

JAMES: THE WORKINGS OF A LIVING FAITH

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INTRODUCTION

I. Who was James?

A. The author of the Epistle of James most probably was the James who is identified in Scripture as one of the half-brothers of our Lord Jesus (Galatians 1:19; compare Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 with Jude 1).

B. As did the rest of the family, at first he accompanied Jesus (John 2:12), but later stood aloof from Him (Mark 3:31) and joined in the open unbelief expressed by his brothers (John 7:2-5). A post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to him personally caused him to believe (1 Corinthians 15:7). He was among the disciples in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

C. In time he became the leading elder in the Church at Jerusalem. As such he led the first great council in A. D. 50 and gave the final pronouncement of that council on the question of Gentile believers (Acts 12:17; 15:4-29; 21:18; Galatians 1:19; 2:9-11).

D. His ministry was primarily to Jewish believers, first in Jerusalem and also in the eastern regions where they had become dispersed. Having a deep background in the Law, he ministered to Jewish believers whose background also was in the Law.

II. When did James write his epistle?

The Epistle of James was the first of the New Testament books to be written, having been composed before A. D. 50. James mentions his name in a matter-of-fact way, as though there would be no question of his identity. This strongly implies that James the brother of John had already been beheaded (circa A. D. 44), because had he written before that event, he would be expected to have distinguished himself from such a prominent apostle. (See Acts 12:2). Also, the epistle makes no mention of the question of Gentile believers, a fact that strongly implies that it was written before that issue reached its climax at the Jerusalem council in A. D. 50.

III. To whom was the epistle written?

A. The Epistle of James was addressed to Jewish believers who had become "scattered abroad" (1:1), mainly throughout the eastern regions, though possibly in the west also.

B. These Jewish believers seemed to be of the poorer socioeconomic levels, with only a few of the more well-to-do persons being among them (see James 2:1-7). During the earthly ministry of Jesus, "the poor heard Him gladly" (Mark 12:37). That many of these

to whom the epistle was addressed had followed Jesus and/or were children and grandchildren of those who had followed Jesus is a great probability. Persecution had further impoverished them, and (as is the case so often with the socially and economically underprivileged) they were tempted to seek the recognition and acceptance of the rich and influential.

IV. Why was the Epistle of James written?

A. Jewish believers in Jesus as the Messiah met with open and violent hostility from unbelieving Jews. These early disciples had become somewhat isolated from the strong fellowship of believers in Jerusalem as they had become "scattered abroad." They needed strong, supportive encouragement from an authority figure in Jerusalem, one who would speak to them the word of the Lord. They had the Old Testament Scriptures; yet they were the first to need and to receive New Testament revelation in propositional, written form. This helped to sustain them in the midst of persecution.

B. Having come into liberty in Christ, these Jewish believers were experiencing the joys of liberation from legalism. But they encountered some spiritual dangers. Isolated from the large community of believers in Jerusalem, ostracized from the strict legal Jewish system, and surrounded by Gentile immorality, they were tempted to drift from liberty to license. They needed to understand that the great moral imperatives are even more active in grace than they were in the Law, that the validity of faith and the vitality of faith are evidenced in its moral dynamic in practice. Faith is not merely an intellectual assent to truth, but a volitional response to Christ.

V. What and how did James write?

A. James's style is typically Jewish. He is concrete, practical, and direct to the point of being abrupt. He uses illustrations, metaphors and similes, much as Jesus did. He is dealing with the practical applications of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so he speaks of real life situations. His aim is not only to encourage Jewish believers in persecution, but even more to charge them sternly with the fact that the law of faith (being a higher principle than mere legalism) demands a standard of conduct consistent with itself.

B. The Epistle of James speaks directly to the inter-personal and human implications of the gospel. It describes in human terms what love by its very nature does.

C. As Paul wrote to warn against legalism, so James wrote to warn against antinomianism. Faith and works do not conflict, except in the minds of those who misinterpret one of the two. As works without faith are dead works (Hebrews 9:14), so faith without works is also dead (James 2:17).

D. One can see in James a relationship with the Epistle to the Hebrews and also to the First Epistle of Peter. Peter writes to Jewish believers of the western Diaspora, and Hebrews is written to Jewish believers who are under severe pressure to forsake Christ and return to the old Mosaic system. Hebrews is more theological and doctrinal, James more practical. Peter is both. Such are the workings of a living faith.

**LESSON 1:
CIRCUMSTANCES TEST OUR FAITH**

James 1:1-12

- 1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.
- 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,
- 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.
- 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
- 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.
- 6 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.
- 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,
- 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
- 9 But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position;
- 10 and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.
- 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.
- 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.

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**Key Verse:
James 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."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

James wrote his epistle to believers who were going through some very difficult circumstances. They were suffering persecution at the hands of unbelieving Jews, including the loss of property, dislocation, even the martyrdom of family and friends and the continual jeopardy of their own lives. James tells them that, instead of sinking into despair and self-pity, they should consider it all a joyful experience in view of the priceless value of the permanent qualities of character being built in them through the

circumstances. He exhorts them to respond positively and constructively, allowing their steadfastness to produce a perfect result.

B. Current background

All of us experience circumstances that challenge our faith and exert pressure on our souls. The temptation is strong to give in to the pressure and give up, to escape the pressure by abandoning the principles for which we are suffering. Many believers live in societies and under governments that are hostile to the faith of Christ. Others are threatened with economic reprisals if they refuse to compromise their Christian principles in business or on the job. Young people are subject to tremendous peer pressure, and find that there is often a social price to pay for maintaining their Christian integrity. As believers, we find it vitally important to keep our priorities straight. We must look beyond the immediate circumstance and fix our hearts on the priceless and timeless moral qualities that God is building in us.

I. Trials have a purpose (1:2-4)

A. God does not bring hardship and opposition upon us, but He does use the circumstances to build character in us. These inner qualities are perfected by exercise under provocation. Romans 8:28 assures us that "all things work together for good" for believers. And 2 Corinthians 4:17 declares that our "light affliction" is producing a great "weight of glory."

B. When we know the purpose and see its priceless eternal value, we can rejoice in the trying circumstances. Romans 8:18 tells us that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the future glory "that is to be revealed to us."

C. God is certain about what He is doing. As His grace enables us to respond positively to the trials and testings, the character that He is building in us for eternity will develop and mature. So Paul says, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6).

II. God has provided wisdom (1:5-8).

A. We need wisdom, particularly when we are in trying and distressing circumstances. Such disruptions tend to disorient us from our familiar surroundings and routine, introducing into our pattern of living new and threatening things. We need wisdom not only to know how to cope with the situations themselves, but also to see what God is endeavoring to build into our character so we can respond constructively in the divinely-ordained process. As one person in the middle of a trial put it: "Lord, help me to learn what you are trying to teach me, so I won't have to go through this again."

B. We need more than just ordinary human wisdom. We need wisdom that comes

only from God. God foreknew that we would need this wisdom and He has provided it for us. To encourage dependence on Him and His grace, God requires us to ask Him for this wisdom. Thus we are thrown back on Him for the spiritual resources needed so that steadfastness can perfect its work in us. Notice that our request is not to be primarily for relief or escape, but for wisdom. Learning the lessons is most important. Nevertheless, God does provide the escape. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13).

C. Unwavering faith is essential. Already in his epistle James indicates the active, volitional nature of faith. Faith is a moral commitment, a choice of the will, and a commitment of the will produces action (works). True faith is steadfast. It is choosing where one stands and standing there unmovable by God's grace. The wavering that is condemned here is more than just a conflict in one's thoughts. It is vacillating in one's basic purpose and commitment. The doubleminded receives nothing from God because he never settles his heart on the integrity and faithfulness of God. "Do not associate with those who are given to change" (Proverbs 24:21). God said to Judah: "Why do you go around so much changing your way?" (Jeremiah 2:36). Ephesians 4:14 says that we are not to be "tossed here and there by waves." "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings," Hebrews 13:9 admonishes us. Elijah challenged the people, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21). And Jesus informed us that no man can serve two masters (Luke 16:33). Double mindedness is a moral and not merely a psychological problem. It requires repentance (James 4:8).

III. Rejoice in the things of true value (1:9-11).

A. The poorer believers perhaps did not suffer any great loss of material possessions through persecution, because they possessed little in the first place. Even so, they still experienced the persecutions and are therefore "considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" as were the apostles (Acts 5:41). They, too, will receive the "weight of glory" that these "light afflictions" are working for us.

B. The rich believer suffered a greater measure of material loss through persecution. But he, too, is to rejoice. He is to rejoice that he has been delivered from the danger of having a wrong sense of values, set free from any false sense of riches that he might have had. His wealth has been removed as a source of temptation and false security. He has now discovered a greater oneness with his poorer brothers and sisters, social and economic differences having been abolished. Persecution is a great leveler. The rich was going to lose his wealth someday anyway (just as the flower fades). He can now rejoice that the loss came when it could occasion in him the development of humility and other moral gain. We know from 4:13-16 what temptations and tendencies these rich believers had. Spiros Zodhiates tells of a wealthy family that was so

occupied with the source of their riches that they took little or no time for their daughter. The father lost his wealth and as a result had more time for his family. One day the daughter came up, put her arms around her father's neck and said, "Don't get rich again, daddy." In this passage James reaffirms the words of Isaiah 40:6.

