering from sickness or lack of physical needs? Even in adversity, we can enjoy life to its fullest. Jesus said that He came that we "might have life and that we might have *it* abundantly."

The implanted word is able to save our souls. By learning and applying the word, we deliver our souls from experiential death to the abundant life in Christ. Our faith in Jesus Christ saves us from the eternal penalty of sin, but only by applying our faith can we deliver our souls during this life.

Final comments: This passage contains a strong warning to believers to listen to the teaching of the word of God and to apply it. Failure to learn and apply the word leads to experiential death for the believer. The experientially dead believer does not experience the abundant life promised by God.

Mature believers, who will not themselves fall into the trap of arrogance and pride, perform the ministry of restoration. This ministry involves restoring believers to the truth of God's word. The final result of the ministry of restoration is the avoidance of greater sin.

33

EPILOGUE

James and the contemporary situation: The epistle of James has important lessons for believers today. The lessons are evident when we understand the significance of the feud between the brothers of humble circumstances and the rich believers. We often overlook sins of bitter envy and selfish ambition.

Believers give lip service to the need to help the poor. We think we do our part by giving to charitable causes. On television we see starving children from all over the world, so we send our military to help them. We support government programs to help the poor. Is charity a proper function of government? Would independent charities exist if the churches were doing their job? Have we, as believers, revised the language of James 2:16 to "Go in peace to the nearest shelter, be warmed and be filled" or possibly to "Go in peace to a government agency, be warmed and be filled?"

How much of the money given to churches is used to help the poor or support missionaries? How much goes to build ever larger and fancier buildings and gymnasiums that church members use only a few hours a week? The largest hospitals in the nation carry the names of religious denominations. These hospitals are nonprofit institutions, but is their primary function charity? My town, like many others, has a government sponsored charity hospital where those without insurance or money must go for

treatment. Down the street from this charity hospital are other hospitals bearing the names of more than one religious denomination.

Every city has a few churches where the "movers and shakers" go. A person can attend one of these churches to see and to be seen. Is this all that different from James 2:3a?

and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," Y

Are we so intent on getting ahead in this world that we hear the word on Sunday, when it is convenient, but as soon as we are out the door, rushing to Sunday dinner, we forget what kind of persons we are? Do we hear the word, but are too busy to do and apply the word? In reality is our drive for material possessions and success the same selfish ambition the rich believers in James possessed? Is your two-worker family necessary for the health, welfare, and support of your family, or does it simply provide a higher level of material possessions?

Vocal believers: Now, lets "cross the tracks" and consider the brother of humble circumstances. Their counterparts in James were guilty of speaking out about unfair treatment. They were angry and voiced their anger in criticism of the rich believers.

Have you ever heard someone called a snob? Have you ever called someone a snob? I do not know of any use of the word that is not derogatory. What action makes a person a snob? How do you know that a person is a snob? We decide a person is a snob by a subjective evaluation of their attitude toward others, and more specifically, their attitude toward us. Doesn't a person have the right to choose his own friends? Just because you are not among those chosen friends, do you consider the person who has rejected you a snob?

A believer may take office supplies home for his personal use. He sees nothing wrong with this, because no one will miss the supplies and everyone else takes supplies home. The criminal mind

thinks much the same way when he breaks into the home of a rich person and steals the television set and the silver. Both the petty theft of office supplies and the burglary of the rich man's home violate God's commandment, "You shall not steal." The rationalizations of the perpetrators of both thefts are similar to the thinking leading to the feud between the rich believer and the poor believer in James' letter. "He is rich, so he will never miss this television."

The federal sugardaddy: Our Federal Government is running in the red, piling up large annual deficits. The solution is obvious. Increase revenues or decrease expenses. The government increases its revenues by raising taxes. Recently, a candidate for office won the election in a campaign in which he stated his intent to raise the taxes on the rich. We don't object to raising someone else's taxes. Just "Don't raise my taxes."

Well, since no one wants to pay higher taxes, let's reduce spending. This is fine unless one is on the receiving end of the government dole. The government subsidizes beekeepers for honey production. Peanuts cost twice as much in the United States as they do elsewhere in the world because we both limit the amount of peanuts that farmers can grow and the government guarantees the growers a minimum price. Similar government programs apply to other crops. The government has protected our financial assets by insuring bank accounts and pension benefits. The government has bailed out depositors in failed banks and savings and loans, exacerbating federal budget deficits. Now, we hear that a similar bailout may be necessary for pensions.

