

STUDIES IN JAMES

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1. JAMES THE PRACTICAL Based on James 1:1

A contemporary author who loves mysteries describes his frustration when the mystery gets too great. A friend gave him a mystery book to read, and soon he found himself deep in the midst of the sinister plot. "Imagine my consternation," he says, "as I came to the end of the unraveling of the mystery to find the last page had been torn out. The final lines of that next to the last page went like this: 'What was it that Mrs. Daisy Dick had seen when she looked through the window of the tower-that had torn from her that last terrible shriek of protest, that cry of No! No! as she plunged to her death on the flagstones beneath?'" She plunged, and the reader was left hanging in the air because the conclusion was missing. That was more mystery than he cared for.

The letter of James begins with a mystery also, and this mystery is one that has caused a great deal of frustration. Many have found it hard to be happy with the unknown. Thousands of pages have been written about the mystery. It is the same mystery that you would experience if you received a letter signed James. If you only knew one James, the mystery would not be difficult to solve, but if you knew several by that name it could be quite a task to figure out which one it was who wrote the letter.

This is the mystery which has faced scholars all through history. Nobody but the God who inspired him to write knows for sure which James of the New Testament wrote this letter. There are four men by the name of James in the New Testament, and each of them has been made to be the author of this letter. Some argue that it could have been a James not mentioned in the New Testament at all.

Tradition has attributed this letter to the James who was the brother of Jesus. He opposed Jesus until after the resurrection. Jesus made a special appearance to His brother when He rose from the dead, and James became a believer and a dedicated leader in the church at Jerusalem. Paul called him one of the pillars of the church, and though he was not an Apostle, he was for many years the head of the home church of Christianity.

The vast majority of scholars through history agree that the evidence supports this tradition. James writes with the authority of one who lived with the Master of the art of living. This letter is more like the Lord's Sermon On The Mount than anything else in the New Testament. You might think it is a waste of time to dwell on who the author was, but not so. Thousands of hours of the time of the greatest Christian scholars in history have been consumed in struggling to solve the mystery of who James was. If you are not convinced of the authority of the author, but believe he was just some godly man writing down some pious advice, it will undermine the value of what God is saying to you in this letter.

This happened to Martin Luther, and to many others. He did not consider the letter of James to be equal with the other Scripture written by the Apostles. He called it an Epistle of straw, and when he published his Bible in German, he put James in the back, and he didn't even list it in the contents. He influenced many others including Tyndale to follow the same pattern in their Bibles. Luther did not reject James, but he made it second class Scripture. There is an extremely value lesson to learn from Luther's attitude toward the letter of James. It is a lesson that can help us avoid the folly of many of God's greatest servants.

First we have to understand why Luther had the attitude he did. Luther was a reformer in constant conflict with the Catholic church leaders. Luther's main theme was justification by faith. Luther

emphasized the need for personal faith in Jesus Christ; a trust in His atonement, and His shed blood for forgiveness of sin. The death and resurrection of Christ, and faith in the Christ who died and rose were the foundations of his Reformation theology. The letter of James does not deal with these things at all. It does not mention the blood of Christ, or His death and resurrection. James does not emphasize faith, but his focus is on good works. He even says that faith without works is dead. The opponents of Luther used the book of James constantly in their debates with him. The result was that Luther looked upon James as a hindrance to the doctrine of justification by faith.

Luther did what Christians are always in danger of doing in reaction to controversy. They blind their minds to the fact that the whole Bible is the Word of God. The greatest tragedies in Christian history are those who come about because Christians pick and choose which parts of God's revelation they are going to live by. Every time this happens it produces a kind of Christianity which is a perversion. All cults are based on selected Scriptures instead of the whole counsel of God. No church and no Christian will ever have the kind of balance that leads to true godliness and Christlikeness until they can accept all the Scripture as their authority for faith and practice.

Luther could not see beyond his conflict, and rise above it to incorporate the practical emphasis of James on works with his emphasis on faith. The result was Lutheranism in Germany and surrounding nations came to a point where dead faith dominated. Luther had God's truth about faith, but he didn't have the balance of God's truth about works, and because he failed to listen to all of God's Word his movement was not all it might have been. It was the dead orthodoxy of Lutheranism that led to the formation of other evangelical denominations, which would not have been necessary had Luther listened to James.

If we can learn from Luther's mistake, we can find God's best instead of His second best. Do not reject anything in God's Word just because it seems to contradict, or conflict, with a truth you hold to be precious. Do not ignore parts of the Bible that are misused and abused by cults and extremists. Jesus said we are to live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. All Scripture is inspired of God and profitable, and not just the parts you like best. If you pick and choose, you will be an unbalanced Christian. What you have may be good, but it will never be God's best.

All of this relates to the letter of James because it is a part of the Bible which has suffered from attack and abuse. Many have ignored it in building their Christian lives. Those who have studied it, however, have found that it does not at all conflict with Paul, but, in fact, adds to, and compliments Paul. James is not writing to help Christians formulate doctrine. He is writing to help Christians make doctrine practical. James is a man of action, and his letter is on how to put faith to work. It is practical from start to finish, and you cannot criticize him for not saying anything about basic Christian doctrines, for that was not his purpose in writing.

Calvin points out that God does not require every man to handle the same arguments. Paul was chosen by God to deal with certain aspects of God's truth. James was used to communicate other aspects of God's truth. There would be no point in the letter of James if all he said was what Paul had already said. James did not fail because he wrote nothing of the cross or resurrection. It was not his purpose to do so, and every man is to be judged according to what his purpose is, and not according to what others think his purpose should have been.

Let's begin our study of this letter then with the assurance that whoever James was, he was a channel through whom God spoke in his day, and through whom he continues to speak today. Some will

not like James because he speaks too frankly on subjects where all Christians have some big hang-ups. He will step on all of our toes before he is done. He will hit all of the major weaknesses and sins of the Christian life, and he will hit them hard.

Doremus Hayes, one of the greatest Bible teachers of all time, writes in The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "There are those who talk holiness and are hypocrites; those who make profession of perfect love and yet cannot live peaceably with their brethren; those who are full of pious phraseology but fail in practical philanthropy. This epistle was written for them.....The quietists who are satisfied to sit and sing themselves away to everlasting bliss ought to read this epistle until they catch its bugle note of inspiration to present activity and continuous good deeds. All who are long on theory and short on practice ought to steep themselves in the spirit of James."

If true doctrine was enough to be an adequate Christian, James says that the demons themselves would be perfect Christians, for they believe that God is one. The demons acknowledge Jesus as the Son of the Most High in the Gospels, but they believed the truth and tremble says James in 2:19. Their theology doesn't do them or anyone else any good because it is truth not obeyed and practically applied. If one's creed does not control one's conduct, his creed is not worth the paper it is written on. Many will feel the wrath of God who had a beautiful creed, but who never learned the lesson of James to put it into practice. James wants to see saints in shoe leather, and not just in stained glass windows. The Christianity of James is Christianity in action. It is above all-practical.

One of the greatest problems the church has struggled with all through history is that of getting Christians to act like Christians. It is no problem to get them to talk like Christians, and to believe doctrine like Christians should, but it is a battle to get them to act

like Christians should, and that is why James is such an important part of God's total revelation. It wakes us up to the realization that all our belief, and all our words are dead and useless unless they lead us to practical action that does some good. Action is what makes faith come alive. All the Christian talk about faith, hope, and love are only theory until action makes them real to life.

C. S. Lewis captured the essence of the message of James when he wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor or not; act as if you did. As soon as you do this you find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him." We so often fail to be Christian because we want to get the feeling we love someone instead of acting on God's Word, and finding that out of action love comes. James says that theoretical Christianity is not the religion of the Bible. If your religion is not practical, it is not biblical, even if everything you say is from the Bible. We need to recognize that we cannot wait until we feel like being Christian. We need to just go ahead and act like a Christian should, for it is being a doer of the word that really matters.

James is a great believer in prayer. Tradition calls him camel knees because he spent so much time on them in prayer that he developed calluses. However, he does not hesitate to blast away at all the superficial ideas of prayer that many Christians have. Prayer is not always answered, and he makes this clear. Prayer can be abused and misused. Prayer that does not get results is of no value. Nothing counts with James which is not practical, and that even includes prayer.

James has such a love for the practical because that was the emphasis of his Lord and brother Jesus Christ. You remember when the rich young ruler came to Jesus, and he acknowledged that he had kept all the commandments from his youth, but he asked

Jesus what he still lacked. Jesus knew he was a good man, and a reverent man. Jesus loved him, but he said that he still lacked one thing, and so he said, "Go and sell what you have and give to the poor." Jesus said that he had a beautiful religion, but it lacked practical application in life that helps solve some human problem. The young man went away sorrowful because he just couldn't see getting so practical that would cost him a great deal. He wanted religion to be a comfort to him, and to give him assurance of eternal life. He didn't want a religion that made him get out of the ivory tower of his pleasant isolation from the sufferings of others, and do something about it. That, however, is the only kind of religion that is Christlike, and the only kind of Christianity we find in James. You don't just pray for a man who is hungry, you give him something to eat.

James condemns all the pious religion of those who say lovely things and believe glorious things, but who do not do the practical things that help meet human needs. If James was going to be stranded on a deserted island, and he could only have one book with him, he would not likely say, as most Christians would, give me the Bible. James would likely choose a book about survival or on how to build a boat so he could get back into the stream of life where he could be a channel of truth and love into the lives of others.

James is theology in action; a creed in conduct, and a call to practice what we preach, and to walk the talk. Vance Havner said, "We do not actually believe any more than we are willing to put into practice." A study of this letter will reveal, not what you believe, but whether or not you really do believe what you say you believe. Bob Harrington said, "What this nation needs is a better me." That is practical theology. It is what we see in Paul when he spoke his first words when confronted by the Living Lord. He asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That is the question the whole book of James urges us to ask daily.

2. SUCCESSFUL SUFFERING Based on James 1:1-8

Imagine the testing of the body in such a sport as football. To be on your feet and seconds later brought to the ground hard and fast. Then to get up and do it again, and again, and again, but constantly moving forward. All of that falling is not what wins the game, but whether or not you win depends a great deal on how you fall. In fact, it has been pointed out that when the coaches begin to train their teams the first lesson they teach is not how to make a touchdown, but how to fall. For days they learn to fall limp and to roll so as not to be injured. There is nothing good about a fall. It is only a hindrance to reaching the goal, but if you don't learn how to fall successfully it is not likely you will ever get a chance to reach the goal. All the training is not to cross the goal line, but to survive until you get there.

What is true in football is likewise true in life in general. If we hope to make life a successful experience, and reach some worthy goals, the first thing we need to learn is how to fall. Life is always filled with obstacles to overcome. Scripture says, "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." And, "Man that is born of a woman is a few days, and full of troubles," says the book of Job. The Bible from Genesis to Revelation gives a realistic picture of life, and that picture looks more like a washboard than a slide. We must face the facts of Scripture and history and realize that the future holds trials, troubles, and for some even tragedy. This realism in the Bible, however, is combined with an optimism because it reveals to us the way to triumph through our trials.

The Bible is very practical and one of the books most noted for being practical is the book of James. It was written by James, not

the Apostle, but James the brother of our Lord. It was written by a man who grew up with Jesus in the same family, and who knew his teachings very well. There are more references to the Sermon on the Mount in James than in all the other Epistles put together. It also has the distinction of being one of the first books of the New Testament to be written. It was written about 45A.D.; less than 20 years after the death of Jesus. The very first lesson that James teaches, like that of the football coach, is the lesson on how to fall, or if we were to give it a title we might call it, The Secret Of Successful Suffering. In these first few verses James tells us of three requirements necessary for the successful suffering of trials. The first is-

I. A POSITIVE RESPONSE OF THE WILL TO TRIALS. verse 2.

The difference between tragedy and triumph is all in how you count your trials. James says by an act of the will count it all joy when tried. Don't let circumstances take you captive and control your life, but compel them to yield the fruit of joy by a choice of the will. The Christian is never to be under the circumstances, always on top of them. Faith does not change what life brings to you, but it is to change what you bring to life. Every trial calls for a choice that involves the will. It is not what happens that determines a person attitude, but how they chose to count what happens. One man can get a flat on the way to work and count it a blast from the hand of fate, and be upset all day because he lost an hour of work. Another can have the same experience and count it as the providential protection of God that may have saved his life, and he rejoices all day in thanksgiving to God. The difference between the scowling crab and a smiling Christian is all in how you count your trials. The scowler counts them a jinx; the smiler counts them a joy.

The Bible has a high view of man's will power, especially after he has been delivered from being dominated by the forces of evil. For

James to say, count it all joy, it is assumed that if they will so choose they have the will power to do so, and only if they do can they be successful in their suffering. James can urge them, warn them, and counsel them, but only they can make the choice, but they can if they will.

When those two planes crashed in mid air some years ago killing all aboard there were three men who watched it on the radar screen. They saw the two planes on a collision course and they shouted and shouted until they saw them hit. One of them became violently ill, the second passed out, and the third had a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized. They saw the danger but did not have control of the plane, and so all their efforts were in vain. So it is in our experiences of falling into trials. James can shout, count it all joy; preachers down through history can shout it; your friends can shout it, but then all they can do is stand and watch you go down unless your will responds in a positive manner and counts it all joy. In other words, your will is the pilot in your life. If it gives up all is lost, but if it refuses to be defeated you can never fail. Your plans may fail, and the plane may go down, but the positive will, even then, land you safely with the parachute of joy. As long as the will responds positively there is no such thing as defeat.

When Dr. Maxwell from Prairie Bible Institute was in the Twin Cities, he told the story of the first man to bring a plane out of a tail spin. His name was Stinson, I believe. He was flying one day doing some fancy tricks when suddenly he went into a tail spin. No one had ever come out of a tail spin before. He tried everything he could think of. He pushed and pulled, turned and twisted, and nothing happened. It looked hopeless and time was short as he plunged toward the earth. He finally decided to give it everything and get it over, and to his amazement, as he gave it the gas he pulled out of the tail spin. He wondered, could it be he discovered the way to come out of a tail spin? The only way to know was to try again, so he

climbed up high and purposely went into another tail spin, and came out of it by the same method. By an act of the will he turned a trial that had always brought tragedy into triumph.

Scripture tells us that God works in all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, but nothing works for good to those who will not count it good. If we refuse to consider a thing good even when it is, it will not be good for us. Like the woman who always complained about so many bad potatoes in her field. One year almost all of them were good, and then she complained because she had no bad ones to feed the pigs. Even blessings are not good to the person with a negative will, but to the person with a positive will even trials can bring joy. But James makes it clear that this positive response of the will to trials must be based on the second requirement which is-

II. A POSITIVE RECOGNITION OF THE WORTH OF TRIALS. verses 3 and 4.

The Scriptures tell us that no chastening for the present seems to be joyous. James does not expect us to be joyful because we are suffering, or even while we are suffering, though that is not impossible, but the joy comes in reflection and by our recognizing how even trials can help us attain the spiritual goals of our life. If we allow them, they can teach us patience, which is an essential virtue in becoming all that God wants us to be. The joy we can have in trials is in recognizing that Christlike character is our goal, and if trials can help us to be more like Him, then we can rejoice and suffer successfully.

Virtues grow out of the possibility of vices. Who has ever been brave who did not have a chance to be a coward? How can one have courage who has never faced danger? Who can know what patience is who has never been tried by impatience? Trials are opportunities

to develop virtues. It is not the trial that brings joy, but the knowledge that the trial can teach us things that are never learned by a life of ease. Nobody would ever bother to watch football if there were no obstacles to overcome. Take away the opposition and the game loses all meaning.

A young Italian working in an American stone quarry had both eyes blinded, and he lost one arm by careless handling of dynamite by others. He was helpless and the future looked dark, but a woman who lived near the hospital where he was, and who knew Italian, had compassion on him, and she helped him get into a school for the blind. He was grateful for the fact that someone cared, and he became an eager student. He went on to become one of the most popular teachers in that school. If he had never had his tragic experience he likely would have remained an illiterate the rest of his life. The loss of his sight lead to him seeing more than he ever did before. He once said, "The day of my accident was the birthday of my mind." He counted his trial all joy.

Archidimus in Thucydides, the famous Greek historian, said, "We should remember that man differs little from man except that he turns out best who is trained in the sharpest school." Henry Howard has pointed out that this is true in nature as well. The Australian black-butt is a tree that grows in rich soil where there is a great deal of rain, and they grow so close together they are sheltered from the wind and storm. It becomes huge in its life of luxury and ease, and it grows to a height of 300 feet, but in its sheltered life it develops no toughness of fiber, and, therefore, is practically worthless for any purpose where endurance is required.

In contrast with this tree is the English oak which battles the storms from its birth until it is strong and mature. It grows slow but solid. The Australian-butt will rot under ground in 6 months, but English oak is used in England for underground wooden pipes, and

after 300 years they were dug up and found to be as good as when they were laid. The proof that it is the trials endured that gives it the strength is that if the English oak is planted in Australia with its less vigorous climate, it grows twice as fast and is much feebler. Therefore, even nature teaches that trials are of great worth in producing quality.

Who can find a greater quality of music than that of Handel's Messiah? It did not come out of a life of ease, but one of great trial. In his biography we read, "His health and his fortune had reached the lowest ebb. His right side had become paralyzed, and his money was all gone. His creditors seized him and threatened him with imprisonment. For a brief time he was tempted to give up the fight, but then he rebounded again to compose the greatest of his inspirations, the epic Messiah." If all had been going great for him, he may never have created his greatest work.

The greatest trial in all of history led to the greatest triumph in all of history. When Jesus in the agony of Gethsemane recognized the worth of what He was to suffer for, responded with His will saying, "Not my will but thine be done." He counted it all joy to go to the cross. Scripture says, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross." Never has there been such successful suffering, and James urges us to follow that same pattern that Jesus followed by making a positive response of the will to trials, based on a positive recognition of the worth of trials. The particular value which James stresses is patience, which we will not deal with now, for now we want to look at the third requirement which is-

III. A POSITIVE REQUEST FOR WISDOM IN TRIALS. verses 5-8.

In a sense, we are ending with the beginning. We are covering last that which comes first. Just as the response of the will is based

on our recognition of the worth of trials, so our recognition of the worth of trials is based on our request for wisdom to be able to see it. In other words, learning how to triumph in trials, and to suffer successfully, begins with prayer for the wisdom needed to guide our will to the proper choices. Success in anything for the Christian comes down to the simple phrase, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Like the football player, we do not wait until the tackler is upon us before we learn how to fall. We learn this before the trial comes. A Japanese proverb says, "Dig the well before you are thirsty." Another says, "Shingle the roof before the storm." The football player prepares through practice; the Christian prepares through prayer. James is saying, if you don't have the will power to count it all joy when trials come; if you are not convinced that trials can be of great value, then you lack the wisdom which only God can give. Therefore, you had better make a positive request for such wisdom, for without it you can never suffer successfully.

Notice, he does not say we are to ask to be delivered from trials, but ask for the wisdom necessary to make them work for good in your life. Alexander Maclaren said that the lack of wisdom is the chief defect in the average Christian. It comes only by persevering in prayer. Paul was constantly praying for the Christians of his day that they might have the wisdom of God. In Col. 1:9 we read, "We do not cease to pray for you that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." We have not because we ask not James says. Here is a clear statement that to ask for wisdom is always in the will of God, and God delights to grant it. James himself was known to be a man of prayer, and that explains his practical wisdom. Tradition says he has knees like a camel because he spent so much time on them.

Donald M. Baillie relates of how in the 17th century the

Westminster Assembly met to draw up a Protestant Confession of Faith. At that assembly was Dr. John Selden, one of the greatest scholars of the day, but who was a defender of the Erastian heresy. He gave such a brilliant argument for the heresy that the good Presbyterians there were at a loss as how to defend the truth. Then, unexpectedly, George Gillespie, a young Scotsman, rose in the meeting and spoke against the heresy in an amazingly effective way which swept away years of labor on the part of Dr. Selden. When his speech was over his friends got a hold of the notebook that had lain in front of him hoping to find the outline of his argument, but on the page they found nothing but a single sentence penciled over and over again as he sat there waiting to speak. There were just three Latin words, "Da lucem, Domine," which means "Give light, O Lord." He lacked wisdom but he asked of God.

Wisdom includes knowledge, but is more, for it is the ability to use knowledge to arrive at the best ends by the best means. Wisdom directs the use of knowledge. Many people have the knowledge of how to drive a car, but they lack the wisdom which is necessary to drive it properly. When a drunken man wants to drive a car, it is not knowledge he lacks, but wisdom. Wisdom is the capacity to use knowledge effectively for good purposes. Everyone suffers, but only the wise makes a success of it, for only the wise recognize that trials can be of profit if they are wisely used.

Disraeli said, "The fool wonders but the wise man asks." But notice that our asking must be positive. It must be in faith without doubt. God is ever ready to grant the request for wisdom, but He cannot answer the prayer of the double minded. This is one who is not sure he wants God's will, and so he would not be able to receive the wisdom of God anyway. He is like Augustine who in his early prayers before he came all out for Christ use to pray, "O God, make me pure, but not now." He was double minded. He wanted to follow two paths at the same time. Jesus said you cannot serve two

masters, for you will love the one and hate the other. The double minded man literally does not have a prayer. God refuses to grant any request from such a person. They are like people who are "Trying to serve the Lord in such a way as not to offend the devil." They think they can be a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and get by with it. God demands a simple and single minded faith.

The lesson on how to suffer successfully involves the whole of one's spiritual life and relationship to God. In learning this lesson we will learn that which is necessary to be a complete and entire Christian. We will learn to fall in such a way that we are brought closer to our goal of Christlikeness for having fallen. We will do this by a positive response of the will to trials; by a positive recognition of the worth of trials, and by a positive request for wisdom in our trial. The most important thing to remember is that we must be asking God for wisdom if we are going to suffer successfully.

3. DON'T WASTE ANYTHING Based on James 1:2-4

Marcus Bach in his book The Power of Perception tells of how great worth is found in waste. An old lead and zinc mine had been abandoned for years. It appeared a worthless worn out pit with all its value exhausted. But when man developed a new need, a need for Tungsten, the waste deposits from this old mine were re-assayed and discovered to be full of Tungsten. The ghost mine sprang back into life, and a thriving community grew up because waste could produce worth. In other words, it was not waste at all, but valuable stuff. Bach says, no mine is ever totally exhausted, and all waste just waits for man to discover a new use for it. As men develop the power of perception, they see new values in what they formerly threw away. Numerous are the examples of how what were once

waste products are now valued products.

Nothing is more practical than the art of turning waste into worth and James the brother of our Lord was an expert. He has the power to perceive the worth in what everyone else tends to call worthless-the trials of life. What can be a greater waste in life than to suffer trials and tribulation? We count it all joy when we can escape these worthless types of waste. But James, with an advanced perception, says you are throwing away your own treasure . There is great value to be gotten from tough times. In fact, it is one of life's most precious values-the virtue of patience.

Less you think that patience is a very simple thing, let me point out how it covers a multitude of complex feelings and attitudes.

- 1. It means a calm waiting in hope. This is the patience of the gardener or farmer who plants his seed and then must wait to see the fruit.**
- 2. It means endurance of trial; a putting up with what is not pleasant, such as a nine year old boy who is convinced he can learn to be the world's greatest drummer.**
- 3. It means self-control. When too many things happen at once, you can still keep your cool and not go to pieces, but persevere through them all. There are many different degrees of this virtue.**

James says to Christians who are struggling with life's adversities-don't waste anything in life-not even your negative experiences, for they contain great potential. They can be used to produce the costly value of patience. If you lack the wisdom to see this, ask God for it, says James, for none are so wise as those who have the power of perception that can explore the waste deposits of human burdens, and see how they can be turned into human blessings. May God grant us wisdom as we try to see what James reveals concerning the value and the vision of patience.

I. THE VALUE OF PATIENCE.

Patience is a hard to win virtue. It does not come from reading books and hearing sermons. You cannot teach patience, because it is not taught, it is caught, and it is only caught by getting into the stream of life's trials. Patience is like a purple heart. The only way you can get it is by getting wounded in battle. The great Henry Ward Beecher said, "There is no such thing as preaching patience into people unless the sermon is so long that they have to practice it while they hear. No man can learn patience except by going out into the hurly-burly world, and taking life just as it blows....and riding out the gale." We cannot learn patience by this message, but we can learn to appreciate its value.

You have to be thoroughly convinced of the value of patience if you are going to pay the price to obtain it. Men fight for their country, and for their family, and for the honor of their faith, but whoever heard of fighting against adversity, and all the while counting it a joy because they are thereby gaining the virtue of patience. We all know it is a wonderful thing to have, but is it that precious? James clearly implies that it is. It is so valuable to possess it that those who see its value can even suffer in joy when they know that their suffering is leading them to more patience. Only a deep grasp of this value will enable any Christian to practice what James tells them to do. Men can only enjoy suffering that pays high dividends.

Men can suffer long fearful journeys, and hunger and thirst and pain of every description, if the end result is gold. Men have suffered everything for gold, and just the hope of possessing it drove them to endure agonies beyond our comprehension. A value less tangible, but just as real as gold, is glory, and again, there is no end to the suffering men and women will joyfully endure for glory. The world of sports alone is ample evidence of this. Millions of muscles

shriek out in painful agony, yet there is no let up and relief, for the price must be paid for glory. The point is, people count it all joy to suffer for any goal they are convinced is of high worth. We fail to be motivated to suffer for the sake of patience, because we have undervalued it, and do not consider it as one of life's precious possessions for the personality.

There is no doubt about it, Paul saw eye to eye with James on the value of patience, for Paul says it is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and in the great love chapter of I Cor. 13, the first positive characteristic of ideal love is patience. In Rom. 5:3, Paul uses the word in the same way as James does when he says that tribulation worketh patience. Jesus used this same word when He described the good soil in the parable of the sower as that which holds fast the seed of the word, and brings forth fruit with patience. There are other texts we could look at, but these are sufficient to convince us that patience is a virtue which is a key to the fruitful Christian life.

As soon as James opens his letter with a greeting, he launches into the praises of this virtue that is so precious that it ought to make us enjoy our trials. If we cannot see the value in patience, we will not see the value in the trials that help produce it. In 1934 the huge Jonker diamond was discovered in South Africa. It was given to Lazare Kaplan, the patriarch of diamond cutters. The owner also sent a plan for cutting it, but Kaplan said, had he followed that plan it would have been destroyed. He spent one year just studying that stone, and planning how to turn it into 12 smaller stones. Only after great patience in planning did he go to work, and his patience paid off, for he turned that egg size crystal into a dozen immortal gems. Only recognition of great value could motivate such patience. Nobody could exercise such patience to produce a ring of little value. It takes great value to motivate patience.

If you do not see the great value in patience, you will not see the worth of any kind of suffering. Only a value system which places a high worth on patience can give you the power to perceive value in tribulation. If you lack such a value system, you will consider all forms of suffering as worthless, and so you will waste a good chunk of your life's experiences. James says you don't have to waste any experience of life, but can rejoice in its value if you see it develops patience. What could be more practical than asking God to give you the wisdom to be able to turn all waste into worth. Those who think like James are incurable optimists. If even life's rough roads are increasing your supply of patience, then you can rejoice while you groan and moan. You don't have to like the suffering, but you can't help but like the fringe benefits, if you are building up your patience. Someone wrote, "Patience is like the pearl among the gems. By its quiet radiance it brightens every human grace, and adorns every Christian excellence."

In the history of Christian missions, it has been the virtue of patience that made the difference. William Carey, the father of modern missions, labored 7 years before he won his first convert. This has been true for many, and you just can't write the history of Christian missions without people of patience. The second thing we want to consider is-

II. THE VISION OF PATIENCE.

The person who possesses patience perceives life with a particular perspective. He sees life from the point of view of the whole and not just the part. He sees the long run of things, and not just the now of them. He has a vision that penetrates the cloudy now, and sees into the sunny yet to be. James has a vision, not just of the present suffering of trials, but of the long range effects of what they can produce in us through patient endurance. He sees the outcome of it all leading to Christians being made complete, and lacking in

nothing. If the only way to the castle is by means of a rough road, than rejoice that you are on that rough road, for better to be struggling up toward an ideal than walking in ease down a road to no where.

James does not portray the Christian life in a superficial manner. It is a false hope to tell people the Christian life is the answer to all their problems. The Gospel is not, come to Jesus and live happily ever after. The Christian life is often a struggle and a battle, and an uphill climb over many obstacles, but it is worth it all because the end result is a happy ever after with a great sense of satisfaction, because we have come through the trials of life more like our Lord, who made it possible for us to fight the good fight by His grace. The point is, if this year is going to be a good year of Christian growth, it will not be all blue skies and barbecues. There will be some struggle and hard decisions that force us to move up or down on the scale of Christlikeness. James says, don't waste these times, but catch a vision of the value to be gotten out of them.

The patient Christian sees life as a process in which God works out His plan by stages and degrees. This is a perspective based on wisdom. God made reality this way, and it is folly to try to make it any other way. God could have made it so babies were born a week after conception, but He chose to make it 9 months so life would begin with a process of waiting and expecting. God could have made man so he would be like some animals, and be very soon independent after birth, but instead He made it so they need a long process of care and training. This provides a school of patience for both parents and child. Family life is a process of growth in learning patience. Life is made to develop by degrees. Jesus entered this process and grew in wisdom, and in stature and in favor with God and man. At 12 He already felt the need to be about His Father's business, but God made it so He had to go home with Mary and Joseph and live in patient growth for 18 more years.

Jesus spent most of His life learning to develop patience. Without this long process His humanity could not have endured the injustice of His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Jesus needed time to develop this virtue, and so do we. There is no such thing as instant maturity. The fruit of the Spirit, like the fruit of the soil, takes time to develop to maturity. Nobody is fully loving, joyful, peaceful, or patient upon conversion. These and all other Christian truth grow by degrees.

The virtue of patience is essential to every aspect of the Christian life. You cannot become anything God wants you to be without patience. Patience gives you the ability to see life in its wholeness and the long run. It enables you to see how the trials of life can be part of the process you need to develop in specific areas you would neglect without them. Shakespeare said, "How poor are they who have not patience! What wound did ever heal but by degrees." Healing, growing, becoming Christlike-they are all achieved by degrees, and, therefore, patience is a necessity.

The vision of patience enables us to be ever moving toward the goal of being complete, lacking nothing. Impatient Christians always stop short of this goal. The impatient Christian gets a glimpse of a Biblical truth, and immediately begins to proclaim he has found the key to the Scriptures. He tends to blow it out of all proportions, and many will not go along with his enthusiasm, and so he starts his own church, or cult, and becomes an extremist, fighting the rest of the body. The patient Christian takes time to see how new light and insight fits into the whole picture, and how to incorporate all aspects of truth into the whole. The result is, he brings greater unity rather than division to the body.

Inpatient Christians have looked at Paul's emphasis on faith and the emphasis of James on works, and have concluded there is conflict, and so they choose up sides. Patient Christians look deeper, and see both Paul and James in agreement, for the two must be part

of the whole for there to be any authentic Christianity. Patience builds, but impatience destroys. If you want to be the best possible Christian, James says nothing is more practical than the development of patience. Try and imagine any other Christian virtue being complete without patience. Imagine an impatient love. I'll love you if you snap it up. Sure I love my neighbor for a while, but when I asked him to come to church, and he said no, I gave up on him. Impatient love is not Biblical love.

Joy that is impatient will not last in a trial. If all goes smoothly impatient joy can function, but patient joy can function even when the way gets rough, for it knows God can use even this to make us more Christlike. Go through the list of Christian virtues, and see how all of them lose their value if not combined with patience. The problem with everyone of us is that our Christian virtues tend to all have a breaking point. We will be kind and gentle when all is normal, but lose our cool and become like an unenlightened pagan when the waters get rough. We have not arrived at the point where we lack nothing, for we clearly do not have the patience to be complete in the exercise of our virtues.

Patience is both active and passive. It can press on or hold on, whichever is needed. The active patience is called perseverance or persistence. It is a never giving up spirit that plugs away even when progress seems hopeless. A father was scolding his son for his lack of ambition. "Why when I was your age I worked ten hours a day and five hours a night washing dishes." The son said, "I'm proud of you dad. If it hadn't been for your pluck and perseverance, I might have to do something like that myself." Wise are the parents who make their children do what they don't have to do, just to learn to be patient. Even in our day of greater leisure, every person needs to be prepared to plod. Shakespeare said, "Though patience is a tired mare, yet she will plod."

If God did not have patience, the world would long ago be gone. Love is patient says Paul, and God is love says John, and so God is patient. The only way we can live the Christian life is by developing patience. You cannot love yourself or your neighbor without patience. Impatience is the key sign of immaturity. The Christian who wants instant success in himself, or in others, will be a neurotic Christian. They will never be happy, for they spend their entire life fighting the reality of life. All of their energy will be spent in seeking shortcuts to holiness, and despising those who will not join them in their futile search. Impatience mars every gift and perverts every grace so that even what is good becomes a waste.