IV. The happiness that results from steadfastness. (1:12).

Patience. Patient continuance. Remaining true. Steadfast love and devotion. Tried and proven true; deepened; stabilized; fixed; made firm. The crown of life is given to those who love God, for only those who love God are compatible with Him. Only they would enjoy His fellowship. This love is what God is after. He wants it to be of the highest quality--deep, true, steadfast, intense. To develop these qualities, love must be tested and tried. All who partake of this process and its priceless result are blessed indeed. Whatever prepares us for supreme joy is in itself joyful. This should make every Christian a happy Christian. It should also make us humble, for this crown of life is a gift, not a prize.

CONCLUSION

As believers we should be thankful for the circumstances that God uses to prevent us from setting our hearts upon the things of this world and to keep our sense of spiritual values strong. Adversity shall not overcome us, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38, 39). Neither can people force us away from Christ. This is His assurance: "My Father, who has given them to Me. is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand." (John 10:29). In this confidence let us remain steadfast in every trial, looking forward to the joy and crown that His approval will bring.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. In what ways can our faith be tested by circumstances?
2. How do these pressures produce patience? Would it not be easier to live a stable, consistent life if our faith were not under attack from these circumstances?
3. What is the "perfect work" of endurance?
4. Discuss the meaning of "perfect."

5. From other passages in James, describe the wisdom that comes from God.
6. What are the marks of a "double mind"?
7. What does it mean to be "exalted" (high position), and to be "brought low" (humiliation)?
8. What is the "crown of life"?

**LESSON 2:
FEELINGS TEST OUR FAITH**

James 1:13-27

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

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

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

16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

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.

18 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.

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

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.

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

23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;

24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.

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

26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

27 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.

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**Key Verse:
James 1:22**

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

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

1. Hebrew believers of the First Century had long been tied to the Mosaic law prior to their conversion. Also, a body of tradition had developed and had been imposed on them. Now in Christ they found liberty, liberty from the foolish traditions of men, liberty from the ceremonial aspects of the Law, even liberty from the attempt of the Law to impose morality by legislation alone.

2. Scattered abroad by persecution, they found themselves in Gentile surroundings--immoral, sensual, pagan. Cut loose from strong, strict Jewish society, and enjoying release from legalism, they were in real danger of slipping into antinomianism. Liberty could easily become license. They were under real temptation to moral evil, to commit sin.

B. Current background

1. Do we live in a morally strict society? Does the world system surrounding us provide moral strength and spiritual inspiration? The answer to both questions is not hard to find.

2. Like the First Century Jewish believers, we also are fully human and subject to desires, feelings and impulses. Often these clamor for control. How do we cope with them? James makes clear that as believers we are born of God. We are His. Therefore we adhere to His word and do it. We exercise the discipline and demonstrate in practice the love that saving grace produces and that is the evidence of genuine religion.

I. What is going on inside of us? (James 1:13-15)

A. Because God created us, is He therefore responsible for the temptations that arise from the physical and psychological nature He has given us? In other words, by creating us with desires, is God our ultimate, real Tempter? Thus some might rationalize.

B. God does not tempt, because that would be contrary to His character. He is love, and love works no ill. In fact, so true is His love that He is never tempted to evil, that is, to act and choose contrary to His love for us. For that reason He would never tempt us to do evil, as that would be contrary to both His and our good.

C. Temptation results when natural, God-given desires appeal to us for excessive, unnatural, harmful, and therefore unreasonable gratification (food, sex, etc.). This arises within our own nature when some object stimulates our natural desires or

promotes an artificial desire (alcohol and narcotics).

D. If we do not yield to this appeal for unreasonable indulgence, no sin results and our desires are kept within their natural boundaries to serve their natural purposes. But when the will consents to the unreasonable indulgence or indulgences, sin begins. The desire or desires reign. This is "minding" or giving one's purposeful attention to the flesh (Romans 8:5).

E. Sin does not bring its full result at once. Even so, its final product is death. The deliberate, conscious yielding is the conception. Continuing in sin is the period of its gestation. At last it gives birth to death. This is in contrast to the "perfect result" of an enduring faith (verse 4). Sometimes the "conceiving" takes place in the heart long before it becomes evident in the life. Such was the case of Judas Iscariot, whose love of money existed long before it revealed itself in selling Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. That, too, resulted in death (Matthew 27:5). Also, Demas loved this present world before that commitment expressed itself in his forsaking Paul (2 Timothy 4:10).

II. Warning against a false philosophy (1:16-25).

A. If one's premise is wrong, the system of thought built upon that premise will lead to a wrong conclusion.

B. God did not create us with an evil nature. Therefore our temptations do not come from Him. His gifts are wholesome, including the ones that people abuse and pervert.

C. God, the Giver of every good gift, is immutable. His good and beneficent purpose in creation does not change. Man perverts the use of God's gifts to serve his own desires, but that does not change God. Morality does not change to reflect human consensus. Morality is changeless because it is grounded in the immutable nature of God. He is the Father of lights. "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." (1 John 1:5).

D. Believers are born of God. He is the Father of lights. Therefore whatever is born of Him abides in light. The new birth involves a change. Because God and His will are unchanging, therefore the change is in us, not in God. The new birth is a moral change. The Holy Spirit applied the word of truth to bring our hearts into conformity to the will and character of God as revealed in that word. Thus God changed us from disobedience to obedience, from darkness to light, from disconformity to conformity to the unchanging word of the unchanging God. The result of necessity is a volitional response, a behavior consistent with the truth by which God has begotten us according to His will. "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:10).

E. God's design in begetting us with the word of truth is that we be "the first fruits

among His creatures." (vs. 18). He has predestined us "to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren." (Romans 8:29). Of all creation, what God is after is an elect, sanctified people for His eternal glory and fellowship.

F. This begetting by the word of truth to fruitfulness stands in direct contrast to the conceiving of sin that brings forth death.

G. If God's purpose in sanctifying us by the word is to be fulfilled, we must remain in conformity to that word. It must abide in us. We must listen to the word. We must look into it diligently. We must guard our words. We must bring our human spirit under the discipline of the word, because human wrath does not produce God's righteousness (and His righteousness *in* us is His purpose *for* us).

III. Character is what counts (1:26,27).

A. Many are deceived as to what constitutes true religion. To some it consists in certain emotions. To others it is a set of correct doctrinal positions. Yet others view religion as a code of conduct. The Scriptures teach that it consists in heart-conformity to the truth, exhibited in practical behavior.

B. Because the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart (Matthew 12:34), an unbridled tongue reveals an unregenerate heart. Whatever religion such a person might have is spurious. He deceives his heart with it. The more valid it seems to be, the greater is the deception.

C. True religion is a matter of love. Jesus said that to love God with all the heart and one's neighbor as himself is the essence of morality and hence of true faith. Only this is acceptable to God. It demonstrates its genuineness in two ways: the practice of love to others and separation from the world.

CONCLUSION

Knowing that every gift of God is good because it comes from Him who is unchanging in His love and goodness, we conclude that sin and evil are the result of man's perverting these gifts to his own selfish gratification. As believers, we are the result of God's design to sanctify to Himself a people compatible with His character. To accomplish this design in us, God employed the word of truth to regenerate us, that is, to bring us into a new life in Christ. In view of God's high and holy purpose in us, we ought to be the most highly motivated people on earth. It is of utmost importance that we live diligently in and according to the very word of God by which God gave us life and by which He sustains that spiritual life. Our attitude should be that of Paul's: "Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13,14). They who have this sense of holy purpose will exhibit the same in their speech, deportment, and actions toward others. Such are truly blessed in what they do.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. If God created us with inner emotional drives, is it not natural and proper to obey these drives?
2. Why did God create us with these inner drives since these drives lead so many to sin?
3. What does it mean for lust to conceive?
4. Why does James refer to the immutability of God in relationship to the new birth?
5. What part does the word of truth have in the new birth?
6. If no moral change has taken place in a person, is that person truly born again?
7. What is the "perfect law, the law of liberty"?
8. What does it mean for the word of God to be engrafted or implanted?
9. Once it is implanted, what is the action of the word of God in our lives?
10. Are good deeds and right behavior proof of regeneration?

**LESSON 3:
FAITH WORKS BY LOVE**

James 2:1-13

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

2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes,

3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, "You sit here in a good place," and you say to the poor man, "You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,"

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

5 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?

6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?

7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?

8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF," you are doing well.

9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

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

11 For He who said, "DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY," also said, "DO NOT COMMIT MURDER." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

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**Key Verse:
James 2:12**

"So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background.

The Jewish believers to whom James wrote were generally of the poorer classes.

They had suffered loss through persecution and its dislocations. So when they met together for worship and a well-to-do person attended, they had a tendency to treat him with special favor. But when persons poorer than themselves attended, they were told to stand or to sit wherever they could. The poor detracted rather than added to their social aspirations. Such partiality was motivated by a desire for acceptability with the rich. This desire and its resultant practice was selfish. It violated the law of love, the essence of true faith.

B. Current background.

The desire for social acceptance, upward social mobility, and the advantages that such bring can be a very real danger in modern churches. It is a sociological fact that there are poorer class churches, middle class churches, and upper class churches (and churches trying to be identified as upper class). When someone from a higher "class" attends, the tendency is to treat him or her with greater deference than the poor family from across the tracks. So is the desire for upward social mobility. This is selfish and contrary to the truth that true faith professes. It is treating people on the basis of their contribution to our own selfish desires.

