

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Introduction and Outline

I. Its place in the NT.

It is the first of the seven General Epistles. They are sometimes referred to as the Catholic Epistles, meaning universal. This is because they were not addressed to any particular church or individual. (2 and 3 John are exceptions.)

- 1) James.
- 2) 1 Peter.
- 3) 2 Peter.
- 4) 1 John.
- 5) 2 John.
- 6) 3 John.
- 7) Jude.

II. The Writer and Date.

There has been much disagreement about who the writer was, and when the Epistle was written. There is no biographical information in the Epistle, nor are there any personal references (except for the name, James), in the first verse. Neither are there any personal messages to others. But, without going into a lot of unnecessary detail, it seems that the writer was James, the Lord's brother, and that he wrote after Paul wrote Romans, probably about the time that Paul was a prisoner in Rome, writing the Prison Epistles--about A.D. 60. This seems reasonable because it would appear that James, in the latter part of chapter 2, was seeking to correct some errors about salvation which had developed from the doctrine of justification by faith.

III. The Purpose of the Epistle.

It is not doctrinal, but practical. James was obviously concerned about Hebrew Christians who were facing great trials, great testings. If we are right about the date, Paul was in prison in Rome. James would be martyred in less than two years. Jerusalem would be destroyed by A.D. 70. Things were becoming more and more critical for those who had trusted in Christ, and that was especially the case for Hebrew Christians. So James, the recognized leader of the Church in Jerusalem, was writing to instruct, to encourage, to exhort his fellow-believers among the Jews who had been scattered throughout the Empire, and so were already suffering for their faith. At such a time as this it is especially important that believers "show their colors." The tendency would be to give up because of the opposition and the discouragement which accompanies such trials. James wanted them to see that when our faith is under attack, it is most important that believers show by their lives the reality and power of the Lord in their lives. Therefore, he wrote to them about four things. After greeting them in verse 1, he went on to show that he wanted them to:

- 1) Be happy (Jas. 1:2-18).
- 2) Be holy (Jas. 1:19-3:12).
- 3) Be humble (Jas. 3:13-5:6).
- 4) Be hopeful (Jas. 5:7-20).

He took up various themes under each heading, but these stand out as the basic concerns of James as he wrote.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

The Outline

- I. GREETINGS (Jas. 1:1).
- II. BE HAPPY (Jas. 1:2-18). Trials have certain benefits for the child of God.
 - A. They mature us (1:2-4).
 - B. They teach us to pray in faith (1:5-8).
 - C. They make us realize our human frailty (1:9-11).
 - D. They cause us to live for eternal rewards (1:12).
 - E. They show us how prone we are to sin (1:13-15).
 - F. They show us that our blessings come from our heavenly Father (1:16-18).

The sum-total of all of these things which result from our trials is good, and give us many reasons to be happy.
- III. BE HOLY (James 1:19-3:12).
 - A. In departing from sin through obedience to the Word (1:19-27).

James mentioned the wrong use of the tongue at the beginning of this section, a subject which he would take up more in detail at the end of this section.
 - B. In dealing with people--the rich and the poor (2:1-13).
 - C. In showing our faith by our works (2:14-26).
 - D. In the use of the tongue (3:1-12).

It is very apparent that James felt that the tongue poses real problems for the child of God.
- IV. BE HUMBLE (James 3:13-5:6).
 - A. In seeking wisdom from God (3:13-18).
 - B. Before God (4:1-10).

From the way James began this chapter, we can see that the lack of humility is the cause of the frictions which can so easily develop among us.

 - C. In our relationships with others (4:11, 12).
 - D. In making our plans and living our lives (4:13-17).
 - E. A warning for those who are rich (5:1-6).
- V. BE HOPEFUL (James 5:7-20).
 - A. About the Lord's return (5:7-10).
 - B. By persevering under our trials (5:11, 12).
 - C. About prayer being answered (5:13-18).
 - D. About rescuing others who have erred from the truth (5:19, 20).

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In dealing with these themes, however, it was necessary for James to deal with the hindrances to happiness, and holiness, and humility, and a hopeful spirit. Some of these were:

- 1) Impatience and discontent.
- 2) Prayerlessness.
- 3) Dependence upon human wisdom.
- 4) Doubt.
- 5) The love of money.
- 6) Temptation.
- 7) The tongue and the temper.
- 8) Disobedience.
- 9) A worldly spirit.
- 10) Pride.

Some have referred to these as problems which were particularly Jewish, but they are obstacles in the lives of Gentile believers as much as they are for Jewish believers.

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There can be no question but that this Epistle was designed to show the people of God in every generation how their joy and spiritual progress can actually be increased when they are under the trials that come to all in this life. But it does not come just because we have trials. If that were the case, it would not have been necessary for James to write this Epistle. We need to keep the things in mind that James has emphasized in this Letter. There can be no true happiness without holiness, and no true holiness without humility (primarily in our attitude toward God). And the three of these tend to make us hopeful about the outcome of our trials, both for the present and for all eternity.

V. OTHER FACTS ABOUT THE EPISTLE OF JAMES.

A. There are five OT people mentioned in the Epistle:

- 1. Abraham and Isaac (James 2:21-23).
- 2. Rahab (James 2:25).
- 3. Job (James 5:11).
- 4. Elias, or Elijah (James 5:17).

These take us back to Genesis 22, Joshua 2, the Book of Job, and 1 Kings 17, 18.

B. James only quoted from the OT four times:

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1. In 2:8, from Lev. 19:18.
2. In 2:11, from Ex.20:13, 14.
3. In 2:23, from Gen. 15:6.
4. In 4:6, from Prov. 3:34.

However, Scroggie, in his book, The Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Vol. III, p. 297, says that there are over 50 allusions to OT teaching throughout the Epistle, or generally 1 for every 2 verses. So the writer was very familiar with the OT and its teaching.

- C. Luther did not believe that this Epistle belonged in the NT, and that was because of the section in the latter part of the second chapter in which it seems at first that he was teaching salvation by faith and works. But we will see, as we get to that part, that that was not James' intention at all. He was concerned, as we ought to be today, that there are many who profess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, but their lives do not support their claim. James believed that, if a person is truly saved, his life will show it! We ought to believe that, too.

VI. Four requests:

- A. Read the Epistle as often as you can. It takes less than 20 minutes to read it aloud.
- B. Pray that the Lord will help all of us to understand it. Unless the Holy Spirit teaches us, we are spending our time in vain.
- C. Apply the teaching of the Epistle to your own life. Read and listen for yourself first.
- D. Talk to others about it. It will clarify your understanding of the Epistle, and you will help others in their relationship with the Lord, too.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 1I. GREETINGS (James 1:1).

1:1 "James" -- After all of the questions surrounding the authorship of this Epistle, it is interesting to see how briefly the author of this Epistle described himself, and how briefly he identified those to whom he was writing. He simply wanted to be known as "a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ." The order of the words, as James wrote them, was this: James, of God and of (the) Lord Jesus Christ, a servant. If he were an apostle, as we believe he was, he did not mention it. If he were a half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, as we also believe he was, he did not mention that. He simply wanted to be known as one who was a bondservant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In calling himself "a servant," he was portraying his complete devotion to the God, and to Christ. He dearly loved God, and he loved the Lord Jesus Christ (note the full name of our Lord). His greatest joy was to do what They wanted him to do. He had placed himself under their authority, and counted it his greatest joy to serve Them. But the word itself (as Trench brings out) does not emphasize the service, but the relationship. In his heart, his will had been "swallowed up" by the will of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Trench, p. 30).

This is how he wanted to be known. Thus, in writing, he would be concerned that his Epistle was, from start to finish, an expression of the will of God and of Christ. He wanted his readers to know that this Letter was not primarily from him (although his heart was in every word), but it was from God and from the Lord Jesus Christ!

Notice that he did not try to distinguish between being a servant of God, on the one hand, and being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, on the other hand. If you served God, you served Christ; if you served Christ, you served God.

He and all of the Jewish brethren to whom he was writing would have, before their salvation, placed the greatest contrast between God and the Lord Jesus Christ. They would have said, "If you serve God, you will have nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth. If you serve Jesus of Nazareth, you are an enemy of God." They did not believe that Jesus was the Lord, nor did they believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ. But for James, and for them, all of that had been changed. They had had their eyes opened to the realization that Jesus was the Lord, and that He was the Messiah--and that God and the Lord Jesus Christ were one in nature, equally God. And because the Lord had died specifically for them, they were His. They were not their own. They had been purchased for God and for the Lord Jesus Christ as the cost of the Saviour's blood.

It is truly and very remarkable and precious statement. It not only honors these two Members of the Godhead, but it properly humbles the writer of this Epistle so that the readers would not glorify him, but his God and his Lord.

"To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" -- Thus, this Epistle was written to Jews, and, as the Epistle itself shows, to Jews who had trusted Christ for salvation. "The twelve tribes" are the twelve tribes

of Israel. And it is interesting that the word, "scattered," which is simply transliterated into the English language with the word, Diaspora, means, the scattering, or sowing, of seed. The Jews in the OT were scattered among the Gentiles as a judgment from God. In the NT the Christian Jews were scattered among the Gentiles to avoid persecution in Jerusalem in particular. But in the word that was used, a word which describes the sowing of seed, we can see that God was scattering His people as seeds, planting the Church, and spreading the Gospel of Christ among the heathen Gentiles.

In Acts 8:1 we read,

And at that time there was a great persecution
against the church which was at Jerusalem;
and they were all scattered abroad
throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria,
except the apostles.

Later the scattering became more extensive throughout the Roman Empire. This scattering, therefore, that James referred to, did not take place at one time, nor were they scattered just to one place, but to many. How amazing and how marvelous are the ways of the Lord!

"Greeting" -- He wished them joy. He was calling upon them rejoice and be glad! It is said in Acts 15:23 that the Jews in Jerusalem sent greetings to the Gentiles. This was the common greeting of the day, but it held special significance for the believers. It was really a prayer for their greatest happiness.

AND SO JAMES, WITH THIS GREETING, SOUNDED THE KEYNOTE OF HIS FIRST POINT IN THIS EPISTLE, WHICH WAS:

II. BE HAPPY (James 1:2-18).

And, in the light of what we have already seen, they were to be happy even though they were in the midst of trials. It is one thing to be happy when everything is going right, but the believer in Christ is expected to rejoice when things are going wrong!

In the following verses he gave them no less than six reasons why they should BE HAPPY. No one seeks for troubles, but the Christian who is living for the Lord will soon find that troubles come to him in this world. BUT God does not forsake us in our troubles. Instead, He works "all things together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The first reason given for rejoicing in our trials is this:

A. They mature us (James 1:2-4).

1:2 "My brethren" -- James was not only the Lord's servant, and their servant, but he was their brother. James was not ashamed to identify himself with the despised people of God. They were His "brethren." They all belonged to the same family of God. So God was not only their Master and their Lord, but He was their heavenly Father. And this truth concerning God, that He is the Father of His people, always takes on new meaning for the family of God in times of trouble.

So just as James had spoken in a very endearing way about God and about the Lord Jesus Christ, so now he spoke with great affection for the people to whom he was writing. They were his brothers and sisters in

Christ, and he loved them!

Have you noticed this word throughout the Epistle? I will have to confess that it had escaped me until I began to track it down when I was studying this verse. Let me point them out for you in the Epistle:

- 1) In chapter 1, verses 2, 16, 19.
 - 2) In chapter 2, verses 1, 5, 14.
 - 3) In chapter 3, verses 1, 10, 12.
 - 4) In chapter 4, verse 11.
 - 5) In chapter 5, verses 7, 9, 10, 12, 19.
- In addition, notice "brother" in 1:9; 2:15; 4:11 (2x).

So we have the word "brethren" or "brother" 19 times in the Epistle--a point worth noting, wouldn't you say?

"Count it all joy" -- The verse actually begins like this, All joy count it, my brethren, . . ." The tense (aorist) and the words which James used means that they were to look upon their trials as whole joy, unmixed joy (Robertson, VI, p. 11), and do it right then, not later, and never look upon it in any other way! This is what trials were to be to them in their estimation. It was not to be some joy with a lot of grief (Robertson), but "all joy." They were not to delay at all in looking upon their trials in this way. The longer they waited, the more they would be pulled down by their trials. And so he said to do this "when ye fall into divers temptations." "Temptations" here means trials, testings. Whenever they would "fall into" any kind of a trial, as a man would fall among thieves, suddenly overtaken by the trials, they were to look upon that trial as a blessing in disguise.

Peter used this same expression in 1 Pet. 1:6 (which see). This shows that there can be "heaviness" at the same time there is joy. We sorrow, but not like others do who have no hope!

But let us go on to see James' explanation.

1:3 "Knowing this" -- Do you see how important it is to be learning the truth of God? The most pathetic person you will ever see is a Christian who goes into a trial without knowing what he ought to know, and needs to know--to know about God, to know about the ways of God, to know about the purposes and power of God. Make sure that, as you read your Bible, as you attend church services and Bible classes, as you read the works of godly men--**MAKE SURE** that you are learning the truth of God!

But what did James say that they knew?

Two things:

- 1) That trials are, more than anything else, a proving of our faith. They show how real our faith is. They show how strong our faith is. They show how much we know about trusting the Lord.

But they also knew:

- 2) That the trial of our faith produces patience.

We may think we have a lot of patience, but none of us was born with a very great supply. We do not like to wait. We do not like obstacles which stand in our way. We are happiest when everything is going the way we want it to go. But how often is that the case?

Even the trial of faith when prayer goes unanswered is one of our

greatest trials. It is very vexing when we can see no good reason why God should not send the answer to our prayers right now!

But let me tell you a little bit about this word, "patience." We usually think of it as meaning that we must wait. And it does! The Greek word means literally "to remain under." We do not try to manipulate our way out of the trial. If God provides the escape, we take it. But we wait for His time and His provision for us.

However, the word "patience" has another idea in it that is very important. It means that we are going to persevere doing all that we can within the will of God while we are passing through this time of testing when our faith is being tried in the fire so the dross can be removed, and that which is genuine remain.

1:4 James has already told his "brethren" one thing to do. That is in verse 2, and continues into verse 2. Now he tells them the second thing that they are to do, and why. (Read.)

"Let patience have her perfect work" -- The trial comes. Our faith is tested, and is being strengthened. At the same time we are learning "patience." But here James said that they were not to start out being patient, and then stop when they felt that they had been patient long enough. They were literally to keep on being patient. They were to see the work that God was doing through to its completion. They were not to look for short cuts. They were to wait for God's time of deliverance.

Why?

Because God was primarily concerned, not about what He could do for them, but for what He intended to do in them. "That ye may be perfect . . ." Robertson says that "perfect and entire, wanting nothing" means "perfected all over" (Vol. VI, p. 12).

It is God's purpose and will that we should grow in our trials, that we should become more like our dear Saviour. It is usually in the tough places that we grow the most. God designs our trials for our blessing. And there is no greater blessing than for us to become more holy than we have been. This is not just the sanctimonious behavior of a hypocrite who acts the part, but the genuine reality of a man or a woman or a young person or even a child, who is learning to walk with God and to trust Him whatever the trouble may be.

Notice what Peter said writing to many of the same people. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:6, 7; 4:12, 13.

We can also find a great deal of encouragement by reading Hebrews 11, and thinking of the people of God in the past who have been tried in many different ways, but have always found God to be faithful to His Word. Even in Heb. 6:11, 12 the writer had said this:

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:
That ye be not slothful, but followers of them
who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Cf. Rom. 5:1-5. When our expectation is in the Lord, we will never be disappointed with the final outcome of our testings.

This is not the last that James had to say about faith and patience.

Cf. Jas. 5:7-11. And see Heb. 10:35, 36:

Cast not away therefore your confidence,
which hath great recompense of reward.
For ye have need of patience, that,
after ye have done the will of God,
ye might receive the promise.

But we are not through. One thing with James leads to another, and show he shows that we can rejoice in our trials for another reason, and this grows out of the problems that we face in submitting to God under our trials.

The second benefit we receive is this:

B. They teach us to pray in faith (Jas. 1:5-8).

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1:5 It seems appropriate to remember that this point that James was writing to Hebrew Christians. To them (and it ought to be the same to us because it is according to Scripture), getting wisdom was the highest good. And wisdom to them not only included the acquiring of knowledge, but the application of that knowledge in daily life.

James came back to the subject of wisdom in 3:13-18. There we see the practical emphasis. A man shows that he is wise, not just by how much he knows, but by the way he lives. And a man with divine wisdom will live in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord.

Trials expose to our own hearts the need we have for wisdom--the need to understand God's purpose for us in the trial, and the changes that need to be made in our lives. So in this we can see the connection between verses 2-4 and verses 5-8. We are all guilty of walking according to the ways of men, according to human wisdom, instead of walking according to the wisdom of God. And so one purpose that the Lord has of correcting us is to bring us into some trial where we will see the need which God is concerned about. Again we are reminded that God works all things together for good (cf. Rom. 8:28).

James makes it clear that the Lord does not try us to turn us away from Himself, but to turn us toward Himself. And so, when the tried Christian is looking for answers, the One he needs to turn to is God! "Let him ask of God." Prayer takes on greater priority. It may be that the Christian under trial prayed if he had time to pray. But now prayer comes first, and he does those other things if he has time after he has prayed. And usually the other time is far more productive if we pray first.

It is a truth seen everywhere in Scripture: God is wisdom, and possesses wisdom, and gives wisdom! The Scriptures are the wisdom of God. But we must come to Him to understand what He has revealed for us in the Word of God.

It might seem unnecessary to say what James said, but, if we stop a moment and think about it, we usually go to everyone else first. And after we have exhausted every other possibility, we go to God. But James is saying that we must go to God first; we must pray first; we must seek wisdom from Him first! When we ask for wisdom, we are praying according to the will of God, and, according to 1 John 5:14, 15, we will

have our prayer for wisdom answered. If we ask, we will receive. If we seek (in the right place, and from the right Person), we will find. If we knock, the door of heavenly wisdom will be opened to us.

"If . . . lack . . ." - James was not suggesting here that they might, or might not, lack wisdom; he was assuming that they did lack wisdom. The word "lack" actually means to be destitute of wisdom. This means that he knew he was writing to people who felt that they were devoid of knowledge. There is nothing like trials to make us realize that we do not know as much as we thought we knew. We may have counseled others, but now we need counseling. It is so often true that we learn so little because we fail to realize how little we know.

What happens when we "ask of God"?

HE GIVES IT! He gives it "liberally," which means that He gives without expecting anything in return. He does not charge for what He gives. It is free!

One of the greatest blights upon the work of the Lord today is the way some men who claim to be serving the Lord, charge for what they give. They are trafficking in the truth. They are making merchandise of the Word of God. They close their eyes and minds to what the Lord told His disciples: "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8b). I even wonder about Bible schools and seminaries charging tuition. In the past they didn't, you know, or do you? We are afraid to trust the Lord to meet our needs. We follow the ways of the world, the wisdom of the world, in conducting the work of the Lord. And a lot that so-called Christian counselors give is not even close to the truth of God.

Follow James' advice. Take your Bible, and go directly to the Lord. If you need others to teach you, He will lead you. But go to someone who has gotten the truth the way he will give it to you: "freely," from the Lord.

"And upbraideth not" -- He will not scorn you, nor reprove you because you have not come sooner, nor because you have gone to the world's wise men, nor even because you have done nothing. The patience and grace of God is amazing. This is meant to encourage believers to come to the Lord regardless of what the timing may be, or the circumstances.

"And it shall be given him." Our mission in turning to the Lord will not be, it cannot be, in vain.

In meeting our need for wisdom, God most likely will begin to teach us about Himself first. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy (One) is understanding" (Prov. 9:10). Our trials make us realize how dependent we are upon the blessings of the Lord, but even more than that they make us seek the Lord, not for His blessings, but for Himself!

1:6 But there is an important condition attached to our asking: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

Now we begin to see why trials are primarily trials of our faith. Will we trust the Lord, or not? Will we seek the Lord, or not? Do we really believe that He will help us, or not?

Perhaps we have been so crushed by the trial that it is hard to believe

that even God will help us. Possibly we have prayed about our problem before, but have not seen any answer. Maybe we have been praying about other things, but have not seen any specific answers, and so we doubt if it will be any different in the present trial.

Before we speak about how our faith is strengthened, let me finish with verses 6, 7, and 8.

"Nothing wavering" - This sets a high standard. It means that we cannot be in a lot of inner turmoil. Doubts cause turmoil. Those doubts have to be settled before we can pray in faith. This is similar (but not the same word) to what the Lord said in Matt. 21:21, 22:

Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not,
ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree,
but also if ye shall say unto this mountain,
Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea;
it shall be done.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, **believing**,
ye shall receive.

Mark, in recording these words, used the expression, "And shall not doubt in his heart." Cf. Mark 11:21. Mark's account begins with, "Have faith in God." Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission used to paraphrase that with, "Hold the faithfulness of God."

When the Spirit told Peter that three men were seeking him there in Joppa, He added,

Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them,
doubting nothing: for I have sent them (Acts 10:20).

And then he said why they were not to doubt:

For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea
driven with the wind and tossed.

"Driven . . . and tossed" pictures a person who is under the control of his circumstances. The individual whose faith is not strong, but vacillating, does not rise above his circumstances, in this case, his trials, but is subject to every wind that blows.

1:7 Prayer which is not offered in faith is not effectual prayer. Just to go through the motions of prayer is not enough. There must be that confidence that God is, and that He rewards those who seek Him. The man who wavers must not try to convince himself that faithless prayer will be heard by God, and answered.

1:8 Here the one whose faith wavers is described as "a double minded man." See the word again in 4:8. Lit. it means, two-souled, or a man with a double heart: part of it is turned toward the Lord, and part of it is turned elsewhere. One writer explained this word by Bunyan's character, Mr. Facing-both-ways (cf. Robertson, Vol. VI, p. 85).

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Such a person is "unstable in all his ways," i.e., in his relationships with people, just as in his relationship with God. Notice the word, "all." "Unstable" means "not settled, not standing fixed, not steady, inconstant" (Bullinger, p. 835). A. T. Robertson says that he is one who is unsteady and fickle, one who reels like a drunken man. See Vol. VI, p. 85.

We have all seen Christians like this. Religious people who do not know

the Lord are like this, too. At one time they seem to be interested and zealous for the things of the Lord; at other times they are so occupied with worldly pursuits that they have no time for the Lord. There probably have been times when this has been descriptive of us. What is the cause? Either a weak faith, or no faith.

How can our faith be strengthened?

Actually, the whole Epistle of James was written for this purpose: to strengthen our faith. So let us expect that it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit to do just that for us as we read and study and seek to understand what James has written. It would be a tragedy if we spend many weeks going through this Letter from James, and in the end of our study are spiritually exactly where we were when we began. To have our faith strengthened is to grow spiritually. That should always be our goal.

But, in that connection, let me point out several important things regarding our faith:

- 1) Let us always remember that faith is a gift from God. So we must look to Him for our faith. Cf. Eph. 2:8, 9.

It is important in this connection to remember also what Paul taught about "the fruit of the Spirit" in Gal. 5:22, 23.

- 2) God uses means to give us faith, and to strengthen the faith that we do have.

Primarily this is the Word of God. Cf. Rom. 10:17. The person whose faith is weak is a person who has either been neglecting his Bible, or he has not really been understanding what he has been reading and hearing. We always need the Word, but we need it even more when we are going through a trial of any kind. We not only need to read it, and to hear it, but we need to meditate on it--going over and over the promises of God, reading and re-reading them, asking the Lord to give us greater light and to strengthen us through His Word.

We need to look upon unbelief in any form as sin, and then to apply the words of the Psalmist in Psa. 119:11.

- 3) We need to obey the Word.

Notice what James said in Jas. 1:22 ff. This is one of the greatest reasons for the weakness of our faith: we know what we should do, but we are not doing it! This is when we need to pray according to Phil. 2:12, 13 and Heb. 13:20, 21.

But there is still a fourth thing that we need to keep in mind with reverence to our faith, and the strengthening of our faith. It is this:

- 4) Cf. Heb. 12:1-3.

As I have said many times, and I say it again today, the Bible is not only a revelation FROM God, but it is a revelation OF God. And this applies equally to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The more we know about the Lord, the more we will trust Him. There is nothing that will strengthen our faith more than looking

intently at the Lord as He is revealed to us in the Word.

This is probably the greatest purpose God has in our trials: to teach us more of Himself, of His Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Remember Prov. 9:10 and its reference to "the knowledge of the holy" (One). Cf. also Phil. 3, the whole chapter, noting in particular what Paul had to say about the Lord from v.7 on to the end.

Note the outcome of Job's trials as expressed by him in Job 42:5, 6:

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear:
but now mine eye seeth thee.

Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

What did he mean, "But now mine eye seeth thee"? He meant that at that point, as a result of his trials and God's dealings with him through his trials, He understood and knew the Lord better than ever before. His faith had been strengthened; his heart was at peace.

So, to summarize what we have in 1:5-8, here we have the second reason it is possible for us to rejoice in our trials: THEY TEACH US TO PRAY IN FAITH--not just to pray, but to pray "believingly," to pray with real trust in the Lord that He will hear us, and He will answer us. It is in our trials that we learn to pray and to seek the Lord, not just for His blessings, but for Himself.

What place does prayer have in your life? Why do you pray, if you do? Is it to get things from the Lord, or is to be with Him, and to let Him minister to your heart? Can you sing from your heart the words of that old Gospel song?

I am thine, O Lord, I have heard thy voice,
And it told thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to thee.

O the pure delight of a single hour
That before thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with thee, my God,
I commune as friend with friend!

Illus: Dr. Tidwell in his study one Saturday morning preparing for the next day, when he was interrupted by his young son.

Now we come to the third benefit we receive from our trials which James mentioned:

C. They make us realize our human frailty (James 1:9-11).

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1:9 In the early church there were many ways in which the Enemy sought to bring division. One was through class distinctions. On the one hand there were those who were poor in this world's goods; on the other, there were the rich. The poor were inclined to be jealous of, and resent, those who were rich. The rich were prone to despise the poor and to feel, perhaps, that they should not associate with the poor. James came back to this problem again in both parts of chapter 2. See 2:2-9 and 2:15, 17.

How would trials affect both the poor and the rich so that there could

be harmony instead of division, especially when he could not promise that the condition of the poor were ever change, and that the rich might very well continue to be rich? James gives us the answer in vv. 9-11.

First of all, James' word to the poor. (Read v. 9.)

The poor needed to deal with the envy that was in their hearts. They need to get their eyes off of people, especially rich people, and get them on the Lord. Paul expressed a truth in writing his Second Epistle to the Corinthians which they needed to know. It was this:

For we dare not make ourselves of the number,
or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves:
but they measuring themselves by themselves,
and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise
(2 Cor. 10:12).

What should the poor man do, "the brother of low degree"?

He is to "rejoice that he is exalted." He is to glory (in a good sense), to exult, to rejoice as having experienced a great victory, to be in high spirits, in the fact that "he is exalted." How has he been exalted? He has been exalted in Christ! He has been lifted up. James has reference here to his salvation. Though outwardly, socially, and materially, he had nothing that would commend him to God, God has lifted him up. Though he could not have purchased salvation if it had been offered for money, he has received this priceless gift "without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1b). Spiritually is rich. And he has been raised with Christ, and seated with Christ in heavenly places "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world (age), but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). So the poorest saint has more real wealth than the richest man in the world who is without Christ. And the poorest saint has nothing less spiritually than the rich man who knows the Lord.

The spiritual riches of any man in Christ is incalculable. And he has a position in Christ that is higher than the angels of heaven. What a glorious thing it is to be in Christ, to be a child of God, to be an heir of heaven.

This is the cure for the poor man's unhappiness, and for his tendency to be envious of the rich.

1:10 What about the rich man, what should he glory in? "In that he is made low." What does this mean?

