

Bible Study Series on.....

The Study of
JAMIES

“Practical Christianity”

12 Lessons

Prepared by:
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2006

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“A Study of the Book of James”

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Lesson One

“Introduction to the Book of James”
(James 1:1)

The book of James has been variously evaluated by men. The three following quotes will give you some ideas of what others think about the book:

“There is no more Jewish book in the New Testament than the Epistle of James, not even including Matthew, Hebrews, and the Revelation letter.”

“If we eliminate two or three passages containing references to Christ, the whole epistle might find its place just as properly in the Canon of the Old Testament as in that of the New Testament, as far as its substance of doctrine and contents is concerned. That could not be said of any other book in the New Testament.”

“Saint James’ Epistle is a right strawy Epistle as compared with them (John’s letters, Paul’s, and Peter’s); for it has no real Gospel character.”

Why are such statements made about this book and are they justified? It is because of such statements like the above that caused the book to be questioned as to whether it should be placed in the New Testament “Canon.” After some discussion and some years passed, the book was included in the New Testament Canon. There were some early references to the book as noted below:

- 1. Origen (c. 230 AD)**—He was the first to explicitly quote James as Scripture.
- 2. Shepherd of Hermas (100-150 AD)**—The write seems to echo some of its teachings.
- 3. Clement of Rome (c. 96 AD)**—He uses similar language as that of James.
- 4. 1st Peter (c. 65-67 AD)**—There are similarities of language in the two books.

If the book of James was written early, it would possibly reflect the religious conditions between Jews and Christians. In some instances, there was very close identity until persecution began to divide the two groups from each other. The early Christians only had the teaching of Christ as the Messiah and the barest rudiments of Christianity. They often met together as in Acts 4 in the Temple—also in Synagogues, as well as their homes (Acts 9:1-2). Those who were persecuted were scattered, but they preached Christ—but to Jews only at first. As late as AD 58 some Jewish believers were still zealous of the Law (Acts 21:20). The Jews had been scattered among the nations many years before the beginning of the church. The book of Acts reveals that there were Synagogues in most major cities of the civilized world (Acts 2:5; 8:4; 11:19-21).

But one of the more obvious facts about the comparison between Judaism and Christianity is that both had moral laws by which God’s people were to be guided. The Old was in reality a shadow of the New....so it is to be expected that there would be many similarities. So the book of James would generally fit well in the Old Testament Canon as well as the New Testament Canon. There has been universal acceptance of this book in the Canon of the New Testament.

THE WRITER OF THE BOOK

The writer is stated as being: “*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” (1:1). However, there is more than one James in the New Testament. There was James, the brother of John, an Apostle (Matthew 10:2); James, the son of Alphaeus, also an Apostle (Matthew 10:3; Mark 15:40); and James, the Lord’s brother (Matthew 13:54-56). Which James would possibly be the writer of this book? James, the brother of John, was beheaded early (Acts 12). James, the Less (son of Alphaeus) was not prominent in the early church and we do not know much about him. The writer does not identify himself further; and it could be assumed that he was someone well-known and did not need further identification at the time. Some have felt that there is some similarity in the book of James with the remarks of James, the Lord’s brother, as recorded in Acts 15 and Acts 21. Thus, the weight of what evidence we have seems to point to the Lord’s brother.

THE LIFE OF JAMES, THE LORD’S BROTHER

James was one of four other brothers of Jesus (James, Joses, Simon, and Judas—Matt 13:54-56). If all four of these were born of Josephus and Mary, James would probably be the oldest since he is mentioned first in the listing. They would have all been born and brought up in Nazareth (Matt. 2:22-23). Joseph, being a just man, would have brought his children up in the strict observance of the Law of Moses. We know nothing about James up till the time of Jesus’ public ministry. The indications are given in John’s Gospel that his brothers did not really believe Him to be the Messiah (John 7:5). At Jesus’ death, He committed His mother to the care of the Apostle John, not His brothers (John 19:26-27). But after Jesus’ death and resurrection, He appeared to a James in particular (presumed to be His brother—1 Cor. 15:7). All of Jesus’ brothers and mother were to with the disciples and Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). For a while no mention is made of James until Paul’s letter to the Galatian churches (Gal. 1:15-19—AD 39).

After the early death of James, the brother of John, and Peter’s release from prison (Acts 12:1-17—AD 44), Peter tells the brethren at John Mark’s house to tell James of his release. From this time on James seems to have taken a very prominent role in the church at Jerusalem (AD 50-62). He was one of the elders in Jerusalem—highly respected—almost on the level of an Apostle (Gal. 1:17-20). In the Jerusalem discussion over the question of Gentiles being circumcised and keeping the Law (AD 50—Acts 15), James gave the concluding thoughts and wrote the letter that was to be carried to the Gentile Christians. James endorses Paul’s work among the Gentiles, but was himself mainly concerned with the Jews believing in Jesus (Gal. 2:11-12). He felt that the Jewish Christians should keep the Law, but not the Gentiles—which caused problems at Antioch. His intense interest in winning Jews to Christ is shown by his advise to the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:17-26).

The writer of this letter is referred to as “James, the Just,” because of his devotion to God. He drank no wine, ate no animal food, and no razor touched his head. He spent much time in prayer at the Temple and had a strong emphasis upon obedience to God. His death as a martyr came in AD 62, as recorded by Josephus, the Historian. His remarks were mentioned by Hegesippus (a Christian Jew in 160 AD) and later by Eusebius, another Historian.

“Upon the death of Festus and before the new ruler came, the High Priest and Scribes and Pharisees compelled James to proclaim from one of the galleries of the Temple that Jesus was not the Messiah to restrain the people who were embracing Christianity in large numbers. Instead he cried the opposite, whereupon his enraged enemies hurled him to the ground, then stoned him, till he was dead. Shortly afterwards, the fatal siege of Jerusalem began—many of the Jews feeling that this was their punishment for murdering James.”

TO WHOM THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN

The writer states that he is writing to: ***“the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.”*** (1:1). This phrase could apply to Jews who had been scattered throughout the civilized world or to Jewish Christians everywhere. The later we believe is the obvious from the following information:

1. Abraham was spoken of as being “our” father (2:21).
2. The Synagogue was spoken of as a place of worship (2:2).
3. Yet, he speaks of himself as being a servant of ***“the Lord Jesus Christ”*** (1:1).
4. He also shared with them a common faith in the ***“Lord Jesus Christ”*** (2:1).
5. Those to whom he wrote had been begotten by the Will of God, which is a New Testament concept (1:18).
6. He said that the rich blaspheme the ***“worthy name by which you are called”*** (2:7).
7. He exhorted them to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord (5:7).
8. He encouraged them to look for a ***“crown of life”*** (1:12).
9. He seems to be using the phrase ***“twelve tribes”*** in a spiritual sense as those with whom God was pleased.

The date of the writing of this letter is not exact, but there are some indications as to possibilities. It probably was not written any earlier than AD 45, nor later than AD 62 (when he died a martyr’s death. The Jewish tone of the book with no Gentiles involved could denote an early date. There is no reference made to the controversy over Gentiles being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses (AD 50). The use of the word “Synagogue” for a place of worship may indicate an early date also. And also, the absence of drawn-out arguments against Judaizing Christianity could be a very good indication of an early date. The time could be as early as AD 45-48.

POSSIBLE CONDITIONS THAT CAUSED THE BOOK TO BE WRITTEN

The following passages could be indicators that caused James to write to the Jewish Christians that had been scattered abroad:

1. Persecution and Tribulations (1:2-4, 12-18)
2. Clash between the rich and poor (1:9-11; 2:1-10; 5:1-6)
3. Lust, Greed, and Pride (2:13-15; 4:1-10)
4. Prejudice (2:1-10; 4:11-12)
5. Uncontrolled tongue (1:26-27; 3:1-18)
6. Mere profession of religion (1:26-27; 2:14-26)
7. Lack of trust in God (4:13-17; 5:7-11)
8. Lack of proper prayer (1:5-8; 5:12-18)

Whatever the reasons, we do believe that James was guided by the Holy Spirit as he wrote this wonderful and practical book that has become a favorite one for Christians to study.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LETTER

The book leaves the impression that a strong personality is behind the writing. He was referred to by inspiration as one of the “*pillars*” of the church (Gal. 2:9). His writing is stern, sincere, eloquent, and rebukes are some of the sharpest to be found in the New Testament. He jumps into his message quickly, point by point, like a hammer striking and changes quickly from each point. The book deals very little with many of the doctrinal issues that both Paul and Peter had to deal with later. His work is one of practicality. He overlaps his ideas from beginning to end. He gives an overview of the rest of the book in the first chapter and deals with each point more in detail in the remainder of the book. Someone has observed that “*If Paul is a writer of faith, Peter is a writer of hope, and John is a writer of love; then, James is a writer of a working faith.*”

His efforts in the book are to exhort those to whom he is writing to be patience and to be in prayer in the midst of trials. He reproves them for a lack of trust in God’s promises and exhorts them to an activation of their faith. He also rebukes them sharply for their respect of persons, their lack of control of the tongue, and their need for humility.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

1. The phrase “General Epistles” is a catch-all designation for all Epistles not considered written by Paul.
2. The phrase “Catholic Epistles” has reference to those books translated by Catholic scholars.
3. Jerome was the first to place the “General Epistles” after Paul’s letters.
4. The Epistle of James has never been questioned as to its belonging among the inspired letters of the New Testament.
5. It is believed that James is the youngest of the brothers of Jesus.
6. Some have taught that James was only a cousin of Jesus rather than an actual brother.
7. The Lord appeared to James, the author of this book, after His resurrection.
8. James is called a pillar in the church by Paul.
9. James did not agree with Paul and Peter on the question of the Gentiles being circumcised.
10. James is pictured as rigorous in his religious exercise, living the life of a Nazarite.
11. The Sadducees were in virtual control of the Sanhedrin during the years of 44-70 AD.

