

Lesson 1

James and His Readers

James 1:1

An Epistle On Christian Living

The book of James has most often been placed in a group with 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John and Jude. The seven books, as a group, are often called the general epistles. This title comes from the fact that they all are written to the church in general or a wide section of the church, instead of to a church in a specific city.

In many ways, this epistle could be called a commentary on the sermon on the mount. James reveals the very heart of the gospel. He tells Christians how to live daily for the Master. Coffman says, "There is no similar portion of the sacred scriptures so surcharged with the mind of Christ as is the Epistle of James." Shelly titles his book on James *What Christian Living Is All About* and suggests James 1:27 sounds the theme of the book, which is pure and undefiled religion.

James, The Lord's Brother

The author identifies himself as James (James 1:1). Four men in the New Testament are called James. One was the father of Judas, not Iscariot (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). It seems unlikely that this is our author since we know so little of him. The author of this book was so well known to the early church that he only signed his name.

James, the son of Alphaeus, was one of the Lord's apostles (Acts 1:13; Luke 6:15; Mark 3:18; Matthew 10:32). His mother was one of the women at the cross and his father seems to have also been called Clopas (Matthew 27:56; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 19:25). He was known as James, the less, which may have been because of his height. Matthew was also known as the son of Alphaeus and may have been his brother along with Joses (Mark 2:14). Other than details about his family, this James is also obscure and an unlikely candidate for authorship.

The third James we would consider is James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (Matthew 4:21; 10:2; Mark 1:19; 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13). He was among the three Jesus often took with him apart (Matthew 17:1; 26:36-37; Mark 5:37). This James was put to death by Herod Agrippa I, as is recorded in Acts 12:1-2. Since Herod died in A.D. 44, James would have had to die before that time. Such an early date would seem to eliminate him as a choice.

Thus, we conclude that James, the brother of our Lord is this book's author (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Christ's brethren did not believe on him during his early ministry (John 7:1-5; Mark 3:31-35). However, after the resurrection, Jesus' brethren were in the upper room praying with the disciples (Acts 1:12-14). The resurrection must have convinced them Jesus was God's Son (1 Corinthians 15:7).

James' Role In the Early Church

Having been converted, James became a leader in the early church. After his release from prison, Peter told those assembled at Mary's house what had happened. Then, he instructed them to tell James and the brethren (Acts 12:17). It is James who made the suggestion at the Jerusalem counsel which was finally agreed to as the wisest course (Acts 15:13-22). At the end of the third missionary journey, Paul went in with his companions and delivered a report to James, with all the elders present (Acts 21:18-25). Paul also referred to James as one who seemed to be a pillar in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9).

Does Galatians 1:18-19 teach James was an apostle? It should be noted that the word apostle means "one sent" and is applied to others besides the twelve plus Paul (Acts 14:14; Romans 16:7). The Hebrew writer even calls Jesus an apostle (3:1), presumably because he was sent by God to die for our sins (John 3:16). The American Standard Version, in the margin, suggests the verse could be translated "But other of the apostles saw I none, but only James the Lord's brother." So, it is our opinion that James was the Lord's brother, but was not an apostle in the sense we generally mean.

About the Author and His Readers

Rather than relying upon his physical kinship with our Lord to get himself a hearing, James calls himself "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word "doulos", which is translated servant, suggests the idea of one born into slavery. We are born into Christ by baptism (Romans 6:3-4), and should be his slave since he gave his blood to buy us (Acts 20:28; Titus 2:14). Woods says the word means, "one 'who gives oneself up wholly to another's will,' serving to the complete disregard of one's own selfish interests." Paul would certainly describe himself as such an one (Philippians 1:21; Galatians 2:20), and would plead with others to join him (Romans 12:1-2).

The twelve tribes which were scattered abroad must be Christians, since James uses the word brethren nineteen times. They could be Jewish converts who were scattered throughout the world after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1-4). However, it seems more likely James was addressing all of spiritual Israel. The kingdom was taken away from fleshly Israel (Matthew 21:43). The children of flesh were no longer recognized as the children of God (Romans 9:8). So, we conclude James must be speaking to Christians who were Gentiles as well as Jews (Galatians 6:15-16). God now looks on the inward circumcision of the heart instead of the outward circumcision of the flesh (Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3). The children of promise are now Abraham's seed in Christ (Galatians 3:7, 16, 26-27, 28-29). Christians are a holy nation, the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Discussion Questions

1. Briefly describe the four men called James in the New Testament. Which of these do you think is the likely author of this book?

2. Do you think James was an apostle in the same sense as Peter was? Why?

3. What word did James use to describe himself in reference to the Lord? Why would the same word be applicable to any Christian?

4. Who are Jews under Christ's authority? What is the true circumcision today?

5. Who are now children of the promise?

Lesson 2

Christians Should Be Joyous

James 1:2-12

Reasons For Having Joy In Trials

James uses the word for "greetings" which means "joy to you." He then goes on to tell his readers they ought to be happy even in the presence of many and various kinds of outward hardships and trials (James 1:2). This is not a faked happiness, but a sincere joy because the results of overcoming trials are known. Overcoming trials will result in receiving the promise (Hebrews 10:32-39). Jesus said, "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11-12).

Robertson emphasizes the fact that one falls unwittingly into these trials. He is unexpectedly, and through no fault of his own, surrounded, much like the man who fell among thieves (Luke 10:30). Notice, James assumes trials will come. Becoming a Christian does not make one immune from life's troubles. Jesus told his disciples, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). At the close of his first missionary journey, Paul went back to the churches and worked to strengthen the faith of the brethren. He said, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Peter also told the brethren not to be surprised when they experienced fiery trials. In fact, he urged them to rejoice because they had proven worthy to suffer for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 4:12-14).

The reason for joy in trials is that they produce patience (James 1:3). The word "testing" here suggests raw ore going through a furnace to remove the dross (1 Peter 1:6-7). So, this is like a trial to prove the purity of one's faith (Compare Genesis 22:1-14). Such trials produce a quality of lasting endurance, like a long distance runner must have. Furthermore, if patience is allowed to progress to its absolute end, the man of God will be full grown and whole, or possess all his parts (James 1:4). Woods says of the words "lacking nothing", "Basically, the word is a racing term, and points to the fact that those who develop into mature Christians are not out-distanced by any."