I. Does faith have moral character? (2:1-7).

A. Does what one believes have any relationship to morality and ethics? Is faith only the assent of the mind that something is true or is it also the commitment of the will to the values perceived and recognized by the mind? That is, is faith only a recognition of the truth? or is it also a volitional, heart-surrender to the truth, evidenced in behavior?

B. What we believe *about* God becomes faith *in* God only when a volitional commitment is made *to* God. The same is true regarding others. The great commandment is to love God with all our hearts and others as ourselves (Matthew 22: 34-40). If this commitment of the heart is missing, true saving faith is missing. True faith is evidenced by love.

C. Partiality, then, is inconsistent with true faith. It is the fruit of selfishness, not of love. They who demonstrate this spirit in habitual practice reveal that they know not what it means to be begotten of the word of truth.

D. Even among true believers, this spirit can manifest itself if we are not watchful. Guy King calls this the short-sighted usher, the one who could not see beyond the superficial, the material, and the temporal. Of course, it involves more than the ushers. It is an attitude that pervades whole congregations. It is wrong in that it refuses to recognize "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ" as our basis of fellowship, and introduces instead social status as the basis. This is the attitude of the unregenerate world. Such distinctions and biased discriminations are the expressions of unworthy, selfish motives. They are totally contrary to "our glorious Lord Jesus Christ," who said that all believers

are brothers (Matthew 23:8).

E. Partiality rejects and ignores God's choice in election. It rejects what God has chosen. It also fails to see what constitutes true riches. Many years ago a minister in the southern part of the United States said to me, "If a black man comes into my church, I will personally usher him out." Horrible. The most charitable thing that can be said of such an attitude is that it expresses a lack of understanding on the subject.

F. Partiality to oppressors represents a callous disregard for those who are oppressed, in this case our own brothers and sisters. Yet it goes beyond even that. Since the rich oppressors blasphemed the honorable and beautiful name of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, partiality to them is an insult to Him and a virtual denial of their high and holy calling in Him. "But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God." (1 Peter 4:16).

G. In verses six and seven James levels a serious charge against them. "But you have dishonored the poor man." This is one of the most serious charges that can be leveled against professed believers. It is a virtual denial of the faith, akin to that committed by the one who provides not for his own (1 Timothy 5:8).

II. What is the royal law? (2:8-11).

A. James does not include the whole church in his rebuke. He leaves the possibility open that some were indeed following the royal law. Paul states that faith establishes this law (Romans 3:31). It is the law of love. It is the law of liberty. Its establishment in the heart of the true believer is what makes liberty from legalism morally possible and justifiable. It was the real principle behind the Mosaic law (Leviticus 19:18), and Jesus affirmed it to be the essence of true religion and morality (Matthew 7:12). It is the law of faith, that is, the principle on which true faith operates.

B. James's addressee who practiced partiality was committing sin by violating the very essence of morality and was also being convicted by that law as a transgressor. To the legalistic Jewish mind, only outward acts were transgressions. Here the Scriptures again show that what really counts is the disposition of the heart. This reminds us of the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer in Luke 10, and of the Lord's answer in the parable of the good Samaritan. Legalism asks, "How much do I have to do?" Love asks, "How much can I do?"

C. Moral action is a unit. Jesus established that fact when He said, "No one can serve two masters..." (Matthew 6:24). The person who stumbles in one point of the law becomes guilty of all. This stumbling is not a mere mistake in ignorance. It is willful violation of the basic principle, breaking the integrity of moral character. If a person chooses to sacrifice the interests of God and of others for the sake of some selfish gratification, what does it matter the occasion? If the person will do it in one way, what

would prevent him from doing it in every way if he had sufficient desire and opportunity? Certainly not love for God and man, for that was set aside in the choice to commit the one transgression. The person who will lie but will not steal has no particle of morality or true faith in him.

III. Will believers be judged? (2:12,13).

A. James says so. So does Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Will we be judged according to the law of Moses? No, but by the higher law, the law of liberty. James still has the "offending usher" in mind. Legalism centers morality on the precept and its technical obedience. The law of love centers on real values (God and man) and our attitudes toward them. Since we are to be judged according to this law, we should speak and act toward others in love.

B. Under the law of love, we receive as we have given. This is not to say that by showing love and mercy to others we merit mercy ourselves. Our own mercy cannot save us. Only God's mercy can do that. But under the law of liberty, mercy on our part (or the lack of it) becomes a condition (not the ground) of the dispensation of God's mercy toward us.

C. Under the Mosaic law the willful offender had no mercy (Hebrews 10:28). It was retribution. The law of liberty recognizes mercy. Since that is the law by which we shall be judged, let it be the law by which we live and by which we treat others. That is the only way to triumph over judgment. We shall be judged by the same law we apply to others (Matthew 7:1,2). Speak and act as one who desires to be judged by the provision of mercy. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." (Matthew 5:7).

CONCLUSION

The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is more than a catechism, or a set of doctrinal propositions (though it is certainly that). It is an embracing of the truth, a commitment to the truth, a heart-conformity to the truth. This volitional response to the truth is an act of love, induced by the Holy Spirit. It is the beginning of the reign of love in the heart. If love reigns in the heart, it will express itself in our words and actions, particularly toward others. This law of love is the standard by which we shall be judged. Let it be the standard by which we speak and act.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. Is the Church the true classless society?
2. A well-known evangelical church holds separate services for poorer people. Is this justifiable?
3. Some church growth writers emphasize that to grow, a church should be a "homogeneous unit," that is, a group of people socially, economically and intellectually compatible. Do you agree?
4. How is partiality shown in the church besides the way it was shown in the early Christian synagogues?
5. What is meant by the unity of moral action?
6. The person who has shown no mercy will receive merciless judgment. Is this person a believer?
7. How can we be assured that mercy will triumph over judgment when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

**LESSON 4:
FAITH PROVES ITSELF BY ACTION**

James 2:14-26

14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

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

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

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

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."

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

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

21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

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

23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS," and he was called the friend of God.

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

25 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?

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

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**Key Verse:
James 2:17**

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

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background.

Jewish believers in the dispersion found themselves among not only Gentiles but also other Jews, most of whom did not believe in Christ. These unbelieving Jews had a "faith," however, just as the Pharisees whom Jesus denounced as hypocrites had a faith. Jesus pointed out that their faith was vain because their works were evil. It would have been very comfortable and advantageous for these believing Jews if they were to

content themselves with a mere intellectual, traditional "faith," a faith that accepted the tenets of Jewish orthodoxy but had no power to save from sin. They could even have an article of faith about Jesus, so long as His Lordship did not require any moral commitment, any heart-obedience. Such antinomian "faith" would have been inoffensive to others, but it would be dead and useless.

B. Current background

The popular notion today seems to be that to be a Christian is simply a matter of subscribing to a set of beliefs and acting in a socially acceptable manner, all of which is to be made official by a few religious rituals. Such an attitude misses the essential point. It makes religion to consist in a set of opinions that do not move the heart to loving obedience toward God, yet compensates for this lack of true heart-obedience by substituting a set of religious duties to be fulfilled. It manufactures a combination of "faith" and "works," neither of which is genuine. The truth is that real faith is of the heart, and therefore it acts from the heart.

I. Do we really know what faith is? (2:14-18)

A. Can the kind of faith that does nothing be the kind of faith that saves? If so, then in what way has it saved? If the person is left unaffected in heart and life, what good has that person's religion done? Is this the kind of salvation that the angels desire to look into?

B. James uses a dramatic illustration to demonstrate his point: telling someone without food and clothes to be warmed and filled, yet doing nothing. By this illustration James informs us that he is speaking of the "faith" that consists only in words, words, words. That kind of "faith" had a long history in Israel. Jesus said so much as that when He quoted Isaiah's charge against Judah recorded in Isaiah 29:13: "This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me." (Matthew 15:8).

C. Works are not something added to faith to supplement or fortify it; neither do works (and we are talking about real works--love works) merely flow from faith. In verse 17 James tells us that the practical energizing of love is the very heart and life of faith itself. "Faith" is spurious if something has to be added to it, or if works only result from it. Faith is genuine saving faith only if its actions are a part of its own dynamic. One cannot make a dead body "live" by merely moving its arms and legs. Such "works" are imposed from the outside, and are just as dead as the body that is manipulated to perform them.

D. So often faith and works are placed separately, even in antithesis to each other. James is not contending for works against faith, or works apart from faith. James is championing faith--real faith, the kind that is alive and shows that it is alive by the actions that it generates from within itself. As sin is aroused to action by its enmity to

the law, so faith is aroused to action by its response to grace. (See Romans 7:8).

E. Verse eighteen is a battleground of conflicting interpretations. It's thrust is clear, however. It is impossible for faith to reveal itself except in actions. This is the premise of Hebrews 11. In that great faith chapter, the faith of the people cited was shown by what they did. Faith is a choice, and choice produces action.