- ___ 12. James' death is thought to have occurred from exposure to the cold weather in the wilderness.
- ___ 13. James was held in high regard and esteem as a righteous person in the early church.
- ___ 14. James would have been able to keep up with the churches through the continual travel to Jerusalem of those coming to the feasts and for other business.
- ___ 15. The word "servant" or "slave" was used as a term of honor among the Greeks.
- ___ 16. James makes only two references to his being the brother of Christ in his book.
- ___ 17. The term "Israel" has a spiritual significance in the New Testament.
- ___ 18. At the time of the New Testament, Jews were scattered into every nation under heaven.
- ___ 19. Approximately one million Jews lived at Alexandria in Egypt at this time.
- ___ 20. James was brought up in the town of Capernaum.
- ___ 21. The Jews were very strong at this time in Babylon.
- ___ 22. James was put to death before the death of Festus.
- ___ 23. The death of James is thought to be closely connected with the destruction of Jerusalem.
- ___ 24. We have no other source of information for James outside of the New Testament.
- ___ 25. James followed Jesus during His public ministry as did his other brothers and sisters.

Lesson Two

“Attitudes Toward Mistreatment”**(James 1:2-4; 5:1-12)**

Christians are often subjected to difficulties and trials and need to be shown the right ways or attitudes with which to deal with them. James certainly is not encouraging God’s people to court trials or even temptations, but rather to have the right attitudes and understanding about them when they do come. It should be obvious that attitudes reveal our hearts to others, as well as, to ourselves at times. The world we live in is not perfect and therefore problems will come—not only of our own making, but because of health conditions, job situations, or family situations. Of all people, the child of God should know how to properly deal with trials, tribulations, temptations, or even persecution.

HOW TO DEAL WITH MANIFOLD TRIALS (1:2-4)

A. Realize their purpose. “Trials” seems to be the better word in this context rather than “temptations.” Temptations are an enticement to sin, while trials are a means of testing us to see what we are made of! In verse 13, James does use the concept of temptation as an enticement to sin. What are some things that could be considered “trials” or that James mentions:

- 1) Heb. 10:32ff
- 2) Gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions.
- 3) Spoiling of your goods—bonds (put in prison).
- 4) Adversities of life—unexpected disappointments and sorrows.
- 5) Oppositions of enemies of truth.
- 6) Rom. 5:3—tribulations.
- 7) Rom. 8:18ff—sufferings of this present time—groaning and travailing in pain of the whole creation.
- 8) 1 Thess. 2:14ff
- 9) Oppression of rich (James 2:6)
- 10) Being dragged to court and having one’s religion blasphemed (2:6ff)
- 11) Keeping back of wages due one (5:1 ff).
- 12) Killing of the righteous (5:6).
- 13) Sickness (5:13ff).

It is important that one understands the value of such trials if we have the proper attitudes toward them. They are not only a means of testing our faith, but as well they are a means of perfecting our character—that is, to bring it to completeness or fullness. Perfect and entire does not mean moral perfection or sinlessness. It is to go on to a complete and balanced character that will fall short in nothing. Too many members go back into the world because of not having this understanding of trials. New members need to be involved in work, encouraged through fellowship, helped and comforted in adversity, shielded and strengthened in temptation, restored from sins and mistakes, made to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. With the proper attitudes toward trials, we can become steadfast Christians.

B. Count it all joy. Count, reckon, consider, realize that trials need to be handled with a joyful attitude. It is not stated that trials are pleasant in and of themselves; but since they are beneficial to the individual, they are to be received gladly rather than with sorrow and despair. We cannot be prepared for all that may come our way, but we can be prepared in attitude for whatever form trials may happen to come to us. It should be obvious that we do not court such trials, but as well neither do we dwell on the unpleasantness of the experience. We should be glad that we can suffer as a Christian. We need to know that trials are a proving of our faith in God—it is showing the genuineness of our faith! Instead of being sad, have a defeatist attitude, or become angry—we should be joyful and rejoice. It is certainly easy to become bitter when we see so much injustice, pain, and suffering all around us—and especially if we receive the blunt of it. This is one of those paradoxes—joy in the midst of trials! It is the same as: “strength out of weakness” or “life out of death.” The Christian is to look on the bright side of all things because God is able to turn all things to our good (Romans 8:28). James makes it clear that there are good benefits that can come from trials.

C. Let them develop Patience and Steadfastness. If our faith is true and genuine in the Lord, trials will only produce a sterling quality of endurance or patience. The reward of not yielding or giving in to trials is to receive a crown of life. But patience or steadfastness is the immediate reward from holding fast or being unmoved from trust in God. This is not just a passive endurance, but the courage with which we contend against the various hindrances, persecutions, trials or temptations. We not only do not seek vengeance, but we do not succumb easily under trials. ***“In your patience possess your souls”*** (Luke 21:19). It is to trust and wait on the Lord to see how His way will work out for our good.

HOW TO DEAL WITH MISTREATMENT (5:1-12)

A. Be Patient and look for the Lord’s Coming. It is important to see why they were called upon to be patient. They were being terribly mistreated by the rich:

- 1) The rich were selfish and covetous and had gotten rich off of the poor man’s labors.
- 2) On top of that, they were withholding their pay. It is hard to understand why they did not pay what they owed. They had plenty of money.
- 3) The rich were living and feasting in luxury, while they were going hungry.
- 4) The rich had also condemned and killed just persons because they did not resist them.

The Lord is saying to the poor... ***“Be patient—the Lord is coming in judgment!”*** The rich will not escape their just punishment. So, don’t render evil for evil, but rather good for evil. Don’t avenge yourselves, for vengeance is God’s business. ***“Behold, the judge stands before the door!”*** The rich will be punished!

B. Don’t grumble against one another. Don’t grumble, murmur, or complain. ***“Do all things without complaining and disputing.”*** (Phil. 2:14). Realize that God’s promises can be relied upon. The Gospel levels all: (1) The rich will be made poor, and (2) The poor will be made rich. Both should rejoice in such! However, the unrighteous rich will have a time when they will weep and howl and there will be no comfort for them (Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16). His time of miseries will come like a flood. The rich are being prepared for their slaughter like the fatted ox. Those who are unconcerned for God, righteousness, or compassion will suffer the consequences of their ungodly ways.

C. Look and imitate godly examples of those in the past who have held steadfast. The Old Testament has many examples, especially of the prophets who suffered unjustly, but endured faithfully to the end. James especially mentions the great patience and endurance of Job and how God rewarded him for such—being merciful and compassionate towards him.

D. Don't lose your "cool!" Lightly swearing in the face of what a person is undergoing may be the intent of verse 12. James, possibly, is not condemning solemn oaths in courts of justice, etc., but is warning against the Christian losing his composure, patience, or endurance and swearing lightly without thinking. Be calm, trust in God, endure wrongs patiently, and look to God for justice!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. The trying of one's faith has a great value.
- ___ 2. Trials are to be courted because they are enjoyable.
- ___ 3. Wisdom is needed to accept James' concept of how to accept suffering and trials.
- ___ 4. The sufferer is to be glad that he can suffer rather than dwell on the experience.
- ___ 5. The word "temptations" is a more appropriate word than "trials."
- ___ 6. Faith is only proven to be genuine when it is tried.
- ___ 7. Perfection in these verses does not mean "without sin."
- ___ 8. I must be joyful about facing many trials.
- ___ 9. Patience and endurance are the same.
- ___ 10. James condemns all rich men.
- ___ 11. Riches can never give permanent security.
- ___ 12. The rich are condemned because of their defrauding of the poor.
- ___ 13. Ill-gotten gain will be a witness against the rich in judgment.
- ___ 14. James stressed the need for the poor to be patient.
- ___ 15. James says that the end of the world was drawing nigh.
- ___ 16. James condemns holding grudges.
- ___ 17. Job becomes an example of a poor man enduring patiently.
- ___ 18. James forbids swearing.
- ___ 19. James is concerned about how Christians look upon their suffering.
- ___ 20. The coming of the Lord has reference to the Lord's presence.

Lesson Three

“Perfecting Faith”

(James 1:5-8; 2:14-26)

The Emphasis upon faith is found in both Testaments! The Israelites that came out of Egypt were not allowed to go into the promise land because of their unbelief (Hebrews 3:18-19). We today are warned not to get caught up in **“an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”** (Hebrews 3:12). The necessity of faith is clearly stated in Hebrews 11:6: **“without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”** During Jesus’ public ministry He, time and again, rebuked His disciples with the expression: **“O you of little faith!”** (Matthew 14:31). And in other instances marveled at some of the people who had a great faith in Him (Matthew 8:10). Jesus was not only constantly rebuking the unbelief of the people (**“O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?”—Matthew 17:17**), but at the same time challenging people to greater faith (**“If you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done.”—Matthew 21:21**). Possibly the greatest emphasis upon faith in any one place in the New Testament is Hebrews chapter eleven! In the verses for this lesson, James deals with the issue between doubt and faith, as well as, a dead faith versus an active faith.

