

**NOTES
ON
JAMES**

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LESSON ONE

1:1-8

I James,—This name is the English form of “Jacob,” from the old French *James*, which is an abbreviation of the Italian *Giacomo*, from the late Latin *Jacobus*. The fact that the author was named after the great forefather of Israel indicates that he was a Jew, both by race and religion, who had been converted to Jesus Christ. No other information is given about him. The most likely candidate, however, is James the brother of Jesus. It is true that there were two apostles named James, but it is doubtful that they are indicated here. James the son of Zebedee was executed around A.D. 43 (Acts 12:2), which was before the earliest date ascribed to this epistle, A.D. 45 (which would make it the earliest of all the New Testament books). James the son of Alphaeus, the other apostle by that name, is given no prominence in the divine record of the early church. But the facts concerning James the Lord’s brother, who enjoyed great prominence and influence in the early church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 1 Corinthians 15:7), referred to in Galatians 2:9 as one of the reputed pillars of the church, harmonize perfectly with the character and contents of the epistle. The message of such a person would be especially influential among the Jewish Christians to whom it was written.

Although he is designated as an apostle in Galatians 1:19, he was not one of the Twelve. It is plainly stated in John 7:3,5 that the Lord’s brethren did not believe on Him, which was over a year after the appointment of the Twelve. He was thus an apostle in the same sense as Barnabas, Andronicus, and Junias (Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7).

Josephus (*Antiquities*, XX.9:1) relates that he was stoned to death about A.D. 62 by the high priest Ananus. Hegesippus (quoted by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* II.23:4-18) gives us many traditions about him; such as that he was a Nazarite by birth, that he prayed so continuously that his knees became hard like a camel’s, and that he was called “the bulwark of the people.”

a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,—In describing himself as a servant (Greek *doulos*, slave or servant), James affirmed that he had been “bought with a price,” and so was not his own but belonged entirely to God and Christ, and that thus his will was wholly subservient to the divine will. In acknowledging that he was equally bound to the service of God and Christ, he tacitly affirmed his belief in the Deity of Christ. See John 17:10. The term “servant” was also used by Jude, implying that both writers, although brothers of the Lord, were in no way privileged above their readers but that all Christians are on the same level. See Acts 10:34,35; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17.

It is interesting to note that James expressly mentions the name of Jesus only here and in 2:1.

to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion,—The term “Dispersion” was a familiar one for the whole body of Jews outside Palestine, scattered among the Gentiles. In light of his reference in 2:1 to “our Lord Jesus Christ,” James obviously referred here to those Jews of the Dispersion who had been converted to Christ, who thus were obligated to accept this inspired message written to them by their fellow servant of Christ.

greeting.—The word *chairein* literally means “rejoice.” It is the same expression used in the letter from the church at Jerusalem (Acts 15:23).

2 Count it all joy,—The *joy* of which James here speaks follows the *rejoice* of his greeting. The readers were to consider the temptations that beset them as a thing of *all* joy, wholly joyful, without any admixture of sorrow. See Matthew 5:11,12; 2 Corinthians 7:4; 12:10.

my brethren,—James uses this word nineteen times. Although he is a brother of the Lord, he emphasizes here the thought that he is the brother of all Christians, however humble their circumstances may be.

when ye fall into manifold temptations;—These temptations are not the allurements to sin referred to in 1:13 but the trials of life that take the form of afflictions. The adjective “manifold” in the Greek means “varicolored, motley,” and so designates the different trials Christians are subjected to: sickness, poverty, persecution, etc. Christians “fall into” them in the sense that such afflictions are the inevitable result of living in this world and of serving Christ, which they must endure if they would finally reach heaven. See Matthew 10:22; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 1:6.

3 knowing that the proving of your faith—This verse and the one to follow explain the reason for the Christian’s rejoicing in regard to the trials of life. The Greek word for “proving,” *dokimion*, was the technical term for metals that were put to the test to see if they were the real thing. So faith, the foundation of the Christian life, can only prove to be genuinely anchored to its object Jesus Christ, fully trusting in His power and will, as it is tested in the crucible of afflictions. See 1 Peter 1:6,7; 4:12.

worketh patience.—The word “patience” is from the Greek *hupomonen* (*hupomone*), which denotes the perseverance and steadfastness that do not falter under suffering. It is more than passive submission, the mere gritting of the teeth at the harshness of life. When faith in Christ holds up under the stresses and strains of life, it *works* patience in the sense of producing steadfastness and resoluteness in living the Christian life and in reaching the heavenly goal. See Romans 5:3; Hebrews 12:1.

4 And let patience have its perfect work,—The perfect work of patience is the steadfastness or persistence in the Lord's work that is not broken off in the midst of its operation, but that continues to have its full effect in accomplishing God's purpose concerning the Christian. Thus every Christian will do well to heed the following injunctions: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58); "And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

that ye may be perfect and entire,—The word "entire" is from the Greek *holokleroi* (*holokleros*), from *holos*, whole, and *kleros*, a lot or allotment. It here signifies the Christian who lacks none of the graces that are essential to the Christlike life (love, knowledge, mercy, kindness, etc.). The word "perfect," Greek *teleioi* (*telos*, fulfillment or completion), describes these graces as being without blemish, fully and completely developed.

lacking in nothing.—These words emphasize the meaning of the preceding phrase. The Christian who would lack nothing would be one who possesses all the attributes of Christian character in their full and complete development. The earthly goal of the Christian's faith in Christ which is proved by manifold temptations is a life that is entirely and perfectly patterned after that of Christ. Even though no Christian ever attains such an ideal, and thus always has room for improvement, that is the goal he must constantly strive for if he would reach the heavenly goal in the next life. See Matthew 5:48; Philippians 3:12-15; 1 John 1:8.

5 But if any of you lacketh wisdom,—The word "wisdom" is from the Greek *sophias* (*sophia*), designating true knowledge in a practical way. There are many aspects of life in which the Christian is to apply wisdom. But the word "lacketh" here in the context indicates that James has in mind wisdom as it is applied to the trials of life. Without this wisdom the Christian's faith will eventually falter and be overwhelmed by the afflictions that beset him. In order for him to rejoice in his tribulations, to possess the patience that will have its perfect work so that he can continue to grow in Christlikeness, he must have the wisdom which will enable him to form a true valuation of life from the divine point of view. Such wisdom will cause him to recognize that the manifold temptations of life represent God's purpose concerning him—divine providence working for his good. See Romans 8:28; Hebrews 12:3-13. This wisdom is beautifully exemplified in Paul's attitude concerning the thorn in his flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

let him ask of God,—The wisdom contemplated here is a gift of God, something given in answer to prayer. It is not mere philosophical

inference from the harsh realities of life, nor is it something the Christian can receive from his study of God's word alone. Certainly, he needs to cooperate with God's grace in studying all that the divine word has to say about the faith-strengthening effect of manifold temptations; but such study will only be of academic interest to him, not becoming a practical reality in his life, without the wisdom to be received from God through prayer.

who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not;—It is noteworthy that in the Greek the word "God" in the preceding phrase is connected here with the word "giving" so that *giving* is emphasized as an attribute of God: *tou didontos Theou*, translated literally as "the giving God."

The word "liberally" is from the Greek *haplos*, appearing only here in the New Testament. Its literal meaning is *simply*, which accords with the negative clause "upbraideth not." It is giving with a single heart—frankly, freely, and purely—without any admixture of resentment, reluctance, or bitterness. Men often mar their giving by a resentful attitude. Cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7. But God, who is perfectly generous, gives because of His perfect desire and willingness to benefit us. He wants us to have wisdom more than we can ever want to have it. See Matthew 7:7-11; John 14:13.

and it shall be given him.—This declaration is unequivocal. There can be no question that it is God's will that His children have wisdom, and thus He affirmatively answers every sincere, believing prayer for wisdom. See Psalms 81:11.

6 But let him ask in faith,—The Christian who follows this injunction is in such close fellowship with God and His word that he knows what is the will of God concerning wisdom. He thus is sure that his prayer for wisdom is in accordance with the divine will and that he will receive what he asks for. See Mark 11:24; 1 John 5:14,15.

nothing doubting:—The word "doubting" does not mean unbelief as such. The original Greek signifies "to be divided in one's own mind, thus to be irresolute." Marvin Vincent says that it expresses "the hesitation between faith and unbelief, and inclines toward the latter." We are reminded here of the Israelites, who were not entirely devoid of belief in God's power, but favored unbelief more by limiting this power. Cf. Matthew 21:21; Acts 10:20.

for he that doubteth is like to surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed.—The one whose prayers waver between faith and unbelief is portrayed as being like the surge or froth of the sea by the shore—now coming in, now going out, as the wind drives it to and fro. This was a natural figure for a man who had spent his early years near

the sea of Galilee. And this sea-symbol was also used by others in the ancient world to illustrate instability and irresoluteness. The Greek orator Demosthenes (*De Falsa Legatione* 383) compared the shifting, unreliable policies of democracy to winds at sea. And it is especially noteworthy that the only other use of the Greek word for *surge* in the New Testament immediately precedes Jesus' question of His disciples, "Where is your faith?": "he rebuked the wind and the *raging* of the water" (Luke 8:24). See Ephesians 4:14, where the same Greek word for "driven by the wind" is translated as "tossed to and fro." Cf. Isaiah 57:20.

7 For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord;—"That man" is the doubting self-deceiver. The context limits anything to be received of the Lord to the things that are prayed for. Of course, the doubting, unstable petitioner may continue to receive many of the good things of life from God, but not in answer to prayer. Cf. Matthew 5:45. He is thus sadly deceived if he thinks he will receive anything from God in answer to his prayers, much less wisdom.

8 a doubleminded man,—The word "doubleminded" in the Greek conveys no idea of duplicity or deceitfulness. It does not mean hypocrisy as such, but only indecision—"a man of two minds," one who is dubious and undecided. In the New Testament this word is only used by James, here and in 4:8. However, it was often used by later religious writers, occurring forty times in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. One such example is where the shepherd says to Hermas, "Wherefore purify thy heart of all the vices of this present world; and observe the commands I have delivered unto thee from God; and thou shalt receive whatsoever good things thou shalt ask, and nothing shall be wanting unto thee of all thy petitions; if thou shalt ask of God without doubting. But if thou doubtest in thy heart, thou shalt receive none of thy petitions. For those who doubt regarding God, are like the *doubleminded*, who shall obtain none of these things."

unstable in all his ways.—The word "unstable" in the Greek is *akatastatos*, found only here in the New Testament and the Septuagint of Isaiah 54:11; but the kindred *akatastasia*, confusion, occurs in 3:16 and elsewhere. It is obvious that one whose heart is unstable in his prayers to God will also be unstable in his actions in general, for where unity is lacking in the internal life it is also lacking in the external conduct. This conclusion is certainly involved in the import of Proverbs 4:23, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." See Matthew 6:22-24. The unstable man's eye is double, not single; he thus tries to serve both God and mammon. He is unsettled and uncertain in his decisions and deeds. And since he does not receive wisdom, the thing sought for of which James here speaks, he cannot possibly live a life in harmony with God's will.

Questions

Verse 1. Who is the author of this epistle and to whom does he address it? How does he designate himself? What is the significance of the word "greeting"?

Verse 2. What are the temptations designated in this passage? How are the readers to consider these temptations? What is the significance of the address "my brethren"?

Verse 3. How do Christians *prove* their faith? How does this *proving* work patience?

Verse 4. How does patience have its perfect work? What is the significance of "perfect," "entire," and "lacking in nothing"?

Verse 5. What is the wisdom designated here? Discuss the attitude of God in His affirmative, unequivocal answer to prayer for wisdom.

Verse 6. What is meant by praying "in faith"? Discuss the significance of "nothing doubting" and James' use of the sea-symbol to illustrate the doubt of which he speaks.

Verse 7. Discuss the self-deception of "that man" in his prayers to God?

Verse 8. What is a *doubleminded* man? Why is such a man "unstable in all his ways"?

LESSON TWO

1:9-17

9 But let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate:—How different is the attitude of the one here portrayed, who depends on God with singleness of purpose, from the doubleminded man spoken of in the preceding verse! One who “glories” in his high estate will boast of God Himself who has made this exalted position possible. The poverty-stricken brother who trusts in God is of “low degree” in the estimate of the world, but he is of “high estate” in the estimate of God because he possesses “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). The majority of the Jewish Christians to whom James wrote were probably poor and of inferior social position, but they were to exult in the spiritual dignity which Christ had brought them.

10 and the rich, in that he is made low:—The “rich” designated here is evidently the rich Christian, not the rich non-Christian (5:1-6). He is to glory in his low estate. This does not refer as such to any loss of physical wealth. Nowhere do the scriptures teach that poverty is inherently good and wealth is inherently bad. It is true that not so many who are wealthy are followers of Christ, but certainly some are (1 Corinthians 1:26). And some of these were among the Jewish Christians of the Dispersion. Just as the poor Christian has been exalted above what the world calls lowly in his loyalty to Christ, so the rich Christian has been brought low in the eyes of the world by his singleminded trust in and devotion to God (the world considers both physical poverty and loyalty to Christ as states of degradation). But the humble rich Christian, who is not highminded, who trusts not in his riches but in God, has cause for glorying because he knows that he also has “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” He thus enjoys the same divinely exalted position as his faithful poverty-stricken brother. See 1 Timothy 6:17-19. As the poor brother does not feel degraded because of his poverty, so the rich brother does not feel exalted because of his wealth. The two are equals by faith in Christ, which is the design of the epistle: to reduce all members of the body of Christ to an equal footing (2:1).

because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.—Here and in the next verse it is believed by some commentators that the reference is to the fate of the wealthy man who is bound up with his wealth, the unconverted man of property, who will meet a swift, complete doom. But this conclusion is untenable in light of the fact that the antecedent of the word “he” is the “rich” who glories in his low estate, the man of wealth who is a faithful, humble follower of the Lord. The doom of the unconverted rich is rather the subject matter of 5:1-3.

The humility of the truly converted rich brother brings him to the full realization that he shall presently pass away like the bloom of the grass, that he came into this world naked and will so also leave the world (Job 1:21). He thus well realizes the need of obeying the injunction of 1 Timothy 6:17-19, to be a good steward of that which has been entrusted in his care so that he may abide with God forever. See 1 Peter 4:10; 1 John 2:17.

11 For the sun ariseth with the scorching wind, and withereth the grass; and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth:—Those of the Dispersion who had lived in Palestine knew how short-lived were the patches of grass under the sirocco or scorching wind blowing out of the desert regions from the east and south which came with the rising sun and made short work of the flowers and herbage. What grace and beauty such grass had did not last; it quickly wilted, faded, and perished. See Job 27:21; Jonah 4:8; Luke 12:55.

so also shall the rich man fade away in his goings.—As the grass fades away from the scorching wind, so will the rich man quickly fade away in his goings, in all his earthly pursuits. This cessation of all earthly activities pertains to all men (Isaiah 40:6-8; 1 Peter 1:24), but the poor Christian does not bloom like his rich brother. Thus James applies the figure only to the latter. But whether one is rich or poor, if he is a follower of Christ who realizes the transitory nature of life in this world and is faithful to his divine Master, he has the assurance that when life's little day is over he will enjoy the promise set forth in 1 Peter 1:4.

12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;—The temptation of which James here speaks is the same as in 1:2, the trials of life which take the form of afflictions. The word "blessed" pronounced on those who patiently endure such temptation answers to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5:4,10-12.

for when he hath been approved,—The word "approved" in the Greek is a form of the same word rendered as "proved" in 1:3. See notes on that verse. To loyally stand outward trials, without breaking down under them, is the test that proves the sterling quality of one's faith in Christ, such a test as ultimately results in being received by God in heaven. See 1 Peter 1:5-9; 1 John 5:4,5.

he shall receive the crown of life,—In such passages as 1 Corinthians 9:25 and 2 Timothy 2:5 the word "crown" (Greek *stephanos*) means the wreath of victory given in the Greek games; but in addressing Jewish Christians, James would not likely refer to these games, which

those of Jewish background would regard with abhorrence. He rather used the word in the Old Testament meaning of "a mark of dignity" (Proverbs 4:9; Isaiah 28:5; Zechariah 6:11). The "life" constitutes the crown, which is eternal life in heaven (1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 2:10).

which the Lord promised to them that love him.—See 2:5. The true love one has for Christ can only be seen by his continuing steadfastly to the end in faithfulness to Him. Indeed, love of Christ produces steadfastness in the face of all life's trials. See John 14:21,23,24. Cf. 2 Timothy 4:8, "the crown of righteousness . . . to all them that have loved his appearing."

13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God;—Here the word "tempted" means "enticed or solicited to evil." Thus we must distinguish between the trials used as the discipline of faith, referred to in the preceding verse and in 1:2, and temptations used to degrade and destroy souls. If one fails to be disciplined by the trials of life, which are intended by God to make him better and not worse, and thus gives way to the solicitation to evil, he cannot blame God but only himself. Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

for God cannot be tempted with evil,—The meaning here is that the divine nature is utterly unversed in evil things. One who is so absolutely immune to temptation, who has such an utter hatred for evil, is entirely without the capacity to solicit, entice, or encourage anyone to commit evil.

and he himself tempteth no man:—This affirmation is emphatic: God entices no man to commit evil!

14 but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed.—The temptation which seduces one to sin is from within, from his lust or carnal inclinations. James certainly recognizes that such temptation is ultimately of the devil, which is implied in 4:7 and forthrightly expressed in such passages as 1 John 3:8,10. But he does insist that these solicitations of the devil for sinning cannot cause one to sin unless he first allows them to draw him away; hence, no man can justify his sins by saying, "The devil made me do it." This drawing away may mean the turning from God's law, the perfect standard of truth and righteousness (1 John 3:4). Or the meaning may be that of being drawn away from one's spiritual defenses, inward self-control, or fortress. The two ideas are complementary, not contradictory.

Also stressing the responsibility of each individual for his sins is the *enticement*, allurement, of which James speaks. This word literally denotes "taken with bait, as fish are." It is only as the fish take the bait that they are caught by the angler, and it is only as men accept the

temptations of the devil that they are caught by him. See 1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26. Thus James insists that the eventual blame for being tempted to sin must be placed where it rightly belongs—not on God, who tempts no man; not on the devil, who is the originator of all temptation; not on wicked men, who are the devil's tools; but on the one who is tempted.