Remember that most of our problems are spiritual in nature. So the solution is spiritual. Does he have any right to despise the poor man, or to glory in his riches? No!

In the first place, the riches he has are riches he has received. If he inherited them, he received them from his father. He may have been born into a wealthy family, but he did not come into the world independently wealthy. If he worked for his riches, God is the One Who gave him the ability, and enabled him to make the right decisions so that he was financially successful.

Do you remember Paul's questions in 1 Cor. 4:7?

For who maketh thee to differ from another?
and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?

Now if you didst receive it,
why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Cf. also Jer. 9:23, 24:

Thus saith the Lord,
Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
neither let the mighty man glory in his might,
let not the rich man glory in his riches:
But let him that glorieth glory in this,
that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord
which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness,
in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

The rich man was not saved because he was rich. He was not saved because he was smart (and he may be very intelligent). Often riches and wisdom go together, and they produce power and influence.

But the rich believer is not to glory in any of these things. What is he to glory in? James said, "In that he is made low." What did he mean by that? Did he lose all of his money? No necessarily. It seems that James was speaking of believers who were rich at the time he was writing. No, that was not the way they were made low. They were made low spiritually, they were humbled before God by their sins, and in realizing that if God gave them what they deserved, they would have been banished forever from His presence just like anyone else.

Do you remember the publican we learned about in Luke's Gospel? He very likely was a wealthy man. Most publicans were. They had gotten their wealth by cheating their fellow-Jews out of their money. But what did that publican do and say? Cf. Luke 18:13,

And the publican, standing afar off,
would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,
but smote upon his breast, saying,
God be merciful to me a sinner.

So the rich man was to glory "in that he was made low." How was he saved? Just like the poor man was saved. God is no respecter of persons. The rich and the poor alike can only get into heaven by the grace of God.

It is not a sin to be rich, if those riches have been gained honorably. Nor is it a disgrace to be poor, unless poverty is due to slothfulness. The Lord said that there would always be those who were poor. See John 12:8. But it is a sin for the rich to despise those who are legitimately poor, and it is a sin for the poor to be envious and jealous of the rich.

But notice that James went on to point out the frailty and the temporary nature of life here on earth. And he said this with respect to rich in particular. He is not always going to be healthy. Money cannot buy health. Eventually the rich man will die. He brought nothing into the world, and he will take nothing out of the world. You remember Paul's words to Timothy:

For we brought nothing into this world,
and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Tim. 6:7).

Therefore,

1:11 As the sun dries up the grass (or it can refer to the scorching

desert wind), and the flower (which is the glory of the grass) "falleth," it perishes. Such is the rich man. "The grace of the fashion" is like saying, the beauty of his face, dies. When the rich fades away, it is like a fire that is extinguished, or a light that goes out.

Thus, the rich man must learn to glory in his heavenly riches, and to look upon his earthly riches as a temporary gift from God which he is to use for the glory of God.

Trials have the power to make us see things in their right perspective. We cease to glory in what we are, or in what we have, and we see how frail and temporary we are as far as this earthly scene is concerned. And this leads to James' next point.

Trials benefit us because:

D. They cause us to live for eternal rewards (James 1:12).

We come in verses 12 and 13 to see this same word, "temptations," used in both ways in which it can be used:

- 1) It can mean a trial--which has been its meaning from the first of the Epistle.
- 2) The same root is used in v. 13 and 14 of a temptation to sin.

Now a trial can become a temptation to sin. The Devil seeks to use our trials in that way, and our sinful hearts, in rebelling against God's dealings with us, often make the trial an occasion to sin. The Devil tries us to make us sin; the Lord tries us to strengthen our faith so that we will not sin.

God never tries us beyond what we can bear. Cf. 1 Cor. 10:13. This is God's promise, and He never violates that promise. So, if our trials become temptations, it is our fault, not God's. Let us always remember this. God always has grace available for us if we will be turn to Him and seek it and receive it.

Our trials are designed by God to make us think more in terms of heaven and the rewards that await us there. And so v. 12 is a beatitude. Happiness does not consist in getting out of our trials, but in enduring them--in remaining under them, and persevering as we do. (We saw this back in vv. 2-4.) Paul's spiritual autobiography, which many call, The Epistle of Joy, was written while he was a prisoner in Rome. Cf. James 5:11. Trials cause us to give God a greater place in our lives. We learn of Him (and this applies as well to the Lord Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit). And this brings happiness, true happiness, happiness that lasts!

"Tried" means tried and proved. There is nothing that will bring out the genuineness of a person's faith, or the lack of it, like a trial.

"He shall receive the crown of life -- Note the certainty of this promise. We have the same crown mentioned in Rev. 2:10--to the church of Smyrna,

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer:
 behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison,
 that ye may be tried;
 and ye shall have tribulation ten days:
 be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Both James 1:12 and Rev. 2:10 say that the Lord Himself will personally present "the crown of life."

One thing that trials ought to do for us is to make us interested in rewards. The Lord has promised them. The Lord Himself will present them. How can we possibly say that they are not important? The more crowns we have, the more glory we can bring to our Lord because He alone can keep us faithful in times of trial.

What is "the crown of life"?

There are several crown spoken of in Scripture:

- 1) We need to remember that our Lord wore a crown of thorns (cf. Matt. 27:29; Mark 15:17; John 19:2, 5).
- 2) There is an incorruptible crown mentioned in 1 Cor. 9:25.
- 3) "A crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8).
- 4) "The crown of life" (Jas. 1:12; Rev. 2:10).
- 5) "A crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4).
- 6) Cf. Rev. 3:11,
Behold, I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast,
that no man take thy crown.

One definition that the dictionary gives of the word crown is that it is "the highest state or quality of anything" (Webster's Collegiate, p. 243). If jewels are placed in a crown, the value of each jewel is enhanced, multiplied, increased. And so in such a crown you would the jewels at their best and highest state. So a "crown of life" would be life at its best and highest. This is only possible in heaven, and it is life which is eternal.

Trials make life here on earth difficult and hard. We need to remember what Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:7-5:4. (Read.)

Finally, note in v. 12 that enduring our trials is an evidence to the Lord that we love Him. Cf. 2:5. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and nothing delights Him more than for us to manifest our love for Him in return. Our Lord's words in John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," would suggest that James was pointing to obedience to the Lord as our chief concern in the midst of our trials, as well as when things are going smoothly.

But let us go on to the next point:

E. They show us how prone we are to sin (James 1:13-15).

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The trial of our faith is to bring us to a greater degree of holiness of life. But, sometimes, they become a temptation to sin. We may get angry with God. We may get discouraged and turn away from the Lord. Many different things can happen that are sinful in the sight of God. But James would have us know one thing for certain: God is never responsible for tempting us to sin. The Devil and his demonic forces will always try to turn us against the Lord, or to make us take matters in our own hands. And these are terrible forces with which we have to contend. But ultimately the fault is our own! This is what James was dealing with in vv. 13-15.

1:13 We are never to blame God for our sin. We must never say this

audibly, nor even think it in our own hearts. Even to have wrong thoughts about God is sin. God cannot be tempted with evil, nor is He ever in any way responsible for tempting us. If He were, then He would bear part of the blame for our sin. It is sin for anyone to put temptation before someone else. The Devil sinned when he tempted Eve to sin, and for all eternity he will bear a large part of the judgment because of what he did to the human family.

And so James was emphasizing here how important it is for us to know our God, His nature, and His ways. And we can only know Him today through His Word.

The impeccability of God! What an amazing and glorious truth this is! Not only is it true that God does not sin, and that He has never sinned, but it is also true that He cannot sin! His ways are inscrutable. At times they may seem to be hard and unfair. But we feel that way because we can only see a part of the picture. He knows what we need. He works all things out in accordance with His will. His purpose is always good, that is, to further His purpose of making us like the Lord Jesus Christ. So we need to say with David, even in the midst of our trials, as bewildering as they might be:

As for God, his way is perfect:

the word of the Lord is tried:

he is a buckler (a shield) to all those that trust in him

(Psa. 18:30).

Alexander Ross wrote that James was repudiating with horror, and laying the charge of blasphemy, against the very thought of charging God with sin. And he wrote this:

Such ideas as those express in so subtle a way in the poisonous honey of Omar Khayyam,

O Thou who didst with pitfall and with gin,

Beset the path I was to wander in,

are ruthlessly set aside (Ross, Alexander, Commentary on the Epistles of James and John, p 33).

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1:14 The problem is our own "lust." This is a strong part of our sinful nature. While this word can mean a good desire, yet it is most frequently used in the NT of an inordinate, excessive, evil desire. We have a natural desire for that which is evil, and we are quickly turned aside by it. "Drawn away" is a term which describes what a hunter does to catch an animal, or what a fisherman does to catch a fish, or even to a prostitute who seduces her victim into sin. "Lust" is like a lure at the end of a fishing line. The fish is attracted to it, but learns too late that there is deadly hook attached to it. And so "enticed" means to be caught.

James was not dealing here with all of the sources of temptation to which we are exposed. He was getting down to the main reason that we sin. We are surrounded by temptation in this evil world. The Devil takes advantage of every opportunity to get us to sin. but the solemn fact is that we would sin even if there were no longer a Devil, and if our environment were perfect.

This is the reason that Solomon wrote in Prov. 4:23,

Keep thy heart with all diligence;

for out of it are the issues of life.

Many are the warnings in Proverbs against sexual immorality. But there

are also the sins of covetousness, drunkenness, pride, and all of the other sins that are mentioned by Paul in Rom. 1:28-32; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:22-31; Col. 3:5-9.

We can rejoice in our trials because they make us realize the sinfulness of our hearts, and set us more on guard because of the moral weakness of our hearts, and our proneness to sin.

1:15 It is no sin to be tempted. We all are tempted constantly. But it is sin to yield to temptation.

James illustrates how sin is born by comparing it to the conception of a child. R. V. G. Tasker in his commentary on James in the Tyndale Bible Commentaries series, said this:

Just as a child is alive before the actual moment of its birth, so sin does not begin to be sinful only when it is manifest in a specific, visible action, though some such sinful action is bound sooner or later to emerge, once the lustful thought has been entertained and cherished (p. 47).

We have a chain reaction: lust > sin > death! Contrast "death" with "the crown of life" in v. 12. To people who are without Christ life and living mean being able to satisfy your lusts to the full. The Word of God says that this leads to death.

Speaking of the immoral woman, Solomon said,
 Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children,
 and attend to the words of my mouth.
 Let not thine heart decline to her ways,
 go not astray in her paths.
 For she hath cast down many wounded:
 yea, many strong men have been slain by her.
 Her house is the way to hell (sheol),
 going down to the chambers of death (Prov. 7:24-27).

Solomon also said,
 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,
 but the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12).

Lust leads to sin, and sin leads to death--often physical death; always eternal death. A child of God cannot live in sin, but a child of God can fall into sin. God often uses trials to keep us from sin, and for this we can be very happy and thankful to God.

James still has one more reason as to why we can be thankful for our trials. It is this:

F. They show us that our blessings come from our heavenly Father
 (James 1:16-18).

1:16 Probably this verse could go with either the verses which we have just finished, or the verses that we are going to consider now.

Anything that causes us to err, leads us astray. It is easier for us to be mistaken about things than it is for us to be right. We can think that a thing is right when it is wrong. When we are saved (v. 18), we begin to see everything in a different way. Before, we were living in darkness; afterwards, we are in the light. Before, we try to work things out for ourselves, and we talk about luck and chance, and perhaps accidents. Afterwards, we recognize the hand of God in our lives. And so we learn to talk about the Lord, His ways, His sovereignty, His love,

His faithfulness, His grace, His wisdom, and all of His other glorious attributes. And this is the reason for James' words in verses 17, 18.

1:17 Man's way of getting what he thinks is "good" and "perfect" is to follow the lusts of his heart. And he learns by sad experience that his way produces on that which is bad and defiled. The believer also learns that the blessings of life are not rewards, but they are gifts--expressions of the Father's love for His children. All that is really "good" comes from God; we never receive anything bad from Him. Sometimes things may seem bad. They may be things that we would never choose. But whatever the Lord gives is good--even the trials--because of what God is doing in our lives through them.

It is interesting that James used two different words for "gift" in this verse. The first word is _____; the second word is _____. The first speaks of the act of giving; the second, of the gift itself. It seems that James was speaking of the same gift, using both words. Put together they mean that what the Lord gives is always "good," and it is always "perfect." But it is also true that the way He gives His gifts is "good" and "perfect."

"Good" means something that is useful, beneficial, profitable. It speaks of something that is for our blessing, that which serves the purpose of God. Cf. Rom. 8:28. Or think of the words of Joseph to his brothers after Isaac died. His brothers felt that he would now be free to get even with them, and they feared the worst. But Joseph allayed their fears with these words:

Fear not: for am I in the place of God?
But as for you, ye thought evil against me:
but God meant it unto good,
to bring to pass, as it is this day,
to save much people alive (Gen. 50:19,20).

"Perfect" means that it was complete. It included nothing that was not necessary; it did not leave anything out. God's gifts to us, even when they come in the form of trials, are just what we need--nothing more, nothing less. It cannot be improved upon. No other gift, and no other way of giving the gift, would have been as "good" and "perfect" as God's gift and God's way of giving the gift.

So, what He gives us is right, and the way in which He gives it is right. Sometimes our trials come as a punishment from God, if we are being disobedient to the Lord, but James was not speaking of that here. These are gifts!

But note: They are "from above." For Job, they were not from his enemies, or freak "accidents" of nature. For Joseph, they were not from his brothers. For Daniel, they were not from his enemies who were jealous of him. For Stephen, they were not from the unbelieving Jews. Even for our Lord, they were not from Pilate, nor Herod, nor the Sanhedrin, nor from the Romans soldiers, nor from the Jewish mob. All of these things were "from above." The hand of God is to be seen in them all.

We are in the habit of attributing what appears to be "good" to us, to the Lord. But we attribute our trials to the Devil, or to our enemies, or to fate, or bad luck, or chance, or just the circumstances that we have to face in this world. Our enemies may have a part in them. The Devil always seems to be involved in some way. Trials may come to us as

a result of our own foolishness. BUT ALL OF THEM ACTUALLY COME FROM GOD, OR THEY WOULD NEVER GET THROUGH TO US!

James sweeps aside all second and third and fourth causes, and shows who the Sovereign One is in our lives. He calls him here, "the Father of lights."

He is the Father, the Source, of all lights--natural and spiritual. He put the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens to give light upon the earth. Jesus Christ came as the light of the world. This world is a place of spiritual darkness. This world needs the light, and the only source of true light is our heavenly Father. He has begotten us (v. 18), and He is the Father of all light.

The reason people turn to sin is because they are in darkness. They do not know what they are doing because they are blinded by the darkness. There was a time, as Paul said in his Ephesian Epistle, when all of us "were sometimes darkness," but now we are "light in the Lord."

Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ it is said,

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.
And the light shineth in darkness,
and the darkness comprehended it not (John 1:4, 5).

So, what is happening when we are going through our trials?

"The Father of lights," our heavenly Father, is performing spiritual surgery on us to improve our ability to see and live according to and in the light! It is not an accident. It is not fate. It is God working out His purposes in our lives, making us more like He wants us to be--which is to be like our dear Saviour and Lord.

But we are not finished with verse 17.

James said concerning our Father that with Him "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What does this mean, and why would he say this about the Lord in this particular place?

He did it for one main reason: to quiet any resentment or question that we might have concerning God when we are going through our trials. What do our trials make us think about God? We suddenly begin to feel that the Lord has undergone some kind of a change, if not in His character, at least in His attitude toward us.

The sun varies from time to time. So does the moon. The same is true of the stars. But it is not true of God!

James firmly believed in the immutability of God. And he also believed that we need to remember this when we are in our trials. Our circumstances suddenly change. We change. People about us change. Our friends may forsake us, and our enemies become more active toward us. But God never changes. As Weymouth translated this, **"In Him there is no variation nor the shadow of a change."** Turning sometimes suggests changing. For example, we read this in John 6:66:

From that time many of his disciples went back,
and walked no more with him.

They turned away from the Lord. The Lord never does that. He will never leave us, nor forsake us. And so in our trials we are not to turn away from Him, but toward Him, to call upon Him, to trust Him, and to thank Him that He is an unchanging God in a changing world with His

people who greatly need to be changed. What a rich, rich passage this is! Let us pray that the Lord will let us understand the marvelous truths that are here, and that we will remember them every day, through all of our trials, big and small.

And then we come to the last verse in this first section of the Epistle:

1:18 How unusual to find a Gospel verse in a setting like this--OR IS IT? What place does this have in the message that James was giving to these Hebrew Christians.

He has been talking about trials, and about the purpose God has in our trials. These are words for the Lord's people--not just for Jewish people in general, but for Jewish people who know the Lord. (They are words for Gentile believers, too, but they were originally written for scattered, suffering Hebrew Christians.) We have been learning a lot (I hope) about how God deals with His own. The whole passage has been designed to assure the Lord's people, to strengthen them, and to encourage them in their trials. Now we come to a concluding word of encouragement.

Why was James so sure that the Lord would not forsake His people, and that He would not leave them at the mercy of their enemies nor their circumstances? BECAUSE THEY HAD BECOME THE LORD'S PEOPLE, NOT BY THE EXERCISE OF THEIR OWN WILLS, BUT BY THE ETERNAL, SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD!

Do you remember those days in the life of Samuel when the people of Israel asked him to give them a king so they would be like the other nations? And the Lord told Samuel to grant them a request, and Saul was given to them. The Lord also told Samuel not to be grieved personally about it because He said that they had not rejected Samuel, but they had rejected Him, that He, the Lord, should not rule over them. But when the Lord sent a storm of thunder and rain on them, they realized that they had sinned in asking for a king, and they were afraid of what the Lord was going to do to them. But then Samuel comforted them with these words found in 1 Sam. 12:20, 22,

Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness:
yet turn not aside from following the Lord,
but serve the Lord with all your heart . . .

And then listen to these words:

**For the Lord will not forsake his people
for his great name's sake:
because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.**

How did you and I become the Lord's children? Please don't say that it was your idea. Please don't say that it was because you took the first step toward the Lord. You and I have been saved because the Lord willed that we be saved. He drew us to Himself, or we never would have come. He loved us, or we never would have loved Him. He sought us, or we would never have sought Him. He wanted us, or we would never have wanted Him. "Of his own will . . ."

He gave us birth. And you and I had no more to do with that spiritual birth than we had with our natural birth. We were born again, as Peter said, and as James said here, "by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23b). James' words are, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." It was through the Word of God that we have been born again, that we have received life from above, the greatest of all of God's good and perfect gifts!

But what purpose did He have in saving these Jewish people to whom James was writing? "That we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

Obviously James was speaking about God's new creatures. So he was speaking of what God was doing in their lives--making them "a kind of firstfruits." What were the "firstfruits"?

- 1) They were that part of the harvest that was devoted especially to God.
- 2) They were presented to God as belonging to Him.
- 3) They became the pattern for all that was to follow. And so we have the idea here of an example.

The Lord had brought them their trials so they would be devoted him Him, so that they would live as people who belonged to the Lord, and so their lives would become a pattern for their children and all other believers to follow.

Let me take you back again to Samuel's words which he spoke to the people of Israel:

For the Lord will not forsake his people
for his great name's sake:
because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people.

Is it not amazing that the Lord would say that after the way the Israelites had disobeyed Him, had dishonored Him, and had rejected Him in preference for a human king so they could be like other nations? They did not understand their trials. They forgot the Lord in their trials, and rebelled so quickly against Him.

But is our record any different? Is it not amazing that the Lord never regrets that He, of His own sovereign will, chose us, and saved us, and made us His people.

I have heard husbands say, "I wish I had never married her." I have heard wives say, "I wish I had never married him." I have heard parents say, "I wish I had never had any children because they have caused me such grief." I don't know about you, but I have given the Lord many opportunities to regret that He ever chose me. I haven't always pleased Him. I haven't always taken His dealings with me the way I should have. And, although I hate to think that there might be other times when I will fail the Lord, there may be those times. But I am so thankful to know that the Lord has never said about me, "Do you know Dwight Custis? I wish I had never saved him. I am sorry that he is my child." No, the Lord has had a right to say that, but He never has said it. And I can tell you on the authority of the Word, that He never even thinks that way. The Apostle John said,

Having loved his own which were in the world,
he loved them unto the end (John 13:1b).

O the love that sought me,
O the blood that bought me,
O the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold.

Now we come to the second main division of the Epistle:

III. BE HOLY (James 1:19-3:12).

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 1 -- Part 2- III. BE HOLY (James 1:19-3:12).

We come to a new section in 1:19, one in which James emphasized the need for holiness of life. He had been stressing the need to BE HAPPY, and this even in the midst of trials. He, among other things, had warned them against sin. He had shown them that God was not responsible for their sin; they were! Therefore, it was necessary for them to make use of the means that God had provided for their deliverance from sin. They were not to deal with sin passively, but actively. James would agree with the saying that the best defense is a good offense. And so he was encouraging them to wage war against sin. In order to do this, they needed to cultivate holiness in their lives.

Holiness and happiness are real companions. You cannot be truly happy without being holy. Neither can you seek holiness without also finding happiness. Holiness is that which pleases God. Men seek sin in order to please and satisfy themselves. But such men are never really happy. They may enjoy themselves for a time, but such pleasure does not bring happiness. The end result is always bitterness and regret. Moses found true happiness when he did as the writer of Hebrews has told us:

By faith Moses, when he was come to years,
refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;
Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God,
than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb. 11:24, 25).

James mentioned no less than four ways in which every child of God needs to seek to BE HOLY. (See the outline.) The first of these is:

A. In departing from sin through obedience to the Word
(James 1:19-27).

We always need to remember that when we come to a new division in any Book of the Bible, we do not leave and forget that which we have already considered. James brought that out with his use of the word . . .

1:19 "Wherefore" -- In v. 18 he had just said that salvation was the outworking of God's will, not ours. And that one of God's purposes for us in redemption is that "we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." The Church began with the Jews in Jerusalem. They had experienced great suffering because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But God's purpose in their trials was to make them examples to other Jews, and to the Gentiles, of what God wants His people to be. God's purpose was not to destroy their faith (as it might have seemed), but to strengthen their faith, to purify their lives, and to perfect them in lives of holiness. James had stressed that they needed to see the Lord's hand in all that they had experienced. Their trials were, so to speak, a gift from God, blessings in disguise. And so now we come to some very practical matters leading to holiness to which they were to give the most careful attention.

"My beloved brethren" -- This is the third time in this chapter he had called them, "brethren." See vv. 2, 16. Many have charged James with being hard and severe, but here you see evidence of his tender feelings toward the people of God. He was not setting himself above them, but he wanted them to know that he felt himself to be one of them, one with

them. What a lesson this is for all of us who teach the Word! Even as James was encouraging them to become examples to others, he was showing in the way he was teaching an example of the way that he wanted them to be.

"Let every man" -- No one was excluded from these exhortations. They applied to the one who had just been saved, and to the oldest saint who would read this Epistle. We never outgrow any of the commandments of the Word. We can always be more perfect in our obedience to God and His Word.

Notice Paul's emphasis on "every man" in Col. 1:28. He was speaking of Christ,

Whom we preach, warning **every man**,
and teaching **every man** in all wisdom;
that we may present **every man** perfect in Christ Jesus.

No one among the saints is to be neglected in the ministry of the Word.

"Let every man be swift to hear" -- We do not stop with hearing, as James will go on to point out, but that is where we begin! We need to "hear" what we read. We need to "hear" what is being taught.

Fausset in the JFB Commentary quotes the old Rabbis who said that God gave us two ears, but only one tongue. The ears are exposed, but the tongue is walled in behind the teeth. So, with two ears we ought to do twice as much listening as we do speaking.

We know that James was speaking of hearing the Word because of what he went on to write in the following verses. This is what we need to be eager to hear, getting it the first time, never getting enough, always ready to hear more. This expression, "swift to hear," is an illustration of what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:2, 3,

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word,
that ye may grow thereby:

If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

What is it to "desire" the Word of God? It is to long for it more than for anything else. This is what is lacking in the lives of many Christians today. There are a lot of other things that they want more than they want the Word of God. Job said,

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips;
I have esteemed the words of his mouth
more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

"Esteemed" means treasured up. Can you and I say that? The Psalmist said (Psa. 119:97),

Oh how love I thy law!
it is my meditation all the day.

Jeremiah said,

Thy words were found, and I did eat them;
and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart:
for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts (Jer. 15:16).

"Let every man be swift to hear," eager, anxious to hear the Word, and to learn as much about the Word as he can.

But what else did James say here?

"Slow to speak" -- Robertson (Vol. VI, p. 21) pointed out that this means "slow to begin speaking, not slow while speaking." Listen to Solomon's words in Ecc. 5:2:

Be not rash with thy mouth,
and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God:
for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth:
therefore let thy words be few.

Solomon also said in Prov. 17:28,

Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise:
and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.

James was referring here to the person who speaks out against God in the midst of his trials, acting like he is wiser than the Lord is, being critical of God in his heart.

The Bible has a lot to say about the misuse of the tongue. James will bring this subject up again in this Epistle. How we need to be careful about the use of the tongue. Every day we need to pray the prayer that is found in Psa. 141:3,

Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth;
keep the door of my lips.

Remember the example set by our Lord which was prophesied by Isaiah the prophet in Isa. 53:7:

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb,
so he openeth not his mouth.

And listen to what the Apostle Peter said about the Lord:

For even hereunto were ye called:
because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example,
that ye should follow his steps:
Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:
Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;
when he suffered, he threatened not;
but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously
(1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Oh, how careful we need to be not to say things to God, or about God, or against God, in times of testing (or at any other time)! And we need to be just as careful about saying things against the people who may be the instruments that are causing us our trouble.

In Ephesians 4 Paul had a lot to say about the right use and the wrong use of the tongue. And right in the midst of those verses we have these words;

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God,
whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30).

The suggestion seems to be that we are more likely to grieve the Lord with our tongues than in any other way.

Remember: When you are speaking, you are not listening. James said that we need to be "swift to hear, slow to speak."

But let us go on with this important verse.

"Slow to wrath" -- This is the kind of anger that makes a person want to take revenge, to get even with someone. James may have been thinking of Solomon again at this point because we read these words in Ecc. 7:9:

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry:
for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

An angry person is not a good listener because he is too busy thinking about what he wants to do than to hear what he needs to do and ought to

do. A good example of one who was in a hurry to get mad was Naaman, the Syrian. The king of Syria sent him to be healed by Elisha, but he did not like what Elisha did to him, nor what Elisha said for him to do: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times" (2 Kings 5:10). Listen to Naaman's reaction:

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said,
Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand,
and call on the name of the Lord his God,
and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.
Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus,
better than all the waters of Israel?
may I not wash in them, and be clean?

So he turned and went away in a rage (2 Kings 5:11, 12).

If Naaman servants had not been wiser than he, Naaman would have died because he got mad so quickly when things did not go as he expected, and as he felt he deserved for them to go.

Why do we need to avoid anger? James said why in verse 20:

1:20 "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

Notice what is coming in Jas. 3:13-18.

What does this verse mean? Well, it can mean several things:

- 1) "The righteousness of God" is that which is pleasing to God, that which is right in His sight. The main purpose of every child of God should be to please and glorify and exalt God. When we are angry we lose sight of that objective, and so what we do is not pleasing to Him, and, consequently, not righteous in His sight.
- 2) In the second place, remember that we are to be "a kind of firstfruits of his (new) creatures." We are to be examples to each other, and to the world. That is all spoiled if we are controlled by our anger, rather than by the Lord. And so people get a distorted idea of how a child of God should behave when he is tried.

Thomas Manton point out (quoted in Matthew Henry, Vol. VI, p. 973) that if we were more inclined to be swift to hear, and slow to speak, there would be less of anger, and more profit to be gained, when the people of God meet to hear the Word.