II. Where do we see faith in action before the law and apart from the law? (2:19-26).

A. If one's "faith" consists only in a mental assent to the truth, though it be the most fundamental truth of all, the existence of the one true God, yet does not obey God, he does no more than the demons. They, too, believe as much and obey not. In fact, the demons do more than merely subscribe to the doctrine of God. They tremble. This shows that their "belief" has a more profound effect on them than the "belief" of the person with a dead faith. (A Christological note: the Biblical examples of demons trembling before the one true God include demons trembling before the Lord Jesus. cf. Mark 1:24; 5:12).

B. No stronger argument could be presented to a Jew than the example of Abraham. How was Abraham justified? By faith (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4; Hebrews 11:8-19). What kind of faith was it? It was a living faith, a faith that "was working with his works," and therefore was a complete, effective faith. It was the action of his faith (the "follow-through" of his faith) that fulfilled the Biblical declaration (made earlier than the action) that he was justified by faith. So we see that a person is justified by the *operation* of faith (i.e., the action of faith), and not merely by its form. Abraham was before the Law of Moses.

C. Though Rahab the harlot was in a category about as far removed as possible from Abraham in the Jewish mind (to compare her with Abraham was in itself a stumblingblock to many Jews), she was justified in the same way as Abraham. That is, she believed. How do we know that she believed? By what she did, that is, by her actions, her works. Apart from those actions (works), there would have been no vitality and hence no validity to her faith.

D. This principle is demonstrated over and over in Scripture. "And Jesus, seeing their faith, said to the paralytic, 'My Son, your sins are forgiven'." (Mark 2:5). What did Jesus "see"? He saw them tear the roof off! No antinomian "faith" there! Faith is a volitional response to the truth and to the God of truth.

E. James's concluding analogy is an exact one. Just as it takes a body and a spirit to make a whole person, so it takes both the form of belief and the volitional response to make a living faith.

CONCLUSION

Do we truly believe? Are we trusting Jesus alone as our Savior? Are we trusting Him to forgive us? Do we believe that He has given us new life? What is there in our lives that demonstrates that faith? What are we doing about it? Where is that new life energizing in us? Has it made a difference in our attitudes and actions? What is the evidence that our faith is true saving faith? Can Jesus "see" our faith? If we truly believe the gospel, we will act like it to the extent of our light.

A familiar story is told of a performer whose top act was pushing a wheelbarrow over a waterfall (from one edge to the other) on a narrow cable. The performer asked a spectator if he believed that he (the performer) could really do it. The spectator said, "Sure, I believe you can do it." To this the performer replied, "Are you willing to get into the wheelbarrow"? Faith "gets into the wheelbarrow." Faith--real, living, saving faith--trusts Christ completely, and it proves itself by a total commitment to Christ.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. What is the difference between the works that complete faith, and the works of legalism?
2. Who is the "someone" in verse eighteen, and whom is he addressing?
3. Is it possible to exhibit one's faith apart from works? Why?
4. In the light of verse 20, is every person who does not recognize that faith without works is useless a "foolish fellow," that is, an "empty man"?
5. How did the act of offering up Isaac "justify" Abraham? Did it merit forgiveness of sins?
6. Rahab the harlot did not have the relationship with God that Abraham did. Was her act of receiving and protecting the Israelite spies just as total a commitment for her as surrendering Isaac was for Abraham? Why?
7. Discuss the relationship between body and spirit as it relates to the relationship between faith and works. If the body represents the form and/or substance of faith, what does the spirit represent?
8. We are saved by faith alone, but we are not saved by a faith that stands alone. Do you agree? Why or why not?

9. Is there any truth of the gospel that we profess to believe, but are doing nothing about?

**LESSON 5:
THE TAMING OF THE TONGUE**

James 3:1-12

- 1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.
- 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.
- 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well.
- 4 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.
- 5 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!
- 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.
- 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race.
- 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.
- 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God;
- 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.
- 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?
- 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh.

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**Key Verse:
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."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

The believers to whom James addressed his epistle were tempted to think of faith in only an intellectual, antinomian sense. He has been endeavoring to tell them that faith is a moral commitment to the truth that the mind affirms to be true. We are

responsible to obey it personally. It was easy for teachers to think of the faith only as a set of propositions to be shared like so much objective and impersonal information. But Christian teachers cannot teach the faith like one would teach mathematics. We are responsible to obey the truth that we teach. Therefore no-one should proceed in mere human enthusiasm to be a teacher, knowing that we have the greater accountability. The more we know, the more we are responsible to live and obey. To be qualified as a true teacher, he must demonstrate in word and conduct that he himself has been taught the truth.

B. Current background

It is fashionable in intellectual and academic circles to treat the Bible and the Christian faith "objectively." Personal commitment is viewed almost if not altogether as a fault, a bias. It is possible to earn a doctorate in Theology, with an emphasis in Christology, and yet not love the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to remind ourselves and all such that truth is for obeying. Truth contains imperatives, and our obedience to those imperatives is called faith. In conducting Bible studies, our aim should be not only to understand the Bible but also to live it in our speech and conduct. A clear example occurred in my graduate studies in Social Science. I was enrolled in a course in Criminology and Delinquency. In the middle of the quarter the professor was arrested and charged with public indecency.

I. What is a mark of a perfect teacher? (3:1,2)

A. To be a teacher of revealed truth carries with it a great responsibility. In view of the fact that "faith without works is dead," then teaching the truth without living it means that the teacher is spiritually dead. Such teaching is dead. They who teach the truth will have a greater accountability, for by teaching it they are professing to know it and by professing to know it they are accountable to live it.

B. All of us are liable to stumble. We stumble in many ways, the worst of which seems to be in our words. Because the tongue seems to be the worst offender and the easiest in which to stumble, the person who can bridle the tongue can bridle the rest. That is the mark of the completed man, the man qualified to teach.

II. Who can tame the tongue? (3:3-12)

A. The tongue is crucial in character determination. By that we do not mean the physical organ itself, but the use that is made of it. James likens its relationship to the whole being to the relationship of a bit to a horse and a rudder to a ship. In other words, the tongue controls things.

B. The Bible has much to say about this. Jesus said "For by your words you shall be

justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." (Matthew 12:37. See the context). In Proverbs 13:3 we read, "The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." And Peter admonishes us, "For let him who means to love life and see good days refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile." (1 Peter 3:10).

C. Words are irretrievable. The story is told of a person who hurt an acquaintance very deeply by his words. In time he apologized. The friend forgave, but sought to impress the consequences of the harmful words. Taking a feather pillow, he went to the window and emptied its contents into the wind. Turning to the offender he said, "I forgive you, but you will no more be able to recover the harm done by your words than you are able to recover all those feathers."

D. As a small match can destroy a forest, so a tongue out of control can destroy a life. It defiles the whole person, and it is kindled by hell itself.

E. In the beginning God gave man dominion over earthly creation. But one thing mankind can never tame--the tongue. The reason for this is that it speaks "out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34). And so long as the heart is evil, the tongue will be poisoned.

F. This is seen in its duplicity. Here again, James is warning against one of the tendencies of an antinomian "faith." In it he implies that a tongue that blesses God and curses man is not in reality offering true blessing to God. No matter how degraded a person might become, that person still carries the image of God. If we speak lightly of man, therefore, we cannot truly speak greatly of God. In Romans 12:14 Paul admonishes, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not."

G. The story is told of a philosopher who told his servant to go to the market and buy the worst thing there. The servant did so and brought back a tongue and served it.

H. If we bless God and curse men, we are not acting right, for we are assuming to ourselves that which belongs only to God. We may warn of God's curse upon the ungodly, but we do not originate it. Such cursing reveals a moral perversion. The tongue cannot be tamed until the heart is cleansed. Only God can do that.

I. Here again we see the unity of moral action. No one can go in opposite directions at the same time. If a fountain is sending forth sweet water, the source must be sweet. But if it begins sending forth polluted water, the source must be polluted. The sweet water is poisoned by the bitter water that flows with it, and the entire flow is corrupted. How tragic when this happens in the moral and spiritual realm. It reveals an impure heart, for if the heart is pure so will the mouth be pure.

J. Just as a tree or plant cannot produce fruit inconsistent with its own inner nature, so the tongue cannot produce other than what is in the heart.

K. Here we see the kind of works that James is calling for. He is emphasizing works that flow from the right source (faith), and not works as an assortment of unrelated and detached acts (legalism).

CONCLUSION

Someone said that the tongue is a subject that is in everybody's mouth. All of us are affected by it. Each one of us has a tongue with the potential for great good or great evil. How we use it will reveal the state of our hearts. No amount of pretence can prevent that revelation, because no man can force the tongue into subjection if the heart is stimulating it. The only way for the tongue to be subdued and brought into order is for Christ to control the heart. We are reminded of James's earlier statement in 1:26 that an unbridled tongue reveals the vanity of one's religion, no matter how much a person professes "faith." Saving faith will redeem the tongue.

A lady in a Pentecostal prayer meeting was seeking the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Someone asked her, "Are you seeking tongues, Sister?" "No," she replied, "I'm trying to get rid of forty feet of the one I have."

A sanctified tongue and a sanctified heart go together.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. How can we tell whether we are called of God to be teachers of His word, or whether we are motivated only by human eagerness?
2. How do people "stumble" in what they say?
3. How does the tongue defile the entire body?
4. What does it mean to "tame" the tongue? Why has the human race not been able to do so?
5. What does "ought not" in verse ten mean?
6. How does this lesson relate to the larger subject of faith?
7. What is the only way to purify the tongue? Why?