The whole point of Satan's attack on Christ in the wilderness was to entice Him into impatience. Don't wait for food, turn the stones into bread now. Don't wait for popularity, jump off the temple and get the crowds now. Don't wait for power, bow to me and have your kingdom now. Satan's greatest trick is to get us to be impatient. D. L. Moody said, "Paul when writing to Titus, second chapter first verse, tells him to be sound in faith, in love and in patience. Now in this age ever since I can remember, the church has been very jealous about men being unsound in the faith....They draw their ecclesiastical sword and cut at him, but he may be ever so unsound in love and they don't say anything. He may be ever so defective in patience-he may be irritable and fretful all the time, but they never deal with him....I believe God cannot use many of His servants because they are full of irritability and impatience." Moody, like James, is saying, let's get practical. What earthly good is a Christian who believes in the Trinity, but who is so impatient he turns everybody off?

The passive patience is endurance. It stands fast and takes a pounding, but does not yield. It patiently holds on waiting in expectation for a victory. If mud splatters on your clothing, you tend to want to wipe it off now, but if you wait until it dries it will

not smear, and come off much easier. The unknown poet writes,

**O wait, impatient heart!
As winter waits, her song-birds fled,
And every nestling blossom dead.**

**Beyond the purple seas they sing!
Beneath soft snows they sleep!
They only sleep. Sweet patience keep,
And wait, as winter waits the spring.**

We must confess that it is one of hardest things to do, for so many things in life put pressure on us. Jesus, even in His perfection, still felt the tremendous pull of impatience. How long must I endure this generation, He moaned as He came to the edge of His own breaking point. The folly of man; their blindness and pettiness, and weakness puts even divine patience to the test. Trials put all of us against the wall at some point. What do we do? We hang on. Many rescues take place because victims are able to hang on just a little longer than what seems possible.

Jesus had to endure the weakness of those who loved Him as well as the wickedness of those who loathed Him.

**O who like thee, so calm, so bright,
Thou Son of man, Thou Light of light!
O who like thee did ever go
So patient through a world of woe!**

Those who are not willing to endure trials will just not become what God intends for them to be. If the Son of God needed to learn obedience by what He suffered, how much more must we endure to learn. It is just a part of God's universal plan for all life to grow by degrees, and by struggle.

**I wish I were big the acorn said,
Like the great, green oak tree, over head-
Cool shadows it throws for all who pass-
But I am so useless and small--alas!
Only be patient, a kind voice spoke,
I was not always a mighty Oak;
For my beginning was humble, too;
Once I was an acorn--just like you!**

Roberta Symmes

Emerson said, "Adopt the pace of nature, her secret is patience." Study of one of the great Sequoias in California indicate it was a sapling in 271 B.C. 516 years later it was damaged by fire. For over a century it repaired that damage, and grew layer after layer over the scar. God built patience into that mighty tree, and it survived. You and I have the potential for patience as well, but we must choose to develop it, and only testing can help us do that. Nothing can be more practical than for us to ask God for the wisdom to see the value in testing, so that we do not waste anything.

4. PERSISTENTLY PATIENT Based on James 1:3-4

All our lives we are being tested on our ability to wait. Those who fail to learn early become candidates for insanity. Nothing is more frustrating than to have an impatient mind in a world where you cannot control all that is necessary to fulfill all your desires and dreams. Gutzon Borglum, who craved the Mount Rushmore Memorial, was asked if the faces he had craved were perfect in detail? He replied that the nose of George Washington was an inch too long, but that it would erode to exactly the right length in about 10 thousand years. If he had been a perfectionist without patience,

he would have worried himself to death over this detail, but he had the wisdom to accept his limitations, and leave perfection to the patient working of nature.

Those who do not learn this lesson, and who just cannot accept their limitations, can never become mature adults, let alone mature Christians. Maturity is directly dependant upon one's patience. When a baby cries the mother usually goes immediately to satisfy it's need. As the child gets older there are longer intervals between its wishes and the fulfillment. Parents ought to make sure of this by design. When we say a child is spoiled it really boils down to the fact that they have not been taught patience. Their wishes have always been fulfilled with only short intervals between. They have not been discipline to wait. They expect the world to jump when they say frog. They are demanding, and they expect to get what they want right now. They are intolerant of anyone or anything that stands between them and fulfillment of their wishes. Immaturity is largely a matter of impatience, just as maturity is largely a matter of patience. Mature people have the ability to endure the postponement of wish fulfillment.

A child is usually by nature impatient, and so also immature. If it wants a piece of candy before supper and you say they have to wait until after supper, there can be quite a storm stirred up in them. The child can act as if the world has lost all meaning, and there is nothing more to live for. They can fall on the floor, kick and cry, and be uttering crushed by this denial. This is all a part of the process of becoming mature. The child must deliberately be made to endure the trials of being denied. This is the only way they can learn that wishes are not automatically and immediately fulfilled in life. Parents do their children a great injustice when they send them into the world unprepared for trial and denial. They must be taught how to suffer and endure postponement.

God is not so unwise in raising His children. James is saying to Christians that they are to rejoice in the trials that come into their lives, for only by these can they learn patience, and only through patience can they ever be perfect or mature. The Christian who is raised in a sheltered situation, and who is never allowed to wrestle with the problems of life, and the problems of faith, and who is never made to confront the challenge of unbelief, is not prepared to live in the world as it is. Such Christians are forced to withdraw from the battle into their own shell, and live in fear lest something makes them lose their faith. This is not what a Christian is to be. He is to be a soldier of the cross. He is to be out on the front lines confronting problems greater than his ability to solve, for only there will he learn to be patient, and to trust that God can work even where the Christian's limitations make him unable to work.

To learn patience is identical with becoming Christlike. Jesus submitted to the limitations of the flesh, and to the slow but sure way of success through patience. Paul in Rom. 15:5 calls God the God of patience. If God was not patient history would have ended long ago. All through the Old Testament we see His patience and long suffering with Israel. Even before that we see His patience with Adam and Eve. Instead of striking them dead for their sin, He let them continue to live, and He promised them redemption. After a multitude of failures on the part of Israel, God persisted in being their God, and He patiently worked and waited for the fullness of time to send forth His Son.

Jesus was not created like Adam. He was not ready to go to work as soon as the breathe of life was breathed into Him. He had to go through the process of growth. He patiently worked as a carpenter until he was 30 years old, even though at age 12 He sensed the call to be about His Father's business. What a demonstration of patient waiting. I have seen men so impatient in their desire to preach the Gospel that they dropped out of college or seminary, and they took a

short cut through a board that did not demand high standards of education. Jesus could wait, but they could not. Jesus could patiently prepare, and fully fulfill all that was required, but we often think God's plan needs us now whether we are prepared or not.

I felt this way often, and I wanted to quit my education, but as I look back I can see the impatience was not motivated by God's will, but by the desire to escape the discipline it took to persist in what is hard. It is a real trial to go to school for so many years, and have to meet constant deadlines, and be under constant pressure, but I count it all joy now that I suffered those trials, for through them I learned patience, which is absolutely necessary to do the will of God.

Jesus had to have patience to see men perishing without the Gospel, and yet wait until He was 30 to reveal Himself. Then when He began His public ministry He spent another 40 days being tried in the desert. You would think just waiting that long would be trial enough, but not so. Jesus had to go on demonstrating patience over and over again. Even in the temptation Satan offered Jesus a short cut by which He could rule the world, but Jesus chose the long hard way of the cross. He began His ministry with men whom He came to save opposing Him. He was hated and mocked, and leaders sought to trip Him up by watching every move, and listening to every word, hoping to catch Him in a heresy. He was criticized for every action, and finally His enemies nailed Him to the cross. Yet through it all we do not see Jesus becoming bitter because He was misunderstood. He did not grow sour on mankind because of their ingratitude. He patiently endured, and even on the cross He prayed for God to forgive them. No one has ever demonstrated the virtue of patience like Jesus.

**O who like Thee, so calm, so bright,
Thou Son of man, Thou Light of light;
O who like Thee did ever go**

So patient through a world of woe!

We can never fully imitate the patience of Christ, but it is our duty as Christians to try by His grace. We must learn the patience of Christ to a large degree in order to be of worthwhile service to Him. That is why James says that we are to count it all joy when we are tried, for trials present you with an opportunity to learn patience. A concordance will reveal that the New Testament exalts the virtue of patience to a very high level, and makes it clear that one cannot be a mature Christian without it. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

It is a virtue of such obvious and essential value that it is universally exalted and praised. This means it is not limited to Christians, but is a value among all people, no person can be mature without it. This means that the Christian ought to give all the more heed to its importance. If a value is held in common with pagans, and even atheists, the Christian ought to be a greater possessor of that virtue than they are.

Tertullian, in a famous sermon preached in the 2nd century, said of patience, "Its good quality, even they who live blindly, honor with the title of the highest virtue. Philosophers, indeed who are counted creatures of some wisdom, ascribe so much to it that while they disagree among themselves in the various humors of their jests, and the strive of rival opinions, yet having a common regard for patience alone, in respect of this one alone of their pursuits they are joined in peace; in this they conspire together; in this they are confederate; this they pursue with one mind in aspiring after virtue."

No pagan religion, or moralistic philosophy, or humanism can get far in producing any virtues in people without patience. For you cannot even be an adjusted and mature person without it. This only shows how much more the Christian needs patience to fulfill the

higher ideals and standards of Christ. If one cannot even be a good pagan without it, it is impossible to be a good Christian without it.

Therefore, do not look at trials as evil, but as opportunities to develop patience. It takes patience even to learn patience in trials. So often we are like a child who is so concerned about his present wishes that he does not even consider developing virtues for the future. We often use prayer as a means to cut down the time between our desires and their fulfillment. We do not want to go the long hard way, and so we ask God to give us wisdom without searching for it. We ask God to change us without going through the painful process of change. We ask God to work immediately rather than through the laws He has written into reality. We want a religion like that of the magician. He pulls trees out of the hat right before our eyes, and without all the nuisance of planting, watering, and waiting. In body building people count it all joy to endure trial, for they know that is the only way to build muscle. We forget that the same thing is true for building up the soul.

Who has not had a child or loved one who was sick, and prayed that they would be spared the suffering and be healed, and yet had to go on watching the pain continue until it has run its course? Does God not care? It is because God does care that He does not spoil us like being like those foolish parents who jump at every whim and wish of their children, and never discipline them by keeping them waiting. God wants children who learn to wait, and who can endure. These are the two aspects of the meaning of patience. It is the ability to wait and hope, and to endure without giving up. It is being persistent in your goal of being Christlike when everything seems to hinder it and oppose it.

Being patient is essential for just normal life adjustment. It is of double necessity to live the Christian life. Thomas A. Kempis said, "All men commend the patience, although few be willing to practice

it." We must be among those few if we expect our lives to be the best instruments for God's glory. Susanna Wesley had as great a task as any woman has ever had with her large family, but her patience enabled her to do such a marvelous job of it. She raised children that changed the course of history. John Wesley became a famous Christian leader, but it took a lot of patience to raise him. His father once said to his mother, "How could you have the patience to tell that blockhead the same thing 20 times over?" She replied, "If I had told him but 19 times, I should have lost all my labor." She was persistently patient, and that is why her life is used in millions of sermons as an illustration of the Christian life.

Fruit growing takes patience. Most of us want to get the fruits of the Spirit just like we get our groceries. We want to walk along and pick up what we desire and be done with it. This would be possible if we could acquire fruits grown by someone else, but in the moral and spiritual realm every person has to grow their own. The process calls for discipline and patience. Those who cannot persist and wait until they develop and grow will never progress to the point of perfection. If you cannot wait, you cannot win. Hovey said, "Impatience strikes a death blow to all the graces of the Holy Spirit. Not one of them can remain intact in an impatient soul." On the other hand he said, "Every act of real patience, under severe trial, tends to strengthen itself and all other graces." The bottom line is that we can only be all that God wants us to be by learning to be persistently patient.

5. WHO CAN BE PERFECT? Based on James 1:4

Mozart was only 25 years old when he settled in Vienna in 1781. Ten years later he was dead, but his commitment to perfection made

his mark live on and crown him as one of the princes of music. Those ten years were years of struggle for survival. He lived in poverty with little food, and often even without heat in the winter. His publisher threatened to stop giving him any payment at all if he did not write in a more popular style. Mozart replied, "Then, my good sir, I have only to resign and die of starvation. I cannot write as you demand." He refused to dedicate his gift to the trivial, and he went on writing his matchless music which made him so famous after his death. He aimed for perfection, not because it paid well, but because he do no other. The love for quality was in his blood. James is informing us that this should be the goal of every Christian, for God is perfect, and we are to be partakers of the divine nature.

Facing life's trials with joy and patience is not just to prove we can do it, but that we might be perfect and complete, and lacking in nothing. Someone will immediately take issue with James and ask, "Who can be perfect?" We said James was a very practical writer, but how can he be practical and so soon jump off the deep end, and write of being perfect?

If there is one thing that almost everyone agrees on, it is the realistic truth that nobody is perfect. Jesus Christ is the only candidate for the office of perfection, and James, of all people, should know that, and not introduce such a concept in his letter. Is it possible that James was just expressing a sense of humor, for that is usually the only realm in which we deal with perfection. The poet writing from a doctor's perspective put it this way,

The perfect patient let us praise: He's never sick on Saturdays,
In waiting rooms he does not burn. But gladly sits and waits his
turn. And even, I have heard it said, Begs other, please go on ahead.
He takes advice, he does as told; He had a heart of solid gold.
He pays his bills, without a fail, In cash, or by the same day's mail.
He has but one small fault I'd list: He doesn't (what a shame!) exist.

This seems to be the major defect in all perfect people-they are conspicuous by their absence, and just do not exist. Spurgeon wrote, "He who boasts of being perfect is perfect in folly. I never saw a perfect man. Every rose has its thorn and everyday its night." Shakespeare summed it up, "No perfection is so absolute, that some impurity doth not pollute." But what are we to do with James? Are we to write off his words as humor, and say he must have been joking, or should we just skip over such things, and not ask so many questions? This is often the approach to things we do not understand, but it is folly and sin. If you do not understand what the Bible is saying, then you need to search until you do. Bible reading is not enough. We need to study the Bible until we do understand what God is saying. So we are going to study the biblical concept of perfection so that we know what God expects of us. First let's consider-

I. THE EXPECTATION OF PERFECTION.

James is not alone in expecting Christians to be perfect. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament have many text that make it clear that believers are expected to press on to perfection. This expectation is not hidden away in some obscure corner of the Bible where scholars have to dig to find it. It is written so often, and so clearly, that he who runs may read.

James did not set up the standard of perfection. He only echo's his Lord and brother, who in the Sermon on the Mount, made the most absolute statement on perfection to be found anywhere. In Matt. 5:48 Jesus said, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus expected His followers to be perfect. That may sound impossible; especially to be perfect like God, but the point is, that is what is expected. Why should Jesus expect less than the best? The Old Testament saints attained perfection, and so why not New Testament saints? Listen to these

texts:

Gen. 6:9, "Noah was a righteous man and perfect in his generation."

Job 1:8, "A perfect and an upright man..."

I Kings 11:4, "The heart of David was perfect with the Lord his God."

I Kings 15:14, "Asa's heart was perfect with the Lord all his days."

If these men of God of old could be perfect in some sense in spite of their sins and blunders, how can we expect God to expect less from us who have his best in Jesus Christ? Anything less than perfection is not only sub-Christian, it is sub-Judaism. It is below the ideal of the entire Bible. There are many other references in the Old Testament, but we must move on to look at the exalted expectation of the New Testament. Eph. 4:11-13 says, "And he gave some Apostles, and some prophets; and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Paul believed it could be done, for he wrote even to the sinful saints of Corinth and said in II Cor. 13:11, "Be perfect." In 7:1 he urges them to be cleansed from sin and perfected in holiness. Some did attain it, for in I Cor. 2:6 he wrote, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect." In Heb. 5 the Christians are being rebuked for being on milk when they should be eating the meat of the Word. They are forever on the bottle of the simple Gospel, and they never go on to the profound heights to which God is calling. After this rebuke he says in 6:1, "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to perfection...." God does not want His children in elementary school forever, anymore than we want our children to remain on that level.

One of the most wide spread heresies among Christians is the idea that all God cares about is getting people saved. The Bible, however, makes it clear that God is not satisfied until His children are perfected, and made complete and mature in Christ. We cannot begin to quote all the evidence, for the entire New Testament was written for this purpose. The whole concept of Bible study is based on this assumption that by studying the Word of God we can become Christlike in character and conduct. God is concerned about quality. He wants justified sinners, but He wants them to become sanctified saints. Calvin Coolidge refused to run for a second term as president of the United States. He said it was because there was no room for advancement. This is never the case for the Christian, for there is always room for progress.

The expectation of perfection can be burdensome. It is like the new bank president being introduced to the employees. One of the tellers said, "I have worked here for 40 years, and in all that time I have only made one mistake." "Good," said the new president, "but hereafter be more careful." He expected perfection, and that is too much to expect. Sydney Harris wrote, "Nothing is perfect is what we say when we want to justify our current state of imperfection; the statement is made not because it is true (which it is) but because it offers us a plausible defense against improvements, and this is more dangerous and misleading than a lie." We do not want anyone to expect perfection from us, but we cannot escape the fact that that is what is expected of us in Scripture. Let us look next at-

II. THE EXPLANATION OF PERFECTION.

Now that we know that it is expected, we need to know what it is that is expected. How can we be expected to be what we know that no one but Christ has ever been? Who can be perfect? Christians who try and face up to the biblical expectation without an biblical explanation often make the Scripture a stumbling block, and a basis

for a nervous breakdown. A Christian perfectionist who does not understand what the Bible means often become a neurotic, guilt-ridden, self-hating Christian. If they do manage to maintain some stability, they are a plague to others with their cursed perfectionism. They become the Felix Ungers of the religious world. They are tormented in trying to be as spotless as those in heaven.

There is much written on the dangers of perfectionism by both secular and Christian counselors, but our purpose is not to try and understand what biblical perfection isn't. Our task is to try and understand what it is. If we can grasp what it is, we do not have to worry about the follies of exaggeration. Elimination of the doctrine of perfection is one extreme, and exaggeration of it is the opposite extreme. You can only stay on the narrow path of truth by finding a proper explanation of what the Bible means by perfect.

The Greek word here is the usual Greek word for perfect. It is teleios, and it means to reach a goal; to accomplish a task and complete it, and to bring it to perfection. If your goal is to raise tomatoes which weigh a pound a piece, then when they reach one pound you have completed your goal, and it is teleios-perfect. You have created the perfect tomato. Perfection is a matter of development toward a goal until that goal is reached. If my goal is to run three miles, and I run those three miles, I have had a perfect run. It may not be perfect for the one whose goal is to run five miles, but it is for me because my goal was three.

Growing Christians are constantly reaching new goals, and so they are constantly being perfected. James is especially concerned here about a perfected faith. What is a perfected faith? Faith means trust, and so a perfect faith would be a trust which is continuous, and which cannot be shaken by circumstances. It is to be able to say with Job, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." That is perfected faith. Paul wrote in I Thess. 3:10, "Night and day

praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith." A perfect faith is essential, and that is why James says be glad when your faith is tested, for an untested faith can never be perfected, and who wants a weak faith that might let you down when life gets hard?

A faith that cannot survive trials is not worth having, and if a crisis makes you lose it, you will never be what God wants you to be. Testing is essential to perfection. Everything is tested these days. If the wings on a jet cannot stand the test, the plane is no good. If the brakes on your car cannot stand the test, the car is no good. Everything has to be tested to see if it can hold up and reach the goal for which it is made. If it cannot accomplish the purpose for its existence, it is of no value to create it.

A Christian can have a perfect faith; a faith that has reached its goal, and will trust in God no matter what. A faith that only lasts until the pressure gets to a certain point is like a bridge that goes half way across a river. It is incomplete and greatly lacking, but just as a bridge can go all the way and be a perfect bridge because it accomplishes its goal of getting across the total river, so are faith can be perfect, and get us all the way through life's trials with complete trust in Jesus Christ. That is perfection, and it can be done, and has been done by millions, and will be done by millions more. Who can be perfect? Every Christian can be, and is expected to be perfect.

A bridge that gets you over the river may be imperfect in many ways. It may need paint; it may need fixing, and it may have many rough spots, but if it complete its purpose of getting you over the river, it is in that aspect perfect. In the Christian life perfection is relative and will not be absolute until we are transformed to be like Christ Himself. That is why Paul in the same context says he is not perfect, and then says that he is perfect. Paul's paradox applies to all of us. In Phil. 3:12 he says, "Not as though I had already

attained, either were already perfect..." He goes on to say that he presses on toward the mark of perfection, but then in verse 15 he says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Paul is saying that the perfect Christian is one who clearly recognizes that he is not perfect, and must be ever pressing on. Part of perfection is being aware of your imperfections.

What this means practically is that we must be ever growing, but that we can be perfect in our present state of growth. Everyone of us can be right now living fully up to the light that God has given us. We can be completing all that He wills for us to do, and that is to be living a perfect Christian life. Everyone can see room for improvement, and all of us can see the defects in our lives, and so we all say that no one is perfect. However, if you are constantly growing, developing, and overcoming as you grow, you are at each stage of your growth in a state of perfection, for you are living at that point in complete obedience to God as you understand His will. That is what God expects of us, and the Bible says it is possible to live on that level. Only those who believe it is possible will keep pressing on toward perfection. If you live today in full obedience to what you understand of God's will, you are living today in perfection.

This explains how the Old Testament saints, who sinned, could also have a perfect heart toward God, and walk in perfection before Him. A perfect Christian today can still fail God tomorrow, and that is why he must be constantly growing and striving to perfect every area of his life. It is because perfection is relative that it can be real. To be perfect is to be all you can be for God. To live in frustration because you cannot be something or someone you are not, is to misunderstand what God wants. A perfect piano cannot be an organ or guitar. Each has its own purpose, and each is perfected when it fulfills its purpose. So it is with the individual children of God. To get depressed and disgusted with yourself, and feel guilty

because you can't be something you are not, is to be on the path of imperfection. Being the best of what you are is what it means to be perfect.

Someone might remind us, however, that Jesus said we were to be as perfect as God. That is certainly impossible! No it isn't when you understand it. God's perfection consists in always doing what He knows to be good and wise. We can do just the same as His children. We are not equal with God, for the finite can never be infinite, but the thimble can be just as full as the swimming pool, and man can be just as obedient to what he knows as God can. It is likeness to God, and not equally with God, that is expected. If we act always in a way consistent with our redeemed nature, we are perfect in the midst of our many imperfections.

If we sin, and we immediately recognize this to be an offense against God, and we confess it and seek its forgiveness, this is a part of the perfect relationship to God. Absolute perfection is still ahead, but relative perfection is to be attained now. A little girl was asked by her teacher, "Where is the dot over that i?" The little girl said, "It is still in the pencil." The final perfection when every i will be dotted, and every t will be crossed is still in the pencil as God writes the history of our lives, but God continues to write, and everyday He writes can be a day in which we live in perfection. If I say that my goal today is to read three chapters of the Bible, treat everyone I know in love, and not choose to do anything I know displeasing to God, that is teleios-perfect. I have fulfilled the purpose of God in my life for this day.

I once had to fix our vacuum cleaner, and all I had was my rusty old pliers and bent wrench. I was able to get it apart and back together with these tools, and it worked. These tools were perfect for the job. That means they helped me achieve my goal. They had many defects, but they were still able to get me to my goal, and so

they were perfect. God needs people in the world to get His will done on earth as it is in heaven. We may have many defects, but if we help God reach His goal, then we are perfect. This means that every one of us can be perfect tools to touch some life for His glory. God does not expect us to be frustrated by the call to perfection, but to be encouraged because it is possible for any of us, even with all our imperfections. God does not expect us to be now what we will eventually be, but He expects us to be what we can be now, and that is tools that get the job done.

John Wesley was a great believer in Christian perfection, and he wrote a whole book about it, and he has influenced millions. Many suggested that he should call it something else other than perfection, for that leads people to be confused. He responded, "As to the word, it is scriptural, therefore, neither you nor I can in conscience object against it, unless we would send the Holy Ghost to school and teach Him to speak who made the tongue." Perfection is a valid biblical word and the only problem with it is our lack of understanding what the Bible means by it. Hopefully we have made that clear so that it need not be a problem in our minds.

Perfect has to do with purpose. God's purpose in this fallen world is to redeem the lost, bring good out of evil, and guide His children to grow in Christlikeness. The primary tool for this task is love, as it is expressed through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, and continually through His earthly body-the church. It is the perfect tool to get the job done. Who can be perfect? We can, for we can be channels of the tool of Christ's love every day, and help fulfill the purpose of God in the lives we touch every day.

6. ASKING GOD based on James 1:5-8

Two brothers came to the U.S. from Europe in 1845 to make their fortune. The older brother had a trade for he knew how to make sauerkraut, and so he took a wagon train west to California to raise cabbages. The younger brother went to school to study metallurgy. Several years passed, and the younger brother went to visit his older brother. As the older brother was showing him around the cabbage fields he noticed he was not paying any attention to what he was explaining, and he protested, "You really don't care about my work do you?" The younger brother picked up a stone and said, "Do you know what this is? It is quartz, and that yellow spot is gold. You have been raising cabbages on a gold field." It turned out to be one of the greatest gold strikes ever in Eldorado County.

Raising cabbages on a gold field is what every person does when they fail to fulfill the potential of what they possess. In the realm of prayer almost every child of God is raising cabbages on a gold field. We are playing marbles with pearls and do not begin to fulfill the potential of prayer. It has always been so, and James in 4:2 says, "You do not have, because you do not ask." Only that angel who is the accountant of heaven could ever know how many blessings God's people never receive because they never ask. Someone told the story of a man who was being shown the glories of heaven, and his angelic guide showed him a vast storage area of beautiful gifts God wanted to give His children on earth, but they never asked. The story is fiction, but the truth of it is fact.

In the next verse James says to the Christians, "When you do ask you don't receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions." To ask for a wrong motive is just as fruitless as not asking at all. A 7 year old boy was told by his mother that he could not go to the Sunday School picnic because of his disobedience. By the next morning she had softened, as mother usually do, and she told him he could go after all. He took the news so quietly that she asked him,

"What's the matter, don't you want to go?" He sighed and said, "Its too late now Mom. I've already prayed for rain." He saw prayer as a way to get even with others. Prayer was a means by which we get God to do our will.

If only children had this immature concept of prayer, it would not be so bad, but the fact is, many Christian adults are also immature amateurs when it comes to prayer. We all miss its potential, and spend our lives raising cabbages on this gold field of spiritual riches. Prayer is the most universal aspect of man's religious nature. Man is such a praying creature that even an atheist has a hard time to keep from praying in certain situations. Like the girl in Russian who was taking a test to qualify for a job in the Soviet government. One of the questions was, What is the inscription of the Sarmian Wall? She answered, "Religion is the opiate of the people." She was not sure, however, and so obsessed with a desire to know that she went the 7 miles out of the way to check. When she saw the exact words she had given, she was so relieved that she sighed, "Thank God." It is sometimes hard for unbelievers to escape all prayer.

Charles Steinmetz, the great scientist, was asked what field for future research holds the greatest promise, and he replied instantly, "Prayer, find out about prayer." That is what we intend to do, because James very quickly in his letter gets to this subject of prayer. He knows you cannot get far in any direction spiritually without prayer. She knew that the Apostles of his divine brother and Lord never asked Him to teach them to preach or teach, but did ask, "Lord, teach is to pray." James was such a man of prayer that he was known as camel knees, because he spent so much time on them in prayer. He will help us see how important and practical prayer is for effective Christian living. The first thing he makes clear is,

I. THE REASON FOR PRAYER v. 5

The reason we pray is because we have a need. James says that if you feel you lack wisdom, ask God. Prayer is first of all a confession of our own inadequacy.

**Say, what is prayer, when it is prayer indeed?
The mighty utterance of a mighty need.
The man is praying who doth press with might
Out of his darkness into God's own light.**

Saying prayers and praying are not the same thing. Many times we say prayers because it is the appropriate thing to do, but to really pray is to feel a need that only God can satisfy.

If you are facing trials and lack the wisdom to see how they can make you a better Christian, you know you have a need. You can petition God and ask in all sincerity, "Lord, give me wisdom. I don't see any good. I cannot find any value in what I have to endure. Give me the wisdom to see it." The greater we feel the need, the greater the fervency of our prayer. Those who feel no need do not pray with any sense of urgency. Need is the basis for earnest prayer, for recognition of need is the reason we pray at all. We just do not ask for what we do not need, or for what we do not recognize as a need.

What we are saying is that there are different degrees of earnestness in praying. The degree varies with the sense of need. This was true even in the experience of our Lord. Certainly Jesus never prayed a superficial prayer, but He did pray with varying degrees of need, even as we do. In His hour of greatest need in the Garden of Gethsemane, Luke tells us in Luke 22:44 that when he went to pray the second time, "...being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground." Never on this planet was a need ever felt more deeply, and never was prayer ever offered in greater earnest.

Jesus establishes this truth by His life and teaching: The greater the reality of one's need, the greater the reality of prayer.

In His parable on the Prodigal Son He pictures the Prodigal feeding the pigs, and coming to a full awareness of his need. "How many hired servants of my father have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father." When he felt his need deeply enough, he went to the source where his need could be met. When he felt self-sufficient he left his father, but need brought him back, and need is what brings men back to God.

Lincoln faced the burden of a great nation being torn apart at the seams, and he felt an intensity of need as few men ever have, and he wrote, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom, and that of all about me, seemed insufficient for the day." Here is intense and earnest prayer based on need felt so deeply that only God could meet it.

We are all in a civil war, but because we do not feel it deeply, we do not pray earnestly about it. It is the war within ourselves to live for the flesh, and the things of the world, or to live for the spirit, and the things of Christ. He came to seek and to save the lost, but because we do not feel deeply that the lost are really lost, we do not have intense prayer for their salvation, and we do not witness to them earnestly. Consciously or unconsciously we feel that there is always time, or that there will be a second chance, and there is nothing to worry about. By this subtle trick Satan takes most of the army of the Lord out of the battle, and slows down the conquering march of the kingdom to a crawl. Until we really feel strongly the need of getting lost people saved, we will not pray seriously for that to happen, nor will we pray for the wisdom to know how to communicate the Gospel to them.

Prayer is the link between supply and demand. Need reaches out for resources to satisfy it. This has very practical consequences in our prayer life. It means that our real prayer life is in our desires. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire." I might say a prayer which goes, "Lord give me a deeper understanding of your Word," but if my real desire is to get more money, and my greatest need I feel is the lack of cash, then all day long by my life I am praying, "Lord give me more money." Your real prayer is for what you really feel you have a need. You can ask for wisdom in 10 prayers a day, but if you do not feel any need for it, you will not receive it, for God knows that is not your real prayer. We can learn to ask for all kinds of things that sound good, but if they do not meet a need, it is not truly prayer.

The reason behind all true prayer is a sense of need. If any lack wisdom let him ask of God says James. He knows all do lack it, but if Christians do not feel this lack, and sense a need for it, there is no point in asking. Only what you really need is what you really ask for, for need is the reason you pray. After giving us the reason for prayer James next reveals-

II. THE REQUIREMENT OF PRAYER. v. 6

Recognizing a need is essential, but in itself it is not enough to get the need met by prayer. James says you must ask in faith with no doubting. God requires faith before he meets a need. If you do not believe God can give you the wisdom you lack to enable you to rejoice in life's trials, then you just as well save your breath. God gets personally involved in the laws of prayer, and they are not like natural laws. A man can cast seed into the ground, and whether he believes they can grow or not they will come forth and bear fruit. Prayer is not so impersonal. In prayer you are dealing with nature's Lord, and you cannot just send request to heaven and expect them to be answered regardless of your personal faith. "He that comes to

God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." If you lack such assurance, God will not grant your request.

James is a practical man, and he is not interested in prayer that doesn't work, and so in this first reference to prayer, and in his last one in 5:15 he makes it clear that faith is the requirement for effective prayer. In that final reference he says it is the prayer of faith that will save the sick. Prayer without faith is not practical because it just doesn't work. The motto says, "Prayer changes things." But to be fully accurate it should say that the prayer of faith changes things. Without this requirement being met prayer changes nothing. James is only echoing his Lord and brother, for Jesus said in Matt. 21:22, "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." Remove the requirement of faith, and prayer holds no promise.