It must be understood, however, that it is not temptation per se that is wrong, but only in succumbing to it, in allowing it to lead to sin. Our Lord was "tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1); but He was never drawn away from God's law and His spiritual defenses, never to be enticed, and thus never to succumb to any of the devil's solicitations to evil. And so the divine word says concerning Him, "one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

15 Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin:—Here lust is likened to a harlot. It conceives, becomes pregnant, when it is excited or allured by its object. This is the imagination toying with a forbidden idea. Then when man's will acquiesces, sin is brought forth in that the thing desired becomes a reality. For example, a man lusts after a woman, toying with the forbidden idea of fornication. With his spiritual defenses down and enticed by the object of his lust, he will commit the actual act of fornication if given the opportunity. The plain fact is that there can be no birth of sin without the conceiving of sin, just as there can be no birth of a child without the conceiving of a child. See Matthew 5:28; 12:34; 15:17-20. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9)." This is the source of all evil. Before the act can be committed the purpose must be formed in the breast, which takes time, design, deliberation. Seduction, theft, perfidy, drunkenness, injustice, murder . . . all require design, arrangement, decision" (T. East).

and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death.—The death designated here is spiritual death, "the second death" (Revelation 21:8), which stands in striking contrast to "the crown of life" (1:12). See Romans 6:21-23. This death results not from sin as such, but from sin that is "fullgrown." This does not mean that sin, like a babe, gradually grows to the adult stage. Any sin that is unrepented of will fail to be forgiven by the grace of God through the blood of Christ, the result being eternal death. See Revelation 21:27. Thus sin becomes fullgrown, is brought to completion, when repentance is blocked. It therefore behooves every Christian who would escape eternal death to live always in the spirit of contriteness and penitence concerning the mistakes he makes along the way, so that in his striving to do God's will he may enjoy continual cleansing from his sins (1 John 1:7-10).

16 Be not deceived, my beloved brethren.—The emphatic injunction here is that Christians should not make the monstrous mistake

of attributing the origin of sin to God, but should attribute to Him, as James proceeds to show in the next verse, the source of only that which is good.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift—The gifts of God are here contrasted with the evil that arises from man's lust. What is the difference between the *good* gift and the *perfect* gifts. Such commentators as M. F. Sadler believe the former are temporal gifts and the latter spiritual gifts: "All the temporal good gifts and all the spiritual gifts, gifts more perfect, gifts in a higher sphere, which men receive, they receive from God, the Author and Giver of all good things." It is noteworthy, however, that two different Greek words are used here for *gift*. This distinction is noted in the rendering of the NEB: "All good giving and every perfect gift." The more probable meaning is expressed by A. R. Fausset, "The first, *the act of giving*, or the gift in the *initiatory* stage; the second, *the thing given, the boon, when perfected*. As the 'good gift' stands in contrast to 'sin' in its initiatory stage (v. 15), so the 'perfect boon' is in contrast to 'sin when it is finished,' bringing forth death." But whatever the distinction may be concerning the words "good" and "perfect," the general sense is that God is the author of all good, that everything that is good on the earth comes from Him.

is from above,—From God, who is represented in Colossians 3:1 as dwelling above; that is, in heaven.

coming down from the Father of lights,—The word "Father" is here an equivalent with Creator. Any of James' readers, who had been born and reared as Jews, would recollect the praise of God which prefaced the daily Shema of prayer, recited every morning and evening: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Creator of the luminaries."

with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning.—James contrasts the periodic changes in the luminaries like the sun and moon, which in their various vicissitudes or turning cast shadows (as the sun is eclipsed by the shadow of the moon, or as shadows on a sundial), with the changeless, unfailing God, unvarying in His light shed on men, from whom no shadow of evil ever falls, who is the giver of good and nothing but good. His powers bestowed on us are, like Himself, free from anything that is dark, base, or uncertain. Nothing that incites men to sin is ever light from heaven.

This unchanging nature of the all-powerful, all-righteous God is expressed in such passages as the following: "His work is honor and majesty; and his righteousness endureth for ever" (Psalms 111:3); "For his lovingkindness is great toward us; and the truth of Jehovah endureth for ever" (Psalms 117:2); "Trust ye in Jehovah for ever; for in Jehovah, even Jehovah, is an everlasting rock" (Isaiah 26:4); "For I, Jehovah,

change not" (Malachi 3:6); ". . . for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee. . . Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yea and for ever" (Hebrews 13:5,8). See Hebrews 1:1-12.

Questions

Verse 9. Why does the brother of low degree glory in his high estate?

Verse 10. What is the significance of the rich glorying in the fact that he has been made low? Discuss the passing away of the rich Christian.

Verse 11. Discuss the fading away in his goings of the rich Christian.

Verse 12. Discuss the reason for the blessing pronounced on the one who endures temptation.

Verse 13. Discuss the inability of God to entice or solicit to evil.

Verse 14. How is temptation brought about?

Verse 15. Discuss the conceiving and bearing of sin. What is the meaning and result of sin that is fullgrown?

Verse 16. What is the deception that James urges against in this verse?

Verse 17. What is the difference between "every good gift" and "every perfect gift"? Discuss the source of these gifts.

LESSON THREE

1:18-25

18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,—The Greek verb for “brought forth” is the same as in 1:15. Sin brings forth death; but the regenerating power of God brings forth life, freeing men from sin and death. Cf. Romans 6:17,18,22,23. This bringing forth is of God’s “own will,” not incited by any external force, which answers to the fact that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” the greatest gift being regeneration. God’s will is inclined to man’s salvation, not to his condemnation. See 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9. According to 1 Peter 1:3, God’s mercy corresponds to His “own will” in regeneration. Every sinner who comes to God in accepting Christ as his Saviour, has allowed his will to be submissive to God’s merciful, loving will, with regeneration being the result. Cf. Titus 3:4,5.

This being brought forth, regeneration, is by “the word of truth,” the gospel, the divinely revealed, saving message of God’s redeeming love in Christ. This message must be received and understood in order to produce saving faith in the Saviour, who is the personal Word (John 1:14), “the way, and the *truth*, and the life” (John 14:6). See Romans 10:17; 1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 3:9.

that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.—Some commentators believe that the term “firstfruits” is to be taken literally, referring to the Jewish Christians as being the first converts to the gospel. The word “kind,” however, indicates the figurative nature of the term. “The figure is taken from the requirements of the Jewish law that the first-born of men and cattle, and first growth of fruits and grain should be consecrated to the Lord. The point of the illustration is that Christians, like first-fruits, should be consecrated to God. The expression ‘first-fruits’ is common in the New Testament. See Rom. 8:23; 16:5; 1 Cor. 15:20, 23; Rev. 14:14” (Marvin R. Vincent). See Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 26:2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10. The Jewish Christians to whom James was writing were not to exult in any primacy in order of succession but in the superlative rank of their relationship to God through Christ, in which also all Christians of every generation are to exult. Cf. Luke 10:20; 1 Corinthians 1:30,31.

19 Ye know this, my beloved brethren.—This rendering from the ASV is an indicative, an acknowledgement that the readers do know. Other versions render it as an imperative; for example, “Know this, my beloved brethren” (RSV). In either case, the word “know” probably pertains to what precedes rather than to what follows. In expressing his loving, affectionate concern for his readers in the address “my beloved brethren,” James stresses what they do know or are to know concerning

their being brought forth by the regenerating word as the greatest gift from God. And so he shuts the matter up concerning God as the ultimate source of good and only good.

But the divine word requires our cooperation; we have the responsibility of hearing and obeying it. This is the subject matter of the remainder of the chapter.

But let every man be swift to hear,—This hearing in the context is of the word of truth (1:18,21). Those who have been brought forth by the saving word of truth should make sure that they fulfill their basic responsibility to have receptive hearts and so “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17). From Hebrews 5:11-14 we gather that the Jewish Christians were especially in need of this exhortation because of their failure to grow in the knowledge of God’s word. Cf. 2 Peter 3:18.

slow to speak,—See Proverbs 10:19; 17:27,28; Ecclesiastes 5:2. One who is quick to speak rather than to hear is a very poor learner of God’s word (or of anything else for that matter). Furthermore, such a person is constantly in danger of going off “half-cocked,” so to speak, and saying things that display his ignorance of the divine will, urging his opinions on others as commandments of God. He is also in danger of speaking rashly concerning God Himself (1:13). Such a person urgently needs to give heed to the exhortation of 3:1.

slow to wrath:—The man who is swift to speak and slow to hear, a know-it-all who believes he has all the answers, is quick to clash with those who disagree with him. And even when he hears something taught that is true to God’s word, he is quick to lose his temper if it does not agree with his prejudices. See Acts 22:22; 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Such a person is also quick to give way to wrath in charging God foolishly when beset by trials and tribulations. Cf. Job 1:22.

20 for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.—See 3:13-18. The wrath of man never accomplishes God’s will. It is utterly impossible that the perfectly righteous God should allow His cause to be forwarded by “bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing” (Ephesians 4:31). Those whose speaking is characterized by a wrathful, argumentive, abusive spirit are not defenders but offenders of the gospel. Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:12. They neither promote the righteousness of God in themselves nor in others. See Matthew 12:19-20; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:24.

21 Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness,—The words “putting away” in the Greek literally mean “stripping off,” as a filthy garment. This is a common figure in the Bible (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:8; 1 Peter 2:1). Both

bitterness and overflowing of *wickedness* are to be stripped off the Christian. What is the distinction between the two? The word "filthiness" is from the Greek *rhuparian* (*rhuparia*), literally denoting dirt, filth (1 Peter 3:21), and is here used metaphorically of moral defilement, of everything that defiles the souls. The adjective form *rhuparos* is found in 2:2, "*vile clothing*." Cf. Revelation 22:11.

The Greek word for "wickedness" is *kakias* (*kakia*), meaning "badness in quality" (W. E. Vine), "the vicious character generally" (Joseph Lightfoot), "the hostile disposition toward our neighbor which we call *malignity*" (Hermann Cremer), "malevolence, as social faultiness" (John Huther). Robert Tuck states that the "Greek word has come to be associated with the sins that have their root in wrath and anger, rather than those that originate in love of pleasure." The footnote in the ASV renders the word as *malice*, and it is also so rendered in Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8; Titus 3:3. This is its probable use by James, answering to "wrath" in the preceding verse.

The word "overflowing" does not mean that only the excess of malice must go. In the Greek (*perisseia*) it simply denotes a great quantity of malice, and James insists that all of it should be put away.

receive with meekness the implanted word,—The word "implanted" does not denote something separate from the word "receive." The word of God is implanted as it is received. James' readers are Christians. The divine word had already been implanted in their hearts when they received it at their conversion. See Acts 2:41. Thus James is not telling them to receive it for the first time. What he has in mind is made clear in the next verse: an acceptance that not only understands the will of God but also does that will. Such receiving of the word of God is something all faithful Christians continually do as they grow in Christ. Cf. Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14. See Matthew 13:19-23.

The soil for the word of God is meekness, which in the context means submissiveness to the divine will and at the same time gentle consideration for others, the very opposite of the egotistic, argumentative, antagonistic, malicious spirit of the one who is swift to speak and slow to hear, who vents his wrath on those who do not acquiesce to his opinions.

which is able to save your souls.—The word of God, the gospel, is able to save because it reveals the One who is able to save, Jesus Christ. See Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:12,13; 1 Timothy 1:15. Thus the Christian who receives the word of God with meekness is the one who by faith receives Jesus Christ into his life, who constantly depends on His saving power as he strives to obey His will.

22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, excluding your own selves.—No doubt James has in mind the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-27, thus qualifying the precept "be swift to hear."

Such hearing of the word is indeed basic in the Christian's responsibility to the Lord; he cannot *do* His will without first *knowing* His will (Ephesians 5:15-17). But James resoundly refutes the false notion that the hearing of the word is sufficient. He insists that Christians must carry through with their understanding of divine truth as "doers of the word," which is the regular business of their lives. Those who think that all that is needed to please God is to hear the word suffer from the worst kind of self-delusion.

23,24 For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.—As a mirror faithfully reflects one's "natural face" (literally in the Greek, the countenance of his birth, the face he was born with; that is, his face in its real, natural state), so the word of God reflects one's actual spiritual state, his soul as it really is. If it is considered unreasonable for one to immediately forget what he has seen in a mirror, to do nothing about improving his appearance by removing any blemishes that may mar his face, how far more unreasonable it is for one to see his soul faithfully mirrored in the word of God and do nothing for its improvement. Indeed, the changes that can be made to improve one's soul are infinitely more important than any changes that can be made to improve the appearance of his face.

The word "beholding" in the Greek carries with it the significance of *attentively* considering, so that the contrast is not between a *superficial* look into a mirror and a *careful* contemplation of God's word. The man who beholds his face in a mirror does indeed see his face as it actually is; his contemplation of it is thorough enough to tell him what changes can be made to improve it. But he so looks in vain because he does nothing about what he sees. It is thus not careless hearing of the word that James rebukes, but the failure to carry into practice what is heard. One may be a very attentive, careful hearer of God's word and yet fail to be a doer.

25 But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty,—The word "looketh" elaborates upon the meaning of "beholding" and "beholdeth" in the preceding verse, especially stressing the necessity of carefully scrutinizing one's spiritual life in the light of God's word. It is from the Greek *parakupsas* (*parakupto*), literally meaning "to stoop sideways (*para*, aside, *kupto*, to bend forward, denoting to stoop to look into)." The word thus denotes the looking at anything as closely as possible, which always characterizes those who closely, carefully, and zealously inquire after divine truth.

The thing here commanded to be looked into is portrayed as "the perfect law, the law of liberty." Although James nowhere uses the word

“gospel” in his epistle, it is evident from the context that his use of the word “law” is equivalent to the gospel, the word of salvation referred to in 1:18-24, which is God’s only power to save. True it is that the basic meaning of the gospel pertains to the good news of the saving, redemptive work of Christ, but that does not rule out the ethic of Christ which James commands Christians to look into and be doers of. To have only the ethic of Christ is certainly not the gospel, but to have the saving power of Christ without commitment to the ethic of Christ is also not the gospel. The salvation of Christ and the ethic of Christ comprise the whole gospel, the perfect law of liberty. This inseparable connection between the two is plainly portrayed in Ephesians 2:8-10. Cf. Romans 1:9; 16:25; Philippians 1:27; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:22. As John Huther observed concerning “the law of liberty,” “It is thus the gospel, inasmuch as it places before the Christian—by reason of redemption—the rule of life.”

The perfection of this law of which James speaks, the gospel, is defined by the phrase “the law of *liberty*.” When sinners receive the saving, liberating power of the gospel, to have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ, they are thus perfect in the eyes of God through the righteousness of Christ, being made free from the guilt, power, and punishment of sin. See John 8:32,36; Romans 6:17,18. They are then committed to the ethic of Christ, to be keepers of His law by faith in Him, and thus to enjoy continual cleansing from their sins. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). See Matthew 28:19,20; Galatians 2:20.

This perfection of the gospel’s saving power in contrast to the inability of the law of Moses to save is set forth in such passages as Galatians 3:21; Hebrews 7:19; 10:1-18. The perfection of the law of liberty, the gospel, in contrast to the law of Moses is also seen in its ethical completeness or wholeness. See Matthew 5:21-48.

and so continueth,—This statement is antithetical to “goeth away” in the preceding verse. The Christian who continues to do God’s will is one who continues to look into that will. In the words of Psalms 1:2, “His delight is in the law of Jehovah; and on his law doth he meditate day and night.”

being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh,—We are here reminded of God’s injunction to the Jews in Deuteronomy 4:9, “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw, and lest they depart from thy heart all of the days of thy life.” The faithful Christian forgets not what he hears concerning God’s will, but *does* what he hears in his zeal for good works. See Titus 2:14.

this man shall be blessed in his doing.—In the very doing of God’s word, inherently and innately, there is true blessedness. The sig-

nificance of this conclusion is especially seen in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). As Dean Alford expressed it, "The life of obedience is the element wherein the blessedness is found and consists." Cf. Psalms 19:9-11. Only the Christian who obeys God from a loving heart and a clean conscience will find life's greatest blessedness, the true happiness that is inherent in following Christ. See John 8:31; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:9-12. And with this blessedness that comes from doing God's will is the guilt-free realization of the continually cleansing power from sin through Christ's blood, as we previously noted (1 John 1:7).

Questions

Verse 18. Discuss the regenerating power of the word of truth, the gospel. In what sense are Christians a kind of firstfruits of God's creatures?

Verse 19. What is it that Christians know or are to know in the context of this verse? Why are Christians to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath?

Verse 20. Why does the wrath of man work not the righteousness of God?

Verse 21. What are the "filthiness" and "overflowing of wickedness" that Christians are to put away? What is the significance of "putting away"? Discuss the meaning of the implanted word, the meekness with which it is to be received, and why it is able to save our souls.

Verse 22. Discuss the self-delusion of one who is a hearer but not a doer of God's word.

Verse 23,24. Discuss James' illustration of the absurdity of being a hearer of the word but not a doer.

Verse 25. What is the significance of the word "looketh"? What is the law of liberty? In what sense is it the *perfect* law? What is the blessedness involved in doing God's word?

LESSON FOUR

1:26,27; 2:1-6

26 If any man thinketh himself to be religious,—The word “religious” is from the Greek *threkos*, occurring only here in the New Testament. The kindred noun *threskia*, religion, occurs in 1:26,27; Acts 26:5; Colossians 2:18. It refers to the outward profession of religion, corresponding to *eusebeia*, godliness, the inward profession of religion. In its context, *threskos* designates the person whose opinion of himself is that he is “piously observant of the external duties of his faith” (The Amplified NT). But what he *thinks* of himself in no way coincides with what God *knows* about him.

while he bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart, this man’s religion is vain.—The Greek for “bridleth” literally means “to guide with a bridle.” See 3:2,3. One who does not control his tongue, but lets it go like an unbridled horse, is self-deceived in thinking that he is religious in a way that pleases God. Such a person fails to curb the impulse to malice as expressed in verbal abuse and contempt. See 1:21. James may be thinking of religious people who let their tongues run away with them in their criticism of those with whom they disagree, especially in religious matters, who cannot discuss such differences without being spiteful and acrimonious. They think that they are truly, sincerely religious to so denounce the errors and failings of others, assuming an air of righteous indignation. But God knows otherwise. As John Calvin observed, “For they who are free from grosser sins, and even bear the outward form of sanctity, will often exalt themselves by detracting others under the pretence of zeal, whilst their real motive is love of evil-speaking.”

It may be, however, that James has in mind the unbridled tongue that engages in any and all forms of evil speaking, which he further deals with in 3:1-12. In any case, the person who does not bridle his tongue, no matter how faithful he may be in following certain phases of religion as ordained in God’s word, has a religion that is vain or futile, that makes no appeal for divine mercy, grace, and approbation. Such a religion can never lead anyone to heaven.

27 Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this,—The two adjectives *pure* and *undefiled* present the positive and negative sides of the kind of religion that has the approval of God our Father, which is genuine in His sight. Such a religion is sincere, free from the contamination of self-pleasing and self-seeking, which seeks to be like the generous, loving, merciful, holy heavenly Father. James does not, however, deny the place in divinely acceptable religion of what we commonly call worship, such as prayer, singing, partaking of the Lord’s

supper, etc.; but he does insist that the religious life that excludes chastity and acts of charity can never be divinely approved. Cf. Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8; Matthew 9:13.

to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction,—The objects of good works that characterize pure and undefiled religion are not limited to those specified here. Indeed, we are commanded, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men . . .” (Galatians 6:10). James uses a figure of speech known as synecdoche, a part for the whole. He specifies the afflicted widows and fatherless because they are typical and outstanding instances of those needing aid, who are the least able to take care of themselves.