LESSON 6: DEMONSTRATE YOUR WISDOM

James 3:13-18

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

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

15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

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

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

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Key Verse: James 3:13

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

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

Jewish believers had been raised in a religious system that had many teachers. Rabbis, scribes, doctors of the law were abundant. Schools of interpretation flourished. Much of this teaching was purely speculative and external. Jesus characterized the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in such passages as Matthew 23, charging that they "say things, and do not do them" (vs. 3). Also, in the Greek-influenced Gentile world much philosophical speculation passed for "wisdom." There was a real danger that Christian teachers might degenerate into mere temporizers with truth. James emphasizes that truth is to be obeyed. Real wisdom is moral, not merely intellectual. It is a humble submission to the truth as God gives us perception in the truth.

B. Current background

We still have two kinds of "wisdom" in the world. We have much of the ego-centered so-called wisdom, both secular and religious. It places self-interest as the highest good. It is usually auto-soterical. It is "foolishness with God" (1 Corinthians

3:19). In the knowledge of God in Christ we have the true wisdom, the "hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory" (1 Corinthians 2:7). To know this wisdom, we must lay aside the pretensions of worldly wisdom. Since pride is contrary to true wisdom, humility of heart is essential to the acquisition of true wisdom. True wisdom involves knowing how to live. Its atmosphere is peace. Its product is righteousness. We find it all in Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30).

I. Is wisdom of the head or of the heart? (3:13)

A. The call for volunteers: "Who among you is wise and understanding?" To ask a question like that is to establish a test, because the person who would respond, "I am," would in so doing reveal his lack of wisdom and understanding. The asking of the question forces the truly wise man to demonstrate his wisdom by silent reflection.

B. Paul told the Corinthians, "...we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Here is the issue. Knowledge without love is not wisdom. Wisdom is not a quantity of information. It is recognition of and submission to the truth in love. Sin is most unreasonable. "Insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives" (Ecclesiastes 9:3). It is the pursuit of self-gratification in opposition to what the mind knows to be the demands of the higher values.

C. This is selfishness, and selfishness in possession of knowledge is not wisdom. In fact, it is even more dangerous and destructive by the amount of knowledge it possesses. Hitler's scientists had knowledge, but their selfishness perverted their knowledge to the most unreasonable and insane ends. Certainly they were not wise.

D. True wisdom consists in the best use of the most appropriate means to attain the most valuable and therefore most reasonable ends. Such a course will demonstrate itself in the most gentle of concerns and good behavior.

II. Wisdom or shrewdness? (3:14-16)

A. As love is reasonable, so selfishness is unreasonable. Selfishness disregards the true interests of God and of others, that which the intelligence affirms to be truly valuable, and it acts as though the ambitions of self were more important. This is most unreasonable, and is sin because it is perpetrated in opposition to reason, that is, to light. It manifests itself in all kinds of strife and competitive behavior. In Galatians 5:19-21 Paul calls these the deeds of the flesh, and expands on James's description.

B. Love is the sum obligation of all true morality and religion. Jealousy and selfish ambition are contrary to love, hence to the truth, hence to wisdom. The remedy is genuine repentance in humility. This means confessing our sins. But arrogance is the refusal to confess, to acknowledge our sins. This arrogance is a denial of the truth in

two ways: it denies the truth about ourselves, and it denies in practice what we say is true in word. It is like the story of a minister who preached about peace and order in the home in view of the fact that Christ is the Head of the home. When he went home his daughter said to him, "Father, why don't you practice what you preach?" The father responded by knocking his daughter across the room. "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him..." (Titus 1:16). Remember, James is still talking about faith, true saving faith, faith that behaves, that lives what it truly believes.

C. Selfishness perverts knowledge by misdirecting it to its own ends. This is not wisdom, but shrewdness in the worst sense of the word.

D. God is not the Author of this "wisdom." It is:

1. earthly--having nothing in common with the sweet, holy reasonableness of Heaven. So the five "I wills" of Lucifer (see Isaiah 14:12-14) were totally incompatible with Heaven and intolerable there.

2. natural--"soulish," "unspiritual," "sensual." It seeks to gratify the propensities of man. It rationalizes selfishness. We hear its blatant voice in some of the "self-first" paperbacks that are so popular.

3. demonic--"demon-like." It is the big lie of Satan. He first convinced himself of it, then many of the angels, then Eve. Hear it in Satan's words to our first mother: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). By its ego-centeredness, it proclaims that by being independent from God, every person can become free, his or her own supreme being and central interest. Away with such "wisdom"!

E. Selfishness inevitably collides with others. The result is conflict. Its fruit is strife and every evil work. Its final end is death (Romans 8:6).

III. What are the attributes of true wisdom? (3:17,18)

A. True wisdom is pure. Purity is its outstanding characteristic. True wisdom recognizes that holiness is essential to happiness, to securing the highest good. Love will pursue its great end only by means consistent with its own pure nature. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). Proverbs 9:10 tells us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." This implies the recognition that God is holy. Impurity dishonors Him; consequently, love for Him necessitates love for purity.

B. True wisdom is peaceable. Selfishness brings strife. Love excludes selfishness. The absence of selfishness is the absence of strife. The result is peace. Proverbs 13:10 tells us, "Through presumption comes nothing but strife..."

C. True wisdom is reasonable. True wisdom pursues the right end with the most appropriate means. This and this alone is reasonable. It is fair equitable, gentle, approachable, compliant.

D. True wisdom is full of mercy and good fruits. It recognizes the worth of the person and seeks to do him good, to pardon, to extend practical aid and assistance. Faith is not a barren tree. Galatians 5:22,23 expands on this list.

E. True wisdom is unwavering. Stability must be an attribute of wisdom. It is not fickle, following selfish impulses here and there. Instead, it fixes on great and eternal values. It is exhibited in the endurance that results in a perfect work. Another definition of the word means "without partiality," certainly a possible meaning here in view of Chapter Two.

F. True wisdom is without hypocrisy. Luke 12:1 records the warning of Jesus against "the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." True wisdom is not deluded by an exaggerated sense of self-importance. It does not pretend to be what it is not.

G. Righteousness grows in the soil of peace, sown by peaceable people. Righteousness cannot grow unless there is peace. See 1:20. This necessitates discipline, as Hebrews 12:11 informs us: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

CONCLUSION

Wisdom is practical. Colossians 4:5 says, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making most of the opportunity." Wisdom is love acting sensibly. Only they who live the truth are qualified to teach it, for they alone demonstrate that they believe it. This is true faith. We find it all personified in Jesus Christ. As we learn of Him, so let us walk (Matthew 11:29; Colossians 2:6,7; Ephesians 4:20-24).

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. What difference is there between wisdom and understanding? (see 3:13).
2. What does it mean for wisdom to "come down from above"?
3. Why is there such a direct relationship between wisdom and peace?
4. If peace is evidence of wisdom, what does strife evidence? Why?

5. Why do jealousy and selfish ambition open the door to "every evil thing"?
6. How does this section relate to the general theme of the epistle?
7. Why is purity the first quality of wisdom?

**LESSON 7:
THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT**

James 4:1-10

- 1 What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?
- 2 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.
- 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.
- 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.
- 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"?
- 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE."
- 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
- 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
- 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom.
- 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

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**Key Verse:
James 4:10**

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

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

The Jews of that day were very volatile. It did not take a lot to precipitate a mob action. Passions were strong. Some of the Jews were called Zealots, including one of Jesus's disciples. It is not unlikely that some of this same spirit manifest itself among the Jewish believers, or at least by some who associated themselves with the Church. Perhaps there were family members of believers who were in "church" but not in Christ. Yet their behavior affected the spiritual life and witness of the Church. Could it be that someone in this category had actually committed murder in a fit of frustrated passion, and James uses this shocking event to drive home the truth about the source of

conflict? It is certain that James calls some of his addressees "sinners." He warns the whole Church that they need to stop cultivating the friendship of the world and to separate themselves to God. The tone of this passage and of other passages in the epistle suggests that some unregenerate people had become accepted and acceptable in the church.

B. Current background

Human nature has not changed. The world is as full of strife as it has always been, perhaps more so. This spirit of the world creeps into the Church, particularly when unregenerate people are accepted in the Church as Christians. We see the slogan, "If it feels good, do it." This sums up the attitude of the age. Passions have generated tremendous momentum. It is so easy for believers to be swept along by it, to accept this as "normal." Multitudes of professed Christians know nothing of the moral imperatives of true faith and of the personal discipline that truth imposes on us. It is not too much to say that the average Christian lives pretty much according to his or her feelings, sometimes without realizing it. This is the cause of conflict.

I. Where is all the fighting coming from? (4:1-3)

A. James has already given us a clue in 1:14. We all have emotions. Emotions were given to us for beneficial purposes. The desire for food is helpful, and loss of appetite is a complaint. But when the desire for food takes control, the sin of gluttony is committed.

B. We all have emotions, some of them very strong. It is when we surrender to them that we sin. When we voluntarily and deliberately give some desire or combination of desires control, we become the slaves of those desires. By turning those desires loose to seek their own demands, we literally send them "off to war." They begin fighting for gratification for its own sake. This is hedonism, pleasure for the sake of pleasure. Paul spoke of this as "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" (Romans 7:23). And in 1 Peter 2:11 the apostle warns believers. "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul."