Faith involves confidence in your need being legitimate. In other words, if you sense a need, you must believe that God can and will satisfy that need before it does any good to pray. To pray without such confidence is to fail to meet God's requirement, and such praying will be ineffective. You might just as well go out and try to sell a product that you have no confidence in as to try and get God to meet your need without faith. If you said to a prospective customer, "I would like to sell you this vacuum cleaner, but I'm not sure it works better than others. I'm not even sure it works, because I didn't want to try it at home since we just got new carpet. A lot of people say it's not a bad little machine. Would you want one?" Your answer is clearly going to be no! Without faith in your product you will not please man, and without faith in your prayer you will not please God.

God is more discerning than any man, but even men will not give a positive response to a faithless request. God will not reward the

negative. A perfect, or mature faith is a faith that says that my need is legitimate, and that my God is adequate, and He will supply what my need demands. The doubter, on the other hand, is tossed about like a wave in the wind. He is not certain what he needs, and shifts his conviction back and forth every day. He is not convinced God would meet his need even if he was certain, and so he fails to meet God's requirement for prayer. The result leads to our third point.

III. THE REJECTION OF PRAYER. v. 7-8

If you read a hundred books on prayer, probably 90 of them will each that prayer is always answered. It is fantastic the lengths to which Christians will go to try and prove what is clearly contrary to the plain teaching of the Word of God. James tells it like it is. He says that if we pray, not in faith, but with doubt and double-mindedness, we will not receive anything of the Lord. Some will try and get around this by saying God always answers prayer, but sometimes the answer is no. It is a clever face-saving trick to prevent the Christian from blaming himself for his faithlessness. He can throw the responsibility back on God and say, "Well God said no that time."

The fact is, God does say no sometimes. He did to Paul's request to be healed of his thorn in the flesh, but what is dishonest is to put all unanswered prayer in this category, and fail to see that believers are often themselves responsible for the lack of an answer. There is such a thing as prayer that is rejected. God refuses to listen and respond to it at all. He does not say no, for He ignores it because it is unworthy. For example, if a believe has sinned in his life, but still wants God's blessing, he is double minded. He wants to serve 2 masters, and Scripture says his prayer will not even be heard. This was true in the Old Testament, and it is true in the New Testament, and it is true today. In Isa. 59:1-2 we read, "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, or His ear dull that it cannot

hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you so that He does not hear." The prophet is not telling them that God is saying no to their prayer. He is telling them that God is not even listening. Their prayer is not being answered at all.

David understood this, and in Ps. 66:18-20 he wrote, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" David knew that God did reject prayer, and there are many reasons all of which revolve around man's doublemindedness. If you do not practice the golden rule, you will have many prayers rejected. If you do not forgive others your prayer for forgiveness will not be heard. If you do not meet others needs when you are able, your needs will not be met when you cry out to God. Peter even says that not living together properly as husband and wife can lead to prayers being unanswered.

Those who try and escape this clear teaching of James, and other Scriptures, will fail to realize their own responsibility, and, therefore, never correct their lives and press on to perfection. They will remain immature Christians. A. W. Tozer, that great prophet of the Christian And Missionary Alliance denomination, hit hard at the evils of teaching that God always answers prayer. In one of his editorials he wrote, "The God-always-answers-prayer sophistry leaves the praying man without discipline. By the exercise of this bit of smooth casuistry he ignores the necessity to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and actually takes God's flat refusal to answer his prayer as the very answer itself. Of course such a man will not grow in holiness; he will never learn how to wrestle and wait; he will never know correction; he will not hear the voice of God calling him forward; he will never arrive at the

place where he is morally and spiritually fit to have his prayers answered. His wrong philosophy has ruined him."

James is too practical and realistic to let Christians think prayers are always answered. If we listen to James we will see that effective prayer with our lives. We must shape up and follow Christ, for it is out of obedience that faith and confidence grow, and this is the requirement for answered prayer. Effective praying is simply the result of effective Christian living. A good prayer life is the practical result of a life of commitment to Christ. Our greatest need is to live in obedience, and we know God will hear our prayer for wisdom to do so. The answer to this prayer is the key to answers to all other legitimate prayers. It all begins by asking God.

7. CHRISTIAN DIGNITY Based on James 1:9f

An old business man once spoke at his club and told of how he made an investment which brought him great dividends, but for which he did not have to pay a cent of taxes. One night as he closed his store he found a dirty boy of 12 crouched against the building trying to protect himself from the blowing snow. He took the boy inside and fed him, and he listened to his story. All of his family had recently died of the flu, and he had no relatives. The store owner gave him some clothes and \$25.00. He advised him to buy a ticket to go West, and get a rancher to take him on.

Fifteen years passed and he never heard a word. Then one day the young man returned, not as a rider of the range, but as Dr. Fredrick Miller, the man who had made headlines for isolating the flu bug that had left him an orphan. The old man had invested in a lowly person. He was an economic and social nobody, but by

investing in him he did more for humanity than if he had given away all his wealth.

Every nobody can become somebody, and that is why everybody is worthy of investment. This is God's view of man, for it was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for the ungodly. God is no haphazard and foolish investor. When He gave His Son, and His Son gave His life, they expected that investment to pay off with eternal dividends. They knew that all men, however, lowly, could become sons of God. Every man is a potential child of the King. Every man can be born again into the royal family of the Risen, Reigning, Returning Redeemer. This is the theological foundation for Christian dignity, and a sense of self-respect.

James is very much concerned about his subject of Christian dignity, for if Christians do not have a proper grasp of it, they will be poorly prepared to face life's trials. Verses 9-11 is a troublesome paragraph to most students of the Bible, for it does not appear to have any connection with what goes before and what comes after. James writes in verse 2 of counting it joy when you meet various trials, and then he goes on to refer to the need for wisdom to attain the goal of perfection. In verse 12 he takes up the theme again of enduring trials. Before and after these verses the theme is trials of life. It is obvious that James in these verses we are looking at is dealing with some specific examples of the trials Christians must face, and they are poverty and prosperity.

James, as we have emphasized, is very practical, and he knows that one of the greatest trials Christians will face all through history is the trial that comes with too little or too much money, fame, and prestige. Christians will be on both sides of the track, and both have their dangers. Poor Christians and rich Christians both fail to find happiness and a sense of fulfillment in God's will because they lack a proper understanding of Christian dignity.

The Apostle Paul was a man could abound and be abased, and be content in either state. That is, he could be a happy poor man, or a happy rich man. Externals made no difference to him because the basis for his happiness, well being, and self-respect, was not in external circumstances, but in the internal Christ. For him to live was Christ, and it was Christ in him that was the hope of glory. This is the attitude that James is trying to communicate to all Christians. Let's look at his counsel first of all to-

I. THE LOWLY BROTHER v. 9.

We need to establish in our minds that all Christians are not in the same category. Christians are in many different categories, and here they are divided between the lower class and the upper class; the poor and the rich. The common man and the man of culture are two clear categories. Some Christians eat out at McDonald's, and others eat at the Black Angus. Some Christians always have a struggle to make ends meet, and others have money available at all times. This is one of the facts of life. It has always been true, and always will be true.

This means that not all Christian teaching applies to the same people. What may be of value for the poor Christian will not be of value for the rich Christian. James has two perspectives here, and he deals with the two categories in two different ways. Christians must be dealt with according to their individual status, and not like a herd of cattle. If this is true in the matter of economic and social status, it is true in many other categories as well. A true respect for people's personality and dignity demands that you deal with them as individuals with particular and special needs.

James recognizes that the poor and lowly Christian has a unique trial in life, and that he needs a particular kind of wisdom to gain the victory. What is the trial of the brother of low degree? Most of

should know, for most of us, as most Christians through history, fall into this first category. It is hard to be poor and not envy the rich. It is hard to be a nobody and not be jealous of those who are popular. Most Christians feel they are obscure and unknown, and they can easily get depressed about their place in life if they let negative thinking dominate their mind. Most can see themselves in this poem:

Common as the wayside grasses,
Ordinary as the soil.
By the score he daily passes
Going to and from his toil.
Stranger he to wealth and fame-
He is only what's-his-name. Author Unknown

Our names are known only by a few, and most all of them are as equally unknown to the world as we are. Christians can allow their lowly state, and their lack of money and fame, to crush them and leave them feeling worthless. When a Christians feels like he or she is a nobody, and good for nothing, they not only destroy their own joy, but are a hindrance to others. A person who feels like a worthless nobody tends to play the part. They do nothing, for they have no gifts. They try no service, for they are not worthy. The devil has defeated such Christians because they are ignorant of the reality of their Christian dignity. Much that calls itself Christian humility is just a lack of self-respect.

That is why James urges the lowly brother to boast in his exaltation. The Greek word refers to professing boldly something for which you are proud. James is saying that every Christian has something to be proud about. He has a status in Christ that is so lofty that he need not feel inferior to any man. The foolish Christian who lies in the dust like a worthless worm is denying that his life is hid with Christ in God. He is declaring that love has not lifted him

and set his feet on the solid rock. He is still psychologically down in the miry clay.

If only Christians could see that it is a denial of their Christian dignity as children of God they would cease forever to pity themselves as if they were worthless orphans. In 2:5 James writes this way according to the Living Bible-"Listen to me, dear brothers: God has chosen poor people to be rich in faith, and the kingdom of heaven is theirs, for that is the gift God has promised to all those who love Him." If you love God, you are an heir of the greatest fortune in the universe. You have the highest status known to man, and even the archangels cannot top it.

American Christians have become so enamoured with the success imagine that they have only multiplied the tensions that Christians normally have anyway. Several years ago a Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor wrote what he called an open letter to Jane Ordinary. It was published in Christianity Today. Let me share a portion of that letter.

Dear Jane:

"I'm writing to help you shake this feeling of uselessness that has overtaken you. Several times you have said that you don't see how Christ can possibly use you-you're nobody special. The church must bear part of the responsibility for making you feel as you do. I have in mind the success-story mentality of the church. Our church periodicals tell the story of John J. Moneybags who uses his influential position to witness for Christ. At the church youth banquet we have testimony from all-American football star Ox Kickoffski, who commands the respect of his teammates when he witnesses for Christ. We've lead you to think that if you don't have the leverage of stardom or a big position in the business world, you might as well keep your mouth shut-nobody cares what

Christ has done for you."

People of fame, like movie stars, sportsmen, and scientists were first used by the church to show the world that being a Christian did not hold you back in any way from being the best of what you could be. Christianity was consistent with being brilliant, strong, handsome, talented, and rich. All of this is true, but it has caused Christians themselves to lose their sense of balance. They have forgotten that Jesus is just as concerned about the common person. As a matter of fact, he has an even greater investment in the average man than in the superstars, not only because there so many more of them, but because he has chosen them as the main resource for the building of His church.

Listen to Paul in I Cor. 1:26-28, "For consider your call, brethern; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are." We are deceived is we think that Great Commission of Christ is going to be fulfilled by people of fame and fortune. Just about every organization serving Christ is this world would fold up without the support of the common average Christian.

If the community is influenced in any lasting way for Christ, it will not be because we have famous Christians in our midst. It will only be when the average Christian realizes the dignity Christ has given them, and begins to boast in his exaltation, as James says he should. It is the average Christian that is the hope of the average sinner, for he will only be deeply impressed by what he sees Christ doing in those on his level. Bob Hope can lift him with a laugh for awhile, but only John Doe Christian can point him to a Hope that

will lift him to a new life forever. So boast in your exaltation says James. Rejoice that God has given you a position and a power that General Motors executives cannot touch without submission to Christ.

When W. D. Jackson gave his Presidential address to the Baptist Union of Great Britain, he told of how he was in spiritual darkness as he fought in World War I. He stayed in a little village in France where a peasant family took him in. It was a humble home, but a godly home, and when he heard the children pray before they went to bed the flame of faith began to kindle in his heart. He never even knew their names, and it wouldn't make any difference, for nobody knew them anyway. They were used to change the life of a man who became a national Christian leader. The fact is, almost all men of Christian fame were won to Christ by some lowly brother who had a proper respect for what they were as a child of God.

When a Christian loses respect for himself, and fails to boast in his exaltation, and be proud of what God has done for him, and in him, he will not be a channel for God to do through him what He intended to do. All useful Christians are proud of what they have become in Christ. They are not proud of what they were, nor are they proud of how far short they still are from the ideal, but they rejoice that they are no longer what they were, and are moving toward the ideal. Christians will never gain the victory over the trial of being just average until they face realistically their Christian dignity as children of God. If you go through your daily trivial routines thinking nobody cares what you are or do, and that you have as much effect on this world's values as you have on the weather, you will be a defeated Christian, and think it is normal. You become a doubleminded Christian, and James has just warned that this will lead you to receive nothing from the Lord. It is the Christian whose mind is set on things above, and who is conscious of his heritage and dignity as a Christian who will live what he sings-

**A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there;
Though exiled from home, yet still I may sing;
All glory to God, I'm a child of the king.**

James goes on in chapter two to point out that a poor personal attitude toward one's own dignity will lead to social problems of treating others also according to their earthly treasures, rather than for what they are in Christ. In other words, prejudice and bigotry grow out of false concepts of one's own personal dignity. If you think you are nothing you will tend to treat those with less than you like they are dirt, and you will give an evil preference to those who have wealth. This matter of Christian dignity and a sense of self respect is an important issue personally and socially. The world need, and the church needs, Christians who can, in spite of deficiencies in the material and social realm, boast in their exaltation in Christ.

8. CHRISTIAN HUMILITY Based on James 1:10-11

A young girl from a very wealthy family decided to write a story about poor people for her assignment in school. Her story began like this: "Once upon a time there was a poor family. The father was poor, the mother was poor, the children were poor, the butler was poor, the chauffeur was poor, the maid was poor, and the gardener was poor. Everybody was poor." The little girl's concept of poverty was obviously colored by her own environment. This is true for all of us, however, even though it may not be as conspicuous as it was in her case.

Poverty and prosperity are relative terms, and who is rich and who is poor is often very hard to define. People with very little

income in our society can own almost everything that people with large incomes own. They usually pay more for it in the long run, but they can have it if they wish. I remember the surprise I got one day when I took a bag of groceries up some dilapidated steps and pounded on a poor excuse for a door. It almost came off when I did. I was on an errand of mercy to give these poor people a gift of necessities from the church. When I stepped into the house I saw the children dirty and ragged watching a large color television. This was back in the 70's when most of the church members who were giving the food did not yet own a colored set.

In our society you don't have to wait until you can afford it. You can have luxuries today if you are willing to sacrifice necessities. We can't knock it, for such freedom of choice is a freedom most of the world does not have. Most would have little if they had to wait until they could afford it. Richard Armor gives us a humorous insight into this reality.

The bride white of hair, is stooped over her cane,
Her faltering footsteps need guiding,
While down the church aisle, with a wan, toothless smile,
The groom in a wheelchair comes riding,
And who is this elderly couple, you ask?
You'll find when you've closely explored it,
That here is that rare, most conservative pair,
Who waited till they could afford it.

Such people are more than rare, for they are extinct in our society, for we live where even the poor are rich with luxuries that millions never possess in other parts of the world. This means that most Christians today need to listen to James when he gives advice to the rich, as well as his advice to the poor. American Christians are both relatively poor, and relatively rich, and so they can be defeated by the trials that come with either poverty or prosperity.

In our previous message we focused our attention on the trial of poverty and lowliness, and we discovered that we can conquer the tendency toward depression and feeling like a worthless nobody through an honest realization of our Christian dignity. We have a right to be proud as children of God, and we have in Christ that which makes us the richest people on earth. We can say with the poet,

**Lord of the poor, when earth you trod,
The lot you chose was hard and poor;
You taught us hardness to endure,
And so to gain through hurt and pain
The wealth that lasts for evermore.**

A proper sense of our Christian dignity will make us rich, and victorious over the trials that come from lacking the best this world has to offer.

Now we want to focus our attention on verse 10-11 where the opposite trial is dealt with, and that is the trial of prosperity. The treatment of this problem calls for an understanding of Christian humility. Christian dignity and humility must be combined in that Christian who hopes to beat both battles-the battle of fearful depression, and the battle of false pride.

James in verse 10 says the rich Christian is to rejoice in that he is made low, or to rejoice in his humiliation. This is in contrast to the poor Christian rejoicing in his exaltation. What does it mean that the rich Christian has been made low in Christ, when the poor have been lifted? Certainly the rich are exalted also when they became children of God. James is not denying this. He is giving advice on how to gain victory over trials, and the trial of the rich will be the tendency to put their trust in, and find their prestige in their material possessions.

James is telling rich Christians they are to gain the victory over this danger by recognizing that in Christ they have been made equal with the brother of low degree. They have actually lost something by coming to Christ. They have lost the right to be respected for their wealth alone. Christian humility demands that they see themselves as God sees them, and He sees them on a level of equality with all His children. As rich Christians they have no right to lord it over their brethren in Christ who have much less. If they shun them, or treat them as unworthy of equality, they show that they are still measuring life's values by the world's standard. They are failing to conquer in the trial of prosperity, and they will end up with less reward than their brothers of low degree who do succeed in conquering in their trial.

The poor Christian is in danger of thinking too little of himself, and the rich Christian is in danger of thinking too highly of himself. One fails without a sense of dignity, and the other fails without a sense of humility. The Apostle Paul had everything going for him as a leader among the Pharisees. He had position, power and possessions, but he gave it all up, and he counted it as refuse in order that he might have Christ. Jesus Christ was the pearl of great price for which he sold all that he had that he might possess it. The greatest thing that ever happened to Paul was when he got knocked off his high horse of pharisaical pride, and was brought low to the level of Christian humility.

From that point on Paul was all things to all men. He could stand with dignity before Apostles or kings. He could serve the lowly like a common slave. He even wrote a letter for a slave to Philemon. Paul was a rich man who discovered greater riches in Christ, and escaped the world's value system. Like James, he was concerned that rich Christians not get defeated by trust in their riches. He wrote to Timothy in I Tim. 6:17-19, "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth,

which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

James is saying that very same thing. He too wants rich Christians to escape the temptation of wealth, and gain God's best. They can only do so by constantly and consciously rejoicing in their Christian humility. That is, by being grateful that their eyes have been opened to the folly of measuring a person's value by the possessions he has acquired. Christian humility is not saying that you are nothing, or that you are of little value. It is simply recognizing that your dignity and worth as a person is not based on material possessions or social position. Your dignity is based on what Jesus did for you, and for all who receive Him. Your humility is an awareness that you are on the same level with all of God's children. When a Christian thinks he is something special because of what he has, he is living on the level of worldly pride. When he has the same pride as the poor Christian based on being a part of the family of God, then he has the Christian humility he needs to be victorious over the trial of riches.

When the rich Christian has been brought low so that he recognizes his equality with the poor Christian, that is when he can rejoice says James. He is saying you can be happy when you no longer have to base your dignity on those things which cannot last. This explains how a person can rejoice in losing something, and in being brought low. He has lost what is passing away, and by being brought low he has gained a sense of his dignity that will last forever. He has lost a passing security to gain an eternal security. A Christian who finds his security in God alone can face any trial and be victorious. He can be a poor Joseph who became rich, or a rich

Job who became poor, and either way, like Paul, be content in whatever state he is. Worldly wealth is of withering worth, but in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You are truly rich when Christ is the foundation of your wealth.

The rich will have a hard time doing what James advises. Many will live defeated lives because they cannot stop basing their dignity on earthly standards. Most everything James says about the rich in this letter is negative. He knows how hard it is for them to escape the pride of class and position. James, as a leader of the church of Jerusalem, no doubt knew people personally who fit these words of Cullen the poet-

**She thinks that even up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor servant cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.**

God wants all believers to have a sense of dignity and security, but if they find it in power, possessions, or position, rather than in Christ, they have no greater security than the world has which passes away. Christian humility is simply a recognition that all the passing values of this world are no basis for pride or dignity. It is a recognition that the true basis for these things is available to all people equally. A rich Christian can rejoice that he has lost his reason for pride in his riches, and found the same everlasting foundation in Christ that the poor brother has found.

The whole point James is driving at here in his counsel to Christians is that their physical circumstances must always be balanced with the proper spiritual virtues, or they will be defeated by life's trials. If you are poor, you must experience spiritual prosperity, and if you are rich, you must experience spiritual humility. If you do not balance out life with the proper spiritual

virtues, your physical circumstances will determine your character, and you will be no different than the non- Christian, and that means you have a defeated Christian life. Satan has succeeded in neutralizing your witness.

A wise Christian is one who never lets poverty or prosperity hinder his service for Christ. If you are too poor to serve Christ with joy, or too rich to have the time to serve Christ in humility, you have been blinded to the true values of life. You are a double minded man, and James says you will receive nothing from the Lord in that state. Do not let Satan rob you of God's best, but get all the riches He wants to give you by practicing Christian humility.

9. HOW TO RECEIVE A ROYAL REWARD James 1:12-18

In modern educational psychology we read such statements as, "Learning takes place only when the act that is performed is reinforced or rewarded." And, "Without reward, people fail to learn." Educators are more and more realizing that rewards play a major part in teaching that is effective. God was well aware of this truth long before man. In Heb. 11:6 we read, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarded of those who diligently seek Him." In Matt. 5:11-12 we read, "Blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven."

To want rewards is perfectly normal. Intelligent beings take a course of action that results in the best reward by nature. We are made that way by God. James is only following the teaching of his

divine brother when he tells us to count it all joy when we fall into trials, knowing there is great reward in endurance. James is trying to teach us the secret of receiving a royal reward. He breaks this practical lesson into two sections. One is positive and the other is negative.

I. HE DECLARES A FINAL OBJECTIVE. v. 12.

James says we are not suffering for sufferings sake just as the football players are not on the field taking those spills just for the sake of putting their body to a test. They are enduring those trials because they have a goal to reach. The Christian who endures trials also has a goal to reach, and it is the final objective for which he was created. It is to receive the royal reward of the crown of life.

When Jesus spoke to the church of Smyrna thought the Apostle John in Rev. 2:10 he said, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." One of the early church martyrs was Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna. He refused to sacrifice to Caesar. At his trial the Proconsul said, "Curse Christ and I will release you." Polycarp spoke those words for which he has become famous. "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

He was put to the stake and the fire was kindled, but wind blew the flame around him, and so the executioner killed him with a sword. He was faithful unto death, and, therefore, he received the reward that both Jesus and James speak of-the crown of life.

What is this crown of life that is worth dying for? It is the ultimate goal, and final objective of our existence. It is that quality of life which is in perfect harmony with God. To live without

fellowship with God is to have only the rags of life. To live in perfect fellowship with God is to have the crown of life. The crown of life goes only to those who endure all things for the sake of Christ. It is that quality of life that enables a person to reign with Christ because they are in perfect harmony with the Lord of life. It is the life of love, praise, and service which we see displayed by the saints in heaven as they are pictured in Revelation.

How do we receive this royal reward? James says the road to this reward is the road of endurance. Kings only want tried men in their army, and so how much more does the King of Kings want tried men and women to serve with Him? The trials of life are training us for the day of our coronation when we receive the crown of life. The requirement is that we endure. It is not just suffering trials that is important, for that is as easy as falling off a log. It is the enduring of the trials that is vital. It is not blessed are they who escape, but blessed are they who endure. Endurance is the key, and this means that we must be convinced that suffering can be successful, and that it prepares us for attaining our final objective of being Christlike. Only as we are convinced that trials can be of worth can we endure. Robert Service wrote,

**And so in the strife of the battle of life,
Its easy to fight when you're winning;
Its easy to slave, and starve and be brave,
When the dawn of success is beginning.
But the man who can meet despair and defeat
With a cheer, there's the man of God's choosing;
The man who can fight to heaven's own height
Is the man who can fight when he's losing.**

Endurance is being positive when circumstances are negative. It is not just passive suffering, for many can do this. Some pagan people's even let great injuries be inflicted on their bodies without a

murmur. This is not Christian endurance. Christian endurance is like that of Christ when He endured the cross, and ask God to forgive those who crucified Him. It is like Madam Chiang Kai Shek saying, after all the Japanese did to China, "There must be no bitterness. No matter what we have undergone and suffered, we must try to forgive those who injured us, and remember only the lesson gained thereby."

Christian endurance is not only to go all the way, but to go all the way in the right spirit, and without self-pity, discontent, and giving up. Some endure great trials to the end, but allow themselves to become bitter, and this is not being prepared for receiving the crown of life. One fails the test who is not more Christlike for having taken it. Both of the thieves endured the same suffering on the cross, but the suffering of one cause him to look to Christ and receive the crown of life. The other bore it also, but he never looked to Christ, and so he was tried and failed. No one suffers successfully and receives the reward who is not made more Christlike in their trials. The secret of receiving the reward is endurance, and the secret of endurance is in looking to Christ.

**Why should I fear the darkest hour,
Or tremble at the tempter's power?
Jesus vouchsafes to be my tower.
Though hot the fight, why quite the field?
Why must I either flee or yield,
Since Jesus is my mighty shield?
Against me earth and hell combined,
But on my side is power Divine;
Jesus is all, and He is mine. Author Unknown**

In declaring our final objective, James not only tells of the reward, and the road by which we reach it, but also the result in the present because of following that road to the ultimate reward. The

result is present happiness. The man who by faith in the promise of God is enduring trials, and counting them joy, has found the secret of the happy life. The world think happiness is found in having, but the Bible says it is found, not in what we have, but in whom we hope. Happiness is that attitude of life that knows there is meaning and purpose no matter how rough the road gets. Without this hope and expectation there can be no lasting happiness.

Solomon in Ecclesiastes says that he had everything. He had wisdom, wealth, wine, and women, and yet he concluded that all was vanity, and he found no happiness in all that the world could offer. Apart from hope in God there is no such thing as happiness, but with this hope, though we lose all else, we are yet blessed. Ignatius was the Bishop of Antioch. He was ordained by either Peter or Paul. He was the first prominent Christian to be martyred after the Apostles. When he was being taken by the Romans to be thrown to the wild beasts in the Coliseum, he wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome, and he said, "I bid all men know that of my own free will I die for God. Let me be given to the wild beasts for through them I attain unto God. I am God's wheat. I am ground by the wild beasts that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. Come fire and cross and grappling with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, racking of limbs, crushing of my whole body; only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ."

He counted it joy, and he endured to the end with a happiness that only Christ can give. The truth that James teaches here has been proved over and over again in the lives of those who have had to endure persecution. If you follow the road of endurance, it will lead you to the royal reward of the crown of life. Endurance is based on the hope of reward, and the knowing that things will not always be as they now are. Change may come through death that leads you into the eternal kingdom, or it may come in time, and you get to see reward in this life for holding on. Every negative

circumstance is only temporary, and every trial will one day be just a memory.

**Once in Persia reigned a king
Who upon his signet ring
Graved a maxim true and wise
Which, if held before his eyes,
Gave him wisdom at a glance;
Fit for any change or chance.
Helpful words, and these are they;
Even this shall pass away. Author Unknown**

Recognition of this enables people to endure failure, knowing that success can still be ahead. Most successful people have to endure many trials of failure before they get to the reward of success. Abraham Lincoln marched off to the Black Hawk War as a Captain, and he returned demoted to a private. If he would have let failure defeat him, he never would have been heard of again. But he endured that trial, and now everyone has heard of him. Even the rewards of this life go to those who endure. Edgar Guest put in 4 lines the philosophy that has led to the heroes of history, and the kind of people James says every Christian should be.

**One broken dream is not the end of dreaming.
One shattered hope is not the end of hoping;
Beyond the storm and tempest stars are gleaming,
Still plan your castles though your castles fall.**

This is the basic theme of James, but he has a negative side he has to deal with.

II. HE DENOUNCES A FALSE OBJECTION. vv. 13-15.

Someone might conclude after hearing all this about the worth

and value of trials if they are endured, that if one fails to overcome temptation that it is God's fault. If a man is tempted and falls, he might be further tempted to say, "Why should I lose the reward because I fell, It was God who put me to the test? If He hadn't tested me I would not have fallen." James says is response to this false conclusion, "Now wait, lets not get confused about what I am saying. I have not been talking about falling into sin. I have been talking about the troubles and trials of life that come because you are seeking to live for Christ. If you are going to talk about enticement to sin, it is a different story. God has nothing to do with this at all. If you fall into sin, and suffer trials because of it, and you endure those trials, that has nothing to do with receiving the crown of life."

God may test you, but He will never tempt you. To test is to bring out the best in you, but to tempt is to bring out the worst. God tests, but Satan tempts. They are both trials, but one has the goal of making you more than you now are, and the other has the goal of making you less than you are now are. God put Abraham to the test to try his faith, but when Abraham lied to Pharaoh about his wife being his sister, that was sin and God had nothing to do with tempting his to tell such a lie.

Man from the beginning has wanted to throw blame on someone else for his sin, and if possible blame it all on God. He made everything that is, and He is the Author of life, and so He should be held responsible, and not me. God made alcohol possible, and so all the consequences of drinking must be blamed on Him. He is the one who made the tobacco plant, and so He is the one to blame for cancer of the lungs. When Adam blamed Eve for his sin, he was really blaming God. He said in Gen. 3:12, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." You are the one who gave me this woman, and so who is really to blame for what has happened here? That is what Adam was saying, and implying that God was to blame. Ever since man has looked for

ways to blame God for all the evil of life and history.

James makes the strongest statement possible, and he declares that God cannot be tempted to evil and He never tempts anyone else to evil. It is contrary to His very nature. Everything good in life comes from God, but He is not the author of any evil. He is the father of lights, and the giver of every good and perfect gift. He never changes either, and so He does not once in a while slip some evil into the world. He is consistently always good, and never the cause of what is bad. There is an ancient legend of a king who died, and ambassadors were sent to choose a successor between two infant twins. Both were sleeping, but they noticed that one had his tiny fist closed, and the other has his hand wide open. They chose the one with the open hand, and he became known as the generous King with the open hand. This describes the God of the Bible. He is the giver of all the good gifts that men receive.

James tells us about the character of God to show how foolish it is to try and blame Him for all the trials of life that come from the sins of people who yield to temptation. These do not qualify for the royal reward. Those who think that God is the author of these temptations are doubleminded in their thinking about God. He is not the author of both good and evil. Sweet and bitter water do not come from the same well. He does not tempt to do the very things that He forbids men to do. It is a shame that God's character has to be defended, but the fact is it is being called into question all the time. There are major theologies even that make God the author of evil by saying that He predestined the sins that people commit. We need to give heed to the strong statement of James and recognize that any theology that makes God the author of sin and evil is a false theology.

Do not blame God for that lust in you that makes sinful behavior look so attractive. When you do recognize that you have an enemy

within that is enticing you to what God forbids, then you are facing a trial that can count for the reward, for you will be trying to endure not giving into temptation for the sake of obeying your Lord. This can be a legitimate trial that qualifies for the royal reward. It is Satan's testing and not God's, but if you endure and stay faithful to God, it will lead to reward because you are doing it for Him. Most of the trials that James is thinking of are the external trials of persecution, but the internal trials of temptation are even more universal, and these are the trials that most of us today will have to endure. We are seldom persecuted, but we are always tempted. We are not tempted by God, but our culture is tempting us every day.

The Christian does not escape the struggle with temptation. C. S. Lewis, one of the great Christian authors of the 20th century wrote of his struggle in a letter. "Pray for me; I am suffering incessant temptations to uncharitable thought at present; one of these black moods in which nearly all one's friends seem to be selfish or even false. And how terrible that there should be even kind of pleasure in thinking evil." Every Christian has the potential of evil thoughts of all kinds. They may not be the same as his, but they cover the whole world of evil. It is wise to be aware of just how evil your thoughts can be, for then you are not shocked at what can happen inside your head. You need to share these thoughts openly with God and denounce them as that which is not your will, just as you know they are not God's will. You are not evil to have such thoughts, but they can be a temptation to follow through and do evil.

It is your responsibility of know where your weakness is, and in what areas you need to pray for God's wisdom to overcome the temptation. Paul says in I Cor. 10:13, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." That is what James is saying in verse 5. Ask God for

wisdom, and if you ask believing, you will receive what is needed to endure and conquer temptation, and you will then stand the test and receive the royal reward of the crown of life.

10. ANGRY SAINTS Based on James 1:19-20

Near the end of the last century a group of minors in a mid-Western state became angry. They expressed that anger by igniting a carload of coal and pushing it down the mine shaft. Like most who act in anger, they could not foresee the long range consequences of their action. When the burning coal struck the bottom of the mine it spread to the layers of coal within the earth, and 52 years later it was still burning. It consumed 12 million tons of coal, and burned over an area of 10 square miles. Now and then a road would cave in that had been undermined by the eating fire. Property values in the whole area were greatly reduced, and all of the people suffered. One farmer even dug up roasted potatoes from his field. All efforts to quench the fire were fruitless, and so a moment of anger led to a lifetime of living with the consequences.