The obligation Christians have to those in need is designated by the word “visit,” from the Greek *episkeptesthai* (*episkeptomai*), meaning “primarily to inspect (a late form of *episkopeo*, to look upon, care for, exercise oversight)” (W. E. Vine). The idea of “care for” involves anything and everything we can do to help those who are afflicted. But the most effective service we can render them is that which brings us into personal contact with them. See Matthew 25:36; Luke 1:78,79. Acts of charity that avoid personal involvement in the lives of the afflicted are not those of the religion of which James speaks. The Christian who tries to escape from the actual sight of suffering, privation, and hunger, even though he may salve his conscience with impersonal donations to charity, is not an imitator of Him who during His early ministry entered the haunts of suffering and woe to make loving, personal contact with the actual persons who were their victims.

and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.—This second characteristic of true religion is personal purity, the word “world” being used as the corrupting influence of the world without God. See 4:4; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:20; 1 John 2:15-17. Perhaps James’ thought is that to mix with the outside world, even in doing acts of charity, exposes one to the risk of moral corruption. But this does not imply that personal purity is to be sought by the selfish, cowardly avoiding of involvement with the real needs of suffering, sinful mankind, whatever the risks or dangers may be.

Concerning the import of the words “keep oneself,” A. R. Fausset observed, “With jealous watchfulness, at the same time praying and depending on God as alone able to keep us (John 17:15; Jude 24).” See 1 Corinthians 10:13.

2:1 My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.—The sense of these words can best be seen by the renderings of the following modern versions: “My brethren, while holding to your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory, do not exhibit partiality” (Weymouth); “My

brothers, do you try to combine faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with acts of partiality?" (Goodspeed); "My brothers, believing as you do in our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns in glory, you must never show snobbery" (NEB); "My brothers, as you believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Glory, pay no servile regard to people" (Moffatt).

Who are the persons to whom Christians are to show no "respect" in this particular context? In our comments we shall assume that they are both saints and sinners, Christians and non-Christians. Since God treats all men impartially (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17), so also must His children. It is sinful to show partiality to men, whether they are in or out of the body of Christ (2:9). Edward Plumptre's comments on this passage expresses the folly of Christians showing partiality to any man: "In believing in Him who was emphatically a sharer in the eternal glory (John 17:5), who had now returned to that glory, men ought to feel the infinite littleness of all the accidents of wealth and rank that separate man from man."

2 For if there come into your synagogue,—The word "synagogue" is the transliteration of the Greek *sunagoge*, from *sun*, together, and *ago*, to bring; hence, a gathering, assembly, or congregation. By metonymy it also means a place of worship. In this passage alone is it expressly applied to a Christian assembly or place of worship, probably so used by James because it was a term most familiar to the Christians of Jewish background to whom the epistle was written.

a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing,—The Greek does not signify a man wearing a single gold ring, which would not attract attention where most of those assembled wore a ring, but a "gold-ringed man," having his fingers loaded with rings. This was a mark of ostentatious vanity. Juvenal describes one who had rings of gold, light or heavy according to the season; and Martial writes of one who wore six rings on each finger and kept them on even when bathing. Then, too, the Greek literally signifies one who wears "bright or shiny clothes." Such ostentatious, flashy, expensive jewelry and clothing would more likely be worn by a pagan or Jew than a Christian. See 1 Corinthians 14:23.

and there come in also a poor man in vile clothing;—The word "vile" denotes dirty, squalid attire, which signifies this person's poverty just as the expensive finery of the other person signifies his wealth.

3 and ye have regard to him that weareth the fine clothing,—The Greek for the word "regard" literally signifies "look upon," with the idea of special consideration and attention. Although this person is no more important in the eyes of God than the poor man, he is shown special consideration because of his wealth.

and say, Sit thou here in a good place;—This person is invited to a prominent seat because of the signs of his wealth, with the ostensible purpose of currying his favor and approbation. We are reminded here of the rebuke Jesus gave the scribes and Pharisees for loving “the chief seats in the synagogues” (Matthew 23:6). It is just as wrong to show deference to a man because of his wealth as it is for him to seek such deference. Today it is not the custom to show special attention to a rich man by inviting him to sit in a prominent place in our services; but any other kind of special treatment we give him because of his wealth is here condemned in principle, just as any mistreatment of the poor man is also condemned.

and ye say to the poor man, Stand thou there, or sit under my footstool;—No deference at all is shown to the poor man, although he is just as important to God as the rich man. He is not granted the plain civility and courtesy of being offered any kind of seat, but is told “to stand there” by the wall or wherever else he might be wedged in, or to sit on the floor at the foot of the speaker’s footstool where there may be just enough room to uncomfortably crouch. See Romans 12:16.

4 do ye not make distinctions among yourselves,—The word “distinctions” in the Greek is the same as “doubteth” in 1:6. The question can thus be rendered as “have ye not wavered?” (Goodspeed) or “are ye not divided in your own mind?” (ASV footnote). The wavering or divided mind may here signify part wishing to be loyal to Christ and part wishing to gain the favor of the rich man. Or the idea may be “that in making a distinction between the rich and the poor, they expressed a doubt concerning the faith which they professed, and which abolished all such distinctions” (Marvin Vincent).

and become judges with evil thoughts?—This reference is to evil-thinking judges, the sense of the phrase being that those who show such favoritism to the rich are guilty of making unjust distinctions between men. This was a characteristic vice of oriental judges. Cf. Deuteronomy 1:17; John 7:24.

5 Hearken, my beloved brethren;—The imperative “hearken” emphasizes the urgency of what follows; and the word “beloved” expresses the loving concern of the writer for his brethren in Christ, with the hope that they will give heed to his warning against showing respect of persons.

did not God choose them that are poor as to the world—The poor designated here are those who are comparatively materially destitute in contrast to those who are “rich in this present world” (1 Timothy 6:17). James does not have in mind, however, all the poor (nor does he

exclude all the rich). Matthew 11:5 refers to the gospel being preached to the poor, but it is obvious that not all the poor accept this message. And it is just as obvious that not all the rich reject the gospel (1 Timothy 6:17-19). James Macknight observed that "among the Gentiles, the prejudices of the rich against the gospel were not as great as among the Jews. Hence more persons of rank and education among the Gentiles were converted than among the Jews."

What James does affirm here is that the poor as a class furnish more followers of Christ than the rich as a class. All subsequent history attests to the fact that the gospel has always had more appeal to the poor than to the rich. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26, "For behold your calling, brethren, that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called."

to be rich in faith,—Faith is not that which constitutes their riches but that which gives them access to "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). An implied contrast is drawn between material poverty and spiritual riches. One may, like the rich fool in the Lord's parable (Luke 12:16-21), have great material possessions and not be "rich toward God"; but however materially poor one may be who is a faithful Christian, he is exceedingly rich in the eyes of the Lord. We are reminded of the Lord's commendation of the church in Smyrna, "I know thy tribulation, and thy poverty (but thou art rich)" (Revelation 2:9). It is noteworthy that the Lord's earthly poverty is the source of all the believer's riches: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him?—Those Christians who truly love the Lord, no matter how materially poor they may be, not only enjoy His unsearchable riches in this life but shall also enjoy the even greater riches of the heavenly kingdom. The Lord will say to them in the last judgment, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). See Luke 12:32; Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 4:8; Hebrews 1:14.

6 But ye have dishonored the poor man.—The word "ye" is addressed to Christians and is meant to be most emphatic. It is as if James were saying, "The dishonoring of the poor man, looking on him with contempt, can be expected of those of the world; but it is especially reprehensible for you who are Christians, who claim to be godlike in your attitude, to do so. Surely, much better things are expected of you than those who have never come to Christ." In this rebuke of Christians who dishonor the poor, James does not imply that it is right to dishonor the rich. Indeed, the word of God exhorts, "Honor all men" (1 Peter 2:17).

This means that we are to show respect for the common humanity of all men, who are made in the image of God. Thus every person who comes into our midst, rich and poor alike, should be treated with honorable friendliness. To fail to so treat the poor man is to fail to treat him with the honor he is due.

Do not the rich oppress you, and themselves drag you before the judgment seats?—The word “oppress” is from the Greek *kata dunasteuousin*, used only here and in Acts 10:38. It signifies “lording it over you, act the potentate over you.” Cf. 1 Peter 5:3. Among the oppressive acts of the rich against those to whom James wrote his epistle was the dragging (implying violence) of them before the judgment seats, or courts; that is, instituting persecutions for religion and oppressive lawsuits against them. This does not mean that any particular rich Christian would so mistreat his brethren, but that he belonged to a *class* that did. James would remind his readers that the treatment they were receiving from the rich was no worse in the eyes of God than their dishonoring of the poor. See 5:1-6; Luke 12:58; Acts 8:3; 9:2.

Questions

Verse 26. Discuss the vain religion of the person who “bridleth not his tongue but deceiveth his heart.”

Verse 27. Discuss pure and undefiled religion.

2:1. What is meant by the phrase “hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with respect of person”?

Verse 2. How does James use the word “synagogue”? Discuss the respective attire of the rich man and poor man.

Verse 3. What is meant by “have regard to him” that wears the fine clothing? Discuss the treatment of the poor man.

Verse 4. What is meant by making “distinctions among yourselves” and becoming “judges with evil thoughts”?

Verse 5. What is the significance of the address in this verse? Discuss the choosing of the poor of the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the divine kingdom.

Verse 6. Why is the dishonoring of the poor by Christians so reprehensible? Discuss the oppression of the readers of James' epistle by the rich.

LESSON FIVE

2:7-14

7 Do not they blaspheme the honorable name by which ye are called?—The blasphemy spoken by both rich pagans and rich Jews is further illustrative of their contempt for Christians. “Only *indirectly* rich Christians can be meant, who, by their inconsistency, *caused* His name *to be* blasphemed; so Ezek. 36:21,22; Rom. 2:24” (A. R. Fausset).

The footnote in the ASV for the phrase “by which ye are called” is “which was called upon you,” the literal rendering of the Greek. James refers to the holy, honorable name of Jesus Christ, which was called or invoked upon them when they were baptized into Him (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). See 1 Corinthians 3:23. The Greek for the phrase “called upon you” also occurs in the Septuagint of 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 14:9; 15:16; Amos 9:12; referring to those who were marked by God’s name as being His own.

8 Howbeit if ye fulfill the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,—In his use of the term “royal law,” James may be referring to the entire body of moral law, which is called royal because its promulgator through inspiration given James is Jesus Christ, regarded as true king, superior to the Roman emperor, and because it is given to a sovereign people, Christians, who are a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9). If this is the correct interpretation, the word “fulfill” answers to the teaching of the following passages: “Owe no man anything, save to love one another: for he that loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: love therefore is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10); “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Galatians 5:14).

It may be, however, that James uses the term “royal law” as an express reference to the commandment, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” because it is not only promulgated by a sovereign and given to a sovereign people, but because it is also sovereign over all other moral laws. If this is the valid interpretation, James uses the word “fulfill” in the sense of “carry out the contents of a command” (Joseph Thayer). Cf. Mark 12:28-31; 1 John 4:20.

The phrase “according to the scripture” refers to Leviticus 19:18, which was spoken by Moses and was familiar to the Jewish Christians to whom James wrote. But these Christians were to recognize that the authority behind this command to love one’s neighbor was no longer

Moses but Christ (Matthew 17:5; John 1:17), who carried it to such perfection and laid such stress on it that it is called "a new commandment" (John 13:34) and "his commandment" (John 15:12). See Matthew 5:43, 44; Luke 10:25-37.

ye do well:—If a Christian shows impartiality in his treatment of all men, rich and poor alike, loving them as he loves himself, he acts in a way that is beautifully acceptable to God. He thus glorifies the beautiful name of the loving Christ, who died for all and invites all to come unto Him (Hebrews 2:9; Matthew 11:28-30). The impartial, cordial treatment of all men by the Christian does indeed correspond to the spiritual beauty and majesty of the name of Christ. No one can be a faithful Christian who does not love those whom Christ loves.

9 but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin,—James forthrightly labels as *sin* the ungodly conduct of showing deference to the rich in contrast to the contemptible treatment of the poor, thus having respect of persons. The import of the Greek is "it is sin you are working." No excuse that any Christian might make to justify such conduct can evade the plain fact that it is sinful, as much so as murder, stealing, lying, adultery, and such like.

being convicted by the law as transgressors.—The word "transgressors" is from the Greek *parabatai* (*parabates*), from *para*, beyond, and *baino*, to go. Consequently, a transgressor is one who goes beyond the line. Those who have respect of person, contrary to God's law, are thus convicted by that law of going beyond the line which it represents.

10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is become guilty of all.—There is no question that the obligation of keeping the law on the part of Christians pertains to the law of liberty, the law of Christ (2:12). James is certainly aware that Christians are to follow Christ rather than Moses. But in this verse and the one to follow, he probably has in mind the law of Moses, the old covenant, taking the strictly Jewish standpoint in appealing to his readers, who had been converted from Judaism to the gospel but who had most of their lives prided themselves on being loyal to the law of Moses. He thus wants them to see that what was true concerning the striving for complete loyalty to the law of Moses is especially true concerning the striving for complete loyalty to the law of Christ, because the full consequences of Judaism led to Christianity. Cf Hebrews 2:1-3. Hence, even though James may have in mind the law of Moses, he does so in order to enhance his readers' attention to their responsibility to Christ and His law.

The case of a person stumbling in just one point of the law is purely hypothetical. James uses an extreme case to illustrate his point since

he plainly states that "in many things we all stumble" (3:2). He is simply declaring that the law is a unit, and that to violate one point of it is actually to violate the whole of it. If any part of a man is leprous, the whole man is judged to be a leper. In a human court no just judge will excuse a prisoner's one crime because of his noncommission of all other possible crimes. His one infraction reckons him as a lawbreaker, as much so as if he has transgressed every other law of society. Thus to violate the law by having respect of persons makes one guilty of the whole law as if he has transgressed it in all points. "The law is one seamless garment which is rent if you but rend a part, or a musical harmony which is spoiled if there be one discordant note" (Tirinus); "a golden chain whose completeness is broken if you break one link" (Gataker). Cf. Galatians 3:10; 1 John 5:3.

11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou dost not commit adultery, but killest, thou art become a transgressor of the law.—In designating the commands to abstain from adultery and killing, James probably continues the appeal to his readers from the Jewish standpoint, referring to the sixth and seventh commandments of the decalogue. But at the same time he does not forget that Jesus also taught these commands, which are binding on His followers. He designates the particular sins of adultery and killing because they are the most glaring cases of the failure to love one's neighbor as oneself. The keeping of one of God's commandments does not keep a person from being a transgressor of the law if he breaks another. Thus those who disobey the commandment of love in showing respect of persons can find no justification for such ungodly conduct by claiming to keep the other commandments of the law.

12 So speak ye, and so do, as men that are to be judged by a law of liberty.—James plainly tells his readers that they are to speak and act in conformity to the law of the liberty, the law of Christ, which Christ affirms will be the basis for His judgment of them: "The word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). Again, as in 1:25-27, James insists that the law of liberty, which frees men from the guilt of sin, in no way frees them from the responsibility of being obedient to all of its requirements. See Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 6:1. It is as if James were saying, "Don't think you can show respect of persons, thus violating the rule of love which Jesus so plainly and emphatically teaches in His law, and fail to be judged by that law, even though you are faithful to all the rest." When Christians manifest love toward all men, rich and poor alike, both in speech and in action, they are exercising their glorious liberty in the gospel to live as those who truly recognize that they have been made free from sin to be servants of righteousness (Roman 6:17,18). Cf. 1 Peter 2:16; 2 Peter 1:9.

13 For judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy:—The word “mercy” is from the Greek *eleos*, meaning “pity, especially on account of misery” (George Berry), “kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them” (Joseph Thayer). See Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7. In their unloving attitude toward the poor man (2:2,3), James’ readers had failed to show them mercy. If they thus had persisted in such a sinful course, they could have expected no mercy when they would eventually face the Lord in judgment. This also is the emphatic import of Matthew 25:41-46. Cf. Matthew 7:22,23.

John Adam appropriately wrote, “James speaks here as from the day of doom itself, like one looking back to the transactions of life as over, as things of the past, not of the future or the present. His statement is to the effect that those persons who show no mercy, who work none in the case of their fellow creatures, shall find none at the Divine tribunal hereafter, but be dealt with in strict justice, according to its rigid, unmitigated requirements, apart from any modifying influence or mingling element of mercy. Having acted, not in the spirit of the law of liberty, but in opposition to it, they shall reap no benefit from it themselves at the great future assize.” See Matthew 18:23-35.

mercy glorieth against judgment.—This statement answers to Matthew 5:7, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” James personifies judgment and mercy. While judgment threatens condemnation, mercy interposes and prevails over judgment. This meaning is made plain in the rendering of the NEB: “mercy triumphs over judgment.” As the ancient writer Chrysostom observed, “Mercy is clothed with divine glory, and stands by the throne of God. When we are in danger of being condemned, she rises up and pleads for us, and covers us with her defence, and enfolds us with her wings.”

It is evident that the merciful person, who has walked in the light of God’s word and has thus been continually cleansed from sin (1 John 1:7), will stand before divine judgment perfect in Christ, with the triumphant, bold assurance that he will receive mercy at the hands of God.

14 What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have no works? can that faith save him?—The faith and salvation contemplated here, as also in the other verses to follow in the chapter, do not pertain to the alien sinner but to the child of God. Having previously connected the salvation of the Christian with the faithful reception and doing of God’s word, with practicing pure religion and undefiled before God, with merciful respect for the poor, with striving to obey every commandment of God as those who will be judged by the law of liberty (1:21-27; 2:1-13), James now climaxes and emphasizes all the foregoing teaching by insisting on the futility of the declaration of a faith that is not manifested in works. The question, “can that faith

save him?," is entirely rhetorical, the answer being an obvious, emphatic "no!" This answer, which we shall elaborate upon in our comments on 2:24, is in keeping with the entire tenor of New Testament teaching concerning the relationship of faith and works to the salvation of the Christian. Suffice it to say here, it is God's purpose concerning one who has been saved from his past, alien sins (Mark 16:16; 2 Peter 1:9), who has come into vital union with Christ (Galatians 3:26,27; 20 Corinthians 5:17), that he engage in good works, gospel works, works that glorify God. See Ephesians 2:8-10; John 15:8; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:22. Any Christian, then, who fails to maintain a working faith cannot enjoy the continual salvation, cleansing from sin, pronounced in 1 John 1:7, that culminates in the eternal, heavenly salvation pronounced in Matthew 10:22; Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 1:9; 2:2; etc. See Matthew 7:16-27; Luke 6:46; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 5:3-6; Philippians 2:12; 1 Timothy 2:15; 4:16; Hebrews 4:11; 10:26,27; etc.

Questions

Verse 7. What is the honorable name that the rich pagans and rich Jews blasphemed?

Verse 8. What are the possible definitions of "royal law"?

Verse 9. Discuss the *sin* of having respect of persons? Why are those who are guilty of this sin convicted by the law as *transgressors*?

Verse 10. Discuss the *law* to which James refers. Why does one who stumbles in one point become guilty of the whole law?

Verse 11. Why are the particular sins of adultery and killing specified here? Discuss the fact that the keeping of one of God's commandments does not keep a person from being a transgressor of the law if he breaks another.

Verse 12. Discuss the necessity of Christians speaking and doing as those that will be judged by a law of liberty.