DEALING WITH DOUBT (1:5-8)

The statement: **“Count it all joy when you fall into various trials”** (verse 2) is what is called a paradox. It doesn’t seem to make sense on the surface. It needs further clarification. The usual human experience when trials come is to question, doubt, or to be uncertain about why such has to happen to us. God knows this and immediately tries to help us to see the need to deal with our doubt and then ask for wisdom to be able to understand such an expression. Man’s need is to learn to trust in God even though we do not fully understand something at the time. The doubting person has not given or committed himself fully to trust in God. He is like the surging of the sea—back and forth! He never seems to make up his mind about God—whether to fully trust in His word. In the words of one person: **“He has just enough religion to make himself miserable.”** A double-minded man is one that is hesitate, indecisive, doubts, or is uncertain about God. Such a person is unstable, unsettled, fickle, or unreliable in all his ways. This type of person does not and should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. His prayer is worthless before the throne of God.

One of the remedies for doubting is to seek for wisdom to be able to understand how God’s way is the right way. If you want to fully understand, you must go to the divine source for such wisdom—ask God! Mere knowledge alone may not be sufficient. A person can be a walking Bible and not be wise. It is the person with a head full of knowledge of the Word of God that needs to seek for the wisdom to, not only practice the principles and instructions given to us by God; but, as well, to fully understand the reasons behind what God has given us. Both James and Job give emphasis to the need for wisdom to understand and have the right attitude towards suffering. Christians will face many circumstances in trials and will need to be **“wise as serpents**

and harmless as doves.” We need to also have the wisdom to know how to answer those who want to know why we believe as we do (1 Peter 3:15).

PERFECTED FAITH (2:14-26)

Upon one occasion, the disciples of Jesus were seemingly, finally, getting the message about the need for a greater faith when they ask Jesus to: **“Lord, increase our faith!”** (Luke 17:5). Upon another occasion, a certain man who had a son that had a “mute spirit” asked Jesus to heal his son. Jesus told him: **“If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”** (Mark 9:23). The father cried out with tears (in reality, speaking for all mankind): **“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”** Faith is basically defined as: ***the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*** (Hebrews 11:1). But when you read the rest of Hebrews chapter eleven, you find that faith is more than mere intellectual belief, but a trust in God that leads one to commit his life fully to God. James deals with this concept in these verses (2:14-26).

James begins his thoughts on faith by asking two questions: (1) What value is faith that does not have works; and (2) Can that kind of faith save him? He illustrates his point by using a very practical situation. Your brother or sister is naked and in desperate need of food. If you do not give them what they need, of what value is your faith. So, it should be easily seen that faith without works is dead. “Faith alone” or “faith without works” is useless, valueless. James then challenges his readers to demonstrate or show that they have faith (without works being involved), and he would show or demonstrate his faith by his works. Obviously, they could not do so! A workless faith is a mockery to the needy!

The writer, by inspiration, now makes a very obvious deduction: You claim to believe in one God....that is fine! But do you not also realize that the Demons also have that kind of faith and they tremble! There is no evidence that they are willing to repent or be obedient to God. Does this not clearly show that your faith must be coupled or demonstrated by your works (actions) for it to be a valid faith? For one to claim to believe in God is obviously not enough. This faith has to be the kind of faith that demonstrates itself by being obedient to the will of God! It should be obvious that a dead faith is worthless!

Abraham, the father of the Jewish Nation, is now used to clearly demonstrate what true or perfected faith is—one that is couple by action! Abraham demonstrated his faith in God when he was ready to offer his son as an offering to God (by God’s command)! If God had not stopped him, he would have carried out what God commanded. Thus, his works justified him before God because they were proof of his faith in God. Without his obedience to the command of God, his faith would have been dead—unperfected or incomplete! So, when the Scriptures say that Abraham was justified by faith, it was speaking about an obedient faith, not a dead one.

James now draws his conclusion again....**“you see then that a man is justified by works (working faith understood) and not by faith only.”** (v. 24). And, as if the above was not enough proof, he adds two more thoughts to illustrate:

- 1) Rahab the harlot was justified by works and not by mere faith alone. She was not a Jew; yet, she could be saved by a faith in God that was obedient. She is listed

among the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter eleven (11:31) and is also in the lineage of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

- 2) Faith without works is like the body without the spirit—it is dead just like the body alone where the spirit has departed from the body.

Faith that is not active in obedience to the will of God is unworthy of the term and of no value.

CLARIFICATION

Many in the Protestant world have advocated that justification is by “faith alone” without any works. This comes from a misunderstanding of Paul’s teachings on Justification, as well as a rejection of what James is teaching by inspiration of God!

Many of the passages on justification in Paul’s writings draw a sharp contrast between the two concepts of justification: (1) Justification by works of merit (Law keeping), or (2) Justification by “grace through faith.” The first concept advocates that a person must keep the Law of God perfectly (without sin) in order to be justified. This only Jesus could do and did! The second concept advocates that man cannot do the first and must therefore turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. This is provided by the Grace of God through faith in Christ. But this is not by “faith alone” but by a working, obedient faith as James describes so clearly. This harmonizes both Paul and James’ writings, as well as the rest of the Bible! Faith is not a saving faith until it does whatever God commands in order for His grace to save us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- 1. Failure to receive wisdom from God shows a lack of faith.
- 2. A man pulled in two directions at the same time is undependable.
- 3. Wisdom is not mere knowledge.
- 4. Wisdom from God can be obtained only by prayer.
- 5. It is necessary for us to know how God gives wisdom before we pray for it.
- 6. The doubting person shows he has not committed himself fully to trust in God.
- 7. The sin of double-mindedness is a way that leads to death.
- 8. One who cannot trust God cannot be trusted by others.
- 9. James says that a man is saved by faith.
- 10. James advocates the need for showing faith to others.
- 11. Faith alone is spoken of as saving a man.
- 12. It is possible to have faith without works.
- 13. James commends those who believe in one God.
- 14. James inters that demons will be saved someday because they also believe in God.
- 15. Faith alone is a perfected faith.
- 16. Man has a choice of two ways to be justified before God.
- 17. James advocated that Abraham was justified by faith only.

Lesson Four

“The Sin of Showing Preference”

(James 1:9-11; 2:1-13)

We have suggested that the first chapter of James gives a brief pointed overview of what is discussed more in detail in the remainder of the book. James seems to quickly be passing from one thing to another throughout this first chapter. He is basically dealing with man's inconsistencies. To claim to have faith, but to doubt God's promises is inconsistent. To claim to be religious, but not controlling one's tongue or helping those in need or not being concerned about living a pure life is inconsistent. Much of what James deals with is not only in showing these inconsistencies, but what to do about them.

One of the problems that would come up in the church is the differences in economic standing of the members and how well each would get along with the other. The tendency in society is for the rich to look down on the poor and even take advantage of them. This brought a reaction from the poor which led to their despising the rich. James briefly deals with this potential problem in chapter one (vs. 9-11), but comes back in chapter two (2:1-13) and deals more in detail with the issue.

ATTITUDES OF THE RICH AND THE POOR (1:9-11)

The church is made up of both the poor as well as the rich. There are probably far more poor than there are rich people in the church. Quite a few reasons could be given as to why this is true, but this is not the primary purpose of this study at this time. But of this fact there is no doubt. The poor are generally more receptive than the rich. And in James 2:5, it is clearly shown that this is true. The real issues that must be dealt with is what is the proper attitude that each should have about themselves as Christians, as well as the proper attitudes toward each other. James seems to be dealing with the first issue in chapter 1:9-11.

Let the poor in the church glory in his exaltation! We have been saved—we are children of the Most High God (1 John 3:1). We have been made a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God (1 Peter 2:5). We are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation unto God (1 Peter 2:9). We have the promise of God's loving concern here in this life (Matthew 6:33; Romans 8:28) and the promise of eternal life to the faithful (Revelation 2:10). What a blessing and what an exaltation that we have received.

But let the rich glory in his humiliation—being humbled! No one enters the kingdom of God without humbling themselves like a little child (Matthew 18:3). For the poor, this can be easy; but not necessarily for the rich. Jesus made the observation: **“It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”** (Matthew 19:23). The rich have to make a choice between God and Mammon—which will be his god? (Matthew 6:24). He has to realize that riches can stand in his way of having eternal life like the “rich young ruler” (Luke 18:18-24). He must become rich towards God as Jesus pointed out in Luke 12:21. If he loves his riches, he will greatly endanger his soul (1 Timothy 6:10). Thus, the humbling of the rich is a necessity for his soul to be saved.

Both the attitude of the poor and the rich about themselves need to be changed—which will help them have the proper attitude towards one another.

