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Measuring Up

Studies in James

by

Evan D. Baltz

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*Dedicated to my father, Rev. Douglas
Baltz, who originally taught me the
book of James and the important
lessons of life contained within.
I love you Dad.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

JAMES CHAPTER ONE

“OH BROTHER”	13
JAMES 1:1	13
I. The Author	17
II. The Readers	21
III. The Theme	24
“JAMES, YOU’RE CRAZY”	27
JAMES 1:2-4	27
I. What does it mean to be mature?	32
II. What is the purpose of trials in my life?	34
III. How are we to respond?	36
“SPIRITUAL MPD”	43
JAMES 1:5-8	43
I. The Giver	47
II. The Receiver	50
III. The Double-Minded Taker	52
“WHEN DID JAMES VISIT ARIZONA?”	57
JAMES 1:9-12	57
I. The Poor Man	61
II. The Rich Man	63
“HOOK, LINE AND SIN”	71
JAMES 1:13-15	71
I. The Nature of Sin	76
II. The Nurture of Sin	79
III. The Net of Sin	81
“COMPARE AND CONTRAST...”	85
JAMES 1:16-18	85
I. God Gives Good and Perfect Gifts.	89
II. God Does Not Change.	91
III. Examples	94
“ADVICE FOR DR. DAVID BANNER”	99
JAMES 1:19-20	99
I. Be Quick To Listen.	104

II. Be Slow To Speak	107
III. Be Slow to Become Angry	108
“JAMES: HIRED BY NIKE?”	113
JAMES 1:21-25	113
I. Lay Aside the World	117
II. Accept the Word	120
III. Do the Word	121
“RELIGION 101: INSTRUCTOR, GOD”	129
JAMES 1:26-27	129
I. The Truly Religious are not Hypocritical	133
II. The Truly Religious are Compassionate	136
III. The Truly Religious are Pure	138
“WAS O.J. GUILTY?”	145
JAMES 2:1-7	145
I. The Problem of Favoritism	148
II. The Examples of Favoritism	150
III. The Charge of Favoritism	152
IV. The Ignorance of Favoritism	153
“YOU KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THE LAW”	157
JAMES 2:8-13	157
I. The Depth of the Law	161
II. The Depth of Our Sin	163
III. The Depth of God’s Mercy	165
“THE WONDER OF DISNEY’S ANIMATRONICS”	171
JAMES 2:14-17	171
Question 1:	174
Question 2:	176
Question 3:	177
Summary Statement:	179
“I BELIEVE IN GOD AND ALL, BUT...”	183
JAMES 2:18-26	183
I. Faith and Works <u>Must</u> Go Together	187
II. Intellectual Assent Means Nothing	188
III. Evidence Which Proves the Thesis	190
“SHIPS, SPARKS, AND SNAKES”	197
JAMES 3:1-11	197

I. The Power of the Tongue	200
II. The Nature Of The Tongue	203
III. The Cure for the Tongue-The Antivenin	207
“DIAMONDS AND LATEX PAINT”	211
JAMES 3:13-18	211
I. The Wisdom of the World	215
II. True Wisdom (or Heavenly Wisdom)	218
“GIVE ME YOUR SNEAKERS”	225
JAMES 4:1-3	225
I. The Cause of Conflict	228
II. The Consequence of Coveting	230
III. The Criticism of Your Complaint	232
“TAKE A CHILL PILL JAMES”	237
JAMES 4:4-6	237
I. The Nature of God’s Relationship with Us	240
II. The Nature of Our Relationship with God	242
III. The Nature of God’s Solution	244
“DOING THE OPPOSITE”	247
JAMES 4:7-10	247
I. Resist the Devil and Come near to God	250
II. Wash Your Hands/Purify Your Hearts	253
III. Don’t Be Happy about Sin	255
IV. Humble Yourself	257
“STICKS AND STONES”	261
JAMES 4:11-12	261
I. We Violate the Royal Law	264
II. We Dis the Law (or, We Judge the Law)	266
III. We Usurp God	268
“THE BOTTOM LINE”	273
JAMES 4:13-17	273
I. The Statement of Arrogance	276
II. The Sentence on Arrogance	278
III. The Solution for Arrogance	280
“IT’S NOT JUST SEMANTICS”	283
JAMES 4:17	283
I. Sins of Commission	287