Verse 13. Why is judgment without mercy to one who shows no mercy? How does mercy *glory* against judgment?

Verse 14. Discuss the futility of a Christian's declaration of a faith that is not manifested in works.

LESSON SIX

2:15-23

15,16 If a brother or sister be naked, and in lack of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Go in peace, be ye warmed and filled; and yet ye give them not the things needful to the body; what doth it profit?—These passages that pertain to works of brotherly love are illustrative of the efficacious, saving faith alluded to in the preceding verse. In 2:1 James had said, “Hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . with respect of persons,” and now it is as if he is saying, “Hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with the failure to help your fellow Christians.” As the lack of mercy that treats the poor man with contempt when he comes into the Christian assembly negates faith, thus denying one the mercy of God (2:3,13), so also the failure to give practical assistance to the needy shows that faith is inoperative and denies one divine mercy. Carefully read Matthew 25: 41-46.

Imagine the hypocrisy of one who blatantly avows belief in the merciful, loving Christ piously saying to some hungry, ill-clad person to go in peace, to be warmed and filled, and yet doing not a single thing to alleviate his suffering, implying by his utterance, “Let somebody else warm and feed you.” Such speech is vain, useless, profitless. What do you think of a faith that produces nothing more than empty speech? The faith that is devoid of the love for one’s neighbor can never fulfill the law of Christ. See Galatians 6:2; 1 John 3:17,18. As such faith cannot profit one’s neighbor, neither can it save one’s soul. It is axiomatic that a vital faith in Christ, which is always heavenly oriented and motivated by love, will manifest itself in appropriate deeds.

17 Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself.—In his use of the word “dead” concerning the faith that fails to work, James does not mean nonexistent. It is certainly faith of a sort (2:19,20), just as a dead body is a body of a sort. But he does insist that the faith which fails to produce works is dead, lifeless, inoperative, useless, without any access to the saving power of God in Christ. It is dead in *itself*, at the very root and heart of it, no matter how voluble and orthodox it may be. It is in the head but not in the heart, thus being without power and vitality to move its possessor to engage in good works.

18 Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works:—Who is this man, an objector or ally? If he is an objector, he is obviously telling the readers of this epistle that what James is telling them is a mistake. One such explanation is that the objector, who resents what James has to say about the necessity of works in justifying faith for the

Christian, uses the word "I" in a subtle way to designate James himself, as if to say, "Let James have his works; he makes too much ado about them. You just rest easy with your faith. God will continue to accept you as long you continue to believe in Him and His Son." Thus the speaker could be an antinomian, one who does not believe that those who have been saved by God's grace through the merits of Christ are bound to any law, or code of conduct. Cf. Romans 6:1. Or the objector may have in mind the notion held by many Pharisees that they could accept the vicarious responsibility for performing good works on behalf of the masses, as if to say, "You need not worry about any lack of works in connection with your faith as long as there are members like me to perform good works. It will suffice you to make a confession of faith while others like me assume the responsibility for deeds." Or the argument could be "that religion is not always manifested in the same way. . . One may manifest it in one way and another in another, and still both have true piety. One may be distinguished for his faith, and another for his works, and both have real religion" (Albert Barnes).

If the speaker is an ally, which is the more probable meaning, he must be supposed to be addressing the person censured by James, as if to say, "Thou hast faith, while I, the ally of and in agreement with James, have works."

show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith.—These can be the words either of an ally of James or of James himself. In either case (more probably those of James' ally), they strongly argue against the saving power of a dead faith, a faith without works. James or his ally is saying in effect, "You who claim to have faith but do not have works, show me your faith apart from your works, which, of course, you cannot do. All you can do is produce a declaration or profession of faith, which consists of words only, nothing else. But I who have a living faith can prove that I have such faith by the only possible way: my works. Thus my faith is more than the mere words of a declaration or profession. I can show you by my works what justifying, saving faith is to any Christian: the genuine religious belief that always issues in obedience to the will of God, in being 'a doer of the word' (1:22)."

19 Thou believest that God is one; thou doest well:—The footnote in the ASV states that some ancient authorities read "there is one God," which is the obvious meaning here. Taking the words "thou doest well" literally, any person who believes in the one God, or in the oneness of God, does indeed do well since this belief is the fundamental tenet of the religion of Christ, as it was also of Judaism. See Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29. How can anyone possibly depend on the Saviour for salvation who does not believe in "the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3)? Thus Jesus emphasized the fundamental significance of belief in God when He declared, "Believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).

the demons also believe, and shudder.—The demons certainly recognize the existence of the one God and shudder at the realization that He will eventually consign them to "the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). This will also be the eternal destiny of those who claim to be the Lord's followers but fail to express their belief in good works (Matthew 25:41-42). Like the demons, such also shudder when they think of the horrible destiny that confronts them. It is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Implied in the demons' belief in the one God is their belief also in Christ, whom God has appointed to be the final judge of their eternal destiny. We are reminded here of the words of certain demons to Jesus: "What have we to do with thee, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before our time?" (Matthew 8:29); "What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Nazarene? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). See Acts 19:15.

This statement of James concerning the belief of the demons may imply a touch of irony in his words "thou doest well," as if to say, "You believe in one God. So what! So do the demons. What superiority do you have over them just because in your daily prayers you confess your belief in the one God, and yet fail to put your works into action?" Such inactive, dead faith can thus be aptly described as devilish. Jesus' words in Luke 6:46 are appropriate here: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" The demons say, "Lord, Lord," and do not the things He says. What superiority over them does the child of God have who also says, "Lord, Lord," and fails to obey Him?

20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is barren?—In this rhetorical question James forcibly denounces the person whose faith is devoid of good works. The word "vain" is from the Greek *kenos*, literally meaning empty, and occurring only here in the New Testament as applied to persons. It describes one who is spiritually empty, corresponding to the emptiness of his faith. The word "barren," corresponding to the word "dead" in 2:17, literally means *idle*, as of money that bears no interest or of fallow land. Thus the barren faith of which James speaks, being devoid of works, is idle or useless in the sense of being unavailing as to eternal salvation. It is axiomatic that a barren faith is the reason for a spiritually barren life, such a life as is unprepared for the heavenly realm. Good works are the only evidence of a faith that continues to trust in Christ for salvation, that depends on Him for the heavenward life.

21 Was not Abraham our father—James' allusion to Abraham as "our father" is probably meant to stress the affinity he and his fellow Jewish Christians felt concerning the great progenitor of the Jewish race. Cf. Matthew 3:9. Or James may have Abraham in mind as the spiritual father of all those whose faith in Christ has wrought their redemption (Galatians 3:7,8).

justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac his son upon the altar?—No finer example of a working faith is found in the Old Testament than this. The justification of which James here speaks in no way illustrates the initial justification of the sinner who believes in Christ for his salvation, but it rather is illustrative of the sacrificial nature of the Christian life, of being a friend of Christ. As Abraham was willing to do anything and everything required of him by God, even to the extent of giving up that which was nearest and dearest to him, his beloved son Isaac, so the Christian who follows his example will also be willing to do anything and everything, to make any kind of sacrifice, in obedience to the will of Christ. And as such obedient, working faith made possible Abraham's continual justification before God, so also will it do the same for the follower of Christ. Thus Jesus taught, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:24,25); "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. . . . So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26,33).

22 Thou seest that faith wrought with his works,—There is a play on these words in the Greek: faith "worked with his works" (Marvin Vincent); "was working with his works" (New ASV). James stresses that the only way Abraham's faith could be active was in the works he performed in obedience to God's will. By his faith thus cooperating with the works that sprang from it, it had access to divine justification. See Hebrews 11:17.

and by works was faith made perfect;—James does not imply that prior to the offering of Isaac the faith of Abraham was defective or wanting in the attitude of submissiveness to God's will. Even before he brought Isaac to the sacrificial altar (which is the significance of the Greek in 2:21 for "offered up Isaac his son upon the altar"), he was willing to do anything and everything that God required of him. See Hebrews 11:8-10. But in being willing to offer his son, to give up that which was most precious to him (cf. John 3:16), his faith was made perfect in the sense that it was brought to completion, reaching the highest state of submissiveness to God and His will. Cf. 1:4; 2 Corinthians 12:9; 1 John 4:17.

The faith of Abraham was such that it unreservedly surrendered to and trusted in God by offering the sacrifice required of him. In so doing his faith was put to the severest trial because obedience to this command (Genesis 22:2) was seemingly directly contrary to the promise made to him by God, "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Genesis 21:12). Yet Abraham was not staggered by this seeming contradiction between the divine command and the divine promise. He reasoned with himself "that God is able to raise up, even from the dead" (Hebrews 11:19). He thus recognized that it was his responsibility to obey God and at the same time to trust in Him to keep His promise. His was genuinely living faith, such as should be possessed by every Christian: to obey God at all costs and to trust in Him to keep His promises, even though the harmony between the two cannot always be understood. Cf. Matthew 6:33; Luke 21:2; Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 9:8.

23 and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness;—The scripture cited here was spoken of Abraham many years before he offered up Isaac, immediately after God said to him, "Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Genesis 15:5). It is entirely wrong to conclude that Abraham's faith was in no way imputed unto him for righteousness until he offered up Isaac many years after his belief in God regarding the seed promise. The faith of Abraham as designated in Genesis 15:6 is illustrative of the sinner's faith in Christ being imputed unto him for righteousness, and the faith of Abraham in offering up Isaac is illustrative of the Christian's faith being imputed unto him for righteousness. The word "fulfilled" means "fully realized"; and so it was that Abraham's life of subsequent obedience to God was the full realization of the faith reckoned unto him for righteousness when he believed in God regarding the seed promise, just as the Christian's subsequent life of obedience is the full realization of the faith reckoned unto him for righteousness when as a sinner he believed in Christ's promise regarding salvation from his past sins. More about this in our discussion of 2:24. See Ephesians 2:10.

and he was called the friend of God.—See 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. Abraham was given this honorable appellation because he was obedient to God's will. We are reminded here of the words of Jesus to His disciples: "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you" (John 15:14).

Questions

Verses 15,16. Discuss works of brotherly love as involved in a living faith.

Verse 17. Discuss faith without works as being dead in itself.

Verse 18. Discuss the meaning of the words "Thou hast faith, and I have works," both from the standpoint of an objector and an ally.

Verse 19. Why can a dead faith appropriately be described as *devilish*?

Verse 20. Discuss the word "barren" as it is applied to a dead faith. What is the significance of "*vain* man"?

Verse 21. Why does James refer to Abraham as "our father"? Discuss Abraham's justification by works in offering up Isaac.

Verse 22. What is meant by "faith wrought with works"? How was Abraham's faith made *perfect* by works?

Verse 23. Discuss Abraham's offering up Isaac as the fulfillment of the scripture cited in this verse. Why was Abraham called "the friend of God"?

LESSON SEVEN

2:24-26; 3:1-5

24 Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith.—In light of Abraham's justification by a faith at work in the offering up of Isaac, and not by faith alone, James reminds his brethren of the obvious conclusion that they too are justified by a faith wrought in works, a faith that obeys God's will, and not by faith alone. There have been those who believe that this utterance of James is in conflict with Paul's statement in Romans 3:28, "For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (RSV). See Romans 3:27 in connection with Ephesians 2:8,9. This conflict, however, is entirely imaginary since James deals with the faith of the Christian and Paul deals with the faith of the sinner. In James' case it is the Christian bearing fruit, keeping divine law by faith as the means of continual justification; whereas in Paul's case it is the faith of the sinner in Christ for initial justification, so that by receiving union with Christ when he repents and is baptized (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27) he can become a keeper of divine law and enjoy the continual justification of which James speaks. See comments on 2:14.

It is not that the justifying faith spoken of by Paul in Romans 3:28 is dead, in contrast to the living faith spoken of by James. The faith that saves the sinner, although it does not manifest itself in law keeping or fruit bearing, is certainly alive, else it could not reach out to the Saviour by repentance and baptism to receive justification, salvation. And because such faith is alive in bringing one to Christ, it has the power through its vital union with Christ to produce good works, works of law, and thus to have access to the grace of God in continual justification. See John 15:4,5; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 1:7.

Also substantiating the conclusion that James refers to the faith of the Christian when he speaks of justification by works, and not only by faith, is a comparison of 2:21-23 with Romans 4:1-10, to which the reader is asked to give careful attention. Paul refers to Abraham's justification before he was circumcised, when without any law keeping on his part he was justified by his unwavering trust in God that He would keep His promise to make him a father of many nations. See Genesis 15:5,6. And so, as we have already pointed out, this reference to Abraham's justification is illustrative of one's initial justification through trust in Christ, when he accepts Christ as his Saviour. But James refers to Abraham's justification after his circumcision, when he offered up his son Isaac, which happened several years after the justification to which Paul refers. See Genesis 17:10-14.

To affirm that Abraham was in no way justified before God until after his circumcision, when he offered up Isaac, is to make Paul a liar,

who insists that he was justified before his circumcision. Such an affirmation would inadvertently make Paul and James contradict each other. But the only conclusion that makes for harmony between the two writers is that since Paul's reference to Abraham's justification is illustrative of the sinner's justification, it logically follows that James' reference to Abraham's justification is illustrative of the Christian's justification, when his living faith will naturally bear fruit to the glory of God by the power of Him who is the object of that faith. If, however, he lets his faith die, failing to engage in good works, he thus shuts Christ the Saviour out of his life and gives up the hope of eternal salvation. See 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Peter 2:20-22.

25 And in like manner was not also Rahab the harlot justified by works, in that she received the messengers, and sent them out another way?—James adds another illustration of the justifying nature of good works wrought through faith. Abraham had believed for many years at the time he offered up Isaac, but Rahab had only recently come to faith when the Israelites were surrounding Jericho and sent their spies into the city (Joshua 2:9-11). She is listed among the ancestors of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Although her faith was young, yet it was living faith because it had works, even the works of mercy in receiving the messengers, protecting them, and sending them off safely. See Joshua 2:12. Such mercy, kindness, should characterize the faith of all followers of Christ, however young they may be in the faith (Luke 6:35; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12; Matthew 5:7).

In Hebrews 11:31 we read, "By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that were disobedient, having received the spies with peace". And it is true that the living faith of the Christian which shows itself in works of kindness and mercy will keep him from eternally perishing with the disobedient (Matthew 25:31-46).

26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead.—In this comparison, James likens faith without works to a dead body in order to emphasize its uselessness. But the comparison must not be pressed too far. Although it is obvious that the presence of the spirit gives life to the body, James does not affirm that works give life to faith. Good works, the works ordained by Jesus for Christians to do, can only be done by a faith that is already alive. If it were not alive it could produce no actions.

3:1 Be not many of you teachers, my brethren,—In this verse and in the discussion to follow, James elaborates upon the theme of "swift to hear, slow to speak." developing "slow to speak" as in 1:19-27 he developed "swift to hear." The will of God is that all Christians manifest the growth in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter

3:18) so that they can teach others the word of God (2 Timothy 2:24; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 3:15). Thus James' exhortation here is not meant in any way to discourage maturing Christians from assuming this responsibility. But it is his forceful way of discouraging all from teaching who desire to be served rather than serve, who are not continually growing in the knowledge of God's word, who are not cultivating their teaching ability and understanding of those whom they will teach, who do not love both God and man, who do not have a passion for souls, who do not live godly lives. His advice is especially significant concerning those who aspire to become public teachers of the word, expressly designated in such passages as Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9. The churches addressed in this epistle had such teachers, of which James was one. In the early church, as also in the church today, to teach publicly was a position of repute and prestige; and there were many who would aspire to so teach that they could exercise their powers of rhetoric and thus inflate their egos in the praise received from their listeners. Then, too, there has always been the danger in the church of zealous but ignorant men setting themselves up as teachers. Zeal and purity of life are not sufficient teaching qualifications without the necessary study and preparation. Hence James gives special warning as to the serious responsibility of the proclamation of God's word, especially in a public way, insisting that it is not a work to be entered into without the proper qualifications. Only those who are qualified in attitude, life, and preparation are able to use their tongues to the due edification of their listeners, both in the pure doctrine and in a pure manner. Cf. Ephesians 4:29; Colossians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:8. On the other hand, what damage has been done the cause of Christ by unqualified teachers! Cf. Matthew 23:6,7; Acts 20:29,30; Romans 2:17-24; 2 Peter 2:1-3.

knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment.—James does not say that he is expecting condemnation for his teaching, nor that all teachers of the divine word will be condemned. But he does insist that God will look more closely at all such teachers when He judges them, that more is expected of them than others, and that therefore they are more answerable to Him. They will be judged with special strictness on account of their influence on others. Thus James would imply that the position of teaching in no way assures one of final salvation unless he faithfully serves in this capacity.

2 For in many things we all stumble.—Were sinless perfection a qualification for being a teacher of God's word there would be no such teachers, for the scriptures are very plain in their declaration that all Christians commit sin. James includes himself in this category, just as Peter, Paul, and John included themselves with similar assertions (Acts 15:11; Philippians 3:12; 1 John 1:8). The context of James' assertion

in this passage indicates that he has in mind that the recognition of the Christian's personal imperfections should induce him to great caution in seeking the position of teaching God's word, when any sin committed by him could likely do so much injury. See 1 Timothy 1:6,7. If all Christians are expected to strive for less and less stumbling in their lives as they grow spiritually, thus to exercise greater and greater influence for good, it is especially true concerning those who have assumed the weighty responsibility of teaching God's word. Cf. 1 Timothy 4:12. And since no greater harm can be caused by any Christian than his stumbling in word, it is especially true of those whose very activity of teaching is the use of the tongue. Hence James proceeds to show the necessity of every Christian, especially those who teach the divine word, of giving special attention to the control of the tongue, realizing the great mischief that can be caused by the uncontrolled tongue.

If any stumbleth not in word, the same is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also.—The perfection contemplated here may be that of sinlessness, which is the goal set forth in God's word for the Christian life. See Matthew 5:48. James may thus have in mind that if one could be sinless in word, perfectly controlling his tongue, he would also be sinless in action, perfectly controlling all the other members of his body. But since the writer has already established the fact that he and his fellow Christians stumble in many things, it necessarily follows that no one is perfect in the absolute sense and that therefore no one is absolutely able to control his tongue. The practical significance of this observation of James is that we are to grow constantly toward perfection in the control of our tongues, and so constantly grow simultaneously toward the perfect goal of sinlessness in our actions. By such growing we will then become *perfect* in the secondary sense of the word, that of spiritual maturity. Without such perfection no one is qualified to use his tongue in the teaching of God's word, of which the writer has spoken in the preceding verse. See 1 Corinthians 9:27 and notes on 3:1. How are we to explain the connection between controlling the tongue, "stumbling not in word," and bridling or controlling the whole body? "The inference is founded on the thought that the tongue is that member of the body over which man finds it most difficult to establish the mastery and that he who does not offend in word, shows that he has established that mastery. Consequently, he who offendeth not in word and thereby shows himself to be the master of the tongue, has obtained the mastery over his whole body" (John Lange).

James takes for granted that both man's words and actions are prompted by the heart or mind (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18,19); but at the same time he insists that the instrument most difficult to control of all the members of the body is the tongue. It is obvious, then, that one who is able to control the most difficult member of the body, the tongue, will be able also to control the less difficult members. Cf. Matthew 12:37.