Ask God For Wisdom

Having said that patient endurance of trials will lead to spiritual maturity, James seems to anticipate his readers' thoughts. Some would probably wonder how they could approach their trials with joy. They would feel that a greater wisdom than they possessed was required to have that joy. James says they should ask God for such wisdom, because he is a generous provider who will not reproach us for asking (James 1:5). Jesus told the listeners assembled on the mount, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-11). The "wisdom" for which we should ask is the ability to rightly practice God's word in the opportunities life presents (3:13-18).

The request of verse 5 must be made with full expectation of receiving (Hebrews 11:6). The one who doubts would be inwardly torn between believing God would provide and believing he would not. Such doubt would cause his whole life to be unstable like a wave driven in different directions by the wind (Compare Ephesians 4:14; Mark 11:24). That kind of man has no reason to expect God to answer his prayers. James calls this man doubleminded. This appears to be the first use of these words in combination and serves as a good description of one with divided thinking (James 1:6-8).

Lessons From the Rich and Poor Brother

In demonstrating the maturity brought by patient endurance of trials, James uses the example of the poor and the rich brothers. The Christian who is poor can rejoice in his poverty because he is rich in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The rich man in Christ should be humbled by the knowledge that all he has cannot buy an entrance to heaven. Instead of being independently wealthy, he is really dependent upon God for his wealth. This passage has much the same purpose as Paul's message to the slave and the free man in 1 Corinthians 7:22.

All of us need to realize this life is as temporary as the grass and flowers of the field (James 1:9-11). Peter quoted from Isaiah 40:6-8, when he wrote, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever" (1 Peter 1:24-25). Knowing wealth did not stop one from needing God and remembering the brevity of life, Paul directed Timothy to, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

The wise place to lay up treasures is in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). When one has laid his treasures in heaven, he will be "blessed." Christians experience an inner peace, which is their joy or blessedness. It is not merely happiness which is brought on by good events around us, but an inner calm unaffected by outward events. Those who successfully overcome those trials which fall in upon them (verse 2) will receive the crown of life (James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:6-8). In this case, life is our victory wreath. Those who continue to endure prove by their lives that they love God (1 John 5:3).

Discussion Questions

1. Name some events in life which might be considered trials. How can we count it all joy when we experience such?

2. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge? What is the origin of wisdom?

3. Why might our prayers go unanswered? How can we avoid those things that will prevent us from receiving an answer?

4. Give reasons a poor brother can rejoice in his poverty. What facts should humble the rich brother?

5. What man does James say will have inner peace? What gives a man inner peace?

Lesson 3

God Is the Source of Good

James 1:13-18

Put The Blame On Self

In the first part of James 1, trials, or external hardships are considered. Then, as Woods notes, James changes from the noun form to a verb in his consideration of temptation. Woods tells us the verb form means "solicit to do evil" and gives the example of Satan tempting our Lord (Matthew 4:1-11). God will test men, as we have already seen and the case of Abraham shows, but he will not tempt men to sin (James 1:13). Adam, like some today, tried to blame God for his temptation and sin (Genesis 3:12). James clearly answers the challenge of Adam.

Notice the external trial becomes an internal problem when we are drawn away of our own lust. Adam tried to put the blame for his sin on Eve and Eve tried to blame the devil (Genesis 3:13-16). James does not put the blame upon Satan because ultimately it rests with us (James 1:14). The devil will receive his punishment, but so will we because we are responsible for our actions. Ezekiel recorded the Lord's words when he said, "The soul who sins shall die" (18:4). Similarly, Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10; Galatians 6:7-8).

Sin, An Unwanted Offspring of Uncontrolled Lust

Lust is natural desire out of control. It is not wrong to be hungry and want to eat, but it is wrong to steal food to satisfy one's hunger. "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). Similarly, sexual desire is not wrong unless it is satisfied outside of marriage. For, "marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19).

"Drawn away" and "enticed" come from fishing and hunting experiences. They picture one who is lured by the bait and hooked when he bites. God warned Cain, "And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). Wiersbe reminds us that it is the bait which keeps the animal from seeing the trap or the fish the hook. The attractive nature of sin also keeps us from seeing its consequences (Genesis 13:10-13; 2 Samuel 11:2-12:14). We must learn to resist its enticement. The wise man wrote, "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10).

Lust and uncontrolled desire join and conceive an unwanted child called sin. Sin, like an unwanted child, is a direct result of our allowing our passions to run out of control. When sin grows up, it gives birth to death (James 1:15; Romans 6:23). Thus, we have sin's lineage.

God Is The Source Of Good

Do not make the mistake of believing that God tempts us to do evil. He would not give man two such unwanted offspring. Instead, God is the source of everything that is good (James 1:16-17). "So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is God'" (Mark 10:19). He is also the source of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). God is light (1 John 1:5) and is the source of every light (Genesis 1:1-5, 14-18). Unlike the lights which he created, which vary in intensity of brightness and cast varying lights and shadows due to the earth's turning, God is unchanging. "For I am the Lord, I do not change" (Malachi 3:6).

Our own lust yields temptation which gives birth to sin and death. God causes men to be born of the truth (James 1:18). Rather than being the source of temptation, God is the one who has begotten us unto a living hope (1 Peter 1:3). The new birth is spoken of repeatedly in the New Testament (John 1:12-13; 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 4:14; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7-8; 5:1, 4). It does not come about because of good works we do to merit an entrance into heaven. Instead, it is produced by the washing of the new birth, as Paul told Titus.

James describes Christians as being brought forth, like a baby being born, by the word of truth, or the gospel. "In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13; Colossians 1:5-6). The very fact that these first century brethren were born to be "firstfruits" indicates that God expected many more to follow (Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 26:2). The sacrifice of the firstfruits was made in expectation of a good harvest to follow. It was a means of consecrating all of the harvest (Romans 11:16).

Discussion Questions

"Doers of the Word"

James 1:19-27

Quick to Hear

Because we are born of God's word, we ought to be quick to hear it (Matthew 11:15; 13:9). The Bereans show us how to do this (Acts 17:11) and Cornelius, with his friends and family, waited to hear the word (Acts 10:24, 30-33). Our attitude toward God's word ought to be the same as three of David's men to the expressed desire of their king. They immediately carried out his expressed wishes, even to the point of jeopardizing their own lives (2 Samuel 23:14-17). We should be ready to carry out God's wishes, especially because God's word is truth and is able to set us free (John 17:17; 8:32). When it is heard, it produces the faith necessary to please God (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:7). To fail to hear it is to endanger the soul (Matthew 13:15; Proverbs 28:9; 3 John 9-12).