C. This is Satan's playground. Someone asked C. M. Ward, "Do you believe in a personal devil?" C. M. Ward replied, "I've been to too many church business meetings not to believe in a personal devil." Sad, but true.

D. Lust is never satisfied. Again, quoting C. M. Ward, "If you put pleasure at home plate, the cost keeps getting higher ever time you go around the bases." Frustrated unfulfilled lust leads to conflict, the ultimate of which is murder. Lust disregards others, because it seeks first and foremost itself. It is willing to sacrifice others to itself. Thus, sinners "sell people across the counters of their own lusts." Lust always desires more than it can obtain, leading to fighting and quarreling. This is why the pursuit of pleasure

never leads to happiness. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Oh, the joy of the release from the pain of slavery to self-indulgence! This is the true freedom, found only in Christ.

E. Selfishness seeks its object by carnal strife. Being incompatible with God, it does not rely on God. Generally, when people seek their own way, they leave God out of the picture. Even when sinners pray, they are merely seeking to enlist God in the cause of selfishness. Our prayer-motive is vital. The world (to say nothing of the Church) is cursed with self-centered religion. In some cases whole religious and ecclesiastical systems exist mainly as a moral basis for social and political ends. Most of the religion of the world is an attempt to use God for our own purposes. Such people pray to themselves (Luke 18:11). God cannot answer selfish prayers.

II. What is spiritual adultery? (4:4,5)

A. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2). Jews familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures were aware that unfaithfulness to God, particularly idolatry, was often denounced as adultery. So it is for believers.

B. The simple fact is that Christ deserves and demands our loyalty. The lusts of this world are hostile to Him and to all good. Surrendering to a lustful world, a world in rebellion against God, is a breach of loyalty to Him. We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). By joining ourselves to this present self-centered world system we thereby render ourselves (or are thereby rendered) an enemy of God.

C. James has not left the main theme of his epistle. He is still speaking of true faith and the fact that true faith acts right. Here he emphasizes the loyalty of faith to the truth and to the God of truth.

D. John states it thus in 1 John 2:15--"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." We cannot pursue two opposite and mutually exclusive goals at the same time. We are reminded of Demas, who forsook Paul, "having loved this present world." (2 Timothy 4:10).

III. Does God have a remedy? (James 4:6-10)

A. God gives a grace that is greater than the pull of the world and greater than the appeal of the flesh. But who receives this grace? Only the humble. Grace is not "irresistible." The proud will not receive it. They are in enmity against Him and He is arrayed against them. Grace is sufficient for all who will to serve God. James has not left the subject of faith, for this grace is by faith (Ephesians 2:8), and faith submits to the

truth.

B. God's grace is greater because the Father is greater than all (John 10:29). If verse five says that our human spirit longs enviously, then the greater grace is meant to imply greater than the lustful longings of the human spirit. Who or what can conquer within me? The grace of God!

C. No one can successfully resist the devil who has not first submitted to God. A young man was under deep conviction of sin, but he was reluctant to come to God for fear that he could not resist temptation. His minister assured him that his responsibility was to trust Christ as his Savior, and Christ would give him the grace to overcome. He surrendered and lived an overcoming Christian life in Christ. Many will not come to Christ because they do not have the moral strength to resist temptation. This is pride. If they would humble themselves, they would receive the grace that is greater than their temptations. Faith is still the subject. Faith receives grace in humility.

D. The Old Testament priests were said to draw near to God (Exodus 19:22). The gospel principle is that humility before God puts us into such a relationship with Him that He can exalt us. So as believer-priests (1 Peter 2:5,9) we are invited to draw near to God. As we do, God draws near to us. The action is simultaneous. God is always drawing near to man (Acts 17:27), but man draws back. The moment we cease drawing back, the divine initiative puts us closer to God.

E. The cleansing of the hands (action), and the purifying of the heart (motive), is an echo of Psalm 24:4--"He who has clean hands and a pure heart."

F. Now the writer addresses the sinner. No relationship with God is possible if the life is unclean or the heart is disloyal. Doublemindedness here is a moral problem. James 1:8 describes it as instability of heart that results in instability of life. It is a lack of steadfastness with God. Such are commanded to repent, to stop playing with the truth. True faith is stable, for it is a fixing of the heart onto the truth.

G. The repentance called for is a deep breaking up of the heart before God. It is true godly sorrow for sin (see 2 Corinthians 7:10). Its action is the result of an awareness of "the presence of the Lord," and not merely a sense of regret for what sin has done to us. In every true revival, the deep sorrow for sin has been the result of a renewed awareness of the holiness of God. We need this consciousness of the "presence of the Lord." Only then are we in a state where God can exalt us.

CONCLUSION

There is a struggle going on. The Christian life is a warfare. Galatians 5:17 describes it this way: "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the

things that you please." We overcome by faith (1 John 5:4), as both Paul and John tell us. James tells us what it is that we overcome and the necessity of overcoming it, as well as emphasizing that this faith that overcomes operates in humility and submission to God. Certainly no one would maintain that faith is being exercised in arrogance and pride. Grace is given to the humble, and that grace is greater than the evil we are commanded to surmount. So the emphasis is not on works, but on how to receive grace.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. In verse one, to what does the word "members" refer?
2. Pleasure in itself is not sinful. When, then, does pleasure "wage war"? Why is this the source of conflict?
3. Are selfish people ever satisfied? Why?
4. When you pray, what is your most important concern?
5. In your opinion, do most professed Christians live to make God happy or are they more concerned that God make them happy?
6. It has been said that to be happy we must be holy. Do you agree? Why?
7. What do you think verse five says? Where is the quotation found in Scripture?
8. Do we have to draw near to God before He will draw near to us?
9. What does it mean for God to exalt us?

**LESSON 8:
SUBMISSION TO THE SOVEREIGN GOD**

James 4:11-17

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.

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

13 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."

14 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.

15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

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

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

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**Key Verse:
James 4:17**

"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

James now changes the direction of his message from "sinners" (vs. 8) to "brethren" (vs. 11). Among the people to whom the epistle is addressed, there were some who professed belief but evidenced no faith in their conduct. Others showed the results of genuine faith, but they succumbed to another fault--judging one another. It was very easy for those who considered themselves more successful overcomers to look down on others whom they considered to be "still having problems." Also, this attitude of pride led them to feel that they could determine their own course of action. They were enterprising Jews, after all. Some of them had suffered the loss of property through persecution, and now perhaps they felt they were resourceful enough to take matters into their own hands and "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" economically. In this they felt that they could make the decision as to where they went and what they did. This attitude is contrary to humble submission to the sovereign Lordship of Christ. It is almost like Peter saying, "I'm going fishing," after seeing Jesus crucified.

B. Current background.

Pride manifests itself in these two ways today. Resourceful, self-reliant people often judge others in these two areas: ethical inferiority and lack of ability. They, of course, consider themselves superior in both categories and thus justified in categorizing others and determining their own course. This attitude creeps into the Church, causing a breach of love and alienation among believers. Love does not judge; it helps. Love does not boast; it submits and trusts.

I. You doing the judging, who are you? (4:11,12)

A. If we truly recognize the sovereignty of God, we must acknowledge that the right of judgment is His alone. Love gives our fellow-believer the benefit of the doubt. It "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:7).

B. To speak against or judge a brother is not to love him. This is a practical assertion that the one doing the judging is above the law of love, that he is not subject to it. This sets the law of love aside (so far as he is concerned), as invalid and inapplicable to him. In this he is implying that the law is not good, and therefore not to be obeyed. He thus affirms his right to set the law aside on the grounds that he is superior to it. This is judging the law, not obeying it.

C. This attitude involves a refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of God in two respects: His right to declare what is right and to judge accordingly, and His ability to save and to execute judgment.

D. Who would dare to arrogate to himself these prerogatives? Let us "not go on passing judgment before the time..." (1 Corinthians 4:5). In Romans 14 the Scriptures speak direct to this point. Verse four speaks of God's keeping power: "Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand." Again, verse ten asks, "But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." James and Paul agree.

II. When is self-reliance a sin? (4:13-17)

A. The moral base of our "Protestant work ethic" is laid in Scripture. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 commands "if anyone will not work, neither let him eat." From such principles and declarations as this we have developed a theology of personal responsibility. But from where did the "I am the captain of my soul" arrogance come? Certainly not from The Scriptures.

B. True faith recognizes and accepts what God says about man--his transitoriness, his inability to foresee the future, his dependence on God. Unbelief regards none of these. The familiar story is told of the farmer who was on his way to town with a horse-drawn wagon filled with produce. On his way he met a Christian neighbor. "Hello, Zeke! Where ya' goin'?" "On my way to cash in some corn for a little sewin' material," came the reply. "You mean, the Lord willin', don't you," the Christian rejoined. "Lord willin' nuthin'," snorted the farmer, "I'll make it on my own." About an hour later the farmer came hobbling back by, ankle sprained from stepping into a hole, and with his produce still unsold. "Zeke, what happened?" his surprised Christian friend asked, "Where ya' goin'?" "Home," the farmer retorted, "...the Lord willin'."

C. Life is filled with uncertainties. In fact, life itself is uncertain apart from God. As believers we recognize this and acknowledge our dependence on God. The spirit of independence from God is evil. It is selfishness.