Therefore, since it is true that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," there are certain things that we need to do in order to prevent such things that are so displeasing to God. And these are what James takes up next.

In Acts 10:35 we have these words which apply to this verse:

But in every nation he that feareth him (God),
and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

So to work righteousness means that we are more concerned about pleasing God than we are in having our own way, which is sin.

Notice in verse 21 that James mentioned first, what we need to put from us, and second, what we need to receive.

1:21 First, what we need to get rid of.

"Laying aside" -- This is the verb that is used to picture laying off our sins as we would change our garments. We need to put off some things, and put on others. We reject them. They are not proper attire for a child of God. This would speak of outward behavior, but it has to

have its roots in our hearts. What is it that we need to take off and put away, having no more to do with it?

The first is: "all filthiness." This is anything that defiles us, anything that renders us unfit for the presence of the Lord. It speaks of sin in any form. We are not to excuse sin (such as a bad temper), but we are reject it by the power of God.

Note how Paul used this same verb, and the sins that he mentioned in Rom. 13:12-14; Eph. 4:17-32, esp. vv. 22, 25, 31; Col. 3:5-17, esp. vv. 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16. We can see from these verses that Paul taught exactly what James was teaching.

What a blessing it would be for all of us if we could learn to look on sin in any form as "filthiness," and nothing but "filthiness." Things can be acceptable with men, and even be legal, that are filthy in God's sight--and it is God Whom we need to be concerned about!

But then James adds what our translators have called, "superfluity of naughtiness." What is this?

Some feel that the word translated "naughtiness" has reference to the sinful source of our outward sins, and that the word "superfluity" shows how abundant and excessive the sins are. In other words, it would seem that James was saying that we need to deal with sin outwardly and inwardly. We must deal with both the root and the fruit. We must never try to do the will of God or the work of God with that which God calls sin. It ALL has to be put away.

But how do we do this? The second part of our verse tells us. (Read.)

The Psalmist, in Psalm 119:11, said,

Thy word have I hid in mine heart,
that I might not sin against thee.

This is essentially what James was saying. We are to "receive" it, to welcome it, to treat it as a gift which we treasure very highly. We are to love it, to listen to it, to make it our very life.

"With meekness" -- Archbishop Trench who lived in Dublin, Ireland in the mid 1800's, has defined this word, "meekness," in this way:

. . . an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly toward God (Matt. xi. 29; Jam. i. 21). It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; . . . because it is only the humble heart which is also the meek; and which, as such, does not fight against God, and more or less struggle and contend with Him.

This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him for the chastening and purifying of His elect. This was the root of David's (meekness), when Shimei cursed and flung stones at him --the consideration, namely, that the Lord had bidden him (2 Sam. xvi. 11), that it was just for him to suffer these things, however unjustly the other might inflict them; and out of like convictions all true Christian (meekness) must spring. He that is meek indeed will know himself a sinner among sinners;--or, if there was One who could not know Himself such,

Triumph - "the wickedness remaining over in the Christian from his state prior to conversion" (p. 55). And there is usually a lot of it.

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yet He too bore a sinner's doom, and endured there the contradiction of sinners (Luke ix. 35, 36; John xviii. 22, 23);--and this knowledge of his own sin (speaking again of us--my comment) will teach him to endure meekly the provocations with which they may provoke him, and not to withdraw himself from the burdens which their sin may impose upon him (Gal. vi. 1; 2 Tim. ii. 25; Tit. iii. 2) (pp. 152, 153).

Our trials bring our sins to our attention. They cause us to hate them and to long to be delivered from them. But we soon learn that they are too strong for us. If God does not help us, we cannot find help from any other person or place. And so the Lord draws us to His Word, deeply conscious of our sins, humbled and submissive and ready to listen to His Word. This is the picture that James presents to us in these words.

"The engrafted word" -- The NASB says, "implanted." It is not the Bible on our desks or tables that will help us, but it is when it is planted in our hearts. And this is a work which God does, but he opens our hearts to welcome it, to read it, to hear it, to listen attentively to it, and that is where the changes begin to take place in our lives. A Christian without the Word is always a defeated, sinning Christian. Again remember Psa. 119:11.

"Which is able to save your souls" -- We are born again by the Word. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:23. No one is ever saved apart from the Word of God. But that is not James' thought here. Salvation, or to be saved, are words which are all-inclusive with respect to the work of God in our souls. It has a past aspect: we were saved. It has a present aspect: we are being saved. The work of salvation continues in our hearts. It has a future aspect: we will be saved--finally and completely and eternally when we get to heaven. IT IS THE WORD IN OUR HEARTS BY WHICH GOD CONTINUES THE WORK OF SALVATION, AND BY WHICH THAT WORK WILL FINALLY BE COMPLETED.

But, and to avoid the possibility that he might be misunderstood, James then enlarged upon the meaning of having the Word of God implanted in our hearts.

1:22 It does not mean that we merely hear the Word, but it means that we obey the Word, that the Word is expressed in our lives by the holiness which becomes the people of God. Fausset says that this means obeying the Word of God "systematically and continuously" (Vol. VI, p. 585). "Be ye" means lit. to keep on becoming. James was not saying that they were disobedient, but he was saying that they needed to be more obedient, and to give their lives to be patterned according to the Word of God.

"Deceiving your own selves" -- Knowledge of the Bible is no substitute for obedience. The person who claims to know a great deal about the Word, but who is not submissive to God and obedient to His Word, is self-deceived. He certainly does not deceive God, neither does he usually deceive other people. To be deceived is to be cheated. And, as Alexander Ross stated (p. 39), self-deception is the worst kind of deception. And then he added this:

It is greatly to be feared that there are multitudes of "sermon-tasters," to use a striking old Scotch phrase, who have never yet tasted that the Lord is gracious. If we content ourselves with sentimental admiration of the preacher, or simply with the enjoyment of an emotional and mental treat, and if the sermon

does not move us to do something to our lives that sadly needs to be done, we are indeed in a parlous (perilous, dangerous) spiritual state.

So there is a warning here for the child of God, and a warning for the person who is religious, but not Christian. May the Lord give us ears to hear, and eyes to see, and hearts to understand, and feet to walk in His Word--all for the glory of His holy Name. This is the way of holiness.

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From chapter 1, verse 19, on to chapter 3, verse 12, James stressed the importance of holiness in the lives of the Lord's people. Holiness means godliness. It requires constant changes in our lives, changes in which we are seeking greater conformity to Christ. There are certain things that a child of God ought not to do. There are other things that he must do. And so James began that way in verse 19.

But when he got down to verse 22 he expressed a truth which was not new to the NT. The Psalmist said it long ago in the words found in Psa. 119:11. Just as no person can be saved without the Word, so no person can be holy without the Word.

But it is not enough just to hear the Word (whether it be through reading or hearing it preached), but we must be "doers of the word." To be a doer of the Word means, according to the word that James used in verse 22, to practise the Word of God.

He followed this with an illustration in v. 23.

1:23 A person who hears the Word, but does not follow the hearing with doing, is like who looks at himself in a mirror.

How many of you have done that this morning? How much time have you given to it? How many times have you done it? Do you expect to do it again before the day is over? How many mirrors do you have in your home? How many of you ladies have a mirror in your purse? The mirror is probably the most used article in our homes (except possibly for the floor on which we walk).

Why do you use a mirror? The word that James used for "man" here is a word which is usually confined to the male species. So, while undoubtedly he was saying this for men and women, it is clear that men use mirrors also. Why? Probably the main reason is that we want to look presentable when we go out in public. We want our faces to be clean, our hair in place, our clothes to be right.

Hearing the word is to be for each one of us like looking into a mirror. We read to learn about God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit. We read to learn the great doctrines of Scripture. But ultimately all of our reading is to be turned upon ourselves. We are looking into the mirror of the Word of God, and in the Word we see our own needs. We see what we need to do. We see the kind of people we are supposed to be.

Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18 for another idea related to the Word as a mirror.

1:24 If we hear the Word, but fail to obey the Word, we are like a man who looks at himself, he sees that his face is dirty, but he gets

distracted in some way, and forgets to wash his face.

How significant it is that he goes "his way, and forgetteth what manner of man he was." The easiest thing in the world is to read, and to forget. We are convicted at the time, but we soon put it out of our minds.

How many Christians there are like that. They may read the Bible faithfully, but it does not really do them any good because they are not concerned about obeying the Word. Our problem so often is not that we do not know what the Word says, but we forget it!

1:25 Here we find a different kind of a person described.

"Looketh" is the word which John the Apostle used when he described in John 20:5 how, when he arrived at the tomb of our Lord, He stooped down, "and **looking** in, saw the linen clothes lying . . ." It does not describe the person who hastily looks into a mirror as he walks by it on the street, but the person who bends over, and gazes long and intently at something, not wanting to miss a thing.

The Bible is here called, "the perfect law of liberty." It is "perfect" because it is complete, and because it lacks nothing to in order to accomplish that for which it was intended. Here we have the teaching of the sufficiency of the Word. It is called a "law" because it is binding upon all of the people of God. James is not speaking of just the Mosaic Law, but of all the Word of God. He was not extolling legalism, but he was saying that the commandments of Scripture are not optional, but they are our God-given responsibility. We do not decide IF we are to obey the Word of God (the Lord has already decided that for us, but we are to be concerned about HOW we are to obey the Word of God. It is defined as "the perfect law of **liberty**" because obedience to the Word is true liberty. Sin enslaves us; the Word of God sets us free--free from sin, and free to obey God. Our Lord said on one occasion,

And ye shall know the truth,

and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

And He followed that with these words:

If the Son therefore shall make you free,

ye shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

Paul told the Galatian churches,

Stand fast therefore in the liberty

wherewith Christ hath made us free,

and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage

(Gal. 5:1).

"And continueth therein" -- This is not the simple word for continuing, but a compound (), and it means to stay close to, or to persevere in obeying the Word.

This person is not like the man described in verse 24. He remembers, and he obeys. He is "a doer of the work."

And so what is the promise? "This man" (as compared with the man described in verses 23 and 24) "shall be blessed in his deed."

Here we have a key to blessing. And this is the same word as the first word of verse 12. And it means to be happy. We can be happy in our trials if we are persevering with God in the midst of them. And the Word will give us great blessing IF we persevere in obeying the Word.

It is not the person who is causal in his obedience, but the person who is constant. The reason more people do not enjoy the Word, and are not happy in the Lord, is because there is so little obedience to the Word.

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1:26 In this verse, and in the following, James spoke of a "religious" person, and "religion." This word, as a noun or adjective, is only used five times in the NT: here, in v. 27, in Acts 26:5; Col. 2:18 where it is translated, "worship."

The word speaks of the outward observances that a person will go through to express his devotion to God. With the Jews in the OT it was seen in the bringing of sacrifices, the observance of the various holy days, hearing the Word of God, prayer, and in the many things that were required of them in keeping the Mosaic Law. Today it consists in going to church, honoring the Lord with our money, preaching and witnessing, reading our Bibles, prayer, and in our obedience to God's Word.

And all of this is important--extremely important! But there is another factor that is just as important. It is that which gives reality and genuineness to what we are doing outwardly. And that is what is going on in our hearts!

Illus: The people of Israel in the OT. Cf. Isa. 1:2-31. Then cf. Isa. 29:13.

In reviewing the history of Israel, the Psalmist wrote in Psalms 78:36, 37,

Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth,
and they lied unto him with their tongues.
For their heart was not right (stedfast) with him,
neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

The point is this: If what we do outwardly is not the true expression of our hearts, it not only is unacceptable to God, but it is hypocrisy of the worst kind!

This was the sin of the Pharisees. And this is the worst sin of the Church today. Outwardly you would think that things are great in the Church. But when you begin to watch the way people live, and listen to the things that they are really interested in, you soon realize that we are in big trouble.

James was interested in "pure religion and undefiled" (v. 27). He was concerned that what was going on outwardly with the Lord's people was equal with that which was going on inwardly--and that both were as they should be before God! Our outward lives are important, very important. But so is the heart.

Notice what James said.

"Seem" -- means to have the appearance of, or to have the opinion of himself, i.e., that he is "religious," and wanting to convey that idea to others. You will find a lot of people like this. But James would have us realize that sometimes it is genuine, at other times it is false and hypocritical. Perhaps a person has been misguided into thinking that somehow what they do outwardly will work itself into the heart. This is the manner of man's "religion." But true "religion"

begins in the heart, and then the outer life is transformed.

So we need to be able to test ourselves, and we need to be able to discern the reality, or the lack of reality, of those around us. But how is this done?

James came back in this verse to the place where he began in verse 19 speaking of holiness in v. 19. Listen to the way a person talks. This little instrument in our mouths can be used to glorify God, or it can show that we are, in reality, hypocrites.

Cf. James 3:8-13.

"Bridleth not" -- Cf. this same word in 3:2. We need bridling. Our bodies need it (our minds, our eyes, our ears, our hands, our feet), but it all is tied to the use of the tongue.

What is a bridle? It is the headgear that you put on horses or mules to restrain them, and to make them go where you want them to go. It is essential in training these animals, and in controlling them after they are trained.

You see that James mentioned in this verse both the "tongue" and the "heart"--one is on the outside; the other, on the inside. The person who thinks that the outward observances of the Christian faith make him a Christian, or that they make him a true man (or woman) of God, is self-deceived. And, if this is the case, his "religion," his outward observance of religious duties, "is vain." It is a reproach to God, and it will bring no blessing to himself.

We are always so anxious for our children to learn to talk. Maybe we shouldn't be. Their speech can be very cute and amusing, but they soon learn to say a very determined "no" when they are told what to do. The sinfulness of a child is always more apparent than ever when he begins to speak.

So much for the negative side of it, with the positive side clearly implied. Even a Christian needs to be bridled, and often we need to be bound and gagged.

1:27 But what is "pure religion and undefiled"?

James was not really giving a full definition here, but doing what is often even more helpful: giving us an illustration of "pure . . . and undefiled" religion. Note he did not say that "religion" was unimportant. But he was saying that it needs to be the right kind.

"Pure" -- means clean, free from anything that would hinder its proper use. The Lord spoke in one of His beatitudes about "the pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8). The tongue has a proper use (or we would not have one), but it can also be misused.

"Undefiled" -- is unstained, unsoiled (cf. Bullinger, p. 830). This is really the negative of "pure."

So, if our "religion" is to be what it should be, and not be otherwise, what are we to look for? Two things:

- 1) "To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,
- 2) "And to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Again, we have one that is positive; the other is negative.

First, "to visit the fatherless and widows."

"Fatherless" means also motherless, so James was speaking here of those who were orphans. "Visit" means, as we would think, to go to see them with the idea in mind of finding out how they are doing, and to give them help where it is needed and possible.

"Widows" are those women whose husbands have died. Perhaps they have children, too.

The church is to be very concerned about these--not all widows and orphans, but those with whom we have some contact, and especially those who are in the Church. This was one of the first needs mentioned in the early Church. Cf. Acts 6:1. And this led to the appointment of deacons. It did not mean that the deacons were to do it all, but that they were to see to it that the orphans and widows were cared for.

If our "religion" is true and genuine, it makes us concerned about others, especially those who are in real need. In 1 Timothy 5 Paul wrote to Timothy about "widows" in the Church. Often we are not able to do all that needs to be done, but we can visit them, and pray with them, and encourage them.

But what about the truly religious person in his relationship with "the world"?

He is to "keep himself unspotted."

Notice how much James had to say about what we need to be doing about ourselves. That was his emphasis from v. 19 on. In addition to refraining from the wrong use of the tongue, we are to make sure that we hear the Word, and that we do the Word, that we apply the Word to ourselves, that we bridle our tongues, and that we "keep" ourselves "unspotted from the world."

"Keep himself unspotted" -- This is not as easy as we might think. We are all influenced, and influenced greatly by the world. The world has left its mark upon all of us. The world has greatly influenced the Church of the 1980's. We follow the world in many, many ways. But let us remember that the influence of the world always leaves spots on us. It defiles us. It contaminates us.

Remember what the Apostle John said in 1 John 2:15-17. And what Paul said in Romans 12:1, 2. See also James' words in James 4:4.

OT sacrifices were to be "unspotted." Only then would they be acceptable to God. And being "unspotted" they were types of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:18, 19. So to be like the Lord in His relationship with the world is our best definition of what it means to be "unspotted."

“PURE RELIGION”

Intro: We have come in our study of the Epistle of James to the last two verses of chapter 1. In these verses James made use of the words, “religious” and “religion.” The only other time that we find this particular word in Scripture, is in Acts 26:5 when the Apostle Paul was defending himself before King Agrippa. The word “religion” in English is found in Galatians 1:13, 14, but it is a different word in the Greek text. In those verses it would bear the translation, *Judaism*. But, in our text in James, he was using the word which referred to the outward manifestation, or performance, of the way in which a person demonstrates his relationship, as well as his service, to God. It can be “pure,” or it can be *impure* or *defiled*. It can be a true expression of a person’s relationship with God, or it can be just a show. If it is just an outward performance without an expression of a person’s inner relationship to God, it is hypocrisy. This is what it was with the Pharisees. With Paul before he became a Christian, it was sincere, but he was sincerely wrong. He described it himself as what he was doing “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13).

Here in the Epistle of James we have the only place in the NT where the words “religiously” and “religion” are used for true Christian living. Evidently those Jews who were saved did not use it for their relationship to God through the Lord Jesus Christ because it spoke to them of a relationship to God that was based upon works. But James’ use of the word is one reason many NT scholars believe that his epistle was written early rather than late in the history of the church. But James is emphasizing the “pure religion” must be inward as well as outward, that is, it must come from the heart, and that if it does, it will be seen in the way a Christian lives as well as in the way a Christian serves the Lord. That is the reason that James wrote in chapter 1, verse 27 that if a Christian’s religion is to be “pure and undefiled” it must be “before God and the Father.” A true child of God is primarily concerned that his life and his service are pleasing to God, are the way God intended that they should be.

My Pastor, when I was growing up, said that “religion” was not a good word to use when speaking of the Christian faith. He said that it was a word which belonged to the religions of the world which all are concerned more about works. I have always appreciated his emphasis, but I have also learned that there is a good and proper use of the word “religion” and “religious” if it retains the idea of a person’s heart being expressed in his daily life. But I prefer to follow what my Pastor taught, and what the NT certainly emphasizes, that it is not the right word to use for a Christian’s relationship with God. And it is primarily a true relationship with God, inwardly and outwardly, that is James’ reason for writing to his Jewish brethren in Christ. And what is important for Jewish Christians, is just as important for Gentile Christians, which is what we are.

“Pure religion,” then, is that which is “pure and undefiled.” “Pure” is the positive word; “undefiled” is the negative. “Pure” here means all that God intended that our relationship with Him should be; “undefiled” means free from anything that would be displeasing to God, such as it will be if we are concerned about our outward performance, but give little or no attention to the condition of our hearts. We are inclined to think more about the outward because that is what people see. But God is the only One Who can make us truly pleasing to Himself in our hearts. The Lord told Samuel that “man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). It is not that the Lord doesn’t look on our outward appearance, but He starts with the heart. Many of the Jews of the OT had it exactly the opposite way. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, said this about the people of Israel, “. . . this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear of Me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa. 29:13). That is what James was telling his Jewish brethren that we all need to avoid.

Now the question is, “What is ‘pure religion’? How do we keep our relationship to God ‘pure’?” To answer that question, let us go back over what James has been saying here in chapter 1 which has led up to verses 26

and 27.

- 1) We need to have a true understanding of the Gospel and our salvation. See James 1:17-18.

Salvation is a gift. Everything about it is a gift, even our faith. Cf. Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 12:2. See also Titus 3:5-8. We work from salvation, not up to it.

- 2) We need to become those who are “swift to hear” (Jas. 1:19). And from what James went on to say, it is clear that in this verse he is talking about *hearing the Word of God*. We are to be reading the Word of God for ourselves. We need to hear it as others read it, or teach it. We are to believe what we read. It is to be received with meekness (v. 21). We are to be humbled by it, and to be submissive to it (v. 21). The Lord implants the Word in the hearts of those who really know Him. If a person claims to be a Christian, but he or she has no real desire to read the Word and to learn from the Word, that person probably has not yet become a Christian. The Apostle Peter told generally the same people to whom James wrote what their attitude should be toward the Word.

There are great doctrines to be learned from the Word of God, doctrines about the Bible itself, doctrines about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about ourselves (the Bible is a mirror), about sin (we learn about sin from the Bible, not by experiencing sin), about sanctification, about glorification, about serving the Lord.

The only way we can become discerning about the teaching we can hear from different groups, is by becoming familiar with the Bible for ourselves. This takes time. It is easy to get in with the wrong group. I am always concerned about that when I hear that someone has been saved, or has professed to be saved.

But there is another word here in James 1 that we need to pay attention to. It is in verse 25:

- 3) A true believer will *continue* in the Word. This means not only that he or she will live by the Word to begin with, but that a true believer continues to read, continues to grow, continues to obey. Many start out fine, but they soon fall by the wayside. Why? It is usually because they have not truly been saved. **Illus:** What Jonathan Edwards learned following the Great Awakening back in the 1740's. Many ministers and church people became critical of the Awakening itself. Others were given to emotionalism and considered that the real evidence of salvation. See what we learn from the parable of the sower in Matthew 13.

I met a young woman yesterday. She was from Roumania. She was a nurse, and very intelligent to talk to. She was married and had one child. I am sure that she was a good wife and a good mother. But when she found out that I was a pastor, she opened up and talked to me about herself. She had been raised as a Catholic, but at the present time wasn't going to a Catholic church, or any other church, but she said that she knew that she needed to settle down in some church. But she went on to say that her main reason for going to church was to worship God, and that it didn't make any difference what kind of a church it was, Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, and so on, because she could worship God in any church. Now what was she telling me? She was telling me that doctrine is not important. She was telling me that she did not understand what worship is. But I am afraid that she was telling me unintentionally that she really was not a Christian.

Churches today are neglecting the teaching of the Word, and so there are hundreds of people in our churches, attracted by music, or by the crowds that go to certain churches, by preachers who are careful not to offend anyone by talking about sin, but who want to make people feel good about themselves. But the Gospel is not being preached, and people are being attracted to certain preachers and their churches, *but I am afraid that in most instances it is not to Christ!*

But let me mention three other ways that James said that we can identify one in whom there has been a true, saving work of God.

You see the first of these three in verse 26.

4) A true Christian can be identified by the way he uses his tongue. Notice how James emphasizes things that we need to do to ourselves, and for ourselves. We can only do what we need to do as God works in our hearts by the power of the Word of God which the Holy Spirit uses in our lives. But we have definite responsibilities before God concerning our lives.

Anybody who does not bridle his tongue, even though he professes to be “religious,” James says that he is self-deceived, and that “this man’s religion is vain.” James used the same word “bridle” in 3:2. We start with the tongue, but the whole body needs to be bridled. Our minds, our eyes, our ears, our hands, our feet – every part of our bodies need to be bridled, but interestingly we begin with the tongue. But notice that both the tongue and the heart are mentioned in this verse.

What is a bridle? It is the headgear that you put on horses or mules to restrain them, and to make them go where you want them to go. It is essential training for these animals, and also in controlling them after they are trained.

Of course we know that a Christian is not going to take the Name of the Lord in vain. But I have heard professing Christians to do take the Name of the Lord in vain. They will say, “O my God,” or “Good Lord.” You can hear it all of the time on TV and radio. But there is more to what James is saying here than a reference to profanity. When people talk all of the time about themselves, rather than about Christ. Or when they tell you about some book that they are reading, instead of telling you what they recently read in the Bible. These are things that we need to be on the lookout with ourselves as well as with others. Dirty jokes, or suggestive comments, are often made by a person who claims to be a Christian. But his speech contradicts his claim to be a Christian.

But let us move on to verse 27.

5) Again we come to a positive and a negative. We will come to the negative as the last of what James has mentioned in this verse.

“To visit the fatherless and widows” – Probably the primary emphasis here has to do with “fatherless” and “widows” in the church. That, at least, would be the starting place. But it has to do with those who have been left as such by death. The visiting that is referred to has to do with continuous visiting, not just a one time event. A mark of true Christians is that they are concerned for each other, always on the lookout for an opportunity to help someone in need, to be a spiritual blessing to them. Our generation is very much an I, me, and mine generation. Christ was always mindful of the needs of others, and, if we know Him and are walking in fellowship with Him, that will be our concern too.

The negative side remains:

6) “To keep himself unspotted from the world” (v. 27). Every believer needs to be constantly aware of the world’s warfare against a holy life. The Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:19 that our Lord was “without spot,” meaning He was perfect in holiness, never contaminated by the world. And so if we are keep ourselves “unspotted from the world,” James meant that we are to always seek to be like Christ.

Concl: As we can all see, this is not the end of the epistle. James has much more to say. And after he has said all that the Spirit of God directed him to say, there is more that other writers of Scripture have said. We will never attain it all until we are with the Lord, but we must continue in the Word, in prayer, and in obedience to the commandments of Scripture. James in this passage calls it “the perfect law of liberty” (1:25). “Perfect” means that it is complete in itself. We do not need anything beyond the Word to enable us to attain and maintain “pure religion.” It is a “law” (not speaking only of the Mosaic law, but of all the Word of God) because we are under an obligation to obey His Word. And it is “liberty” because there is freedom to be found in obeying the Lord, freedom from being dominated by sin, and free to live a life that is pleasing to the Lord.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 2

III. BE HOLY (James 1:9-3:12).

A. In departing from sin through obedience to the Word (James 1:19-27).

B. In dealing with people--the rich and the poor (James 2:1-13).

This is not the first time that the subject of the rich and the poor has come up in this Epistle. Cf. 1:9-11. Nor was it to be the last. Cf. 5:1-6.

It was a subject that came up in the teachings of our Lord when He, e.g., warned against "the deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22).

The Psalmists warned against trusting in riches. Solomon warned against riches in the Book of Proverbs. The prophets of the OT warned against riches. Cf. Jer. 9:23, 24.

The Apostle Paul probably made the most sweeping indictment found anywhere in Scripture against riches. He said this:

For the love of money is the root of all evil:

which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:10).

Somewhere, in connection with all sin, we find "the love of money" involved. That is a statement worth thinking about. It has been responsible for murder, for the spread of prostitution and drugs. It is one reason that men seek political power.

At least two of the Ten Commandments were directed against "the love of money": #8 and #10 -- the commandments against stealing and coveting.

It is truly amazing that, after all of the instruction that is given about riches in the Scriptures, James would have to add even more. And it would seem from his repetition of references to money, that it was a major problem in the Early Church!

But let us remember, at the same time, that it is not "money" that is "the root of all evil," but "**the love of money.**" Being rich is no sin if those riches have been gained honestly and honorably, and are being used as a stewardship from God. Riches are not to be the object of our faith, but they often are the reward of hard work--although they are not to be the reason for which we work, i.e., to become rich! It was when Solomon chose wisdom above everything else, that God promised him that which he had not asked for, namely, "riches, and honour" (1 Kings 3:13).

However, in this problem between the rich and the poor, which basically is a social problem, we recognize a larger problem. And that is the problem of prejudice. A prejudice is a bias. It is a pre-judgment which we are all inclined to exercise--some in one direction; others in another direction--but without sufficient reason or knowledge. We have personal prejudices; we like some people more than we do others. We have social prejudices. We have racial prejudices. We have religious prejudices. We have nationalistic prejudices. We have age prejudices.

We have sexual prejudices. The human heart is continually giving expression to prejudices of many different kinds. This is the larger problem, still with us today, of which the conflict between the rich and the poor is but one illustration.

So, as we deal with this problem, let us learn what we can about the same problem in its other manifestation, and recognize that what we are actually dealing with is sin in the human heart.

Let us notice also this other thing.

James spoke of this problem as showing "respect of persons." See vv. 1, 3, 9.