II. Sins of Omission	288
“REVERSAL OF FORTUNE”	295
JAMES 5:1-6	295
I. They Hoard Their Wealth	299
II. They Defraud Their Workers	300
III. They Live Self-indulgent Lifestyles	301
IV. They Persecute the Righteous	302
“MAIL ORDER CUSTOMERS”	307
JAMES 5:7-11	307
I. Be Patient	311
II. Stand Firm	313
III. Don’t Grumble	314
“TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES”	319
JAMES 5:12	319
I. The Original Intention of Oaths	322
II. Why We Shouldn’t Take Oaths	324
III. How to Be a Christian of Integrity	326
“PRAY NOTHING, WE’RE GOING”	329
JAMES 5:13-18	329
I. Is Any One of You in Trouble?	332
II. Is Anyone Happy?	334
III. Is Any One Sick?	335
IV. Is Any One Part of God’s Church?	337
“ONE FOR THE ROAD”	341
JAMES 5:19-20	341
I. The Indications	347
II. The Danger	351
III. The Agent	352
IV. The Objective	354
Conclusion:	355
BIBLIOGRAPHY	357
INDEX	359

Measuring Up

James 1:1-27

“Oh Brother”

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:2

“The Christian is the most contented man in the world, but he is the least contented with the world.”

Charles Spurgeon

James 1:1

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

James 1:1

I must confess. I originally thought this first chapter would just be a simple introduction to our author and his readers, only consisting of a paragraph or two. However, there was so much more to be learned about James that it requires more than just a brief introduction. The ideas in this chapter will surface again and again throughout this study. So, first we will get to know James personally, and then in the following chapters, we will look at what God has to say to us through this man named James.

His given birth name was William, but we rarely associate that name with him. He grew up in the south in a fairly typical southern family—typical for a while anyway. William’s brother graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and then went on to work as an engineer with nuclear powered submarines. He then took over the family business after the death of the boys’ father. Later, he became a state senator and then a governor. It became very difficult for William to cope with all of his brother’s success. He resented it, even though his brother was careful not to flaunt his success. It became almost unbearable for William when his brother became the president of the United States. Imagine living in that shadow. William’s resentment turned to ideas of capitalizing on his brother’s fame. His antics and ill-fated business ventures only served to make the differences between the two brothers more obvious. While James, his brother, otherwise known as

President Jimmy Carter, became known around the globe as the leader of the free world, William (usually known as Billy) Carter's main claim to fame was having a beer named after him and urinating in public. Billy just couldn't live up to his brother, and rather than accepting his position quietly, he made a mockery of his own life.

It isn't easy growing up in the shadow of a successful or famous sibling. Maybe you have experienced this personally. I went through such a phase when I was ten or eleven. I became jealous of my older sister Darla. She graduated from high school 2nd in her class of over 300. She went on to Bethel College, where she was also successful. Then she landed a good job. Meanwhile, I was not as dedicated of a student, a little less well-behaved, and sometimes probably downright bratty. I could sense people thoughts, "Hmmm, he sure isn't like his sister." Have you ever had someone say that about you? It isn't pleasant, is it? After I was over that phase in high school, my sister and I became good friends, and I have carved out my own little niche, in part, due to her good example.

This is why I really like the book of James. He is a guy I can relate to, not only on this level, but on many others as well. In this chapter we are going to examine three aspects of this book. First we will attend to the author, then his readers, and finally his theme or purpose for writing. I believe these insights will help us better understand this book as we study it.

I. The Author

Verse 1 tells us a man named James wrote the book. To determine authorship then, a good starting place would be examining those people in the New Testament with the name James. Actually, James is an English translation from an Italian translation of the name Jacob or *Ya chobe*. There are 4 people mentioned in the New Testament with that name.