Further, we should be "slow to speak", which Roberts suggests is in response to God's word. Later, James is going to talk about wars among the brethren (4:1), which may have been caused by contentions over the truth. The Corinthians all wanted to speak at once and caused confusion that prohibited learning (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

Then, James says to be "slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Some hear the truth and become enraged by it. Those who heard Stephen ran and bit him and finally stoned him (Acts 7:54-60). When Jehoiakim heard the truth read, he began to cut out the pages and throw them in the fire (Jeremiah 36:20-23). Paul, through the power of the Holy Ghost, caused Elymus Bar-Jesus to be blind for a season for refuting God's word (Acts 13:4-13). He also directed that those who refused to follow his instructions, as given by inspiration, be withdrawn from (2 Thessalonians 3:12-14).

Men who are uncontrollably angry are not ready to receive God's truth and do that which is right (Micah 6:8). Notice that James is talking about the "wrath of man", which would be a personal anger. This does not condemn righteous indignation which is actually needed at times (Mark 3:5). We must learn to control our anger so that we do not sin (James 1:20; Ephesians 4:26-27).

Preparing Hearts To Receive God's Word

Instead of allowing anger to boil over uncontrolled from our hearts, we must prepare our hearts to receive God's word. We must put aside the clothing stained with the stinking dirt of sin, or filthiness. We also need to sweep clean the heart that has been bubbling over with evil, or the overflow of wickedness (James 1:21).

Having gotten rid of the bad, we need to fill up the heart with good (Compare Matthew 12:43-45). So, James says to receive the "implanted word." The idea here is of a seed that has taken root and begun to grow. Remember that the seed is God's word and grows best in the soil of

a receptive heart (Luke 8:11-15). For it to really take root, the word of God must be received in meekness, with none of the anger in 19-20 but with a submissive spirit ready to hear of needed changes and make them. We want to receive it because it is able to save our souls (Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:15).

Doing What We Hear

The word is only able to save if we hear and do what we hear (Matthew 7:21-27; Romans 2:13). Woods says the verb tense here in the word "doers" is such that it denotes a continuous action. The same is true when Paul says Christ is going to take vengeance on those who "obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). We are deceived when we think all that we have to do is hear the truth. That hearing must produce a faith that acts (James 1:22; Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6).

James then gives a parable to illustrate the point of verse 22. A person who looks in a mirror to check his appearance and then goes away without correcting the problems he sees is like one who only hears. Woods says the verb for "looks" in verse 25 means "to stoop and look, to gaze intently". So, in contrast to the one who glances in the mirror and does nothing about the things he sees which are amiss, we have one who carefully examines himself intending to correct every flaw.

The perfect law of liberty could not be Moses' law since it was unable to offer liberty or bring imperfect man to perfection (Galatians 5:1; Hebrews 8:8). In Christ, perfection is available to man (Hebrews 7:19; Colossians 1:28). Certainly, it is Christ's law that offers true freedom from condemnation (Romans 8:1-6). Christ's law is the perfect law of liberty (James 1:23-25).

Things True Hearers of the Word Will Do

James' first illustration of one who truly hears the word is in the area of the tongue. Some people outwardly practice religion by regular attendance, taking the Lord's Supper, singing, etc., yet are fooling themselves as is evidenced by their failure to control their tongue. His failure to be truly religious is clearly seen in his unbridled, or uncontrolled, tongue. His religion is empty, worthless (James 1:26).

The religion of a true hearer is displayed in one's active concern for the needy. To be godly (God-like) one must especially care for the needs of the fatherless and widows (Psalm 68:5). The word "visit" does not refer to a social call but attention to the needs of the one visited (Compare Colossians 3:12; Galatians 6:10; 1 John 3:17; and Matthew 25:31-46). Pure religion is also demonstrated by keeping ourselves separate from the world's vices (James 1:27).

Discussion Questions

1. Why should we be quick to hear? Describe an incident or two which show the wisdom of James 1:19-20.

2. How is a Christian born? What does one need to do to prepare his heart to receive the word?

3. Name some things you can do this week to show you have stooped and looked in the mirror.

4. How can an uncontrolled tongue ruin one's religion?

5. What does the word "visit" mean? When does one need such a visit? Who does James designate as needing a visit?

Lesson 5

Eliminating Prejudice

James 2:1-13

Christianity Eliminates Partiality

Roberts points out that the Greek word for "respect of persons" literally means "face receiving." In other words, judging what kind of man one is by how he looks. Their problem was rich versus poor. Others have had the same type of problem with race, color, nationality, social status, etc. To be a true follower of God, one must not be a respecter of persons (Leviticus 19:15). As Woods notes, Christ was lowly while on earth but is now the "glorious Lord" (James 2:1).

Remember that Jesus studied with a ruler of the Jews (John 3); a Samaritan adulteress (John 4); and taught both the despised tax collectors and sinners (Luke 15:1-2). He commanded his followers to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15-16). The true disciple of the Lord will be concerned about the souls of all. He will also make every effort to treat each in a loving manner. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

The gold-ringed man, as Woods says the Greek means, likely wore his rings in a way which would cause others to take notice. Likewise, his clothes were brightly colored so they would cause people to look. In contrast, the poor man wore cheap, perhaps dirty, clothes. The Christians James addressed had been directing the rich man to the place of honor. The poor man was told to stand or lay under the usher's footstool. In such a practice, they were actually being double-minded. They showed special favor to one over the other, which was against the Lord's teachings, yet claimed to follow the Lord. Thus, they were showing that they still judged men by the evil standard of the world (James 2:2-4).

The Poor Are Often Rich In Faith

The simple truth is that the poor in this world are much more likely to have that rich faith which moves them to obey the gospel call (James 2:5). They do not have so much to give up. The rich young ruler wanted to follow Christ and inherit eternal life. However, he went away sorrowful instead of selling all he had and giving the proceeds to the poor (Matthew 19:16-22; 1 Timothy 6:8-19; Luke 12:13-21). All people are called by the gospel (Matthew 11:28-30; Revelation 22:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14), but the rich seldom accept the call (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

Peter told Cornelius and those assembled in his house, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:34-35). Instead of being like God, the scattered Christians had honored the rich while treating the poor despitely. Yet, it was the rich who crushed Christians. It was the rich who dragged them into court against their will. It was the rich who spoke against the name of

Christ (James 2:6-7).