This is a term which speaks of favoring someone, or of showing partiality toward someone. And in most instances, this is done because the person showing such respect feels that he (or she) can profit from that other person for doing so. Verse 1 gives us the noun; verse 9 gives us the verb; verse 3 uses a different word which simply mean to look upon, but the idea is that of looking upon that person with favor or partiality.

This is the way we are! Let us not deny it. We all have our prejudices. It is deeply rooted within us. Unfortunately, we are not prejudiced toward that which is good, but we are always inclined to go in the wrong direction. Our prejudices get us into trouble. And it is especially bad when "respect of persons" gets into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this was the concern that James had! Where there is the kind of prejudice that James was talking about, the fellowship of the saints is affected, and the church's testimony to the world is greatly hindered.

James' solution was not a protest against the rich. It was not some kind of civil disobedience. It was not the formation of some kind of a committee to study the problem and bring a recommendation to the church. James attacked the problem with his teaching, and sought to minister to both the poor and the rich to help them to understand the problem, and to solve it.

We can learn a lot from our Bibles about how the Apostles sought to deal with problems which we are still facing today.

2:1 "My brethren" -- here; in v. 5, "my beloved brethren." And then he used "my brethren" again in v. 14 as he took up another subject. Remember that we have this fifteen times in this Epistle.

It is a family word. It is a loving word. It is a word which says, "We are all facing this problem together. It is not just your problem, or just mine; it is our problem." When we deal with the problems of the saints, let us never lose sight of the fact that we are "brethren," and we ought to consider each other as "beloved brethren."

The Greek order of the words is like this:

My brethren, NOT with respect of persons hold the faith
of our Lord, Jesus Christ,
(the One, or the Lord [understood]) of glory.

Let me try to put all of that together as I understand it.

"The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ" is not the faith which our Lord

had, nor is it the faith which he exercised, but "the faith" is an expression in the NT which stands for the truth of the NT. But it can be expanded to include the truth of all of Scripture as it was held to be binding upon the people of God in the Church. "The faith" is the doctrine of Scripture. It is the Bible, the truth we are to believe, and, as James had just emphasized, the truth which we are to obey. I read many years ago, and I cannot remember where, that one writer said that the truth must be believed, and it must be behaved!

Now the way we "have," or hold "the faith of our Lord, Jesus Christ," is the way we show in our lives the effect of the truth that we believe. Remember that most people never read the Bible. They do not have any idea of what the Bible teaches. But they get their impression of the teaching of Scripture from the lives of those of us who know the Lord. And so people will only be able to conclude that, if the Church shows itself to be a "respector of persons," then the Lord must be a "respector of persons"!

In the original Greek, as I have tried to bring out, the words, "the Lord," in the phrase, "the Lord of glory," are not in the original. All the original gives us are the words, "of glory," which undoubtedly means "the Lord of glory," but it is perhaps even more emphatic with just those two words, "of glory"! Many feel that James was here identifying our Lord Jesus Christ with the Shekinah Glory of the Tabernacle in the OT. That James was speaking here, not of the Lord's presence in the Tabernacle, but of His presence in the Church--just as real, although not made known in the same way. But the point would have been even more impressive because that one, "our Lord, Jesus Christ," positively identified now, was more than ever "the Lord of glory." He had entered into His glory, as the Lord Himself said that He must in Luke 24:26. But, being "the Lord of glory," it was possible for Him not only to be in heaven, at the right hand of the Father, but on the earth, with His Church, present with His people, seeing what they were doing, and being either pleased or displeased by the conduct of His people!

So, what was James saying?

He was telling those believers to whom he was writing that they could not, they must not, act as respector of persons in their meetings because the Lord was with them, watching them, and that He did not want His Word to be treated in that way!

The truth of the presence of the Lord should be a source of great comfort to us, but it should also be one of the greatest restraints we have upon us to keep us from error in any form.

We are coming in this chapter, the latter part, to a section dealing with the Gospel, and the place of works in salvation. But what James was saying in the first thirteen verses of this chapter was actually leading up to that, as we shall see. We even have some references to the Gospel here. And it can be stated this way: The world could say, "IF THE CHURCH SHOWS RESPECT FOR A MAN'S PERSON, THEN THAT MUST BE TRUE OF GOD ALSO, AND SO IT IS EASIER AND MORE LIKELY THAT A RICH MAN WILL BE SAVED, THAN THAT A POOR MAN WILL BE SAVED"--when actually the Lord said how hard it was for a rich man to be saved. Cf. Luke 18:24, 25 where we have the story of the rich, young ruler.

So, do you see what being a "respector of persons" teaches? It cuts away at the very roots of salvation--that salvation is by grace alone!

If the rich man given preferential treatment in the church, then God must feel that way about him, too.

But apparently these people were strong in teaching the grace of God in salvation, and so we assume from verses 2-4 that James knew that they would come back at him with a denial like this: "We are not showing respect for persons. We welcome the rich and the poor. Why are you so concerned about a problem that does not exist. We believe in the grace of God!"

Verses 2-4 show us what James had reference to.

2:2 Two men come into church. One is very obviously rich; the other very obviously is not rich.

You did not have to know the rich man to be able to tell that he was rich; he looked rich. He had a gold ring. The poor man had no ring. The rich man had "goodly apparel," meaning bright and shining, costly, expensive.

The poor man only had "vile raiment." It was old, worn out, and dirty. It was probably hard to be near him--like some bum off of skid row.

2:3 Both were welcomed. Neither was turned away. But the rich man was treated with real honor; the poor man, tolerated, but very obviously not as welcome.

These two men represented the two extremes of society: the very high, and the very low. The description of the poor man portrays him as one who was extremely poor. One was given the best seat; the other was told to stand, or to sit on the floor (which seems to be the meaning of the expression, "or sit here under my footstool").

The people could have argued that both men were welcomed. It is not indicated that the rich man demanded the treatment that he received. Nor is it indicated that the poor man was surprised by the way that he was treated. James was focusing attention on the church, and her attitude.

2:4 Their actions were the result of their thinking, and James identified their thinking as "evil." So the problem was not with the rich man. It is good that he came to the service. Nor was the problem with the poor man. It is good that he came. The problem was with the church, with the Lord's people. And what they were doing was showing that their hearts were not right with the Lord, nor with men.

This is true of all of us. We set ourselves up as judges, but instead of letting our judgments be guided by the Word of God, they reflect the natural tendency we have toward prejudices that are evil. Cf. what our Lord said in Mark 8:20-23:

And he said, That which cometh out of the man,
that defileth the man.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed **evil thoughts**,
adulteries, fornications, murders,
Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness,
an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:

All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.

Remember: In this section we are dealing with holiness. When we judge

our lives by the Word of God, we are made conscious that we have sins in our lives that we have never paid any attention to. To think "evil thoughts" is certainly sin, but who would classify such action in the church as the result of evil thinking?

1/17/89

2:5 At this point James added to the argument he had already given in verse 4 to show that what they were doing was wrong. There are four of them. He enlarged on the fourth, and then drew his conclusion in verse 12 and 13.

"Hearken" -- How easy it is to listen without really hearing! How easy it is to listening without really understanding! How easy it is to listen without making the needed application to ourselves!

There are similarities, and there are contrasts in our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 1 and 2, but there is one phrase that is found in all of the seven letters. It is this:

He that hath an ear, let him hear
what the Spirit saith unto the churches
(Rev. 2:7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

Whenever you come to the word, "Hearken," or, "Behold," or expressions like that in Scripture, ask yourself, "Am I really hearing what the Lord was saying here?" You will notice that that statement to which I have just referred in Revelation 2 and 3 indicated that, while the people of each church were to hear what the Lord was saying to them, yet they were all to listen also to what He was saying to the other "churches"!

One good question for all of us to ask when confronted with a problem of any kind is this: WHAT WOULD THE LORD DO IN THIS SITUATION? And then look in the Word to find your answer. James had said that the Lord of glory was there with them just as He dwelt in the Tabernacle in the wilderness--only they had a greater access to His presence than Israel did in those days. If, (or, Since) then, He is present, do what He would do!

And so how did James find an answer?

He looked at what God did in salvation. What did God do?

Now here is one of many times in which it is absolutely necessary to be right in your thinking about salvation. If you are wrong, if you think that salvation is the result of man initiating his relationship to God by the exercise of His own will, or that salvation for people is dependent primarily upon how diligent Christians are in getting people to profess faith in Christ, then you are not going to appreciate this reason. But if, on the other hand, you know that "salvation is of the Lord," and that we do not come of our own so-called "free will" (which is not actually "free"), but we come to Christ when we are sovereignly and effectively called by God. And He only calls in this way those whom He has chosen.

Read verse 5.

I think that one of the reasons Paul called these people, "my **beloved** brethren," was because he knew how dear they were to the Lord. They were the Lord's chosen people--not as a nation, but individually.

When you look at the Lord's people, how you classify them when it comes to those who are rich, and those who are not rich? None of us look like we are poor, but we all have to be careful with the money that the Lord has given to us. But, as you look through a list of the wealthiest people in the world, you find very few (thank God, there are some)--but you find very few who even profess to be Christians.

How would you classify your church, the work of the Lord today?

Why is the Lord's work this way? Is it by chance? Is it just that poor people seem to be more receptive to the Gospel than rich people are?

We are seeing, as we look at the true Church in any generation, those whom God has chosen! The Church never has been the way it is as far as its constituency is concerned, just by chance. We look at the Church, and we see the elect of God.

You and I might have done things differently, but the Lord did not ask us. Salvation is His work, not ours! He has the perfect right to do it His way, or not to do it at all!

Why are there people who are very poor in the church? Because God has chosen them. They are in the fold not only by a divine invitation, but by a divine calling. And that is the case with rich Christians. They did not get in because of their riches; they are in because they, too, were sovereignly chosen and called by God.

Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-31, noting that not all are chosen and called, but that some are.

James' question is not, "Hath God chosen?" His question is, "Has He chosen the poor . . . ?"

As you would look over the congregation of people (or congregations) who first received this Epistle, how many rich people do you think you would see? Probably NONE! Maybe some had been rich at one time, but now they had nothing! Did God love them more when they were rich than He loved them as poor? Obviously not!

God had chosen the poor. The poor saints may not have had much money, but they were "rich in faith." They were "heirs of the kingdom." They loved God, and that could never have been said about them if they had not loved the Lord Jesus Christ also.

Let me contrast for you the church at Smyrna (Rev. 2:9) and the church at Laodicea (Rev. 3:17). One was a poor rich church, but the other was a rich poor church. It is far better to be rich spiritually, but poor materially, than to be rich materially, but poor spiritually.

2:6 But then James pointed out how much in contrast their actions had been with the Lord's. Oh, they had let him stay in their meeting, but they actually wished that he had never come. Perhaps he would be the reason that the rich man would not stay.

It is so easy for us to lose sight of the Lord and His will in our dealings with people. "Despised" -- means that they did not honor those whom the Lord honors. They would not have known which man had been chosen by God, but it was far more likely that He had chosen the poor man rather than the rich. Therefore, they needed to await the

manifestation of God's will, and highly esteem them both on the basis that they both might be chosen of God.

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From the poor, James at this point turned to the rich. And he asked two questions. The first question is at the end of this sixth verse. (Read.)

"Oppress" -- means that they used their power against the poor.

Lenski (on James, p. 568) pointed out that the Roman government allowed rich Jews of the Dispersion to have a great deal of control over their own people. This was true even in Israel. The Sadducees were the main tyrants, and an illustration of how vicious the powerful and rich Jews were could be seen in the authority which was given to Saul of Tarsus to go to Damascus, and to bring Christian Jews bound back to Jerusalem. Many of the Christian Jews died at this time. The rich Jews were worse tyrants than the Romans in many instances. Weymouth translated "oppress" as grinding you down! "Draw you before the judgment seats" is an expression that speaks of force and violence.

So if they had any reason to be suspicious of anyone, it was the rich; not the poor.

Rich people do not always do these things, but it was especially true of the Jews to whom James was writing.

2:7 The second question.

This question makes it clear that James was speaking of rich people, especially rich Jews, who did not know the Lord. "That worthy name" was, of course, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They showed nothing but contempt for the Lord, ridiculing Him, saying that He was an impostor and not the Person He claimed to be.

So the part of wisdom whenever a rich man came into their assembly was to question why he was there. Did he know the Lord? Was he seeking the Lord? Or was he there to find out who all was there so he could take action against them. However, even he must be treated with cordiality and respect.

"That worthy name" -- an expression which means that the Lord Jesus lived up to His Name, that outwardly and inwardly He was all that He claimed to be. Bullinger translated this word _____ morally excellent, worthy of the recognition that was given to Him, good, excellent. A person's name is really all that he has. Solomon said,

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
and loving favour rather than silver and gold (Prov. 22:1).

So the worst that men could do to our Lord was to blaspheme His Name. And this they did in any many ways as they possibly could.

2:8 James comes to a very important point in this verse, and it occupies his attention down to the end of this section in v. 13.

IT IS THIS: THEIR ACTIONS HAD TO BE EXAMINED IN THE LIGHT OF THE WORD OF GOD. There are many principles and commandments that are the same in the OT and in the NT, and, if there is any difference, it is usually that the commandments are made even stronger in the NT. Concerning the commandment to love which James mentioned in this verse, we have the

teaching of our Lord in which the commandment was given even greater force than in the OT. Cf. Matt. 5:43-48. (Read.) Note also John 13:34, 35.

The important thing for every Christian to keep in mind is that he must live according to the Word of God. To do so, is to "do well"; not to do so, is to sin. Cf. v. 9.

Why did James call the Law, "(the) royal law"? It surely is a Law that is fit for kings to follow? It is royal in its quality because it has come from the Sovereign over all men, from God Who has the right to determine how all men should live--and to see that it is obeyed. It is "royal" because it is supreme over all other laws. We are to be subject to the laws of the nation under which we were born and in which we live. But, should there come the time when the law of the nation conflicts with the Law of God, we must "obey God rather than men," as Peter said, according to Acts 5:29.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" is a quotation from Lev. 19:18. The Lord Jesus cited this as the second most important commandment in the Law. Cf. Matt. 22:39. It was second only to the commandment to love God with all of our heart, soul, and mind. And the Lord said that all of the Word hangs on these two commandments, which is what James was getting ready to say. These two commandments are the reason for all of the rest. All of the Law can be summed up as being represented by these two commandments. Break either one of these commandments, and the rest of the Law is also broken.

So, although they Christians in those days were having trouble with the rich, they were to love them. And, although the poor might not be to their liking, they were to love them also.

Paul said in Gal. 5:14,

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this;
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Contrary to what we are being told today, neither James, nor Paul, nor Moses, nor our Lord, ever indicated that we need to learn to love ourselves. This goes along with our philosophy of self-worth, self-love, and all of the other man-centered ridiculous trash that is being given out today as Christian teaching. WE DO LOVE OURSELVES. WE LOVE OURSELVES VERY MUCH. We take care of ourselves. We feed ourselves. We protect ourselves. We clothe ourselves. We are interested in how things are going to affect us.

Now to love our neighbour, those around us, as we love ourselves, means that we need to seek their welfare. We need to be concerned about them. We need to do what we can to help them, to protect them, to warn them when necessary, to give them direction. We do all of that for our children--Why? Because we love them.

And, if we love other people, we are going to put them ahead of ourselves if the need should require it, and love our neighbor for a time more than we love ourselves. Take those wonderful words in 1 Cor. 13:4-8a if you want a Biblical definition of love. And there is no greater love that has ever been seen than the love the Lord manifested for us when He died on the Cross. Remember that our Lord said,

Greater love hath no man than this,
that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13).

When the Lord was asked by the Lawyer when they were talking about these two commandments, "And who is my neighbour?", he told him the parable of the Good Samaritan. Cf. Luke 10:25-37.

2:9 Love is no respecter of persons. If we love people because they love us, or if we love them because they love us, or because we feel that they can help us, then we are showing partiality, and this is sin. And it is sin because it is in violation of the will of God which He has revealed in his word. And this makes it a transgression.

Transgression literally means stepping beyond. It is departing from the will of God. This is sin. The Law convicts the sinner.

2:10 Here James stated an important principle of Scripture. (Read.)

Alexander Ross, in his commentary on James (p. 49), quoted these words from Dean Farrar:

To break one commandment is to break all, for it is to violate the principle of obedience, just as it matters not at what particular point a man breaks his way out of an enclosure, if he is forbidden to go out of it at all.

Probably all of us have closed our eyes to some "small" acts of disobedience on the ground that, as far as most of our life is concerned, we are trying to obey God. But in v. 8 James said that God is concerned that we "fulfil the royal law," and this means that we are to be satisfied with nothing less than complete obedience to all of the Word of God. God will not be bought off by much obedience so we can indulge in one or two acts of disobedience.

2:11 Here James used an illustration. (Read.)

He could have reversed his commandments. Or he could have used two other commandments. The point is: The Law has been violated. We do not excuse a criminal because he is a murderer, but hasn't done anything else wrong. He is a law-breaker, and must pay the penalty. (At least he should if our laws were what they should be.)

Lenski used this illustration: He said that you do not have to touch a high-powered wire in more than one place to get a full shock from all of the electricity that is in that line.

2:12 Therefore, we can come to only one conclusion, and James stated it for us here in this verse. IN ALL THAT WE SAY, AND IN ALL THAT WE DO, WE HAD BETTER MAKE SURE THAT WE ARE LIVING ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF GOD, BECAUSE THE DAY IS COMING WHEN WE ARE TO "BE JUDGED BY THE LAW OF LIBERTY."

Here James gave the Word of God another name: "the law of liberty." What did he mean by this?

He could not have meant the Mosaic Law because that was not a "law of liberty." When the Judaizing teachers were trying to put the Galatians back under the Mosaic Law, Paul wrote this to them in Gal. 5:1:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty
wherewith Christ hath made us free,
and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

What was the yoke of bondage? It was the Mosaic Law. This was apparent also from what Peter said at the Council in Jerusalem where this very

matter was being discussed: Were the Gentiles going to be forced to submit to the Mosaic Law--and it had to do in particular with circumcision? In Acts 15:10 we have Peter's words:

Now therefore why tempt ye God,
to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples,
which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.

And then he went on to say in verse 11,
But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
we shall be saved, even as they.

Add to all of this the fact that in 2:1 James indicated that he was talking about "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," which is the Gospel. In 1:18 he spoke of "the word of truth" by which we are born again. That certainly was the Gospel, not the Law. And where is the promise that James mentioned in 1:12 if it is not in the Gospel?

In addition, turn to Jer. 31:31-34.

The Lord said in John 8:32,

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

And then He followed this in v. 36 with these words:

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

It is the Gospel which is "the law of liberty." In 1:25 he called it, "the perfect law of liberty." It is called "the law" because, as James said in this 12th verse, it is the standard by which we are to be judged. It is binding upon all men to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." And when people believe, they are set free--free from condemnation, free from the bondage of sin, free to obey God from the heart. There is no freedom comparable to the freedom a sinner experiences when he comes to Christ!

And so our talk and our walk must always be in harmony with the Gospel of the grace of God. Rom. 8:2 teaches us,

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus

hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Oh, how important it is for us to know the Word, and to live by the Word!

2:13 James was sounding another note here that is needed today, and one that is found throughout the Word. It is this: Failure to "speak" (v. 12) and "do" (v. 12) according to the Gospel in present and continuous way, are manifesting that they are not truly saved. There may be temporary failures and lapses in the life of a Christian, but no true believer will be satisfied to be, as in the case James was speaking about, a respecter of persons. Those who are without Christ will find in the day when they stand before the Lord that they will be "without mercy." The full judgment of God will be executed against them because of their sin.

On the other hand, "mercy rejoiceth against judgment." There will be no such judgment for the man in Christ. Because of the grace of God, he can laugh at judgment. The only way to be secure from eternal judgment is to be trusting for salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOW ALL OF THIS LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE NEXT SECTION WHICH IS THAT WE NEED TO BE HOLY . . .

C. In showing our faith by our works (James 2:14-26).

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 2 -- Part 2

III. BE HOLY (James 1:19-3:12).

- A. In departing from sin through obedience to the Word
(James 1:19-27).
- B. In dealing with people--the rich and the poor
(James 2:1-13).
- C. In showing our faith by our works (James 2:14-26).

Here James continued to emphasize the importance of being doers of the Word. This has been the most controversial part of the Epistle of James because some have accused him of teaching salvation by works. That seems to be the risk that any person runs when he insists, as James did, that true faith will result in a changed life! And James is not alone in this teaching. Paul certainly was teaching this in Romans 6, in Galatians (where he was opposing salvation by works, and yet insisting upon a changed life), and in 2 Cor. 5:17! The whole first Epistle of John is devoted to this truth. Our Lord taught this many places. Cf. Matt. 7:16-20, concluding with the statement, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

We are living in a day when the Church is in dire need of this teaching. Our methods of getting people to make professions of faith has caused many teachers not only to be silent about this, but they have opposed any insistence that "faith without works" is not true faith at all. There are thousands of people in our day who claim to be Christians, but who show no evidence that they have been transformed. They may be moral people, but they are not godly people. It is impossible to get many professing Christians interested in the Word. They do not look for churches where they can be taught; they look for churches where they can be entertained, and where the church can take over the work with their families that they ought to be doing in their own homes. Certainly one of the greatest needs of our day is for a lot of church members to be saved. Men will be elected to church boards who are not saved. The fact that many people cannot be convinced by the Word of God concerning the needs in their own lives, or problems in the church, is evidence that we need the teaching of James in our churches today.

Paul had a co-worker by the name of Demas. In his last letter to Timothy Paul said this: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10a). James wrote in 4:4,

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not
that friendship with the world is enmity with God?
whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world
is the enemy of God.

And the Apostle John wrote,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.
If any man love the world,
the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

Speaking of particular sins, the Apostle Paul was just as definite when he wrote these words in 1 Cor. 6:9, 10:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit
the kingdom of God? Be not deceived:

neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,
 nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers,
 nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Today we water down verses like these. But they are true. They are very strong, and they teach us truth which we desperately need to recognize. If we did, our churches would not be in the sad state that they are in. The truth of Scripture can be summarized like this: It is impossible for a person to be saved and not have his life changed. There are certain evidences that we need to look for, evidences that are given in Scripture. And, if those evidences are not there, that person is not saved.

But let us look into the way in which James deals with this.

2:14 "What doth is profit . . . ?" This question is repeated at the end of verse 16. "Profit" is a word which means, How is a person helped, or of what advantage to him is such a faith? And James has in mind, salvation! Is he saved by claiming to believe in Christ even though the works are not there?

Perhaps some of the difficulty that people have with James is due to the fact that they do not understand the Biblical idea of "works." The illustrations that James used in this passage (the professing Christian who meets a brother or sister who needs clothing and food, Abraham and Isaac, Rahab and the spies) show that James was not talking about being a Sunday School teacher, or a pastor, or an elder or a deacon. He was talking about the way we live, the love that we have for each other, the limits to which we will go to obey the Lord, the risks that we will take in order to protect the people of God. OUR WORKS ARE THE THINGS WE DO THROUGHOUT THE DAY, THE WAY WE LIVE! OUR WORKS ARE TO BE SEEN IN THE LOVE WE SHOW, IN THE WAY WE AVOID SIN, IN THE WAY WE SEEK TO PLEASE GOD. to be sure, preaching, and teaching, and serving in our churches, are included, too. But the emphasis in the word "works" is upon the way we live. And these are the things that show what we are!

Notice that again we have those words, "my brethren." James did not hesitate to address himself to the people of God on this issue. If they were saved, they could be encouraged because of the evidences of salvation in their lives. If they were not saved, they needed to be awakened to the fact that they needed to be saved.

And so, when James mentioned "faith," he was not talking about merely subscribing to a doctrinal statement, nor just agreeing to the principles and practices of the church (although those things are important). But such a limited idea of "faith" is not the true idea, and that kind of faith is not saving faith. We will see later in this passage how James brought this out.

2:15, 16 Notice that James was speaking primarily about "a brother or sister." That is, he was speaking about believers who were in need.

Let me say a word about this because of the many people there are around us today who are in need. Churches are bombarded with phone calls and appeals of all kinds for help. And if you have had much to do with some of these people, you know that many of them are professional beggars, and they are working society for everything that they can get. There

are many who have lost their jobs and have had serious reverses in their lives, but too often we find that drugs, and drinking, and licentious living have contributed to their downfall. Often crimes have been committed. Some people will not work if they have the opportunity, or they won't take a job unless the pay they get is a lot more than they can get on welfare or unemployment. I firmly believe that what we are seeing today in our cities is to a great extent the fruit of our godlessness, and has come upon us as a judgment from God. Most people do not want spiritual help; they want money!

I believe that James was speaking especially about people in the church who are in need--other Christians who need food and clothing, people who are known to have legitimate needs. And there were plenty of people like that in the early Church.

You will remember that Paul was involved in getting money for the needy saints in Jerusalem. The first deacons were appointed to take care of the widows in the Church. James described "pure religion" in the last verse of chapter 1. It does not mean that we should not be concerned about others, and help where we can, BUT THE CHURCH THAT TRIES TO BECOME A SOCIAL AGENCY TO FEED AND HOUSE THE POOR OF OUR WORLD WILL SOON BECOME A CHURCH THAT HAS LITTLE OR NO TIME TO DO WHAT SHE IS SUPPOSED TO DO.

Our first responsibility is to our own people.

If one of them is in need, and we do nothing to help. We just tell them to go, and even pray that they will be fed and clothed, but do not do anything to help them, of what value is it going to be for us to boast that we are trusting in Christ? John, the Apostle, wrote in 1 John 3:14,

We know that we have passed from death to life,
because we love the brethren.

He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

The way in which a person responds to human needs, true legitimate needs, is an indication of his character, but the way in which he responds to a believer in trouble is an evidence of the reality, or lack of reality, of his faith.

And so James drew a conclusion:

2:17 One writer has said, " . . . a dead branch fails to show life by not bearing fruit" (Lenski, p. 580).

James was not saying that our faith is not valid until we do some works, but he was saying that faith and works go together. They are inseparable. Wherever you find one, you find the other. Sometimes you find people who are very busy, and who think that their works will stand in the place of faith. They may be doing a lot of good things, but they do not claim to trust in Christ for salvation. They may not even believe that salvation from sin is even necessary, or that Christ came to be a Savior. The works of such people are nothing but dead works, and will mean nothing to them in that day when they stand before the Lord.

It seems that James was talking about such a person in:

2:18 It seems that the idea is this verse is that, while James is discussing the importance of works accompanying faith, and he is speaking to a certain person, someone else comes along and says to the

man who does not have works, "You have faith, but I (James said of himself) have works."

It is as though this man was saying that James was concerned about works, but the one to whom James was talking claimed to have faith, and so he was telling this man that he should not let James disturb him. And then he might say something like this: "After all, if you claim to be a Christian, that is all that matters. Let James say all that he wants to about works, we are not saved by works, but by faith. So, if you have faith, don't worry; your faith will get you to heaven."

There are always people in the church like this. Sometimes preachers talk like this. They may try to assure a woman that her son is a Christian because he "accepted Christ" as a child--even though that son is now in his thirties and has never lived like a Christian. In fact, his life has been lived in gross sin!

And so James said: "Shew me thy faith without works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works." There will always be people who will argue against what James was teaching here, but James was not going to give ground to anyone on this important point. The evidence of salvation may not be all that we would like for it to be, but it will be there if we really have been saved, and if Christ is actually our Savior.

"Shew," or show, means to demonstrate, to prove, to cause it to be seen. Faith without works is just talk, or talk accompanied with morality, decency, and respectability (and often with not much of these), but not with godly living. There is a difference, a vast difference, between being good in the eyes of men as compared with being good in the sight of God.

2:19 Here James takes up the doctrinal side. The person under question believes that there is one God, or that God is one. This is certainly a basic tenet of the Christian faith. Paul expressed it in Eph. 4:6 like this:

One God and Father of all, who is above all,
and through all, and in you all.