3 Now if we put the horses' bridles into their mouths that they may obey us, we turn about their whole body also.—In this simple reference to nature, James illustrates how man turns about his whole body with the tongue just as he can turn about the whole body of a horse with a bridle.

4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by rough winds, are yet turned about by a very small rudder, whither the impulse of the steersman willeth.—As the will of the steersman controls the great ship through the rudder, so also one's will controls the whole body through the tongue.

5 So the tongue also is a little member, and boasteth great things.—Like the small size of the bridle and rudder in comparison to the much larger size of the horse and ship, so also is the tongue a small member in comparison to the much larger size of the body. But smallness, James insists, does not necessarily imply weakness or helplessness. The bridled tongue (1:26) does indeed accomplish great things for good; for example, preaching the gospel and thus leading men to Christ and His salvation, which is the greatest and noblest work to be accomplished in the world. On the other hand, the unbridled, uncontrolled tongue accomplishes great things for evil, which is the subject matter of James' discussion through verse 12.

Behold, how much wood is kindled by how small a fire!—This allusion to the kindling of a great quantity of wood, such as a forest fire, by a small fire or spark was quite familiar in ancient literature; for example, Euripides, in a fragment from his last play on *Ino*, compares the incautious blabbing of a secret to a spark catching hold of a forest. In our day we have known of hundreds of square miles of forest being consumed by a spark from a locomotive engine or by a match thrown away before it had quite gone out.

Questions

Verse 24. Discuss the Christian's justification by works, and not only by faith.

Verse 25. Discuss Rahab's justification by works as illustrative of the Christian's justification by works of mercy.

Verse 26. Discuss the similarity between a dead faith and a dead body.

3:1. Why is James' exhortation here not meant in any way to discourage maturing Christians from teaching God's word? Discuss the

importance of the proper preparation for such teaching. Why will teachers receive "heavier judgment"?

Verse 2. Why is one who "stumbleth not in word . . . a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also"?

Verse 3. What allusion to nature is made here by James concerning the use of the tongue?

Verse 4. What is the allusion to nature here concerning the use of the tongue?

Verse 5. Discuss the fact that although the tongue is a small member it boasts of great things. What is the significance of the kindling of much wood by a small fire?

LESSON EIGHT

3:6-13

6 And the tongue is a fire:—The figure of a very small fire or spark producing a forest fire is now applied to the incendiary ravages of the tongue. James here passes over the fact that the tongue is destined to become an organ of spiritual fire in igniting souls to the service of God, for he is intent on showing the great conflagration of sin, pain, trouble, and sorrow that is caused by the evil-speaking tongue.

the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue,—The evil-speaking tongue is “the world of iniquity” among the bodily members because it embraces and reflects every form of evil in the world. “A little world of evil in itself. This is a very expressive phrase, and is similar to one which we often employ, as when we speak of a town as being a *world* in miniature. We mean by it that it is an epitome of the world; that all there is in the world is represented there on a small scale. So when the tongue is spoken of as being ‘a world of iniquity,’ is meant that all kinds of evil that are in the world are exhibited there in miniature; it seems to concentrate all sorts of iniquity that exist on the earth” (Albert Barnes).

The evil-speaking tongue is undeniably the embodiment of all evil. There is no wrong emotion, thought, and deed that the unbridled tongue cannot utter. It can curse, lie, slander, gossip, teach false doctrine, speak evil of God and man. It can speak in praise of adultery, fornication, murder, stealing, and every other sin under the sun.

which defileth the whole body,—The wicked tongue defiles the body when it speaks in favor of sin, thus inciting the body to commit sin. The tongue that speaks in favor of fornication will tend to incite the body to commit fornication; the tongue that speaks in favor of stealing will tend to incite the body to steal; the tongue that speaks in favor of murder will tend to incite the body to commit murder; etc. Indeed, there is no sin committed by any member of the body that is not affected by the tongue, which speaks of sin, helps to plan it, defends, praises, and in other ways comments on sin after it is done, etc.

and setteth on fire the wheel of nature,—There is much controversy among commentators over this phrase, especially over the meaning of the word “nature,” from the Greek *geneseos* (*genesis*), which literally means *birth*. In this context it is probably used metaphorically to mean *existence*. That this meaning is possible is confirmed by at least one instance of its use in the secular Koine, P. Oxy I.128.8. Commenting on the use of the word *trochos*, wheel, in connection with *geneseos* in the phrase under consideration, W. E. Vine states that it is so used “with

metaphorical reference to the round of human activity, as a glowing axle would set on fire the whole wooden wheel." And there is certainly no question that the evil-speaking tongue does set on fire the whole round of existence or human activity. We see on every hand the spark of whispering slander and gossip set on fire a whole congregation or community, and the spread of angry passions stirred by some ill-judged, vindictive words. The inflammatory words of such demagogues as Hitler have resulted in many nations being caught up in the conflagration of war. Teaching that advocates ungodly living, such as the so-called new morality, leaves countless victims in its wake as it spreads like the vast conflagration of a forest fire. Indeed, "how much wood is kindled by how small a fire" as the whole round of existence is set aflame by the little member of the human body, the tongue! What fire of sorrow, death, suffering, and sin has been caused in the world generation after generation by the spark of the evil-speaking tongue!

and is set on fire by hell.—The tongue is a fire, but how is it ignited? James answers plainly: it is ignited by *hell* (Greek *geenna*, the place of the damned, called in Matthew 5:22 "the hell of fire"). Since hell is the place prepared for the devil (Matthew 25:41), James may here be identifying it with the devil himself, as by like representation heaven is identified with God. The fire of hell that ignites the tongue is ultimately the work of the devil. Compare Matthew 12:34 with Luke 22:3-6. To know the diabolical, hellish source of the devastating, inflammatory power of the tongue, is to be forewarned of the necessity of controlling one's tongue if it would speak only words of truth and righteousness.

7 For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind:—This reference considers the superiority, and thus dominion, of mankind, human nature, over the whole realm of fauna, brute nature. The sense of the word "tamed" is that all wild things, all forms of lower life, have been *subdued*, put under the power of man by his craft, skill, and cunning. See Genesis 1:26; 2:19; 9:2.

8 but the tongue can no man tame;—Although man has mastered all forms of lower life, he is not the master of everything in the world: he is unable to subdue his tongue. How does this pessimistic conclusion harmonize with James' intent of persuading his readers to control their tongues? The obvious answer is that man by his own power alone is unable to control his tongue, but only as he can truthfully utter the following words: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who

loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20). See Romans 6:17-22; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 1 John 5:4,5.

it is a restless evil.—Since the faithful Christian recognizes that his tongue will be a restless, turbulent, unruly evil without the grace of God, which is the power of the indwelling Christ, his constant prayer will be in the words of the psalmist: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Jehovah, my rock, and my redeemer" (Psalms 10:14); "Set a watch, O Jehovah, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Psalms 141:3).

it is full of deadly poison.—The Greek word for deadly, *thanatophorou* (*thanatophoros*), literally means death-bearing or death-bringing, stressing the terrible destructive force of the tongue which is not God-controlled, which is set on fire by hell. Such a tongue is the means of causing both physical and spiritual death. See Romans 3:13,14.

9 Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, who are made after the likeness of God:—In this verse and the one to follow James points out the inconsistent use of the tongue in blessing God (described as *Lord*, implying His dominion, and *Father*, implying His paternal love) and cursing human beings, who, being made in the likeness of God, bear upon themselves His stamp, each an immortal spirit having volition, self-consciousness, and knowledge. The use of "we" in this passage includes the writer James, just as in 2:1 he included himself in the phrase "in many things *we* all stumble." Although Christians have the grace of God, the power of the Spirit, to control their tongues, they do not always utilize this power. In one breath they will bless God in their devotions to Him; and then in the next breath, succumbing to human weakness, they will give way to the wrath which does not work the righteousness of God (1:2), forgetting the law of love (2:8), and curse human beings, who are made in the likeness of Him they have blessed.

10 out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing.—What an incongruity and enormity, that from the same source should come words that are diametrically opposed to each other!

My brethren,—In driving home his point, James appeals to his readers' consciousness of their common brotherhood in Christ.

these things ought not so to be.—"A mild appeal, leaving it to themselves to understand that such conduct deserves the most severe reprobation" (A. R. Fausset). Although Christians will stumble in the use of the tongue as they do in many other things, they must recognize that every deprecation they bring on men is contrary to the will of God. They should therefore continually strive to improve the use of the tongue

so that it will be consistently used to speak righteously to man as well as to God. They constantly need to remind themselves of the injunctions in Ephesians 5:29 and Colossians 4:6, and of the power of the Spirit of grace that can make these injunctions a reality in their lives.

11 Doth the fountain send forth from the same opening sweet water and bitter?—In this rhetorical question and in the one to follow in the next verse, James illustrates from nature the absurdity, monstrosity, and enormity of a tongue that speaks both blessing and cursing. Certainly, every person with ordinary intelligence knows that a fountain sends forth from the same opening only one kind of water. The readers of the epistle would recall the bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15:23) and the death-dealing waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19). “Sweet and bitter” are opposites and contradictory, the former good and the latter bad, and both of them do not come out of the same opening or spring. But the tongue will send forth bitter as well as sweet words when it is not closely watched and firmly held in check in cooperation with divine grace.

12 can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or a vine figs? neither can salt water yield sweet.—It is entirely contrary to the nature of a fig tree to yield olives, for a vine to yield figs, and for salt water to yield sweet! But does James mean from these allusions to nature that for one to possess the nature of a genuine Christian he can never use his tongue for anything but good? Not at all. See again 3:2. Thus the following argument by A. R. Fausset, in agreement with other commentators, is specious: “His argument is, No tree can bring forth *fruit inconsistent with its nature*: so if a man speaks bitterly, and afterwards speaks good words, the latter must be only so seemingly, and in hypocrisy, they *cannot be real*.” This line of reasoning is carrying James’ argument beyond the realm of reality in the life of any Christian, however faithful he may be. Just because one has said something unkind to a fellow human being does not mean per se, wrong though it is and displeasing to God, that he is not a faithful Christian and that the words of praise he speaks to God are insincere or hypocritical. And certainly one who is a faithful Christian will manifest a penitent, forgiveness-seeking spirit when he has so wronged someone. See Matthew 5:23,24. But James does imply in these allusions to the nature of a fig tree, vine, and salt water that when the inconsistent use of the tongue in blessing God and cursing men becomes a *consistent* pattern in the life of any Christian, he then no longer is faithful to Christ and his words of praise to God become patently false and hypocritical. How hypocritical indeed it is for one to attend religious services with an air of sanctimoniousness, uttering pious, high-sounding word of praise to God in prayer and song, but in daily life to treat men with contempt, to have little regard for

their rights and feelings, to curse, insult, and slander them! And what about the hypocrisy of those teachers and preachers who utter lofty sentiments and spiritual truths to their listeners, but who give way to bitterness in controversy, even cursing or insulting those who disagree with them? All such persons can in no way qualify as faithful Christians. They do not *essentially* use their tongues as instruments of good. They do not *essentially* partake of the divine nature and thus are not genuinely converted and committed to Christ. Cf. Matthew 6:24; 9:13; 15:8; 25:41-45.

13 Who is wise and understanding among you?—This question asks each reader of the epistle to examine himself to determine whether he is *truly* wise and understanding, not whether he simply makes a pretense in this regard. At the same time the questioner bids the readers to examine those of their number to determine who are really wise and understanding among them, consequently to use them as models of emulation. Moreover, the question implies that all ought to be wise and understanding but that some are lacking in these qualities.

In 1:5 James dealt with wisdom as it is applied to the trials of life. He now uses the word “wise” (Greek *sophos*) in the general sense, the divinely instilled insight which enables the Christian to apprehend, practice, and grow in the life that is in keeping with the law of Christ.

The *understanding* of which James speaks is that which the Christian possesses from the study of God’s word and from life’s experiences. God’s wisdom can only be utilized by the Christian to the extent that he is knowledgeable, learned, expert, or intelligent; for one cannot apprehend, practice, and grow in that which he is not well-instructed and knowledgeable. See Ephesians 5:17; Philippians 4:11.

let him show by his good life his works in meekness of wisdom.—Just as the *saying* that one has faith does not necessarily mean that it is alive (2:14ff), so also the *saying* that one has wisdom and understanding does not necessarily make it so. As real faith will prove or show itself by works, so also will real wisdom and understanding show themselves by works. Words are never enough without deeds; and the deeds of Christian service are never to be done in an ungracious, ostentatious spirit, but in wisdom’s *meekness*.

No one is truly wise who is lacking in the attribute of *meekness* (Greek *prautes*, gentleness, mildness), which corresponds to the word “meek” (Greek *praus*) in the third Beatitude (Matthew 5:5). When the Christian seeks to do good to others, whether it be in bringing them to a realization of their sins and their need of divine forgiveness or extending to them a helping hand in any other way, he must do so in a gentle, gracious spirit, which John Milton described as “the invincible power of meekness.” See Ephesians 4:15; Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 3:1,2; 1 John 3:18.

Questions

Verse 6. Discuss the great evil that is caused by the uncontrolled tongue and how it is set on fire by hell.

Verse 7. Discuss man's dominion over the entire realm of brute nature.

Verse 8. How can the Christian control his tongue? Discuss the tongue as a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

Verse 9. Discuss the inconsistent use of the tongue in blessing God and cursing men.

Verse 10. Discuss James' appeal to his readers, "these things ought not so to be."

Verse 11. What is the significance of James' illustration concerning the water that comes from a fountain?

Verse 12. What is the significance of James' allusion to a fig tree, vine, and salt water?

Verse 13. Discuss the wisdom and understanding that Christians must possess.

LESSON NINE

3:14-18; 4:1-3

14 But if ye have bitter jealousy and faction in your heart—The Greek word for jealousy is *zelon* (*zelos*), which is used in the New Testament both in a bad and good sense. For the latter, see John 2:17; Romans 10:2; 2 Corinthians 9:2. It is the derivation of our word “zeal,” which may be either good or bad, wise or foolish. However, the bad sense is predominant in the New Testament. See Acts 5:17, Galatians 5:20, and its use here by James, where the bad sense is emphasized by the word “bitter.” It is often joined with *epis*, meaning “strife, contention, or wrangling.” See Romans 13:13; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Galatians 5:20.

The word “faction” is from the Greek *eritheian* (*eritheia*), primarily meaning “labor for hire or wages as a mercenary.” It thus came to be applied to those who possess the selfish spirit that seeks its own will and advantage, and, who, to that end, promote factionalism or party spirit. See Romans 2:8; 2 Corinthians 12:20. James denounces the bitter zeal and party spirit that promote not the cause of Christ but only one’s selfish interests, that create not harmony and peace in the church but only strife, rivalry, contentions, wrangling, that make brethren competitors rather than workers together with Christ.

glory not and lie not against the truth.—Those who have bitter jealousy and faction in their hearts—the intense, harsh, unloving zeal and factional spirit—take pride in such an attitude, justifying it as loyalty to the truth. But James forthrightly informs them that such glorying or boasting is in reality opposition to the truth. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:29-31. It is certainly true that all Christians are to be “set in defence of the gospel” (Philippians 1:16), but this to be done with “*meekness* and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Those, however, who claim to be wise exponents of the gospel, but who have bitter jealousy and faction in their hearts, manifesting this ugly, ungodly spirit in their teaching, are not set in defense of the gospel but in *offense* of it.

15 This wisdom is not a wisdom that cometh down from above,—The wisdom that the fanatically zealous, self-seeking, unscrupulous partisans boast of is not the wisdom from heaven, not one of those perfect gifts that come down from the Father of lights (1:17).

but is earthly,—So far from being heavenly, it is of this world, taking its inspiration from the selfish, self-seeking, self-exalting spirit that characterizes all worldly men. It is the cheap wisdom of those who know not God, who thus cannot remotely know what spiritual, heavenly wisdom is. Cf. 2 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:15,16.

sensual—This word in the Greek is *psuchike* (*psuchikos*), “belonging to the *psuche*, soul (as the lower part of the immaterial in man), natural, physical, describes the man in Adam and what pertains to him (set in contrast to *pneumatikos*, spiritual), 1 Cor. 2:14; 15:44 . . . ; James 3:15, ‘sensual’ (R. V. marg., ‘natural’ or ‘animal’), . . . a wisdom in accordance with, or springing from, the corrupt desires and effections” (W. E. Vine). See Jude 19. The wisdom that is sensual is that which is only devoted to carnal, earthly, selfish interests. It is thus the opposite of spiritual wisdom, which is devoted to spiritual, divine, eternal interests. Cf. Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-3.

devilish.—The Greek word here is *daimoniodes*, signifying “proceeding from, or resembling, a demon, demonical.” This word is not too strange in its context, for it traces its self-boasting, lying wisdom back to its ultimate source, just as was the case in 3:6.

16 For where jealousy and faction are, there is confusion and every vile deed.—James emphatically portrays the evil results of the fanatically zealous, factional spirit. The word “confusion” is from the Greek *akatastasia*, signifying “instability, denoting a state of disorder, disturbance, tumult.” See 1 Corinthians 14:33. It is translated as “tumults” in Luke 21:9; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 12:20. It is a form of the word translated “restless” as describing the unruly, uncontrolled tongue (3:8). This confusion is opposed to the peace of 3:17. The squabbles and disturbances of Christians in their fellowship are not due to the exercise of godly wisdom, which produces peace, but of the selfish zeal and partisan spirit. Cf. 1 Corinthians 1:11,12; 3:1-3.

Not only does this worldly, unspiritual, devilish wisdom cause confusion in the church but also in society in general. Cf. Proverbs 14:34. Thus Christians should obey the injunction of 1 Timothy 2:1,2, seeking the help of God so that His wisdom may prevail in the affairs of men.

The ungodly wisdom expressed in the bitterly jealous, partisan spirit also produces “every vile deed.” The word “vile,” from the Greek *phaulon* (*phaulos*), signifies “worthlessness, good-for-nothingness.” Goodspeed renders the phrase “every low action.” There is no limit to the low, mean actions that jealous, factious men will stoop to in order to get their way, to fulfill their selfish ambitions. Every action that arises from the source of the ungodly wisdom of jealousy and faction is vile, low, worthless, good-for-nothing.

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure,—James now enumerates the characteristics of heavenly wisdom, the wisdom that comes from God. He begins with the word “pure,” which suggests an *unsullied* life because it is inspired and influenced from God above, free from the impure motives of sensual, devilish jealousy and faction.