1. The father of Judas (not Iscariot) the disciple, mentioned in Luke 6:16.

2. The son of Alphaeus, a disciple, perhaps known as James the “lesser.”

3. The son of Zebedee, also a disciple, and the brother of John the disciple.

4. The younger brother of Jesus.

The first two are very obscure, and therefore we can probably safely eliminate them. The only two that would have the authoritative tone of this book would be the son of Zebedee or the Lord’s brother. However, James, the brother of John, was martyred about AD 44. It is unlikely the epistle would have been written prior to this date. That leaves us with James, the brother of Jesus, as the most likely author. This is a relatively unchallenged notion since early in church history.

So what do we know about James? He was the brother of Jesus. Try living up to that standard! How do we know James is Jesus’ brother? Look at what Matthew 13:53-58 says.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. ⁵⁴ Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. ⁵⁵ "Isn't this the

carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Yes, contrary to Catholic teaching, Jesus had brothers and sisters. In fact we see in this passage Jesus had at least six siblings: 4 brothers, one of who is named James, and at least two sisters, perhaps more.

Apparently Jesus' family followed him around at various times. John 2:12 says, "**After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.**" Jesus spent some time with his family after the wedding where he turned water into wine. In Matthew 12:46-50 we find his brothers wanting to talk with him, probably trying to get him to stop acting like some kind of "Messiah," and just come home and act normally. It says,

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." ⁴⁸ He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

Does this mean Jesus did not care about his family? No, He was simply expanding His true family to include

those who do the Father's will. James shows up again with Jesus in Galilee as John records in John 7:1-10.

After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. ² But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, ³ Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. ⁴ No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." ⁵ For even his own brothers did not believe in him. ⁶ Therefore Jesus told them, "The right time for me has not yet come; for you any time is right. ⁷ The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that what it does is evil. ⁸ You go to the Feast. I am not yet going up to this Feast, because for me the right time has not yet come." ⁹ Having said this, he stayed in Galilee. ¹⁰ However, after his brothers had left for the Feast, he went also, not publicly, but in secret.

We find here perhaps a motive for his brother's presence. It looks as if they are trying to give Him career advice. They tell Him if He wants to be a star, and be famous, and do his little magic show, He should do it in Jerusalem where people can see Him. As it is in show business—if you want to be a star, you don't live and work in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. You go to Hollywood. James wanted his brother to do it right, and he probably thought there might be something in it for himself as well. "Hey, if my brother becomes famous, I might be able to see a little money my way too. Who knows where this whole thing could lead." Jesus' brothers did not believe who Jesus was. They just thought he was out to make a name for himself. Jesus however responds with a statement I think later on caused James to reflect. Jesus basically said, "You

can become famous any time you want, because the world likes you, because you are part of the world. It is your crowd...but that world you love so much hates me, because I tell them what they are doing is evil.” Jesus wasn’t in it for popularity. His very message was what caused people to despise Him. The truth He taught revealed the sin and the filth of their lives. I think this effected James, maybe not right then, but definitely later on.

The next mention of James comes from Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

Did you notice something interesting about the appearances of Jesus? Read the passage again and see if you can pick it up. Paul mentions only three people Jesus appeared to, alone or personally: Peter, Paul himself, and James. Jesus knew James’ heart would be changed. In Acts 1:14 (after Jesus’ ascension into heaven) we find the disciples, the women, Mary, and Jesus’ brothers meeting together in Jerusalem. ***“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”***

It didn’t take long for James to become a leader in that first church. He is mentioned as having a

prominent role in the life of the church in Acts 12, 15, and 21, and Paul recognizes him as an important apostle in Galatians 1:19, consulting with only him and Peter when he first came to Jerusalem.