THE SIN OF BEING A RESPECTER OF PERSONS (2:1-13)

The problem that James now deals with is clearly stated: ***“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.”*** Do not show favoritism, or be a respecter of persons. Leviticus 19:15 clearly indicates what James is pointing out: ***“You shall do no unrighteousness in Judgment; you shall not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”*** It is to judge people by something external and not by their real character (John 7:24). James is clearly saying for them to stop showing respect of persons if you want to be right with God.

James uses an example to illustrate his point. Two men come into your assembly—one that is rich, the other that is poor. You say to the rich, come sit in the best place; but you say to the poor, stand over there out of the way or sit on the floor at my feet. When you do this, you sin! You become judges with evil thoughts—corrupt judges or unjust judges! You judge by the standard of the world, not by God’s standard. You refuse the common courtesy that should be shown to all who visit in our homes or in our assemblies.

James gives five reasons why such judgment as described above is wrong and should not be found among God’s people:

1. God’s offer of salvation primarily appeals to the poor (2:5). The Apostle Paul stated that: ***“Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:26). It is poor in this world that can see their need of the mercy of God and humble come for cleansings—not the rich, or mighty, or noble! To show favoritism to the rich over the poor goes against God, Himself!

2. Because it is usually the rich that oppress the poor and even blaspheme the name of Christ (2:6-7). This seems to have been especially true among the Jewish people. When Saul (later called Paul in Scripture) persecuted the church, he dragged Christians from their homes and tried to get them to blaspheme the name of Christ. It was the rich that were the more bitter and cruel enemies of Christians. To show respect for the rich is to show such to the very persons who were their worst enemies at that time.

3. Because the Law taught that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves (2:8). We are to love all men, not just those who love us (Matthew 5:43-48). Whether rich or poor or whether oppressor or friend, we are to love and honor all men (1 Peter 2:17).

4. Because it is a sin to be partial in judgment (2:9-11). God’s Law condemns it. We have no right to pick and choose which commands we will obey and which we will ignore. We become a transgressor of God’s Law when we break any one of His Laws—and thus, need the mercy and forgiveness of God as well as the need for repentance for our disobedience.

5. Because un-repentant sinners will be brought into judgment (2:12-13). If we want mercy in that last great Day, then, we need to be merciful ourselves (Matthew 5:7; 7:1-2). We know that God's new Law of Liberty can make us free from the penalty of sin. But that freedom comes with a price to be paid—turning from sin and turning to obey God. If we want mercy, we must be willing to be merciful.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We cannot love God and hate our fellow man (1 John 4:20). We cannot hold Jesus in proper respect when we openly ignore and reject His commands, for He said: ***“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*** (John 14:15). To show respect for a person who is rich and not to show the same respect for the poor is hypocritical. We need to be sincere and show respect for both the rich and the poor because they are both made in the image of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- 1. The material prosperity of the rich will perish or fade away as the grass and flower.
- 2. No rich person can remain rich and be a Christian.
- 3. The gulf between the rich and poor in James' time was possibly greater than in the present time.
- 4. Showing respect of persons is a sin.
- 5. To be partial is to judge with evil thoughts.
- 6. James uses wealth as an example for showing partiality.
- 7. It is possible to have a proper attitude towards Jesus and not towards our fellowman.
- 8. God showed partiality by choosing the poor to be in the kingdom.
- 9. The name of God's children is taken from Christ.
- 10. Showing partiality makes us a transgressor.
- 11. God's people will be judged at the last Day.
- 12. The “royal law” is strictly a New Testament doctrine.
- 13. It is not wrong to be partial in our judgment of the poor if they do not try to help themselves.
- 14. A person can be justified if he keeps the Law of God.
- 15. Merciful judgment will only be given to those who have extended merciful judgment.

Lesson Five

“The Pathway of Sin”

(James 1:12-16)

Sin is the breaking of God’s Law or Lawlessness—not respecting Law (1 John 3:4). If there is no Law, there is no sin (Romans 5:13). The Bible says that **“all have sinned”** (Romans 3:23); therefore, we can logically conclude that all men are under God’s Law and are held accountable to it. James is pointing out different ways that men can sin and the things that lead to sin—doubt, impatience, not controlling one’s tongue, not showing love to those in need, being a respecter of persons, etc. But in the verses for this lesson (1:12-16), James is describing the pathway or the reasons why men sin.

TEMPTATION

In the first place, it is important to realize that “temptation” in and of itself is not sin! It is also important to realize that “temptations” and “trials” are not the same. James makes it very clear that God does not tempt us to sin, but He does allow us to be put to the test by Satan’s wiles. Satan wants us to yield to the temptation and sin. God wants us to deal with the temptation in such a way that we do not yield and are made stronger as a result. We must realize that Satan is bound as far as we are concerned (Matthew 12:29; Hebrews 2:14). He has no power over us that we do not give him (1 Corinthians 10:13). His enticements have no power unless something within us is appealed to by his temptation. For an example—there is no temptation to gluttony or fornication if there is no appetites for food or sex. All of us have varying conditions within us that can lead to sin. Certain desires are stronger in some than in others and they will have a harder time dealing with the temptation in those areas. To one person, the temptation to become drunk does not even affect him at all; but, to another, it may be a real battle to overcome the temptation. James says that we are drawn away of our own lust! The battleground is usually over those areas where our desires or passions are the strongest (2 Timothy 4:3; 2 Peter 3:3; Jude 18ff).

The universality of temptation is obvious. Men sin, not because of Adam’s sin, but because of their decision to give in to the temptation—just as Adam and Eve did in the garden. We don’t inherit the sin of Adam! We have enough sin of our own. The evil impulse does not constitute guilt or sin unless we give in to it. We can’t put the blame for man’s sin on Adam, nor on our circumstances, or on natural forces. The guilt of sin comes from our own decision to obey sin. When Cain did not offer the kind of sacrifice that God commanded (Hebrews 11:4; 1 John 3:12), he was disobedient to God and was in grave danger of something. God warned him that sin crouches at the door and wants to come in and rule his life. He also admonished him.... **“but you must master it.”** (Genesis 4:5-7). We all have to deal with sin in our lives. The Apostle Paul expressed it so well when he said: **“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”** (1 Corinthians 9:27). Dealing with the temptation to sin is a constant battle that we all face until we die. And we need to realize that our own conscience bears testimony to our responsibility for sin (Psalm 51:3).

THE OUTCOME OF SIN

If we do not deal with the temptations that come our way properly, and give in to them—this is called “SIN!” If we repent and confess that we have done wrong, we can avoid the spiritual consequences of such. Sin does not result in death immediately because we can be forgiven (1 John 1:7-9; Acts 8:22). But if sin is allowed to grow unchecked (becomes full grown), it will result not only in spiritual death here, but eternal death after this life is over—for the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). It is important that we do not let sin become a fixed habit, for it is this that shows the character of a person. This should be the distinction between a “sinner” and a “saint.” The “sinner” continues in the way of sin, while the “saint” deals properly with sin in his life so that it is not a way of life. The “sinner” walks in the way of disobedience to God, while the “saint” walks in the way of righteousness (1 John 1:5-7; 3:7-10; Romans 6:17-18).

If we do deal properly with sin in our lives—“*endure temptation*”—we will be approved by God! We were tried and successfully dealt with the temptation and have become stronger as a result. When we endure trials which come and do not grow weary and quit or give in to the temptation, we can be perfected and strengthened by successive triumphs. If we can continue faithfully dealing with sin all of our lives until death, we have a promise of a “crown of life” or “eternal life.” (John 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68, 1 John 3:15; 5:11, 20). How do we have the strength to endure temptation? It comes out of our love for God—“*this is the love of God that we keep His commandments!*”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. The Lord promised a crown to those who love Him.
- ___ 2. God does not tempt man.
- ___ 3. Control of man’s lusts determines the extent of his yielding to temptation.
- ___ 4. Temptation is defined as “enticement to sin.”
- ___ 5. The Christian is highly exalted by God.
- ___ 6. The Greek word translated “approved” means something tried and proved genuine.
- ___ 7. The crown of life refers to the new life in Christ.
- ___ 8. God created the evil in man.
- ___ 9. God does not allow man to be tempted above what he is able to bear or overcome.
- ___ 10. The Devil has no power over us, except what we give to him.
- ___ 11. The philosophical theories of Determinism states that man’s sins are fully caused by his surroundings and an inheritance factor.
- ___ 12. Sin, unrepented of, will bring death.
- ___ 13. Physical death is what James has in mind as the full grown results of sin.
- ___ 14. It is important that man realizes that he is responsible for his sin.
- ___ 15. If we had no desires or passions, we would not sin.

Lesson Six

“Gifts from God” (James 1:17; 4:13-17; 5:13-20)

As a follow-up from Lesson five, James tells us not to mistake God’s place in man’s pathway to sin. Nothing but good comes from God—He is the author of good and not evil. God did not and does not plot man’s fall. He doesn’t want man to fall, nor to be lost eternally. Ezekiel said of God: **“I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies, therefore, repent and live.”** (18:32). But He has created man as a creature of choice, so that man determines his destiny by his choices—whether to obey God or disobey God. If he chooses the way of sin, he will die. But God will take no pleasure in his death. God wants man to live with Him eternally, but man also must want that as well—strong enough to deal with sin in his life.