The Royal Law

James seemingly anticipated their response. Perhaps they would say they were only following the law, fit for kings, which said they should love their neighbor as themselves (Leviticus 19:18). James said it would be fine if they really practiced that law. He just did not want them to do so to the exclusion of one class of people. The law also forbade prejudice (Deuteronomy 16:19-20). Woods says "you commit sin" literally translated is you "work sin." They apparently did not just slip into sin but intentionally practiced it (James 2:8-9).

Since they might appeal to the law of Moses, James showed that one who breaks one part of the law is a law breaker. Thus, he would stand condemned by the law. The law is taken as a unit because it all comes from one source, God. To violate one part is to stand condemned by the whole law as a transgressor. Ultimately, we should speak and live as those who will be judged by the perfect law of liberty. In Christ, we are free from the condemnation of sin (Romans 8:1-2). Of course, being free should not make us want to abuse our freedom and return to bondage (James 2:10-12; Galatians 5:13-14).

Each person's judgment will be based upon how he has dealt with others. If he has failed to show pity on those in need, he can expect no pity. Jesus' parable of the judgment shows the importance of caring for the needs of others. Those who failed heard, "Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me" (Matthew 25:41-46; 18:23-35). Mercy will stand above judgment, so those who have been merciful have no need to fear (James 2:13; 1 John 4:16-18).

Discussion Questions

1. What is a "face receiver"? With what groups of people today might we find this practiced? What actions might be involved in such a practice?

2. Describe different types of people Jesus taught and tell what we can learn from his actions.

3. How do people, especially the rich, act so that man is sure to notice them?

4. What is the royal law? How can you and I apply it in our daily living?

5. Having studied the judgment, what actions should one avoid? What should one be sure to do?

Lesson 6

A Living Faith

James 2:14-26

A Faith That Does Not Work Is Useless

Those who claimed to have faith but failed to be fair in their treatment of the poor, as well as rich, had a faith that would not save them. James does not say they are faithless, just without a faith that saves. In a similar manner, it is clear the works he speaks of are not works of merit which will save. Instead, they are the fruits of a faith that does save (Compare Luke 3:7-14; Matthew 7:15-20; 2 Peter 1:1-10; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:9-11). We can recognize a true man of faith by the things he does (James 2:14).

To show how worthless faith without works is, James uses the illustration of a brother, or sister, without adequate food or clothes. What would come from telling them to be warmed and filled. Obviously, they would not have a full stomach just because someone told them to be filled. Neither would they be warm because someone told them to be. Instead, it would take food and clothes coupled with the words to achieve the desired end. Just so, faith without works is "dead in itself." It is without any power because it has no works (James 2:15-17).

An objector might answer by saying one has faith and another works. They might say it is just as well since they are both good and useful in the Lord's service. The only problem is that faith cannot be seen except through the works it causes one to do (compare Hebrews 11:4, 7, 8, 9, 21, 22, 23, 24-25, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31). To the one who said faith was a good thing, James would say to test it by thinking about belief in God. If they mentally acknowledged that there was one God, they did something which was good. In fact, it is absolutely necessary, but it is not enough. Even Satan's workers tremble at the thought of the God who will one day punish them (James 2:18-19).

Faith Without Works Is Dead

James wanted his objectors to acknowledge the obvious truth that faith without works is dead. Woods says "foolish man" literally means "an empty-headed fellow" (James 2:20). Those who really understood God's word should have known Abraham was not only the father of the Jewish nation. He was also the father of all the faithful (Romans 4:1-25; especially 16). James says Abraham was pronounced free from guilt by works. Abraham's works were those done to follow God's specific instruction, as Coffman notes (Hebrews 11:8-19). The Hebrew writer shows that it was because of his faith that Abraham took action. Words like "obeyed," "went out," "sojourned," "dwelling" and "offered up" show specific actions he took to please God. It is these works which demonstrate one's faith that James has in mind (James 2:21).

In contrast to James emphasis upon works of obedience which show we have faith, Paul is talking about works which earn an entrance into heaven in Romans 4. In verse 4., Paul says, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt." Would anyone accuse

James of saying our works make God owe us heaven as a reward? Certainly not. Instead, he is saying our salvation is contingent upon faith. The only way to have a living faith is to have a working, obedient faith like Abraham. Paul likewise teaches us that we must work God's will to be saved (Philippians 2:13-15; Galatians 5:1-6). To be baptized in accord with the Lord's will (Mark 16:16) is not to do a work thinking it will justify us. Instead, it is an act of obedience which shows our trust in Jesus' promise to save. Our works plainly show where our trust (faith) rests (Titus 1:16).

Abraham's faith was tested when God told him to take Isaac, the son of the promised blessing, and offer him up as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-19). When he obediently went forth to work God's bidding, Abraham showed his faith was real. Because he did God's will, the blessing promise was his (see verses 15-18.) In verse 16, the angel of the Lord says "because you have done this thing." God saw Abraham's faith in his works.

Abraham's Justification

Woods says the word translated "working together" comes "from sunergei, imperfect active of sunergeo, to cooperate with; hence, faith and works kept on cooperating with each other to produce the result - Abraham's justification". Abraham's faith was brought to its full maturity by works. Faith without works would then be imperfect (dead, verse 17) and unable to save (James 2:22).

The quote in James 2:23 comes from Genesis 16:6. Abraham was 75 years old when he first received the blessings promise (Genesis 12:1-4). He had no children, yet he had faith that God could work what he promised. God counted that faith for righteousness. It should be observed that Abraham's faith did not fully mature until he offered up Isaac, as noted above. His faithfulness caused God to call him his friend. We, thus, are brought by James to the inescapable conclusion that faith only will not save. Instead, it is a working faith which saves (James 2:24).

Rahab's Example

Likewise, Rahab the harlot showed her trust in God by receiving and hiding the spies (Joshua 2:1-24). Despite the fact that she had lived a wicked life, as her name indicates, she and her household were saved because of her working faith (James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31).

Our body is a temporary dwelling place which will one day be put off. (2 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Peter 1:13-14.) It was made from dust and will return to dust at death. (Genesis 2:7; 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7.) Roberts says the spirit is "the animating principle of life." So, a body apart from the spirit is dead and will only decay. James concludes faith apart from works is also dead and will rot (James 2:26).