It was James' prominent role in the church and the obvious respect and authority he had which enabled him to begin his letter with only his name, and no title. In fact we learn something more about James in that he even calls himself a "***servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.***" That word "servant," or *doulos*, can also be translated "slave" or "worshipper." With respect to God, that is one thing, but James tells us he is a servant of Jesus—his brother. He doesn't brag about being the brother of Jesus, rather he understands that even as Jesus' brother he didn't recognize Jesus for who he was, and so he takes no glory in boasting of his relationship. James had to live his faith, not simply rest on his birth status. He was humble and righteous. In fact he was later named "James the Just." This appears to be a family trait, since his father Joseph was referred to in Matthew 1:19 as "a just man," and James also refers to Jesus as being a just man.

So we not only learn insights for James' letter, but we also gain insight into Jesus and who He was. We learn that with God's help we can rise above our unbelief as James did. We learn we don't have to let sibling envy or bitterness destroy our maturity and spiritual development. And we learn the value of humbly accepting God's calling.

II. The Readers

The author is the brother of Jesus, but to whom is he writing? Who are his intended readers? Looking

back at verse one, and James' introduction, he addresses the letter to "***the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.***" The word used here for "scattered" is *diaspora*. It is a reference to the twelve tribes, which are scattered or dispersed around the world (they will be rejoined in the end times). The readers then might likely be thought Jewish. However, since James was the leader in the early church, and since he supported Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, it is also possible James has a wider audience in mind. Not only Jewish Christians who no longer live in Jerusalem or their homeland, but also Christians in general who are not living in their true home heaven, but rather are living in the world for a time until God gathers them up in the end times. Of course, within the church there would also be those who simply name the name of Christ, and have no real faith. In either case, since the book is part of our Bible or canon, we are *God's* intended audience.

We can also learn some things about these readers based on James' exhortations to them. It appears from comments James makes, some of the readers are enjoying or admiring the world too much. Away from their support group of the church, the world has begun to affect and infect them. James is afraid this may be a sign of false faith among some of those in the church.

James knows about this personally, and speaks from his own personal experience. He is remembering what Jesus said to him and his brothers about the world not hating them because they are part of it. James knows how hard it is to keep the right perspective. He lived with Jesus himself—knew him, heard him, saw his miracles, but still saw him with worldly eyes. How

much more difficult is it for those of us who didn't see Jesus?

In a sense, each day we are the Christians of the Diaspora. We gather together on Sunday and support and encourage one another. Then during the week we are "out there" living in the world, surrounded by worldly people with worldly desires. The lure of riches and popularity begins to break down our Christian beliefs and our Christian attitude. It's so easy to give into this pressure.

James also sees his readers lacking Christian love. He sees in them a failure to put into practice what they know. He is sensing they need an attitude adjustment. They are familiar with the facts of the gospel, but they are failing to apply what they believe to their everyday lives. The world is corrupting and hardening them, and has instilled in them a secular worldview.

Some of James' readers are also under a certain amount of ridicule and persecution. Their new religion "Christianity" is not popular, and the pressure of fitting in with the world is taking its toll. James knows all too well his readers are living in troubled and even perilous times, but he encourages them to remain in a true faith, no matter the trial or persecution.

You might say, "Some of that sounds quite a bit like the world today, and what Christians living in the 1990's are facing. But we really aren't undergoing that much persecution or threats to our freedom." Maybe not yet, but we are getting there. Take, for instance, the following two examples.

After the terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995, the president of the United States blamed the bombing on "Right Wing Extremists." You may say,

“So?” But not long after that, I opened up my newspaper to find a sizable headline proclaiming the president had called those who seek to restrict abortions or impose their morality on others, “Right-Wing Extremists.” So now the most powerful man in the world has just labeled me (and millions of other Christians) a terrorist who would kill innocent people. Hmmm? Who exactly is it that is promoting the killing of innocent unborn babies? Who is the terrorist?

The second example is even more recent. A rather sizable Christian church has been threatened with having its tax-exempt status revoked if the pastor continues to preach against abortion. The IRS says is political speech, and cannot be uttered in a tax-exempt church. We are living in a dangerous time. The question is, do we simply give in to the world? We might then be like James and his brothers were originally—accepted by it. Or do we meet Jesus’ and James’ challenge to live out our faith and not become polluted by the world?