GOD IS THE GIVER OF ALL THAT IS GOOD (1:17)

The very nature of God is to be a giver! He is also a generous giver. He is not a stingy giver, but a lavish giver. All that is good and perfect comes from the Father of lights. He is not the Father of darkness, but of light. He walks in light and challenges His children to also walk in the same light (1 John 1:7). He is not an off and on giver, but a constant giver—He is not fickle. The Sun and the rain are constantly coming down upon mankind to bless us (Matthew 5:45). All that we need in order to survive upon this earth has been richly provided for us. He especially is a giver to His children—**“all spiritual blessings”** that we would need to survive as a Christian (Ephesians 1:3). An interesting thought that someone has suggested: *“We can’t out give God, for He has a bigger shovel!”* All that is good, useful, or beneficial comes from the hand of God to all mankind. However, some things may not seem to be good in “human estimation,” but good in God’s estimation. We do not pretend to know, nor would I try to list all the good gifts of God in this lesson. However, James does deal with two gifts that we can profit from a study of: (1) The gift of time; and (2) The gift of Forgiveness.

THE GIFT OF TIME (4:13-17)

All who live have time—for we live in a world of time: past, present, and future. The past is gone forever and the future has not arrived yet; so, the only time that we have is the present. The Apostle Paul encourages us to **“redeem the time”**—make good use of the time that we have in the present—don’t waste it on things that are not lasting. James is dealing with the presumptions of men who leave God out of their plans for the future. There is nothing wrong with planning for God is the greatest of all planners. He planned this universe. He planned our place of existence. He planned for our redemption before He ever created us (Ephesians 1:4). May we never accuse God of wrong-doing in planning His actions. But with man, planning becomes a matter of recognizing if it is God’s will, we will do something tomorrow, or the next day, or some time in the future. It becomes vain boasting on man’s part because he doesn’t have the power to say with certainty what will be on the morrow. It is good of us to plan to make the best use of the time that God has given to us—but do so recognizing our dependence upon God.

James reminds us that our life is very short upon this earth. It is like a mist or fog in the early morning and by mid-morning, it is gone! So, the evil is not in the planning, but the boasting of what we will do tomorrow or some time in the future presumptuously thinking that we have control of how long we will live. Thus, it is the attitude with which we plan, not the planning itself. We should never leave God out of our plans—today, tomorrow, or anytime in the future. James wants us to realize that sin can be committed in more ways than outright disobedience. It is also committed when we know to do good and do not do it. Let's boasts in our dependence upon God—not in ourselves!

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS (5:13-20)

God's beautiful gift of forgiveness did not come to man without great planning and a still greater cost on God's part. God could not be "God" and arbitrarily forgive sinful man—for in so doing He would go against and invalidate His Own Law! God cannot be unjust or unrighteous in His acts; therefore, he had to plan out a way that was righteous in forgiving sinful man. The plan involved the sending of His Son to earth as a human being, to live and to die as a "sin substitute" for sinful man. In so doing, He could uphold His Law and be able to justly forgive sinful man (Romans 3:23-26). But there is a catch to receiving this gift from God. It is not like the gift of the sunshine or the rain that falls upon both the good and the bad. This gift is offered to all (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20), but it must be received by man based upon conditions he must meet. These conditions differ with whether we are a "sinner" or a "saint."

For the "sinner," God requires that he be willing to hear the message of the Gospel and upon coming to a belief in the truthfulness of that message to obey it. The first Gospel sermon preached told people what God expected of them: ***"Repent....and be baptized....for the forgiveness of sins...."*** (Acts 2:38). The people were not only expected to believe the message, but upon an acknowledgement of Jesus being the Christ, they were to repent (change their mind about serving sin and turn to serve God) and be baptized (immersed, buried with Christ) so that God could give them the beautiful and desirable gift of the forgiveness of their sins.

For the "saint," God requires that he be willing to repent and confess any sin in his life. (James 5:16). This is what James is discussing—forgiveness for the "saint." It is in our prayer to God as our Father that we can confess our sins and ask Him for forgiveness. It is a great gift and not something that we earn! But it is not an unconditional gift...we must deal with our sin or else it can become a means of our eternal loss. The passage in 1 John 1:7 shows clearly that we must be willing to walk in the light if we want the cleansing of our sins. He also adds that if we will confess these sins, that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness is a continuous gift from God if we will continue (be faithful) to walk in the light. James also points out that if a "saint" wanders from the truth and someone encourages him to turn back to God's way of living, that that person can be saved from death and his sins be forgiven (5:19-20).

While there is a strong emphasis upon prayer for the child of God in these verses, it also shows clearly what the "saint" must do to have continued forgiveness of sins. He encourages us to copy after those righteous people before us who show the great effectiveness of prayer in the life of the "saint" of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

1. God is not fickle.
2. Sin is also defined as a failure to do what is good.
3. James compares the human life to a mist that is quickly gone.
4. It is a sin to plan for the future.
5. Boasting is okay if we include God in our plans.
6. We must always preface our statements about the future with “If the Lord wills.”
7. Sufferers can find help in prayer.
8. It is wrong to call for a preacher when one is sick.
9. Sins of sick people can be forgiven.
10. Confession of sin is a necessity in order to be forgiven.
11. God used Elijah as an example of praying for something miraculous to happen.
12. Even brethren at times need to be converted.
13. It is necessary for a person to be anointed with oil before praying that he get well.
14. Physical sickness is sometimes the results of sin in a person’s life.
15. We should be willing to confess our sins one to another in order to be forgiven.

Lesson Seven

“Wisdom and God’s Word”**(James 1:5; 1:18; 3:13-18)**

Another gift that God promises to give to the seeker is “wisdom!” But it is obvious that God’s wisdom has been revealed to us through His word. The Gospel (as well as Christ) is not only said to be the “power of God,” but they are also called the “wisdom of God!” (Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30; 2:1-8). **“Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom come from the mouth of the Lord.”** (Proverbs 2:6). The man who finds this wisdom and gains understanding from it will be blessed.... **“For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her....”** (Proverbs 3:13-14). God’s admonition to all men is to **“keep his commands and live. Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget nor turn away from the words of my mouth.”**(Proverbs 4:4-5).

THE DESIRE FOR WISDOM (1:5)

If a person desires wisdom, then he is to turn to the One who is the giver of wisdom—God! The key here is the little word “if.” God’s wisdom is always available, but does man always desire or seek after it? It is obvious that all of us lack wisdom, but not all of us recognize such as we should, nor seek to receive the wisdom of God. The desire must be there. We must recognize the great value of wisdom and what it can do for our lives. A list of benefits are given in Proverbs 4:6-9—**Preserve us, Keep us, Promote us, Bring us honor, Place on our head an ornament of grace, and give us a crown of glory.** These things are just the beginning of the listing of things that God’s wisdom can do for those who love and greatly desire His wisdom.

THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD (1:18)

The Apostle Paul stated that the Gospel (God’s Word, His Wisdom) can save those who will believe it (Romans 1:16). James states that this powerful Word is able to begat us unto God as His beloved children (1:18). John records Jesus as having the power or authority to let those who receive Him and believe in His name to choose to become children of God (John 1:12). Our becoming children of God grew out of God’s desire, His good pleasure, or His counsel alone—it did not originate with us! God’s love brought us this great gift—which was revealed to us by the preaching of His Word of Truth to a lost and dying world. Those who first heard and responded to receive God’s gift of salvation were the first of many that would thereafter be gathered into the new kingdom of God.

DESCRIPTION OF HEAVENLY WISDOM (3:13-18)

James discusses two kinds of wisdom: (1) The wisdom from above; and (2) The wisdom that is from the earth. It becomes an easy matter to determine which is which. James points out that you can tell by the conduct and results of a person’s life and teaching. He suggests that where one has bitter envy and self-seeking in his heart that this reveals that his wisdom is from the earth—that it is sensual and demonic. He also points out that when envy and self-seeking are

found, you will also find confusion and every evil thing present. In other words, there is an absence of meekness or humility that shows that the teacher is following human wisdom, not that which comes from above. Meekness would involve a gentleness, humility, courtesy and consideration toward others. Teachers in the church who are vying for positions and seeking for honors and the praise of their hearers will promote confusion and all kinds of evils among the church members. Earthly wisdom originates with man who is being influenced by evil spirits in the service of Satan. Confusion and vileness is the natural fruits of the evil world and the underworld.

The wisdom that comes from God is quite different! It is described in the following ways that shows how much more desirable that it is to possess:

- 1. It is pure.** Both God and His Word are pure (1 John 3:3; Psalm 12:6). God is holy, pure, or without defilement. True wisdom produces only that which is holy and pure—not evil.
- 2. It is peaceable.** It brings orderliness as opposed to confusion and strife. That which is harmonious and unifying.
- 3. It is gentle.** It shows kindness, graciousness, and forbearance (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 2:18;). It is the absence of bad manners and quick temper.
- 4. It is willing to yield.** It is characterized by sweet reasonableness and a yielding to one another. (Philippians 4:5). It is easy to be entreated, compliant, open-minded, yielding to entreaty. It is the opposite of dogmatic and unyielding. The teacher himself must be ready to be taught and guided where needed. It is a poor teacher who does not learn, even from students.
- 5. Full of mercy and good fruits.** It is the opposite of vile deeds. It shows mercy, compassion, pity towards the poor and the sick in particular. Their deeds of kindness will bring about good things.
- 6. Without partiality.** The person does not show a respect of persons, but treats all the same.
- 7. Without hypocrisy.** The sincerity of the person will be obvious. It will not be a fain love, but a sincere love for others.
- 8. Righteousness is a fruit or outcome of heavenly wisdom.** Peace is the atmosphere necessary to help produce righteousness in a congregation of people. And peace is only produced by those who are peaceable.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

1. The expression “first-fruits” indicates that more is to come.
2. Man’s salvation is attributed originally to God’s own will.
3. The Holy Spirit begets us unto God.
4. A man can show himself to be wise by his life and actions.
5. Christians can have bitter envy and strife in their hearts.
6. Man can show by his good behavior that he is being guided by heavenly wisdom.
7. Earthly wisdom is not totally devoid of good.
8. Earthly wisdom is said to come from demons.
9. The person that is guided by heavenly wisdom will not be a hypocrite.
10. A person must desire and seek after wisdom in order to possess it.