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a sense in which faith and the royal law go together?
2. How can we show others that we truly have faith in God?
3. What does James say about faith without works? In your own words, describe how faith and works cooperate with one another?
4. Explain how Abraham showed he was a man of faith. What proves Rahab was a woman of faith?
5. Name some things we can do to develop our faith.

Lesson 7

That Slippery Tongue

James 3:1-12

"Let Not Many of You Become Teachers"

Apparently, there were those in James' day who rushed to teach (James 3:1). They longed for the prominent position in which it would put them. Certainly that had been a problem of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 23:1-12). For some, it was carried over into the church (Romans 2:17-25; 1 Timothy 1:3-7). The problem may have been encouraged by the somewhat informal organization of their worship services (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).

The desire to teach is a good desire that should not be discouraged (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:2). Instead, we should discourage a seeking after personal glory. We should also beware of failing to be adequately prepared to teach (Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Timothy 4:12-16). God has stricter standards for those who teach because their words can cause others to believe a false gospel (Galatians 1:6-9; Romans 16:17-18). Bad teaching can also lead others into the practice of error (Galatians 2:11-13). Such would surely bring down a heavy judgment upon us (Matthew 18:6-7).

Woods does well to remind us that there is a great joy for those who properly teach. To the Philippians Paul said, "Therefore, my beloved and longed for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved" (Philippians 4:1; compare 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:18-20). John said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4).

Little, But Powerful

We all continually trip or slip into wrong actions. Thankfully, Christ's blood continually cleanses (1 John 1:7-9). The most common sins must be those of the tongue because James says the man that controls it is perfect and able to control his whole body (James 3:2). James used two illustrations to show the power of the tongue.

First, he referred to the bridle. By controlling the horse's mouth, the rider is able to control the whole horse. Similarly, we need to keep our tongues under control (Psalm 39:1). Then, James told his readers about the rudder. Huge ships are driven by fierce winds but are turned according to the pilot's desire by a very small rudder. The tongue is small like the bridle and rudder, but it is able to do great things, either good or bad. A great bonfire, or forest fire, can be started by one small match (James 3:3-5).

The tongue can be truly called a fire in its devastating effects (Proverbs 16:27; 26:18-28). An uncontrolled tongue is totally wicked, in fact, a world of evil in itself. It stains the whole life in its sinfulness. The tongue often sets the stage for what we feel we must do. Robertson notes, "It is now known that angry words cause the glands of the body to discharge a dangerous poison

that affects the stomach, the heart, the brain." There are two possible meanings for "course of nature." It is either all of one's life, or, the sum of all human existence. Both would be true. Hitler's evil tongue led the whole world to war. The tongue's fire is so destructive it can only be set on fire by Hell, which is the place of eternal punishment for the devil and his angels (James 3:6; Matthew 25:41).

No One Can Tame the Tongue

Mankind has been able to subdue all the animals, but not his tongue. Woods notes that the verb indicates momentary action in regard to taming. One may control his tongue for years, yet let it loose for just a moment and reap havoc. "Unruly evil" is like a restless caged animal always stalking about seeking a means of escape. It is like a poisonous snake full of venom and ready to strike a death delivering blow (James 3:7-8; Psalm 140:1-3).

Man uses the tongue to praise and speak highly of God (Ephesians 5:19; Hebrews 13:15; Romans 10:9-10). Yet, the same tongue is used to "regularly pronounce curses upon other men" (Woods). It is actually a prayer to God to cause evil to fall down upon a man. We need to remember that one who truly loves God must show it through his true display of love for his fellow man (1 John 4:20-21; Matthew 25:31-46). For, man is made in the image of God (James 3:9; Genesis 1:26).

James 3:10-12 comments on and illustrates the ridiculous nature of the action described in verse 9. Woods says the force of the verb makes it mean, "These things ought not to begin to be." Obviously, calling down the curse of God upon men will not cause God to act. It is as contradictory to use the same tongue to bless God and curse men as it is for a fountain to give forth sweet and bitter water. It is as absurd as a fig tree bearing olive berries, a vine producing figs, or a fountain producing fresh and salt water.

Actually, the problem with the mouth stems from the heart. Solomon said, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:18). If we can get our heart right with God, our mouth will not be used to curse man.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think James did not want many to be public teachers? What reasons do you see for teachers receiving greater judgment?
2. How might a man's tongue be said to control his whole body? Set a fire?
3. Name some good uses of the tongue. Name some bad uses of the tongue.
4. Show the absurdity of blessing God and cursing man with the same tongue.
5. What is the source of tongue problems? Give some verses to support your answer.

Lesson 8

Heavenly Wisdom

James 3:13-18

A Wisdom From the Devil

Some of those rushing to be teachers may have claimed great book knowledge. They may also have claimed to have wisdom, or the ability to apply knowledge. The test of that comes in how one lives. Some may have said, "Your actions are so loud I can't hear what you are saying." Real wisdom is found in one who knows how much he does not know. So, a good teacher will not be proud or haughty in his knowledge, but will teach in meekness (James 3:13).

Some people get a sour disposition when someone else does well. They tend to rally people to their side to win arguments whether they are right or wrong. Such actions make one lie against what is right. Those who do that have no reason to be proud of their so-called wisdom. Christians need to put aside bitter envy and personal pride (James 3:14; Hebrews 12:15; Ephesians 4:31; 3 John 9-11).

The so-called wisdom of verse 14 is not from God, but from the devil, or demons under his control (1 Timothy 4:1). It originates on earth instead of in heaven (see John 8:23; Philippians 3:18-19; Colossians 3:1-10; 1 John 2:15-17). It comes from an attempt to fulfill physical desires without retaining control over one's body (Jude 17-19). Obviously, a wisdom which causes envy and strife would not be from God since it produces disorder and worthless works (James 3:15-16; 1 Corinthians 14:33).

The Fruits of Heavenly Wisdom

In contrast to the wisdom from the devil, James presents the wisdom from heaven. He begins his list of the fruits of heavenly wisdom with the word "pure." It might be described as being free from fault. To achieve freedom from fault, one must submit his life to the Savior. He must be willing to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus to receive remission from his sins (Acts 2:38).

"Peaceable" describes a peace lover. Jesus said the peacemakers would be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). After all, God sent his Son to make peace between himself and sinful man (Romans 5:8-10; Ephesians 2:13-16). The wisdom which comes down from God is also "gentle." That is, fair in its treatment of others and mild mannered. "Willing to yield" describes one with an open mind who can be persuaded to change when the facts are laid before him.