Congress did not design the social security system on an actuarial basis. In its early years, the system appeared to work because an expanding number of workers could easily support a few eligible retirees with a minimal tax on workers' salaries. Now the number of retirees is increasing faster than the number of workers. Do we continue to raise taxes to provide retirees their social security benefits or do we reduce the benefits to create a

fiscally sound system that does not increase the federal budget deficit?

Sins of the believers of humble circumstances in James

Verses that mention some of the sins of the poor man or brother of humble circumstances are:

1:19. "Let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger."

1:26. "If any one thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religious is worthless."

3:1. "Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment."

3:6. "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."

3:9-10a. "With it we bless *our* Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come *both* blessing and cursing."

3:14. "But if you have bitter envy ... in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth."

3:16. "But where envy ... exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

4:1. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"

4:2b. "And you are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask."

4:3. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."

4:5. "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: 'He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us.'" Col. R. B. Thieme translates this verse: "Or do you presume that the Scripture speaks in vain against jealousy; The Spirit who permanently indwells us pursues us with love."

4:6. "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'"

4:11. "Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brothers, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge *of it*."

5:7. "Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains."

5:9. "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door."

Bitter envy: When the government raises our taxes or reduces our benefits, how do we react? Is our opposition based on an evaluation of the proper function of government? Do we respond with bitterness or envy of those the government's actions do not affect adversely?

Somalia in 1992 and 1993 is an extreme example. The nation existed in a state of anarchy when there was not enough food to feed the population. Bitter envy among the people erupted into a bitter war for survival.

Bitter envy shows itself when violence arises during strikes for higher wages and better working conditions. Sometimes even the strikes themselves may be examples of bitter envy. The non-resistance of the righteous man in James 5:6 does not describe today's striking worker.

Sins and failures of the rich man and the poor man appear throughout the book of James. Two insets in this chapter list the sins of the rich believers and the sins of the believers of humble circumstances. These sins are not unique to a person's social status, since we are all guilty of several of these sins.

Sins of the rich believers in James

James also mentions the rich man's sins many times.

1:27. "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

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

2:13. "For judgment *will be* merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."

2:15-16. "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 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?"

3:14. "But if you have ... selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth."

3:16. "But where ... selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

4:1. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?"

4:2a. "You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. ... You do not have because you do not ask."

4:3. "You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures."

4:4. "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

4:6. "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore *it* says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'"

4:13-17. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' 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. Instead you *ought to* say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."

5:1-6. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. ... It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 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. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you."

5:12. "But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment."

Suffering: In dealing with the feud between the rich and the poor believers, James covers additional themes. James 1:2 introduces the subject of testing or suffering. We are to be happy while we are suffering. Believers who persevere under testing and adversity will receive a crown of life in James 1:12.

James tells us that man's sin nature and the lusts of his flesh, not God, are the source of suffering.

James 1:21 explains how to save our souls, not from hell, but from the stress and pressures of suffering and testings. We are to receive the teaching of the word of God and become doers of what we have learned. By being doers of the word, we overcome the stress and pressures of suffering and adversity and store up riches in heaven. James calls these riches a "crown of life."

The discussion of faith and works in James 2:14-26 asks the question, "Can that faith save him?" Again, James was not writing about eternal salvation, but deliverance from the mental pressure and stress of suffering. Deliverance requires the application of the word. The believer must act upon his faith.

Have you ever read the third chapter of James and considered the suffering caused by a loose tongue? James 3:6a, "And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity."

"Disorder and every evil thing" in James 3:16 accompany the sins of bitter envy and selfish ambition.

James 4:1 discusses "the source of quarrels and conflicts among" believers. The quarrels and conflicts cause suffering.

James uses the suffering of Job and the prophets as an example in James 5:10-11.

The book of James is about suffering in all its aspects and how to handle suffering in our lives.

God's solution: James does not discuss suffering among believers without presenting God's solution to the problem of suffering. James gives the first solution with his first mention of suffering. Believers are to be happy while they are suffering. As long as men exist on earth with their fleshly lusts, suffering will be a part of their lives. We can apply the word of God and be happy, even when we come under the most intense suffering.