Lesson Eight

“The Swiftiness to Hear”**(James 1:19-21)**

James deals with some very practical factors in human relationships. One of the greatest evils in such relations can be the improper use of the tongue. (We will spend more time on the tongue in Lesson Eleven.) James gives a very simple, but outstanding, answer to this proper in these three verses. But the problem with mankind in dealing with this problem is—we won't do the very thing that helps us learn how to solve the problem—we won't listen! Have you ever noticed how that many people had rather talk than listen? Have you noticed how easy it is for a person to fall asleep on a speaker, but they can be wide awake when they are talking? Also, have noticed that some people talk incessantly, and do very little listening—if any? It would seem that some people's ego is so big that they think that everyone should listen to them. Do you think that people like the above will listen and do what James says will solve a lot of our people problems? Are we willing to listen to what James is saying to us?

BE SWIFT TO HEAR!

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Revelations 2:7). This is what God says to each of the seven churches! It is interesting to notice that God gave each of us two ears with which to hear, but one mouth (tongue) with which to speak! That should tell us something! Will we listen and profit by the following admonitions:

- a) Prov. 1:5—***“A wise man will hear and increase learning....”***
- b) Prov. 1:8—***“My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother.”***
- c) Prov. 8:33—***“Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it.”***
- d) Prov. 8:34-35—***“Blessed is the man who listens to me....whoever finds me, finds life.”***

There needs to be in the life of every man an openness and readiness to hear God's message. The Bereans are held up as an outstanding example of this—calling them more noble than those Jews at Thessalonica who would not listen (Acts 17:11--KJV). I have been greatly impressed with the attitude expressed by Cornelius when the Apostle Peter came to his house to speak with them. He said to Peter: ***“we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”*** (Acts 10:33). He and all his house showed an eagerness to hear God's Message. Jesus accuses the Jewish people of being dull and hard of hearing because they had closed their eyes, ears, and hearts to the message of God that Jesus was trying to teach them (Matthew 13:9-17).

Our openness to hear needs to be, not only with God, but with our fellow-man as well. If we will listen, we may learn some things. In fact, we may be able to get all the facts about a situation before we shoot off our mouth about what we don't really know. Listening quietly and attentively to another person is a way of showing respect to them and to what they have to say. It can also show that we are willing to know all the facts about a situation that is important. Our

unwillingness to listen can reveal some things about ourselves that is not very commendable. To be willing and eager to listen to others is a compliment to ourselves!

BE SLOW TO SPEAK

A man that delights in hearing himself talk will find it hard to listen to another! He can't wait to speak. He will rudely interrupt others. When he starts, it seems that he will never stop! James is trying to tell such a person, you need to learn how to listen more and speak less. But possibly the primary thing that James is trying to communicate is that the person who will be more concerned about hearing than speaking will probably cause less problem for himself, as well as others. If we are too quick to speak before we have thought through our words, we usually say things that we wish that we had not spoken. Paul, in writing to Timothy, encouraged him to warn young widows about being idle, sticking their nose in other people's business, and being gossipers and busybodies, saying things which they ought not (1 Timothy 5:13). We need to have our brain in gear before we speak. We need to be reluctant to speak—to weigh well our words before we speak. James warns us: ***“So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.”*** (2:12). Jesus also warns us: ***‘But I say unto you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.’*** (Matthew 12:36-37).

BE SLOW TO WRATH (ANGER)

One of the most likely time that we need to be slow to speak is when we have become angry and speak out before we think. James warns us not to speak evil of one another (4:11). The admonition of Paul to the Ephesians covers the whole territory: ***“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”*** (4:31). Paul also says that such speaking should be laid aside and our lives filled with kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness (4:32). Our speak should be that which builds people up, not tear them down. Paul told the Colossians: ***“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt...”*** (4:6) He also told Titus that God's people should have sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8). Unless we put away bitterness, wrath, and anger...there is little reason to believe that our speech will be pure, clean, and uplifting.

God's people need to be of calm temper, eager to listen to that which is good, and be very thoughtful about what we say. If we will listen more than we speak, hopefully we can avoid becoming angry with people. We are reminded that God's righteousness cannot be done in anger or wrath. We should work hard at not getting angry with others and most of all angry with God. Only those who are humble of heart can enter heaven someday (Matthew 18:3; 2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 5:9; Matthew 6:1; 2 Peter 2:21; 1 Jn. 2:29). One of the reasons for anger is that there is sin in my life that I am unwilling to give up! If you will recall that much of the anger on the part of the religious people during Jesus' public ministry was over Jesus' teachings that showed up their sins—and they could not deal with it! (John 8:40-47).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORD OF GOD

Of all the words that we should be swift to hear they are the word of God! These are the words that can give us enlightenment and understanding that leads to the salvation of our soul (Romans 1:16; Psalm 119:104). These words should be sweet to our taste and desired above all other words (Psalm 119:103). Such words should be better than great sums of money (Psalm 119:72). These are the words that we should love and meditate upon all the time (Psalm 119:97). To those who love God's words, he is promised great peace (Psalm 119:165). We need to trust in his words and let Him direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

1. Man can and must control his anger or wrath.
2. To be swift to hear is necessary in being a dedicated child of God.
3. One King became so angry at the reading of God's word that he cut it up and burned what was being read.
4. Man who becomes wrathful at the word of God indicates a very good possibility of sin in his life that he is reluctant to give up.
5. A Christian's sins should be those of honest mistake and weakness of the flesh.
6. Man cannot be saved without a reception of God's word.
7. The person who is swift to speak usually has something very good to say.
8. Slow to hear indicates that people are dull of hearing.
9. Part of our judgment in that Day will be based on the swiftness or slowness of our speaking.
10. How we hear the word of God indicates the value we place upon it.

Lesson Nine

“Laying Aside Evil”

(James 1:21; 4:1-10)

Reception of the Word of God depends upon the kind of heart that we have. In the parable of the sower (Matthew 13), Jesus pointed out four kinds of soils that evidently represented the kinds of hearts of mankind. Three out of the four soils (hearts) received the word of God, but only one out of the three was called a good and honest heart that was productive of fruit. The lack of receptivity or productivity is because there is evil still in the heart that is not being dealt with. The stony soil (heart) would not allow the word of God to put down roots deep in their heart; so, they soon fall away because of the temptations or problems they don't want to face. The thorny soil (heart) allowed too many things in their lives to crowd out the word of God so they were not productive. If we are to be faithful to God, we must grow in the word of God; but at the same time we must lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness for that to be possible. As the Apostle Paul stated to the Ephesians: ***put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*** (4:22-24). Can a person put on the new man if he doesn't put off the old man? The answer seems to be an obvious one!

THAT WHICH MUST BE LAID ASIDE (1:21)

The old man with his former conduct that is corrupt must be put off! All filthiness, moral uncleanness, vulgarity, avarice or greediness or wickedness must be put off. We need to make a resolution to commit to complete resignation to the will of God. It is God's purpose that His children erase sin from their lives as rapidly as possible. We must not make provision to fulfill the lust of the flesh (Romans 13:14). Our sins should only be those of honest mistakes or weakness of the flesh. Sincere repentance envisions the putting away of all that is evil, wicked, or wrong. If we receive God's word in the right spirit (meekness or with humility), it will deepen its roots in our soul and help us to cleanse ourselves of all ungodliness and unrighteousness. There are several listings of sins that help to give insight to the more easily recognized sins, such as Romans 1:18-32; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, etc. The lingering of these sins in our lives will make it impossible to grow and mature in the faith as God has designed.

THINGS THAT INDICATE LINGERING EVILNESS (4:1-12)

1. Fulfilling desires for Pleasure. Fighting, wars, lust, murder, coveting probably should be taken in a figurative sense—not literal! Giving in to these strong desires for gratification will not satisfy the spiritual needs that we have. It is also possible that what James intended to communicate is that internal bickering and strife are indications of carnality—satisfying the desires of the flesh, not the spirit. (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). A person who lives for pleasure in the bad sense cannot be pleasing to God. To give in to selfish, wanton, lascivious ways will bring about strife and conflicts in your midst. To be envious, jealous, or bitter toward others show that you are following the flesh, not the Spirit of God (Romans 8:5-6).