What those minors did illustrates what millions of individuals are doing daily by letting their lives be controlled by anger. Add the letter D to the word anger, and you have danger. In a state of anger we are only one letter away from danger. This means all of us live dangerously, because all of us get angry. It is a universal human emotion, and the saints must wrestle with this trial, along with all the others they face.

James does not say we are to eliminate anger. He says we are to be slow to anger. James is too realistic and practical to think that the saints will never feel angry. Anger in itself is a normal and

legitimate human emotion, but it is so little understood that most men fail to find its values, and let it be expressed in destructive, rather than constructive, ways. There are no sinful emotions; only sinful uses of them. Anger is no more sinful than joy, for God and Jesus experienced both of them.

Anger handled properly will make a Christian more effective in living the Christian life. Anger is a form of energy, and energy has to be used in some way. You cannot destroy it. You have to channel it, and like atomic energy, you can channel it to purposes of destruction, or to purposes of construction where it will be helpful rather than harmful. When we are dealing with anger, we are dealing with a powerful energy which will serve the cause of good or evil, and, therefore, it is important for Christians to understand all they can about this energy which they possess.

Since most of the energy of anger is used for evil, the predominant emphasis of Scripture is on the peril of anger. In verse 20 James makes it clear that the anger of man is not a fit instrument for doing the will of God. The chances of being just and merciful when you are angry are about as great as the chances of removing a splinter gently with a wood saw. It is just not the right tool for the job, and anger is just not the right tool for expressing God's righteousness. That is why we read so many places in Scripture of the peril of anger, and the need to forsake its path.

Psa. 37:8, "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath."

Psa. 14:17, "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly."

Pro. 22: 24-25, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man thou shalt not go lest thou learn his ways and get a snare to thy soul."

Pro. 29:22, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression."

The Old Testament looks at anger as folly, but in the New Testament the language is even stronger, for anger is seen as one of the gravest of sins. Matt. 5:22, "But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Paul, in several places, lists anger, strife, and wrath as the sins which make the saints carnal. He writes in Titus 1:7, that a bishop must be blameless, "...Not self-willed, not soon angry." All that the Bible says about the peril of anger is backed up by studies in modern psychology.

On the other hand, we dare not close the door on the positive side, and so before we look further at the perilous power of anger, we want to look at-

I. THE POSITIVE POWER OF ANGER.

James implies there is some value to anger by putting it in the same category with speaking. He says we are to be slow to speak and slow to anger. He does not say give up speaking and anger altogether, but recognize that both can do more harm than good, so use your tongue and your emotion of anger very cautiously. Nitroglycerin can do a lot of good, but it can also blow everything to pieces if handled carelessly. So it is with both speech and anger. Speaking can be used for the glory of God, and so can anger. Paul makes this clear in Eph. 4:26: "Be ye angry but do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger." So, it is possible to be angry and not sin, and this means there can be a positive side to anger.

Two things characterize a positive Biblical anger. 1. It is slow in coming. 2. It is fast in departing.
Prov. 14:29, "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding, but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."
Prov. 16:42, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty...."
Eccles. 7:9, "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry." Counting to ten

is a Biblical idea. All of these texts emphasize the point James is stressing. We are to be slow in anger. Paul stresses the point that we are to quickly settle the issue of anger and not let the sun go down on our wrath. Anger is to be hard to come, and easy to go.

Jesus is our ideal in everything, and he reveals in his manhood the ideal of positive anger. The wrath of the Lamb is not our ideal, for what Jesus does as Lord is not for our example. It is what He did as man that is to be our guideline to follow. We have no right to play God, but we have a responsibility to be all that man can be by God's help, and that means to be Christlike. If we examine our Lord's anger, we discover that He was slow to anger, and when it did come, He expressed it, and did not hold a grudge. Jesus became angry with His disciples when they persisted in their blindness. He rebuked them and said, "Oh ye of little faith." When Peter insisted on holding Him back from fulfilling His purpose, He sharply responded, "Get thee behind me Satan."

Anger expressed toward a loved one, not to hurt them, but to inform them, or prevent them from folly, is a positive anger, and is often necessary to maintain a good relationship. Husbands and wives who use anger properly never have to suffer the negative use of it. Jesus used it to communicate His frustration with those whom He loved. If we do not learn this, we often let frustration go until it explodes, and that kind of anger is never positive.

A wife felt for years that her husband did not share his part of the cost when they went out for an evening with other couples. It griped her, and she resented it, but she suppressed it. Suppressing anger is something like trying to keep an inflated inner tube under water. Part of it pops up, and while you struggle to get that part under, it pops up in another place, and finally you lose control and it leaps to the surface. Suppressed anger will pop up someplace else if it is not expressed. Millions of people don't know it, but their physical

problems are the result of suppressed anger. If you don't let it out, that energy has to do something, and it usually does harm to your body or mind. It is like trying to hide a fire: Something is going to get burned.

Getting back to our story, the wife ended up with a need for therapy, and in a group session her resentment came out. When she let her husband know about it she discovered that he had contributed his share all along in a quiet and unassuming way. The point is, had she expressed her anger to him, and got it off her chest how she thought he was a cheap skate, the truth would have come out in the open, and the problem would have been solved before it became an issue. Positive anger informs others of your hurt, and is not a means by which you hurt others.

Anger is energy, and energy moves us to action. The only way we ever get any problem in life settled is by someone getting angry and deciding to get to the bottom of it. The people who strive for excellence are those who get angry with mediocrity and shoddiness. Jesus did this when He drove out the money changers in the temple. That was positive anger because its purpose was not to do harm, but to protect others against a great injustice and evil. If you can watch people being treated unfairly and unjustly, and not get angry, you are not being Christlike in your attitude.

Prisons were vile hell holes until John Howard lost his temper, and did something about it. Slavery was entrenched in our society until Lincoln got mad, and hit it hard. Hospitals were terrible nightmares for the sick until Florence Nightengale got angry, and hurled her anger at government officials until things were changed. Most of the great changes for good in the world begin with an angry saint. A wife said to her husband, before you go to work give the maid a scolding. He said I thought you were satisfied with her. I am, but she is beating carpets today and she always does it better

when she is angry. Some things are done best when we are angry, and this is especially true when we fight evil.

Martin Luther said, "When I am angry, I can pray well and preach well." When you are angry you really care, and caring is what counts. The man who lets nothing bother him, cares about nothing. If you do care, and have the compassion of Christ, you will be angry at all the forces that mistreat and injure people. Anger at evil is one of the ways the energy of compassion is produced. If men never get angry at evil, there is no power generated in them to work for a change. Jesus had a healthy anger against injustice, and He made His protest. As God, He judged those who refused to heed His protest as a man.

The positive anger of a Christian is anger that motivates us to protest against evil. It instantly becomes a perilous power, however, if we take it upon ourselves and try and carry out the judgment of God. Anger which motivates us to fight unjust laws and practices is positive, but anger which leads us to destroy the lives and property of the guilty, is anger which does not work the righteousness of God.

The positive anger of Christ is brought out clearly in Mark chapter 3. Jesus entered the synagogue, and saw a man with a withered hand. Jesus had compassion on him, but He saw the Pharisees watching Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath. Verse 5 says, "And He looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart." Jesus did not care what they would do, for He knew it was right to do good on the Sabbath, and so He healed the man. He did not start a fight with the Pharisees and seek them do them injury. Positive anger drives us to do what is good and constructive. The prejudices of people should not move us to fight them, but to help the people they oppress. That is letting the energy of anger be used in such a way that it becomes a virtue. That is

being angry and not sinning, as Paul commands.

Anger without compassion is not positive anger, and will always do harm for the cause of Christ. Spiros Zodhiates tells of a church which had two candidates who came, and both preached on hell. They both used the same text, and had the same Biblical position, but the people voted for the second rather than the first. When asked why, they said the first one spoke as if he were glad people were going to hell, the second one seemed sorry for it. Both had the doctrine right, but only one had a Christlike spirit. The truth of Christ without the love of Christ can never accomplish the work of Christ. That is what Paul is saying in verse 20. The anger of man just will not do the work of God. Only that anger which is controlled by the spirit of Christ can be used for such a positive purpose. Look now at-

II. THE PERILOUS POWER OF ANGER.

Anger has always been one of the seven deadly sins, but few Christians treat it as a serious sin. They have to ignore the teaching of Christ and the Apostles, and the whole of Christian history to do this, but this is a small obstacle for the human heart which is deceitful above all things. We can easily deceive ourselves into believing that anger is a mere trifle, and not to be compared with the sins we condemn in others.

One of the reasons we minimize the sin of anger is just because it is so common among the saints. Like the world, we tend to think if something is common, it must be okay. If everybody is doing it, it cannot be wrong to do it. If everybody loses their temper now and then, it is perfectly normal, and therefore, acceptable. We follow this logic because we hate to face up to the fact that we all have a tiger in our tank that can suddenly give us power to do evil. June Callwood in her book, Love, Hate, Fear, Anger And The Other Lively

Emotions writes, "One of the most appalling discoveries a person can make about himself is to meet the hellhound of anger he contains. A glimpse of this inner hyena leaves a man shaken and confused."

Cain rose up and killed his brother in anger, but he was not a freak, he was normal man who didn't know how to control the energy of anger. It has happened to born again Christians. In a fit of anger they have killed someone. More than one Christian has served a prison sentence for involuntary manslaughter. I read of one who got in a fight with his boss and gave him a push. The boss hit his head on a piece of metal and died. Of course, this was not the intention of the Christian who pushed him, but that is the nature of anger. It tends toward accomplishing evil ends rather than the righteousness of God.

Moses, the meekest man alive, and greatest man of God of his day, let his anger get the best of him. He struck the rock he was to merely speak to, and God punished him for this act of anger by preventing him from leading Israel into the promise land. Angry saints can be dangerous to themselves, and to others. Studies have shown that when anger takes over the rest of the brain is as if it was paralyzed. That means anger can turn a man into a robot gone bezerk. There is no control, and one is not subject to the leading of reason, common sense, or the Holy Spirit.

Anger is a primary cause of prejudice. If you are angry at how life is going for you, and angry at yourself for being poor, or angry because you are not shown respect because you are not rich, anger may be suppressed and come out as prejudice toward others. A test at Yale revealed this. A group of men were asked to fill out a questionnaire on their feelings toward people of another race. After the questionnaire was filled they were promised an exciting night of entertainment. They were in a good mood as they anticipated a great evening, and they had a high degree of respect for the minority group

they were being questioned on.

Then it was announced that the evenings entertainment had to be canceled for some organizational meeting that meant nothing to them. They were angry and aggravated, and in that state they were asked to fill out one more form. The results revealed a radical change in their attitude toward the minority group. Prejudice and negative feelings of all kinds were brought out as they expressed their anger. The point is, an angry man cannot relate to others honestly. Anger creates all kinds of destructive negatives which hurt us and others. How can you prevent this? The answer is found in the total context in which James deals with anger. All of your problems come from within. They are not from God. The battle is with your own self-image. Anger is aroused by anything we feel is a blow to our prestige. Dr. Dolby, Professor of Psychology at Baylor University said, if you say his knowledge of Spanish is poor, he is not the least upset, for he does not think of himself as a student of Spanish. But if you question his knowledge of psychology, his anger begins to rise rapidly. The person who feels he is being attacked or belittled will be angry.

The best defense against anger is your confidence in your status before God. If you have assurance of God's approval and acceptance, you will not fear the puny pin pricks of peoples perverted tongues. All you do when you get angry is reveal your own lack of self-respect. The man who does not easily get offended can let criticism roll off him like water off a duck's back. He is secure in his relationship to Christ, and because he knows who he is, and what his worth is to his Lord, he does not have to defend his ego with anger. Christian maturity involves a total acceptance of one's value. This includes the ability to accept failures as part of the process of growth, without any need to blame God, self, or others. If you are like a pile of gun powder ready to flare up every time a spark of personal offense is produced, your problem is a poor self-image. You lack an

adequate supply of the water of life that can keep you cool.

As followers of Christ we need to let the Spirit of Christ be the controlling influence that enables us to experience the positive power of anger, and escape the perilous power of anger.

**We mutter and sputter,
We fume and we snort.
We mumble and grumble,
Our feelings are hurt.
We can't understand things,
Our vision grows dim.
When all that we need is,
A moment with Him.**

Author Unknown

11. HOW TO BE A BIBLICAL BELIEVER James 1:19-25

Can a Christian be non-biblical? Can he defend teachings and practices that are contrary to Scripture? Can he reject those who are taught in God's Word? The Bible itself and history answer, yes. Yes it is possible to be a Christian who is more in love with his own opinions than with the revelation of God. It is just this possibility that has been the cause of so much poor Christianity. Why has the Christian world so often been split by bitter controversy that has hindered the progress of the kingdom of God? It is because Christians, and not just superficial Christians, but born again Christians, who can ignore God's Word in favor of their own ideas.

We thank God for Martin Luther, for he gave the Bible back to

the people in their own language, and without the mixture of many foolish traditions. But we see even in the life of a great man like this the danger of becoming non-biblical. He preached justification by faith as the central theme of his theology, and in so doing he was thoroughly biblical, but the Catholic opponents who argued with him kept quoting the book of James against him. They kept quoting, "Faith without works is dead." Rather than examining closely the teachings of Paul and James to see that they did not contradict each other, he was ready to throw the book of James into the river. He called it a right strawy epistle. He was ready to reject this part of God's Word when it seemed to conflict with what he thought it should say. We usually associate this kind of practice with liberalism, but only the blind can fail to see that fundamentalists and evangelicals are also guilty. It was a problem in the early church as well.

James is writing to born again Jewish Christians who are apparently caught up in religious controversy in which there is more heat than light. James has to call their attention several times to the dangers of a hasty and uninformed tongue that can cause so much trouble. James stresses the place of God's Word in their lives, and he urges them to make it the basis of all their attitudes and actions. The dangers of being controlled by our own pride and opinions are still with us today, and so we can all profit from this lesson of James on how to be a biblical believer. It is a very simple lesson to learn, but not as simple to practice, and according to James, if it is not practiced it really is not learned either. There are two basic requirements to being biblical.

I. WE MUST BE RECEPTIVE TO THE WORD. vv. 19-21.

Since it is by the word of truth that God brought us into the kingdom, it is by the Word that we are to be guided. It is not only the source of our salvation, but the source of our sanctification. The

most important qualification for effective Christian growth is an eagerness and willingness to hear the Word of truth. In our day we should add, "Be swift to read." When James wrote people did not have access to the Word of God like we do today. Most of what they learned came through the hearing of the Word as it was read. That is why the Bible says very little about reading, but a great deal about hearing. Jesus in concluding the Sermon On The Mount said, "He who hears my words and does them is like the wise man who built his house on the rock."

The idea is that we must be receptive to the Word if we expect our lives to be guided by it. There is no greater mistake than thinking all is well when we have gotten someone to make a decision for Christ. God's goal is that men might be conformed to the image of His Son, and this is not accomplished by a decision. It is accomplished by a life of receptivity to the Word of God. You would think Christians would recognize this, and realize they can never know enough of God's Word. The greatest of biblical scholars are always students who are constantly learning more. No one has ever exhausted the teachings of God's Word, even though some find it hard to admit they don't have all the answers.

This seems to have been the problem with the Christians James wrote to. They were authorities from birth. They had the answers, and they knew how things ought to go, and they were eager to get on with things according to their expert advice. They were swift to speak and slow to hear, and, of course, with this attitude you immediately run into trouble, for experts of this nature seldom agree, and so soon there is controversy. Since both sides of the issue are more eager to defend their opinion of the matter than they are in searching the Word of God, the result is not just a friendly discussion, but an angry argument in which tempers explode, and the fires of hell are kindled within the very church of God.

We see then that James is dealing with a serious matter which could have saved the Christian church much heartache if they would have given heed to his teaching. A biblical believer is one who is more concerned about extending the kingdom of God and His righteousness than of defending his own pride. He is characterized by an attitude of meekness, which is every ready to receive more light from God's Word. Few things have caused so many problems as the unwillingness to hear God's voice on matters of controversy. If we could only be like Augustine who said in his controversy with a false cult of his day. His opponent cried out, "Hear me, hear me!" Augustine responded, "Neither let me hear thee, nor do thou hear me, but let us both hear the Apostle." That is an example of being swift to hear and slow to speak.

It is never right, wise, nor Christian to judge a matter without hearing the other side, and that is what James means by being slow to speak. Prov. 18:13 says, "He who answers before listening-that is his folly and his shame." Some people form an opinion and start tongue lashing a fellow Christian before they even his defense. We had a psychology professor in college who tried an experiment. A crippled girl on campus came to class late, and he began to scold her. She raised her hand to tell why she was late, but he would not let her speak. He just warned her and went on teaching. The class was clearly disturbed, and so to avoid any outburst it was arranged that one of the most likely men in class to cause trouble was to raise his hand as if he wanted to say something about this unjust treatment of the girl. The professor said, "Any discussion on the matter would be taken up after class." Before the class ended he announced that we were to write about our feelings of anger toward him. It was all arranged as a test. It revealed how angry we all got because he was not willing to hear her side. He was swift to speak and slow to hear, and it made us all mad.

There is such a thing as legitimate anger, for we are exhorted to

be angry and sin not. The sin of anger comes because of lack of self-control. It can be right to be angry, but not to fly off the handle and add another evil to what you think is evil. If a man could learn to be quiet when he is angry, he would soon cool off for lack of fuel. Words become fuel for anger. As someone has said, "Hitting the ceiling is the wrong way to get up in the world." James is not saying we should not speak at all, but that we should be slow to speak. Take time to think and make sure you represent the will of God when you do speak.

Joseph Parker, the great English preacher said, "Let us keep ourselves out of those little fuming controversies in which bigots almost fizzle themselves to death, thinking that if they get angry the universe will be kept from tilting over." If we really are seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness we will not be characterized by a puffed up pride that speaks out on all matters with dogmatic authority. The biblical believer will be one with a spirit of meekness, and a spirit of receptivity that is open to all that the Bible has to say. The fact is, almost all heresies and cults tend to stress some aspect of biblical truth that has been neglected by orthodox Christianity, and it is wise to even listen to them to try and discover something biblical that we have ignored. In order to be a biblical believer we see a second point that James stresses.

II. WE MUST BE RESPONSIVE TO THE WORD. vv. 22-25.

There is a balance that is to characterize our beliefs. The Bible never leaves us stranded on an island of half truth. James has just emphasized how important it is to be receptive to the Word, but now he goes on to show that hearing is not an end in itself. We hear in order to heed. We must receive the Word to even begin, but then we must respond to obedience if we are going to claim to be biblical believers.

I can just imagine some who heard the first part of the message of James, who were people who never get involved in controversy, and who never get angry over any difference in doctrine, and they are congratulating themselves on being so much superior to other Christians. They are swift to hear and slow to speak, but then James goes on in verse 22 with a but. But wait a minute, you who have learned the first requirement. Don't break your arm patting yourself on the back until you hear the conclusion of the matter. Ignorance of the Word certainly does not work the righteousness of God, but knowledge that does nothing is just as useless, and so do not be deceived. Even if you do listen to the Word, and learn its truths, if they do not change your character and your conduct, you are better informed, but still non-biblical. There are two ways to be non-biblical. One is to be unknowing, and the other is to know and not be obedient to it.

The receptive hearer must be a responsive doer. If he is not, he may not be causing all the trouble that the quick tempered Christians causes, but he is deceiving himself, for he will get to thinking that knowledge is life, and that the more he knows, the better he will be. Most of us need to beware of this deception. We almost unconsciously feel that if we can get people to memorize so many verses, and so many facts, like how many books of the Bible, and who killed Able, and who built the Ark, and how many times did the cock crow when Peter denied Christ, that then they will be better Christians, but this is not necessarily so. It is not what we know of the Word, but what we obey that makes us better Christians.

This is the very thing that makes a growing Christian vulnerable. He is learning much truth from the Word, and he begins to feel superior and self-sufficient. He feels he is strong in the Lord because he knows so much of the Word. Then Satan lets loose with his fiery darts, and he discovers that he does not have on the whole armor of God, and he falls wounded in the battle against sin. If you ever

wonder why it is that people who know so much of the Word can fall, it is because of the very thing that James warns against. They are deceived into thinking that hearing without doing is sufficient.

Strangely enough, this is even a danger for the non-Christian. I mean by this the non-Christian who is a professing Christian. There are many who hear the Gospel over and over, and they know it so well that they are convinced they must be Christians. I remember talking to a man who was so proud of the fact that he heard the great evangelist Billy Sunday. He never indicated that he received Christ as Savior, he just seemed to think that hearing him gave some kind of advantage before God. I do not doubt that there are many who listen to Billy Graham with the same deception. They think that just hearing the Gospel is good in itself, even if they do not respond to the Christ who is proclaimed. Hearing the Gospel no more makes a Christian than hearing the rules of baseball makes you a professional player. Hearing a recipe does not make you a cook. Faith comes by hearing, but what James is trying to make clear is that a faith that does nothing but hear is not real faith. Someone put it this way:

"The Word of God by faith received-Imparts regeneration,
And he who hath in Christ believed-Lives out a new creation,
But if we hear and do it not, -We hear for condemnation,
For doers of the Word, we are taught-Are heirs of Christ's
salvation."

We all need to recognize that the Bible is to be lived, and not just learned. It is to be a guide to our daily conduct, and not just a text book of facts to cram into our cranium. A mechanic is one who does mechanical work. A carpenter is one who does carpentry. And electrician is one who does electrical work. The Christian is one who does the works of Christ, and carries out the will of Christ as he is taught in the Word. If he only hears and does not do, he is like a mechanic who never uses a wrench, or a carpenter who never uses a

hammer, and an electrician who never uses wiring. He is, says James, like a man who looks into the mirror, sees that his face is dirty, and then goes off to work without washing.

James is showing us how ridiculous it is to think that mere hearing of the Word is enough. Nobody is so ignorant that they think just knowing about their dirty face will make any difference. They know that when they see the mess they are in, they have to act on the message of the mirror if it is to be of any value. There is no point in even looking to see your face if you do not act on the information it gives you. Looking in the mirror is receiving the message, but if you do not respond to the message and clean off the dirt it is of no value to have received it. So it is when you look into the Word of God, or hear it. If you do not do anything about what it reveals to you, it is as worthless for your soul as the mirror is for your face when no action is taken. Only those who respond to what the Word reveals can claim to be biblical believers.

In verse 25 James sums up the two requirements for being a truly biblical believer. Be receptive and be responsive. You start with a positive attitude and follow through with practical action. Maud Frazer Jackson captures the essence of what James is saying in her poem.

**What if I say-
"The Bible is God's holy Word,
Complete, inspired, without a flaw"-
But let its pages stay
Unread from day to day,
And fail to learn therefrom God's law;
What if I go not there to seek,
The truth of which I glibly speak,
For guidance on this earthly way,-
Does it matter what I say?**

**What if I say-
That Jesus Christ is Lord divine,
Yet fellow-pilgrims can behold
Naught of the Master's love in me,
No grace of kindly sympathy?
If I am of the Shepherd's fold,
Then shall I know the Shepherd's voice
And gladly make His way my choice.
We are saved by faith, yet faith is one
With life, like daylight and the sun.
Unless they flower in our deeds,
Dead, empty husks are all the creeds.
To call Christ Lord, but strive not to obey,
Belies the homage that with words I pay.**

12. HOW TO TEST THE REALITY OF YOUR RELIGION 1:26-7

An anthropologist once visited a Bantu village in South Africa to study the customs of the very primitive people who lived there. When he returned to the U.S. he sent back a sun dial to those people to express his thanks for their cooperation. The natives were delighted with their gift, and they were concerned that nothing happen to it, and so they immediately built a thatched roof over it to protect it. In so doing, however, they made it of no practical value. The foolishness of this is obvious to us all, but James says the foolishness is not always obvious to Christian people when they do the same thing with their religion. They take it home after church on Sunday, and they hang it in the closet with their Sunday clothes, and there it stays until the next week. It is as worthless as a sun dial under a roof.

James warns us that if our Christianity is not practical, and we only hear and do not do, then we are deceiving ourselves. A Christianity that is not practical is not a real Christianity. If it does not control your conduct, and change your character, and make you more sensitive to the will of God and the world's need, then you better stop and ask some questions about the reality of your religion. In these last two verses of chapter 1 James has a lesson for us on how to test the reality of our religion. If your religion does not change you, you had better change your religion. James implies that there are three questions that we must be able to answer with a definite yes if we are to be confident that our religion is not vain, but of real value to God, to the world, and to ourselves. The first question that grows out of what James says is-

I. AM I PRUDENT IN MY SPEECH? 26.

James is saying in a different way what Jesus said when He made the statement, "It is not what goes into a man but what comes out of him that defiles him." Jesus was referring to the tongue just as James is. The Bible makes it quite clear that one of the greatest responsibilities that men have is the wise use of their tongue. Jesus said, "By your words you shall be justified and by your words you shall be condemned." A real Christian is one who does not say, "I have freedom of speech, and so I can use my tongue as I please." He is one who presents his body a living sacrifice unto God, and that includes his tongue. He is one who is truthful with his tongue, and wise with his words.

A man who can go to church on Sunday and then curse, and tell dirty stories at the office or plant on Monday is only deceiving himself, "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." I that is what comes out of his mouth, we know his heart is filled with the language of the world and not that of the Word of God. James is saying that the man's religion is vain, and it has no real value to

anyone. He is a double minded man who will receive nothing from the Lord.

It is amazing how many people are deceived at this point. Out of the same mouth comes both sweet and bitter. I have known men who could talk about their church work, and of how they help the church in so many ways, and then a few minutes later hear them using filthy language, and do so with no respect for others in their presence. He thinks he is very religious, but James would say that because he cannot bridle his tongue he fails the test of real religion. A foul and filthy tongue characterized the ancient world, and the Christians who were won out from this type of society had a difficult time in keeping their tongues committed to the glory of Christ. The same problem exists today, where foul language is even very common in the public schools; in modern movies, as well as the workplace. It is easy for the Christian to get caught up in the common expressions of the world and thereby cease to be different from the world. This can totally ruin your witness and make your religious commitment of no value.

Paul was concerned about this problem also, and he wrote to the Colossians and said in 3:8-10, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: Anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on a new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator." This brings us to the basic idea that James is getting at. It has to do with the use of our tongue in relationship to other Christians. When Paul says we are to put away anger, wrath, malice, and lie not to one another, he is saying what James means when he says we must bridle our tongue. William Penn put it this way: "Men who fight about religion have no religion to fight about."

We mentioned before that the Christians to whom James is

writing were caught up in a great deal of religious controversy. And unbridle tongue could cause much damage. A tongue not under the control of reason and the Holy Spirit will race wildly across the field of a man's character, kicking, bucking, and trampling it without pity, and the result will be a victory for Satan. Most all great men of God suffer much sorrow because of the severe criticism they receive from Christians. The speed with which Christians are ready to blast out at other Christians is the speed by which they make themselves useless to God, the world, and themselves. All the good a person may do vanishes rapidly when the tongue is filled with malice and contempt for a brother or sister in Christ.

A critical and malicious tongue is a sign of self-righteousness. When a Christian becomes satisfied with his own attainment he tends to become critical of others. He feels that if only others could be as wonderful as he is the church could get somewhere. So he builds a fence around his religion to protect it. He becomes narrow and bigoted, and he sets out to straighten the world according to his standard. The end result is that he does more harm than good, and his religion is as worthless as a sun dial without the sun. He is trying to be a Christian without the spirit of Christ.

There are many more areas where the unbridle tongue is a curse, but we will come to that subject again in our study of James. It is clear what James is getting at, and we must be able to say that we are aware of the power of the tongue, and that we will strive to use its power according to the will of God. If we cannot say that, we had better ask God to forgive us and help us to gain the victory in this area, or our life will count for nothing in the kingdom of God. We may still be saved by faith in Christ, but it will be sad that all of our works will be consumed by fire, for they will not stand the test. The second question is-

II. AM I PRACTICAL IN MY SERVICE? v. 27

Before we can answer this question we must understand what James means by religion. This is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. Many have used it to deny the basic truths of Christianity itself. They say that religion is good works, and so we can start an orphans home, or do social work for the needy and widows, and we will get to heaven according to the Bible. But though this seems to be logically based on this verse, we know it contradicts the rest of the Bible, and the rest of the letter of James itself.

There is no salvation apart from faith in Christ. James knows that, and in 2:1 he speaks of the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 1:1 he is the servant, and all through the chapter he stresses prayer and the Word of God which is able to save souls. Why is all this left out when he tells us what pure religion is? We would expect him to include all these fundamental truths. The problem is not with James, but with our language. The word that James used meant "The external service of God, and not ones inner state before God. James is referring to the result of our faith in Christ, prayer, and fellowship with Christ. He is saying that if these things are real, we will be able to know it because it will show itself in practical service. True religion is not seen in ritual observance, but is practical obedience to the Word of God.

What James is saying can be illustrated by saying the same thing about a mother's love. If I said, "Pure motherly love and undefiled before God is to wash and feed her child." I would not mean by this that love is merely a matter of keeping a child clean and fed. I would mean that if the love of a mother is real it would show itself in a practical way in her care for her child's basic need. This is not the whole of love, but it is the practical result that proves the love is real. So to have a sympathetic concern for human need is not the whole of being a Christian, but it is the practical result that must be seen to know that the vital factor of faith in Christ is real. In other words, being good will show itself in doing good. As John said, if you can

see a brother in need and have no compassion, how does the love of God dwell in you?

The world was filled with impractical religion then, and it always has been. Christianity is the only pure and undefiled religion, for if God's Word is obeyed and put into practice it will lead to the compassion of God, which, in turn, leads to vital service that makes a difference in this world of endless needs. People can come to a temple offer sacrifices, burn incense, bow and pray, and lay in submission before God, or go through any number of practices of ritualistic religion, but if they do not go out and serve God in a practical manner, all of this is vain and worthless. Masses of people think they are religious because of their ritual before God, but they never show the compassion of God in the world. James says that if there is no practical service that grows out of one's religion, it is not the Christian religion, but a cheap imitation.

The particular examples that James used to illustrate Christian service are the two that are used all through the Bible. In the ancient world the orphans and widows were the subjects of great injustice. There were no orphan homes, and no social security to help widows. They were often at the mercy of any who sought to do them harm, or take their property. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees who thought of themselves as the most religious of persons. He said, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows houses, and for a pretense make long prayers." (Matt. 23:14). This was a long time practice, and they were blind to how inconsistent it was with the nature of God.

It is amazing how often people in the Old Testament had to be commanded not to oppress the widows and the fatherless. They were constant victims of an ungodly world. One of the characteristics that God proclaims of Himself over and over is His concern for the orphans and widows. In Deut. 10:17-18, "For the Lord your God is

God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow...." Keep in mind that James was the brother of Jesus, and his mother Mary was a widow. Joseph died leaving her to raise her family as a single parent.

James was using the most common examples of human need in the world of his day. He does not limit Christian compassion to these examples, but he uses them to illustrate that a religion that does nothing to help the needs of those who are in need of help is not a religion but can be called Christian. Real Christians have been the greatest source of compassion in history. Orphanages are the product of Christian compassion. The first hospital for the insane was started by a Christian. Hospitals, prison reform, and servants of the poor such as the Salvation Army are all the products of Christian compassion. These are not works that earn salvation, but they are works that reveal the reality of salvation. Practical service the fruit of true personal salvation.

It was a very practical matter to see that widows were supplied with their needs. This need led to the election of the first deacons in the early church. Tertullian, the famous leader of the church in North Africa in the second century describes the practice of the church in his day. "Each man deposits a small amount on a certain day of the month or whenever he wishes, and only on condition that he is willing and able to do so. No one is forced. Each man makes his contribution voluntarily. These are, so to speak, the deposits of piety. The money therefrom is spent not for banquets or drinking parties or good for nothing eating houses, but for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without their parents and means of subsistence, for aged men who are confined to the house, likewise for shipwrecked sailors, and for any in the mines, or islands, or in prisons." They took seriously what Jesus said when He taught that what we do unto the least of his brothers, we do to Him.

Tertullian went on to say, "The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. 'See,' they say, 'how they love one another....' This is the response that real religion should bring forth from the real world. It is true that men can be deceived, and think that all that is necessary is the social gospel, and forget the basic need of salvation from sin and new life in Christ, but that danger is no excuse for Christians to refrain from being practical in their service in meeting social needs. If we keep our Christianity a matter of theology, feelings, and ideas, and never get practical, we are not spiritual from God's point of view. We have looked at two test questions: Are we prudent in our speech, and are we practical in our service. If we can say yes to the first, but not to the second, our religion is not realistic enough to please God. And if we can say yes to both, but not to the third, we are still falling short of the glory of God, and the third is this-

III. AM I PURE IN MYSELF? v. 27.

To make our religion practical we have to get out into the world to meet its needs, but James wants to make it clear that we must be in the world but not of it. In other words, don't become contaminated by the world as you seek to lift it. This means we need a constant reliance upon God. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were to be without spot, and so in the New Testament we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God. The only way we can keep from being spotted by the world is by a careful walk and constant confession.