Every Christian agrees with that teaching. But that does not make anyone a Christian. Why? Because demons believe this! They have no question in their minds about whether or not there are many gods. Their understanding on this point is perfect. BUT YOU NEVER HEARD OF A DEMON WHO WAS SAVED. AND YET THEY ALL BELIEVE THIS!

James commended the man because he believed this. We should never make light of the truth even when it is confessed by those who are not saved. But James went on to say that the demons who believe in the unity of the Godhead, or that God is the only God, do something that this particular unbeliever never did. They "tremble." This truth strikes them with fear because they know that some day they are going to stand before Him and face certain judgment. The truth can lull men to sleep, but it greatly disturbs the demons of hell! It is when a believer comes to realize the glorious truths concerning God that, instead of being indifferent about his life, he seeks to do all that he can to please God.

2:20 James here makes his appeal to the man who has apparently been convinced by the one who has been talking to him, that his faith is true faith. If the demons believe, but are not saved, then is it not possible that people can have that kind of faith and yet not be saved.

True faith changes one's life, is the evidence of an inner transformation which is the work of God. But this man is a "vain man," an empty man, empty because he is proud, unrepentant, devoid of spiritual life, "without Christ." "Know" is a word which means that what James wanted to see was evidence that this man understood that what James was saying was indeed the truth. "O man" showed James' deep concern. This was no insignificant matter. This meant the difference between eternal life and eternal death. And again we can see that a person can be very orthodox in what he believes, and yet not be a child of God.

The chapter concludes with two illustrations: one from the life of Abraham; the other from the life of Rahab. One was a Jew; the other was a Gentile. One was a man; the other was a woman. The man demonstrated his faith by what he did with his son; the woman demonstrated her faith by what she did for two strangers. But one thing both Abraham and Rahab had in common was that they were ancestors of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh: Abraham by blood; Rahab by marriage. She was the mother of Boaz, the great grandfather of David, the king.

1/31/89

2:21 The example of Abraham in Genesis 22 when God called upon him to offer Isaac as a sacrifice.

It is interesting to see how often the truth of the NT is confirmed by the writers of the NT in their references to the OT. Paul referred to Abraham in Romans and Galatians is proving that justification is by faith; James takes him as an example that we are also justified by works. How can we reconcile this two teachings which seem to be so contrary to each other?

The answer is very simple. We are justified by God when our faith is in our Lord and His work on our behalf at the Cross. But people cannot see our hearts. They can hear what we say, but it is the evidence in our lives that will show them that Christ is really our Savior. So Abraham was showing by his willingness to offer up Isaac that he loved the Lord, that he would do whatever was necessary to prove that love, and that he, as the writer of Hebrews wrote (Heb.11:19), he did so:

Accounting that God was able to raise him up,
even from the dead,
from whence also he received him in a figure.

And the writer of Hebrews in Heb.11:17 said that Abraham did that "by faith." It was a work of faith. The genuineness of his faith was shown by his work in sacrificing Isaac. Thus there was evidence for all to see that Abraham was justified. They declared him to be righteous.

2:22 This and the next verse really give us the gist of what James was saying.

Works were not added to faith, but Abraham's faith showed itself by his works. And so it was "by faith" that he did what he did with Isaac.

To speak of Abraham's faith being "made perfect," did not, and does not, mean that Abraham was not fully saved until he offered up Isaac. What it means is that with that act we see the full evidence that his faith was true faith. If Abraham had failed in the area of works, it would have meant that his faith was dead because it was by itself; it would have had no works. So the picture is complete with Isaac's sacrifice.

Neither does it mean that we have no works from Abraham before Genesis 22. Genesis 22 was the climactic test of Abraham's life, and it stands out above and beyond all of the other works that Abraham was a man just before God.

2:23 Not only was Abraham's faith confirmed by his works, but the Scriptural doctrine of justification by faith was made complete. And we can say that the Scriptural declaration made in Genesis 15:6 was proved. Abraham would never have done what he did if he had not been a child of God.

We see, then, that the OT taught with regard to salvation exactly what James was teaching. It may not have been spelled out in the OT as clearly as James was making it, but the evidence was there in the life of Abraham nevertheless, and the Spirit of God used James to bring all of the truth together for us.

This is often the purpose of the NT: to interpret for us the teaching of the OT.

We have been talking about Genesis 22. Before that, in Genesis 15 (verse 6) we have the declaration:

Abraham believed God,
and it was imputed to him for righteousness.

(This verse is also quoted in Rom. 4:3 and Gal. 3:6.) But we need to recognize that Abraham did not make himself justified in God's sight by his faith any more than he did by his works. God imputed righteousness to him, God placed that to his account in the heavenly records. Both by Abraham's faith and by his works God was acknowledging what he had done for Abraham. We learn from Eph. 2:8, 9 that even our faith is a gift from God. So with Abraham, as with us, he was not justified because his faith was a meritorious act deserving salvation, but it was "because of the value of what he embraced by believing" (Lenski, Hebrews and James, p. 594).

And so "he (Abraham) was called the Friend of God." Cf. 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8. He did not call himself, "the Friend of God"; that was what God called him! Cf. what the Lord said in John 15:14,

Ye are my friends,
if ye do whatsoever I command you.

Obedience to God is evidence of our justification by God and before God.

2/6/89

Thomas Manton, one of the Puritans, has some very enlightening points concerning that it means that God and Abraham were friends. He wrote that that statement means:

- 1) They were friends because they had been perfectly reconciled to each other by the future sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham, like each one of us, was born at enmity with God; Christ, by His death, has made us friends.
- 2) They were friends because God was committed to turn all things to Abraham's good, and Abraham was committed to seek the glory of God in every event of his life.
- 3) They were friends because there was a sharing of secrets between the two. God had said, "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do?" Cf. Gen. 18:17. Our Lord said in John 15:15,
Henceforth I call you not servants;
for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth:
but I have called you friends;

for all things that I have heard
I have made known to you.

- 4) It is evident that they were friends because there was agreement between their affections and wills. This is brought out in that statement already referred to,
Ye are my friends

if ye do whatsoever I command you (John 15:14).

If we do otherwise, it is a betrayal of our friendship with the Lord. Manton mentioned that it was a commendation of the church at Ephesus that the Lord could say,

Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans,
which I also hate (Rev. 2:6).

And then Manton said this:

No friendship like that where we love and hate the same things, to hate what God hateth, and love what God loveth (Vol. 4, p. 259).

- 5) Their friendship meant that they delighted in each other. Listen to the way in which Manton expressed it:

. . . they delight in God, and God in them: Isa. lxii. 4, 'The Lord delighteth in thee,' in their persons, their graces, their duties; so do they delight in God, in their addresses to him (their prayers), in his fellowship and presence, they cannot brook (bear, tolerate, endure) any strangeness and distance; they cannot let a day pass, or a duty pass, without some communion and intercourse with God (Op. cit., pp. 259, 260).

- 6) The Lord's friendship with His people is shown by the special blessings which He daily confers upon them, blessings that the unregenerate know nothing about.

This truth ought to bring great comfort to all of our hearts, but it also should make us aware that our sins and failures affect the Lord more deeply than they do anyone else. How carefully and prayerfully we should walk so as to please God Whom we can call our "Friend."

David spoke of being betrayed by a friend, and his words were prophetic of what Judas was to do to the Lord:

Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted,
which did eat of my bread,
hath lifted up his heel against me (Psa. 41:9).

So we see in what Abraham did, even to his beloved son, how much he loved the Lord, showing himself to be the friend of God, and that God was his Friend--proof of his salvation.

2:24 James here drew a conclusion.

If our justification before God is genuine, the evidence of it, showing that we are not hypocrites, will be evident in our works. And works are not limited to what we call service, but have to do with all that has to do with the way we live day by day. Our life is our works.

So "justified" here means that he gave proof of his justification by what he did, and not just by any claim that he might have made with his mouth.

2:25 Here James began his second example: Rahab. The account regarding Rahab is found in Joshua 2.

Hebrews 11:31 says this:

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not
with them that believed not,
when she had received the spies with peace.

So this passage says that she was justified by faith; James said that she was justified by works. Which was right? Both of them. And it is not because justification is by faith and works, but because her behavior with the spies showed her faith. She had trusted in the God of Israel before the spies came, and so was justified. But the spies could see the evidence of her faith in the way she received them, protected them, and sent them safely away. The Greek would indicate that she hurried them off. There could have been no other explanation for her actions except that she was their sister in the faith.

Let me say again that it is impossible to be saved, and not to demonstrate it in some way.

It is true that in the course of protecting the spies, she lied. That does not justify her lie. It simply showed her immaturity in the faith, but God overruled, using even her lie for the safety of the spies and for the fulfillment of His plan for the people of Israel. Her faith may not have been strong, but, weak as it was, it still manifested itself in what Rahab did for the spies.

James may have mentioned that Rahab was a harlot, not to heap more shame upon Rahab, but to show that her salvation was by the grace of God. Her goodness to the spies could not atone for her past sins; they were too great. But what she did was the evidence that God, by His grace, had done a saving work in her heart.

So you have as proof of what James was teaching, a Jew and a Gentile, a man and a woman, a good person and a bad person. Both of them were saved by grace, believed in the Lord, and gave evidence of their faith by what they did.

2:26 Again we have a conclusion.

A lifeless body is like a work-less faith. A faith that does not manifest itself in good works is no faith at all. As repentance and faith are inseparable, so faith and works are inseparable. Where you find one, you will find the other. Either of them by themselves is not true faith, not true works.

Application: James had at least two reasons for dealing with this subject:

- 1) It was a problem to the Jewish believers of his day, and he wanted to clarify in their minds what true salvation is.
- 2) The very truth of salvation would cause those who first received this Epistle, as well as those who would read it later, to examine their own hearts to make sure that their profession of faith was a true profession.

And so we need to ask ourselves the question: Is this what I have understood salvation to be--not just a profession of faith, but a profession of faith in Christ which is confirmed by a changed life?

The emphasis today has been on the profession of faith, but not on the changed life. There are many, many people in our churches who give no

evidence that they are saved. It is impossible to get many of them to listen to the teaching of the Word of God. Many more, if they listen to it, never give it a thought as far as their lives are concerned. There are many who never read their Bibles, never pray, never show any concern for the glory of God, never show any concern for people who are without Christ. Sin is not a problem to them. They go on thinking the same way, talking the same way, living the same way that they did before they professed faith in Christ. They may in many respects try to be good people, but they are not holy people. And it was holiness that James wanted to see.

In short, James would say of such people that they are hypocrites. They claim to be one thing; they live in just the opposite way. And so the only conclusion that we can come to is that we have many professing Christians today who are not Christians at all. They may have their names on a church roll. But that does not save them. They may give their money to the church, but that does not save them. It does not even help in their salvation. They may try to live good, upright lives, but their supposed morality is not Biblical holiness. The life of a true Christian certainly is not perfect, but it is different, distinctively different. How we need an awakening today, and that awakening needs to start in our churches!

What James was really talking about was the perseverance of the saints.

Dr. John MacArthur has stirred up a hornets' nest among professing Christians by his new book, The Gospel According To Jesus. Many pastors, Seminary professors, and I am sure, evangelists, are very unhappy with John MacArthur's book. Why? Because he is teaching the very thing that James taught, that our Lord taught, that the Apostles Paul and John taught, truth which was established, as we have seen today, by the teaching of the OT. What is it? It is simply that if Jesus Christ is your Savior, he is also your Lord! It is incredible that this theme should cause so much adverse criticism. One reason that there is such an outcry is because it destroys the assurance that a lot of people have had, which Dr. MacArthur shows to be false assurance. People want to believe in security without perseverance.

Let me read the first couple of pages in Dr. MacArthur's book. You be the judge as to whether or not you think he is right. I firmly believe in what he says. (Read pp. 21-23.)

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 3

III. BE HOLY (James 1:19-3:12).

- A. In departing from sin through obedience to the Word (1:19-27).
- B. In dealing with people--the rich and the poor (2:1-13).
- C. In showing our faith by our works (2:14-26).
- D. In the use of the tongue (3:1-12).

It is good for us to notice that there is a connection between what James had been discussing at the end of chapter 2, and what we find here in chapter 3. His discussion of "works" led to his comments about words because words are works. Let me reiterate with you that "works" are not to be limited to what we think of when we think of service, but "works" include all that is included in our daily living: what we do as well as what we say. Here he was going to discuss teachers, and a teacher works with words, doesn't he?

But cf. also James 1:19. After writing that James began to deal with the phrase, "swift to hear." Lenski pointed out that a child of God who is careful to hear the Word of God, to learn the truth of God, generally will be inclined to bridle his tongue (1:26), will not mistreat the poor and cater to the rich (2:1-13), nor will he put a needy brother or sister off with just words (2:15, 16). But he will show by his life that his faith is a true faith. That brings us up to the end of chapter 2.

Now at the beginning of chapter 3 James began to deal with that second phrase of 1:19, "slow to speak." And so it can be said that the great mistake all of us are inclined to make is that we want to talk more than we want to listen.

There were two men in a church I was previously the pastor of, and one of them always had something to say about every subject that came up. You would think that he was an authority on every subject. He gave the impression that he knew it all. And so, when any subject came up, he took the floor, and rarely gave anyone else any time to say anything. One day the other man who obviously was tired of what this first man was doing, and so he said this: "How is it that you know so much when you never listen?"

Every Christian needs to be "swift to hear, slow to speak." That would be a good motto to put up somewhere in our homes where we could see it every day.

In chapter 3, verses 1-12, James dealt with the tongue, and this is an important part of holiness. Holiness not only includes what we do; it includes what we say. Salvation not only influences our walk, but it influences our talk.

3:1 The order of the Greek words is especially interesting. They would read like this:

Not many teachers become ye, my brethren,
knowing that greater judgment we shall receive.

It seems that James was talking about teaching the Word. This is done in our churches, but it can also be done in a conversation between two people. James' comment here would indicate that teaching is very serious business. God is greatly concerned about how His Word is taught. And He is greatly concerned about what is taught as His Word. Teachers can have a great deal of influence, and so they are going to be judged more closely and more severely than those who are not teachers. So, while it is important that we have teachers, yet NO ONE SHOULD SEEK TO MOVE INTO THAT PLACE IF HE HAS NOT BEEN CALLED OF GOD. Cf. Eph. 4:11. Christ gives us the teachers that He wants us to have, and all teaching should be under their oversight.

It is not true that any and everyone should be teaching. Perhaps James was indicating that there were men preaching and teaching in those days who had no right to be teaching, and their false teaching and empty messages showed that they were in the wrong place.

3:2 In this verse James makes one of the most illuminating statements to be found any place in Scripture. I refer to the second part of the verse.

But let us look at the first statement because it, too, is very enlightening. It should read, For in many things we all stumble, or fall. James was not only saying that we all sin, but we all sin in many different ways. This probably could be expanded to mean also that we all are continually failing even though sin may not always be involved.

How do we sin? We sin by not doing what we ought to do. We sin by doing what we ought not to do. We sin in our thoughts. We sin in the things that we do--where we go, what we look at, what we listen to, what we read, the way we behave or misbehave, and, of course, in the things that we say. Any person who says that he no longer sins is sinning when he says that because he is lying! We can even be guilty of sin when we do not realize that we are. We are all sinners by nature, and we are all sinners in action, often by choice.

No person can be truly saved and not be concerned about his sins. They grieve him. They discourage him. He longs for the day when he will no longer be able to sin. And he prays that the Lord will make him hate sin and love righteousness--hate the things which God hates, and love the things which God loves. It is said of our Lord in Heb. 1:9, quoting from Psa. 45:7,

Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity;
therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee
with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

If we are becoming like the Lord (and all true believers are), then we know what it is to have a desire to be like our Lord, to love righteousness, and to hate iniquity.

But where do we start in our battle against sin?

This is why I say that the second statement of this verse is one of the most important in all of Scripture for Christian living. Look at what James said. (Read Jas. 2:2b.)

James said here that if we are able to control our tongues, we will not have any trouble with the other parts of our bodies! What a statement! Do you believe it? You have to, because it is the Word of God. But it is hard to believe, isn't it?

James liked that word "bridle" in connection with the tongue and even the whole body, didn't he? Cf. 1:26; then 3:2; and it is a bridle that he was speaking of in 3:3.

A bridle is used with horses to control them. And this means not only to keep a horse from going where we do not want him to go, but it means guiding him where we want him to go.

So what we need with our tongues, with our bodies, is both control and guidance. Our tongues can be instruments of great sin, or they can be instruments of great blessing! We can dishonor God with our tongues, or we can glorify Him with our tongues. So we are not to despise our tongues. The cure for sin is not just negative, but it is negative and positive. We overcome evil with good.

Paul was saying this to the Ephesians when, in Eph. 5:4, he wrote that they were to have nothing to do with

. . . filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting,
which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks.

So the solution to the problem that we have with our tongues is not to stop talking altogether. God gave us tongues to use. Speech is a gift of God, a wonderful gift from God. No, the solution to our tongue problem is to learn, by the grace of God, to use it the right way.

And James says that controlling your tongue, using it properly, is the key to having your mind, your eyes, your ears, your heart, your hands, and your feet under control. And one thing is sure: You will never find a man or woman who is spiritually mature, who does not have his, or her, tongue under control.

Then James gave two illustrations:

1) Of a horse (v. 3).

2) Of a ship (v. 4).

And then he made the application in verse 5--and we see that he was thinking about the size of the tongue in proportion to the rest of the body.

3:3 As far as size is concerned, a bit is nothing in comparison with the size of a horse. And the man who is guiding the horse would never think of putting his strength against the strength of a horse. But when the rider puts the bit in horses mouth, then (in most instances) he can get the horse to take him wherever he wants to go. The whole body of the horse is under the control and direction of that little bit in his mouth.

3:4 The same is true of a ship.

The governor (meaning here the one who is steering the ship) has two problems. One is the size of the ship; the other is the force of the wind and the trouble that the wind causes in creating waves. The ship is certainly too big for him. And the winds are uncontrollable. The disciples were amazed at the Lord when He stopped the storm. They said,

What manner of man is this,

that even the winds and the sea obey him! (Matt.8:27b).

They were amazed at what he did.

The governor could not stop the wind nor the waves, and if he could, he could not have handled the ship by himself. But what did he have? He had a helm! What is a helm? It is the rudder, a piece of wood or metal

that extends vertically down into the water at the rear of a ship, and it is turned either by a wheel, or by a tiller which is a handle attached to the rudder that is capable of turning the ship from side to side, "whithersoever the governor listeth." "Listeth" is one of the Greek words which means, to will. So, wherever the one steering the ship, wants it to go, there it goes! So a big ship is controlled by a comparatively small instrument.

Now for the application:

3:5 The bridle and the helm are good illustrations of the tongue. The tongue also is a small instrument in comparison with rest of the body. It is smaller than the foot, or the hand. It is found inside of the head so that it can hardly be seen. In this respect, too, it is like the bridle and the rudder; one is in the horse's mouth, the other is in the water behind the ship. But what the bridle does to the horse, and what the rudder does to the ship, the tongue does to every man and woman and child. It determines where we are going, and whether that is good or bad.

So we must not be deceived by its small size. "Boasteth great things" means that it is capable of tremendous influence, just like the bridle and the helm, for good or for evil.

And then he gave a third illustration.

"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" That is like saying that you can start a fire with one match that will burn thousands of acres of forest. A match can start a fire that will quickly get completely out of control. It is the same idea: something little affects something else that is much larger. So it is with the tongue.

And then he made an application from that illustration.

3:6 One commentator has written, "Nothing stronger was ever said about the tongue" (Lenski, p. 605).

James had been emphasizing how small the tongue is. Here he spoke of it as "a world (a cosmos) of iniquity." It encompasses all iniquity. It gives expression to evil thoughts and emotions, and is capable of verbalizing evil deeds. It provokes sin, and aggravates sin. There is no other part of the body that is like it, none that could be described as James described the tongue here, none that is as capable of such a wide range of evil. (Adapted from Lenski.) Many, many sins, of all kinds, are traceable to the tongue. And it is continually being fueled from hell itself.

It is interesting to remember that the first sin was brought about by the Devil's speech to Eve. And she got herself into trouble by talking with him.

"The course of nature" is lit. the wheel of birth. It is difficult to determine exactly what James meant by this. But it probably means that the tongue is a problem to man from birth, and continues to be his greatest problem throughout his entire life. There are some sins that are more troublesome in youth than in old age. Also, not everyone is bothered by the same sins. But every person, at all ages, from birth to death, continues to have trouble with his tongue.

3:7 It is surprising that such a statement as this was written in the first century. We are inclined to feel that taming wild animals is something that we have done in the twentieth century more than anyone in years past. But it may be that they knew more about taming animals than we do. But we can agree with what James said here. Lions, tigers, elephants, and so, have been tamed. Serpents have been tamed. Sea life has been trained. These are human achievements.

3:8 But when it comes to the tongue, this is the place of man's greatest failure. All of the philosophers and religions of the past, all of the prophets and apostles, have not been able to tame the tongue. And no man today can tame it. Why? Because it is "an unruly evil," meaning it is untameable. It is "full of deadly poison."

Listen to Psa. 58:3-5:

The wicked are estranged from the womb:
they go astray as soon as they be born, **speaking lies.**
Their poison is like the poison of a serpent:
they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;
Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers,
charming never so wisely.

Paul, in Rom. 3:13, was quoting Psa. 140:3, which says,
They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent;
adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

It is very possible that we have never realized the full import of what James wrote in this Epistle about the tongue. Speaking of this poison in the tongue, Matthew Poole wrote that

. . . it murders men's reputations by the slander it utters,
their souls by the lusts and passions it stirs up in them, and
many times their bodies too by the contentions and quarrels it
raiseth against men (Vol. 3, p. 890).

In the remainder of this section James brings out a paradox concerning the tongue. It is this: The tongue can be, and often is, an instrument of God, and an instrument of continuing evil.

3:9 The first part of this chapter tells us about the tongue of the non-Christian, the unbeliever; from here to verse 10 James was speaking to believers. Note the word "we."

When a person is saved, his whole being is redeemed. Some day the body will be glorified, and then our tongues will never again give us any trouble. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in these words:

And the very God of peace **sanctify you wholly;**
and I pray God your whole spirit and soul **and body**
be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
(1 Thess. 5:23).

But that time has not arrived yet. We still have trouble with our tongues. Thank God, we do not have as much trouble as we used to have, but we still have trouble. And our problem is this: We can pray, and have a wonderful time speaking with the Lord, praising Him. We can go to church and sing his praises from the depths of our hearts. But we may be altogether different in our dealings with people. So often a real change comes over people on Monday morning. We can "curse" them, i.e., be critical of them, be harsh in speaking to them, get angry with them, say a lot of things that we would later like to call back because we regret having said them. When we live like this, something is still very wrong in our lives. We certainly are not like that "perfect man"

James mentioned in verse 2. The "perfect man" will be just as godly in his speaking to men, as in his speaking to God. Since man was made in the image of God, to speak evil of man is a reflection upon God since man still bears some of that image in spite of his sin. And there is nothing to indicate that James was speaking of what we say about other believers; his words include what we say to any person, saved or unsaved.

3:10 "Out of the same mouth . . ." Something is terribly wrong here. This is something you would never expect to hear in the light of what has happened to this person who is saved. But Peter is proof that this sometimes happens! He never thought that he would do what he did when he denied with curses and oaths that he even knew the Lord! But he did just that!

James then said what we all know: "My brethren (there are those words again), these things ought not so to be."

Paul wrote to Timothy about the younger widows who
 . . . learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house;
 and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies,
speaking things that they ought not (1 Tim. 5:13).

How often is it true of us that we say things that are completely out-of-character for a child of God. Even the people of the world expect more of us than often they get.

Then James asked three questions concerning what we find in nature to show that a Christian who blesses and curses is even out of step with nature herself.

3:11 The purpose of these questions was to drive home the point that James was making.

Can you have fresh water and salt water from the same source, the same well, the same spring or fountain? The answer is that if you do it is a freak of nature. Naturally a fountain will either give one or the other, but not both.

3:12 James was not speaking of grafting here, but natural trees and vines. Do you get figs and olives from the same source? Or grapes and figs? The answer is "no," and James answered the first question the same way.

Some say that James abruptly dropped the subject here, leaving the readers to meditate on what he said. I doubt if that is true. Surely he would suggest some remedy, or remedies, for such a great problem which faces every child of God. And I believe that that is what he was doing when he went on to speak of "wisdom," and then continued in chapter 4 with the fighting and warfare that often went on among the Lord's people. And, just as we are concluding the section in which James was saying in many way, BE HOLY, so from this point on he was going to show that in order to BE HOLY we must BE HUMBLE, and that humility is the first step we need to take in clearing up those inconsistencies in our lives which are so dishonoring to the Lord.

Let us keep in mind all that James has said about holiness of life, and seek the help of the Lord in not only hearing the Word, but doing what the Lord has told us to do.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 3 -- Part 2

A review of the outline:

- I. Greetings (1:1).
- II. BE HAPPY (1:2-18).
- III. BE HOLY (1:19-3:12).

WISDOM =

KNOWLEDGE +
PRACTICAL APPLICATION
DOCTRINE + OBEDIENCE

And now we come to the fourth:

- IV. BE HUMBLE (James 3:13-5:6).

And the first point is this:

- A. In seeking wisdom from God (James 3:13-18).

It is clear that James was concerned in this section with the wise and with wisdom. Cf. 3:13, 15, 17.

And these are not the first references to wisdom in the Epistle. Cf. 1:5.

The wisdom that is to be sought by the people of God, is always distinguished from human wisdom. And it is never a wisdom which is merely theoretical or speculative, or, as we might say as Christians, it is never merely doctrinal. True wisdom has a practical effect upon the life of the person who is wise. That is very apparent from the book of Proverbs in the OT. There is no book in the Bible that has more practical wisdom than the book of Proverbs.

Remember Solomon's prayer when the Lord said to him, "Ask what I shall give thee" (1 Kings 3:5b). His answer was this:

Thou has shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy,
according as he walked before thee in truth,
and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee;
and thou has kept for him this great kindness,
that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne,
as it is this day.

And now, O Lord my God,
thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father:
and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.
And thy servant is in the midst of thy people
which thou has chosen, a great people,
that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude.
Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart
to judge thy people,
that I may discern between good and bad:
for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?

No one, except our Lord, has ever surpassed Solomon in true wisdom.

The Bible is a Book of wisdom because it combines the doctrines which we are to believe PLUS the ways in which those doctrines are to guide us in our lives day by day. Divine wisdom never stops short of the practical effect that it always has upon the lives of those who possess it.

As we look back over this Epistle, it is quite to be expected that James would place a strong emphasis on the need we all have for divine wisdom. There is nothing like suffering to make us realize how we need wisdom.

That is why James mentioned it so early in the Epistle. But we have also just come through a passage dealing with the tongue. A man's tongue (or a woman's) soon shows how much wisdom he (or she) has. When a person shows the tendency which James was dealing with in 3:8-12, then we need to know what comes from God and what does not come from Him. So that is where we are in this Epistle.

And so the questions that we need to be concerned about are:

- 1) How can we identify a truly wise man?
- 2) What are the characteristics of true wisdom, the wisdom we can expect to receive from God when we ask Him (according to Jas. 1:5)?

James raised the first question in . . .

3:13 The purpose of that question is to make the people described in the preceding verses to ask, "Is James describing me?" And we who are reading this Epistle need to ask the same question: "Is James describing me?"

The word translated here, "endued with knowledge," is not found any other place in the NT. The verb from which it comes is used several times. Thayer, in his Lexicon, p. 118, says this about the word. It speaks of

knowledge viewed as the result of prolonged practice, in opposition to the process of learning on the one hand, and to the uncertain knowledge of a dilettante on the other.