Marvin Vincent suggests that the word "first" emphasizes "its inner quality, *pure*, as distinguished from its outward expressions. The idea is not first *numerically*, but first *essentially*. The other qualities are secondary as outgrowths of the primary quality." See 4:8; Matthew 5:8; 1 Peter 1:22.

then peaceable,—Godly wisdom is peaceable rather than tumultuous in its tendency. Those who have peace with God (Romans 5:1), thus possessing godly wisdom, will strive to be peacemakers, not trouble-makers. See Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Hebrews 12:14.

gentle,—This word is from the Greek *epieikes*, from *epi*, unto, and *eikos*, likely, denoting that which is equitable, fair, moderate, forbearing. One who possesses this quality of heavenly wisdom will be fair and reasonable in dealing with those who disagree with him, whether they are reasonable or unreasonable. No brusqueness or pugnacity!

easy to be entreated,—This phrase is from the single Greek word *eupeithes*, found only here in the New Testament. It literally means ready to obey, the opposite of *apeithes*, the word rendered as disobedient in such passages as Acts 26:19; Romans 1:30; Titus 1:16; 3:3. One who possesses this attribute of heavenly wisdom is willing to render obedience to whomever it is due, thus being submissive to proper discipline. Some commentators believe that the word is used here in the sense of *conciliatory*, the opposite of stiff and unbending. One who has this attitude will be compliant, willing to make concessions whenever they are in keeping with the law of love and consideration for the rights of others. This does not mean that he condones evil in others, but that he overcomes such evil with good. This is the spirit that is opposed to the selfishness of factionalism and false zeal.

full of mercy and good fruits,—James contrasts this statement with the "confusion and every vile deed" (3:16) that are produced by jealousy and faction. *Mercy* means compassion toward those who are in need or distress, and *good fruits* are the expression of that mercy. The word "good" is to be understood in the sense of anything that is beneficial to others, whether it be moral, spiritual, or physical. Heavenly wisdom never expresses itself in anything that is harmful or useless, but only in that which is helpful or useful. See 1:27; 2:13; Galatians 6:1,10; etc.

without variance,—This expression is from the Greek *adiakritos*, used only here in the New Testament and very rarely in classical Greek, primarily signifying "not to be parted or distinguished"; hence, "without uncertainly, indecision, vacillation, or wavering." When godly wisdom speaks it does so wholeheartedly, with no uncertain voice, without ambiguity, so that it says exactly what it means. This interpretation cor-

responds to the verb form of *adiakritos* in 1:6, rendered as "nothing doubting." As we should be unwavering, wholehearted, unvacillating in our prayers to God, speaking to Him exactly what the convictions of true faith should say, we should also so speak to men. The meaning here can also be that godly wisdom shows itself in an unwavering, unvacillating, decisive treatment of all men alike. See 2:4.

without hypocrisy.—Not only does true wisdom say what it means, but it also means what it says. Its utterances are always straightforward, free from all pretense. Its actions toward all men are also straightforward and unpretending. See Romans 12:9; 2 Corinthians 6:6.

18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for [by] them that make peace.—James enunciates the truth that it is peace that produces righteousness, not the divisive, selfish spirit of jealousy and factionalism. The peacemakers, who are blessed in being called sons of God (Matthew 5:6), sow in peace, and their sowing is preeminently blessed by a rich harvest, abundant fruit, of righteousness. Cf. Ronald Knox's translation: "Peace is the seed-ground of holiness, and those who make peace will win its harvest." See. Hebrews 12:11.

Who are these peacemakers? They are those who possess all the attributes of the heavenly wisdom that James has just commended, who speak and act to the exclusion of selfish ends. "The only activity which has any outcome in this divine direction is that of men purged from every taint of self-interest or private ambition."

4:1 Whence come wars and whence come fightings among you?—"The section beginning with this verse is in close connection with what goes before, pointing to the internal reason for the disorders in the congregations referred to" (John Huther). James is now ready to answer the question concerning the ultimate source of the wars and fightings that were prevailing among his Jewish Christian readers. The word "wars" can refer to the *state* of wars and the word "fightings" to the *carrying on* of the wars. Or *wars* can mean to act the soldier, who engages in the *fightings*. Or still further, *wars* can refer to wider dissensions; *fightings* to single and small conflicts. The context of the passage denies that James has in mind the wars among the Jews—wars between Zealots, Saducees, Pharisees, Herodians, Essenes, Samaritans, and Alexandrians. James deals with the infighting that disgraced the churches composed of Jewish Christians—the personal animosities, quarrels, factions, and bickering among them.

come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members?—In a passage similar to this in Plato, *Phaedo* 66, Socrates explains that conflicts among men are invariably due to material cravings: "From whence come wars and fightings and factions? Whence but from

the body and lusts of the body." This truth concerning the origin of all conflicts among men in general, clearly enunciated by Socrates, is applied by James to the conflicts and wrangles in the body of Christ.

The phrase "war in your members" does not mean that some members of the physical body are fighting against the other members, that these pleasures or selfish desires of which James speaks produce "inward conflict between pleasures that crave for indulgence," as one commentator expressed it. But it does mean that the bodily members of the individual Christian, seeking to indulge their selfish desires, join together, are constantly campaigning, to go on the warpath against other Christians. James is not dealing as such with the inner conflict between the bodily members and the soul, of which 1 Peter 2:11 speaks. But this is certainly implied because all the harm one does to others is also harm he does to his own soul.

The following translations cast light on the sense of James' explanation for the cause of the wars and fightings of which he speaks: "I will tell you what leads to them; the appetites which infest your mortal bodies" (Ronald Knox); "Do they not spring from the aggressiveness of your bodily desires?" (NEB).

2 Ye lust, and have not:—The lust that causes wars and fightings in the body of Christ involves not only the cravings for power and position but also for material things. See 1 Peter 5:3; 3 John 9; 1 Corinthians 6:1-3. Yet those who possess these cravings "have not"; that is, their cravings alone do not obtain for them what they so ardently desire.

ye kill, and covet,—James purposely uses these strong terms to penetrate the hearts of his readers so that they can thoroughly realize the ungodly limits to which they will go to obtain the objects of their cravings. The word "covet" is actually a form of the Greek word rendered as "jealousy" in 3:16. The footnote in the ASV is "are jealous," carrying the meaning of "are zealous." The zeal to which these factious Christians will go, James declares, includes killing. It seems unlikely that they will commit literal murder to gain their desires (although such is not impossible), but that they have the brutal, murderous spirit which is always characteristic of those who do not strive to be faithful to the royal law of love. Cf. "every vile deed" (3:16). James most likely has in mind the same idea as expressed in 1 John 3:15. But it is certainly true that the history of religion attests to the brutality of the factious, selfish religionist in the actual killing of the victims of his sinful, ungodly zeal; for example, the crusade against the Albigenes, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, etc.

and cannot obtain:—James does not literally say that the ungodly zeal of those possessing the selfish, hateful spirit never obtains for them what they desire, but that they find no real satisfaction in their acqui-

sitions. He thus implies that real happiness, which is the basic desire of every rational person, can never be realized by power, position, or possessions, but only by a proper relationship with God.

ye fight and war,—This is a repetition of 4:1, the sense being that since the evil desires that produce conflicts never find the satisfaction of genuine happiness and contentment, the fighting and warring go on and on. The cessation of such strife can only come when love takes the place of hate and unselfishness the place of selfishness. Only then will there be true satisfaction, true happiness, true contentment. Cf. Matthew 5:3-12; 1 Peter 3:8-12.

ye have not, because ye ask not.—Genuine happiness, the great gain of "godliness with contentment" (1 Timothy 6:6), is promised by God to those who pray and not to those who fight, to the peacemakers and not to the troublemakers.

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures.—Whatever honor, position, or material possession one acquires through war and fighting is never something given by God, and thus it never truly blesses its possessor. See 1:17. God's desire is to bless those who pray to Him, but He withholds His blessings from those who ask anything of Him to "spend [waste or consume] in their pleasures [selfish desires]."

Questions

Verse 14. What is the meaning of bitter jealousy and faction, and why are these traits glorying and lying against the truth?

Verse 15. Discuss the nature of the "wisdom that cometh not from above."

Verse 16. Discuss the confusion and every vile deed that are the result of jealousy and faction.

Verse 17. Discuss the nature of "the wisdom that is from above."

Verse 18. What is the result of making peace?

4:1. What are the *wars* and *fightings* of which James speaks? Discuss their origin.

Verse 2. Why do those who lust, kill, covet, fight, and war fail to achieve genuine happiness?

Verse 3. Why do those who pray fail to receive what they ask for?

LESSON TEN

4:4-12

4 Ye adulteresses,—This is especially strong language, with the writer's desire that it will produce deep contrition and prompt repentance and change of conduct in his recalcitrant, worldly wise brethren. The word "adulteresses" is to be understood in the same sense as "kill" in 4:2. The latter refers to what the readers were doing to men and the former to what they were doing to God. Although the possibility is not ruled out that some of his readers may have committed physical adultery, as they may also have committed literal murder, James definitely has in mind adultery in an ethical or spiritual sense. The footnote in the ASV reads, "who break your marriage vow to God." The idea that God is the husband of His people is common in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 3:20; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 2), and her unfaithfulness is represented as adultery: "Thou hast destroyed all them that play the harlot, departing from thee" (Psalms 73:27). Jesus referred to the people of His generation as "an evil and adulterous generation" (Matthew 12:39). In the New Testament the church is pictured as the wife or bride of Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23; Revelation 19:7; 21:9). Thus James graphically depicts his unfaithful readers as faithless spouses who have broken the marriage vow they made at their conversion to Christ.

know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?—This question expresses shock and surprise, implying that the readers know that what James is saying concerning friendship of the world is certainly true but that they are letting this knowledge lie dormant in their factious, jealous, self-seeking spirit. Such a spirit is entirely alien to that which comes from God and is thus described as "enmity with God"; that is, a state of opposition to God and his righteous purposes. See 1:27; 2 Peter 1:4; 2:20; 1 John 3:1; 4:5.

Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.—From the abstract and general of "friendship" and "enmity" James now goes to the individual or personal. Whoever it may be in the church—man or woman, boy or girl, rich or poor, etc.—that *resolves* or *intends* to be (the literal meaning of "would be" in the Greek) a friend of the world, he renders or makes himself by that very fact an enemy of God. This is the worldly spirit, the basis for all worldly actions, which is so resoundly denounced in God's word. The word "enemy" in the Greek is *echthros*, akin to *echthos*, hate, the opposite of love. This antagonism toward God that is involved in being a friend of the world is indicated even more expressly in 1 John 2:15,16. Cf. John 15:10. One who is inclined toward the world is an enemy of God

because no man can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). See Galatians 1:10. He who is a friend of the world despises not only God Himself but also His will and purposes; hence the pungent call for repentance in 4:7-10.

5 Or think ye that the scripture speaketh in vain?—This question probably pertains both to the preceding verse and what follows in this verse, as if to say, “Do you believe it is empty talk, hollow or meaningless, when the scripture speaks of one who is a friend of the world being an enemy of God? Far from it! Neither does it speak in vain when it affirms that God has an exclusive right to your affections, that He grudges the world any share of the love due Himself, as we shall now see in the remainder of this verse.” Cf. Mark 12:10; 2 Timothy 3:16.

Doth the spirit which he made to dwell in us long unto envying?—If this is a correct translation, the word “spirit” designates that part of man referred to in 2 Corinthians 4:16 as “our inward man,” which is capable of “partaking of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). When this spirit is “renewed day by day,” being victorious in the war against the flesh, it acts for God in jealously yearning for love of God that knows no compromise with the evil world. As one of the footnotes for this passage in the ASV reads, “The spirit which he made to dwell in us he yearneth for even unto jealous envy,” which is an emphatic way of saying that God wants us for His very own and is unwilling to share us with the evil world. Cf. Matthew 26:41.

However, the more plausible rendering of this passage refers to the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, as expressed by the alternative reading of the ASV: “That Spirit which he made to dwell in us yearneth for us even unto jealous envy.” If this rendering is correct, it affirms that God has given us the Spirit to make and keep us true friends of His. See Acts 2:38; Romans 8:5-11, 26-28; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:16-19; 2 Timothy 1:14; etc. The Spirit yearns jealously for us, completely begrudging the world receiving even an iota of the love and loyalty that belong to God, so that He is grieved when we become friends of the world and thus enemies of God.

6 But he giveth more grace.—The consequence of the jealous longing that we be friends of God rather than friends of the world is the “more grace” God gives us, unmerited favors of various kinds. See 1:5; John 1:16; Romans 5:2; 2 Corinthians 9:8; 2 Peter 3:18.

Wherefore the scripture saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.—See Proverbs 3:34; 1 Peter 5:5. The proud, whom God resists, are friends of the world, who believe that in seeking the things of the world they will find true happiness. How wrong they are! But the lowly, to whom God gives His grace, are friends of

God, who are "poor in spirit . . . that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matthew 5:3,6), who realize that they are empty vessels which God can fill and that they are entirely dependent on Him for the blessed, truly happy life. Thus they pray without ceasing, asking of God only those things that are in keeping with His purpose concerning them, neither envying nor coveting what their neighbors have and having confidence that they will be filled with divine grace and righteousness.

7 Be subject therefore unto God;—Because God gives grace to the humble, James urges all his readers who are guilty of the selfish, jealous, factious spirit, who seek the things of the world rather than of God, to give up their pride and to humble themselves before God. Submissiveness to God rather than jaunty self-confidence and haughtiness!

The words "be subject" are from the Greek *hupotagete* (*hupotasso*), primarily a military term meaning "to rank under" (*hupo*, under, *tasso*, to arrange), suggesting here that those soldiers of Christ who have broken ranks in their love for the world are to get back into the ranks, so putting themselves again under the leadership of the captain of their salvation. See Hebrews 2:10.

but resist the devil, and he will flee from you.—To *subject* oneself to God, obeying the first imperative, is to *resist* the devil, obeying the second imperative. The one act involves the other. The devil is our archenemy, whose attacks on us through inducements to sin are calculated to destroy us. See 1 John 5:19. But Christians challenge the devil's power and influence by withstanding him. Ephesians 6:10-13 depicts the strength of the Lord we are to rely on and the weapons we are to use in being able to "stand against the wiles of the devil." James emphasizes this successful, victorious fight against the devil by stating that he will be put to flight, like a routed, defeated enemy. Cf. Matthew 4:1-11.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.—If you resist the devil he will flee; but if you draw nigh to God in penitence and friendship, He will come to you and make His abode with you through Christ in the Spirit, giving you pardon, grace, strength, and protection. See Deuteronomy 30:20; Luke 15:18-20; John 14:23; 1 John 1:7; 4:13; Revelation 3:19,20.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded.—Notice that although these words are addressed to James' unfaithful brethren, he does not address them as "brethren" but as "sinners," emphasizing their separation from God because of the sinful acts in which their hands have engaged. To draw nigh to God necessitates obedience to the injunctions here and through verse 10.

The words "cleansed" and "purify" denote the moral cleansing and purifying that are involved in the consecration of a life to God and His service, in drawing nigh to God. Repentance, a change of mind concerning one's sins, is meaningless unless it leads to reformation of life—an about face from love of the world to love of God, from the service of the devil and sin to the service of God and righteousness. *Hands* and *hearts* denote the whole life, outward and inward. Our *hands* act as they are prompted by our *hearts*. They cannot be dedicated, consecrated, to God unless they are free from the contamination of the evil world. Thus hands that are cleansed will cease from sinning, and hearts that are purified will cease from loving the world; hence to surrender the whole person to God.

The word "doubleminded" describes those whose hearts have assumed an attitude of compromise between the world and God, those who desire the things of the world while they vainly think that they are holding to God. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart" (Matthew 5:8), He meant the single-minded or whole-hearted, whose devotion to God is free from any alloy of selfishness and self-seeking.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep:—Here in the language of the Old Testament prophets is a deep and earnest call for the only kind of attitude that can bring about the repentance and reformation the Lord desires of His unfaithful disciples. To "be afflicted" (in the Greek only here in the New Testament) denotes the downcast, subdued, miserable, wretched, depressed feeling of those who are ashamed of their worldly, sinful, double lives. Those who "mourn" feel deep sadness of heart concerning their sins. See Matthew 5:4. In such affliction and mourning they are to "weep," to break forth in tears, to sob at the thought of their sins. See Matthew 26:75; Luke 7:38; 2 Corinthians 7:10.

let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.—James passes here from the laughter and joy related to "the pleasures of sin" (4:3; Hebrews 11:25) to the mourning and heaviness related to repentance. The word "mourning" in the Greek is a form of the word rendered as "mourn" in this same verse. The word "heaviness" signifies in the Greek *katepheia* the casting down of the eyes, both literally and figuratively. It thus denotes shame and humiliation. See Luke 18:13.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall exalt you.—Here James emphasizes that God will exalt, raise up, those penitent persons who have humbled themselves in His presence by deploring their sins. The true penitent, like the publican in the Lord's parable, does not venture to "lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven," knowing that there will be nothing uplifted about him until God's pardon lifts him to his feet. See 5:15,16.

11 Speak not one against another, brethren.—The evil speaking referred to here is unwarranted derogation, slander, what is commonly called “running another down,” or anything that is said about another, however true it may be, that is motivated by malice rather than love. The noun form of the Greek in Romans 1:30 is rendered as “back-biters.” In addressing his readers as brethren, James implies the unbrotherly conduct of such speaking, which violates the fraternal spirit that should prevail in the family of God. See 1 Peter 1:22.

He that speaketh against a brother, or judgeth his brother, speaketh against the law, and judgeth the law:—James combines speaking against a brother with judging that brother, which means that one who runs his brother down thereby judges his own brother. In light of its context, the word “judgeth” does not mean that we cannot draw conclusions concerning others by the standard of God’s law. See 1 Corinthians 6:1-6. But it does mean that we are not to pronounce any judgment that is false, that is malice-motivated, that impugns the motives of others, that censures the conduct of others concerning things which the divine law does not embrace either in its prohibitions or requirements. Since the law of Christ condemns all such unloving, evil speaking, then to so speak is to speak against the law and to judge the law. When we unlovingly, ignorantly, injuriously censure another, we at the same time unlovingly, ignorantly, injuriously censure the law and put ourselves up as judges of what the law should or should not teach. The law protects our brother, as it also does us, from all unfair, unwise, unloving, hurtful speech; and to deny him this protection is no less attacking and judging the law than it is attacking and judging our brother. See 2 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 4:29-31; 1 Peter 2:1.

but if thou judgest the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.—The obligation of the Christian is to be a doer of the law (1:22) and not a judge of it. But when one attacks his brother, failing to concede to him the protection the law gives him, he makes himself superior to the law. He thus passes judgment on the law itself, affirming that it has no right to protect his brother but that he should have the right to speak whatever evil he desires against him. And when one binds laws on his brother that are not part of the law of Christ, he also declares his superiority over the law, thus judging it.

12 One only is the lawgiver and judge, even he who is able to save and to destroy:—Since God is the only lawgiver, then it must be the business of every Christian to obey His law and no other spiritual law, and to grant his brethren the full protection of that law as he himself wants the full protection of it from all evil speaking. Not only is God the sole lawgiver, but He is also the sole judge. It is obvious, however, that He is not the judge in the sense that James has condemned the judgment

of others in the harsh, censorious, unloving, injurious, evil speaking against them. He is the only judge in the sense that knowing the hearts of all men, their actions and the full measure of their responsibility, He alone can save (take to heaven) and destroy (consign to hell). See Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 10:28; 25:34,41,46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 4:13.