It is possible to become a world spotted Christian, and to be more influenced by the world's standards than God's. Hugh Macmillan tells of how in the British Museum there is a splendid hall in which the Elgin Marbles are shown. They are statues and figures craved by the greatest sculptors that have ever lived. They have been the admiration of the artistic world for over 2000 years. They are kept

with the greatest care to preserve them without spot. Night and day the air is warmed to keep it dry and free from all dampness. Plate glass is over delicate areas, and larger areas are gently cleaned every morning by a pair of bellows which blow away any particle of dust. Every 2 or 3 years they are gone over with a fine sponge in lukewarm water, and then wiped with a dry sponge. Only skilled men working inch by inch over a period of days are allowed to do this. Macmillan says, "No crown jewels in the world are treated with such care." Why? It is because they cannot be replaced.

How much more ought a Christian to take care of the greatest work of the divine sculptor? It is his own body in which resides his eternal soul. The Christian who is careless about the purity of his life has not quite understood the price that was paid to redeem him from the present evil world. There is a lack of realism in his religion, and it does not ring true. The only one who can ever lift the world is the one who is above it. This does not mean to shut self off from the world, but, like Christ, to be so busy doing good there is no time to get involved with the world on its level of corruption. As Phillips Brooks said, "The life of Christ was like an open stream that keeps the sea from flowing up into it by the eager force with which it flows down into the sea." What a picture of what the Christian life should be—a stream of practical activity flowing into the ocean of the world's need with none of the ocean getting into the stream.

True purity is gained by being positive, and not by doing nothing so as to avoid doing wrong. He who stays pure by doing nothing is evil, nonetheless, for he is a hearer and not a doer, and only deceives himself if he thinks he pleases God. God demands a positive and practical purity.

We have asked three questions: Am I prudent in my speech? Am I practical in my service? Am I pure in myself? These questions test the reality of our religion. If we pass this test it means we represent

the only religion that is from above. God does not lower his standard to fit man. He promises His grace and power to help them grow to His standard if they hunger and thirst after His righteousness. We could never fully reach that standard. Christ was the only perfect Christian. Paul never attained it, but he kept pressing on. All of us are imperfect Christians, but if our life is a constant striving to be able to say yes to the three questions we have looked at, we are real Christians, and our religion is pleasing to our Lord.

What does this word religion mean? Words change with time and become richer or poorer. Religion is a word that was once rich, but then became poor. But it is beginning to come back and at least be respectable. When I was in college it was a sign of advanced thinking to declare that Christianity is not a religion. It was explained that religion was man search for God, but that Christianity was the good news that God has found man. This is not just clever, but it is also true. It fails to follow through, however, with the fact that once we recognize we are found by God, we want to serve Him, worship Him, praise Him, pray to Him, and be channels of his grace in this lost world by works of love that help turn others to Him to receive His grace, and all of this is religion. What we should say is that Christianity does not start with religion, but it becomes a religion after one is saved by grace.

Religion that is mere external observance and ceremony is vain if it does not make the life of the person pleasing to God and beneficial to man. The religious person who is biblically religious will be a person who is a blessing to all who know them. Your religion is not only seen in church, but in your daily life. We say a man is religious if he is always at every service, reads his Bible, and prays, but the fact is, that can all be of no value if it does not lead to practical living that is a blessing to others.

Tis worth a wise man's best of life,

**Tis worth a thousand years of strife,
If thou canst lessen but by one
The countless ills beneath the sun. Author Unknown**

The Christian is one who should always be for the underdog, the oppressed, the helpless, and the needy. In our day the orphan and widow may be well cared for, but in Bible times they represented the most needy class of people. In our day it may be the homeless, the unemployed, the handicapped, and just lonely people who have the greatest need for our service and encouragement.

If we took a survey among evangelicals, and had a list of things like belief in the trinity and atonement, and read the Bible and pray, and go to Sunday School and mid week service, we would see the majority choosing these as the key to being truly religious. Visiting orphans and widows would be far down the list of priorities. Leave such things as this, and being an encourager to all the others we have mentioned to the do-gooders would be a common conclusion. But James is saying those who get practical and do good to others who need it are the ones who understand what true religion is all about. If you stop short and keep your religion limited to things you do in church, you have a sub- Christian religion. It is only when your religion moves you to, like Christ, give yourself to meet the needs of others that you have a biblical, true, and real religion.

13. HOW TO ESCAPE THE POWER OF PREJUDICE 2:1-13

Arturo Tosconini became famous in the world of music because of the power of prejudice. He was a young cellist with a touring opera company from Italy. In June of 1886 they were in the greatest opera house in Rio de Janerio in Brazil. The house was packed with

shouting people, but what they were shouting was, "Italians go home!" They had expected the opera to sweep Brazil like an army, but they were like an army only in the sense that they started a fight.

The conductor of the company was the only Brazilian, and all the rest were Italians. They had no respect for each other, and when they got to Brazil a battle broke out. It got into the papers, and the people came to take the conductor's side against the company of Italians. The conductor refused to conduct, and when the assistant conductor came to the podium the crowd shouted until he left the stage. He tried to explain to the crowd, but they just shouted him deaf.

The tour manager was beside himself. If the opera did not go on, the company would go broke, and may have been stranded in Brazil. One of the singers approached him and suggested he let Tosconini try. "He knows the opera, and he could conduct it," he said, but the manager resisted. He said, "Tosconini is not old enough to conduct a village band! He is a boy, a beardless bambino! They would laugh him out of Rio." "Perhaps," answered the singer, "But what have you got to lose?" He was right, and so as foolish as it seemed, he called Tosconini out of the pit and told him he was going to direct the opera. He was flabbergasted, and he did not even protest as they put on the conductor's tailcoat several sizes too big for his 17 years old frame. He shoved the baton into his hand, and pushed him toward the podium.

The crowd roared again, but silence fell on the auditorium when they saw it was a mere scrawny kid. He looked more like a comedian than a conductor. He mounted the podium and slammed shut the score of the opera. He had memorized it completely. The crowd was puzzled and curious. He turned toward the orchestra, the baton shot into the air, and they exploded with the opening bars of the opera. Because of their desperate situation the musicians played as never

before. When the curtain came down the crowd applauded, and stood stomping their feet. They would not let Tosconini leave as he stood there trembling and soaked in perspiration. An unknown cellist became famous in one night.

Here was a case where the evil of prejudice became the power that led to good for Tosconini, but in the vast majority of cases prejudice is a destructive power. If Tosconini had not been brilliant, there would have been only hatred between the Brazilians and Italians. He was the mediator that brought good out of an evil situation. James is striving to be that mediator between the different classes of Christians of his day.

Psychologists tell us that all of us have our in-groups, and out-groups. All of belong to certain categories, and there are others outside of those categories, and so all of us are in a position to be prejudiced against out-groups. You have the rich-poor, the intellectual-ignorant, the black-white, the believer-unbeliever, and endless others. Jesus was a victim of the power of prejudice. He was the Son of a carpenter, and so the religious leaders considered him one of the out-group. He did not belong to the leadership class, and so miracles or no miracles, they crucified Him. Evidence makes no difference when prejudice has infiltrated the soul.

Dr. Gordon W. Allport, professor of psychology at Harvard, and past president of The American Psychological Association, says that prejudice can become a mental disease that makes people paranoid. This is when a person is so controlled by a false idea that no amount of evidence can change their mind. He gives the example of a woman who thought she was dead. The doctor was going to try and show her by logical demonstration that she was wrong. He said, "Do dead people bleed?" She said, "No." The doctor then said, "If I prick your skin will you bleed?" "No, because I am dead." So he did prick her skin, and when she saw the blood she said in surprise, "Oh,

dead people do bleed don't they?" This is an exaggerated example, but it indicates the extent to which a false idea can become a major power in a persons life. That is why James is so concerned to warn his brothers in Christ of the danger of respecting persons.

James makes it clear that prejudice is a form of discrimination that has no place in the Christian life. The way to prevent prejudice from having power in our lives is to prevent it from gaining entrance into our thinking. This means we must fully recognize how inconsistent it is with the Christian life. James points out 3 ways in which it is inconsistent.

I. IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE GLORY OF CHRIST. v. 1-4.

The Phillips translation has it, "Don't ever attempt, my brothers, to combine snobbery with faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus was the express image of the glory of God. Paul in I Cor. 2:8 said the rulers of this age would not have crucified the Lord of glory had they understood. James wants to focus their minds on the fact that their faith is in the Lord of glory so they can see how inconsistent it is to respect persons on the basis of any earthly glory like rings and clothes.

James is suggesting to them the folly of being dazzled by the gleam of gold in the light of the glory of God in the person of His Son. It would have no glory at all but for Him without whom nothing was made that is made. Any glory this world has comes from the Lord of glory, and anyone who walks in the light of Christ's glory ought not to be led by the flickering lights of any earthly glory. These people had no excuse, for the Old Testament taught also that God is no respecter of persons, but people often know something, and do not see that what they are doing is contrary to what they know. So James gives an example. If two strangers come into your assembly, and one is obviously rich, and the other is obviously poor, and you

are very kind and pleasant to the rich person, and a snob to the poor person-that is a sin. It is inconsistent with the glory of Christ who died for all men, and so all are of equal worth to Him. Equality is one of the basic truths of Christianity, for that is the only place in which it is really true.

Men are not equal in any other way except in the sight of God. Men are not born equal; they have no equal capacity in mind or body; and there is no social or economic equality. The only place where men are equal is before God. They have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but they are all welcome to repent and return to fellowship with God. If a diamond driller or a ditch digger come to Christ as Savior, the angels in heaven rejoice equally over both. You can come to God in overalls as well as in a tuxedo. James says that when Christians on earth do not have this equality thinking concerning all men it shows that they are out of the will of God. "If there is no class distinction in the heart of God, how can it be right in the church of God?"

James says that they have become judges with evil thoughts, and they are revealing that they have not kept themselves unspotted from the world, for this is the way the world acts. They treat people according to how they can gain from them, and not as persons in themselves. The power of prejudice is so subtle along this line that only as we keep our eyes focused on the Lord of glory can we escape it. Put yourself in the place of this usher standing at the door when the two men appear. One with a very expensive suit and diamond tie clasp. He is well groomed, but the other is obviously in a suit from good will, and the tie you would never think of wearing. If you are not thinking with the mind of Christ you will have a tendency to discriminate, and treat the one far better than the other based on their appearance. God looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart. James says it is evil to think less of a man because of his financial status.

Contrary to the famous saying, it is not clothes that makes the man, but it is Christ that makes the man. It is not gold, but grace. It is not jewelry but Jesus. It may well be that the one without wealth is far more worthy before God in character and conduct. That is why we are to act toward both as equals. I have not had a broad enough experience to judge, but the late A. W. Tozer wrote in an editorial, "Let a man appear in a local Christian fellowship, and let him be one whose fame is sounded abroad, whose presence will add something to him that entertains him, and immediately a score of homes will be thrown open and every eager hospitality will be extended to him. But the obscure and the unknown must be content to sit on the fringes of the Christian circle and not once be invited into any home." This perilous power of prejudice is still with us, and to escape it we must recognize how inconsistent it is with the glory of Jesus Christ. Secondly,

II. IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE CHOICE OF GOD. vv. 5-7.

One of the biggest mistakes the Christian world made was when they let the communist take the credit for being for the masses of poor people in the world. Christianity from the start has been good news to the poor. What hope had they if this life is all there is? Their life would often seem to be only a useless struggle for existence. But the Gospel of salvation in Christ, when they received it, made them rich in faith and hope, for they shall reign with Christ forever and ever.

In the very first sermon Jesus preached in the synagogue at Nazareth He read from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." (Luke 4:18). When John sent disciples to Jesus to ask if He was the Messiah, Jesus said, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind received their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have

good news preached to them." (Luke 7:22). The church began with common people, and it has always been most effective and most pure when controlled by the common people. If the leadership of the church is put into the hands of a few outstanding, gifted, and wealthy people, it tends to lead to corruption. Like democracy, the church must be of the people by the people, and for the people. It was the common people who heard Jesus gladly. Lincoln said, "God must have loved common people, He made so many of them."

James says that God choose the common people to be heirs of the kingdom. From the very first there have been outstanding rich people in the kingdom of God. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were among the first. But generally speaking the rich classes have opposed Christianity. James indicates in verses 6-7 that it was the rich that oppressed them in that day, and they blasphemed the name of Christ. It is known from history that the wealthy Sadducees were the greatest persecutors of the early church. They were the ones who commissioned Saul to go to Damascus to bring Christians bound to Jerusalem. It could be that this is one of the reasons why Christians favored the rich in order to stay on their good side and avoid persecution.

James, however, makes it clear that such action is inconsistent with God's choice. He chose the poor, and if you turn around and dishonor the poor you are out of God's will. God has a purpose in His choice of the poor of the world, and it is sin to oppose that purpose. Paul tells us what that purpose is in I Cor. 1:26-29, "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-and the things that are not-to nullify the things that are, so that no one can boast before Him."

Someone has said, "Prejudice is a great time saver. It enables one to form an opinion without getting the facts." That is just the case when discrimination is made on the basis of appearance and position. The facts of history are that God has chosen the poor, the common, and the average person, to be the main force of His kingdom so that men cannot boast and say what they have done for God. Studies have proven that the work of the church, and of missions, and of tract and radio evangelism, and host of other Christian ministries have been primarily supported by the common people, and not by the rich. That is why it is completely inconsistent with the choice of God to be prejudiced toward people because they are not of the rich class. Someone wrote,

The face we meet in ordinary duty
Might be glorified if we could see the soul,
And the plainest folk be radiant with beauty
If our eyes just once could only read the whole.

The third point we want to look at is-

III. IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE LAW OF LOVE. vv. 8-11.

James deals with an excuse that someone might use to justify their respect for the rich man. They might say, "Yes I gave him the best seat, and I was kind to him, but not because I had a selfish motive, and was trying to gain anything. I was just obeying the royal law of love and doing to him as I would want others to do to me. I was loving my neighbor as myself." This is fine James said if that is the case, for you do well. But if you respect persons you commit sin. If you really are keeping the law of love, you cannot keep it just for the rich, and then not keep it for the poor, for the law applies to all. If you keep the whole law but offend in one point you are guilty of all. If you love everyone according to the law of love except the one person you have a prejudice for, you have broken the whole law.

Your treatment of that poor man was sin, even though you may have loved everyone else in the church.

In verse 10 James is trying to clear up a dangerous misconception that Christians might have that they use to defend their prejudice. It is foolish he is saying to think that you can have exceptions to the law of love. The only persons you have a right to leave out are those whom God leaves out, and He loves all. You cannot love almost all neighbors and think you have kept the law of love. That law is like a chain, and if you break it at any point, you break the whole law.

Imagine a captain of a fortress during enemy attack guarding three walls and leaving the fourth unguarded. Do you think that when the enemy comes over that fourth wall that they will take only one forth of the fort? No! They will take it all because of this break through at one point. When you hurt a man in the arm, it is foolish to say you did not hurt the man but only his arm, for he is a unity, and when you hurt one point of him you hurt the whole of him. All it takes is one slip of the pen to ruin the whole sheet, and all it takes is one blot to ruin the appearance of the whole sheet. James is saying that all it takes is one act of prejudice to break the law of love. Any act of discrimination is inconsistent with the law of love. You cannot justify yourself on a part time obedience to God's laws, for part time obedience is the same as disobedience. God demands consistency.

**God so loved the world, not just a few,
The wise, and great, the noble, and the true,
Or those of favored class or race or hue-
God loved the world, Do you?**

Prejudice is not natural, it has to be learned, and so it is prejudice in parents that is passed on to children. Christians who have prejudice toward just one type of person may feel they are good Christians, but this one area of failure makes them lawbreakers, and

sinners out of the will of God. It is not good enough to be almost free of prejudice. You must be free completely from its power to be Christlike, and consistent with the law of love.

Billy Graham in his book Secret Of Happiness says, "The greatest social evil in the world today is prejudice which is often times based upon our own ignorance. I seriously doubt if we would be prejudice against anyone if we had all the facts in hand. We are quick to judge and prone to denounce that which we do not understand or know or experience." The result is, anyone who is different is usually an object of our prejudice. The Christian is no different than anyone else at this point, and can only become different by strong self-discipline with an openness to the Holy Spirit who will help us be consistent in keeping the law of love.

Prejudice by its very nature is a pre-judgment. We already have convictions about certain type people before we even know them. This means we have believed things about them without any evidence because we want it to be true of them, for that justifies how we feel. About 80% of Americans have an appreciable degree of prejudice claims Gordon W. Allport. He defines prejudice as "An averted or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to that group." One of the reasons it is so hard to overcome prejudice is because we refuse to admit that we have it. Dr. W. L. Northridge in Disorders Of The Emotional and Spiritual Life says that prejudice is one of the gravest sins of the Christian life. It leads to intolerance, hatred, and to persecution, plus all kinds of blindness and misunderstanding. It is no second rate sin.

Jesus worked hard at exalting the underdog, which in His day was the Samaritans. He made a Samaritan the hero of His story while the priest and Levite were made the bad guys. It was the Samaritan

woman at the well who was converted and brought many to Jesus. The only leper out of ten to come back and thank Jesus for healing was a Samaritan. Jesus fought prejudice that divided men. He made it and evil that has no legitimate place in the life of anyone who follows Him.

Religious people are not always known for their tolerance. Sometimes the strongest prejudice is caused by religious convictions. The Jews felt proud of their pure heritage, and of their hatred of the impure mixture of the Samaritans. They were thoroughly convinced that God felt the same as they did. The Samaritans also hated the Jews, and in Bible times each made raids across the border to kill each other. There was much anger between these peoples, and that is why James and John wanted Jesus to burn out the Samaritans because they would not grant them a place to stay. When the Jews got angry at Jesus they expressed it by calling Him the worst name they could think of. In John 8:48 we read, "The Jews answered Him, are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

In the history of our own country the church was the strong hold for segregation. Numerous books and sermons of Christians justified prejudice as the will of God. All through history Christians have been terribly prejudiced against the Jews, holding them responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. The point is, there is no escape from the reality of Christian prejudice. It is an established part of history, and there is plenty of reasons to believe that Christians are prejudiced to the same degree as the rest of the nation. Only those who will see how inconsistent it is with the law of love will escape from the power of this great sin.

14. HOW TO TELL IF YOUR FAITH IS TRUE. James 2:14-26

The passage we are looking at has been greatly misunderstood. Some have thought it contradicts what Paul says about being justified by faith. James says we are justified by works. They appear to be holding opposite views, but a close study of the words reveals that they are in perfect agreement. When Paul spoke of faith he meant a faith that works, and when he spoke of works he meant works before salvation trying to merit salvation. James speaks of faith as mere intellectual knowledge that even the demons have, and which is not saving faith. When he speaks of works he means those works after one is saved.

Let us not forget that the theme of James is always a practical faith. In chapter one he talked of the trial of faith, to pray in faith, and he begins this chapter withholding faith without respect of persons. Faith is the theme, but because of mistaken ideas on faith James stresses that true faith is a working faith. When Paul stressed faith he did not emphasize works because he wrote to those who were in danger of the deception that good works could save them. When James stresses works, he writes to those who are in danger of being so heavily minded they are of no earthly good. They are those who say they have faith, and that is all they need.

The proof that God knew what He was doing when He inspired two men to write about faith from two points of view is that two of the heresies that have plagued the church have grown out of extremes in one side or the other. Pelagians have said we'll work our way to heaven. Antinomians have said that we will ride on faith to heaven and do nothing. Paul and James are a team, and they strike down both of these heresies. Paul says in Eph. 2:8-10, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do

good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Paul makes it clear we are not saved by good works, but for good works, and that is what James is saying. If your faith is true, it will show itself in works. James indicates that we can test the truth of our faith by asking two simple questions. First-

I. IS THERE ANY PROFIT IN MY FAITH. vv. 14-17.

James asks them what does it profit to have a faith without works? A faith that does not express itself in action is nothing but words. He gives a rather humorous illustration. The wind is howling outside as Christian A sets down by the fireside to eat a good meal. There is a knock at the door. Christian A opens the door, and there stands a member of his church, Christian B. He has no overcoat, but only a shabby light jacket. He tells Christian A of the fact that he lost his job, and hasn't been able to buy any groceries. Christian A, with all the compassion of a phonograph record says, "Well brother, you can count on me to pray for you. The Lord bless you. I will see you in church on Sunday." He shuts the door and goes back to his warm fireside chair and finishes his meal. Christian B continues to hunger in the cold.

Where is the profit in such foolishness says James. Can you really be so blind as to think that mere words can substitute for food? Do you think that a faith that is mere words can save your soul? The use of this illustration indicates that these Jewish Christians were giving a wrong meaning to faith in contrast with their old concepts of works. As Jews, before they became Christians, they thought alms-giving was a way to salvation. Ben Sirach wrote, "Water will quench a flaming fire, and alms maketh an atonement for sin." In Tobit we read, "Everyone who occupieth himself in alms shall behold the face of God, as it is written, I will behold thy face by almsgiving." This is why the Pharisees wanted everyone to see them giving alms.

What happened was that when the Jews accepted salvation by the free grace of God, they forgot the other half of the Gospel, and they said that since alms do not save us we can forget that aspect of our old faith. But James is warning them that faith without works is dead. We are saved by faith, but not by a dead faith. We are saved by a living faith that loves God and man, and desires to express the love of God to man by deeds of love and compassion. As Paul says, though I have faith to remove mountains and have not love, I am nothing. Why? Because God is not interested by moving mountains by faith, but in moving men by love. There is no profit in a faith that does not express itself and works of love.

Men of true faith have been men whose faith brought profit in the sense of meeting the needs of men. Evangelical Christians have often considered the so called social Gospel a nasty word. The causes for this are obvious. It was so abused that it came to be that mere humanitarian works became the essence of the Gospel. Salvation by faith in Christ was neglected. Evangelicals made the same mistake as these Jews to whom James is writing. They were saying, "Since alms do not save us then we can forget alms altogether." And evangelicals were saying, "Since the social Gospel did not save anyone, we can forget humanitarian works."

James is trying to get Christians to see that a true faith is of profit in all areas of life, because a true faith acts on what it believes. John Wesley made an amazing impact on the world by his preaching, but only because it was backed up by practice. When he was in Oxford College he began to give to the poor all that he did not need to live on. He made 30 pounds that year, and he lived on 28. He gave the rest to the poor. The next year he made 60 pounds and still lived on 28. He gave the rest to the poor. He kept on making more but living on the 28. God did not require that, but here was a man whose faith did not just profess, but it also produced. There was none of this, "be warmed and filled," with him. He went on to start the medical

dispensary in London. He founded a home for widows, and a school for poor children. He also founded a loan fund for the poor. He was so concerned for the sick that he studied the anatomy and medicine on the side. He even wrote a book called Primitive Physic that went through at least 23 editions.

Wesley's faith was a true faith, and all the world can tell, for he not only preached the love of Christ he practiced it. The result was great profit for the kingdom of God. Not all of the people he helped received his message of salvation in Jesus Christ, but then, how many of the 5,000 that Jesus fed became His followers? Jesus did not love and have compassion because He saw it would pay off. He loved because it was His nature, and a true faith in Christ will cause us to love that way as well.

It is hard for us to see this sometimes because of our background. I'll admit that I sometimes wonder about the value of meeting people's needs other than their spiritual needs. But then I read the books of Frank Laubach. He was a man so dedicated to the task of helping the illiterates of the world to learn to read. He helped millions, and his system is working around the world every day. Why all this effort to teach people to read? One short paragraph from his book The World Is Learning Compassion will explain why. He writes,

"The most bruised people on this planet, the naked, the hungry, the fallen-among-thieves, the sick, the imprisoned in mind and soul, are the twelve hundred million adult illiterates. At least a billion of them are virtually slaves! Almost every illiterate is in debt all his life, and his children, and his children's children inherit the debt. He does not know how much his debt is, nor whether the interest on it is correct. The money lender takes all he can take and still keep his victim alive. It would be silly for him to kill the animal that makes him rich. In one form or

another, this is the black sorrow of nearly every illiterate in the world."

As I pondered the labors of Frank Laubach I became convinced that he is demonstrating the faith the James is looking for. It is the faith that is of profit because it works and expresses the love of God. This picture of millions upon millions of enslaved people for whom Christ died is beyond us, but we ought to thank God for a man who has the power, skill, and compassion to reach them. How can we doubt that this man has a true biblical faith? Can our faith be true if it does not rejoice in the efforts to relieve the world of the miseries caused by sin?

James is trying to illustrate the fact that if our faith is not profitable for others, it is of no profit to us either. Can such a faith save you he asks, and he answers by his illustration-no! A faith that cannot even feed a hungry man can hardly be an adequate faith to save a man's soul. If a faith doesn't work it is dead, and a dead faith is not a saving faith. A workless faith is a worthless faith. Therefore, a test of a true faith is found in asking ourselves-is there any profit in our faith? Is the world a better place where we are because we are men and women of faith? Leonard Ravenhill wrote,

**Could a mariner sit idle if he heard the drowning cry?
Could a doctor sit in comfort and just let his patient die?
Could a fireman sit idle, let men burn and give no hand?
Can you sit at ease in Zion with the world around you damned?**

If you can, James would have us consider, what does it profit brethren, can such a faith save us? Secondly, we need to ask-

II. IS THERE ANY PROOF OF MY FAITH. vv. 18-26

This amounts to the same thing really, but James handles it from

the point of view of an argument here. He wants to prove that, not only from a practical point of view, but from a logical point of view, a faith without works is dead. In verse 18 he says, some man, that is a third party says, "Well here it is, you Jewish Christians have faith, and James has works." This man puts all Christians into these categories. Some are just people of faith, and others are workers. So this man is trying to throw a blanket over the whole thing, and just say, "Let's forget about the matter. To each his own."

James will not buy that theory. He says, "I have faith too, but I have proof of my faith in my works. How do you prove your faith without works? How do you know you have any faith at all? If you have no works, how does your faith differ from indifference and unbelief? Oh I see, you are Orthodox in your theology. You believe there is one God. Well, that is fine. It proves your good sense, and brings you as high as the devil's religion anyway, but that is a far cry from Christian faith. Let me show you from history that your kind of faith is dead."

He had been asking, where is the profit of such faith? Now he is asking, where is the proof that faith even exists at all? Someone said that faith is like calories. The only way you know they are there is by their visible results. We cannot see them, but we know them by their fruits, if you can call an expanding waistline a fruit. The point that James is making here is, you cannot show me that you even have faith without works, but by works I can prove to you that I also have faith. The invisible can only be known by its visible results. Power is invisible. No one has ever seen power, but all have seen its results.

Whether or not a battery has power in it can only be proven by putting it to the test to see if it can produce any visible results. Can it start a car, or turn on lights, or make the indicator on a meter move? This is true with all that is invisible. It might be love, hope, courage, kindness, or joy, but they are all known only by the visible results

which they produce, and without those results there is no possible way to prove that they even really exist. Therefore, a faith without works is like a battery that will not do anything. The battery is dead, and so is the faith. You cannot have a kind man who never does a kind deed. Kindness can only be proven by some visible act that reveals its existence, and so it is with faith.

In verse 19 James says that even if you are orthodox in your theology, but you do nothing, you have no proof of your faith. Monotheism is a basic doctrine. The Jews quoted Deut. 6:4 every morning and evening, and the Orthodox still do to this day. This is called the Shema, "The Lord our God is one Lord." James would not deny that this is a basic truth that must be believed, but he wants to make it clear that if this belief does not cause us to serve this one Lord, we are deceived. The devil himself is a monotheist, and there are no atheistic demons. When Jesus cast them out they knew Him, and they said, "I know Thee who Thou art, the holy one of God." And, "What have we to do with Thee Thou Son of the Most High." Can it be believed for a second that a faith that goes no further than that of demons can save your soul? If there are no works growing out of your faith, your religion is lower than that of demons, for they at least tremble at the fact of one God. Their belief produces some results.

The demons are not better off for their knowledge. They are orthodox, and they probably have a better theology than anybody, because they know the facts about the realm of the supernatural. All of their good theology, however, does not cause them to obey God and bring forth good works, and so it is dead orthodoxy, and dead faith.

A man can say, "I believe the sun is 93 million miles away. I believe that friction causes heat. I believe that Christ died for sinners." They are all facts which he can believe and be none the

better. James says the ability to produce certain sounds with your tongue has no power to save your soul. Many people say I believe in one God, and I believe in Christ, but James asks, "What difference is there in your life because you do?" If there is no difference, you haven't proof that you are a believer. John the Baptist said to people, "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." In other words, show some proof that you have repented.

When you stop and think about this, you can see how sensible the argument of James is. We don't think of people basically because of their theology. When you think of some Christian you greatly admire, you are usually thinking of their loving kindness and Christian actions, and not their views of the trinity. It is by behavior that we impress people with our Christian faith and not by our belief. It is what we do, and not what we say that will be remembered. What we do is the fruit of what we believe, and so belief is the root, but it is the fruit that is the proof that the root is there. If there are no fruits, James wants to know how we can even prove there is any root at all.

James uses Abraham as an example. His faith was known to be real because of his works. He believed God's promise to make a great nation of his seed, and he proved he believed it by being willing to offer his son on the altar. That was God's test. Would his faith have been any good if he did not act on it? Not at all. By works his faith was made perfect. Faith is not complete until it acts.

James begins the chapter with a warning about respect of persons, and now he practices what he preaches, for he illustrates his point, not just from the great Abraham who was a good man even before he believed God, but from the lowly Rahab who was a wicked woman before she believed. He is illustrating that be it male or female, great or small, the same principle holds true that faith without works is dead. She proved her faith was not mere words by helping the

messengers of Israel escape, and by later hanging out the cord on the wall of Jericho.

The great artist Gustave Dore lost his passport while traveling through Europe. When he came to a check point he was asked to produce the document by the officer in charge. Dore explained that he lost his passport but said he was Dore the artist. The officer said that people often parade under a false identity, and he would have to somehow prove that he was Dore. He quickly took out his workcase and began to sketch the view from that spot. The officer looked at the sketch and said, "Now I am sure you are Dore. No one else can draw like that." Dore could back up his words with action. He had practical proof that gave validity to his claim. People need to look at our lives and see evidence in action that back up our claims to be Christian. The world is not looking for a definition of faith, but a demonstration of faith.

So if you want to know if your faith is a true saving faith just examine it, and ask, is it profitable and is it provable. If it works, it is alive and real. If it only moves the tongue to say the right things, but does not move the person to practical action, then, like the body without the spirit, it is dead. All of us need to ask God to help us practice what we profess, for only as we do can we know that our faith is true.

15. TEACHING CAN BE DANGEROUS Based on James 3:1

Roger Williams was the founder of the First Baptist Church in America in 1639. He was considered a trouble maker and a nuisance by most church leaders, and they wanted to get rid of him. They finally were able to banish him. Williams told this story to illustrate

his experience. There was a passenger on board a ship that made himself obnoxious by constantly warning of a hidden reef ahead. He told his story to the captain, but he paid no attention. He warned the other passengers, but they only smiled and avoided him with contempt. Finally they became so irritated that they threw him overboard, and then all was peaceful. It remained this way until the vessel hit the reef and sank. Williams commented, "They had drowned the giver of the warning, but the reef remained."

Human nature is strange. We appreciate the warning of signs that say, danger ahead, poison, watch out for children, beware of dog, bump ahead, but we very seldom like the person who gives us warning about our spiritual welfare. The prophets were always hated because they were always warning Israel of the dangers ahead. James has been a likable author up till now. He has stepped on a few toes, but basically he has been very practical and helpful, and few can complain. In chapter three, however, James comes to the place where he must make Christians face up to the reality that they are still sinners, and that their sin will bring them to judgment.

This is not a pleasant subject, but no one can be honest with the Word of God and neglect it. It is always more acceptable to look at the judgment of the lost than at the judgment of the saved. The believer would much rather look only at those texts that speak of their escape from condemnation. One of the values of preaching through a book verse by verse is that it forces you to look at all that is written, and not just the things you like to hear and read. James is going to say a lot of things to Christians in the next couple of chapters that many will not like. Some will be shocked and offended, and some may even want to throw James overboard as Luther did. Getting rid of the man warning of danger, however, does not get rid of the danger. And so the only wise approach is to give heed to the warnings, and do something about them.

In verse 1 James gives a warning first of all to those who would be teachers. James makes it clear that teaching can be dangerous. Who would ever dream that a teacher could say, "I have a dangerous job." We want to look at this warning, and the why of it.