The one with God's wisdom will likewise be full of compassion, or "mercy." (compare Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus repeatedly filled this role while on earth (Matthew 8:1-17; 9:1-8, 18-38; 14:13-21; 23:37). God's wisdom will cause a man to be full of "good fruits", too. Our Lord said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know

them" (Matthew 7:18-20). The American Standard Version translates the next word by putting "variance." Roberts says, "here the word seems to mean 'not vacillating,' 'not acting one way in one circumstance and another in a different one.'" The man who is truly wise will not be doubtful or uncertain in his actions (Remember 1:8). Neither will he have "hypocrisy." This originally stood for an actor on a stage, thus one who was acting like someone other than himself. Jesus gave stern warnings to the scribes and Pharisees because of their hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-39).

True wisdom will produce right living in the wise. That right living will be a fruit sown in the fertile ground of peace. This will in its own turn produce peace in the lives of the wise and those with whom they associate (James 3:17-18).

Discussion Questions

1. What never fail test does James give to determine if one is truly wise?

2. Describe false wisdom, its origin, characteristics and results. How can one detect and avoid it?

3. List the eight characteristics of true wisdom and give a way we can exhibit such in our lives.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

 - d.

 - e.

 - f.

 - g.

 - h.

Lesson 9

The Origin of Strife

James 4:1-6

Fleshly Gratification

Having just talked about peace, it is natural that James would go on to discuss the origin of strife. The strife of which James speaks is that between brethren. He could also be describing the battle that goes on within a brother. No matter which of the two he had in mind, James discovered the true source of all war. "Wars" describes a state of conflict, while "fights" refers to individual battles. These conditions arise because of one's seeking for pleasure or gratification of fleshly desire (James 4:1).

Paul described to Titus the state of Christians before they were washed. "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Titus 3:3). Such desire arrays itself against the man (1 Peter 1:22; Luke 8:14). The pursuit of its fulfillment will cause one to fight against all in his way, including brethren (compare Romans 7:23). The results of such cause us to remember James' discussion of earthly wisdom in 3:14-16. Obviously, conflicts are born of such false wisdom. Though we do not rejoice in it, the early church had some of the same problems we see today (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; 14:23-40; Galatians 5:15; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 4:1-3).

Seeking To Please Self

"Lust" is a strong desire for a thing. Certainly, it has caused others to do wicked things. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah, killed to satisfy his lust. Jezebel had Naboth killed to fulfill her husband's desire to have his vineyard (2 Samuel 11:1-27; 1 Kings 21:1-16). The sad part is that strong desire is never fulfilled. Instead, obtaining what it wants only makes it want more. James told his readers they did not receive what they wanted because they did not direct their wants in the direction of God's will. Lust controlled their will. Coffman suggests their willful seeking for personal gratification dried up their prayers so they did not even ask God (James 4:2).

Woods notes that it is not unusual for men to be very wicked and yet ask God's blessing on their deeds (Matthew 23:29-35; John 16:2). They do not receive the things for which they ask because they ask for wicked purposes. They simply want to satisfy their desire. God hears the prayers of the righteous and provides for all the needs of those who seek his kingdom first (James 4:3; Psalm 34:15; Matthew 6:33).

When the church is full of lust, she seeks the love of the world and becomes a spiritual adulteress (James 4:4). Paul told the Corinthian brethren, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). The church is Christ's bride and should remain faithful to his wishes

(Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 5:23-24; Revelation 19:6-8). It should be plain to all that one cannot love God and the world at the same time. Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:19-24; Philippians 1:9-11; 1 John 2:15-17).

Strongly Wanting What Belongs To Another

The first four verses of James 4 deal with worldly desire that is contrary to God's working. Verse 5 continues the thought by referring to a statement which is repeated in principle several times in the Old Testament. It is the plain teaching of scripture as a whole that man driven by fleshly desire covets with a selfish desire what others have (Ecclesiastes 4:4; Proverbs 27:4). Of course, God is going to punish those exhibiting such an attitude (Genesis 6:5-7; Job 5:12-13). Fleshly desires lead one in a direction contrary to God's will, or spiritual desire. They will cause one to work those things which will result in eternal judgment (Galatians 5:16-21; Romans 8:4-8; Isaiah 63:8-16).

Discussion Questions

1. What is the origin of war?
2. What will cause one's prayers to go unanswered?
3. In what sense were first century Christians adulterers and adulteresses?
4. To whom does James say God gives his grace? How can we show such in our lives?
5. How does God respond to the proud? What verse does James quote to prove that point?

Lesson 10

Overcoming Fleshly Desire

James 4:7-12

The Means of Overcoming Fleshly Desire

God, in his great grace, provides a means of overcoming the fleshly desire that is the source of war and strife. He has promised to provide a way of escape from any temptation confronting his followers. He will not allow any of his children to face something they are unable to bear (Romans 5:20-21; 1 Corinthians 10:13). James used a quotation from Proverbs 3:34 to show God works for those who live their lives according to the revelations of his Spirit. God is against those who would put themselves above others, but bestows his unmerited favor upon those who have a lowly spirit and place others above themselves. God has greater grace than any wrong desire we have and he will give us a reward far greater than all we give up (James 4:6; Mark 10:30).

So, instead of yielding to wrongful desire, we should make ourselves subject to God by obeying his will. Paul reminded Timothy that a warrior fights for his leader and carefully avoids being turned aside by desires which might lead him contrary to that leader's will (2 Timothy 2:3-4). We must stand in battle array, which is the idea of the word "resist," against the devil. To do this, we must put on the Christian armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) and stand steadfastly for God in loving obedience to his will that the victory might be ours (1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 10:39). If we do stand against the devil, he will run from us (James 4:7; Compare Matthew 4:1-11).

Having resisted the devil, we should draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to us. The way to draw nigh to God is through purification. The reference here would have caused Jewish converts to remember the cleansing of the priests before they performed their duties (Exodus 30:17-21). Sin will not allow us to get close to God (Isaiah 59:1-2). So, we must be cleansed from our sins (Acts 22:16). The heart is critical in such cleansing because the issues of life flow out of it (Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 15:19-29). Our cleansing comes from obeying the truth (James 4:8; 1 Peter 1:22).