When one speaks evil of his brethren, it is virtually equivalent to passing judgment on him as to his eternal destiny, thus presumptuously assuming a prerogative that is God's alone. As we have no power to save a person, neither do we have any power to condemn him. Let's leave this judging business to God!

but who art thou that judgest thy neighbor?—This rhetorical question is an emphatic, final denunciation of those who put themselves in the place of God in judging their neighbors. Who do they think they are, these self-appointed, egotistical, self-righteous, unloving judges?

Questions

Verse 4. What is a spiritual adulteress? Why is friendship with the world enmity with God? Why does the friend of the world make himself an enemy of God?

Verse 5. How does the *spirit* long unto envying?

Verse 6. Discuss the more grace that God gives the humble and how He resists the proud.

Verse 7. Discuss the relationship of being *subject* to God and *resisting* the devil.

Verse 8. Discuss the great blessings involved in drawing nigh to God. What is the meaning of James' injunction to "ye sinners"? Why are they depicted as "doubleminded"?

Verse 9. Discuss the wretched, mournful, weeping state of those who obey James' injunction in this passage.

Verse 10. Discuss the exalting of the one who humbles himself in the sight of the Lord.

Verse 11. Discuss the *speaking* and *judging* denounced by James. Why is this equivalent to speaking against and judging the law? Discuss the necessity of the Christian being a doer of the law rather than a judge.

Verse 12. In light of God being the sole lawgiver and judge, who alone can save and destroy, why is it presumptuous for us to judge our neighbors?

LESSON ELEVEN

4:13-17; 5:1-3

13 Come now,—This phrase is meant to attract the attention of the readers, as if to say, “Come now, let me reason with you.”

ye that say,—Such a declaration as follows concerning one’s business plans is indicative of human pride, not of humble dependence on God’s providence. Cf. 4:10.

Today or tomorrow—This assertion assumes as a matter of certainty that those who so speak have a free choice of the day they will make their journey. *Whenever* they want to do something, so they egotistically affirm, they will do it on their own say so alone.

we will go into this city,—Although this city is not named, it is one those so speaking definitely have in mind. *Wherever* they want to go, so they further egotistically affirm, they will go on their own say so alone.

and spend a year there,—The egotistical self-reliance of such speakers is also expressed in the time they plan to spend in their earthly pursuits. They confidently expect to spend a year in a particular destination, then either to return home or to move on to another city. “They thus speak, as though they would so after deliberate also respecting years to come” (John Bengel).

and trade, and get gain:—The plans of these Christian traders of the Dispersion, who sought pecuniary gain in such cities as Tyre, Sidon, Caesarea, Ephesus, Philippi, Alexandria, Corinth, Rome, etc., were not wrong as such. Certainly, James does not censure such foresight, for any successful business man must have in mind when and where he plans to carry through with his economic activities. The thing, place, and time planned are not wrong as such but only the self-dependent, self-seeking, self-confident spirit that ignores the will of God. Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:12.

14 whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.—The uncertainty of the future, and thus the folly of one determining the course of his life on his own say so alone, is also expressed in Proverbs 27:1, “Boast not thyself; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” An example in point of such boasting of one’s future plans is the rich fool, who, on the very night that God required his soul of him, said to himself, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry” (Luke 12:19). It is so easy to trust in the fulfillment of our plans, forgetting that we have no power of penetrating the future as to what will occur a single minute, hour, or day from now, let alone a year or more.

What is your life? For ye are a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.—What an emphatic, graphic description of the brevity and uncertainty of man's earthly life! As the expression goes, here today and gone tomorrow! Just as the vapor, either of steam or smoke, appears for a fleeting moment and then vanishes away to be seen no more, so the earthly life of man also appears for a fleeting moment and then vanishes to be seen no more. When we recognize the passing, ephemeral nature of our earthly state, we will never be cocksure about the fulfillment of any of our plans for this life.

15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall both live, and do this or that.—In contrast to the egotism and self-dependence of those whom James has just described, he asserts that Christians rather ought humbly to affirm that both the continuity of their lives and the fulfillment of their plans are dependent on the will of God. Without His will not even a sparrow falls to the ground (Matthew 10:29). When James says that we “shall do this or that,” he includes much more than our economic affairs: the phrase covers everything that God may permit us to do. Thus Paul made his return to Ephesus contingent on “if God will” (Acts 18:21) and his coming shortly to Corinth contingent on “if the Lord will” (1 Corinthians 4:19). See 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:3.

What we say concerning our plans, to which James here refers and in verse 13, can be that which we utter to ourselves. But it can also be that which we speak to others. When we tell others of our plans for the future, it is certainly proper to use the words “if the Lord will,” not as an empty phrase on our lips or the assuming of a holier-than-thou attitude, but in the spirit of pride in the name of the Lord and trust in Him for whatever future we have in keeping with His will, as was expressed by the apostle Paul in the forementioned passages. The principal danger that confronts members of the Lord's church in this regard is not that they will use this phrase as a pious, ostentatious form, but that they will not use it at all for fear of being thought of a “holy Joes” or religious fanatics. Although such a phrase is not to be regarded as a legalistic requirement in connection with every declaration of our plans (cf. Romans 15:28,29), yet when it is properly used by Christians who walk humbly with their Lord, it can be a confession with the mouth that they make before men of their living, trusting faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. See Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10,11.

16 But now ye glory in your vauntings:—The word “vauntings” is from the Greek *alazoneiais* (*alazoneia*), literally meaning “a taking on of great airs.” Marvin Vincent states, “The kindred *alazon*, a boaster, is derived from *ale*, a wandering or roaming; hence, primarily, a vagabond, a quack, a mountebank. From the empty boasts of such concerning the

cures and wonders they could perform, the word passed into the sense of *boaster* . . . *alazoneia* is *false* and *swaggering* boasting." Aristotle defines *alazoneia* as indicating the character of the man who lays claims to what will bring him credit, when the claim is altogether false or grossly exaggerated. How different from the glorying in the braggings of those self-confident persons who are so certain that they will accomplish their plans on their own say so alone, is the glorying in the Lord of those who recognize that His will is the contingency upon which they "shall both live, and do this or that"!

Alazoneia is the same word translated as "vainglory of life" in 1 John 2:16, describing those who love the world rather than God, which certainly includes all who glory in their vauntings concerning their plans for the future.

all such glorying is evil.—The glorying here designated is that which is grounded on haughtiness and self-illusion, the entirely false notion that one's fate is in his own hands. All such glorying is actively, positively wicked or evil (the significance of the Greek *ponera*), which should be repented of. In contrast to this wicked glorying there is a holy glorying, grounded not on self-exaltation in forgetfulness of God but on self-abasement in reliance on God and submission to His will. See 1:9; I Corinthians 1:30,31.

17 To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.—When one knows the good involved in dependence on God for whatever future he has in this world and yet fails to do that good, he is guilty of a sin of omission. Indeed, the failure to do anything that we know to be good is plain, downright sin (Greek *harmartia*, literally "missing the mark" concerning the will of God). Every Christian needs to take this teaching seriously to heart. The greatest danger threatening our spiritual welfare does not involve sins of commission, which we plainly recognize as transgressions of God's law, such as stealing, drunkenness, etc., but sins of omission in failing to do what we know to be good. See Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:31,32; Galatians 6:2,9,10. There are many would-be followers of Christ who would never think of getting drunk, committing adultery, etc., who think of themselves as decent, faithful, God-fearing members of the church, yet whose lives are virtually devoid of good works, whose righteousness is virtually entirely negative. In the words of Meander, it is indeed "manifest folly to know what to do and not do it." Or as expressed by Viedebandt, "This omission of good is also connected with slackness in doing good; gradually men become more and more remiss in doing good until at last all love of and longing for good leaves them and this is the death of which we must be on our guard. Beware, therefore, of procrastination! By deferring a thing we ought to do from day day, we come to lessen its importance and soon forget it altogether. Such negligences disclose to

us the slothfulness of our heart, a most dangerous and critical state of disease." Cf. Titus 3:8; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24.

5:1 Come now,—This expression is used to attract the attention of those to whom James speaks with the intent of plainly, pointedly letting them know the great trouble that confronts them because of their wickedness. See 4:13.

ye rich,—These rich are not Christians, not those referred to in 1:10; but in this context they are depicted in contrast to Christians, "brethren" (5:7), who are the victims of their selfishness and injustice. Although these rich are not the direct recipients of the epistle, James denounces them as a preacher would speak to the same kind of sinners in a mixed audience. This reminds us of the Old Testament prophets when they denounced foreign nations such as Babylon (Isaiah 13:6), Moab (Isaiah 15:3), and others. We must keep in mind, however, that the severe denunciation of the rich which follows is not because they are rich per se, but because of their love of money and their ill-gotten gains in the exploitation of the poor. And, certainly, the principle involved in James' denunciation of these rich sinners can apply to rich members of the church who so act in the same ungodly manner.

weep and howl—This command in the Greek literally means "weep, howling." The latter word is from the Greek *ololuzontes* (*ololuzo*), the formation of words in imitation of natural sounds: *ol-ol-uz-o*. It is used only here in the New Testament. In its connection with the word "weep" (Greek *klausate*, *klaio*), the picture James describes is that of audible sobbing accompanied by agonized howling. This reminds us of the weeping and howling of certain nations in the Old Testament when judgment descended upon them; for example, "Howl, O gate; cry, O city, thou art melted away, O Philistia. . . ." (Isaiah 14:31). In 4:9 the word "weep" gives evidence of repentance; here it is that of despair.

for your miseries that are coming upon you.—The noun "miseries" in the Greek is found only here and in Romans 3:16 in the New Testament. It corresponds to the verb rendered as "be afflicted" in 4:9, where it designates the self-imposed misery of one who feels deep penitence regarding his sins. The miseries of which James now speaks, however, are the effect of fatal judgment. When these ungodly rich consider the miseries that will befall them, they will have ample reason for weeping and howling. This should remind Christians of every generation of the warning, "But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as down men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Timothy 6:9,10). See Luke 6:24; 16:19-31.

These miseries facing the rich would be “at the coming of the Lord” (5:7). This can primarily refer to the Lord’s coming when His judgment fell upon the Jewish nation at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans (Matthew 24:1-34; Luke 21:20-24). The war broke out in 66, and the city was destroyed in 70. At the most this was only a few years after the writing of James’ epistle. The miseries of the rich would be greater than the poor when contrasted with their former luxurious living. But finally and more significantly, these miseries would be those that follow the Lord’s visible coming to judge the world (Matthew 24:35-44; 25:31-46; John 5:28,29; Revelation 1:7).

2 Your riches are corrupted,—The word “riches” is a comprehensive designation of all the earthly things for which wicked men long. In this phrase James begins his description of the spiritual poverty of the wicked rich. Although they possess an abundance of earthly riches, that is the only wealth they have; like the rich fool in the Lord’s parable, they are “not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). In his denunciation of these wicked rich, James would warn us not to envy them. He would thus appeal to all Christians to remember the words of Jesus concerning “the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22). See 2:5. He would also remind them of the rich young ruler whose love for riches kept him from following the Lord (Luke 18:23). He would therefore appeal to them to imbibe in their lives “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8), the only riches not subject to the corruption of which he speaks.

The words “are corrupted” in the Greek signify “to cause to become putrid,” here describing that which has rotted. As “riches” is a comprehensive designation of the earthly things possessed by the wicked rich, so “are corrupted” is likewise comprehensive concerning the wasting away of these earthly things. Such possessions may seem splendid and fine to the ungodly rich, but in the eyes of God they are but rottenness with the smell and sight of decay and death in them. Those, however, who are godly rich employ their riches in good works. Such riches are not subject to corruption; they do not rot.

and your garments are moth-eaten.—Here and in the next verse James specifies some of the things that are involved in wealth. One of the marks of riches is fancy, expensive attire (2:2,3). James does not say that all the clothes of these rich men were already literally moth-eaten; but as he looks into the future he sees them in terms of what would eventually happen, as if they had already been destroyed. People who are not clothed with the white raiment of God’s righteousness are as naked as the poorest beggar; whatever expensive finery they may have is as nothing in the eyes of God. See Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 3:17-19.

3 Your gold and your silver are rusted;—The Greek here indicates that which is completely rusted, rusted through and through or rusted clean away. Again James prophetically sees these physical possessions which would eventually be destroyed by the ravages of time as if they were already destroyed. Although, strictly speaking, gold and silver do not rust as iron or steel, James uses the word here figuratively to describe that which is eroded or eaten away. Those who possess expensive finery, gold, and silver, but not the godliness with contentment which is the only wealth that really matters (1 Timothy 6:6), are in the eyes of God the poorest of poor, whose possessions are a lot of corrupted, moth-eaten, rusted stuff that deserves to be thrown out. See Matthew 6:19-21.

and their rust shall be for a testimony against you,—The Greek literally signifies “testimony *to* rather than *against* you,” the idea being that the corroded, rusted possessions of the wicked rich will be a token eloquently declaring to them their selfishness, the covetous hoarding of their wealth rather than its use in good works—thus testifying to them the miseries that will eventually befall them, which they so justly deserve.

and shall eat your flesh as fire.—The rust of which James speaks not only destroys the gold and silver of the ungodly rich; but, figuratively speaking, it will also destroy their flesh as if it were a consuming fire, as an executioner to destroy them. They were so physically *eaten* at the destruction of Jerusalem, and will be more horribly eaten or destroyed in the state of everlasting separation from God. See Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28.

Ye have laid up your treasure in the last days.—The term “the last days” refers to the present dispensation, the time between the first and last coming of the Messiah. See Acts 2:17. These “last days” are the days of grace, the time God gives us to lay up “treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume” (Matthew 6:20), which all faithful Christians do. But the wicked rich ignore the grace of God, laying up treasures for themselves only upon the earth, thus depriving themselves of any hope of heaven.

Questions

Verse 13. Discuss the egotistical self-reliance of the Christian traders of whom James speaks.

Verse 14. Discuss the brevity and uncertainty of life.

Verse 15. Discuss what Christians should say when speaking of their plans.

Verse 16. What is meant by glorying in one's vauntings, and why is all such glorying evil?

Verse 17. Discuss the sin of failing to do what one knows to be good.

5:1. Discuss the weeping and howling of the wicked rich and the miseries that confront them.

Verse 2. Discuss the corrupted riches and moth-eaten garments of the ungodly rich.

Verse 3. In what sense are the gold and silver of the ungodly rich rusted? How will this rust be a testimony to them and eat their flesh as fire?

LESSON TWELVE

5:4-12

4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who mowed your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud,—James charges these wicked rich with fraudulent treatment of their farm laborers. The Mosaic law ordered fair treatment of servants, with their wages to be paid every evening (Deuteronomy 24:14,15). But these rich landowners, unlike the employer in the parable of Jesus who paid his employees at the end of the day exactly what he had promised them (Matthew 20:1-15), kept back either part or all of the pay due their laborers. This was the most despicable kind of fraudulent dealing because of the desperate need of the poor for the means of procuring the bare necessities of life.

crieth out:—The withheld wages of the oppressed laborers are figuratively described as crying out, yelling, to God for divine justice and retribution. This idea is taken from the Old Testament: “. . . the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth out unto me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10); “Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous” (Genesis 18:20).

and the cries of them that reaped have entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.—Not only do the fraudulently kept-back wages yell, but also the laborers themselves, whose loud complaints are justifiably made when they learn that what is their just due has been withheld by their wicked, covetous employers. Such cries have entered into the Lord’s ears until in His own due time He will respond to them.

James calls God “the Lord of Sabaoth,” or literally “the Lord of hosts.” This expression is found in only one other passage in the New Testament, but it occurs frequently in the Old Testament. James uses the term to describe God as the one who leads His heavenly hosts or armies to wreak vengeance on the wicked rich who have defrauded their workers. See Malachi 3:5.

5 Ye have lived delicately on the earth, and taken your pleasure;—The third charge James lays against the wicked rich is their selfish manner of living. The Greek word rendered as “lived delicately” is *etraphesate* (*truphao*), occurring only here in the New Testament and signifying “lead a life of luxury or self-indulgence, revel, carouse” (Arndt-Gingrich). Similar in meaning is the Greek word for “taken your pleasure,” *espatalesate* (*spatalao*), used only here and in 1 Timothy 5:6, signifying “live luxuriously or voluptuously, in indulgence” (Arndt-Gingrich). M. F. Sadler states that “it suggests the idea of extravagance.” Those whom James so describes spend their ill-gotten gains in dissipated self-indulgence. We are reminded of the heartless rich man who was

clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day" (Luke 16:19). See Luke 12:19.

ye have nourished your hearts in a day of slaughter.—These wicked rich nourished their hearts in the sense of living exactly in the way their hearts desired: in wanton luxury. They had fed and fattened themselves like animals for slaughter. See Jeremiah 12:3. "The day of slaughter" could be the destruction of Jerusalem, when the ungodly rich Jews were actually slaughtered in that horrible conflagration. "Their wealth excited the cupidity and provoked the fury of the factious zealots against them, and they fell victims in the day of slaughter to their own love of mammon; what was left of their substance was consumed by the flame, which burnt the city.—Josephus *B. J.* VII.29,32,37" (J. D. Mombert).

In the far more serious sense "the day of slaughter" will be the last judgment, when the wicked rich are forever separated from God. Unconsciously they were fattening and pampering themselves for this day when they will finally, completely, and dearly pay for their wanton indulgence at the expense of their innocent victims. We are reminded of a statement made in uninspired, apocalyptic Jewish literature: "Woe to you rich, for you have trusted in your riches, and from your riches you must be parted, because you have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches. You committed blasphemy and unrighteousness, and have become ready for the Day of slaughter, the day of darkness, the day of the last great judgment" (Enoch 94:8,9).

6 Ye have condemned, ye have killed the righteous one;—Some commentators believe that this refers to the trials and killing of Christ, since He is referred to as "the Holy and Righteous One" (Acts 3:14) and "the Righteous One" (Acts 7:52; 22:14). Cf. 1 Peter 3:18. But the use of the present tense in the last statement of this verse, "he doth not resist you," shows that James uses the term "the righteous one" as the generic singular representing all those innocent poor who were being condemned either by Jewish courts or pagan tribunals. See 2:6. The wicked rich were entirely unscrupulous, using their power and influence to oppress their victims even unto death. And they were also guilty of a kind of killing in depriving the poor of the necessities of life. This concept of murder was familiar in Jewish literature; for example, "a man who offers sacrifice which he has extorted from the moneys of the poor is as a man who slays a son before his father's eyes. The poor have to live on scanty bread, and anyone who defrauds him of it is a shedder of blood. He murders his neighbor who deprives him of his living, and he who defrauds a hireling of his wages is a shedder of blood" (Sirach 34:24 ff). But coming after the word "condemned," the killing James specifically refers to is judicial murder.

he doth not resist you.—James here describes the helplessness of the victims of the ruthless, ungodly rich. Like the defrauded laborers, they had no means of redress, no one to plead their cause. And any defense they might have put up would have been useless in the face of the power and influence of their rich oppressors over the tribunals and courts. Thus they submitted without murmur to the unjust verdicts and even death that faced them.