III. The Theme

James the brother of Jesus is the author, and his readers are basically Christians living in the world. Finally, we want to examine the main theme of the book.

Some have said there is no theme: James is just haphazardly stringing together a bunch of random thoughts. Reformer Martin Luther even labeled the book unimportant and in contradiction to the teachings of the rest of the Bible. As we study this book, we will see just how unfortunate that opinion is, because James does have a very strong underlying theme, and this is a

book of incredible strength and insight. Most recent scholars have also taken this viewpoint.

The theme that ties all of James' thoughts together is a demand for reality in our faith. He insists that faith shall be proven or tested by works, and that character should correspond to profession. "Practice what you preach." He provides for us a series of tests in which we can examine and measure the faith we profess.

James is straightforward, simple, specific, and extremely challenging. In fact, there are more imperatives in this book (54 in 108 verses) than any other epistle. An imperative is a command. But James is not a bull-in-a-china-shop either. He addresses his readers lovingly, calling them "brothers", or "beloved brethren", some 15 times.

One other striking aspect of this book is that it only mentions Jesus twice. However, it is filled with Jesus-like teaching. James apparently did spend a great deal of time listening to his brother, and it appears James learned something from him. James reflects that teaching here. Much of his commands relate directly to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. James is also fond of metaphors or illustrations taken from nature, much like Jesus. James is a bit of a poet as well, sometimes uniting thoughts with common words or similar ideas, much like Jesus. In fact there is a little word play in the first two verses. The word "greeting" is *chairo*, and the word "joy," some four words later, is *chara*.

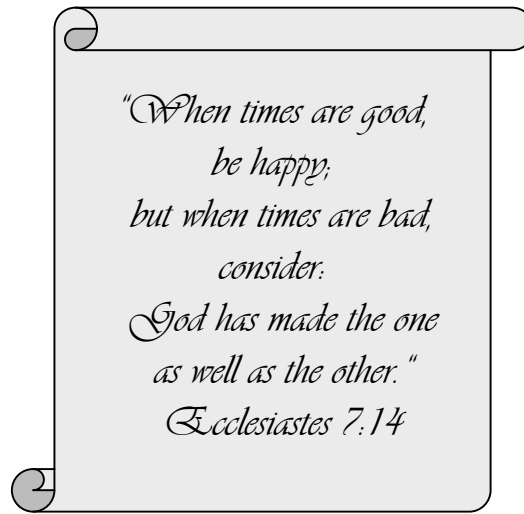
James, like Jesus, will challenge us in this study to begin thinking about the world in an entirely different way, and from an entirely different viewpoint. We will be able to judge how much we have become infected by the world when we see how far from true

Christian thinking we have come. It is going to tax us some, convict us some, and inspire us a great deal.

Whether it is trials you are facing, or your struggle against the draw of the world, you will want to seriously consider what James has to say. Allow yourself to really look inward and see if you truly are “Measuring Up” and thinking and acting like a Christian.

James had a least two conversations with Jesus that impacted him dramatically. In the first one, Jesus told him he was of the world, and comfortable in it. The second conversation we don’t know anything about. What do you think Jesus said to James after his resurrection? How do you think James replied? If Jesus knew you as well as he knew his brother James (and he does) what would he have said to you? What is Jesus saying to you now? How will you respond?

“James, You’re Crazy”



"Joy is the echo of God's life within us."

Joseph Marmion

James 1:2-4

As promised, James will challenge us to think like *true* Christians. In doing so, we can use him as a yard stick in which to measure the maturity of our own faith. The question to ask yourself throughout this study will be, “Do I think and act like James says a true Christian should think and act?” In this chapter that is going to be a tough question to handle. However, it is an incredibly insightful and rewarding one if you dare look deep inside yourself, and deep into three very extraordinary verses of scripture.