Humble Self Before God To Be Uplifted

The desire for cleansing begins with sorrow for sin. It continues with one's repentance (James 4:9). Such is demonstrated by David after he acknowledged sinning with Bathsheba. He sang:

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight--that You may be found just when You

speaking, and blameless when You judge (Psalm 51:1-4).

Paul saw his own miserable condition without Christ and thanked God for the deliverance he found in Jesus. Others heard the words of the Lord and his apostles as they stressed the importance of repentance (Romans 7:24a-25; Acts 2:37-38; Luke 13:1-5; Matthew 5:4). Repentance is the beginning of our humbling ourselves before God. It is followed by putting the old man of sin to death in baptism so that God might exalt us, or raise us up, as a new man. Such yielding to God throughout our lives will lead to the final exaltation in heaven (James 4:10; Romans 6:3-18; Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:2-11).

Brethren Should Not Judge One Another

The verb James used in 4:11 is in the present durative tense and actually means "stop speaking evil of one another". Evidently, they had already been doing such speaking. Woods notes that evil listening should also be stopped since that encourages evil speaking. Gossipers do not like to talk to empty rooms or dead telephone lines. Remember, the law of love would require us to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12).

To harshly judge the motives of our brother's actions and speak against him out of that harsh judgment is to speak contrary to the law of love and judge it an unworthy one. This displays a lack of love for our brother and thus for God. John wrote, "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes." He went on to write, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 2:10-11; 4:20).

God gave Jesus authority to deliver commands to the people of this age and his words will be the standard in judgment (James 4:12; Matthew 28:18-20; Hebrews 1:1-2). He told his disciples, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). God has authorized Jesus to execute judgment. After he had healed a man on the Sabbath and called God his Father, the Jews sought to kill our Lord. He responded by saying, "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:26-27). Realizing the truth of what has just been said, who are we to act as judge against our brother or the law Christ delivered?

Discussion Questions

1. How can we be sure the devil will flee from us? Tell of at least one character who successfully got the devil to flee.
2. What can we do to draw nigh to God and get him to lift us up?
3. Name some types of evil speaking we should avoid? Which ones should especially be avoided in reference to our brethren?
4. What two things happen when one speaks evil of his brother?
5. Who is the Lawgiver? Who will be the judge in the judgment day? What will be the standard of judgment on that day?

Lesson 11

Planning Without God

James 4:13-17

"Are You Listening?"

V. E. Howard, a great gospel preacher, often stopped in the middle of an important point and asked, "Are you listening?" Usually, those who were not, begin doing so at that time. James says "Come now" to get the same effect. They were making great plans for the future without bringing God into their planning. It's as if they thought it was all up to them and they were dependent on no one. Such planning without God is a serious mistake (James 4:13).

In warning against covetousness, Jesus told a parable about a rich man. His ground brought forth a great yield. When contemplating what to do with all the abundance, the rich man failed to consider his fellow man or God's wishes. Instead, he resolved to tear down his barns and build bigger ones so that he might retire. "But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:16-21).

Man's Future Depends Upon God

We do not know what awaits us even a few minutes ahead on life's road, so we should not make plans as if we controlled our own future. The wise man said, "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). What kind of life do we have here on earth? By simple observation, we know it is not permanent. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). James says our life is a vapor, or mist, or puff of smoke. Like the morning fog, it may seem to be permanent. Yet, it appears one minute and disappears the next (James 4:14).

All of our plans for the future should be made in the full realization that those plans depend upon God. Truthfully, our very existence is dependent upon God (James 4:15). On Mars Hill, Paul told about the Almighty.

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your won poets have said, "For we are also His offspring" (Acts 17:24-28).

The Sin of Boasting of Self-Sufficiency

James said some lived as though their plans in no way depended upon God and they were proud of it. Woods says the word translated "boasting" here is not used in any form in any other verse in the New Testament except for 1 John 2:16. There, John describes one aspect of the love of the world as the "pride of life," which is the same word. Some types of glorying are good. For instance, it is good to glory in the second coming of our Lord. It is good to be proud of our brethren. It is especially good to glory in the cross of our crucified Lord (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Galatians 6:14). But glorying in self-sufficiency is sinful (James 4:16).

Clearly, anyone who knows God sustains us should live his life for the Creator. Thus, James describes the intentional sin of omission. Those who knew God existed but acted as if they did not need him and left him out of their plans committed this sin. Jesus said:

And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Luke 12:47-48).

After teaching his disciples about service, Jesus also said, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them" (John 13:17). James 4:17, combined with these other verses ought to move anyone to action who knows what the Lord asks of him.

Discussion Questions

1. What could you do to better include God in your daily planning?
2. To what does James compare the length of one's life? How should that knowledge impact your planning for the future?
3. Describe some dangerous forms of boasting in which you have seen people participate.
4. What does Jesus say will happen to the one who knew God's will but did not prepare to do it?
5. Realizing life's brevity and the result of failing to do good, list some things you plan to do this week.

Lesson 12

Looking to the Lord's Return

James 5:1-12

The Abusive Rich Will Be Judged

James had a message for the oppressive rich. He asked for their close attention, as in 4:13, by saying "Come now." This time he is speaking to the rich. His message seems to be directed to some rich outside the church, especially since verse 7 is directed to brethren. Of course, Christians must also beware of the dangers attached to riches throughout scripture (Isaiah 5:8; Proverbs 11:28; Amos 3:10; 1 Timothy 6:8-10, 17-19). Vine says the word "weep" "is used of any loud expression of grief, especially in mourning for the dead." "Howl" describes crying aloud. It would appear the mourning enjoined is for their own loss (James 5:1).

The money and garments of those oppressive rich were going to waste. As shall be seen, this was from their being ill-gotten and hoarded up without any plan for their good use. That tarnished appearance would stand as a witness against the greed of those addressed and cause them to be condemned. James says they had actually stored up a large treasure to bring God's full wrath down upon them in the last day (James 5:2-3). Paul gave a similar warning in Romans 2:5. "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

The practice of refusing to pay the poor laborers even the meager wages they had been promised is condemned in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:13; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5). The wages held back and hoarded cried, like the blood of Abel, for judgment against those who withheld them. The cries of those cheated were also heard by the Lord of hosts (James 5:4). This may be a reminder that God has the power to take vengeance in such cases and will use it. "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord....Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21).