2. Friendship with the world. To prefer the fellowship of the world, rather than the fellowship of God's people is a sure indicator of lingering evilness. James calls them adulterers and adulteresses because of this friendship lingering with the world—an unwillingness to break the ties, cut the connections, and completely turn to righteousness. This friendship with the world effects their prayer life—they either do not pray to God realizing it would be a mockery; or, if they do pray, it is to pray for the things that are wrong. Those who prefer the friendship of the world cannot be a friend of God, but actually becomes an enemy of God. An adulterer is one who is unfaithful to his mate. Those who want to continue in pleasure are unfaithful to God. A pleasure-loving, covetous, worldly Christian is a contradiction. He chooses hatred or enmity towards God rather than to love God and keep His commandments (John 14:15).

3. A lack of humility. God does not bless the proud who resist Him and His way. His grace is designed for those who humbly submit to the will of God in all things. If you want the fellowship of God, then be submissive to His teachings and take a stand against the devil and his seductive ways. Make a sincere, humble, effort to draw near to God and His fellowship will be granted to you. Put away your sinful, lingering evils out of your lives, clean up your divided and polluted heart, lament and mourn and weep because of your past sinful ways—in other words humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will forgive you and raise you up to serve Him.

4. Speaking evil of one another. This is the way that the world recognizes that we are children of God by our love for one another—not our hatred! (John 13:34). We need to realize that when we speak evil of a brother and judge him that we are in reality speaking evil of God's Law and we become a judge of the Law, not a doer. We put the Law down as though it is something to be ignored or discarded as unfit or undesirable. Let's remember that only God is the true Judge of all things and all people. He alone can save or destroy. We have no right to speak evil of our brother. Let's respect God, His Law, His ways, and surrender to Him so we can be blessed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- 1. The word of God can be implanted before being received.
- 2. The doctrine of total depravity invalidates the Word of God in bringing about man's salvation.
- 3. Christians do not have problems with lust and desires.
- 4. God's Spirit dwells in all Christians.
- 5. A Christian can be a friend to the world.
- 6. We should take such words as "wars," "fightings," "adulteresses," literally.
- 7. A Christian can kill someone in his heart.
- 8. Some prayers can be looked upon as evil.
- 9. The Devil only flees when he is resisted by the person.
- 10. Christians are called upon to have clear hands and hearts.

Lesson Ten

“Doers of the Word”

(James 1:22-25)

The first emphasis of this lesson needs to be about the real dangers of not only being deceived, but being self-deceived! The dangers of deception are all about us! God tells us that there are many deceivers (2 John 7; Titus 1:10) who have gone out into the world. Their purpose is to turn us from God’s way to their way that leads to eternal ruin (Colossians 2:8; 2 Peter 2:1-4). But there is another deception that may be a greater danger to the child of God—self-deception! John speaks of the possibilities of such (1 John 1:8); so does Paul (Galatians 6:3); and so does James as well (1:22). The early church faced both deceivers and self-deception (Ephesians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 11:14).

How is it possible for a person to be deceived when they have the Word of God at their finger-tips? Probably just like mother Eve—she had heard the Word of God, understood what it said, and yet was deceived by Satan’s lie that contradicted God’s Word (1 Timothy 2:14; 2 Corinthians 11:3). We can be deceived by **“empty words”** (Ephesians 5:6) or even by **“smooth words and flattering speech”** (Romans 16:18). It can be done by handling the Word of God deceitfully (2 Corinthians 4:2). Sin and its allurements can deceive us as well when it makes its appeal to the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (Romans 7:11; 1 John 2:15-17). Riches have their deceptive appeal (1 Tim. 6:9-10, 17). Unrighteousness (Sin) has its deceptive appeal as well (2 Thessalonians 2:10; Hebrews 11:25). We need to pray to God that He will deliver us from deceptive men (Psalm 43:1); but even more that He will deliver us from the deceptiveness of our own hearts (James 1:22)! We deceive ourselves when we make a false estimate of our standing before God.

HEARERS ONLY

James calls the “hearers only” people self-deceived! We cannot over-emphasize the need of hearing the Word of God (See Lesson 8). The necessity of hearing the Word of God is quite obvious—faith can only come by hearing (listening or reading) the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Unless we hear the Gospel Message, there is no way for us to know the Will of God for our lives (Romans 10:14-15). Or, we can close our ears to the Truth and fail to be converted to the Lord (Matthew 13:14-15). Truly blessed are those who have the privilege to hear the good news of Salvation through Christ (Matthew 13:16; Revelation 1:3), but John adds **“and keep those things which are written in it.”** To “hear only” takes away the blessing of hearing the Gospel Message!

An illustration is used by James to help drive home his point of self-deception. This person looks into a mirror and sees himself, but with no intent to do anything about it. He goes away and forgets what kind of person he saw in the mirror. The Word of God is like a mirror that can reveal the true person (Hebrews 4:12). It shows us how far short we can fall from being like Jesus and from doing the Will of God. But it can only do this if we diligently look, earnestly look into it for the right purpose! It must not be just a fleeting glance, but a looking into, dwelling upon its message. And it must be with the intent of putting it into practice in our lives! The

person who goes away from the Word of God and says to himself: “*Look what a good person I am,*” goes away deceived and loses the blessing that God wants to give.

THE DOER OF THE WORD

Jesus warns of the hypocrisy of those who say and do not do (Matthew 23:3; 7:21-27; Like 6:46, etc.). There is a great deal of emphasis in Scripture upon putting the Word of God into practice (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 5:8-9, etc.). But it is not just doing something, but doing what is contained in the “**Perfect Law of Liberty!**” James calls the Word of God: (1) The word of truth—1:18; (2) the implanted word—1:21; (3) the word—1:22; the faith—2:1; and (4) the perfect law of liberty—1:25. It is called a Law because it is a body of truth that constitute the foundation of the religion of Jesus Christ. It is “perfect” or “complete” because it is the final revelation of God to accomplish God’s purposes—the redemption of mankind. The Gospel achieves what the Law of Moses could not—deliver us, redeem us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-13). It is a Law of liberty because it sets us free from the hold and bondage of sin (Romans 8:1-4). We are not under a “Law System” but a “Grace System” for justification. Yet, the New Testament is called a Law because of its demands upon man. It demands faith rather than perfect law-keeping for justification. It demands that we follow the teachings of Christ and the Spirit of God to receive and maintain our relationship with the Father and the Son (2 John 9; Romans 8:5-6). A Law of Liberty is a Paradox! Law is a restraint, while liberty is freedom. But it is obvious that to have freedom we must respect Law—this is the only true liberty or freedom we can have. Our obedience to the Law of Christ is the “obedience of faith” that is given out of gratitude and love for what God has done for us.

THE REWARD OF THE DOER

James does not exactly say what the blessing or reward that is given to the doer of the Word, but some things are obvious. Jesus, during the night of His betrayal, told His Apostles: “***If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.***” What are some obvious blessings that come from being doers of the Word and not hearers only?

1. It is the doer that can enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:21).
 2. It is the doer that has and maintains his relationship with the Father and the Son (2 John 9).
 3. He will not be hurt of the second death (Revelations 2:11).
 4. He will have access to eat of the tree of life in the Paradise of God. (Revelations 2:7).
 5. His name will remain in the “book of life” (Revelation 2:5).
 6. He will be permitted to sit with Christ on His throne (Revelations 3:21).
 7. He will receive glory, honor, and peace (Romans 2:10)
 8. He will abide forever (1 John 2:17).
- Etc.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- 1. Both the hearer and doer can be blessed of God.**
- 2. A person can deceive themselves into thinking that their life is alright before God when it is not.**
- 3. The image we see in the mirror of God's Word is our spiritual image before God.**
- 4. To be under the "Law of Liberty" means that one is free from the regulation of Law.**
- 5. To forget is in reality to do nothing about our condition.**
- 6. To be under Law for justification means that we must keep the Law perfectly.**
- 7. Freedom in Christ does not mean that we can ignore the teachings of Christ.**
- 8. Self-deception is something that the person sets out to do.**
- 9. There are many ways that we can be deceived that will leads us from God.**
- 10. It is wrong to make a list of all the does and don'ts of the New Testament.**

Lesson Eleven

“The Need to Bridle our Tongue”

(James 1:26; 3:1-12)

James briefly, but pointedly, shows the need for man to bridle his tongue. Then, in chapter three he comes back to the subject with strong warnings and dangers of the tongue. He is dealing with a very practical problem among humans—the lack of control of one’s tongue! James has a very forceful way of illustrating his subjects under consideration and his conclusions are very pointed, logical, and inescapable. It is as though he is saying that the way to evaluate a person’s religion is by his use of his tongue.

THE SINS OF THE UNBRIDLED TONGUE

1) “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity.” An uncontrolled tongue leads to and embraces all kinds of wickedness. It has within its power the elements of all kinds of mischief. It is like a fire that has the power to consume and destroy. The tongue can voice every evil feeling and every kind of sinful thought. It sets in motion or gives concreteness to every kind of sinful act. Nothing evil is beyond its power of accomplishment. It is like a raging fire—uncontrollable and destructive. There seems to be no end to the great damage it can do, nor where it will stop. The source of such wickedness can only be attributed to the devil, from below, in Gehenna or Hell.