When I woke up that morning to go to the bathroom, I sensed something different about the house. It seemed warmer, and it smelled a little different. I was just six years old, but at that young age I was quite perceptive ☺. The thing I perceived the most however, was I needed to go to the bathroom. After I had completed the task at hand, I decided I would play the “kind brother” and go see my 14 year old sister Darla who had been sick with the flu for the past couple of days. I knew she would probably not be feeling well enough to go to church this morning, so I would just practice my visitation skills with her. Perhaps she might even have an idea about why the house felt different. As I walked into her room, I once again felt something different. She wasn’t there. Oh yeah, she was sleeping in Mom and Dad’s bed, because they had a TV in there and she had been watching it while she was sick. I made my way to my parents’ room where she was lying in bed, looking quite pale. “It’s probably the fever,” I decided. I went up to her and tapped her on the arm and asked her if she was feeling any better. She said, “I am okay, but you need to go talk to dad.”

Hmmm? That was an odd statement I thought. I wonder if I did something wrong?

Wait a minute, this was Sunday morning and Dad is always at church by about 6:00 am, why should I go find dad? “Just go find him, he needs to talk to you,” she said in kind of a raspy voice. Okay, I guess I will go see if I can find dad. As I walked down the hallway, I thought I heard strange voices, but thought maybe it was just the radio. When I was about halfway down the hallway, my dad came up the stairs and met me. Now this was weird, I hardly ever saw him on Sunday mornings. Something is odd here. He knelt down beside me, brushed back my hair, which was notoriously sticking up because of my miserable cowlick, and said in a real quiet and weak voice, “Your sister Pam was in a car accident last night and was killed.” His voice weakened and trailed off a bit at the end, but I understood what he said. I wish I hadn’t heard it. Then he asked me if I understood what he had said, and I said that I did. He started to cry, and put his arms around me and gave me a big hug and told me he loved me. I don’t think I had ever seen my dad cry before. It was weird, and very sad. Now my mom, I had seen her cry all the time: weddings, baptisms, TV commercials, spilt milk, you name it. In fact Mom always had a Kleenex at the ready, stuffed up the sleeve of her robe. I always wondered exactly how long it had been there, - ever since I could remember anyway. But dad crying—that made me cry. Here was my big strong dad kneeling down beside me in tears. I didn’t know what to make of it all.

I had just seen my sister and her boyfriend the night before sitting in front of our stereo, listening to the new Bill Cosby comedy album. They were

laughing away. If I think real hard, I can still hear my sister's laugh. It was real infectious. In fact everything about my 17 year old sister Pam was infectious: her smile, her attitude, her whole personality. But now it was all gone. It was a very hollow feeling, even for a six year old. It was tough for the whole family. It was the first real trial I ever experienced in life. Unfortunately, not the last. Maybe you have faced a trial like that before; perhaps you're even in the midst of one right now. Have you ever found it tough to know how to deal with trials, big or small? Have you ever wondered why you went through a trial or why God allows them in your life? If you are like me, I am sure you have asked those questions. It is not wrong to ask questions. As long as you seek the true answer, and when you find the answer, you are willing to accept it.

Some days in the summer in Phoenix it gets HOT. Understatement of the year. But let's say I wanted to know how hot it was, and I asked the question of a trusted weatherman, "How hot was it?" And, he proceeded to tell me it was 121°. Then I say, "No, I don't believe you. I refuse to accept that. That isn't possible." What good is the question, if I refuse to accept the answer?

Have you ever asked, "Why?" "Why am I experiencing trials?" or "What purpose could this possibly serve?" I have. Have you ever really looked for the answer? Or did you just throw your arms up in disgust, blame God, and turn bitter. We are going to look at James' answer to those questions. But this will be an effort in futility unless we accept what we find and act upon it. Are you ready?

We are going to do something a little different with James 1:1-4. We are going to start with verse 4

and work our way back up to verse 2, and in doing so, we will gain a greater understanding of James' excellent argument. This argument may be foreign to you.