The prayer for wisdom in James 1:5 asks God how to apply His word to testing and suffering so we can obey the command of James 1:2.

James 1:9-11 commands the believers of humble circumstances and the rich believers to apply specific Biblical teaching. The poor believer is to "glory in his high position." The rich believer is to "glory in his humiliation." These commands are meaningless unless a believer has learned the underlying Biblical principles. The original recipients of James' letter knew these principles but were not applying them.

Applying God's word: The three commands in James 1:19 follow the statement, "This you know." Obedience to these commands results from the application of the word of God that James' readers already knew.

"Be quick to hear." Though these believers knew the word of God, they still were to assemble to hear more spiritual truth.

"Slow to speak." We cannot talk and learn simultaneously. James amplifies this command several times. James 1:26, "bridle his tongue." James 2:12, "So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by *the* law of liberty." James 3:1, "Let not many *of you* become teachers." James 4:11, "Do not speak against one another." James 5:9, "Do not complain." The subject of being careful with what we say appears in each chapter of the book of James.

"Slow to anger." Believers are not to react against unfair and unjust treatment.

In James 1:21, believers are to put aside filthiness and wickedness. We are to reject the domination of our lives by the lusts of our flesh. In the same sentence James includes the flip side or positive aspect of the command. We are to "receive the word implanted." The teaching of the word of God is the basis of delivering our souls from the pressures of suffering.

We are not to be simply sponges, absorbing the teaching of the word, but we are to squeeze those sponges to get every last application out of the teaching. James 1:22 says "prove yourselves doers of the word."

James refers to the "whole law" in James 2:10. Although this is a reference to the Mosaic Law, by application we can read this as the entire Bible. "Whoever keeps the entire Bible and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." Until a believer has mastered the entire Bible and applied all of its teachings, he cannot let up on learning more of the word.

The faith and works discussion in James 2:14-26 is not saying that faith is unimportant, but illustrates the importance of applying the word of God.

Wisdom and understanding of the word of God show themselves in good behavior or "deeds in the gentleness of wisdom." A few verses later, in James 3:17, wisdom is to be pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. Simply learning the word of God is not enough to produce wisdom. Wisdom is skill in the application of spiritual truth.

James 4:7-8 presents the divine solution to dealing with the stress and pressure of suffering. "Submit therefore to God." Let the Holy Spirit control our lives through the word of God. Do not let the lusts of our flesh run our lives.

"Resist the devil." Jesus Christ overcame Satan's temptations in the wilderness by quoting the word of God. We must know and apply the word of God to resist the devil.

"Draw near to God." "Cleanse your hands." "Purify your hearts." James describes the method by which the believer lets the Holy Spirit control his life. Paul calls this being "filled with the Spirit" or letting "the word of Christ richly dwell within you."

James 4:10 gives another description: "Humble yourselves." The third chapter of James says that bitter envy and selfish ambition are arrogance. A believer who puts self or business or the acquisition of more material possessions above the Lord is not humble.

James 5:8 gives the importance of patience, endurance, and perseverance. "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts." Believers strengthen their hearts by learning the word of God.

In this letter written nearly 2,000 years ago, James furnishes practical applications and meaning for believers today. Racial problems and class antagonisms, major difficulties in today's society, are major themes in the epistle of James.

As long as we live, we have difficulties, adversities, suffering, and pressures. James tells us how to handle any suffering that comes our way.

A final note: I have used the feud between the rich believers and the believers of humble circumstances to show the unity of subject matter in the book of James. The antagonisms and adversities described in the book of James are not unique to the rich and poor. We face personal conflicts of many kinds. The solutions James gives apply to these conflicts as well as to conflicts between rich and poor believers.

JAMES, A Primer of Practical Christianity

Did James disagree with Paul and teach that both faith and works are necessary for salvation? This question and many others have been raised about the interpretation of this short epistle. As a result many Christians think that James is a difficult book to understand. Mr. Wright sets out a framework for easily understanding the epistle of James.

Is the epistle of James a collection of random thoughts and applications for the life of a Christian? This book shows that subjects, issues, and applications about which James wrote have a consistency and unity often missed in a casual reading of the epistle. The issues and applications are as appropriate today as they were at the time James wrote them.

About The Author

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