D. This boasting misses the true definition of life. Jesus said, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:15).

E. James summarizes by stating the basic principle he has been demonstrating all along. Faith acts according to the law of love. If a person knows what the law of love demands and refuses to do it, he has violated that law. He has sinned. The parallel is found in Romans 14:23.

F. We notice the continued emphasis on the tongue (speech) as a primary expression of our conformity or non-conformity to the law of faith. The fourth chapter thus deals with strife, selfish praying, mourning in contrition, speaking evil of one another, and boastfulness. All involve the tongue. Certainly, "the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34).

CONCLUSION

God is the Moral Governor of the universe. Disregard for Him includes disregard for the moral law, as it is a practical assertion that moral law has no valid moral government to administer it and therefore it is not in effect. Likewise, disregard for the moral law includes disregard for God, as it is a practical assertion that moral government is tyranny with no sanction, a sort of "divine imperialism" or "heavenly colonialism." Ed Allen, a Seattle realtor, was a self-made man. He vowed to become a millionaire by the time he was thirty years of age. He achieved wealth and power. He felt that he controlled life, because he was the one who issued the life-sustaining paychecks to his employees. But one day his ten-year-old son drowned. Suddenly, Ed Allen realized that there was a power beyond himself that controlled life in a way that he could not, and he determined to find that power. His search (or rather, the drawing of the Holy Spirit) led him to a meeting of Christian business and professional men. After

attending the third time he was asked by someone present if he had accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He did so then, and Ed Allen became a fine Christian businessman. He discovered that God is sovereign, and he humbled himself before Him and found peace.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. Discuss what it means to "judge" the law. What law?
2. Why is it impossible to judge the law and obey it at the same time?
3. How should we plan for the future?
4. What kind of life "vanishes away?"
5. Do believers have an absolute guarantee of long life on earth?
6. What is the meaning of the word "boast" as used in this passage?
7. How does verse seventeen relate to the context?
8. Is there such a thing as a "sin of omission" in the sense that no actual sin is committed but only a duty neglected? Why?
9. How do verse seventeen and Romans 14:23 taken together relate to the overall theme of faith? of faith and works?

LESSON 9: THE PROBLEMS OF RICHES

James 5:1-6

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

2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.

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

4 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.

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

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

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Key Verse: James 5:5

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

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

Paul said that the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). It was certainly so in Biblical times. The testimony of James is that the rich oppressed the poor, specifically poor believers. The rich dragged them into court and oppressed them (2:6), even to death (5:6). Selfishness seems to have exhibited itself most prominently in the exploitation of people for material gain. This showed itself openly in times of persecution, as one of the driving forces in persecution was (and is) the desire to get the possessions of the persecuted. James saw his beloved flock at Jerusalem scattered by wealthy persecutors, many of them also in positions of influence and authority, and he levels the inspired message of God's judgment at them.

B. Current background

Human nature has not changed. People still step on others in their savage surge toward gain. Tragically, the organized Church throughout the centuries so often has sided with the rich and the powerful. As a result, Christianity has been associated with

economic exploitation in the minds of revolutionaries. Industriousness and economic freedom flow from Christian principles. Even so, we must be careful lest evangelical Christianity become a moral rationale for capitalistic greed. Conservative, middle-class evangelicals need to be on their guard, lest, in their upward social mobility they find themselves courting the rich. Not every financial success story is proof of God's favor and grace. Someone has said that Martin Luther would have appreciated the epistle of James more had he been rescued by peasants instead of princes.

I. What are we laying up for the future? (5:1-3)

A. James was a Spirit-filled man. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, he knew something was coming. So instead of starting this section with the indictment, he begins it with the declaration of impending judgment. The rich oppressors of Jerusalem were unaware that within about twenty years these judgments would come upon them in full measure, so far as this life is concerned.

B. Riches and misery. We hardly think of the two as going together, yet they do. James says so and human experience demonstrates it. "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income." (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Also in 1 Timothy 6:9 we read "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction." If the mere desire for riches will do this, what is the result of their possession? And who said that James and Paul do not agree?

C. Who ever heard of gold and silver rusting? Who would expect them to do so? So the calamity that befalls riches consists of the unexpected. Moreover, it not only corrodes riches, but the rich themselves, consuming their flesh as fire.

D. The story is told of an Arab lost in the desert. He had water but no food. At last he came upon a bag. "Ah, food," he cried, thinking that he had come upon a bag of provisions. But opening the bag he found nothing but pearls. He was rich, yet he was poor.

E. Note the double calamity. The rich should break out into weeping and howling for the miseries about to come upon them. But that is not all. The greater and final misery will come in the last days. Remember the rich man of Luke 16, and the flame of his torment.

II. Who is going to bring final justice? (5:4-6)

A. Now the charges. The rich have cheated the poor out of their wages. Who has the power to do anything about it? A government that protects the rich will not. The poor cannot. But God does, and He controls the hosts of Heaven. Notice, the owners did not have crop failure. The laborers had mowed their fields.

B. Defrauding their employees is the first charge that James hurls against the unregenerate rich. The second charge is that they have lived a life of indulgence. That is, they have used their wealth to live as play-boys. James says that they are like pet cattle being fattened up for slaughter. Notice, it is the heart that has been fattened, not just the body. Indulgence gratified is indulgence strengthened. A boy who led pigs to the slaughter was asked how he managed to get them to follow him. He replied, "I walk ahead of them and keep dropping a few beans. That's how I lead them to the slaughter." Unsaved friend, what is Satan dropping in front of you?

C. 1 Timothy 5:6 tells us: "But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives." Many are like the man who said to his soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." God's reply is still the same: "You fool." (Luke 12:19,20).

D. The last charge that James levels against the selfish rich is murder, murder coupled with unjust condemnation of the innocent. The guilt of the rich is dramatically demonstrated in the fact that the righteous victim makes no effort to resist. In this he follows the instructions of his Master, recorded in Matthew 5:39--"...do not resist him who is evil..." Again Paul joins in: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God." (Romans 12:19). History is filled with such righteous martyrs. Hell is filling up with their oppressors.

CONCLUSION

The rivers of innocent blood that have flowed freely through the centuries have had their fountain-head in the greed and lust for power of those who lived in self-indulgence. Of the indictments that James makes against the selfish rich, two involve crimes against others. And even though the third involves the sinner's private life, it is not victimless. It is indulged in disregard for others who would have benefited by self-denial on the part of the rich. The rust of riches eats. It eats on the body by dissipation. It eats on the conscience. It erodes the most delicate and highest of human qualities and turns people into insensitive brutes. It will eat on the soul forever.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. Does James have the destruction of Jerusalem in mind when he speaks prophetically about the miseries coming on the rich?
2. How will the rust of silver and gold be a witness against the unrighteous rich?

3. In the light of Romans 2:3-6, what is the treasure that they are storing up in the last days?
4. Because Romans 2 is written of the unbelieving Jews, do you think that Paul is making an indirect reference to what James had written earlier?
5. What should Christians do about injustice in this present age?
6. What is the Biblical attitude toward pleasure?
7. Should Christians offer resistance to evil? Why?
8. Discuss the support of social reform (including the question of resistance) as distinct from retaliation for personal injury.

**LESSON 10:
COUNSEL TO THE OPPRESSED**

James 5:7-11

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.

8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

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

10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

11 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.

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**Key Verse:
James 5:8**

"You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

In the midst of trial and persecution, it was easy for the Jewish believers to lose sight of the goal and to see instead only the present situation. James encouraged them to look beyond the immediate and see the ultimate. No stronger appeal could be made than to the imminency of the return of Christ, the Judge Who will right the wrongs. James backs this up with an appeal to the example of the prophets, and also to the example of Job. As he does, he proceeds from the present to the earlier, Job being the earliest that he cites. In this way he encourages them on two counts: Christ's imminent return and the example of those who have waited long. In both cases God's ultimate triumph is demonstrated.

B. Current background

Modern life is filled with testings for the believer. Some of us might not face the same persecutions as the early believers; but on the other hand, we do face some that they did not. Today, as then, it is easy to lose sight of the ultimate triumph, to allow the

immediate circumstance or problem to become all-important. We, too, need the same perspective that they needed. We need to recognize the sovereignty of God in the circumstances, and to keep in mind that God is working all these things for our greater good. The prophets are an example to us of suffering for the truth. Job is an example of God's ability to bring even seemingly meaningless difficulties to work for our good. We also have the added example of the First Century believers themselves and of the saints and martyrs of the centuries since. The steadfast still win.

I. Why do we have to have longsuffering for something that is at hand? (5:7,8).

A. James tells us that the oppressing rich are building up a treasure against the last days. In view of that, we who look for justice must be patient. God is also longsuffering. He told Abraham, "...the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (Genesis 15:16b), and for that reason Israel was to remain in Egypt under oppression (an oppression that God used to prepare them).

B. How long are we to be patient (longsuffering)? James says "until the coming of the Lord." Then he says that great event is near. But he makes clear the fact that a "crop" must grow first. Clearly, prophecy has its own time frame with Him to whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Peter 3:8). The analogy of the farmer demonstrates that God works in a process. Yet the process is sure, and who knows when God will bring it to completion? So we must always be ready.