Before we look at verse 4, I am going to make a couple of statements I want you to either agree or disagree with.

STATEMENT #1: *Joy is a good emotion, and one to be desired.*

STATEMENT #2: *Fulfilling God's plan and desire for your life will bring you joy.*

STATEMENT #3: *God's plan for your life is that you become more mature and complete in your faith.*

Are we agreeing so far? Okay, how about...

STATEMENT #4: *This is the greatest book I have ever read.* I thought I might be able to slip that one by you, since you were being so agreeable. Keep in mind now your agreement with those three statements as we begin to look at verse 4.

Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

I. What does it mean to be mature?

What does it mean to be mature and complete, no lacking anything? The word translated "mature" (*telios*) actually implies more than just maturity. It suggests becoming perfect, which is attainable only in the sense of our being made perfect in heaven. James believes this goal must always be at the forefront of our minds. We are never to reach a point in our Christian life

where we become complacent or apathetic. The Apostle Paul realized this when he said he had not attained the goal yet, but was continually striving for it. We are not to settle for human standards. James is calling us to a higher standard, or the highest standard—which is perfection.

The other word James uses is translated “complete.” The complete Christian is one who has had his entire nature changed, so he no longer has a worldly understanding. Every aspect of his life is in tune with Christ and His way of thinking. He is completely made over, completely sold out to Christ, not just in one area of his life, but in every thought, deed, and motive.

Finally James also says, “not lacking anything.” This is a Christian who has the full armor of God—a Christian who knows how to think and react and behave in all of life’s various circumstances. That is God’s plan for your life. James doesn’t allow us to settle for anything else. In fact, this verse is a command, and has the force we MUST let perseverance do its work and help us fulfill God’s plan for our lives, not only on earth, but also in heaven. He isn’t asking us to set unreasonable goals we can’t reach, rather he is calling us to the highest possible standard, and promises if we allow God to work in our lives, we will one day be perfect and complete in heaven. It is a great promise and a great challenge.

Now compare that with the world’s standards. The world says we should just go with the flow and not set high standards. We should even blame others for failures, and never really strive for anything. Status quo. But James tests our worldly attitude here by asking us what our desires are for our lives. “Hey, Christian, do you want to just get by?” Do you have the

attitude, “I prayed the prayer, I don’t need to strive for anything. God doesn’t expect anything more from me.” I think, as we will see later in this book, James would say a Christian who isn’t allowing God to work in his life, and doesn’t desire spiritual growth and maturity, probably is not a Christian at all. These qualities he mentions aren’t optional goals for us; they are what we will be striving for *if* we are Christians. Strong challenge, isn’t it?

Okay, so I am supposed to fulfill God’s plan for my life by becoming mature and complete, lacking in nothing, but how do I do that?

II. What is the purpose of trials in my life?

Look back now to verse 3. *“Because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”* James tells us perseverance is what does the work of making you mature and complete, and it is developed through the testing of your faith through trials. Isn’t there an easier way to Christian maturity? No, I am afraid not. In fact, James tells us we know this to be true. The verb “to know” meant to the Greeks the knowledge of facts. But to the Jews, it meant something different. It meant the actual application of those facts to their everyday life and their understanding of God’s plan. We have already examined James’ concern for his readers is that they were showing a lack of application of their knowledge and faith in their life and thinking. James is simply telling us we really do know from experience testing does build perseverance. But we don’t want to accept this or let it take its natural course and mature us.

I think James knows about it all too well. As a leader of the first church, James no doubt came under a tremendous amount of pressure and persecution. He knows first hand about what he speaks. In a sense he is saying, “You know as well as I do that testing can build our perseverance if we allow it to.”

The word James uses for testing here actually has with it the idea of a method by which something is tried and proven.