A "dilettante" is an amateur.

With this definition in mind, note what the Lord told Moses as to the kind of men who were to be chosen as judges for the people of Israel. In the Greek translation of the OT these two words for "wise . . . and endued with knowledge" are used.

Take you wise men, and understanding,
and known among your tribes,
and I will make them rulers over you (Deut. 1:13).

When Paul gave Timothy the conditions which a man must meet if he is to serve as an elder in the church, he said,

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride
he fall into the condemnation of the devil (1 Tim. 3:6).

The people of God are not to be led by the immature, the novices, the amateurs. Just because a Christian has a Ph.D. or a Th.D. or any lesser degree behind his name does not mean that he is spiritually mature. He may be a spiritual infant--and unfortunately we have a lot of them in our pulpits and in our Christian colleges and universities.

We all follow examples. And the Lord means that we should. But be careful who you follow. Make sure that he knows the Word and is really seeking to walk with the Lord in obedience to the Word and in prayer. SUCH A MAN WILL BE A HUMBLE MAN, ONE WHO RECOGNIZES HIS OWN NEED, AND IS CONTINUALLY SEEKING TO BECOME WISER IN THE TRUTH AND WISER IN HIS DAILY LIFE.

How did James say that we could identify such a man?

Not by his degrees. Nor just by his age. And not just by his years of experience. A lot of us live many years and still do not know much, nor do we show that we have learned much when you look at our lives.

Listen to James' answer:

Let him shew out of a good conversation his works
with meekness of wisdom.

Let me explain each of the main words of that statement as best as I can.

"Shew" (an Old English spelling for our word show) -- which means to give evidence of proof that he is such a person. The evidence is not in his titles nor in his diplomas, but in his life. It is not just in the way he talks, but in how he walks! So don't just listen to him; LOOK AT HIM!

"A good conversation" -- Unfortunately "conversation" in modern English means our speech. That is what a lot of churches look for most of all when they are looking for a pastor. But that is not what James was saying. Our "conversation" when the KJV was written was our daily life. It means behavior, conduct. And it is "good" in the sense of being holy, morally good, HOLY!

Now look!

I have pointed out that, according to James, we need to BE HAPPY, then BE HOLY (that is what James was saying here). And in the latter part of this statement he said that we must BE HUMBLE.

We all not only have a large supply of pride in our hearts, but we also have a lot of hypocrisy. We are going to learn more about hypocrisy in verse 17. But James knew, and we should know, that it is possible for people to do a good job of pretending that they are wise and holy when in reality, down in their hearts, they may be just the opposite. This is why James added that our wisdom must be demonstrated in our lives by "works with meekness of wisdom."

We have already spoken about "works" in the latter part of chapter 2. Our works are the things we do, the way we live day after day. "Works" is a practical word. It indicates that we are not sitting in a cloister somewhere, but we are active, busy, doing things, but doing things that please God, and doing things in the way that they will please God. How can they be pleasing to God? Not only because they are HOLY works, but because they are being done by HUMBLE people!

Paul told the Corinthians that "knowledge puffeth up" (1 Cor.8:1b). And it does. We can even be puffed up because of how much we think we know about God and His Word. But if we are truly wise, along with our knowledge there will be that most rare ingredient, "meekness."

What is "meekness"?

This is a part of the fruit of the Spirit. Cf. Gal.5:23. It, therefore, is not a natural characteristic of man. It has to be inward or it cannot be true "meekness." Archbishop Trench in his book, Synonyms of the New Testament, pp. 152, 153, has given an excellent description of this important word. Let me read a part of what he had to say, and, as I do, note how intensely practical this word is:

. . . it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God (Matt. xi. 29; Jam. i. 21). And so we have already had this word in our study of James. But let me continue.

It is that temper of spirit in which we accept his dealings

with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting.

. . .

This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men, even of evil men, out of a sense that these, with the insults and injuries which they may inflict, are permitted and employed by Him (the Lord) for the chastening and purifying of the elect. This was the root of David's (meekness), when Shimei cursed and flung stones at him--the consideration, namely, that the Lord had bidden him (2 Sam. xvi. 11), that it was just for him to suffer these things, however unjustly the other might inflict them; and out of like convictions all true Christian (meekness) must spring. He that is meek indeed will know himself a sinner among sinners;--or, if there was One who could not know Himself such (our Lord), yet He too bore a sinner's doom, and endured therefore the contradiction of sinners (Luke ix. 35,36; John xviii, 22,23);--and this knowledge of his own sin will teach him to endure meekly the provocations with which they may provoke him, and not to withdraw himself from the burdens which their sin may impose upon him (Gal. vi. 1; 2 Tim. ii. 25; Tit. iii. 2).

And then he went on to say that meekness is more than humility, but it cannot exist without humility. It is out of humility of heart that meekness of character and meekness of life grows.

It is interesting to keep in mind the circumstances of the people to whom James addressed this Epistle. They were the Jews of the Dispersion. They had suffered, and were still suffering. So he was telling them, in a sense, to look around at their fellow-believers, and note those who had conducted themselves with the greatest faith, the greatest submissiveness to God, the greatest holiness of life, the greatest joy in all of their trials, with the most graciousness toward their enemies--they would be those who were truly wise and endued with knowledge, examples which all of them ought to follow.

Does this describe us? If it does in any measure, we can certainly praise God because He has made us what we are. But we all should be striving daily to become more like this than we are. This is what it means to be wise before God. If we could take all of the instruction of the Book of Proverbs and pour it into one person, this is the kind of a person we would have.

But let us go on.

3:14 In this verse, and in verses 15 and 16, James described, by way of contrast, earthly wisdom.

Notice again that he was concerned with what people have in their hearts. And note also that he said, "But if ye . . ." So he must have been saying that such things are possible even with Christians!

"Bitter envying" -- "Bitter" was used in v. 11. Here it speaks of that cutting, piercing kind of self-determination which sometimes disguises itself under the form of zeal. "Strife" describes the person who is intent on having his own will and getting whatever will help him the most. He is not concerned about learning anything in his trials; he is concerned about getting out, and getting out by getting the best of his enemies. This is the person who has a lot of self-esteem. However, instead of glorying, boasting, he should be ashamed because he is lying

"against the truth." "Truth," with the article "the," has to refer to the truth of the Word of God, possibly the truth of the Gospel. Such a person is a contradiction: he (or she) professes to be a child of God, but his actions deny his claim! James was not giving up on them, but he wanted them to know where such behavior comes from.

3:15 When James called such behavior "wisdom," he was not saying that the person who lives like this is wise; he was merely using the word wisdom according to its true meaning. Wisdom means the way we live, our manner of life.

This does not come from above, i.e., from God. It is "earthly," lit., upon the earth. It is the kind of behavior that you are not surprised to find here in this world because man by nature is self-seeking.

It is also "sensual" -- It pictures what man is by nature. It can be translated, natural. Jude used this word, and then explained it by adding, "having not the Spirit." Cf. Jude 19.

So James was saying that, if they lived like this, they were living like people who did not know the Lord! What a disgrace it is to the Lord's people that this is too often the case!

And finally he said that it is "devilish," demoniacal. It is traceable to Satan himself, "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). The Devil made Eve feel like God was cheating her out of something good, and he told her to "go for it"! And man has been doing that very thing from that day until this, not always with violence, but using all of his powers in that direction.

3:16 At this point James went back and picked up the two words that he had used in verse 14: "envying" (zeal) and "strife."

What do you always find where these two are at work?

You find (1) "confusion," and (2) "every evil work." The root of the trouble is in the heart, but the fruit, the effects, are out in the open where everybody can see them.

"Confusion" -- of which God is never the Author. Cf. 1 Cor. 14:33. This is the opposite of peace. It speaks of turmoil, division, conflict. Luke 21:9 uses this word to describes what goes on in a time of war.

"Every evil work" -- It means that all that is going on is worthless and good-for-nothing! And all of the time man, in the pride of his heart, thinks that he is doing that which is "wise."

By way of contrast cf. Rom. 14:17,
 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink,
 but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

And also at this point James provided us with a definition of true, divine wisdom, "the wisdom that is from above"--heavenly wisdom, the wisdom that comes from God.

And notice that just as in verses 14-16 we have the root and fruit of earthly wisdom, so in verses 17 and 18 we have the root and fruit of heavenly wisdom.

2/27/88

3:17 Let us keep in mind that "wisdom" carries along with it a practical result. It is true knowledge showing its effect upon the life of the truly wise person. Knowledge alone is not what the Scriptures mean by "wisdom." It is only when that knowledge from God is effective in transforming the life. Cf. verse 13 above.

In this verse James gave seven characteristics of "the wisdom that is from above," i.e., the wisdom of God--which in turn are the characteristics that will be seen in the life of the person who is really walking with the Lord. This means being a doer of the Word. Cf. 1:22.

- 1) "Pure" -- In 1 John 3:2 this word is used to describe God. Thus it really is the equivalent of holiness. In God we have purity in its perfection; in man we see holiness of life which is being perfected. God's wisdom is "pure," and His people are to be "pure" in their lives, avoiding sin in any form, cultivating godliness of life. They are redeemed sinners living in a corrupt world, but kept from being corrupted either by the world without or their on sinful lusts within. The wise man is free from the defilements that are usually predominant in the people of the world.

The word "first" in order and importance. We need to look for this "first." If purity is not there, you do not need to look for the others because they will not be there is purity is missing.

- 2) "Peaceable" -- He loves peace, not contention. He does not argue, or strive. Cf. v. 14 for the opposite. This is undoubtedly why the Apostles' prayer for the people of God was always "grace and peace." A sower of discord is not peaceable. A gossip is not peaceable. Peace always needs to be our primary concern in our churches, not by compromise, but by "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Our Lord was certainly "peaceable"--peaceful in His heart, peaceful in His actions, always seeking peace for others.

How refreshing it is to meet the people of God whose hearts are set on peace!

- 3) "Gentle" -- This person is reasonable, not insistent upon having his own way. It also is descriptive of that attitude which does not insist upon the full letter of the law. God was "gentle" with the children of Israel who were continually complaining and rebelling against Him in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. God was "gentle" to David when He did not deal with him according to his sins (cf. Psa. 103:10). Christ was gentle with the woman taken in the act of adultery. Cf. John 8:7, 9. The Lord was "gentle" with Peter following Peter's denial. Cf. John 21:15-17.

And this is what we need to be. Even in dealing with our enemies we are to be "gentle." Cf. Rom. 12:19-21.

Gentleness is sweet reasonableness, and is the opposite of strict justice (cf. Ross, p. 71).

- 4) "Easy to be entreated" -- He obeys well and without a lot of convincing. When you go to him about anything, you will not find

that it is an unpleasant experience, a big hassle. He is eager to do what is right and good because it is pleasing to God.

- 5) "Full of mercy and good fruits" -- The word "full" suggests an abundance, a never-ending supply. "Mercy" is always directed toward misery. So, like our Lord, a wise man is quick to respond to those who are really in need. Cf. 1:27 for examples of "mercy." in 2:15 we see the lack of it. "Fruits" speak of the results that he gets, and they are called "good" because they are pleasing to God, and are spiritually beneficial. Lenski says that this wisdom never dispenses anything that is either harmful or useless.
- 6) "Without partiality" -- We had a lengthy section on this. Cf. 2:1-13. He does not draw unprofitable distinctions between people, nor does he separate himself from some, choosing only to be with others.
- 7) "Without hypocrisy" -- Genuine, real, sincere. It is easy to be disappointed with people when you meet them because they are not what you thought they were. "A wise man" is not like that. You are not disappointed with him. In fact, he is like the Queen of Sheba said Solomon's wisdom and riches were in actuality; she felt that the half had not been told her. It was all better than she had expected it to be. This is the way it will be with a truly "wise man."

If we were to put all of these together in one person, we would have the Lord. He fulfills them to perfection. "The wise man" will not be perfect, but he will surely be a God-ly man, and Christ-like in his character, and in his behavior.

3:18 If we want "fruit" which is "righteous," then we must seek it by sowing "peace." Where you have earthly wisdom, you have what James mentioned in verse 14. But heavenly wisdom produces both peace and righteousness. The first can never please God; the latter always does.

Let us keep in mind that this is the section where James was stressing the importance of humility. "The wisdom that is from above" is a wisdom that exalts God and humbles man.

We all need to ask ourselves the question, Does this describe me? We might be very hesitant to say that it does because we can see so many ways in which we fall short of being what we know we ought to be. But can we at least say that this describes what we want to be? Do we hate sin, but love God? Do we want to be like He is? Am I a "peaceable" person, or do I cause other people trouble, and is it hard for people to get back on my good side once they have offended me? What is my first reaction toward needy people--disgust, or compassion? How do I respond to just criticism? Am I approachable, or do people hold back from speaking to me? Am I given to special friendships, or is there a place in my heart for all of the Lord's people--and even for people who do not know the Lord? Am I being a hypocrite, or do I really love God and His Word as much as I want people to think that I do? Do people think of me as a humble person, or as being proud?

And last of all, and yet most important of all: IS THE GREATEST DESIRE OF MY HEART TO BE LIKE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE ONE WHO PERFECTLY DEMONSTRATED TRUE HEAVENLY WISDOM IN HIS LIFE HERE ON EARTH? These are questions that we all need to give attention to.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 4

IV. BE HUMBLE (James 3:13-5:6).

A. In seeking wisdom from God (James 3:13-18).

B. Before God (James 4:1-10).

The key verse in this section is verse 10. (Read.)

It is very apparent from these verses that the spiritual condition of the Christian Jews of the Dispersion was far from what it should have been. The closing verses of James 3 did not describe many of them. James was alarmed that the Church was the way it was. It should be a warning to all of us today that the Church of the first century could deteriorate as fast as it did. Imagine speaking to a congregation of people using the words which James used in this first part of chapter 4.

And yet do we not face the same situation today?

There is real trouble in our churches. We have so many churches, most of whom claim to be the Church, and yet the trouble that churches have, and the continued division that we see in the Church, often reaching the place of warfare, is a disgrace upon the very people who claim to be the people of God. The Church by her message and by her methods has shown herself to be more of a friend of the world than of God. James makes it clear that you cannot be on friendly terms with both. If you are a friend to one, you are an enemy to the other.

At the end of chapter 3 James made a real point of showing the believers of that day, and every believer from that day to this, that the traits of a true believer are purity and peacefulness--both as to what he is in himself, and the effect that he has upon others. Among the Christian Jews to whom James was writing, there was little peace, but much warfare--and the kind of warfare that you do not always see in the world.

But let us consider what James had to say.

4:1 He began with two questions. The second question answered the first.

This first question is a question that few people are really asking today--neither Christians nor non-Christians. Why do we have such a tendency to fight with each other, to insist on having our own way, and to get our own way regardless of what we have to do to get it? Why is there so much trouble in our churches? Why do we have such a hard time getting along with each other?

Or, if we turn our attention to the world, why do we have world wars? Why is crime such a problem? Why do people go on smoking, or drinking, or taking drugs when the evidence all around us is that these things lead to broken lives, broken homes, and ultimately to pre-mature deaths? Why is there so much immorality? Why is there so much dishonesty in government, so much dishonesty in business? Why are people so inclined to be dissatisfied with what they have and always coveting after more?

This is what James was asking: WHY? WHERE DO THESE THINGS COME FROM,

NAMELY "WARS AND FIGHTINGS AMONG YOU?"

Why do we fight? Why do we quarrel? Why do we contend with each other? Perhaps the distinction that James would draw between these two words which in some ways mean the same thing, "wars and fightings," would be that "wars" are the major conflicts that split churches; "fightings" are smaller conflicts involving two or three, but not the whole church. Lenski (p. 621) said in his commentary, "These Christians are not devotees of Christian peace, they are chronic fighters."

There was always the possibility then, and there is the very real probability today, that not everyone in the church is really a Christian. But when James in those days, or we in this day, deal with problems in the church, we must approach the problems from the way that things ought to be. If strong talk drives people away, it is more of a commentary on them than on the leadership of the church. Sometimes it takes strong talk (such as James was using here) to wake people up--some to the fact that their lives are not pleasing to the Lord; others to the fact that they do not know the Lord and need to be saved.

But where do these things come from?

They come from within us, out of our hearts. Society today is the way it is because man is the way he is! It is just as simple as that. That was the answer in those days; that is the right answer for today. You are not going to change our churches for the better, nor our cities, nor our nation, nor the world, until men are changed. Christ is the answer to our problems. People need new hearts. They need to be made into new people. They need regeneration. Only then will people cease trying to please themselves all of the time, and seek to please God. This was brought out clearly by James' words in 3:8-12.

"Lusts" are pleasures, which can be good, but the word here is used here of evil pleasures, pleasures that simply gratify man's fleshly desires. This word is used again in verse 3. "Lust" in verse 2 is a different word, as we shall see when we come to it.

The "members" referred to here are not the members of the church, but the members of each person's body--the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the hands, the feet. And then those inward members: the mind, the will, the emotions. Man is at war with himself, and this is what causes him to be in conflict with others. And those others are at war with themselves just as he is with himself!

4:2 Here we see more deeply into the problem of "lust."

"Ye lust, and have not" means that just because a person lusts after something, is no guarantee that he will get it. This is the word that is usually used for lusts in Scripture. It means desires, and is always used in an evil sense in the Word of God. This is the natural tendency of the human heart. It still remains in the heart of a Christian, but he is no longer in bondage to it as he once was.

Does this do away with the desire? No! In fact, it intensifies the desire so much so that in too many cases unsatisfied lust leads to murder. And, if not actual murder, there can be that situation which our Lord described in Matthew 5:22 where He indicated that you can be guilty of murder without actually killing another person. The thought is there if not the act. The word "desire" in verse 2 is not the same

as the word "lust." It is the word which speaks of zeal--the intensification of a person's efforts to get what he is lusting after.

And yet still, he "cannot obtain." And so that leads him to "fight and war." And still he is unsatisfied. Man is never satisfied merely by seeking the gratification of his lusts. And yet he will continually go in that direction. His efforts are unsuccessful. He is not omnipotent. But he spends his life trying. It is especially tragic when we see Christians so intent on having their own way, and satisfying their own desires, that they will ruin any person, even if he (or she) is another Christian, or will tear a church apart, just trying to get what he wants.

But what is the problem?

"Ye have not, because ye ask not." Who would they be asking? Obviously this is an emphasis upon prayer, and all true prayer is directed to God.

James spoke of asking in James 1:5. And we have learned that "wisdom" not only has to do with the knowledge of the truth, but the practical effect that the truth always has upon our lives.

We can always be sure that, when there are "wars and fightings," there is little or no prayer. Or, if there is prayer, it is the wrong kind of prayer as we learn in verse 3.

4:3 The Lord Jesus said, "Ask, and ye shall receive" (Matt.7:7). Here James said, "Ye ask, and receive not." "Ask" is in the present tense, meaning that they had prayed, and not only once, but over and over again. Why did they not receive? Because they asked "amiss." What does this mean?

"Amiss" -- This is the adverb of one of the Greek words for evil: κακῶς. They were sinning in prayer. They were asking for things that were not pleasing to God. If God had answered, He would have been encouraging them in their sin--and so have become a partner to their sinning. The Lord never promised to answer all prayers. They must be prayers in His Name, according to His will, from the hearts of those who are living in obedience. True prayer is that which has as its object the glory of God, not the gratification of man's lusts!

"Consume" -- This is the same word that our Lord used of the prodigal son when He said in Luke 15:14 that that young man "had spent all." In the verse before (v.13), using another word the Lord said that the prodigal son had "wasted his substance in riotous living." GOD IS NOT INTERESTED IN THIS KIND OF A THING. HE DOES NOT CONTRIBUTE IN ANY WAY TO THAT WHICH IS GOING TO LEAD TO WASTED, RUINED LIVES. GOD IS INTERESTED IN GOOD, NOT EVIL. If we ask for anything that is contrary to the Word of God, we can be sure that the Lord does not even hear us! His will is always revealed in His Word.

The word for "lusts" here is different from verse 2. Here, as in verse 1, it is the Greek word which means pleasures. We get our words hedonism and hedonist from this Greek word. Hedonism is that system of ethics which teaches that "pleasure is the sole and chief good in life and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts and dispositions" (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, p. 461). American culture is very hedonistic. And it is easy for Christians to become that way. People work during the week so they can

play on the week end. Sports have become our god. "The good life" according to today's definition has nothing to do with God, nothing to do with pleasing Him. It is the life in which we are able to enjoy ourselves to the uttermost in whatever we want to do. And how many Christians there are who have fallen into that trap!

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4:4 "Adulterers and adulteresses" -- This expression is undoubtedly one of the reasons that James has been called severe. It is very strong language. However, as Solomon said,
Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful (Prov. 27:6).
Sometimes it takes a wound for us to be alerted to our sin so we may be healed.

In many of the most ancient MSS and versions the word "adulterers" is not used. Actually it is not needed because the Church is the Bride of Christ, just as Israel was called the wife of Jehovah. And so any sin against the Lord in either Israel or the Church in which there is unfaithfulness to the Lord can rightly be expressed in the feminine. We refer to Israel, the nation, as "she," and we refer to the Church as "she." And so for either to turn away from the Lord is the sin of an adulteress!

"The friendship of (perhaps better translated, with) world is enmity with God," and this constitutes spiritual adultery!

But let us make sure that we understand what we are talking about when we speak of the world. What is it?

It is the Greek word κόσμος. Actually the word means a unified system or arrangement. It speaks of an orderly system in which everything in that system belongs to it and is a part of it. We can say that the cosmos is the opposite of chaos.

It is used primarily in five ways in the Scriptures:

- 1) It is used of all of the created universe, i.e., the heavens and the earth. The earth cannot exist without the heavens. We are dependent upon the heavens for our light, for our rain, etc. The heavens and the earth are a unified system and arrangement of things, and order established by God "in the beginning." He not only created the earth, but the heavens also.

Example: 1 Cor. 8:4b, 5:

. . . we know that an idol is nothing in **the world**,
and that there is none other God but one.
For though there be that are called gods,
whether in heaven or in earth . . .

Cf. also Eph. 1:4. The same expression in 1 Pet. 1:20. Paul was probably speaking of the whole universe when he wrote Rom. 1:20:

For the invisible things of him
from **the creation of the world** are clearly seen,
. . . even his eternal power and Godhead . . .

- 2) It is used of the earth. Cf. Mark 16:15; Matt. 4:8 where the Devil showed the Lord "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." Cf. John 1:10 (where we have "the world" referred to three times). See also John 9:5. There are times when it is hard to tell just how inclusively the expression was used, but the context will always help us determine its meaning.

- 3) The people in the world. "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:38).
- 4) The Gentile world and the Roman world. Cf. Luke 2:1; 1 John 2:2.
- 5) This is the usage that we are concerned about in James 4:4. It has to do with what we can call the evil worldly system over which the Devil rules, that way of life which is called worldly, the characteristics of which are often described as worldliness! This is the world that Paul was speaking of in Eph. 2:2,

Wherein in time past

ye walked according to the course of this world,

according to the prince of the power of the air,

the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

The Apostle Paul was speaking of Satan and this idea of the world when he wrote to the Corinthians,

But if our gospel be hid,

it is hid to them that are lost:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds

of them which believe not,

lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ,

who is the image of God,

should shine unto them (2 Cor. 4:3, 4).

It was about this "world" that the Lord said in John 17:14, 15 about those who had believed in Him:

I have given them thy word;

and the world hath hated them,

because they are not of the world,

even as I am not of the world.

Perhaps to be more specific, "the world" as James was using it is that Satanic system of which all unregenerate people are a part, which has no place for God. In fact, it is an enmity with God. It is in rebellion against God. It not only has no place for God, but it has no place for Christ, no place for the Bible, and no place for the true people of God. This evil world has its own set of goals, its own honors and achievements, its occupation with earthly goods, earthly riches, earthly pleasures. It is the way of life which we are in, but not of.

This is the world that John said we are not to love. And he also said that it is passing away. Cf. 1 John 2:15-17. This is the world to which Paul said that we are not to be conformed. Cf. Rom. 12:2. This was the world that the Lord was speaking about when he said,

In the world ye shall have tribulation:

but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33b).

What, then, about the words "friendship" and "enmity"?

"Friendship" is from the verb, to love, φιλία. This is the only place that it is used in the NT. It speaks of an emotional attachment, a preference for some one or some thing above all others. So to love the world in this sense is to place the world, its way of life, its honors, its pleasures, above God.

"Enmity," on the other hand, is opposition, hostility, hatred for God. This is what the world is!

AND SO THERE CAN BE NO MIDDLE GROUND. MANY PEOPLE TRY TO BE ON BOTH SIDES, BUT JAMES MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE! IF YOU ARE FOR THE WORLD AND ALL THAT IT STANDS FOR, THEN YOU ARE AGAINST GOD. IF YOU ARE FOR GOD, THEN YOU STAND AGAINST THE WORLD.

This does not mean that it is a sin to be rich, nor that it is wrong to save money. It does not mean that a person cannot be honored by non-Christians for excellence in sports, or in science, or in military service, or as a student, or in many other ways that people are honored. It does not mean that it is wrong to take a vacation and go to Hawaii, or to go to a baseball game. BUT IT MEANS THAT THOSE ARE NOT THE THINGS THAT WE LIVE FOR. THEY ARE NOT ESSENTIAL FOR OUR JOY. IT CERTAINLY MEANS THAT IF THOSE THINGS COME, WE NEED TO BE VERY, VERY CAREFUL. IT IS EASY FOR US TO BE TURNED ASIDE AFTER THEM. IT CERTAINLY DOES MEAN THAT WE ARE NOT GOING TO BE A PART OF THE WORLD'S SINS. IT MEANS THAT WE ARE GOING TO SEEK TO PLEASE GOD IN ALL THAT WE DO. IF WE ARE HONORED, WE GIVE GOD THE GLORY. IF WE ARE UNABLE TO GO AND DO AND BUY A LOT OF THINGS THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE, WE CAN BE CONTENT KNOWING THAT, IF WE HAVE THE LORD, WE HAVE IN HIM ALL THAT WE WILL EVER NEED.

But what was worldly here in our text? What was it that James was condemning?

We have in this passage a combination of troubles from the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

- 1) The flesh -- vv. 1-3.
- 2) The world -- v. 4.
- 3) The Devil -- v. 7.

They were being worldly by the way they sought to satisfy their desires, by the way that they were in conflict with each other over the gratification of their lusts. This is a manifestation of worldliness that we do not often recognize nor talk about. If we live like the people of the world do, and seek what they seek, and use whatever means is necessary to get what we want, this is worldliness!

We have an illustration of this from the time that our Lord and His disciples were going through Samaria, and the Samaritans would not receive Him because He was going to Jerusalem. James and John were very angry about this, and asked the Lord if they should call down fire from heaven like Elijah had done. But the Lord rebuked them with these words:

Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them (Luke 9:55, 56).

How it behooves each one of us to guard our own hearts carefully, and to make sure that we want what God wants, and that we seek that which is pleasing to the Lord, not just for ourselves.

4:5 James would have us know that we are not left to ourselves where the danger of worldliness is concerned. And so he refers to the Scriptures. There can be no higher court of appeal than the Word of God. No true child of God would ever say that any Scripture is "vain," meaningless, worthless, hollow and empty. Every word of God is true. We can always count on that.

So what does it say?

This verse needs a little clarification in its translation.

It seems clear, and most expositors agree, that "the spirit" that is referred to here is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it should be capitalized. We know that He dwells within us.

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"Lusteth" here is a word which means to long for, or to yearn over. And when we add to this the words, "to envy," we add the thought of jealousy.

So the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us earnestly longs over us to the point of jealousy. When we show a worldly attitude or act in a worldly manner, the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to draw us back to the Lord.