7 Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.—The word “therefore” tells these innocent poor Christians that whatever they may have to suffer meanwhile at the hands of the ungodly rich, the Lord in His own due time will redress the wrongs committed against them and give their oppressors what they justly deserve. This coming of the Lord may primarily refer to the judgment that fell on the Jews at the destruction of Jerusalem, but its ultimate meaning undoubtedly pertains to the end of the world when Jesus will receive His faithful ones unto Himself and bring His final judgment on the wicked. In light of this, James urges his poor brethren who are being persecuted by the rich to be *patient*. This word, from the Greek *makrothumesate* (*makrothumeo*), literally meaning “to be longsuffering,” here signifies “to patiently hold out under trials; a long-protracted restraint of the soul from yielding to passion, especially the passion of *anger*” (Marvin Vincent). These poor oppressed saints are to endure all the wrongs committed against them by their rich persecutors with steady, unwavering endurance.

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it, until it receive the early and latter rain.—Through hope of the harvest at last, the farmer has to wait for the final result of his planting, bearing hard work and whatever adversities arise. The grain is planted in the fall, with the early Palestinian rains falling from October through February and the latter from March to the end of April. See Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 5:24. Although the farmer can do nothing of himself to bring this rain, he patiently trusts in the providence of God for it, with the hope that his labors will not be in vain. The “preciousness” of the harvest will more than compensate for the trials of the past in waiting for it.

8 Be ye also patient;—As the patient farmer can expect a harvest in due time, so these suffering, oppressed saints who patiently endure can expect deliverance from all their trials in due time.

establish your hearts:—They are not to lose heart under the fiery trials that beset them, but to have unwavering purpose of heart concerning faithfulness to and trust in the Lord, to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might” (Ephesians 6:10), knowing that He will never forsake them. See 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Hebrews 13:5,6; 1 Peter 5:10.

for the coming of the Lord is at hand.—At this particular time, as men measure time, the coming of the Lord at the destruction of Jerusalem was literally at hand. But how can this prediction be valid concerning the coming of Jesus at the end of the world, since almost two thousand years have passed since James wrote these words and the Lord has yet to return? The prediction implies an exhortation to all Christians, not only to the Jewish Christians who were the direct recipients of James' epistle but also to Christians who live today, that they should so righteously live, so patiently and steadfastly endure the trials of life, so trust in the cleansing power of Jesus' blood, as if He were coming at the very next moment. In this sense the coming of Jesus is always at hand. See Mark 13:32-37.

9 Murmur not, brethren, one against another, that ye be not judged:—The word "murmur" signifies in the Greek *groan* or *grumble*. It can here denote the groaning of Christians against each other as the result of the mistreatment they have received at the hands of sinners. Unless such stress and strain is patiently borne in self-control, it tends to make people irritable and censorious. When one is full of complaint about the mistreatment he receives from others, he is ready to give vent to his spite even against his best friends.

James may have in mind, however, the forbearing, longsuffering spirit Christians must possess concerning the sins committed against them by their brethren. As he has exhorted them to bear patiently the wrongs from sinners, he now exhorts them to bear patiently the wrongs from their fellow saints. In any case, all grumbling and groaning against one's brethren invites God's judgment, divine retribution or condemnation. God's judgment will take strict account of the behavior of Christians as well as of their persecutors. See 4:11,12; Matthew 7:1.

behold, the judge standeth before the doors.—Jesus, who may return at any time, is always standing at the doors, so to speak, to enter and exercise His prerogative as the judge of men's lives. That being so, how foolish and dangerous it is for Christians to be engaged in any kind of ungodly conduct, especially unloving, unkind, unmerciful treatment of their brethren, when they can be taken to task by the divine judge at any time! Some commentators as M. F. Sadler assume the possibility of the destruction of Jerusalem being involved here: "The time of God's extreme vengeance on Jerusalem being so close at hand, quarrel not, ye Christians, among yourselves, or some of you may be drawn to take part with unbelievers, and share their swift approaching doom."

10 Take, brethren, for an example of suffering and patience, the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord.—In order to encourage his readers to patience in the face of suffering at the hands of

their rich oppressors, James refers to the patience of the prophets in the face of the suffering they had to endure. In noting these examples they would avoid the mistake of thinking that something strange had befallen them, as though it was an unusual thing for God's people to be persecuted. See 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12.

The phrase "spake in the name of the Lord" can mean "the obedience of the prophets in praising the Lord's name . . . as at Matt. 7:22; Lev. 19:12, Septuagint" (John Bengel), or it can mean speaking by the authority of the Lord in the divine revelation given them. See 2 Peter 1:20,21.

11 Behold, we call them blessed that endured:—The word "endured" is from the Greek *hupomenontas* (*hupomeno*), defined by W. E. Vine as "to abide under, to bear up courageously (under suffering)." It here indicates such courageous bearing up in the face of afflictions that one will be constant in the service of the Lord until he attains the desired object of divine reward for his faithfulness. See Matthew 10:22. These faithful prophets are called "blessed," happy; and when Christians bear up under the trials of life, joining the glorious company of the prophets, they too are called "blessed," happy. See 1:2; Matthew 5:11,12; Philippians 1:28,29; 1 Peter 3:14; 4:14.

ye have heard of the patience of Job.—A striking example of bearing up under the trials of life is that of Job, who held out under the severest of afflictions. Although his patience was at first shaken by the things he suffered and he questioned the ways of God, he never gave up his faith but persevered through all his trials to a happy end. See Job 1:21,22.

and have seen the end of the Lord, how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful.—The outcome to which the Lord brought persevering Job, giving him "twice as much as he had before . . . blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" (Job 42:10,12), was familiar to James' readers. And the Lord's pity and mercy which so greatly blessed Job would also bless those who were patiently enduring persecution from the evil rich, and they will always bless any and all of the faithful saints who endure life's afflictions to the end. See again Matthew 5:12; 10:22.

The distinction between "pity" and "merciful" is suggested by Marvin Vincent: "The former denotes the *general* quality of compassion, while the latter emphasizes the sympathy called out by special cases, being the feeling which is moved to pain at another's suffering."

12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath:—In this passage James repeats in substance the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:34-37.

The phrase "above all things" is the writer's way of saying that the first thing Christians should avoid or stop is the swearing of which he speaks. He here reinforces the injunction of 5:7-9. In excitement or irritation resulting from the afflictions that beset them, Christians are tempted to swearing or oath taking. They should thus be careful to exercise self-restraint in avoiding all frivolous oaths (swearing by the heaven, the earth, etc.) so that their bare word will suffice.

but let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay; that ye fall not under judgment.—Honest and truthful people need no more than a simple "yes" or "no" to convey the truth to others. James emphasizes the seriousness of disobedience to this injunction by affirming that the oath taking which he condemns will bring upon the guilty ones the Lord's judgment. There is, however, a great deal of discussion as to whether all oaths are forbidden by James, whether his injunction here is absolute. God took an oath (Hebrews 6:17-18), Jesus took an oath (Matthew 26:63,64), and Paul took oaths (Romans 1:9; 9:1). In light of the foregoing, it may be that this injunction of James is limited to ordinary conversation. Those who read these notes are urged to consider all the scriptural evidence on the subject of oath taking and then to decide in their own consciences if there are special occasions in which they can lawfully take an oath.

Questions

Verse 4. Discuss the fraudulent treatment of the farm laborers by the wicked rich.

Verse 5. What was the life style of the wicked rich? In what sense did they nourish their hearts in a day of slaughter?

Verse 6. Discuss the killing of the righteous one.

Verse 7. Discuss the patience of those undergoing persecution until the Lord comes.

Verse 8. What is the significance of the phrases "establish your hearts" and "the coming of the Lord is at hand"?

Verse 9. Discuss the murmuring of brethren against each other. What danger confronts those who so murmur? In what sense is the judge standing before the doors?

Verse 10. Why does James refer to the suffering and patience of the prophets?

Verse 11. Discuss the blessedness of enduring persecution and suffering. Discuss the pity and mercy of the Lord as illustrated by His treatment of patient Job.

Verse 12. Discuss the oath taking forbidden by James.

LESSON THIRTEEN

5:13-20

13 Is any among you suffering? let him pray.—The connection between this verse and the preceding one is not difficult to see. How can one who consistently uses his tongue in foolish, meaningless oaths possibly use that same tongue in reverent, meaningful prayer? The word “suffering” is the same as in 5:10. Whatever evil, distress, or trouble besets the Christian, he is to pray about it. He can cast all his anxiety on Him who is our “strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1). See Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 5:7. Such prayer brings strength for steadfastness in the face of all life’s difficulties.

Is any cheerful? let him sing praise.—The Greek word for cheerful describes one who is thriving, in good spirits. As prayer is a means of communicating with God, so also is singing praise. As the sufferer turns to God for help through prayer, so the cheerful Christian praises God for his good spirits. These special rulings concerning prayer and singing praise do not, however, rule out the privilege of engaging in them during all life’s circumstances. See 1 Thessalonians 5:17,18; Acts 16:22-25.

14 Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:—James now deals with a specific form of suffering, that of bodily illness, informing his readers that they were to call for the elders of the church. This injunction confirms the New Testament pattern for a plurality of elders in each congregation. See Acts 14:23. These elders (Greek *presbuteros*, older man) were the bishops (Greek *episkopos*, overseer) of the local congregation. “That they (presbyters) did not differ from bishops or overseers . . . is evident from the fact that the two words are used indiscriminately, Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5,7” (Joseph Thayer). Their function is described in the command to elders in 1 Peter 5:2, “Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight . . .” The elders of the congregations to which James wrote his epistle were to show concern for those under their oversight whatever their troubles were, whether physical sickness or the spiritual sickness of sin.

Many commentators believe that the anointing with oil spoken of by James was symbolic of special, miraculous power given these elders by God to heal the sick. This use of oil is probably the meaning in Mark 6:13. Cf. John 9,6,7. We definitely know that Jesus and the apostles were endowed with miraculous healing power. See Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:56; etc. Moreover, among the miraculous gifts in the early church was that of healing the sick (1 Corinthians 12:28). There may have been elders endowed with this gift, but there is no indication that all of them

possessed it or that it was given to any of them because they were *elders*. Thus if James had had miraculous healing in mind, his injunction to any one who was sick would have been, "Let him call for someone in the church who has the gift of healing." But James did not request his sick readers to call for any particular elder who may have had this gift, but for the *elders*, all the elders, because they were *elders*, bishops, the overseers of the local congregation. See Matthew 18:19.

In this particular context, it is entirely logical to conclude that James' injunction to the elders involved the physical as well as the spiritual means of healing the sick. Oil was applied to the body in the same sense that a nurse rubs a patient's body with alcohol. Or the anointing with oil can symbolize any kind of physical therapy, just as the command "salute one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16) can symbolize any kind of customary, sincere greeting, such as embracing, shaking hands, etc. Thus James' command here can be equivalent to "giving him medicine in the name of the Lord."

That oil was used in physical therapy during James' time is thoroughly demonstrated historically. The good Samaritan applied oil along with wine to the body of the injured traveler on the Jericho road (Luke 10:34). Herod the Great was bathed in a vessel of oil when he was thought to be on the verge of dying. Celsus recommended rubbing with oil in cases of fevers and other ailments. See Isaiah 1:6.

We cannot assume that the anointing of oil had to be a ritual or an aid to the sick person's faith because it was administered by elders rather than physicians. This act was not restricted to physicians; for example, the good Samaritan was not a physician, nor did he perform a ritual. Rubbing the body of a sick person with oil was a common practice. Although Paul was not a physician, yet he recommended Timothy to use wine for his stomach's sake (1 Timothy 5:23).

Moreover, the addition of "the name of the Lord" to anointing with oil does not make it a ritual; for when Christians do anything to serve others, performing any kind of good work, they do so in the name, by the authority, under the direction, of Jesus Christ. "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). See Matthew 10:42; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 1:10.

It is significant that the word "anoint" in this passage is from the Greek *aleipho*, which in its eight other uses in the New Testament, with one possible exception, refers to the *common* use of oil. The Greek word rendered as "anoint" which always refers to a *sacred* act, a ritual, is *chrío*. Indeed, this word is the derivation of the name Christ, *Christos*, meaning "the Anointed One." Perhaps a better rendering of James' use of *aleipho* would be "oiling with oil" (just as we do not "anoint" a piece of machinery but "oil" it).

We must not forget, however, that the anointing with oil was secondary to the praying. "Let them pray over him" is the main verb, while "anoint-

ing him with oil" is a participle marking the subsidiary act. The principle thus delineated here, in keeping with all other New Testament teaching on the efficacy of prayer, is that of dependence on God and His grace, which must always underlie any and all acts calculated to help us in our infirmities and needs.

15 and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up;—The fact that the sick person is saved by prayer offered in faith, with the Lord raising him up, does not deny the efficacy of oil or whatever other medical means may be used. But what this passage eloquently affirms is that all healing ultimately depends on the will and power of God. Cf. 4:15, "If the Lord *will*, we shall both *live*, and do this or that." For that matter, every other blessing ultimately comes from God (1:17). Yet in our dependence on God for all the blessings of life, which means a life saturated with prayer (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), we are obligated to cooperate with Him in making these blessings possible. For example, the faithful Christian prays for his daily bread and thanks God when he receives it (Matthew 6:11; Ephesians 5:20); yet he does not receive it miraculously, like manna from heaven, but must cooperate with God's grace by working to procure it. See Genesis 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 3:10,12.

The point is that the prayers of the elders which were answered in the restoration of the sick in no way differ from the prayers of all faithful Christians for the ordinary blessings of life. The conclusion that God's power can only be manifested miraculously, as in the signs that were present in the early church, is false. But it is just as false to conclude that God is out of the picture, that He is either unwilling or unable to manifest His power through the physical laws He has created, that such laws are not subject to His control. Such a conclusion would rule out any need of prayer and deny the providence of God.

Of course, we must recognize that James does not affirm that every patient over whom the elders prayed recovered and thus never died. We must therefore realize that all true prayer for all earthly blessings is based upon the Lord's will (4:15; 1 John 5:14).

and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him.—The Greek for "have committed sins" describes not merely the *fact* that the sick person has sinned, but his *condition* or *state* as a sinner; that is, "in a state of having committed sins." These sins may have contributed to his sickness. See Isaiah 33:24; Matthew 9:2-5; John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 11:29,30. Or they could be any sins of which he was unforgiven. In receiving divine forgiveness, the repentance of the sick person is necessarily implied. See Acts 8:22; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:9. The "if," of course, implies that a man may be sick even though he is not in a state of sin.

This verse and the one preceding are the texts that the Catholic Church

appeals to in attempting to prove the dogma of extreme unction. But this so-called sacrament is administered with a view to the sick person dying, whereas the oil and praying which James advocated was with a view to the sick person living.

16 Confess therefore your sins one to another,—These sins (Greek *paraptoma*, a false step, falling aside, mishap) are such as stand between a sick person and his recovery. It is a proven fact that the healing power of God through medical means can be blocked by a conscience burdened with a sense of guilt. Thus in confessing our sins to each other, as also to God (1 John 1:8), we lance a festering conscience and invite the healing power of God. This confession can be that which is made to an individual against whom we have sinned (Matthew 5:23,24; Luke 17:4), to the whole congregation against whom we have sinned (implied in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 12:20,21), or to any sympathetic Christian to whom we desire to unload our conscience and seek counsel and intercessory prayer.

and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.—Intercessory prayer is enjoined on all faithful Christians to whom confession is made. "It is to be remembered that the prayer of the presbyters [elders] does not exclude the common intercessions of Christians and that the efficacy attributed to the latter is not less than that attributed to the former" (John Huther). Cf. Romans 15:1. The context indicates that the healing referred to is that of the body, although spiritual healing also is not ruled out. The fact that James commands confession "one to another" and prayer "one for another" rules out auricular confession and absolution as practiced by the Catholic Church.

The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.—In reference to God's power in answer to prayer, James sets forth a general principle concerning the efficacy of the supplication (Greek *deesis*, a wanting, a need, an asking, entreaty) offered by a righteous man. See Proverbs 15:29; John 15:7; 1 John 3:21,22.

17 Elijah was a man of like passions with us,—James now presents an example of prayer offered by a righteous man "availing much in its working." We are not to attribute the efficacy of Elijah's prayers to the fact that he was a prophet, possessing certain exceptional qualities not found in other righteous persons, but that he was man, a human being, just as we are. This fact is emphasized by the phrase "of like passions with us," the thought being that having a nature and constitution like all other human beings Elijah was subjected to the same pain, troubles, and temptations as they. Yet he was on praying terms with God because of his faith in and love for Him, striving to live a righteous life, just as we also can be on praying terms with God. See Acts 14:15.

and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months.—The term “prayed fervently” in the Hebrew literally means “prayed with prayer,” denoting the earnestness and intensity of Elijah’s prayer. Cf. Luke 22:15, “With desire I have desired”; that is, “earnestly desired.” See Colossians 4:12. Being greatly concerned about God’s honor and integrity and completely agreeing with God in His hatred of Israel’s apostasy, he prayed that the national idolatry should be punished by a national judgment, a lengthy drought. And since his prayer was according to God’s will, it was answered affirmatively.

18 And he prayed again; and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.—No miracle in the sense of any deviation from the normal workings of nature is denoted here. Cf. John 2:7-9; Exodus 16:14-18. The drought was obviously due to God’s power to withhold the atmospheric conditions necessary for rain. And the rain which later fell resulted from God producing the necessary conditions for it: clouds and wind (1 Kings 18:45). This rain contributed to the normal conditions for the earth to bring “forth her fruit.” See 1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:41-45.

19 My brethren, if any among you err from the truth, and one convert him;—With the affectionate address of “my brethren,” James appeals to his readers to labor to convert or turn any erring fellow Christian to the truth. See Galatians 6:1. The phrase “err from the truth” does not refer to the sins that growing, maturing, faithful Christians commit (1 John 1:8), but to the condition of the backslider, one who has strayed away from the gospel of Christ. Cf. “multitude of sins” in the next verse.

20 let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death,—“Let him know” emphasizes the importance of the work of leading souls back to the truth. James would thus encourage all Christians to do this work. How important indeed it is to turn a sinner, an erring child of God, from the downward path he is traveling and thus to save him from the eternal death referred to in Revelation 21:8!

and shall cover a multitude of sins.—Whose sins, those of the backslider or those of the one who converts him? The more logical answer pertains to the former. Cf. 1 Peter 4:8. When the backslider is returned to the truth, his sins are covered in the sense that they are forgiven through the blood of Christ. See Romans 4:7,8.

Questions

Verse 13. Discuss praying when we are suffering and singing praise when we are cheerful.

Verse 14. What is the overall function of elders in the local congregation? What was the purpose of the elders anointing the sick with oil? Why was the anointing with oil secondary to praying?

Verse 15. Discuss God raising up the sick in answer to prayer, that all healing ultimately comes from Him. What is the significance of the healed person's sins being forgiven him?

Verse 16. Discuss confessing our sins to each other and praying for each other. Why does the supplication of a righteous man avail much in its working?

Verse 17. What is meant by Elijah being a man of like passions with us? What is meant by "prayed fervently"? Why did he pray that it might not rain?

Verse 18. How did God answer Elijah's prayer in sending forth rain?

Verse 19. What is meant by a brother erring from the truth? Discuss the responsibility of his faithful brethren laboring to convert him.

Verse 20. What happens when a sinner is converted from the error of his way?