2) “It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” It is restless, unstable, and inconsistent. It is like a caged beast that is never still, but walks back and forth striking out to all about it. It is like the wagging tongue of gossip, profanity, the mouthing of a conceited hobbyist, spectators, or false teachers. It is never seemingly satisfied or content with the evil it does. It is compared to a poison that brings on swift death (2 Peter 2:14; Romans 1:29; Psalms 140:3). No man can fully bring it under control.

3. The sin of blasphemy against God. It is to speak injuriously against God—to curse Him (Revelation 16:21). It is to state an oath using God’s name lightly (Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37). Men often bless God, but curse his fellow-man who is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). We cannot curse man who is made in God’s image without reflecting upon the God who made man. It is to speak of things that are divine and holy in a light and vain way.

4. The sins against our fellow-man. There is the sin of lying that is a shame to the human race. Lying was treated severely by God upon two who lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). Satan is said to be the originator of lying (John 8:44). Lying is a sin that serves as a shield for every other sin. There are various forms of lying: Deceit, Half-truths, misleading statements, and not telling all to deceive.

There is the sin of slander—the desire to do harm or hurt to another—to speak evil of others (James 4:11-12). Instead of speaking evil of a brother, we need to guard jealously each other’s reputations. It is to willfully accuse someone falsely or exaggerate faults that are real to do harm. It is the publishing of the failings of some erring Christian with the intent to do harm, not to help

the person be reclaimed. We can intentionally hurt others by misrepresenting the language, motive, or circumstances of others.

There is also the sin of cursing others—to invoke evil on another. The most ennobling exercise of human speech is to praise the Divine and acknowledge Him as Lord and Christ. But when we curse man that is made in God’s image, we show our true colors.

4. There is the sin of mis-teaching or mis-leading others. James started this section of his letters about the gravity of teachings (3:1-2). It is almost as if he were saying: *“Don’t become teachers unless you can control your tongue and that your teaching will yield peaceable results and unless you are willing to shoulder responsibility.”* James is emphasizing that a teacher is in a unique situation that requires heavier, greater judgment or condemnation if he misuses this privilege. Teachers must proclaim God’s will and as God’s desires (1 Peter 4:11; Galatians 1:6-9). The damage brought about by wrong teaching in the world is colossal. Lack of restraint in teaching heresies and hobbies continually divides and keeps the church in turmoil. Paul stated that such mouths should be stopped (Titus 1:11). James puts the blame where it belongs—on the teacher who will not bring his tongue, teaching, into subjection to the proper understanding of the Word of God.

THE NECESSITY OF BRIDLING ONE’S TONGUE

“I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.” (Psalm 39:1). James makes his case for bridling the tongue very clear by the description of the terrible evil it can do otherwise. But, he also added another thought—a lack of bridling of our tongue makes our religion vain! An unruly, envious, and lying tongue indicates something is bad wrong in the heart of a man’s religious system. Until a bridle is put on our tongue and brought into subjection to the Law of Christ, there is no hope that our religious activity will be approved of God. When we fail to bridle our tongue we are not deceiving God, but our own selves about the validity of our religion.

James reminds us that we put bits in horses’ mouths to help control them and rudders on ships to guide them. Without such they both would be useless to man. So it is with our tongue, unless it is bridled (controlled), it is useless to accomplish good. Just as a spark can become a great forest fire and bring great destruction, so our “little” tongue can boast great things and cause unending harm to mankind. Yet, at the same time, a bridled tongue can accomplish great good (Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:29).

The bridling of one’s tongue is a sign of moral and spiritual maturity (James 3:2). He has learned to avoid falling into areas of stumbling with his tongue. And to do so, he is able to bridle his whole body. But an unbridled tongue can defile us completely. Man has learned to tame the animal world—it is high time he learned to tame his tongue. He needs God’s help! And victory over the tongue can save us from unending tribulations here and our soul for all eternity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- 1. A man can be religious and not be right before God.**
- 2. One may be a worshipper of God in vain.**
- 3. To bridle one's tongue is to restrain, control or guide the tongue or speech properly.**
- 4. It is useless to worship God and leave off controlling our tongue.**
- 5. "Vain" means "useless, empty, or fruitless."**
- 6. To set up our own worship is called "will-worship."**
- 7. James says that we should not become teachers.**
- 8. Teachers are threatened with great condemnation.**
- 9. The tongue is said to be like a fire in a forest.**
- 10. The tongue can be tamed as all other things can.**
- 11. James' used the word "Gehenna" (or Hell) as the only time of its use outside of the Gospels.**
- 12. It is wrong to be called a teacher.**
- 13. It is said that if a man can control his tongue he can control his whole body.**
- 14. Horses and ships are invalid illustrations on how to control the tongue.**
- 15. The tongue, even though unbridled, can still accomplish much good.**

Lesson Twelve

“Pure and undefiled Religion” (James 1:27)

The terms “pure” and “undefiled” are efforts to say that just being religious is not enough. Our religion must be characterized by these two terms or else it is invalid. Man needs to fully realize that he is estranged from God by his sinful rebellious spirit and needs to be reconciled to God. This is the true meaning of religion—to bind back again! If man wants to be reconciled to God, it must be done God’s way not man’s! We need to recognize that we need direction from God (Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 3:5) or else we will continue to make a mess of our religiousness. It is significant to realize that there was no need for religion in the Garden of Eden until man was separated from God’s fellowship by his disobedience. His sin made religion a necessity in order to become right with God and continue right with Him.

The two-fold aspect of true religion should be obvious to mankind. The Lord brought this out during his publicly ministry when asked what was the greatest commandment. His answer was to Love God with all our being is first, but the second is similar—to love our neighbor as ourselves. A one-sided religion is worthless to accomplish its mission of binding us back to God. The statement by James makes this crystal clear—there are two things that help to identify one’s religion as being “pure” and “undefiled.” Without such, our religion is vain and empty. And we must not forget that God will be the judge at the last great Day, not man! We will be judged according to His standard according to our deeds done in the body (John 12:28; 2 Cor. 5:10). To set up our own religious requirements is “will worship” and also worthless. If we want to have pure and undefiled religion, we must turn to God’s Word to learn what is required.

WHAT MAKES RELIGION PURE AND UNDEFILED?

That which is pure is free from stain or sin. It indicates purity of heart (Matthew 5:8) and a clean conscience (1 Timothy 3:9). To defile something is to make it impure. To place poison in a glass of milk would make it impure for drinking purposes—it would be defiled! To be acceptable to God, James spells out two things in particular that are necessary—as follows!

1. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction. It is to look in on—go to see—help to provide for their emergency needs (Jeremiah 23:2; Zechariah 11:16; Matthew 25:36, 43, etc.). Be concerned for those who have been deprived of parents or a mate (Acts 6; 1 Timothy 5:3; Deuteronomy 26:19; Exodus 22:22; Job 31:16ff, etc.). The how in either case is not spelled out—it is a matter of expediency as long as it does not violate New Testament teaching elsewhere. It is an individual responsibility, but can be discharged collectively through the church as in Acts 2 and 6. Individuals gave, but the church was involved as well.

2. To keep one’s self unspotted from the world. God’s people are called upon to come out of the world (things and people contrary to the will of God) and be a separate people unto God to do His bidding (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). James rebukes those to whom he is writing because they preferred friendship with the world over friendship with God (4:4). He strongly urged them to resist the devil and draw near to God again if they want the fellowship of God (4:8). He also

reminds them of the need to clean up their hearts and their lives, to show true repentance, and be willing to be humbled before their God (4:7-10). They had been unfaithful to God—as a wife to her husband (adultery in a figurative sense). The world and God are desiring our hearts and lives—to be a friend of one makes us an enemy of the other. We have been espoused to one husband and we need to be faithful to Him.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

James points out many things that undermine pure and undefiled religion. The following can help us see what he has dealt with in this short book:

1. Not dealing with our doubt correctly.
2. Blaming God for their temptations and not shouldering their own responsibilities.
3. Being too slow to hear and to quick to speak out and do great harm with our tongue.
4. The need to bridle our tongue.
5. The need to be doers of the Word of God and not hearers only.
6. The need to practice pure and undefiled religion.
7. The need to stop showing partiality among yourselves.
8. The need for an obedient faith.
9. The need to realize the gravity of the position of a teacher.
10. The great evils of the tongue.
11. The contrast between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom in our midst.
12. The problem of friendship with the world.
13. The problem of misjudging our brother.
14. The sin of not including God in our plans.
15. The sins of the rich that will condemn them in judgment.
16. The need for patience to endure the things in this life.
17. The great privilege of prayer.

We need to ask ourselves:

1. Are we practicing pure and undefiled religion?
2. Have we and are we experiencing true repentance?
3. Have we truly turned our backs on the world and tried to be faithful to God?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

1. The word “visit” must mean more than making a call on the person.
2. The Ancient Pagan world never abandoned their children to exposure.
3. The caring for the needy can only be done individually and not collectively.
4. To be pure and undefiled are two separate concepts.
5. The word “religion” means “to hold one back.”
6. God calls upon those who believe in Him to separate themselves from the world.
7. Friendship with the world automatically breaks our friendship with God.
8. To defile something is to taint it.
9. The person who is not practicing pure and undefiled religion is deceiving themselves that their religious activities make them acceptable to God.
10. We will be judged on the basis of our deeds done in the body.