There is no Scripture that actually says this in the OT, but there is a passage in Galatians which James undoubtedly knew about because some of the believers to whom he wrote were in Galatia, and Paul probably, most likely, had already written to them, and his Epistle was already in their hands. Since Peter referred to Paul's writings as "scripture" (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15, 16), it is not at all unlikely that James would do the same.

Cf. Gal. 5:16-26.

The Scriptures certainly make it clear that God is a jealous God. Cf. Ex. 20:5. He will not allow His people to turn their affections to others. And so, when a Christian acts in a worldly manner, while he may not be struck down suddenly, yet the Holy Spirit is at work in his heart to bring the Christian's love back to Christ, & away from the world and a worldly life. Cf. v. 4

Ex 34:14. Deut. 4:24; 5:9; 6:15
Naham 1:2; Zech. 1:14; 8:2
1 Cor 10:22
2 Cor 11:2

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4:6 Here is another example of what James meant by being a friend of the world.

The Lord "knoweth our frame" (Psa. 103:14). The difference between the proud and the humble is expressed in the words, self-sufficiency and insufficiency. The Lord knows that we have a strong, natural tendency toward self-sufficiency. He also knows how blind we are as to how completely insufficient we are. The self-sufficient person trusts in himself; the insufficient trusts in the Lord.

The quotation from Proverbs 3:34 tells us that "God resisteth the proud." "Resisteth" is a battle word. God sets himself in battle array against the proud. None of us really understands how much God hates pride in any form.

But the question that needs to be asked here is, Who can stand against God? The believer is defeated before he starts if God is against him. How much wiser and happier and effective he will be by not only acting in a humble way, but in receiving grace from God to be humble! And it does take the grace of God for us to be humble. This was promised in the OT; it is renewed here in the NT.

When we look at the way of life that is promoted in the world, we see that pride is encouraged. That is not God's way!

→ Note: "Therefore" - here practical application.
4:7 So what is the wise course to follow? "Submit yourselves therefore unto God."

There is a play on words here in what James said when he used the words "resisteth" and "submit." Both words are basically formed from the word τάσσω. But in front of the verb "resisteth" we have the preposition, ἀντί; in front of the verb "submit" we have the preposition, ὑπό. The verb τάσσω means to put, or place. So in verse 7 God puts himself

against us; in verse 8 we are to put ourselves under Him. We are to submit to His will, bow to His authority, trust in Him to guide us and to do the very best for us.

Every day that we live, and especially in every trial, every time of need, the first thing that we need to do is to submit ourselves to God. We who are totally insufficient need to place ourselves under the One Who is sovereign over the whole universe, the One Who is all-sufficient!

But this is not all that we are to do.

"Resist the devil." Here is evidence that behind all human pride, all human self-sufficiency, all opposition to God, is the Devil. He is not our friend; he is our inveterate, confirmed enemy. He is called the Devil because he is our accuser before God.

We do not run away from him; we are to "resist" him. We are lit. to take our stand against him. This is a different word from the one in verse 6.

But how do we "resist" him?

The best illustration we have is in the temptation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. Matt. 4:1-11. How did the Lord "resist" the Devil? Through the Word! What did the Psalmist say long ago about this?

Thy word have I hid in mine heart,

that I might not sin against thee (Psa. 119:11).

A child of God without the Word of God in his heart is going to be an easy prey for the Devil. Do you see why it is so important for us to be reading the Word, studying the Word, memorizing the Word, obeying the Word? To have the Word in your heart is to have it in your life. Live by the Word, and you will never regret it. Depart from the Word, and you are headed for trouble. Do not try to add to it, nor to take from it. Take it as God has given it to us, and walk in the light of it.

What did Paul say about our conflict with the Devil in Eph. 6? He told us to put on the whole armor of God, each part of which has something to do with the Word of God and with our Lord Jesus Christ. And then he said,

And take . . . the sword of the Spirit,

which is the word of God:

Praying always . . . Eph. 6:17, 128).

What did the Devil do when the Lord answered him with the Word? He left Him! What will he do when we resist him through the Word? "He will flee from you." The Devil is powerless when we take our stand on the Word of God.

But this is not all.

4:8 "Draw nigh to God." Cf. Heb. 10:19-22.

James expressed this in such a way as to indicate that they were to draw near to God completely. They were not to hold back in any area of their lives. This was to recognize that God was not only their Savior, but that He was their Lord. Drawing near to God is an expressed willingness that His will might be done.

The promise that followed was that, when they drew near to God, He would

draw near to them. When God draws near it is for the bestowment of His grace, for pardoning when needed, and for protection and blessing. This is when the believer experiences the joy of personal fellowship with the Lord. Every time of prayer, every time when the Word is read, or when we hear it preached, in every joy and in every testing, we are to draw near to God. This is not just for emergencies (although it does apply then), but this is to be a way of life for the child of God.

Drawing near to God calls for personal cleansing: "Cleanse your hands." And then James added, "And purify your hearts." There needs to be cleansing sin outwardly and inwardly. Believers are still sinners, and stand in need of the continual cleansing that comes through the confession of sin. Cf. 1 John 1:9. Doublemindedness is that which James had mentioned at the very beginning of this Epistle. Cf. 1:6-8.

4:9 This verse gives us a picture of what true repentance is, and what it means to humble ourselves before the Lord. How rarely do we experience anything like this, or see it in the lives of others! Again we see an emphasis upon the inward and the outward.

James was not saying that this is what the Christian life is to be. He was concerned about those times when the people were turning back to the Lord from their worldly ways. This was not a time for joy, but for the deepest grief. This is a portrait of one who realizes how God has been grieved by his pride and all of the ways in which his pride has manifested itself.

"Heaviness" is lit. to cast the eyes down. Perhaps James was thinking here about the Lord's story of the publican and the Pharisee who went to the temple at the hour of prayer. Cf. Luke 18:13. The Pharisee seems to have felt that he honored God by his coming; the publican felt totally unworthy to be there. That is the way we need to approach God.

4:10 This is the key verse. Cf. also the way Peter said essentially the same thing in 1 Pet. 5:6:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God,
that he may exalt you in due time.

The worldling has never seen himself as he really is--small, insignificant, defiled, weak, totally unworthy of any of God's blessings, as having nothing but what he has received from God, and as being absolutely dependent upon Him. The child of God knows what he is, and he humbles himself before God, not to make himself humble, but because he knows that that is what he really is! Humility is a recognition of what Bishop Trench called, our creatureliness and our sinfulness.

And note that this is to be "in the sight of God." We are always within His view, but we need to remember that and to realize that it is what he sees in our hearts that is most important.

"He shall lift you up" -- This is no promise that we will all be like Joseph, or like Moses, or like David, or like Daniel. Nor is it a promise that we will be able to leave pride behind us as though it would never again be a problem to us, that we would no longer be attracted to the world and the world's way of living. But the thought seems to be that he will lift us up from that despair, that hopelessness, that deep grief of soul, that is ours when we once begin to see how sinful our sins really are. This is the lifting up of the restored sinner. This is being lifted up to a life, not only of renewed fellowship with the

Lord, but of even deeper and more wonderful fellowship with Him.

We need to remember our Lord's words in Matthew 23:12:

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased;
and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.

It was this kind of exaltation that David was praying for in Psalm 51. There is no higher plane upon which we can walk than when we are living in fellowship with the Lord. In Christ we are seated at the Father's right hand,

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion,
and every name that is named, not only in this world (age),
but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:21).

There is no greater exaltation than this! May God enable each one of us, by His grace, to dwell right there in daily communion with our Lord, realizing that we do not deserve to be there so that we will be careful to give all of the glory to our wonderful Triune God!

*Cf. Job in Job 42:5-6 "I have heard of thee by the
hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.
Wherefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and
ashes."*

IV. BE HUMBLE (James 3:13-5:6).

D. In making our plans and living our lives (James 4:13-17).

In this section we have learned that a humble man is peace-loving, as compared with one that is contentious. We have learned that a humble man is holy and prayerful as compared with one who is covetous and worldly. We have learned that a humble man is responsive and obedient to the Word of God. Now, in these five verses we are going to learn that a humble man is submissive to the providences of God. By way of contrast the proud man makes his plans and carries on his business without any regard for God.

4:13 "Go to now" -- See the same expression in 5:1. The NASB translates it, "Come now." It is not only designed to attract the attention of the reader, but it shows disapproval. It would suggest that those to whom James was referring knew better than to do such things, but they went ahead anyway. They clearly thought that they were in control of their lives. They claim to know WHEN they were leaving, WHERE they were going, HOW LONG they would be there, THE BUSINESS that they would conduct, and that it would be PROFITABLE!

Some MSS have, Today and tomorrow.

Whether we are business men or not, we all have a tendency to be like this, failing to remember that Solomon said long ago,

Boast not thyself of tomorrow;

for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth (Prov. 27:1).

In Ecc. 8:7 we read that Solomon also said about man,

For he knoweth not that which shall be:

for who can tell him when it shall be?

James was probably thinking of these words when he wrote the next verse.

4:14 We can make our plans, but none of us knows what tomorrow holds for us, or even if we will be here tomorrow.

The news people on TV amuse me some times because their predictions have nothing to do with the weather that we eventually get. Sometimes they are right, but very often they are wrong. And yet they go right on like they know.

We are the same way about our plans. Man's pride blinds him in more ways than we can count.

The main reason that we cannot really know what we are going to be doing tomorrow, or the day after, or next week, or next month, or next year, is because we have no assurance that we will be here.

"What is your life?" -- A question that we all need to answer. The word "what" means, "of what character?" (Robertson, VI, 55). And here he used an illustration from the weather. It is like a morning mist that disappears as soon as the sun is up. Even the person who lives a long life from a human point-of-view is only here on earth for a very short time--time which passes so quickly? None of us knows how long we will live. There are plenty of illustrations of people who are here today, and gone tomorrow.

James used a play on words when he said, "appeareth . . . vanisheth away." We could translate them, appear and disappear.

Cf. our Lord's parable and His teaching which followed in Luke 12:13-40. There are four things that stand out in this passage:

- 1) In verse 15 the Lord issued a warning about being covetous.
- 2) In the parable: the certainty of death, but the uncertainty as when it will come.

We may not have as much time as we think we do.

- 3) Such a self-confident, covetous person ignores the life that is to come. He makes no preparation for heaven. He does not know that the Lord cares for those who seek to do His will first. He is blinded to all of that.
- 4) If he knows about the coming of the Lord, he ignores it. He acts like life here on earth is going on forever, and like he will be here forever.

There is a great deal for all of us to think about from what James wrote in these verses.

4:15 Here James was teaching them how they ought to talk, and how they ought to make their plans.

In Heb. 6 where the writer admonished his readers to "go on unto perfection," he added in v. 3, "And this will we do, if God permit." Paul told the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 16:7 that he hoped he would be able to be with them for an extended visit, but then he added, "If the Lord permit." Earlier in the same Epistle he said this:

But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will,
and will know, not the speech of them that are puffed up,
but the power (1 Cor. 4:19).

Paul had tried to go to Rome many times to visit the saints there, but he had been hindered on each occasion. But he told them that he was praying . . .

if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey
by the will of God to come unto you (Rom. 1:10).

The Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10b). And even our Lord submitted Himself to the will of the Father when He prayed,

O my Father, if it be possible,
let this cup pass from me:
nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Matt. 26:39b).

The Apostle Paul taught the Ephesians, and was praising God as he taught them, that God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11b).

Who determines the time of our death? God does. So we are dealing with a sovereign God, and yet finite man makes his plans as though he were God and God does not exist.

Have you heard people say that when they were saved they had to learn to talk all over again? That is what James was teaching the believers in that day: how to talk! He was saying, "Don't say that; say this!" It is good to be faithful in business, but plans need to be made under the guidance of God, but even then we need to recognize that we will only be able to carry them out, IF GOD WILLS!

How it pleases God for us to be recognizing continually our dependence upon Him. He planned it that way.

4:16 However, they were not talking like the people of God ought to talk.

"But now ye rejoice in your boastings." They gloried in making their own plans, and in predicting their financial success. They took pride in what they were going to do. They acted as though they were in charge, and that the providential acts of a sovereign God did not even exist!

And then he called it what it was: "All such rejoicing is evil." IT WAS S-I-N!
Man is so depraved that he not only sins, but he boasts in his sin. Thomas Manton who was one of the Puritans said,

Man fallen is but man inverted and turned upside down; his love is where his hatred should be, and his hatred is where his love should be; his glory where his shame should be, and his shame where his glory should be (IV, 395).

Paul told the Philippians that the people of the world had their "glory in their shame" (Phil. 3:19), and that is tragic. But it is even more tragic when such an attitude is found among the people of God.

Rarely do even the people of God think of sin in these terms. But we sin when we make our plans without consulting with God, and when we expect to carry them out without His blessing. Do you remember that Joshua and the people of Israel did this in their dealings with the Gibeonites? Joshua 9:14b tells us that when the Israelites entered into an alliance with the Gibeonites "they asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord:" Ominous words! And yet how many times have we been guilty of doing the same thing?

Manton also said, "First we practise sin, then we defend it, then we boast of it" (IV, 395, 396).

This is not the sin of adultery, nor the sin of drunkenness, nor the sin of stealing, nor of murder, BUT IT IS SIN. And we must not consider it in any other way. James was saying through this instruction that we need to BE HUMBLE and make our plans in accordance with the will of God.

Such boasting as this is "the pride of life," the only other place in the NT where the Greek word for "boasting" is used. Plummer, quoted by Ross, p. 84, said of this word that it

indicates insolent and empty assurance; and here the assurance lies in presumptuous trust in the stability of oneself and one's surroundings.

He called it "pretentious ostentation" which means that this sinner displayed his sin in order to be admired and praised by others--and it often is! They were living in an unreal world, and boasting to others about what they had found there.

4:17 Here James came to a conclusion. "Therefore . . ."

This verse indicates that those who were living like this knew better than to do what they were doing. They knew that God was sovereign. They knew that His will will always prevail. They knew better than to oppose God, and to make their plans without seeking His guidance and blessing. They knew all of these things, but ignored them in their daily lives. Consequently James was charging them with sin. And this was presumptuous sin! The worst kind! As Jewish believers they also would have known what Micah wrote for the people of God many years before. Cf. Micah 6:8:

He hath shewed thee, O man what is good;
and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly,
and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

Does this mean that if we do not know a thing is sin, that then it is not sin? No! Sin is always sin whether we know that it is or not. But James was saying that it is especially odious to God when we know something is wrong, and then go ahead and do it!

The Apostle Paul said about himself that prior to his salvation he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. But then he went on to say, "But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. 1:13b). He felt that he was serving God while all of the time he was opposing God. It was sin, sin for which God forgave him, but sin for which he never forgave himself.

And so James again is emphasizing the importance of obeying the Word of God. It is not enough to know it; we must abide by it in daily living. Having been taught the truth, our responsibility is even greater to do that which is pleasing in God's sight, and therefore will bring the greater glory to Him. May God enable us to live according to the light he has given us. As Paul said in Eph. 5:8, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light."

Riches can be like
the thorn in the
parable of the sower
"the deceitfulness of
riches."

Money is a major
part of the American
dream.
THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 5

4/3/89 RICHES IS
ONE OF THE
MAJOR SUBJECTS
SEE IN SCRIPTURE!
NEW TOPICAL TEXT
BOOK
Note the intro. to this
epistle. Written to Jews
generally, not just to Jews
no characteristic greetings, just
"Greetings."
Chapter 5 carries on
from the last
verse of ch. 4.

IV. BE HUMBLE (James 3:13-5:6).

E. A warning for those who are rich (James 5:1-6).

This is the third time that James has referred to the rich in this Epistle. Cf. 1:10, 11; 2:2, 3, 6, 7. We might even say that it is the fourth since the latter part of the fifth chapter deals with those who intend to get rich, or richer.

James here seems to have had in mind rich men who were not believers, and who obviously had no intention of becoming believers. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that in v. 7 James again addressed himself to the "brethren."

It is important to note the connection between this chapter and the last part of chapter 4. We have seen that the desire which motivated those whom James was referring to was a spirit of covetousness. The world was having an influence upon the Church in that day just as it does in our day. "Friendship with the world" was a terrible temptation to the people of God because it seemed to be so profitable. Christians have always been inclined to follow the ways of the world because they usually work.

So in these verses James was showing what the end of the road was like for those who have made money their god.

5:1 Instead of rejoicing over what they had, and the way they were able to live, they needed to "weep and howl" because of the troubles that were ahead for them. Those troubles are certain to come. They are inescapable. The original language indicates that their miseries were at that very moment in the process of coming upon them (cf. Tasker, p. 110). Nothing is more certain that God's judgment upon those who forget Him in this life.

We have the following words of our Lord which are recorded in Luke 6:24, 25:

But woe unto you that are rich!
for ye have received your consolation.
Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger.
Woe unto you that laugh now!
for ye shall mourn and weep.

RICHES:
PSA. 62:10
PROV. 23:5
LUKE 16:19-31
" 12:16-21
1 TIM. 6:1-19

This warning was intended for the rich, but it was also intended for the benefit of those believing Jews who were not rich. They needed to be careful not to be envious of those who were rich--and they needed to know where that road leads. No amount of money can spare any person from the judgments of God.

"Miseries" -- These are troubles and distresses that will be brought upon them by the judgment of God. The reference to "the last days" in v. 3 and "the coming of the Lord" referred to in vv. 7 and 8, indicate that James had in mind the judgment which will attend the return of the Lord. The truth of the Lord's return was ever-present in the minds of those early believers, and their lives were lived in the light of the Lord's coming.

Rich unbelievers are always self-deceived, as Tasker pointed out. Their minds were blinded to the reality of things. They were so occupied with the present that they never gave a thought to final things, the day of reckoning that is surely coming. Their present joys would disappear to be replaced by howling and weeping if they only knew what was ahead. But humility, which James had been stressing, is usually unknown to the rich of this world.

5:2 James must have been thinking here about Matt. 6:20, 21. James was referring to the riches of the rich as though this were already going on, and would finally be completed, although they did not know it. Our Lord spoke in Matt. 13:22 of "the deceitfulness of

"Riches" and "garments" indicate that James was not only talking about their money, but that which their money could buy. The rich often take great delight in fine, expensive clothing. But none of that will last, and it certainly does not make anyone rich toward God unless riches are used to glorify God.

The same ideas continue on into . . .

5:3 "Cankered" means rusted, or tarnished with rust. Wealth does not have to become rusted; it only does when it is not used according to the will of God. But when it does rust, this is an indication that it was used in the wrong way. Their flesh being eaten with fire has to be a reference to the fires of eternal judgment. If a man is rich, he is a steward of those riches, accountable to God for the way that he uses them. Therefore, if he uses them the wrong way, God will judge him.

How important it is for all of us to remember these things! We may not be classified with the rich, but whatever we have is the Lord's, and must be used as He would have us use it.

As we come to the latter part of verse three, we move from those general statements of God's displeasure and His impending judgment, to specific charges that James was bringing against the rich. THERE ARE FOUR OF THEM.

The first charge (as in a court of law) is that the rich are SELFISH. Note the words in the last statement of verse 3: "Ye have heaped together for the last days."

It can be said as a general condemnation of rich men (although there are some exceptions) that rich men always want more riches. They are never satisfied. And instead of making men more generous, increased riches make them more selfish and more fearful about losing even a penny. My Dad used to say about his boss that he was one of the most generous men he ever knew UNTIL he made his first \$100,000--and then he was afraid that he was going to lose it all so he held it with a tight fist!

Remember the parable we referred to last week: the rich man who got richer, wanted to build more barns, and keep it all for himself. The Lord prefaced that parable by saying, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not . . ." (Luke 12:15).

Covetousness is idolatry (cf. Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). This is one of the greatest sins in America. How tragic when a man's soul is eaten away with a covetous spirit!

5:4 The second charge that James brought against the rich is that they were thieves. They hired men to increase their wealth, and then did not pay them.

This is a very ancient sin. God spoke to masters through Moses in the Law. Note what He had to say. Cf. Deut. 24:14, 15. These Jewish rich men had been trained in the Law. They knew what it said. But their greed for money was such that they did what was forbidden probably because they felt that they could get away with it.

But what did James and Moses both say about such a thing? They said that the cries of those who had been cheated "entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth," the Lord of hosts. The "cries" that James had reference to were cries for help! He did not say that they were crying to the Lord (although that may be included), but, whether they were or not, the Lord heard them. And if the Lord hears, He answers. He may not do it right away, but the rich are to know that they cannot get away with their fraudulent ways. They are going to have to deal with God about what they have done.

Why did James speak of the Lord here as THE LORD OF HOSTS? This describes the Lord in His majesty and His sovereign power, His omnipotence. And, as Lenski added, These pitiful cries of the helpless laborers have entered into the ears of this almighty Lord, and what that implies need not be stated (p. 651).

5:5 Here we have the third charge: pleasure-loving.

Far too many people work just so they can play. Pleasure has also become a god to many Americans. Everybody needs some recreation, but it is different when that is all we live for. "The good life" is a life in which you have having fun all of the time--and that always takes money.

Think of the ridiculous salaries that we give to our athletes. And that means that people have to spend ridiculous amounts of money in order for the athletes to receive such pay. God is not in the thoughts of most people so they do not have any idea that God is the One to Whom we are responsible for what we have and the way we live.

Our Lord likened "riches" and "pleasures" to "thorns." Cf. Luke 8:14. They choke out the Word and everything else that has to do with God and eternity. Do you remember that Solomon tried pleasure? Let me read to you what he had to say about it. Cf. Ecc. 2:1-11. Paul warned the widows of that day that "she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (1 Tim. 5:6). When Paul was describing the last days he said that men would be "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4).

5:6 And then we come to James' fourth and last charge: the persecution and murder of the people of God!

Some commentators take this reference to "the just" as a reference to our Lord. Cf. Acts 3:14. And they may be right. But it also has some application to those whose faith was in the Just One, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Review what James had said in this Epistle about the rich in 2:6b, 7. John the Baptist was the victim of that rich man and political leader, Herod.

Before we leave this subject of riches, let us remember that there have been many rich men mentioned in Scripture who have been godly men: Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Joseph of Arimathea, and Philemon, to name a few. But let us also pay close attention to the warnings of Scripture concerning riches.

David said, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psa. 62:10b). Solomon said, "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes on that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (Prov. 23:4, 5). We have already noted what the Lord had to say.

But one of the most helpful, and yet solemn, of all passages in Scripture is that given to us by the Apostle Paul in 1 Tim. 6. Note vv. 5-19.

And so let us remember that riches present to us temptations which only God can deliver us from. It is not a sin to be rich IF those riches have been gained honestly. But we are not to seek riches. If riches come our way, let us thank God for them, and then seek carefully to use them as He shall lead, and for His glory. Then we will be laying up treasure in heaven with the treasure, be it large or small, which the Lord has given us here on earth.

Perhaps we all need to pray the prayer of Agur, the son of Jakeh, recorded for us in Prov. 30:7-9.

Remember what we have been considering: HUMILITY. And remember that the men who were described by James in our text for today were chargeable with a fifth charge because of the way they trusted in their riches. This final charge was PRIDE.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 5 -- Part 2

A review of the outline:

- I. Greetings (1:1).
 - II. BE HAPPY (1:2-18).
 - III. BE HOLY (1:19-3:12).
 - IV. BE HUMBLE (3:13-5:6).
- And now we come to the last point:
- V. E HOPEFUL (5:7-20).

The first point under this is:

A. About the Lord's return (5:7-12). (For the change in the outline, see the explanation under v. 10 on p. 4.)

In the first part of this chapter we see that James has given us a background of suffering, suffering inflicted by the rich, suffering which was severe, but not justified. The believers were not guilty of any crime. Their fault was that they belonged to the Lord. Some had even died for their faith. The natural inclination would be to fight back, to retaliate, to try to get the best of their enemies. But James was here advising them to behave in just the opposite way.

5:7 "Be patient" -- This is not the usual word for patience. The noun of this verb appears in v. 10, translated "patience." It is a word which indicated that they were to resist the temptation to be angry, or to take revenge. Trench preferred to call it longsuffering. Some commentators have used a word which is very rare: longanimity. This is defined in the dictionary as "the disposition to bear injuries patiently."

How long were they to hold back, to use restraint, to be patient? "Unto the coming of the Lord." In other words, James was saying that this was to be their way of living under such trials.

The One Who manifested this most perfectly was our Lord. Peter mentioned this in 1 Peter 2:23:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again;
when he suffered, he threatened not;
but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

The reference to "the coming of the Lord" shows that this was a prominent and very real hope in the early Church. Believers then did not know any more than we do as to when the Lord will come, but they believed that He was coming, and they were expecting Him at any time, waiting for Him.

The Greek word used here is the word παρουσία. It literally means a presence. And so it is used to indicate the very presence of the One Whom they were expecting to come.

James was not getting into the details of prophecy here, but was simply pointing out the manner of life that should characterize the people of God until the coming of the Lord. He will make things right. He will put an end to their suffering. He will take vengeance upon their enemies. And so they were to wait for Him.

Then James likened them to husbandmen. What is a husbandman? That is

just another word for a farmer. He plants the seed, and then he waits. He cannot hurry the harvest by any impatience or restlessness. It takes time for the seed to grow. And he is dependent upon God for the early and latter rains if he is to see "the precious fruit of the earth." All of this calls for "long patience," translated from the same root as the verb, "Be patient," at the beginning of the verse.

Why would James use such an illustration?

Well, it would seem that he was reminding them that they were husbandmen who had sown the Word of God. They should be expecting a harvest: "precious fruit." As the Lord told His disciples in John 15:16, they were "ordained" to "go and bring forth fruit, and that" their "fruit should remain."

How easy it is for us to forget while we are waiting that we should not only be waiting for the coming of the Lord, but we should be waiting for the Word of God to bear fruit in people's lives, seeing them changed so that they can never be the same again. We may not see much of our fruit until the Lord returns, but our labor in the Lord is not in vain. Persecution often distracts us so that we forget why we are here. We fail to look for the right things. And so it is easy for us to get angry and impatient, and to have desires for revenge in our hearts. The farmer not only waits for the harvest, but he waits for those times of refreshing from the Lord, "the early and latter rain," picturing the special blessings of God along the way, by which the Word becomes fruitful in accomplishing the purposes of the Lord.

The early rain was the rain that came just after the crops were planted. The latter rain came just before the crops were harvested. A fruitful crop was impossible without them. And so, as in the case of the farmer, the spiritual husbandman is dependent upon what God does to the fruit that is sown in the hearts of people as to what the ultimate outcome will be.

So, in the midst of our trials, let us not forget that the work of the Lord goes on. Trials do not put a stop to what God is doing. And so we wait knowing that God is working in spite of the trials, and through the trials, for His glory and praise.

5:8 The exhortation at the beginning of verse 7 is repeated--identically the same word. The "ye" is emphatic. It means, The husbandman is patient; YOU be patient, too! That is the first need we have in the midst of our trials.

The second is: "Stablish your hearts."

A prayer that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians believers, and probably for other saints as well, is recorded for us in 1 Thess. 3:12, 13:

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may **establish your hearts** unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

What does it mean to have our hearts stablished, or as we would say today, established? It means to have it strengthened. Peter prayed in 1 Peter 5:10,

But the God of all grace,
 who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,
 after that ye have suffered a while,
 make you perfect, **stablish, strengthen**, settle you.

God is not seeking to destroy us, nor is He going to let anyone else destroy us. He intends that we come through our trials stronger than ever, not tossed around by any and every wind that comes along, but standing firm in our faith. And the truth that is designed of God to strengthen us is the truth of the coming of the Lord!

R. V. G. Tasker, who was the Professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of London, had this to say in his commentary on the Epistle of James:

If the Lord's return seems to us to be long delayed, or if we relegate it to such a remote future that it has no effect upon our outlook or way of living, it is clear that it has ceased to be for us a living hope; and it may be that we have allowed the doctrine that "He will come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead" to be whittled away by scepticism, or to be so transmuted into something else, such as the gradual transformation of human society by Christian values, that it has ceased to exercise any powerful influence on our lives (p. 120).