I. THE WARNING.

What a paradox! The church is always crying out for teachers, but James says that what we don't need is too many teachers. There is an obvious conflict between the modern attitude and the New Testament attitude. The New Testament takes teaching so seriously that it demands only the most qualified be allowed to do it. The modern church takes teaching so lightly that it will allow anybody who is willing to do it.

It is hard for us to really grasp the significance of this warning of James. It doesn't make much sense to us. We know a lighthouse is to warn ships of the dangerous rocks so they do not have a wreck, and so it makes sense that Christians are the light of the world warning men of the dangers ahead if they follow the path of sin. But here are believers who want to follow the path of Christian teaching, and James warns that they too can make shipwreck of the faith, and so not many Christians should seek to sail in this direction of becoming teachers.

Warning is part of the ministry to Christians. Paul in Col. 1:28 says, "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ." Apparently no Christian can ever become mature without giving heed to warnings but why this warning about becoming teachers? He does not say that no one should be a teacher, but he says that not many should aim for this goal. Few Christians, therefore are qualified to be teachers. Secondly, we want to consider-

II. THE WHY.

The reason why we should hesitate to take on this responsibility of teaching is that if we do we become liable to more severe judgment. Modern versions make it clear that James is saying the teacher will be judged by a more strict standard. The implications are both frightening and exciting. Frightening, because we will be held accountable before God if we teach what is not His truth, but exciting, because it makes the teacher's task the most vital in the world. As far as God is concerned, the most noble task on earth is that of being a teacher. We might take it lightly, but He takes it so seriously that He has a higher standard of judgment for them.

It is a far more serious sin for a teacher to be in error than for a student. A student is learning, and is forgiven if he makes a mistake, but the teacher is suppose to have already learned, and is more responsible for mistakes than is the student. There is a powerful warning here for teachers, but it opens up a biblical principle that becomes a warning to all Christians. Every Christian will be judged, and will be held accountable for the light they have received. To whom much has been given, much shall be required. Every American Christian will face a stricter judgment than the Christians of many other parts of the world where they have little or no Christian literature. We have more of God's truth, and so we will be judged more severely.

The teacher has a higher level of judgment because he has a higher level of truth than the rest of the believers. If they do not, they have no business teaching. It is a great responsibility, and demands a great deal of study to make sure one is teaching that which is truly biblical. The judgment that James refers to is mentioned often in the New Testament, but there are no details revealed. It is a judgment that all believers will face, and none will escape. Here is a judgment that we will not be saved from. The

Christian who thinks that because he is saved he can do as he pleases, and live a slipshod unfaithful life, and have nothing to fear, is greatly deceived.

Let's examine this word that deals with judgment. In the Greek it is krima. It is used for varying degrees of punishment. Jesus used this word in Matt. 7:2 where we read, "For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged." Since this word krima can refer to all different degrees of judgment, some translations use a stronger word to translate it at one time, and a less severe word to translate it at other times.

The KJV translates it damnation when Jesus refers to the Scribes and Pharisees. If you read that word into this context you have these Christian teachers being sent to hell, and that is obviously not what James is saying. The proper word is condemnation and not damnation. Translating this word damnation has caused many problems in the minds of Christians. For example, in I Cor. 11:29 Paul is writing about abuse in eating the Lord's Supper, and he says, "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." This was a very poor choice of words for the KJV translators to use. The newer translations have judgment, but not damnation.

The fact that the same word that is used to describe the judgment of lost sinners is also used to describe the judgment of saved sinners is not a pleasant thought. It is bad enough however you look at it without using the harsh word damnation. This word of judgment is actually applied more often to Christians than to non-Christians in the New Testament. Christians have a great responsibility because they have greater light. This is a biblical principle. The wicked sinners of the Old Testament in Sodom and Gomorrah will suffer less judgment than the Pharisees because the Pharisees had the very teaching of the Son of God. And Christians today have more access

to biblical teaching than Christians have ever had, and so they have a greater responsibility.

Peter says in I Peter 4:17, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the Gospel of God." We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ according to Paul, and though the lost sinner will suffer the most severe judgment ultimately, we as Christians will find that day to be no picnic if we have been unfaithful and unfruitful Christians. No Christian will lose their salvation, but there will be a loss that may effect all of eternity. That is why James in 1:19 stressed that we should be swift to hear and slow to speak. If we will be judged according to every word we speak, then speaking becomes serious business in Christian living. And for the teacher it is the most important thing he does. No wonder James uses so much of his letter to warn of the dangers of the tongue. What we will be for all eternity is greatly affected by how we use our tongue in time.

James does offer a word of comfort to us in verse 2. He admits that we all make many mistakes in what we do with our tongue. The man who doesn't make mistakes with his tongue is perfect, and he includes himself in the we who make many mistakes. There is some consolation here, for we all like to know that our sins are common ones. We are glad that we are not alone, and James makes it clear that we have plenty of company when it comes to mistakes of the tongue. It is just because it is so common, however, to make mistakes that very few Christians should be teachers. If you are a person with a tongue problem, you only endanger yourself and others by being a teacher. Teaching is a touchy task, and an undisciplined tongue makes it even dangerous.

A teacher by the very nature of the task is one who is making constant judgments and passing on ideas and values. If a teacher has

prejudice, and passes this on to others, or passes on some perverted ideas and values, that teacher will be held responsible, not only for personal sin, but for all the consequences that result from their teaching. For example, if I am teaching the biblical truth that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and then people find out that I have a strong prejudice against people of other faiths and races, my hypocrisy will make them skeptical of Christian truths, and I will be held accountable for their rejection of the church, and possibly even of Christ, because of my poor example. A teacher of truth better believe it and practice it, or he should not be teaching it, for if his life contradicts his teachings he will do more harm than good.

A Christian teacher is often tempted to interject personal feelings into his teaching. He may have some convictions that differ from other Christian leaders, and he may begin to criticize them, and even go so far as to label them heretics. This can lead to hard feelings and division in the body, and be pleasing only to Satan, and never to God. The teacher will be held accountable for any division he creates in the body. A good teacher will very seldom knock the ministry of any other person who is accepted by the church at large as a person of God. Naturally, there is freedom to be critical of that which is non-biblical, or anti-biblical, but to attack a brother in Christ who has a different opinion is high risk for any teacher.

James is concerned that Christians not think they can pass on their judgments, convictions, and values, and not have to worry whether or not they are God's judgments, convictions, and values. James says you do have to worry, and that is why only those who are willing to do the study it takes should accept the responsibility of being a teacher. Only those who have a Christlike spirit, and are humble enough to know that they do not know everything should become teachers.

Over the years I have studied many passages of Scripture, and

have spent many hours on them, but I have not preached on them because I was not sure exactly what God was intending to convey. When we are ignorant we need to recognize it and not try to bluff our way through. A good teacher must be willing to admit he does not have all the answers. He ought never to say, "Thus saith the Lord," unless it is quite well established that this is what the Christian church has understood God to be saying through the centuries. The teacher who understands that God demands more from them should be glad, for this will motivate them to demand more from themselves, and they will become better teachers, and a greater blessing to the rest of the body. This warning of James should exclude those not willing to accept the responsibility, and it should excite those who are willing, for it raises their importance in the body to the highest possible level. Teachers should see it as a great honor, even though it is dangerous.

16. THE SMALL IS SIGNIFICANT Based on James 3:2

The story is told of a man who had lived all his life on one of the small islands of the South Pacific until he came to visit America. He crossed the continent by train, and spent days watching the landscape. When the train crossed the Mississippi River, and he was told how much further he still had to travel, he said this to a fellow passenger, "I have been thinking about Christopher Columbus. People make such a fuss about his discovering America, but I don't think it was so much. America is so big, I don't see how he could have missed it."

After crossing Iowa three times in July, I can understand his feelings. We live in a big country. Big is space, big in power, and big in world influence. Bigness characterizes the thinking of Americans.

The huge Astrodome in Houston, Texas is symbolic of the American Ideal. It has been called the eighth wonder of the world. And 18 story office building could be built between the surface and the dome. Men have always been thrilled with bigness. The ancient world had its pyramids, coliseums, towers and castles. From the time we can first talk and our mother asks us how big we are, and we thrill her heart by stretching our arms and saying so big, we are made conscious of the significance of size.

Bigness is not bad in itself. Government can get too big and domineering, and so can business. It can become a monopoly, but bigness in itself is not bad. It has a tendency, however, to lead our minds astray by making us ignore the significance of the small. James was a man who fully realized that the small is significant. God inspired him to share this truth with all believers. When we think of a great Christian leader, we think of great Bible scholars, men of deep prayer, and those with a powerful witness. These are the big things in the Christian life, and we hear them exalted over and over again. No one would think of ever denying their significance, but James makes it clear that you can spend your life concentrating on these big things and still be a failure because of your neglect of the little things. He is thinking especially of that little thing in the lower front part of your head called the tongue.

James does not say, if you read your Bible every day, you are a perfect man, or an ideal and complete Christian. He does not say you are perfected if you pray and witness effectively. He does say, however, you are perfected if you have such control of your tongue that you never offend with it. The ideal Christian is the one who has realized the significance of the small, and has learned to make no mistakes with his or her tongue.

If you have ever been wondering why you are not perfect, now you know. Most sermons on the tongue are looked upon as messages

on a minor problem in the Christian life. They are just little talks on trivial troubles that Christians have. The big things are what count, and so we tolerate some of the topical talks on texts about the tongue, longing to get back to the big stuff of Bible doctrine. There is so much truth to our feelings that it is hard for us to grasp the significance of the small. Certainly a message on the cross or resurrection is far more important than a message on the tongue. Nevertheless, God through James forces us to examine the significance of the small, and the role of the tiny tongue in our total testimony as Christians.

Big things only exist, and can only function properly, because of little things. That is what James is saying in this passage. A realistic look at any area of life will prove it is a true principle. We could explore the great expanse of the universe, and point out that all of it, in its gigantic colossal bigness, is composed of tiny atoms so small that they are unseen. All visible reality exists and functions on the basis of the minute and invisible atom. This is God's doing, and He follows the same pattern in the spiritual realm. Jesus describes it in Matt. 13:31 where He said the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed. It is the smallest of seeds, yet it becomes a huge plant.

God is concerned about the big also, and man can never match God when it comes to bigness, but in all God does there is the reality of the significance of the small. We must grasp this truth, and see its application in all of life before we can deal seriously with the specific topic of the tongue. If we don't, it will only be another message on a minor issue, and it will impress few, and change none. We must recognize that James is not taking us down a side street or a back alley, but is right on main street when he writes so seriously about the tongue. James knows that speech is the primary means of communication in all human relations, and that it is the source of much good or much evil.

Most all of the beautiful relationships of life begin and continue by means of the tongue. Just think back to the thrill it was to first talk with the one you came to love. You might wish he or she would stop now, but it was music then. All friendships begin with the tongue as we learn to know each other by verbal sharing. We also lose friends by the same means. We also hurt those we love by the use of the tongue. All human relationships are made positive or negative depending on our use of the tongue.

The two great commandments of Christ are to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. Keeping the second commandment is a matter of good relationships with other people, and this is a matter where the tongue is the key factor. You cannot do the big things of the Christian life without the aid of the little tongue. The big things collapse if the little things are not under control. Since we cannot truly love God with all our being if we fail to keep His second commandment, it means even the biggest thing of all, our relationship to and obedience to God, depends upon that little piece of flimsy flesh in our face.

It may be hard to believe, but the kind of Christian you are and will become depends more upon your use of your tongue than any other single factor. The small is significant. So much so that we often fail in our Christian growth just because we don't believe it can be all that important. But look at life, and you will see James writes wisdom from above. We need to give this truth more thought, and be more conscious about applying it in our lives. Listen to the poet's description of this truth, and see if it does fit your own experience.

**It takes so little to make us sad,
Just a slighting word or a doubting sneer,
Just a scornful smile on some lips held dear;
And our footsteps lag, though the goal seem near,
And we lose the courage and hope we had-**

So little it takes to make us sad.

Author Unknown

Most of the destructive conflicts within marriage start with some negative little remark you could write on a postage stamp, but before its effects are over, you need a legal size file to hold the folders with all the foul and foolish words. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire says James. We all know its true, yet we cannot bring ourselves to fight fire where it starts, and concentrate on controlling that little thing, the tongue.

The folly of our neglect of this truth is all the more evident when we realize how encouraging a truth it is. Many Christians feel so inadequate and inferior, and they know they will never be great Bible scholars, or great movers of mountains, by prayer, preaching, or witnessing, and so they live in constant guilt and frustration. James is telling us we do not have to turn the world upside down to be a great Christian. We do not have to have mighty gifts to be instruments of His grace. All we have to do is bring our tongue under control and use it in a way pleasing to Him and we can be what He wants us to be.

Every Christian has the potential for doing great things that will lift, and bring light and life into this world of so many needs. The unknown poet also writes of the positive side of the tongue.

**It takes so little to make us glad,
Just a cheering clasp of a friendly hand,
Just a word from one who can understand;
And we finish the task we long had planned;
And we lost the doubt and the fear we had-
So little it takes to make us glad.**

Every one of us has the power in our tongue to be harmful or

helpful to every person we know. To learn to control this little muscle for the glory of God is the secret of successful Christian living. The Christian who can do it is on his way to God's hall of fame, for James says if he learns to control that little member of the body, he will be able to control the whole body, and bring it into submission to God. The little is significant, and because it is, every one of us is significant in the plan of God. There is not one so ungifted that he cannot use his tongue more effectively for the glory of God and the good of man. Now let us give our attention to some of the details of James on this important truth.

In verses 3 and 4 he gives 2 illustrations of the significance of the small. One is for land lubbers, and one for the sea fairing man. By means of a little bit you determine where a horse takes you, and by means of a little rudder you determine where a ship will go. If James had lived today, he could have added another and said, by means of a little stick or wheel you determine the course of an airplane. When Mariner I was launched it went off course and missed Venus by ten of thousands of miles. It seems that in typing out the electronic instructions to the missile someone left out a hyphen. This tiny little mistake cost 18 million tax payers dollars. Numerous little things control the big things of life. The whole elevator goes where you want it to by pushing a little button. The illustration are endless, and the tongue is that little thing in the human body that determines where your life will go. When Paul said in Rom. 12:1 to present your bodies to God as a living sacrifice, he was clearly implying that the tongue, as part of that body, must be submissive to God, or there can be no successful Christian living. The body goes the way of the tongue.

When we think of the weakness of the flesh, and the lust of the flesh, we almost always think in terms of the sex drive. We all know the power of sex, and we are constantly made conscious of it, but reading James convinces me that sex is not as great a problem for

Christians as is the tongue. Christians have temptations, like everyone else, but they are aware of the dangers and tragedies of yielding, and, therefore, are usually on the winning side in this battle, but not so when it comes to the tongue. We are not conscious of its power for evil, and so we frequently fall. Listen as I read verses 6 though 8.

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

I can hardly believe that James is on the level. It sounds like an extreme exaggeration. James makes it sound like our tongues are so evil that they make our mouths equivalent to the very pit of hell. You would have a hard time convincing the most constant curser you know that his tongue is as bad as James makes it out to be. And remember, James is writing to Christians. I would not believe these words if they were not a part of the Bible. But because they are, and because the language is so strong, I have concluded that we have here one of the most significant passages in all the Bible, but one of the most neglected. If the tongue is really the primary tool by which Satan can trip us up, and cause us to fail, and if we are almost totally oblivious to it, and hardly give the matter any consideration, than it is no wonder that we are not advancing toward Christ-likeness.

**Its not the big events alone
that make us what we are;
and not the dizzy moments when
we're swinging on a star.
Its just the things that happens, as**

**along the road we plod;
the little things determine what
we're really worth to God.**

Author Unknown

**If little things are that important, than little things are big things,
and one of the biggest things you can do is take care of the little
things.**

17. A SUBJECT IN EVERYONE'S MOUTH James 3:6-12

Vance Havner tells the story of the old colored manny who was in quite a serious auto accident. Where there is a wreck, of course, there is soon a lawyer, and he said to her, "Auntie, you ought to collect some damages from this." "Damages!" she responded. "Man, I've done collected enough damages, what I need is repairs!" She may have been mixed up, but she knew that getting fixed up was the primary need. That is the need of each one of us when it comes to this subject in everyone's mouth-the tongue. What we need is not more damages, but repairs.

We see the damage everywhere, but we do not have to look at others, for our subject is one that is in everyone's mouth, and, therefore, we have to look no further than ourselves for evidence of its negative, harmful, and destructive power. Christians will often say that the answer is Christ, and no one can argue with that, for in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The problem with this solution is that the solution is not the problem. Leona Hertel explains what I mean out of her own experience. She wrote, "I once took a math course and found all the answers to the problems in the back of the book. I thought it would be a snap.

However, just having the answers did not help me to learn the proper mathematical procedures. Life is often like this. We know the answer to our problems is found in Christ, but we must learn how to apply His all-sufficient grace if we are to find help in time of need."

God has supplied the answer in Christ, but it is our duty to learn how to make it work in life. The application of truth is just as vital as truth itself. We do not become Christlike just by knowing that is our goal. It doesn't just happen. There are practical steps we must take to achieve this goal, and that is why James stressed wisdom, which is the practical application of truth and knowledge in life.

But how does James help us to achieve repairs for this minor muscle of the mouth which is marred by sin, and which can be so harmful in marring the lives of others? James follows the same pattern that needs to be followed in bringing the lost to turn to Christ and be saved. A sinner must be convinced of his sin before he feels any need for a Savior. So a Christian needs to be persuaded about the tremendous danger of the tongue before he will bring it under submission to God. Only when we are fully convinced of how inconsistent our tongue is will we be willing to work at bringing it into conformity with Christlikeness.

In verse 10 James makes it clear that the major problem Christians have with the tongue is in inconsistency. Out of the same mouth we send forth both blessing and cursing. We are back to our doublemindedness again, and James said in chapter 1 that such doublemindedness will not receive anything from the Lord. He will not give the wisdom and patience a person needs to press on to perfection. Your Christian growth can come to a halt just because your mouth is a fountain that sends forth both bitter and sweet.

Aesop tells the story of the master who ordered his servant to prepare him the most perfect dish on earth. The servant brought in

a dish of tongue, for he said, "The tongue is the instrument of the mind, and the source of the most beautiful poems and most noble of thoughts." The master then ordered him to prepare the most abominable dish possible, and the servant again brought him tongue saying, "It is the poisoned instrument of slander, falsehood, and blasphemy." The tongue is a great paradox, for it is both the best and the worst. It is the producer of all our praise, and the maker of all our malice. We both love and hate with the tongue, and James says we must stop using it for evil, and use it consistently for good.

Our need for direct help from God is obvious as we examine the details of James in his denunciation of the tongue. In verse 6 he says it is a fire. Fire can be good, but James stresses the fact that the tongue fire is fed by the flames of hell. Phillips in his translation makes it vivid-"A whole forest can be set ablaze by a tiny spark of fire, and the tongue is as dangerous as any fire, with vast potentialities for evil. It can poison the whole body; it can make the whole of life a blazing hell." The NEB has it, "...it keeps the wheel of our existence red-hot, and its flames are fed by hell."

The more versions you read the more impressed you become with the radical language of James. If we take James seriously, we are all, to some degree, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. One of our members is a traitor. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, but within the body is a sanctuary for an unholy spirit. Satan has one last strong hold in the Christian life, and as long as he can maintain some control of the tongue he can do a great deal of damage, even through a child of God. Mitton in his excellent commentary on James writes, "If our lives are thought of as, by right, God's property, God's rightful kingdom, then the tongue is the enemy agent within that kingdom, a ready tool at the disposal of God's enemy, the ruler of this world."

If James is exaggerating here, it is by God's inspiration, and it is

due to the fact that Christians underestimate the danger of evil in their tongue. The most dangerous enemies are always those within, and every believer carries one at all times right in the mouth. James says in verse 6 that the tongue can defile the whole body. The tongue leads the way and controls what we do with our body. If a man talks of evil, he will tend to follow it up with action. If you cannot trust a man's tongue, you cannot trust any part of him, for the tongue defiles the whole man. In Matt. 15:11 Jesus said, "Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." Jesus went on to name some of the things that defile a man's life, and two of them are false witness and slander.

Satan got the ball of sin rolling in this world by using the forked tongue of the serpent to bear false witness to Adam and Eve. Prov. 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue..." Satan brought death into the world by means of the tongue. Joseph landed in prison because of the slanderous tongue of a sensual woman. Jesus was severely slandered and called a glutton and winebibber, and by means of lying words people were stirred up to cry out for His crucifixion. Paul had to face it, and men of God all through history have had to suffer the burns that can be inflicted by the fire of the tongue in false witness. The tragedy is that this fire from hell can even come out of the mouth of Christian people.

James believed in a hell on earth. He only mentions hell once in his letter, and it is in relation to the tongue of believers. A Christian will never go to hell, but a Christian can bring hell to himself and others. It may be hard to believe that a Christian can be responsible for inflicting the torments of hell on others, but there is no way to escape it unless you get rid of James. James is a writer who is so honest that it hurts. He knocks away all of the illusions, and he forces Christians to look at reality. James says a Christian can have such an uncontrolled tongue that he does more for the promotion of hell than he does for the kingdom of heaven. We may not like to hear

it, but it does explain a lot of things in history.

In verse 10 James says these things ought not so to be. It is wrong, but it is real, and there is no point in sticking our heads in the sand and denying it. Vance Havner says it is not always good to know some of the big shots in the Christian world too well. It is depressing he says to hear them expound the Word of God, and then set down at the table with them and listen to them grip about the hotel service, and grumble about the mail being late. Even the best of God's servants are instruments of clay, and they have a strong tendency to reveal that by the use of their tongue. The unknown poet was not necessarily thinking of a church committee when he wrote these words, but no one can deny that he might have been.

**He cheered each dry committee,
With tales of absent folk,
And let not truth nor pity,
Impair his little joke.
Till loves were soiled, and lives were spoiled,
By every word he spoke.**

It is bad enough that it is real, but James makes it even worse in verses 7-8 when he dogmatically states that it is humanly hopeless to control the tongue. Human nature has some marvelous powers, and with much labor can tame the creatures of the jungle, sky, and sea. One of the wonders of the world is man's power to train the lower creatures. I have seen trained birds perform amazing stunts. It has been done from ancient times. Men of long ago even trained fish, and today most everyone has seen a whale or porpoise trained, and lions and tigers and elephants are old hat. When it comes to the tongue, however, man's weakness is as impressive as his power is over other creatures. No man can tame or control the tongue. James does not mean that we are all a bunch of wild uncontrollable babblers, but that we all have a tongue that at any time might go off

half cocked and do damage. We never know when we are going to say something stupid or hurtful.

The implication is that much of the evil of the tongue is not willful and deliberate, but it is the result of poor control. A Christian might hate himself for what he says, but he does it anyway because his tongue is an unruly evil. Most of us feel civilization is much safer than the jungle, but James implies that our chances of getting hurt are greatest where there are the most human tongues. Satan goes around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and according to James, the roaring may come from our own mouth. Samuel Hoffenstein wrote humorously, but with a touch of realism-

**The jungle is a kind of grove
Where lions, apes and rajahs rove;
Its not the kind of place that I
Should choose to live in, or to die;
Yet I should just as soon be in it
As here you blab another minute.**

Maybe some of you are feeling this way even about this message on the tongue, but we need to consider a few more verses. James closes verse 8 by saying that the tongue is full of deadly poison. It is a tool of the serpent, and once we sink our fangs into someone, and let false rumors or slander flow, there is no cure. The only way to deal with the sins of the tongue is by prevention. It takes a baby a couple of years to learn how to talk, and then decades to learn how to keep quiet. Silence is golden because often the best thing you can ever say is nothing. In verses 9-10 James stresses the terrible inconsistency of the Christian in blessing God and cursing man with the same tongue.

Jesus knew this was going to be a problem for believers. In Luke 6:28 He said, "Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which

despitefully use you." Paul repeated the command to the Romans in 12:14, "Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not." There is just no justification for a Christian to curse any person, but the fact that they need to be constantly reminded makes it evident that they do, and James says this ought not to be. It is totally inconsistent with the Christian life to use the tongue in this way.

**Too many times we judge a friend
Away from God and man,
And drive repentant prodigals
From Jesus and His plan.**

**Too many times our knifing words
Stiletto through a heart,
Leaving wounds beyond the healing
Of any doctor's art. Author Unknown**

Phillip Dodderidge wrote, "The tongue is the instrument of most of the positive evils with which sincere Christians are chargeable." Every Christian must be aware that the most ferocious monster in the world has his den just behind the teeth. Peter denied his Lord with his tongue, and Christians do so frequently by using it to curse and injure those for whom Christ died. There are probably more doubters and skeptics in this world because of the uncontrolled tongues of Christians than any other single factor. Both our relationship to God and to man depends upon our brining the tongue under the Lordship of Christ. The poet writes, "A dog is loved by old and young; He wags his tail and not his tongue."

A man wrote a famous tract called Come To Jesus. He became a well known Christian. Later he got into a theological debate. He wrote an article against his opponent, and it bristled with sarcasm, and sharp cutting words. He showed it to a friend and asked for his opinion. The friend read it and said, "Why don't you title it Go To

The Devil by the author of Come To Jesus." The man got the point, and I trust we will all get the point of James. A tongue that both blesses and curses is as freakish as a fountain that has both sweet and bitter water, or a fig tree that grows olives.

God expects Christians to be ideal specimens of humanity, and not weird freaks who keep everybody guessing whether they are from heaven or hell. The world expects Christians to be consistent. If you walk by an apple tree everyday you will pay little attention, but if you find lemons on it one day, you will be impressed and never forget it. So if a Christian lives a consistent life, and then suddenly lets his tongue speak evil of men, all will be impressed, and never forget that inconsistency. The harm has been done to one's testimony. That is why James is stressing consistency, and that is why one of the greatest prayers in the Bible is Psa. 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer."

18. THE WORLD IN THE CHURCH Based on James 4:1-2

Theodore Reik tells of how an Austrian Jew was trying to find a refuge from Hitler. He went to a travel office to select a place to which he could flee, and with the help of the clerk he began to consider the possibilities. But each country had some difficulty connected with it. In one you needed a certain amount of money; in another you needed a labor permit, and others required a passport, which he could not get, and still others would not allow immigrants at any price. Finally, after going over the globe, the Jew turned to the clerk and said in desperation, "Haven't you got another globe?" He was frustrated by the limitations of only one world.

For the present, at least, man is stuck with only one globe, and this limitation is tough on those who are looking for a utopia. This world is all we have. The Christian, however, though he is also temporarily stuck in it, is not stuck with it. The kingdom of Christ is not of this world, and those who are citizens of His kingdom are to be in the world but not of it. Their lives and conduct are not to conform to the world pattern, but are to be a contrasting challenge to the world. The Christian does not have another globe, but he has another sphere, for his life is hid with Christ in God, and he is a citizen of eternity.

This alternative is not automatic, however, and if a Christian does not consciously commit himself as a living sacrifice unto to God, he can become a victim of the secularism of the world. The words of William Wordsworth are too true to ignore. "The world is too much with us, late and soon. Getting and spending we lay waste our powers." The tentacles of secularism do not stop at encircling our society, but they continue until they worm their way into the church, and straggle its opposition. If the world can just get the church to lose its saltiness so that it does not cause their wounds to sting, and if it can get it to hide its light so it does not reveal their shame, then the world will join the church, for there will be nothing to fear. The church will cease to be an instrument of God, and will soon be worshiping materialism along with the world.

Georgia Harness defines secularism as, "The organization of life as if God did not exist." It is practical atheism, and many feel secularism is the greatest enemy of the church today. It is not an new enemy, however, but has been with the church from the start. The Christians to whom James writes were only 20 years removed from the cross of Christ, and yet they were so infiltrated by worldliness that they were in danger of becoming enemies rather than servants of God. There is nothing quite like these words anywhere else in the New Testament, and their uniqueness demands careful

consideration. The content can be broken into two parts: The external symptoms of secularism and the internal sources of secularism. First consider-

I. THE EXTERNAL SYMPTOMS OF SECULARISM.

The symptoms are so shocking that some commentators feel that James cannot be writing to Christians. He must be addressing non-Christian Jews, they say. They say, "Certainly you cannot believe that Christians could fight and war even to the point of murder." Phillips, NEB, Berkely, and the Amplified all use murder in verse 2. The RSV retains kill, as with the KJV. There is no basis for thinking that these were unbelievers, however, James speaks of them as brethren in verse 11.

This does not prove they are Christians for non-Christian Jews would also be his brethren, but when he speaks of their submission to God and resisting of Satan in verse 7, and of their drawing nigh to God in verse 8, it is obvious they are believers, for if not, James is advising non-believers that they can be right with God without Christ. Unless you admit that James is writing to Christians you are faced with a book in the Bible that says a non-believer can come to God on his own merits without trusting in Christ. This makes it certain that James is right to believers.

Scholars have tried all kinds of things to escape the implications of the strong language of James, and especially in verse 2 where he says they kill or murder. If you cannot deny he was writing to Christians, then next best thing is to deny that he wrote what he did. Erasmus, the Greek scholar during the time of the Reformation, did just that. He said the original must have said that they envy rather than they kill, and so he inserted envy into the second addition of his Greek New Testament. His conscience must have bothered him, however, for in his third addition he changed it back to kill. He

knew he was tampering with the Word of God without a shred of evidence to support him. Many other translations, however, continue to use envy, and not until the KJV was printed did kill get put back into the text.

Even great men like Calvin and Luther substituted another word. Calvin used envy, and Luther used hate. In other words, no one wanted to believe that Christians could be so much influenced by the world that they could even go so far as murder. Men were willing to reject a word from the Bible with no good reason except that they did not want to believe it. Let's face it, we may not be happy about all that God reveals, but we must accept it even it shatters our pre-conceived notions. Luther came close with his substitute with the word hate, for according to the New Testament the hate of a brother is equal to murder. Jesus said in Matt. 5:21-22 that murder faced judgement in the Old Testament, but that to be angry with a brother would lead to judgment in the New. In I John 3:15 we read, "Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer." So hate can be a legitimate substitute, but it is no way lessens the seriousness of it.

Let us remember that the Christians to whom James writes are Jewish Christians with a background of contention and fighting among themselves, and with the Romans. Some of them had, no doubt, been zealots who had cut a few Roman throats. The thief on the cross who accepted Jesus was certainly a thief, and possibly a murderer. The Jews were very militaristic. They had hopes for a Messiah who would conquer the Romans, and give them all the material benefits of life. They had a good start on being secularized before they became Christians, and they brought their worldliness into the church with them.

It is good to remind ourselves that the early church did not draw on a Sunday School trained population for its members, but upon a thoroughly paganized population. Even the Jews were in an awful

state of decline. Jesus called it an evil and adulterous generation because they were so worldly minded and materialistic. Our failure to make a distinction in our reference to the early church between the church at Pentecost, and those founded by the Apostles after Pentecost, has led to confusion in our minds, and has blinded us to an understanding of much of the New Testament. When we refer to the early church as our ideal, and that to which we want to conform, we are referring to the Spirit filled church in which there was perfect unity, harmony, and sound doctrine. This was the church at Pentecost, but the church to whom the Epistles were written were already far from the ideal. The battle with the world in the church began immediately, and it was just this battle that was the cause for much of the New Testament to be written.

We must face the language of James honestly, and not try and brush it off as applying to non-believers. All of the Ten Commandments have been broken by believers, and not to recognize it is to blind yourself to the dangers you face, and the need for constant growth in grace. We would not need the Ten Commandments if it was impossible to break them. We do not forbid fish to climb ladders. We do not prohibit elephants from flying. Why command Christians not to lie, steal, kill, or commit adultery, and covet if they can no more do these things than a fish can climb a ladder, or an elephant fly? If the Ten Commandments still have any meaning to the believer, it means he can break any, and all of them.

Peter assumes this to be so when he says in I Pet. 4:15, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busy body in other men's matters." This is strange advice to give to Christians, but history proves it is needed, for just as the Jews killed Christians thinking they were serving God, so Christians have killed other Christians with the same enthusiasm. It would be a study in itself to cover the history of murder within the church. Most

of this was by professing Christians who are not truly children of God, but history gives many examples of true believers who killed. Men like Calvin and Luther, and the great Puritans of early America who murdered Indians and witches. And who knows how many in the unrecorded history of the heart have hated another believer?