C. The story is told of a hard-hearted army sergeant who gave a Christian recruit a very hard time. Coming in one night, he found the recruit praying at his bunk. The sergeant threw his boot at the rookie, hitting him on the side of the head. The next morning the sergeant found his boots standing by, neatly polished. It so moved his heart that he was converted that day. That is the longsuffering that produces endurance.

D. "Strengthen your hearts" James says. Yet we know that it is only by grace we can stand. Do the two blend? Yes, for we can strengthen our hearts only by appropriating by faith the resources of grace.

II. Is it possible to fight the wrong enemy? (5:9).

A. Sometimes people in distressing circumstances have a tendency to turn on one another. Such was the case at times among the Jews as they were herded into boxcars by the Nazis. James reminds us that longsuffering with one another goes hand-in-hand with longsuffering toward the trying circumstances themselves. We are to refrain from even the inward groaning.

B. Jesus, the Judge, is spoken of as being before the door in two ways in Scripture.

Here He is represented as prepared to bring judgment on the oppressors (with a warning that believers by groaning against one another be careful not to fall into that category in spirit). In Revelation 3:20 He is pictured as standing before the door of the heart, seeking admission.

C. Years ago my wife and I approached the city of Winslow, Arizona. As we drove along we noticed this sign: "Here live 8,000 wonderful people, and a few old soreheads." Perhaps such a sign could be placed over the entrance of some churches.

III. Can we be happy while we wait? (5:10,11).

A. We are looking forward to the coming of the Lord. The prophets had even farther to look, yet they endured. We see a parallel here. Jewish believers suffered from unbelieving Jews. So did the prophets (Matthew 5:12; see also 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

B. Job had even farther to look than the prophets. The prophets are an example of suffering. Job is an example of the outcome.

C. Jesus is not mentioned here. He stands in a class of His own. Later, the author of Hebrews would encourage Jewish believers by the great "hall of fame of faith" (Hebrews 11). There also, Jesus was not included, but was set forth in His uniqueness in Hebrews 12:1-6.

D. James began his epistle by saying "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (1:2). These Jewish believers also had an example of the apostles, who "...went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Whatever increases the joys that await us and lifts us closer to them is itself an occasion of rejoicing.

CONCLUSION

It is possible to hold two pennies so close to one's eyes that one blocks out the view not only of the ocean but also of the sky itself. Just so, present temptations and distresses can loom so large in our thinking as to block out the entire horizon of eternal values. We must keep "fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Hebrews 12:2). So doing, we will encourage one another rather than turn on one another. As someone has said, "I took a look at the last page, and we win."

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POINTS TO PONDER:

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1. Discuss the parallel between the certainty that the early and late rains will produce a crop and the certainty of God's prophetic decrees.
2. How do we strengthen our hearts?
3. What does the word "complain" mean (verse 9)?
4. Discuss "the Judge is standing right at the door" (verse 9). Does this mean that James believed that Jesus was going to return right then?
5. Give as many examples as possible of prophets who suffered and yet endured (see Hebrews 11:32-40).
6. In what way are our trials "the Lord's dealings"?
7. Since God is omnipotent, why does He not prevent Christians from being abused?
8. How did Job benefit spiritually from his afflictions?

**LESSON 11:
THE INTEGRITY OF A LIFE OF FAITH**

James 5:12-20

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.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.

14 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;

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

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

17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

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

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

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

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**Key verse:
James 5:16**

"Therefore, confess Your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that You may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

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INTRODUCTION

A. Historic background

Life has its stresses, particularly life under persecution. The Jewish believers that James addressed were under a variety of pressures. They were dragged into court by the rich, where the temptation to compromise their testimony or to practice the Jewish custom of evasion in oaths was great (see Matthew 23:16-22). They were subject to emotional stresses, illness, strained relationships, discouragement, and even straying from the truth. James emphasizes that the integrity of a life of faith covers all of these areas. Faith is the victory in all things.

B. Current background

The pressures are still on, although the circumstances might differ. Business and other commercial relationships are more complex, posing moral and ethical questions for the believer. Modern living has increased emotional tension. Sickness is still with us, some forms in even greater measure (heart disease, cancer). Human nature is still the same. We have the same kinds of feelings that Elijah had. Still, prayer prevails. In fact, we have even greater means of grace that those available to Elijah. As then, our first responsibility in reaching out to others is still to watch over each other's souls in the family of God. Instead of condemning, let us be ready to restore.

I. Should believers be made to tell the truth? (5:12)

A. James is still dealing with the problems of the tongue. Here the issue is truthfulness. It is a matter of "above all" importance, because it involves basic integrity and not just slips of the tongue or impulsive words uttered in haste. If truth is in the heart, truth will be in the speech. A liar has no particle of truth in him.

B. This injunction was of particular application to Jewish believers, in view of the practice of the Jews of evasiveness in oaths (Matt. 23:16-22). Jesus had already spoken to this very point in Matthew 5:34.

C. It is possible to lie about someone and yet technically speak only the truth. The story is told of a sea captain who disliked his first mate and wanted to get him into trouble. So the captain wrote in the ship's log each third day, "the first mate was sober today." That was the truth, but it left the impression that the mate was drunk the other days when in fact he was sober every day.

D. A believer by definition is one who has acknowledged and embraced the truth. This love of the truth cannot consist with any known falsehood. There might be times when silence is the best course, but when the believer speaks, his yes is to be yes, and his no is to be no.

II. Does prayer really change things? (5:13-18)

A. One would think that the first thing that a person who is suffering affliction would do is pray. But sometimes the easiest thing to do is to withdraw into one's self. So the exhortation to such to pray. This follows from the purpose of one of Jesus' parables. "Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart." (Luke 18:1). The two alternatives seem to be mutually exclusive.

B. When one is feeling good, he is liable to respond just as unproductively as when he is feeling down, only in a different way. He might do something impulsive or dissipate

his joy in jesting and foolish talking. James says that the best way to channel these good feelings is in singing. This reminds us of Ephesians 5:19-- "...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." See also Colossians 3:16. Again, James and Paul are "in tune."

C. Again, the instruction is to pray, this time in sickness. This time the person needs some help. But the initiative rests with the sick. He is to call the elders. How often pastors have been blamed for not visiting the sick, when the minister was not even informed! The elders are to pray over the sick. Whatever his theology on divine healing, what evangelical minister would refuse to offer a word of prayer at the bedside of the sick? Anointing with oil was a common practice among Jews. Perhaps here it symbolizes the Holy Spirit. We notice also some other components:

1. The name of the Lord.
2. Faith on the part of the ones who pray. See Acts 3:16.
3. Confession of sins, if such have been committed. We must confess to God, and also to any whom we have wronged.

D. Effective prayer works. It must come from a righteous man. Righteousness merits nothing, but a right heart, attitude and life are indispensable conditions of effective praying. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7).

1. James informs us that our praying cannot be determined by how we feel. Too many believers never go past their feelings and on into a consistent life of diligent prayer. Thus they miss God's best.
2. Elijah had the same kinds of feelings that we have. But he prayed earnestly, the inference being that he set himself to prevail in prayer regardless of how he felt. So he obtained the answer.

III. Am I my brother's keeper? (5:19,20)

A. "...if any among you strays..." These words ought to keep all of us from becoming presumptuous. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

B. As he so often does, James ends the way he starts. In 1:16 he warns against straying. The same Greek word is used in both 1:16 and 5:19.

C. The story is told of a little girl whose daddy told her to go upstairs and go to bed. The little girl obeyed. After about twenty minutes the father heard a thump on the floor

and a soft whimper. Running upstairs he found his little daughter on the floor beside her bed. "What happened, honey?" he asked. Sleepily, she replied, "I went to sleep too close to where I got in." The same happens to some who stray.

D. Can we save anyone's soul? Is not Christ the only Savior? We can answer in the affirmative to both questions if we understand the way in which both are true. Christ is the only Savior, of course, yet He uses us to bring His word and His love to the one who strays. Any time we pray that someone shall be restored, we should be ready for God to use us as an agent of restoration.

E. This passage calls to mind Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions." We hear the echo of it also in 1 Peter 4:8, "Above all keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." We notice that the sins are covered, not hidden. Sins are to be confessed, not hidden. Then they are to be covered in the sense of put away, put out of sight, forgotten.

CONCLUSION

Throughout his epistle, James has been emphasizing that true faith is a moral commitment to the truth as well as an assent of the mind to the truth. In this concluding section, he urges us to exhibit the moral nature of faith in our words and deeds. Faith is truthful. Faith puts perseverance into our prayers. Faith stays "on the track." Straying from the faith, then, is more than changing one's views. It is heart-deviation from the way of truth. Restoration, then, turns the heart as well as the mind.

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POINTS TO PONDER:
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1. Does James 5:12 forbid taking oaths in a court of law?
2. What does the oil signify in 5:14?
3. How is the forgiveness of sins related to prayer for the sick? Does prayer forgive sins?
4. What sins are we to confess to one another? Are we to confess all of our sins to others?
5. How can the effective prayer of a righteous person accomplish much? Does God answer because we have earned the answer by a certain amount of prayer?
6. What is the difference between righteousness as a ground of God's favor and as a

condition of God's favor?

7. From the record in 1 Kings 17 and 18, discuss the characteristics of Elijah's faith. Did he show some of the same feelings that we do today? Did he become fearful, discouraged?

8. What does it mean to stray from the truth?

9. What does "save his soul from death" mean?