Both the Thessalonians passage and the passage in 1 Peter make it clear that the Lord is the One Who establishes us. And one way He does this is by bringing us to the realization that the only hope for change in this world in which we live is in the return of our Lord to rule in righteousness upon the earth. Trials make us long for His coming when all wrong will be done away, and His will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Obviously this is His second coming to the earth.

5:9 "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned."

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We as the people of God are engaged in a spiritual conflict. Our battle is not primarily with people, but with the Devil and all of the spiritual principalities and powers, the demons, who are his allies. They have many devices, many methods, many purposes in all of their hostilities against us. And one of them is to set us against each other. The Devil knows very well that houses divided against themselves cannot stand. He knows that broken fellowship between believers hinders the work of the Gospel. And he knows that a divided church is a powerless church. So James comes with this exhortation: "Grudge not one against another."

It means that we are not to be grieved with each other, not to murmur against each other. We are not to complain about each other. And this does not have to be outward; it can be, and often is, unexpressed outwardly, but felt very deeply inwardly. As Solomon said long ago, we are to keep our hearts with all diligence because the issues of life come out of our hearts. Cf. Prov. 4:23.

The reason that we are not to be given to murmuring is because "the judge standeth before the door." The judge is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming! We do not know when. But no Christian wants to face Him with a heart that is not right nor, in so far as it is possible, with relationships that are not right.

We do not know the full extent of the judgment of believers. It certainly does not mean the loss of salvation. But it does mean the loss of rewards. And whatever all may be involved, we are earnestly exhorted many places in Scripture to avoid having the verdict of the Lord's judgment to go against us.

So the coming of the Lord is not only to be a source of comfort for each of us as believers, but it is also to serve as a warning against our involvement in any sin, anything that would be displeasing to the Lord.

Cf. James 4:11, 12.

5:10 The thoughts which James was expressing in these verses probably continued through verse 12. One way we can see that is because in verse 12 James repeated what he warned against in verse 9: "Lest ye fall into condemnation." We want our Lord's approval, His "well done," not His judgment.

Therefore, the first two points under the last heading in the outline can be combined with this heading:

A. About persevering in our trials in the light of the return of the Lord (James 5:7-12).

At this point James encouraged them to note carefully what was written in the OT. And we can profit even more from this exhortation because now we have the NT as well.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, said a very important thing about the OT. You will find it in Rom. 15:4:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime
were written for our learning,
that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures
might have hope.

Hope is what we are concerned with in this passage--not just the hope of the Lord's return, but the hope, the expectation, the assurance, that our sufferings, which are inevitable, have not only a purpose, but a good purpose, under the mighty hand of God.

In that same chapter in Romans, verse 13, added this prayer:

Now **the God of hope** fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
that ye may **abound in hope**, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

And we always need to remember that "hope maketh not ashamed" (Rom. 5:5a).

God has given us His Word to establish us, to strengthen us, to assure and comfort us, in the hope which we have. And one way He has done that in both the OT and the NT is by the record we have of the Lord's people who have gone before us. James particularly cited "the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord." They were particularly under fire from the Enemy.

James said, "Take those prophets for your examples." God has given us those examples by His dealings with them, and by the very fact that we can read about them in the Word. They all had one thing in common:

They suffered as the people of God, as the servants of God. But we also see another thing about their sufferings: Under the blessing of God they were left, after their sufferings, better spiritually than they were before. Sufferings purify us. They make us more holy. They make us less self-confident, and stronger in our trust in the Lord.

It is very important to have the right examples before us. The word that James used here indicates that the lessons that we learn from the prophets are very clear, and they are to become examples for us to follow, expecting that things will turn out for us to be a blessing, as they did for them.

So we must expect opposition, but we must also expect blessing to be the ultimate result. Notice that twofold "example" which comes from the prophets.

In the OT the outstanding example is Jeremiah. In the NT the supreme example is our Lord Jesus Christ. But we can also mention John the Baptist, the Apostles Peter and John and Paul. Most, and probably all, of the apostles seem to have died as martyrs.

5:11 What conclusion do we come to as we observe their lives, and as we consider the outcome of their sufferings. James said, "Behold, we count them happy that endure." God's blessing was upon them. The Gospel continued to flourish in spite of all of the opposition. They came out, not the conquered, but the victors!

And here he cited another whose sufferings were very severe and more extensive than the sufferings of most of the people of God. He lost his possessions, his family, his health. He was falsely accused by his friends. His soul was tried to the very limit.

But what do we see as "the end of the Lord"? When it was all over, what did Job and all who read his story learn about the Lord? We learn that the Lord is full of pity and of tender mercy. James was probably referring to Psa. 103:4, 8.

5:12 A warning completes this part of the chapter. They were not to take the Lord's Name in vain, nor were they to swear by heaven, or earth, or any other oath. The believer under testing needs to be very careful about his language. Let him guard his words carefully, using a simple "yes" or "no," but not sinning against the Lord by a lot of talk.

Solomon gave good advice in Ecc. 5:2 which we do well to follow especially in times of trial:

Be not rash with thy mouth,
and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God:
for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth:
therefore let thy words be few.

For this 12th verse cf. also Matt. 5:33-37 because this seems to have been the words of our Lord which James had in mind as he wrote.

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Chapter 5 -- Part 3

The theme for the last part of the Epistle is, Be Hopeful. The first part extends from 5:7 to 5:12. We now come to the second part:

B. About prayer being answered (James 5:13-18).

Previously in the Epistle there have been two, possibly four references to prayer:

1) James 1:5-8.

2) James 4:3.

The two that could be references to prayer are:

3) James 3:9a.

4) James 4:8a.

Therefore, as we come to this section on prayer toward the end of chapter 5, we can say that the Epistle ends as it began, with James speaking of prayer.

5:13 One commentator, Oesterley in EGT, IV, p. 473, suggests that the affliction referred to here may be "mental worry or distress." However, others do not mention this. But it is good to be reminded that afflictions, whatever they may be, are always accompanied by mental distress and worry. So, whether a child of God be suffering outwardly or inwardly or both, he is to pray. If we link this verse with v. 12, the believer is to pray, not to swear. Behavior which Job's wife suggested to him, to "curse God, and die," is not acceptable for the people of God. Cf. Job 2:9. But prayer is always pleasing to God. Our afflictions remind us of our need for God. It is during times of affliction that we learn to pray. Like everything else in our lives, our troubles come to us by the providence of God, and so it is good to know that they have a purpose, a good purpose.

So times of affliction are praying times (MH, IV, p. 998).

The tense of the verb that James used here suggests an interesting idea that may have been in the mind of James as he wrote. Lit. it means, "Let him keep on praying" (Robertson, VI, 64). The thought is that sometimes afflictions cause us to stop praying! It may be because we are so discouraged that it is hard for us to pray. Or it may be that the affliction itself occupies so much of our time that we neglect prayer. Whatever the excuse, James said, "Do not stop praying." It is in times of affliction that we need to pray more than ever!

Tasker, to whom I have referred before, has this interesting statement in his commentary on James:

The habit of prayer should be, and indeed is, one of the most obvious features which differentiates a Christian from other people. He knows that his heavenly Father extends to him a standing invitation to draw near to Himself, which no experience of joy or sorrow and no conditions of prosperity or adversity have any power to cancel. The shed blood of Jesus has opened up for him a way of direct access into the divine presence, and that way is never barred. The believer can turn immediately for inspiration, peace, and power to Him who holds the universe in the palm of His hand, and orders all things in accordance with His sovereign will, with the assurance that 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called

according to his purpose' (Rom. viii. 28), and knowing that 'the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers' (I Pet. iii. 12). The natural man, who knows not God, is without this privilege; and the result is that he tends to be unduly elated in times of success and prosperity, and to be plunged into depression and despair when he is the victim of untoward circumstances or vexed with pain and sorrow (p. 126).

Therefore, we need to pray when affliction comes, and, if we have been praying, we need to continue to pray. This comes first, and must continue throughout the affliction. How thankful we can be for such an exhortation in the Word of God.

"Is any merry, let him sing psalms" -- The Greek simply says, "Let him sing." But the implication that the Psalms are to be sung is found in passages like Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26.

We can thank God that our lives hold those special times of joy as well as times of affliction. We need both, or we will never become what we need to be.

And as in the case of praying, the verb "sing" means, Let him continue to sing. This can be done privately, in families, among friends, or with the church.

It is possible for a child of God to be going through a time of affliction and, at the same time, have a heart that sings to the Lord. Cf. Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail. Cf. Acts 16:25. We minister to ourselves and to each other when we sing, but, most importantly, we sing to glorify the Lord! Let us not forget to acknowledge God as the Giver of "every good gift and every perfect gift," and to praise Him "from Whom all blessings flow."

5:14 Sickness is another kind of affliction. What were the people to do in such times? They were to call for the elders of the church. And what were the elders to do? They were to pray.

This means that elders should be men of prayer. To pray for the people of God at all times and under all circumstances, was the responsibility of the elders. They were not just to visit them, and talk to them, but they were to pray!

"Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" -- This is where the Catholics get their authorization for the extreme unction. But the extreme unction was to prepare people for death; the object here is restoration back to health. Thus, extreme unction is not taught here.

The twelve anointed the sick with oil when they went out to heal, according to Mark 6:13. In Luke 10:34 we read that the Good Samaritan went to the man who had been beaten and robbed by thieves, "and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine." So sometimes oil was used as medicine. That may have been the case here; we cannot say for sure. Whatever might be the meaning, it was done "in the name of the Lord," teaching the sick person and all present that, if healing were granted, it was because of the goodness of the Lord.

5:15 Remember that James, in chapter 1, v. 6, spoke of asking in faith. And our Lord said in Mark 11:24,

Therefore I say unto you,
 What things soever ye desire, when ye pray,
 believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

No passage of Scripture is to be interpreted independently of other Scriptures dealing with the same subject. Nowhere does the Lord promise to heal all who are sick! Nowhere does the Lord promise to give us whatever we may want. All prayer to be answered must be subject to the sovereign will of God. But, if prayer is to be answered, it must be offered in faith. If the sick are to be healed when prayer is offered for them, it is because it is the will of God, and it is because those who pray are praying in faith. What an encouragement this is to know that our prayers can be effective, and that faith is essential if prayer is to be answered! But even in many instances God answers graciously even when people are lacking in faith.

The emphasis is not upon the anointing with oil, but in praying in faith, and in recognizing that it is the Lord Who does the healing.

The last part of v. 15 speaks of sickness that is caused by sin. But even here there is a need for caution. NOT ALL SICKNESS IS BECAUSE OF SIN. But when it is, if the sin is confessed and forsaken, often healing will follow.

These two verses are difficult, but we need to realize that James had to be speaking (1) of the Apostolic period when miracles were still being performed, and (2) that these same conditions do not carry over to today. There is no mention of anointing with oil in the Book of Acts. God can still perform miracles, but this is not the day of miracles as were the days of Elijah and Elisha, of our Lord, and of the Apostles Who labored throughout the first century.

But we can point out certain truths which are important for us:

- 1) Elders need to be praying men.
- 2) People need to call upon their elders for prayer--if not in their home, yet most certainly for prayer.
- 3) God hears and answers prayer.
- 4) We need to learn to pray in faith, submitting ourselves at the same time to the will of God.
- 5) Sometimes sickness is due to sin, but there is hope that a sinning saint who confesses and forsakes his sin will be raised up. Cf. Prov. 28:13.

5:16 This verse may follow from v. 14, but it is more likely that James was speaking about trouble that two believers (or more, but with two sides involved) have had with each other. There was to be confession on both sides. And there was to be prayer for each other. The result would be healing! This must mean that the broken relationship would be healed. It is doubtful if physical healing is in the picture at all here.

This is what Paul was writing about in Eph. 4:1-3. Peace is always to be our objective. And there is nothing that makes for peace any more than when two believers, or more, come together to acknowledge their sins, and to pray for each other. Troubles are healed when we confess our faults, and when we pray for each other.

This verse concludes with a very wonderful statement on prayer: "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

It seems that this verse goes with verses 17 and 18 since Elijah is an example of such "a righteous man" who prayed.

Tasker says that "the main point of the sentence is clear. A righteous man's prayers differ from the prayers of others by virtue of their earnestness and their fervency" (p. 138).

The verse emphasizes the importance of three things:

- 1) The character of the one who prays.
- 2) The manner of his praying.
- 3) The effect, the power, of his prayers.

"A righteous man" -- This obviously means a believer, but more than that is involved here. This is a believer who is righteous in his heart and in his life. Cf. Psalms 66:18. Cf. also 1 Tim. 2:8. Also we have a verse like 1 John 3:22. Two verses in Proverbs emphasize this point:

- 1) Prov. 15:8, "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: **but the prayer of the upright is his delight.**"
- 2) Prov. 15:29, "The Lord is far from the wicked: **but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.**"

And the Apostle John tells us that, if He hears us, He answers us! Cf. 1 John 5:14, 15.

"Effectual fervent prayer" -- The two words, "effectual" and "fervent" are translated from one participle in the Greek. And so translators have had many suggestions as to what the proper translation is. Thomas Manton had this to say about the word in the Greek which has been translated by two words in the English:

The word in the original is so sublime and emphatical, that translations cannot reach the height of it (Vol. 4, p. 461).

And then he added this:

The phrase properly signifieth a prayer **wrought** and **excited**; and so implieth both the efficacy and influence of the Holy Ghost, and the force and vehemency of an earnest spirit and affection (Ibid.).

And so "an effectual fervent prayer" has two characteristics:

- 1) Praying that is diligent, persevering, powerful. This is the idea expressed many places in Scripture where it is said that those praying continued in prayer! Quoting again from Manton, he said,

The phrase signifieth such a perseverance as it kept up with much labour and force. It is no easy thing to pray, and to work a lazy dead heart into a necessary height of affections. The weights are always running downward, but they are wound up by force: Ps. xxv. 1, 'I lift my heart to thee.' When our affections are gotten up, it is hard to keep them up; like Moses' hands, they soon flag and wax faint. A bird cannot stay in the air without a continual flight and motion of the wings; neither can we persist in prayer without constant work and labour: our faith is so weak, that we are hardly (with difficulty) brought into God's presence; and our love is so small, that we are hardly (with difficulty) kept there: affections lag, and then our thoughts are scattered; weariness maketh way for wandering; first our hearts are gone, and then our minds, so that we have need of much labour and diligence; all acts of duty are drawn from us by an holy force (Vol. 4, p. 464).

- 2) "Fervent" is, as Manton says, like putting the fire to the OT sacri-

fice. On certain occasions God sent fire down from heaven to indicate His acceptance of the sacrifice. Manton pointed to Jacob's wrestling and his refusal to let the Lord go until he blessed him. He also wrote of the man in Luke 11:5-13 who went to his friend at midnight to get bread, and who would not take "no" for an answer. And then Manton added:

It is said, Acts xxvi. 7, that the tribes served God instantly . . . the word signifieth to the utmost of their strength. Under the law, the sweet perfumes in the censers were burnt before they ascended. Oh! look to your affections; get them fired by the Holy Ghost, that they may flame up toward God in devout and religious ascents. It is the usual token for good that you shall prevail with God as princes. Luther said, . . . --would to God I could always pray with a like ardour, for then I had always this answer, . . . --be it unto thee as thou wilt. Oh! be earnest and fervent, then, though you cannot be eloquent. There is language in groans, and sighs are articulate. The child is earnest for the dug (nipple) when it cannot speak of it. Only beware that your earnestness doth not arise from fleshly lusts and concernments. The sacrifices and perfumes were not to be burned with strange fire. When your censers are fired, let not the coal be taken from the kitchen, but from the altar. God hath undertaken to satisfy spiritual desires, but not fleshly lusts (Vol. 4, p. 463).

So effectual, fervent praying is what we need.

"Availeth much" -- Manton pointed out that James did not say how much, but that it does avail--meaning that it is mighty and powerful, and does prevail. We cannot seek the Lord in vain. And the Bible is full of illustrations to prove that that is true. God answers prayer. It is not right to say that prayer changes things. What we should say is that GOD CHANGES THINGS IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.

This statement is given for our encouragement, as is the example from Scripture which follows in verses 17 and 18.

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5:17 Elijah is the example. Cf. 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1, 41-46. He is the fourth OT person to be mentioned in this Epistle. The first was Abraham (2:21. 23). The second was Rahab (2:25). The third was Job (5:11). And now Elijah here.

The basis for Elijah's prayer goes back to Solomon's prayer when the Temple was dedicated. Cf. 1 Kings 8:35, 36.

However, lest we say that Elijah was a prophet of God, a much greater person than any of us is, and so it would be expected that God would hear him, James began by identifying him as "a man subject to like passions as we are."

This means that he had the same kind of feelings that we do. He had the same kind of a nature. He had the same kind of trials, and he responded like we do. He may have been a man of God, a prophet, but he was also a human being. As James said, "He was a man." We must not forget this about any of the Lord's servants.

When Peter entered the house of Cornelius (cf. Acts 10:25, 26), Cornelius fell down and worshipped him.

But Peter took him up, saying,
Stand up; I myself also am a man.

When Paul healed the cripple at Lystra, the people began to say that the gods had come down to them. They called Paul, Mercury, and they called Barnabas, Jupiter. And then they prepared to offer sacrifices to them. But Paul and Barnabas tore their clothes and ran in among the people saying,

Sirs, why do ye these things?
We also are men of like passions with you . . .

And so in spite of all the achievements of his life, he was "a man subject to like passions as we are." He had the same sinful nature that we do, was subject to the same fears, experienced the same weakness that we have. Remember the reference that Paul made to Elijah in Rom. 11:2, 3.

But he truly was an outstanding prophet, regarded by many as the forerunner of the Messiah, identified with John the Baptist. Cf. Matt. 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17. Many thought our Lord was Elijah come back to earth. Cf. Matt. 16:14. He appeared with Moses and the Lord on the mount of transfiguration. Cf. Matt. 17:3. Some thought that the Lord was calling for him from the Cross. Cf. Matt. 27:46-49.

The greatness of Elijah consisted in what God had done for him, and how the Lord had chosen to work through him. He was a righteous, godly man. And so his prayers were powerful, so powerful that there was no rain for three and a half years!

James said, "And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain."

We are not told this in 1 Kings. We are simply told that Elijah said,
As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand,
there shall not be dew nor rain these years,
but according to my word (1 Kings 17:1).

As is sometimes the case, the NT tells us things about OT events which are not recorded in the OT.

"Prayed earnestly" is a translation of two Greek words which means, prayed with prayer. So often we have hopes and desires as to what we would like to see God do, but we do not put our hopes into the form of a prayer, and pray it to God. Elijah did! He knew that the people of Israel were deserving of judgment, and that it was only through judgment that they might be turned from their idolatry and other forms of disobedience.

It is interesting to see in 1 Kings 17 and 18 how God provided for Elijah during that time, and how he enabled Elijah to provide for others. It was during this time also that Elijah had the contest with the prophets of Baal to show who the true God was.

5:18 And then he prayed again, and the rains came! And with the rains, as always, came the fruit.

It was by prayer that the rains were stopped; and it was by prayer that the rains started again. Notice in the latter part of 1 Kings 18
(1) Elijah's humbling, (2) his expectation, (3) his perseverance, (4) his faith, and (5) his assurance when there was a little cloud.

This account should be a great encouragement to all of us to pray, not just to be satisfied to learn about how God answered Elijah's prayer.

And if it is an encouragement for us to pray, it is also an encouragement for us to be righteous in all of our ways.

And then, when we pray, let us pray persistently and with great fervor. Let us realize that only the Holy Spirit can enable us to pray this way. Let us pray that we will be delivered from prayers that are dead and lifeless, prayers that are offered once, and then hardly even remembered after that. We all have much to learn about prayer. But, in a world where we have so many discouragements, and so many reversals, let us rise to new heights of faith that it is prayer, prayer, and more prayer, that we need, persevering prayer, offered as we, too, lift up holy hands to our all-powerful, sovereign God.

We also have evidence here in the story of Elijah that God does judge sin. That was what James was concerned about in verses 15 and 16 of this chapter. We always need to ask ourselves if our troubles are due to sin. And when we see the terrible things that are happening in our country, who can possibly doubt but that we are a nation under judgment. Consider the terrible crimes. At the last report (4/24/89) Portland was the third highest in the nation. Gangs who show no remorse for what they have done. The oil spill in Alaska. The explosion on the USS Iowa--taking the lives of 47 young men. Aids. Drunkenness. Immorality and dishonesty in government. Church leaders involved in scandals. Plane accidents. Drugs.

How we need to plead with God for His mercy to be upon us. There is no hope that things can ever be turned around except we see:

- 1) Greater judgment.
- 2) A genuine revival.
- 3) The coming of the Lord.

We are so close to it that it is hard for us to realize how really terrible things are in our country and throughout the world.

And now we come to the last two verses of the Epistle.

V. BE HOPEFUL (James 5:7-20).

- D. About rescuing others who have erred from the truth (James 5:19, 20).

Those who accuse James of hardness need to give special attention to the last two verses of this Epistle. They have to do with evangelism, not of the masses, but of a single "soul." And it would seem that his thought had been prompted by the condition of Israel in the days of Elijah, and that, even in judgment, God's purposes are gracious toward those who will turn from their sins.

"Brethren" -- for the 15th time: 1:2, 16, 19;
2:1, 5, 14;
3:1, 10, 12;
4:11;
5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19.

In 2:5 it is "beloved brethren." The frequency of this family term shows the great affection that James had for the people of God.

"If any of you do err from the truth" -- As was the case among the

Israelites in Elijah's day, so in the first century church there were those who had identified themselves with the people of God, but who were not truly saved. James seems to have recognized this as a special problem, and one which the people of God needed to be concerned about.

"Err" -- Used only elsewhere in 1:16. It means that they had either wandered from the truth of the Word, or they had been led astray. The Greek form here is an aorist passive subjunctive. And therefore James may have been speaking of anyone who had been led astray. The point that James was making is that a person's adherence to the Word of God is that which is the distinguishing mark of a child of God.

"The truth" -- Cf. 1:18; 3:14. The Lord Jesus also spoke of Himself as "the truth" (John 14:6), and so the person who departs from the truth of the Word also departs from Christ, and vice versa. When we see a person who either ignores or deliberately rejects and violates the Word of God on a consistent basis, that person's faith becomes very suspect!

Always notice, too, that when a person turns from the doctrine of Scripture, he also turns from the moral standards of Scripture in his daily life. When a person's doctrine is wrong, his morals will be wrong, too. We see this often in churches and in schools that have been Christian in the past. They begin to reject certain parts of the Word of God, and you soon find that their behavior is anything but Christian. It is happening every day!

"And one convert him" -- It does not take the whole church--just "one."

Calvin remarked on this passage:

We must take heed lest souls perish through pure sloth whose salvation God puts in a manner in our hands. Not that we can bestow salvation on them, but that God by our ministry delivers and saves those who seem otherwise to be in high destruction (Quoted by Ross, p. 104).

To be converted is to be turned. We need to be concerned about people in the world, but we also need to be on the lookout for people among us who may not know the Savior. They may be people who like to hear the Bible taught, but it has never affected their lives, and so you know that it is not in their hearts.

Remember what Peter said about conversion in Acts 3:19:

Repent ye therefore, and be converted,
that your sins may be blotted out,
when the times of refreshing shall come
from the presence of the Lord.

5:20 "Let him know," or realize. HAS IT EVER REALLY OCCURRED TO US AS IT WHAT IT MEANS WHEN WE SEE A SINNER CONVERTED? It means three things:

- 1) That that person has been converted "from the error of his way."
- 1) That a soul, an eternal soul, has been saved from death.
- 2) That a multitude of sins have been hidden.

These statements indicate that if a person is in "error," nothing is done about his sins, nor has his destiny been changed.

But James was positively indicating here that salvation is from three things. The very word "saved" indicates a deliverance. And it is not only from, but it is unto. But at this point James was speaking of what

we are saved from. The three things are (let me point them out again):

- 1) "From the error of his way."
- 2) "From death."
- 3) From his sins: "and shall hide a multitude of sins."

"From the error of his way" -- "His way" is the way he is living, his lifestyle. It is called "error" because it is wrong. This word "error" is related to the word "err" in verse 19. The one James was speaking of was doing the wrong things, was headed in the wrong direction. He thought he was right, but he was wrong. Solomon said,

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death (Prov. 14:12).

And that statement is so important that Solomon repeated it in Prov. 16:25.

The word "error" also includes the idea of straying, wandering, roaming. His ways may change from time to time, but they are all wrong. There is only one right way, and that is Christ! Cf. John 14:6.

And so the meaning of this statement is that, when a person is really saved, there is going to be a very evident change in his behavior. And this may be the reason that James mentioned it first. This is something that can be seen!

"He . . . shall save a soul from death."

One person does not "save" another person, but, being God's instruments through whom others hear the Gospel and are saved, that person is looked upon as having saved the other.

Paul used this expression in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 (cf. v. 22). (Read.) Christ is the Savior, but we are His servants bringing the message to sinners in the hope that they will be saved.

Let us remember what James had already said about salvation in this Epistle. Cf. James 1:21; cf. 1 Pet. 1:22, 23. And then see James 2:14. Cf. Eph. 2:8-10. What was Paul insisting upon? That true faith will be accompanied by works. And then we have James 4:12 where it is specifically stated that God is the One Who saves.

So God saves through faith in the Word of God, but He uses us as His instruments.

When James used the expression, "shall save a soul from death," he was speaking about eternal death! He was speaking of hell! It is only through the truth of the Gospel, it is only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that anyone can be saved from death. Cf. John 5:24; Rom. 5:8, 9. "A soul" is a person.

"And shall hide a multitude of sins." How many sins are in "a multitude of sins"? In the Greek and in the English it indicates a great number.

It does not make any difference who the person may be, every person has "a multitude of sins." There are too many for us to count. We have forgotten many of them. And there are many that we have never recognized as sin. But it is only through the Gospel that they can be hidden from God's sight.

Our sins are hidden when they are forgiven (Eph. 1:7).

It is no wonder that David said,

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered (Psa. 32:1).

To have your sins covered is to have them forgiven. Micah said this:

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity,
and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage?
he retaineth not his anger for ever,
because he delighteth in mercy.

He will turn again, he will have compassion on us;
he will subdue our iniquities;

and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea

(Micah 7:18, 19).

Andrew Bonar, that dear Scottish saint, wrote these words in his diary:

May we stand on the shore of that ocean into which our sins have
been cast, and see them sink to the depths, out of sight, and the
sea calm and peaceful, the sunshine playing on it, the sunshine of
Thy love and Thy favour (Quoted by Ross, p. 103).

Our sins are hidden when we are cleansed. Cf. Rev. 1:5b where John was
praising the Lord with those words, "Unto him that loved us, and washed
(or loosed) us from our sins in his own blood." Our salvation comes as
"a free gift" (Rom. 6:23) to us, but it was purchased for us at the
infinite cost of the blood of our dear Savior.

The salvation of one soul is an event that causes great joy in heaven.
The Lord Jesus said,

I say unto you,
that likewise joy shall be in heaven
over one sinner that repenteth,
more than over ninety and nine just persons,
which need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

We would love to see a mighty revival in which thousands of people would
be drawn to Christ. And let us pray that that may be in the plan of God
for us. But at the same time, let us not lose sight of that one sinner
who needs to come to Christ. Who can measure the joy when we see the
sins of one person cleansed away forever by the precious blood of our
Lord Jesus Christ?

Note: This series on the Epistle of James was concluded on 5/1/89.
With three weeks yet to go before dismissing the Tuesday Class
for the summer, I decided to conclude this hour, and to spend the
next three classes on the subject with which James closed his
Epistle: the evangelization of people who do not know the Lord
Jesus Christ as Savior.