It is hard to believe that there are no Christians guilty of this right today. Since there are born again Christians on both sides of almost every serious conflict, it is likely that there are believers everyday who are in a category with those to whom James writes. Many issues are so emotional that we know they fill Christians with hatred and bitterness, and sometimes it is directed toward other Christians with an opposite perspective. When this happens it is because we are being filled with the spirit of the world rather than the spirit of Christ. This is an example of the external symptom of secularism. Next we consider-

II. INTERNAL SOURCE OF SECULARISM.

James makes it clear that the external wars are products of internal wars. War begins in the heart. Thomas Manton said we carry an enemy in our bosom. The Canaanite is not wholly cast out. There is still the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, and if we feed them, they will consume us. Let your desires go unchecked, and it is like putting a madman in the ship with drills and dynamite. The sides will soon be split, and the waters of worldliness will flood the ship and sink all that is spiritual.

These Christians to whom James wrote were fanatics for things. They desired and fought to get what they wanted. They had set their affections on things below, and not on things above. They were not content, but operated on the principle that a man's life consists in the abundance of his possessions. This naturally leads to conflict with others, for some will hinder this goal, and others will get more

than us, and so in envy we seek to get it from them. Covetousness becomes a ruling passion, and is a form of idolatry that threatens the very soul. Peter warned Christians in I Peter 2:11, "Abstain from fleshly lust which war against the soul."

The Bible is frighteningly realistic about the Christians personal responsibility. James in 1:13-14 makes it clear that God is not the author of temptation. God may test by trial, but never by enticement by sin. Satan can not be blamed either, for he is a defeated foe, and in 4:7 James says if he is resisted he will flee in defeat. Satan only has power in a believer when a believer submits to him. In other words, a worldly, secular minded, covetous Christian has no one to blame but himself, and when he stands in judgement he will have no excuse for the poor use he made of his body and time.

In the crash of 1929 J. C. Penny's business was quite solid, but according to Dr. S. I. McMillen, Mr Penny had made some unwise personal commitments. He was so worried he couldn't sleep. He developed shingles and had to be hospitalized. Even under sedatives he tossed all night. He began to break mentally as well as physically. He became overwhelmed with a fear of death. He wrote farewell letters to his wife and son, for he did not expect to live until morning.

The next morning he awoke and heard singing from the hospital chapel. He got up and went to the chapel. They were singing, "God will take care of you." As he sat there he said something happened to him like a miracle. He felt like he had been instantly lifted out of a dark dungeon into warm brilliant sunlight. He wrote, "I felt as if I had been transported from hell to paradise. I felt the power of God as I had never felt it before. I realized then that I alone was responsible for all my troubles. I know that God will His love was there to help me. From that day to this, my life has been free from worry. I am 71 years old, and the most dramatic and glorious minutes of my life were those I spent in that chapel that morning."

They were glorious because J. C. Penny was delivered from the grip of worldliness, and he found freedom in the kingdom of God.

All of this ought to wake us up to do some serious self-examination. Are we self-centered? Are most of aims and goals in life materialistic? Do we covet the power, popularity, and possessions of others? Benjamin Franklin said, "It is easier to suppress the first desire than to satisfy all that follow it." If we let desire and covetousness have its way in our lives, it becomes a sort of mental gluttony. It kills affection for all else, and becomes the alpha and omega of our being. The solution, of course, as James says in the following verses is to submit to God; to draw nigh to God, and to humble ourselves before God. We must study these solutions to secularism in depth, but our goal in this message is to make it clear that the problem is real, and only as we are aware of the reality of the danger can we honestly face up to it, and conquer it by the grace of God.

It is possible for the world to enter the church and dominate its attitudes and actions. It is possible for the church to be become so secularized that it ceases to be a tool for God. Like the church of Ephesus in Rev. 2, it is possible to leave our first love and substitute our love for the world in place of our love for Christ. The result will be that our candlestick will be removed, and we will no longer be the light of the world, for we will be the world instead. All of this being possible makes it sheer folly for believers not to consciously dedicate themselves to build up their faith and knowledge of God, and to consciously battle the forces that operate in our own lives that tend to make us world minded. It is only as we as individuals keep the world out of our lives that we can keep the world out of the church.

19. GOD'S MARRIAGE PROBLEM Based on James 4:3-4

Nothing can be so funny as that which can be so tragic. There is nothing funny about tragedy, but one of the paradoxes of life is that tragedy produces so much humor. Tragedy and comedy are so close they are Siamese twins. There is nothing funny about a concussion, for example, but if you get one by falling on a banana peeling in a crowd, you will get laughs galore. It is because one of the basic causes for laughter is shock. When I was in college the horrible story of Ed Gein, the madman who butchered several people, hit the news. Within a week there were hundreds of jokes about it. It was the greatest theme for humor. It is strange that such a tragedy can be the basis for so many laughs, but it is not unusual, for tragedies are the source of so much humor. Such themes as immorality, drunkenness, and mental illness are examples of tragedies which produce thousands of jokes.

Then we come to marriage, which is a theme that reaches the interest of just about everyone. Someone has said the money we spent on landing a man on the moon is nothing compared to what women are spending to land a man right here on earth. I was talking to a relative who said she was chasing her parakeet one day and it hit the door and fell stunned at her feet. She was quite thrilled she said, for that was the first time a male had ever fallen for her. It was funny, and everybody laughed, but what made it so was the tragic truth that she was unlovely and unloved.

Few themes can be more comprehensive than love, courtship, and marriage with all of their potential for blessing or tragedy. A bad marriage is no joke, but the jokes on bad marriages could fill volumes. I am sure it is a blessing that we can laugh about the problems of marriage and family life. It acts like a release valve when people can see that their problem is common enough to be joked about. Someone has said that the problems of marriage are so

common that the best way to describe the boy-girl relationship from meeting to marriage is in three words: friendship, courtship, and battleship.

The point of all this is that the kingdom of God suffers because of this same problem. God is not a bachelor. He knows about the problems of marriage from the inside, for He has struggled with it ever since He chose Israel to be His bride. Israel was often an unfaithful wife, and God who remained loyal to her cried out in Jer. 3:14, "Return backsliding children, says the Lord, because I am your husband." (Berkeley Version). All through the Old Testament the idolatry of Israel is called a whoring after other gods. She is pictured as an adulteress. The book of Hosea is a story of an unfaithful wife who left Hosea for her lovers, but he pursued her, forgave her, and took her back, and all of this is an illustration of God's faithfulness to His unfaithful wife.

Now we come to the New Testament, and James says God's marriage problem is still the same. The New Israel-the Church, the Bride of Christ can still be as unfaithful as old Israel. The sharp language of verse 4 can only be understood when we see that worldliness on the part of a believer is a forsaking of God for another love, and it is equal to spiritual adultery. This kind of language is also positive proof that these are true Christians that James is writing to, for one cannot be unfaithful wife who is not a wife at all, which would be true of all unbelievers. No non-Christian is in any sense a part of the Bride of Christ. Phillips translation makes the meaning of this verse very clear. "You are unfaithful wives, flirting with the glamour of this world, and never realizing that to be the world's lover means becoming the enemy of God."

God's marriage problem has always been the same problem. It is a lack of loyalty. His people in both testaments have not given Him their undivided loyalty. God's lament is found in Jer. 3:20. "Surely,

as a faithless wife leaves her husband, so have you been faithless to me, O house of Israel." The Christian likewise breaks the marriage vow when he or she allows the world to win their affection. The enticement of the world is so real and strong that it is rare when a Christian can honestly say from his heart what the poet has written.

**Let worldly minds the world pursue.
It has no charms for me.
Once I admired its trifles too,
But grace has set me free.**

Do we really count the values and pleasures of the world as trifles, or does our life prove just the reverse, and that it is God, His Word, and His service that are the trifles? God will not tolerate a divided loyalty. You cannot serve God and mammon. Polyandry is definitely forbidden in the spiritual realm. The believer can have only one husband. The church owes absolute loyalty to God alone, and because God is a jealous God flirting with the world puts you at enmity with God.

The great need is to be aware of the danger, and that is why James is writing to these Christians. It is the taking of ones loyalty for granted that leads to the problem. The alienation of affection by a third party destroys many a marriage. People think they can flirt without forsaking their loyalty to their mate, but it is high risk. Those who allow these circumstances to continue become personality attached to another. They may not even be aware of it, but they are undermining their primary loyalty. The same is true in our relationship to God. We can give Him lip service, and any spare time we may get, and think we have made Him Lord, even while we are getting intimately involved with the world.

What would you think of a wife who spent 5 or 6 evenings a week with a fellow worker, and only 1 with her husband? God thinks the

same thing about a Christian who lives for the world all week, and then says, "I love you Lord," on Sunday. God not only suspects unfaithfulness, He knows it, and He declares that such a course leads to alienation of affection and enmity. We see then that God has the same kind of marriage problem that is breaking up masses of homes today. The world, like a handsome appealing lover, competes for the church's loyalty. The tragedy is that some are so foolish as to fall for it. What can be more tragic than Paul's lament in II Tim. 4:10.

"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world..." When this happens, it is due to a neglect of spiritual things. Naturally, the other man or other woman seems more attractive and exciting when you neglect your own mate, and do nothing together. When you stopped praying, reading your Bible, seeking the fellowship of the body, and forsaking the thrill of obedience to God's will, you can expect that your spiritual marriage will be dull and drab, and the world will look charming and exciting.

Charles W. Abel, a missionary, said, "Christianity that is really worth anything makes the pagan world progressively less endurable." In other words, if you cannot say as you examine your life, I put less and less value on the things of the world, and more and more on the things of Christ, it means your loyalty is lagging, and you are not growing in grace. Your love for the Lord is not supreme, and the cause is likely to be that you are having a love affair with the world, and you are guilty of spiritual adultery.

This leads to Christians who are indistinguishable from non-Christians in conduct and character. The dedicated Christian can be grateful for all that the world has produced for a modern life of health and comfort. They ought to be grateful for modern studies that help us understand the problems of life, but when they begin to worship the world and its values, they lose their affections for God. The modern religion of secularism is not without its form of worship. They have the so-called 151st Psalm which begins, "Oh, come, let us

sing unto Sociology; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our group consciousness." More famous is the modern version of Psa. 23.

**"Science is my shepherd, I shall not want;
it makes me to lie down on foam rubber
mattresses; it leads me on 4-lane highways;
it leadeth me into the psychiatrist's office
for my ego's sake. Yea, though I walk
thru the valley of the hydrogen bomb, I will
not fear it, thy jets and atomic bombs comfort
me. Thou preparest a table before me in the
presence of the world's billions of hungry
people; thou anointest my head with home
permanents, my alcoholic cup runneth over
surely pensions and social security shall follow
me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in
the old folks home forever.**

We must be grateful for what the providence of God has led men to develop, but when it is allowed to weaken our loyalty to Christ, it becomes a tragedy. The ancient peoples ceased to be thankful to God for the Sun, moon, rain, and all the blessings of nature, and they begin to worship the creation instead of the Creator. This is what can happen to the modern Christian who gets so enamored with the wonderful things God has permitted man to discover that he begins to devote his life to those things instead of to the One whose grace has made them possible. It is too easy to forget that everything man has developed is due to the grace of God in allowing history to continue so that man can experience the progress that he has experienced. This happened to Israel every time God allowed her to prosper. She forgot God and put her faith in their own self-sufficiency.

In verse 3 we see how prayer can even be perverted, and men can seek to use God as their servant rather than submit to serve Him. It is possible to be so deceived that you expect God to aid you in evil. It is like slave traders asking God's blessing upon their business. It is not surprising that a Roman robber could pray to his goddess-"Fair Laverna, give me a prosperous robbery, a rich prey, and a secret escape..." It is surprising, however, when Christians can be so infatuated with themselves that they expect God to feed their lusts. God refuses to be a partner to your self-corruption. If you find you are trying to exploit the powers of prayer for selfish and sensual goals, you have another indication that the world is too much with you. It is as if we became the bride of Christ for the sake of gain, as a girl marries a man for his money.

This does not mean you cannot ask God for material blessings. Dr. Mounce told of his friend who prayed earnestly for God to make him rich so he could give abundantly. The prayer was answered, and he became wealthy. The motive is what makes the difference. His motive was to be able to give more for the kingdom of God. We can ask God for anything if we intend to use it as a means to the greater end of serving Him, but even spiritual requests can be unheard if the motive is strictly self-centered. Verse 5 is one of the most difficult in the book of James. One way of interpreting it is-do you think the Spirit that dwells in us is the author of this lust for the world, and envy of what others have? The answer, of course, is obviously not. This lust and envy is opposed to the Spirit, and if we have it, that is proof we are not walking in the Spirit, but are yielding to secularism.

This interpretation makes good sense, and it could be what James is getting at, but most scholars feel the meaning is more in line with the theme we have been pursuing, which is God's marriage problem. The Berkeley Version has it, "The Spirit, which took up his abode in us, yearns jealously over us." And in a footnote it says, "God wants

all of a person and our undivided loyalty." God loves with such zeal that He cannot tolerate any rival. He loves jealously for the entire devotion of His people. He will not share you with the world, but yearns for a pure and loyal bride. God's Spirit jealously longs for us to forsake the world and cling only unto Him. Like any earthly husband, He cannot be satisfied with a wife whose loyalty is divided. The day will come when the church will be presented to Christ as a bride without spot or wrinkle, but until then we can only solve God's marriage problem by being loyal to him alone, and cease to flirt with the world. When our conduct in the world reveals that we love the world more than we love our Lord, we are a part of God's marriage problem.

20. IN HARMONY WITH HEAVEN Based on James 4:6-10

Russell Delany, professor of philosophy and evangelism at the Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, has said that our great need today is:

**Not for better legislation, but for better legislators.
Not for better business, but for better business men.
Not for better banking, but for better bankers.
Not for better farming, but for better farmers.
Not for better teaching, but for better teachers.
Not for better preaching, but for better preachers.**

In other words, he is saying that man's greatest problem is man. He is trying to cut through the thick fog that has blinded man to the real source of discord in the world, which is himself. James has done the same thing for the church. He has diagnosed the problem as secularism. He hasn't pulled any punches. We are compelled to

admit that the disease of secularism is a serious threat to our spiritual health. It brings discord into our relationship with God and man.

James has made it clear that the real enemy is the self. The problems in the church have the same origin as all the problems in the world, which is self-centeredness. This is the religion of the world. Self is the idol in secularism, but God warns, and history reveals that those who would put self on the throne will end by being the monarch of a madhouse. Nietzsche, the German philosopher, carried through completely the experiment of rejecting God, and all meaning and purpose of life. He finished his experiment with a very logical conclusion by going mad. Deny God, and life becomes a discord. Someone has said that one of the best proofs for the existence of God is what happens to life when you deny it. If all were to forsake God for self, hell would begin on earth.

Listen to the philosophy that Max Stirner expresses, whose religion is radical egotism. He writes, "My relation to the world is this: I no longer do anything for it for God's sake; I do nothing for man's sake, but what I do I do for my sake." Self is his god. In the book Holy Barbarians a man looks into a mirror and says, "This is the face of God you see. Why don't you relax and enjoy God? God is you you fool." This, of course, is radical self-centeredness, but James has made it clear that a modified and more subtle form of self-worship can enter the church, and bring with it the resulting disharmony and discord, for it is incompatible with agape, or selfless love, and humility.

Pride blinds us to our self-centeredness, and to the reality that we are the problem. A character in modern literature cried out, "It's not my fault! It's not my fault! Nothing in this lousy world is my fault!" He is saying that he has no responsibility, and any change that is needed is not up to him. He is like the boy who said to his

father when he was scolded for fighting with his brother, "Well, its his fault. He started it when he hit me back." I trust all of us can recognize that we are a part of the problem, and none of us are faultless. If there is anger, envy, lack of joy, loss of interest in the Bible, and temptation to go after the gods of the world, the problem is not God, the devil, the church, the preacher, or the government, but it is you. The need is not for a better church for you, but a better you for the church. The old Negro spiritual says, "It's not my brother or my sister but its me O Lord standing in the need of prayer."

If we are able to come to this conclusion, and see that the real problem is the self, then we are ready for the answer. James not only describes the sin that leads to discord, but he prescribes the solution that leads to harmony with heaven. The solution to the sins of selfishness, sensuality, and secularism, and all that is anti-spiritual is submission. In verse 7 James says submit yourselves to God. Submission seems to be the key word, for it involves humility, and resistance to the devil, and drawing nigh to God in repentance. It is interesting that James should use this word to describe the solution to God's marriage problem, and of how to be in harmony with heaven. Paul uses the same word to describe the solution for earthly marriages and harmony in the home.

Paul says in Eph. 5:22 and in Col. 3:1, "Wives submit yourselves unto your husbands as unto the Lord." This, of course, is followed by the command for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. This is in parallel with our relationship to God. It takes two to make a marriage successful against all the forces of secularism. Submission on the part of one, and love on the part of the other are the two primary ingredients for happiness and harmony. The answer is action and not a mere formula you memorize. It is action that you perform over and over again all through life.

God's marriage can only be one that is happy for both partners when the Christian remains in a state of submission to his will. The analogy with husband and wife is not perfect because no husband is equal to God, and always right. But the fact is that earthly marriage is also at its best when there is strong leadership, and submission to that leadership. In many cases the strongest leadership may come from the wife. In God's marriage it is always God who provides the leadership, and man who must submit.

Let us not assume, however, that having the answer is the end, for it is only the beginning. The answer is worthless without application. It is one thing to know that submission is essential to a harmonious Christian life, but it is another thing to submit. Pride is a persistent pest, and often the Christian is as rebellious over triviality as were the Lilliputians in Gulliver's Travels. One of them was explaining to Gulliver that the primitive way of breaking eggs before they were eaten was at the large end. The present king's grandfather was going to break an egg in the traditional way, and happen to cut his finger. Whereupon the Emperor, his father, published an edict commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs.

The people so highly resented this law that since then, said the Lilliputian, there have been 6 rebellions, wherein one Emperor lost his life, and another is crowned, and 11 thousand persons have suffered death rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end, and many hundred large volumes have been published on this controversy. This, of course, is a mockery of the triviality over which men fight, but the picture is true in man's relation to God as well. What can be more foolish than for a man to refuse to submit to God, when to do so would gain for him all the blessings of God? Man has always had the suspicion that he will lose something if he submits to God. Satan deceived Adam and Eve into thinking God was denying them something they could gain by picking the forbidden fruit.

Don't submit to God, but take things into your own hands, and you will be like God. This is the deception that leads men into rebellion all through history.

James is saying that the highway to harmony with heaven is reached only by going through the tunnel of submission. Many Christians refuse to take it because they think they can get there by a cheaper route. In reality they pay exorbitant fees, and still never arrive, for the price they pay for any other route is futility. Emile Durkheim has described the pursuit of happiness and harmony which characterizes the world, and which the non-submissive Christian can get caught up in.

"From top to bottom of the social scale, violent but indefinite and unfocused desires are aroused. Nothing could possibly appease them. Men thirst for novelty, for unknown delights, for nameless sensations which nevertheless lose all their zest as soon as they are experienced. Then, let the slightest reverse occur and men are powerless to bear it. They discover how futile the whole uproar was and realize that any number of these novel experiences piled up indefinitely has not succeeded in accumulating a solid capital of happiness on which they might live in time of trial."

Everyone knows this is true, and yet even Christians will often refuse to admit it in their heart, and go ahead acting on it as a philosophy of life. They might agree with the poet who wrote-

**This world is all a fleeting show,
For man's illusion given.
The smiles of joy, the tears of woe,
Deceitful shine, deceitful flow,
There's nothing true but heaven.**

But when it comes right down to actual practice, they choose the world and its way, and refuse to submit to God. It is no wonder that Simone Weil has said, "It is easier for a non-Christian to become a Christian than for a Christian to become one. What he means is that the Christian often will not recognize his pride and repent, but will go on in perpetual resistance to submission. He goes on seeking happiness as an end in itself not realizing that it is only attained by the pursuit of holiness.

Happiness is a by product of a life in harmony with God. If you seek it as an end in itself, you inevitably fall into the deception of the world that says self-indulgence is the proper path. James says to wake up Christians, for God is opposed to the world, and to the pride that determines its whole system of values. God's grace is only given to the humble. If you submit to God, and resist Satan, he will flee as a defeated foe. He cannot stand against one who has placed God's will above self-indulgence and pride. Satan's power is gone when there is nothing to appeal to in us because we are committed to God's will.

Submission to God gives a power that cannot be obtained in any other way. It is a paradox, but submission of self is the way to self-fulfillment. He who does not submit is denying himself the power of God to resist Satan. He is denying himself the joy of perfect harmony with God. This is an enormous sacrifice to make, and all for no good purpose. It is like thousands dying over which end of the egg to break. On the other hand, he who submits to God gains everything needed for true happiness, and the self gains on every count.

The conclusion then is this. The battle within the Christian life to become a fully committed servant of God is as great, if not greater, than the battle within the lost sinner to become a child of God. This explains the often seen poor quality of Christian character. It

explains why you and I are so often what we should not be, and are too often not what we should be. The problem lies in the lack of submission. In one or more areas of our character or conduct we are not submitting to God. In one or more aspects of life we are self-centered, self-willed, and to that degree there is discord in our Christian life. We have the prescription now, but its up to us to swallow it and say with the poet-

**I'll trust my great Physician's skill,
What He prescribes can ne'er be ill;
For each disease He knows what's fit;
He's wise and good, and I'll submit.**

Until we do we can never be completely in harmony with heaven.

21. SINS OF OMISSION based on James 4:17

We are tempted to do evil, but seldom think of the reality that we are also tempted to not do good. It is possible to be doing nothing wrong, and still be living in sin, because of what we are not doing. This is the surprising truth that James hits us with in 4:17 where he says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." Doing nothing can be a worse sin than doing something that is bad. This is because the omission of good is the commission of evil. This text puts an end to any idea of sinless perfection, for it is not likely that anyone can live sinless for very long in the light of this verse. We can avoid doing any evil, but this will not render us sinless, for there is good we ought to do that we are not doing, and this too is sin. This text puts us all in the category of sinners. A Sunday School teacher asked her class, "Does anyone here know what we mean by sins of omission?" A small girl replied: "Aren't those the sins we

should have committed, but didn't?" Lets clarify this issue so nobody has that kind of understanding.

It is a sin to lie, but it is also a sin not to tell the truth when you should. It is a sin to steal from another, but it is also a sin not to give to another when it is in your power to do so for their good. Prov. 3:27 says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act." If you can do good and don't, it is a sin. It is a sin to commit adultery, but it is also a sin to not meet the sexual needs of your mate which can lead to adultery. In other words, the sin of omission can be the major cause for the sin of commission. Because you did not see that a man had food and shelter for his family, he had to rob and steal for these provisions. The doing of nothing on your part was a major cause for the doing of evil on his part. Both are a part of the sin problem. It is not just the one guilty of breaking a law, but those guilty of not meeting a need that leads to that sinful action who are a part of the total picture of evil. Matthew Henry wrote, "Omissions are sins which will be brought into judgment, as well as commissions. He that does not the good he knows should be done, as well as he who does the evil he knows should not be done, will be condemned."

Margaret E. Sangster wrote,

**It isn't the thing you do dear,
It's the thing you leave undone
That gives you a bit of a heartache
At setting of the sun.
The tender word forgotten,
The letter you did not write,
The flowers you did not send, dear,
Are your haunting ghosts at night.
The stone you might have lifted
Out of a brother's way;**

**The bit of heartsome counsel
You were hurried too much to say;
The loving touch of the hand, dear,
The gentle, winning tone
Which you had no time nor thought for
With troubles of your own.
Those little acts of kindness
So easily out of mind,
Those chances to be angels
Which we poor mortals find-
They come in night and silence,
Each sad, reproachful wraith,
When hope is faint and flagging,
And a chill has fallen on faith.
For life is all too short, dear,
And sorrow is all too great,
To suffer our slow compassion
That tarries until too late;
And it isn't the thing you do, dear,
It's the thing you leave undone
Which gives you heartache
At the setting of the sun.**

In 1744 Louis XV of France was sick and all the nation was weeping and in prayer for his recovery. The people lived in hope that the young king would bring happier days to them, for they had lived under the heel of a cruel tyrant. In 1774 after 30 years of his reign he was again lying ill, but there were no tears and no prayers for his recovery, because he had done nothing for the people to fulfill their hopes. Doing nothing good makes you an evil king, even if you do nothing bad. The Golden Rule is, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It is active and not passive. It is not enough to not do wrong. You must do right to be right with God. James is the practical book, and he makes it clear that not doing good works is to

be a worthless Christian. If nothing good comes out of your faith, it is dead faith, and of no value to God or man. Doing is essential to being a Christian.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan the priest and Levite did not do any evil act. They did not go to the injured man and steal something the thieves had missed. All they did is pass by on the other side and do nothing to help the man. They broke no law of the Old Testament, but they did break the law of the New Testament, which is the law of love. They did not love their neighbor as themselves, and this do nothing religion was condemned as evil, and this is the kind of faith that James is condemning as worthless and dead. By doing nothing when they could have done good, they did evil, and were guilty of sin, and breaking the most important law of all, the law of love. They were as guilty as the thieves, if not more guilty.

Sin is like the speed limit laws. You can break the law by going over the legal limit, but you can also break it by going under the minimum limit. You can be going too slow, and not reaching a level that is expected. So it is in life. You can be living below what is expected by doing nothing, or being too slow to do what is right and good, and by so doing be sinning. Wickedness is going too fast, but negligence and indifference is going too slow. Both are breaking the law, and both are sinning. The old guy creeping along the interstate at 30 is just as dangerous as the teen flying along at 90. You must stay within certain boundaries to avoid sinning. Not doing good when you can is being below the minimum. The priest and the Levite were not speeding and breaking the law by going too fast, but they were not going up to the minimum speed, and so were just as guilty as the thieves who were breaking the law at the upper end.

The Gospels do not tell us of Jesus going about avoiding evil. He did that, but they tell us that he went about doing good. It is the positive of what he did, and not the negative of what he avoided that

is the focus of his life. He would not have lived a perfect human life had he gone off to live in a cave somewhere and never once committed any sin. Sinlessness is not found in not doing evil only, but in doing good. The purpose of Jesus coming into the world was not to see if he could avoid doing what was out of God's will, but to fulfill God's will and do all the good he could, and in the end atone for the sins of the world that all might have the chance to experience God's ultimate good in eternity. Jesus avoided the worst sin of all by not committing the sin of omission and leaving undone the great good he, and he alone, could do. He said on the cross, "It is finished." Nothing was left undone that needed to be done for our salvation to be possible.

Jesus is our example, not only in that he avoided doing what was bad, but in that he always did what was good. The nine who never came back to Jesus to thank him for curing them of leprosy did not do evil, but they failed to do something that was so right and good. The five foolish virgins did not do evil, but they failed to do what was right and fill their lamps with oil. The man with one talent did not do evil with it, but he buried it and did nothing with it, and for that he was condemned. Those who are judged as goats in Matt. 25 did not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or visit those in prison. They are not condemned for doing evil, but for doing nothing good when they could have done so. We need to understand that not doing something is the same as doing something bad. When you are not kind, it is being unkind. When you do not give encouragement, you are being discouraging. Hood wrote,

The wounds I might have healed!
The human sorrow and the smart!
And yet it never was in my soul
To play so ill a part;
But evil is wrought by want of thought,
As well as by want of heart.

The basic definition of sin is missing the mark. It is missing the opportunity to do good, and choosing instead to do evil, or to do nothing at all. And the nothing at all is often overlooked as being a part of the whole problem of sin. If we fail to build up another in the body of Christ, it is to be in partnership with those who seek to tear him down. We are part of the problem, and not part of the solution. It is not enough to just be one who is doing nothing bad. You must be one who is doing something good. When we do not do the good that we can we are not the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We are failing to be channels of God's love in this fallen world just by doing nothing. The Bible is loaded with sins that are not active sins of violating the law of God, but which are things that we are not doing that we should be doing. Whit Sasser has compiled this list of such sins:

We Sin By...

- 1. Not Praying - I Samuel 12:23**
- 2. Not Loving everyone - I John 3:14**
- 3. Not Assembling with the congregation - Hebrews 10:25-26**
- 4. Not Providing for our family and relatives - I Timothy 5:8**
- 5. Not Giving as we ought - Malachi 3:8-10**
- 6. Not Helping Those in need - Matthew 25:42-43**
- 7. Not Eating the Lord's Supper correctly - I Cor.11:29**
- 8. Not Bearing fruit - John 15:8,2**
- 9. Not Growing spiritually - II Peter 1:5-10**
- 10. Not Treating Wife right - I Peter 3:7**

I Conclude That We Also Sin By...

- 1. Not being Patient**
- 2. Not Forgiving another**
- 3. Not singing with my Heart**
- 4. Not Confessing openly that I am a Christian**
- 5. Not submitting to my government**
- 6. Not working**

- 7. Not Being more Holy or godly**
- 8. Not Putting on the Divine nature, being more like Jesus**
- 9. Not Obeying the gospel II Thessalonians 1:8**

I am sure we could find even more such sins with a little thought and research, but these are more than enough to get the point. Jesus made it clear to the religious leaders of Israel that saying and not doing is the cause for their guilt and judgment. In Matthew 21:28 through 31 we read, "28 But what think ye? A [certain] man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. 29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. 30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I [go], sir: and went not. 31 Whether of them twain did the will of [his] father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." It is a dominant theme of James that saying good things is of little value if there is not action to back them up. To say to the cold and starving, "Be warmed and filled," but then not give them food and shelter is a conspicuous example of the sin of omission. Many other such sins are not as easily seen, and so we seldom feel guilty for this most common of sins.

For example, we may never show partiality like the usher James refers to who sits the poor person on the floor and the rich in the finest seat. We do not do acts of prejudice and discriminate against other races. We avoid the active sins of racism, but do not realize that we sin still by failing to reach out to include other races in our lives and care. We do not ever seek to show love to the poor, or other classes of people that are neglected and oppressed. We are content just to not do wrong, and forget that not doing right is also wrong. So much of our Christians sinning is undetected because it is not doing what can be seen as wrong. It is not doing what we are capable of doing to make things better in so many situations. It is the unseen sins of omission that blacken the record of all of us. We know what is

the good and right thing to do, but we never get around to doing it. We have good intentions, but we never get them fulfilled. This is living in sin just as those who are doing what is clearly seen as out of God's will. There is no escape, for we are all then living in sin, and this should make us humble about being judgmental toward others. James asks in verse 12, "Who are you to judge your neighbor?" We are all guilty of going off to do our will in gaining wealth, and not asking what God's will is for us. Life is short and we could be taken out of life and miss doing what God wills for our lives, all because we do not pay closer attention to the sins of omission.

The whole context makes it clear that a Christian can go through life being so self-centered that he lives for little more than does the world with its never ending quest for more money and things. They can plan their life with little attention to the purpose of God and boast in their success. They can be very judgmental toward others, as if they were the measure of all things, and the standard by which success is to be judged. And the end result of all their success is that they fail to do what God's will is for them, and totally mess up by living a life of sinful omission of the good they might have done in life had they been open to God's leading. The judgment on Christians will likely be far greater for the things they have failed to do than for the things they did. Our most important prayer should be the one Paul prayed at the moment of his conversion, "Lord, what will you have me to do." May God help us to be open and alert to the opportunities for doing good. Some of the greatest advice Paul ever gave is in Gal. 6:10. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of God." We should be asking ourselves frequently, what good that I could do for someone have I left undone?

If God's will is not the main feature of your future, you are planning to fail, for you will miss so many opportunities to do the good he wanted you to do. You will sin against God for you will not

do the good he wanted to do through you; you will sin against those who did not receive the good you might have given, and you sin against yourself by missing the joy, growth, maturity, and reward you would have gained by those acts and words of goodness. Sins of omission are not little sins of no great consequences. They will likely be the greatest sins in most every Christian life. Let us take seriously the saying, "For wrong to prevail it is only necessary for good people to do nothing." All too often we are experts at doing nothing, and we feel good about not doing wrong. It is time to wake up and see that it is the very doing of nothing, when we could do something good, that is the wrong. When we are indifferent and apathetic to the needs of others, when it is in our power to make a difference, we are living in sin.

The goal of this message is not to make us all feel so guilty that we can never have peace of mind again in a world where there is never an end to the good that needs to be done. God knows our limitations, and He knows that we cannot be ever doing good deeds. We have a life to live, and a family to raise, and a mate to love. We need time away from responsibility and obligation. Even Jesus needed this, and sought for privacy. Nobody could ever do all the good that is possible. This message is just to call attention to an area of neglect. It is a part of the whole sin picture puzzle that we have misplaced, and I am just putting it back on the table so we can fit it in to the total picture. It is not God's will that we become depressed with guilt over our sins of omission, but that we stay alert to our opportunities to be agents of His love.