The rich lived the high life and indulged themselves in fulfilling of all their wants. Their stuffing themselves with pleasure was much like a hog being fattened for slaughter (James 5:5). The Just, or Righteous, One James says they murdered is Christ (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 John 2:1). It was these self-indulgent rich who crucified Jesus. Yet, our Lord submitted to them without resistance (James 5:6; Isaiah 53:7; 1 Peter 2:21-23).

Christians Need To Be Patient

James urges the brethren to patiently endure just as the Lord did (James 5:7; Matthew 5:38-48). At the coming of the Lord, James urged his readers to remember, all will be rewarded according to their deeds (John 5:28-29). This should cause us to patiently endure what others do to us because the Lord will reward them. Also, it should cause us to patiently remain in service because the Lord will reward us.

The Christian's patience should be like that of the farmer in Israel who waited for the early rain to help the seed germinate and the latter rain to help it gain fullness before the harvest. Impatience will not speed the harvest, nor the coming of the Lord (Mark 4:28-29). So, James encourages them to stabilize their hearts and firmly set them to await the coming of the Lord. The Christian, knowing Christ's teachings on his second coming, should always think of the Lord's return as imminent (James 5:8; Matthew 24:36-44; 25:13).

With the great external pressure of persecution, it would have been natural to vent some frustration by grumbling and blaming others for their problems. James warned his Christian readers against such because blaming another would lead to condemnation. Instead, he told them to always be prepared for the judge's return by picturing Jesus at the door ready to enter. They would not want to be guilty of wrongful, or harsh judgment, knowing the judge was ready to come any time (James 5:9).

Those Who Endure Are Blessed

The prophets suffered for God. The Greek word for "suffering" which James uses in reference to the prophets is one which designates external pressure (Matthew 23:34; Luke 11:47; Acts 7:52). Those spokesmen for God left an example of bearing up under such and remaining true to the Lord. Their example should encourage Christ's followers to like patience (James 5:10; Hebrews 11:32-38). They were not just happy because of favorable external circumstances. Those men of faith were happy because of a disposition of heart, or from the inside out.

To be able to bear up under such trials because of wicked people, the men of faith had to remember the end of a wicked life (Psalm 73:1-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), as well as the goal of the faith in life (Hebrews 11:13-16). Job is James' last example of one who patiently bore suffering. We are able to see the reward of that patience because we know the whole story (Job 42:10-17). While we do not know the whole story in our own lives, we can be assured that the end will work out for our good (James 5:11; Romans 8:28, 31-39).

As James' readers awaited the Lord's coming, he urged them to be especially careful to avoid oaths. The Lord, in the sermon on the mount, delivered an injunction against oath taking used to add force to a statement which was made to impress men. Such oath taking may have been used to cause others to believe a lie. Jesus particularly warned the scribes and Pharisees about this practice (Matthew 5:33-37; 23:16-22). This would not seem to prohibit solemn oaths involved in law, religion or contracts (Hebrews 6:13; 7:21; Matthew 26:63-64; Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Philippians 1:8). Christians should be known for doing exactly what they say they will do, thus being ever ready to receive a blessing from the Lord (James 5:12).

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the dangers attached to riches? Under what conditions should those who

have such mourn?

2. In what ways might we be in danger of misusing material things God has given us?

3. What changes might you make in your life if you constantly pictured Jesus at your door?

4. What characteristics worthy of imitation do you see in the group of men who demonstrated patience in suffering?

5. How should a Christian view the use of oaths?

Lesson 13

Some Actions of the Faithful

James 5:13-20

Responses to Various Situations

What should a Christian do when physical and mental problems bear down upon him and depression sets in? James says pray, not just once, but repeatedly. On the other hand, if we are joyful and full of good spirits we ought to let it be known through songs of praise. A Christian ought to be as ready to thank God for the good as he is to plead with him to relieve the bad (James 5:13).

James also urged the sick to call for the elders so they might pray for them and anoint them with oil. Oil was used symbolically in the appointment of kings and prophets (1 Samuel 10:1; 9; 16:13). It was also used for medicinal purposes (Isaiah 1:6; Luke 10:34). Still another usage is found in the working of miracles (Mark 6:13).

Is the healing James speaks of miraculous or providential (through medicine)? Let us suggest that, during the age of miracles, it could have been either. Now, of course, it could only be providential. In either case, the prayer of faith would have to be understood as a prayer which is in accord with the Lord's will (1 John 5:14-15). If the sick needed to repent, they could likewise have their sins forgiven by repenting and asking the elders to pray about that while present (James 5:14-15; 1 John 1:9). Several cases of illness can be found in the New Testament (Philippians 2:25-30; 1 Timothy 5:23; 2 Timothy 4:20; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9). It is interesting to note the power of healing was not even used by an inspired apostle under all circumstances.

Examples of Prayers of the Faithful

James encouraged those in the first century church to keep on confessing their sins to one another and to keep on praying one for another. A similar concept is found in 1 John 1:7 where the apostle of love urged his readers to keep on walking in the light so they could have the continual cleansing of the Lord's blood. Note that no one is set above another in the church. All are enjoined to confess to one another. All should desire the healing power of God's and the brethren's forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24). When one who does the Lord's will petitions him, God promises such a prayer has much power (James 5:16).

Elijah was used by James as an example of a man, with the same weaknesses and desires as other men, who had his prayer answered. The story comes from 1 Kings 17:18-46. Jesus referred to it in Luke 4:25. First, under God's direction, he prayed it would not rain. God closed up the heavens for three and a half years. Then, he prayed again. Elijah truly was fervent in prayer, as he prayed seven times before the rain came at the end of this great drought. When it did rain, the earth began to produce again (James 5:17-18).

Restoring the Erring

It is obvious James believed one could err from the truth. Yet, how can one wander from

something in which he has not been? So, Christians can fall from grace (See also Galatians 5:2-4; 2 Timothy 2:16-18). To turn a man back is to cause him to change course. By causing him to change course, we can save his soul from death. This would not be physical death, as all men are appointed to die once (Hebrews 9:27), but the second death described by John in Revelation 20:13-15. By causing him to seek forgiveness, his brethren are assured by James God will hide his sins so they will be seen, or remembered, no more (James 5:19-20).

Discussion Questions

1. Describe some circumstances ripe for prayer? Song? Who would you most like to have

praying for you?

2. What should a Christian do who has made mistakes and committed sin?

3. How does James' description of Elijah and God's response to his prayers affect your thinking about prayer?

4. Do you believe it is possible for a Christian to fall away? Why or why not?

5. What can you do this week in order to help save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins?

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