Pastor Ron Clarke illustrates the problem with this story: "Many years ago a youngster who lived in a rough area of town was having a hard time at his new job in the factory. He was brave enough, or foolish enough (depending on your point of view) to hang on to his ideals, even his Christian beliefs. His work mates did not approve of that so he got his daily dose of ridicule and abuse. One day, one of

the men said to him: "You're a fool. Can't you see that if there is a God who cares anything for the likes of you, he would tell someone to come along and give you what you need - a good meal, a comfortable home, and at least the chance to make something of yourself." To this the youngster replied: "I reckon God does tell someone, only that someone always forgets." How many good things never happen in the body of Christ because of forgetting? We forget that the prayers of others can be answered through us in so many ways if we stop doing nothing, and start doing something.

The Old Testament stress is on law, and the commission of sin by doing what is contrary to the law. The New Testament stress is on love, and the sin of omission by not doing the loving thing, or saying the loving thing. It is the omission of love that is the most severe issue of sin. All the avoiding of breaking the law is of great value to society, but one is not pleasing to God until there is a life that goes beyond that level to doing acts of goodness and kindness. We must not stop eliminating the negative, but we must more often be expressing the positive. Life is not complete until there is the doing of good works that opportunities bring to you.

These good works do not save you, for only the good work of Christ on the cross could do that, but they make it so that your life is saved, and not just your body and soul. There is salvation in time as well as in eternity, and the salvation of your life on earth is what we are dealing with here in the issue of the sins of omission. By not omitting the good works life brings your way, you can save your life, and make it a fruitful tree in the barrenness of this needy world. If you want to redeem the time, then be on the lookout for the opportunity to do the good you know is the right thing to do. Avoid the sins of omission, and instead, "Let your light so shine that the world may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven."

APPENDIX

I am adding to my message this list of sins of omission that was compiled by the great evangelist Charles G. Finney in his book Revival Lectures. He saw more conversions in his ministry than anyone could number. He changed the history of American Christianity. And one of the ways he did it was by getting Christians to experience revival, and a focus on sins of omission was one of the key tools to reach that goal. If reading this list does not make you more aware of your sins of omission, and spur you on to good works, then you have quenched the Holy Spirit.

"INGRATITUDE (unthankfulness). Take this sin, for example, and write down under this heading all the times you can remember where you have received great blessings and favors from God for which you have never given thanks. How many cases can you remember? Some remarkable protection where your life was spared, some wonderful turn of events that saved you from ruin. Write down the instances of God's goodness to you when you were living in sin, before your conversion, for which you have never been half-thankful enough; and the uncountable mercies you have received since. How long the list of times where your ingratitude has been so black that you are forced to hide your face in shame! Get on your knees and confess them one by one to God, and ask Him to forgive you. As you're confessing these, they will immediately remind you of others...write these down too! Go over them three or four times in this way, and see what an incredible number of times God has given you mercy for which you have never thanked Him!

LACK OF LOVE FOR GOD. Think how grieved and alarmed you'd be, if you suddenly realized a great lack of affection for you in your wife, husband, or children; if you saw that someone else had captured their hearts, thoughts and time. Perhaps in such a case you would almost die with a just and holy jealousy. Now, God calls

Himself a jealous God. Have you not given your heart to other loves and infinitely offended Him?

NEGLECT OF THE BIBLE. Put down the cases where for perhaps weeks, or longer, God's word was not a pleasure. Some people, indeed, read over whole chapters in such a way, that afterwards they could not tell you what they had been reading. If that is so with you, no wonder your life has no direction, and your religion (relationship with God), is such a miserable failure.

UNBELIEF. Recall the instances in which you have virtually charged the God of truth with lying, by your unbelief of His express promises and declarations. If you have not believed or expected to receive the blessings which God has clearly promised, you have called Him a liar.

LACK OF PRAYER. Think of all the times you have neglected private- prayer, family-prayer and group-prayer meetings; or prayed in such a way as to grieve and offend God more, than if you hadn't prayed at all.

NEGLECT OF FELLOWSHIP. When you have allowed yourself to make small, and foolish excuses that have prevented you from attending meetings. When you have neglected and poured contempt upon the gathering of the saints merely because you "didn't like church!"

THE MANNER IN WHICH YOU HAVE PERFORMED SPIRITUAL DUTIES. Think of all the times when you have spoken about God with such lack of feeling and faith, in such a worldly frame of mind, that your words were nothing more than the mere chattering of a wretch who didn't deserve that God should listen to him at all. When you have fallen down upon your knees and "said your prayers" in such an unfeeling and careless way, that if you had

been put under oath five minutes later, you could not say what you had been praying for.

LACK OF LOVE FOR SOULS. Look around at all your friends and relatives, and think of how little compassion you have felt for them. You have stood by and seen them going straight to hell, and it seems as though you didn't even care. How many days have there been, when you have failed to make their wretched condition the subject of even one single fervent prayer, or to prove any real desire for their salvation?

LACK OF CARE FOR THE POOR AND LOST IN FOREIGN LANDS. Perhaps you have not cared enough about them to even attempt to learn of their condition. Do you avoid missions-magazines? How much do you really know or care about the unconverted masses of the world? Measure your desire for their salvation by the self-denial you practice, in giving from your substance to send them the gospel. Do you deny yourself even the hurtful expenses of life, such as tobacco, alcohol, expensive food, clothes, and entertainment? Do you defend your standard of living? Will you not suffer yourself ANY inconvenience to save them? Do you daily pray for them in private? Are you setting aside funds to put into the treasury of the Lord when you go up to pray? If you are not doing these things, and if your soul is not agonized for the poor and lost of this world, then why are you such a hypocrite as to pretend to be a Christian? Why, your profession of faith is an insult to Jesus Christ!

NEGLECT OF FAMILY DUTIES. Think of how you have lived before your family, how you have prayed, what an example you have set before them. What direct efforts do you habitually make for their spiritual welfare?

LACK OF WATCHFULNESS OVER YOUR WITNESS. How many

times have you failed to take your words and actions seriously? How often have you entirely neglected to watch your conduct and speech, and having been off your guard, have sinned before the world, the church, and before God!

NEGLECT TO WATCH OVER YOUR BRETHREN. How often have you broken your covenant, that you would watch over them in the Lord? How little do you know or care about the state of their souls? And yet you are under a solemn duty to watch over them. What have you done to get to know them better? How many times have you seen your brothers or sisters growing cold in faith and have not spoken to them about it...neglecting one spiritual duty after another, and you did not reprove them in love? You have seen them falling into sin, and you let them go on. And you pretend to love them? What a hypocrite! Would you watch your wife or child going into disgrace, or falling into a fire, and hold your peace?

NEGLECT OF SELF-DENIAL. There are many professing Christians who are willing to do almost anything in religion that does not require self-denial. They think they are doing a great deal for God, and doing about as much as He ought to reasonably ask, but they are not willing to deny themselves any comfort or convenience whatever for the sake of serving the Lord. They will not willingly suffer reproach for the name of Christ. Nor will they deny themselves the luxuries of life to save a world from hell. So far are they from realizing that self-denial is a condition of discipleship, that they do not even know what it is. They never have really denied themselves a ribbon or a pin for Christ and the gospel. Oh, how soon ones such as these will be in hell! Some are giving from their abundance, and giving a lot, and will even complain that others do not give more; when, in truth, they are not giving anything that they need, or anything that they would enjoy if they kept it. They only give of their surplus wealth!"

22. THE CHURCH AND HEALING Based on James 5:14-20

One of the enjoyable experiences of being a parent is the experience of exercising the gift of healing. Maybe you are unaware of the fact that you possess such a gift. I was until I noticed how effectively my wife was using it. I then became conscious of the fact that I had the same amazing power to heal. Let me give you a case history of one of my healings, so you understand and recognize that you have this same ability.

My youngest son Mark comes running out of the bedroom crying crocodile tears. He is carrying on as if he had excruciating and incurable pain. He points to his head or arm and cries that Cindy did it. He lays his arm on my lap sobbing pathetically. Dr. daddy has already diagnosed the problem, and I say, "Let me kiss it." With that remedy applied the cure is instantaneous, and he wipes the tears from his eyes and heads back to the bedroom to take his chances again in the battle for survival with his older sister. Seldom have I seen this cure fail. It is so powerful that I have seen my wife throw him a kiss across the room, and it heals his wounds in a moment.

No one can see this time and time again and remain a skeptic about faith healing, for that is what it is. A child has faith in its parents, and some act of love on their part can actually relieve pain and heal the wounded heart. The child is so naive, however, and the method is so unscientific that it is downright funny. Many of you have laughed as we have as you see the marvelous transformation take place before your eyes. A miserable moaning child transformed in a twinkling of an eye into the mischievous little mess maker he normally is.

The realm of faith is often strange, and without apparent

objective foundation, and so it is difficult to understand, but the fact is, it works. It is my becoming aware of the fact that it works on the merely human and natural level that has challenged me to look deeper into the subject on the spiritual level. I figure that if God has built faith healing into the very family structure between parents and children, it is certainly likely that he would have such a pattern as well in his relationship as heavenly Father to those who are His children through faith in Jesus Christ.

I have always been skeptical of faith healers, for this is an area that can be so easily perverted. However, as in every other realm, we cannot close our eyes to God's Word on any subject just because it can be perverted. Salvation itself is perverted in many ways, and should we then cease to preach the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation? The ostrich approach to anything is never the Christian approach. You can bury your head all you like, but the truth marches on whether you see it or not. Most Christians who are confused and uncertain about healing in the ministry of the church are so for the same reason I was-sheer ignorance.

The average Christian knows next to nothing about the New Testament teachings, and the voluminous historical writings concerning the healing ministry of the church. The healing ministry of Christ has never ceased. It has been going on all through the centuries, but most are not aware of it. Ignorance is always an enemy of truth. To judge and condemn what you do not understand is pure paganism, and it has no justification in the Christian life. Yet Christians do it all the time. When the non-Christian rejects the Christian faith because of ignorance, we laugh at such blindness and folly. But then we turn around and do the same thing because we are ignorant of history. The pagan mind has infiltrated the church time and time again, and we are guilty of terrible pride if we assume that this could never be a danger for us.

A Christian can be wrong even when they are right if they oppose a thing, movement, person, or philosophy without understanding it. Many oppose faith healing just because they cannot tolerate the thought that they are not the most superior of God's children. It is hard for Christians to admit that God may use others in ways that He does not use them. This tends to make them negative, and they are lashing out at everything they do not understand. They make themselves the standard by which all God's children are to be measured. It is not easy for a Baptist, like myself, to admit that he can learn something from a Pentecostal, Catholic, or Episcopalian, who is being used of God in areas where I am not.

My life was changed by Christ, and I yielded my life to His service. I was an object of His great love and grace, and yet I do not have the gift of healing diseases. Therefore, anyone who claims to have such power must be a fake. Such is the logic of the proud Christian who does his thinking with a pagan mind. It happens every time when we throw overboard the Word of God, and make self the captain of the ship. How often do we Christians debate on the pagan level of "I think, or I feel, or I like, or I dislike." Some say they think the gift of healing was only for the first century. Others think different. Some think healing was only for believers, others think different. Some think healing is only for special persons, and is not the ministry of the whole church. Others think different. Some do not like the way healing meetings are carried out. Others do like it. Some do not like the emotions involved. Others just love it.

Who really cares about what you or I anyone else thinks and feels about healing, especially if it is all based on ignorance rather than knowledge and experience? Any conclusions reached have to be based on what God has spoken, and not what man thinks or feels. No truth is true because I or anyone else believes it. And nothing is false because I or anyone else does not believe it. The standard has to be God's Word, and what He has revealed.

The reason for this introduction is that it puts us all on the same level whether we are convinced or skeptical on the subject of healing. There is no alternative for the Christian but to listen to God's Word and be submissive. Our goal is not to confirm or reject anyone's convictions, but to hear what God has spoken. James is one of the very first letters of the New Testament to be written. Many feel it is the very first. This is a good place to start a study of healing, for it shows the very early Christians made provision for a church ministry to the ill. This passage reveals that the organized church represented by the elders had such a ministry.

James says in verse 14, "Is any sick among you?" Christians in the first century, like those today, and all those in between, did not have an exempt status from the burden of bearing sick bodies. Germs cannot tell a Christian from an atheist, and even if they could, they would not by pass the believer, for sickness is no friend of the Christian. It is of the kingdom of darkness, and not of the kingdom of light. This is a basic concept that must be established if we are going to think biblically about sickness and healing. If sickness was a servant of God rather than an enemy, then one could be opposing God by fighting disease. If it is an enemy, however, one is always right in trying to defeat sickness. Since we are always grateful to get over being sick, it is obvious that we consider it to be of the kingdom of evil.

So often we talk of the value of sickness and suffering in a confusing way, and it leads to some distorted conclusions. Illustrations are numerous, for example, of people who have overcome handicaps and illnesses, and have by their very battle against these obstacles risen to heights of greatness they may never have achieved without their handicap. It presented a challenge which called forth discipline and determination, and they use suffering as a stepping stone to greatness. But the lesson we are to learn from these examples is not that sickness and suffering are good,

but that in spite of the fact that they are evil, if one looks to God and calls upon Him for grace and wisdom, good can be brought out of the evil. This can even happen in the lives of those who are not Christians, but who are determined.

The danger is that we confuse God's wisdom with His will, and come to the conclusion that God willed the evil that led to the good. If this was the case, the evidence would demonstrate that God's methods are not wise, but foolish and exceedingly cruel, because for every gallant hero that has risen triumphantly over his illness, there are millions who have been crushed, defeated, and destroyed. It is superficial optimism to think that all suffering and sickness is of value in the light of the millions who die of malnutrition every week. Who would dare be so bold as to accuse God of being the author of such a cruel mismanaged program as this?

An honest look at life, and the clear teachings of the Bible compel us to shun such a conclusion, and to see sickness as a product of sin, satanic forces, and a curse upon man, and not a stepping stone to greatness. The woman at the well was a great sinner, and she became a great witness for Christ, but it is folly to conclude that her loose and immoral life was good, and that it is a blessing for the millions of others who have lived in immorality. It is always a mistake to use an example of great victory over evil as evidence that it was good that the evil was a part of the life of the one who gained the victory. It was only by the grace of God that the victory was possible. It is always better when there is less evil to overcome because there has been less ignorance and less folly.

James says that if anyone is sick they should get busy getting rid of it. Call the elders of the church to do so. There is no hint here that there is some value to be gained by being sick, or that God is teaching something through it. Just get rid of it; fight it; overcome it, and here is one method of doing so. Through prayer and the

anointing of oil in the name of the Lord try to rid yourself of sickness. God is the author of the cure, and not the cause of the sickness. The kingdom of God is not divided, and God is not causing the very thing he is overcoming. This is the same impression you get everywhere in the New Testament. Sickness and disease are the works of the devil. They are evil, and they are to be overcome in the name of Christ.

The Apostle John in his first letter in 3:8 writes, "The Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil." All we need to do then is to look at the life of Jesus, and see what it was that He fought most and sought to destroy, and we can then identify the works of the devil. It is as obvious as anything can be that sin and suffering were the two major foes that Jesus fought in His earthly ministry. His healing miracles were a demonstration of His victory over the devil. They were signs that the kingdom of God had really come.

There are 26 individual cases of the healing of Jesus in the Gospels. There are ten cases of multiple healings, and 4 very broad statements of his healing ministry. Matt. 4:23 says, "And He went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people." Notice how Christ's ministry was totally positive. He was teaching to overcome ignorance. He was preaching to overcome the sense of lostness, despair, and sin. He was healing to overcome sickness. Ignorance, sin, and sickness are all works of the devil which Jesus came to destroy. Notice also, that every disease was healed. It is not just certain diseases which are of the kingdom of evil, but all of them are. There is no such thing as a Christian illness, or even a good sickness.

Disease is not divine but devilish, and is the enemy of man. Listen to the impressive testimony of Christ, and the two greatest Apostles

Peter and Paul on this matter. In Luke 13:16 Jesus said of a woman He had healed on the Sabbath, "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" Peter in Acts 10:38 explains the ministry of Christ to Cornelius and his household: "...and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." Then Paul in II Cor. 12:7 calls his famous thorn in the flesh, "A messenger of Satan, to torment me." Here is a case where God clearly permits suffering to continue, but even then it is the work of Satan. God is using it, but is not the author of it.

We need to learn to never confuse God's permissive will with His positive will. That God permits something does not mean that he approves of it at all. He despises much of what He permits. He permits murder, adultery, stealing, blasphemy, and every evil known to man. But who would dare suggest that God is the author of all this sin, or that He approves of any of it? He so despises it that He will severely judge it if there is not repentance and forgiveness. I have heard Christians suggest that because God permits suffering and sickness that He must approve of it, and that it must be His will. This is as foolish as to suggest that murder is God's will because He permits it.

We haven't begun to scratch the surface of the subject of healing, but we have laid a foundation that none can remove. We have seen that sickness is definitely of the kingdom of evil, and that it follows that healing is of the kingdom of light. Healing has been a Christian weapon to destroy the works of the devil from the beginning. Some form of healing should always be a part of the ministry of the church. We will continue this study in part 2.

23. SICKNESS AND SALVATION Based on James 5:14-20

When Jesus preached in the synagogue of His home town of Nazareth, the people were skeptical of His claims, and His power. Jesus said to them in Luke 4:23 you will surely say unto me this proverb, physician, heal thyself." Criticism of the physician is of ancient origin, and had become a proverb in the time of Christ. In spite of all the modern advances in their effectiveness, they are still objects of criticism. This is so because people are just naturally critical and skeptical, and also because doctors, like everyone else, are subject to sin, and to mistakes, ignorance and indifference.

A nervous patient said to her doctor, "I feel like killing myself. What shall I do?" The doctor said, "Just leave that to me." Another doctor said to his patient, "Your left leg is swollen, but I wouldn't worry much about it." The patient responded, "If your left leg was swollen I wouldn't worry much about it either." There are volumes of humorous and serious criticism against the physician that goes back to ancient times. Much of it is valid. But we must also see that Jesus put His stamp of approval on the ministry of the physician. When He was asked why He ate with and associated with sinners He replied, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Jesus said the sick need a physician, and He implied that their ministry of making men whole is a kin to His own ministry enough to use it as an illustration.

This statement of Jesus is recorded in all three of the synoptic Gospels, and reveals to us how Jesus related His ministry to the physician. Jesus ministered to man's sickness and his sin, because the two are directly related. He delivered men from sickness by His ministry in life, and He delivered them from sin by His ministry in death. God's plan of salvation included the whole man-body, soul, and spirit. Since all three are related and inseparable in life, Jesus

could not atone for sin without affecting all three. Sin is the general cause of all sickness, and the specific of much sickness. It follows then that deliverance from sin will also be a deliverance from sickness. You cannot eliminate a cause, and not eliminate the effects. If I prevent a man from drinking and becoming an alcoholic, I also prevent him from dying of the liver disease that he would likely die from. By preventing the cause I prevent the effect.

When Jesus redeems and releases a sinner from the power of sin he also delivers him from the effects of sin. This means that the Christian is one who is delivered by his salvation from the great number of sicknesses which are directly related to personal sin. Examples would be such things as syphilis, dope addiction, alcoholism, and many others. Christians still sin, however, and so they still suffer the effects of those sins that they cling to. Much sickness is still related to personal sin, and so there are still many things that Christians can suffer in their bodies and minds do to some weakness in themselves. Christians, for example, died along with non-Christians in the great plagues brought on by poor sewage disposal. Christians still catch all the contagious diseases through no personal sin of their own. Whatever the case, whether the sickness is the result of personal sin, or whether one is the victim of circumstances, James says the church is to minister to their need.

James does just what Jesus did. He relates the victory over sin, and the victory over sickness by using the same word to describe them both. To be cured from an illness is one aspect of salvation. Salvation means to be made whole, and to be kept sound, and this includes the whole man. The word James uses here for being saved from sickness is the same Greek word used for salvation from sin. It is the same word used in Matt. 1:21, "For he shall save his people from their sins." It is the same word used in Matt. 18:11, "For the son of man is come to save that which was lost." When Paul spoke of Jesus coming into the world to save sinners, and when he spoke of his

desire to use all means to save some, he used this same word. James uses the word in 1:21 and 5:20 for the saving of the soul.

There is no way to escape the conclusion that to be delivered from sickness is a part of the whole experience of salvation which Jesus provided for His people. Jesus is no half-Savior. He does not save men in part only. He saves the whole man of body, soul, and spirit. Salvation is not complete until there is health, happiness, and holiness. That is why healing was a basic part of the ministry of Christ, and a basic part of the ministry of the early church. The Christian continues to sin, and so Jesus made provision to restore the Christian to health of spirit through forgiveness. The Christian continues to get sick, and so Jesus made provision to restore the Christian to health of body and mind through healing.

The day we no longer need the ministry of forgiveness will be the day we can also dispense with the ministry of healing. When we see that the New Testament concept of salvation includes deliverance from sickness as well as sin, we will cease to limit it to only one aspect of our being. It is natural that we tend to think of salvation as only dealing with the spirit of man, for this is the eternal part of man, and, therefore, the greatest value. The salvation of the eternal soul by faith in Christ is obviously the primary goal of the churches ministry. But James is not writing about evangelism. He is writing about the ministry of the church to those who are already saved, but who have bodies still in bondage to sickness. James is making it clear that the church does not quit when it has achieved its primary goal of winning people to Christ. There are secondary things which are just as important to accomplish after the primary goal has been achieved, as the primary goal was important before it was achieved.

We need to think clearly on this point, for misunderstanding here is the cause for much needless controversy. The question is never, which is most important-winning a person to Christ, or healing their

sickness? This is no question at all for debate, for saving a persons eternal spirit is infinitely more important than saving their body from temporal pain. The question is: Which is most important-presenting the whole Gospel of salvation, or just the primary aspect of it? It healing is a part of the salvation of Christ for the total man, then we do not honor Christ by neglecting part of His plan with the excuse that we are stressing the most important part. When the primary is achieved, the secondary then becomes primary. Healing of the body and mind is no longer secondary to the man who is saved from sin, but who is now sick.

When you stand in line waiting to be served, and you are number 33, and the clerk is now on number 4, you are a very secondary customer. When the clerk gets to 32 you begin to have high potential, and when they call 33 you become the primary concern of their business. The secondary becomes primary when the primary is accomplished. We ought never to criticize people for emphasizing the secondary if they have already fulfilled the primary. We would be disgusted with the clerk who insisted on perpetually waiting on customer number 1 even after that customer has been served. First things are first, but second things are also to be second.

Jesus never seemed to worry that His compassion for men's bodies might detract from His concern for their souls. True spirituality is not impractical and mystical, and of no earthly good. True spirituality begins on the level of reality where men are. It applies to the body, to suffering, to frustration, and to the anxieties with which people struggle constantly. The proof of Christianity is in what it does for a man on the level of reality of which he is conscious. When John the Baptist is in prison, and in doubt about Jesus being the Messiah, he sent His disciples to ask Jesus for evidence. Jesus did not send back a lecture on the incarnation or trinity. He said in Matt. 11:4-5, "Go and show John again those things which you hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers

are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them." Jesus proved He was the Son of God by action.

The early church followed its Lord, and combined the preaching of the Gospel with the healing of the body, and they turned the world upside down. We are not thinking clearly if we criticize people today for doing what they did. Those in the healing ministry could say to their critics, "Show me your success in primary task of evangelism without healing, and I will show you my success in evangelism with healing." Billy Graham is not in the ministry of healing, but he recognizes that those who have a healing ministry are also a powerful force for evangelism. Many years ago at the World Congress On Evangelism Billy Graham introduced Oral Roberts by saying, "Our prayer is going to be led by a man that I have come to love and appreciate in the ministry of evangelism."

Many people have asked me what I think of Oral Roberts and other healers, and I use to be confused as to what to say because I was not sure what to think. Now I know that it doesn't make any difference what I think. I can think that much looks and sounds fake, and I can feel that it is too emotional, and I will probably continue to do so, but I will do so in the humble recognition that my subjective reactions do not determine the value of someone else's ministry for Christ. The objective facts are that the ministry of healers is often very fruitful for the whole man. Many are brought to Christ, and many are brought to wholeness in the body. The question we need to wrestle with is, do we believe in the total Gospel? Do we believe that Jesus saves from sickness as well as from sin? Do we believe that the church has a continuing ministry to the bodies, minds, and souls of men?

These are important questions, for there was only one thing that hindered the healing ministry of Christ, and that was unbelief. Matt.

13:58 says, "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." In spite of all His miracles many did not believe, and so they quenched His power in their midst. Could it be they were offended by the emotions, or the showmanship that seemed to be connected healing. I don't know for sure, but I do know that I do not want to be one to hinder the power of Christ through unbelief. Any critical feelings I have about those who seek to continue the ministry of Christ to the whole man I recognize our subjective feelings, and not based on the objective Word of God. Salvation from sickness, and deliverance from sin is definitely a part of the Gospel, and the ministry of the early church. It is logical that some form of healing ministry should continue to be a part of the church today.

24. SPIRITUAL HEALING Based on James 5:14-20

Opportunity not only knocks, but sometimes it even breaks the door down, but still we miss it. Such was the case in the sad story of the great Viennese surgeon Dr. Lorenz. When he was in America some years back he was flooded with more requests with help then he could begin to meet. One woman who sought his help for her child could not even make contact with him. Dr. Lorenz was in the habit of taking a walk after lunch, and he instructed his chauffeur to come after him if it should storm. One afternoon as he was walking it did begin to rain. The woman who was seeking the doctors help went out on her porch to put the wicker furniture in a safe place so it would not get wet. While she was there an elderly gentleman came up to the door half soaked. He asked if he could set on her porch until the rain stopped.

In differently, she motioned him to a chair, and without a word she left him and went into the house. After awhile a car stopped in

front and a chauffeur ran up to the porch with a rain coat and umbrella, and he took the man with him. The woman who saw all this paid no mind to it until she read the paper the next morning. An article told of how the famous Dr. Lorenz was marooned in the rain storm, and had take shelter on a strangers porch where he suffered two chills. One from his damp clothing, and the other from the woman of the house. The woman was shocked and ashamed. She rushed to the hotel where Dr. Lorenz was staying only to learn that he had left on a train that morning, and would never return. She had lost her opportunity forever even though she had it at her fingertips, and it was all because of her indifference. She neglected to care for the needs of another, and in so doing she failed herself as well.

This true story is more than a fact. It is a parable on the danger that all of us face. It is the danger of being indifferent to the needs of others, and, thereby, cutting ourselves off from the blessings of God. One of the reasons why many churches and individual Christians do not believe in, an experience the healing power of Christ is because they have no great concern about His healing ministry in the lives of others. They are indifferent to what Scripture teaches, and how the early church applied it, and how it ought to be applied today. The result of this is, though it is at our fingertips, we miss the opportunity to see the Great Physician work in an through us.

We have established in the two previous messages that the New Testament teaches that sickness is of the kingdom of evil, and that to be delivered from it is a part of Christ's plan of salvation. This means that the ministry of healing is as perpetual as the ministry of the Gospel of the forgiveness of sin. This means that this passage in James is not a mere fact of antiquity preserved only for the interest of the curious. It is still God's Word to us today. It must still find application and expression in our church, or we deliberately exclude a part of its clear instruction. To neglect this portion of Scripture

because we are indifferent, or because we are ignorant, it is to reduce ourselves to the level of those cults we delight in ridiculing because they pick and choose which parts of the Bible they will stress, and which they will ignore. We cannot ignore it, for we have an obligation before God to understand it and obey it along with the rest of Scripture. We want to examine it and strive to see how it applies to us today.

In verse 14 we see the action of the sick Christian. The initiative must come from the person who is ill. They are responsible for calling in the aid which the church has to offer. They are to call the elders of the church. The elders played a major role in the Old Testament, and the office continued into the New Testament church. They were basically the godly men of each congregation that were its leaders. They governed, taught, visited the sick, and in every way represented the church. Acts 14:23 says that Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey ordained elders in every church. Every church needed some leadership, and these were called elders.

The elders were more fundamental than the concept of deacons, for deacons were not needed in every church for specific ministry as they were in the church in Jerusalem. Not every church would have a problem of Greek widows not getting the proper care. The elders would handle this if the need arose. The elders in the New Testament are just about equivalent to what we call the official board. All who are elected to office should be able to fulfill the role described here.

When a Jew was sick he went to the Rabbi or the priest. Jesus, you recall, sent the 10 lepers to the priest, and they were healed on the way. Only the priest could pronounce them clean, and restore them to society as in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament God's people were united in all things around His Word. They took care of one another, and they were like an island in a sea of paganism. There was a clear distinction between the world and the

church. It was a totally different setting than what we have today where the church and secular society are interdependent.

We no longer pool our goods as the church did at Pentecost. We no longer have deacons delivering groceries as a regular ministry. We no longer do hardly any of the work of welfare that the church once did. The government now does this, and has taken this ministry almost entirely out of the churches hands. Some larger churches still do quite a bit, but the average church no longer plays the role it did in New Testament times. Because of this people no longer look to the church, but to secular society, for their needs. This is true for healing as well. When this passage is applied in a Christian home it is usually only after the doctor has been called, and the problem is beyond his ability to cure. If he can cure it, Christians never even give a thought to getting the church involved in healing.

All of us do this. We get medicine to get through our sicknesses. We could not imagine calling the church, for who there knows anything about medicine? We will take a doctor over a deacon any day, and I believe that God would have us do so. But does this mean the church is now irrelevant to the whole matter of healing? Must we give up this ministry completely, and leave it to the medical profession? If we do so, it is not totally bad, for the wisdom and skill of the doctor is a direct and indirect benefit of the church of Christ. The whole ministry of compassion for the suffering of man has grown out of the compassion of Christ, and the healing ministry of the church. Hospitals, nursing, and the search for medicine have all come from the church. The church has lifted the whole world to a higher level of concern for man's health.

The benefits of healing that we receive through non-Christian doctors and secular institutions are still benefits gained by the grace of God and the love of Christ. The Christian is not in any way opposed to the use of medicine in healing. But the Christian does not

stop there, for he seeks spiritual resources as well as physical. The ideal will be a Christian doctor who represents the church and the medical profession, and who uses, as the elders did, both prayer and medicine. The elders were to come and pray, and anoint with oil. Both physical and spiritual resources were used. The oil had both physical and symbolical value.

Galen, the famous Greek doctor, said, "Oil is the best of all medicines." The use of oil was equivalent to our use of medication. It was the best they had in that day. Jesus sent out the 70, and Mark 6:13 says, "They anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them." When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan He said in Luke 10:34 that He, "Bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine." Jesus recognized the medical power of oil and healing. Jesus recommended the use of the best physical medicine you can acquire. Oil was used by Christians and non-Christians alike. Emperors even bathed in oil when they were sick. There are testimonies of the use of oil for healing into the fourth and fifth centuries.

This means that by calling the elders to anoint with oil one was doing what is equivalent today of calling a doctor and getting a prescription. Since oil is no longer the best medicine we have, it would be foolish to use oil for all ills. Applied to our age this text would simply support the role that medication plays in fighting sickness.

Dr. Luke certainly used medicine as well as prayer to heal in his day. Medical missionaries go forth with various medicines rather than oil, healing the masses as they go. There is no reason to suppose that any of this is a sub-Christian ministry because they do not use oil. Medical help is important to the Christian, and no one has any biblical reason to reject what can be gained through medical help. Does this mean that the church no longer has a ministry growing out of this passage because the medical world can do it better? Not at all,

for it is the symbolical and spiritual that is the source of power in this passage. The prayer is the source of the healing power, and the faith of the sick in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Spiritual healing is the great ministry of the church, and this need has not changed at all.

So much sickness is psychosomatic, that is, it is in the body but caused by a mind filled with guilt. The cause is spiritual, and so a real healing must also be spiritual. This can only come from Christ. Just about everything you can think of can be caused by the mind. The anointing with oil becomes a symbol of the Holy Spirit. It becomes a point of contact by which the sick person can let their faith flow out and receive the healing power of Christ's forgiveness.

The church does not compete with medicine in spiritual healing. We only reach to a depth of a persons being that medicine can never reach. Our world needs this kind of healing. It has made great advances in the medical field, but the church still has the greatest resource for spiritual healing, and that is what this passage in James is all about. We can dodge this passage, and just say pray for yourself in faith and forget the calling of the elders. The question is, why didn't James leave it at that, and why didn't the early church? James says that the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up and forgive his sins, will He not do so without all of this bother? We are trying to use the same reasoning as Naaman did when he was asked to dip seven times in the Jordan. He said he had better rivers back home, and so why all this bother?

Why God does things the way He does is usually for the very good reason of calling forth the faith of man through action. God uses means, and Jesus used means, and James says the church is to use means in spiritual healing. It is not for us to ask if it might not be done differently, but to seek to fulfill that which is established by God as a way of doing it. If we want to see the power of Christ in

spiritual healing, we must be prepared to admit it when we are neglecting the revealed means, and then get busy in making provision to obey what is revealed to us here in James 5.