In Florida, there is a theme park known as Busch Gardens. Some years ago they debuted this new incredible thrill ride known as Kumba. It is hard to explain, but imagine yourself standing up and being corkscrewed around at about 60 miles per hour. That is Kumba. It took years to design the ride, and the architects had to know a great deal about forces and stress points and all of that. But with all their competence, how many people would have lined up for the ride if they said to those first people, “Well, we hope it is safe, but we don’t really know because we never really tried it out.” I don’t think many people would be lining up, and the ride wouldn’t really serve much of a purpose just sitting there like some piece of twisted metal artwork. The purpose of the ride was to thrill and excite people, and it could only serve that purpose if it was first tested and proven to be safe and thrilling. A thrill ride isn’t a thrill ride unless someone actually rides it and is thrilled.

A Christian is not a Christian unless his faith is tested and proved. And yet, we try to avoid being tested. We don’t like it when we are tested, not even in school. Testing is a completely negative idea in our heads. But, James says, “NOT FOR THE CHRISTIAN” it isn’t. Here then is another measure of

our faith. How do we view this testing? Do we see it as building perseverance which is making us mature and complete, or do we grow bitter each time a test or trial comes our way? Do we point fingers at God? Do we refuse to allow the testing to better us and improve our steadfastness? James asks us, "How do you respond to testing?" Think back to a recent trial, big or small, with which you had to deal. How did you feel about it? How did you react to it? What kind of thoughts went through your head? What was your attitude? Anger? Frustration? Disappointment? Failure? This leads us to the next question.

III. How are we to respond?

How are we to respond to these tests and trials? Remember I said when you seek answers, you must be prepared to follow them, and respond to them. So what does James say? Look at verse 2.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.

What? James, are you crazy?! How can I consider a trial a joy? That is ridiculous. "Oh, but I have you," James says. Remember the statements you agreed to at the beginning? James uses those now in the actual culmination of his argument. Remember you agreed:

STATEMENT #1: *Joy is a good emotion, and one to be desired.*

STATEMENT #2: *Fulfilling God's plan and desire for your life will bring you joy.*

STATEMENT #3: *God's plan for your life is that you become more mature and complete in your faith.*

Now let's look back over these three verses and see how James has caught us. If joy is a good thing, and fulfilling God's plan for my life brings joy, and God's plan for my life is for me to become mature and complete, and that can only be done through perseverance, which is developed through the testing or proving of my faith in trials, then how should I view those trials? With JOY! WOW! So considering trials joy, which would seem ridiculous at first, now makes complete sense. Trials help us to fulfill God's plan for our life. This is obviously something great and will no doubt bring us joy.

Let's even look at that verse a little more closely, because there is more here. First of all, James is not *suggesting* we consider trials a joy, he is *commanding*. Again, he is saying this is how a true Christian *will* view trials. How do you measure up? James goes even deeper. He doesn't want us to just say to ourselves, "Yeah, yeah, okay, this trial is joyful." No, no. He uses a word meaning a great deal more. The NIV translates the word *hegesasthe* as "consider." That is actually a little weak and doesn't really get at the force of the word. I "consider" what flavor of ice cream I want, or I "consider" which shirt I am going to wear. There really isn't a whole lot of thought that goes into it. The KJV and other versions use the word "count." That is a little closer, but still, what does it mean to "count" something as joyful? Think about what the word "count" means when we use it in reference to someone's name, such as *Count* Dracula, or *Count* of

Monte Christo, or *Count Chocula*? It is a term which signifies someone who has ruling powers or authority or control over something. That is getting closer to the definition. James isn't just commanding us to take this idea lightly, but rather he is charging us to allow this way of thinking to completely rule or control our minds and our actions. Trials=joy must transform our minds and control our perception of everything we face. It does for the true Christian.

The tense of the word is important here too. It is in a form of Greek speech known as the middle imperative. Imperative we know. It is a command, and not just a meaningless command, but rather a command which is volitionally possible. Let me demonstrate.

Follow these commands. Raise your hand into the air. That is something you can actually follow. You can will your hand to rise up into the air. Jump up and touch the sun. That is something you cannot do. That is a command you are not capable of following. The command here in James, is one that IS possible. This is important to remember. The second important aspect of the word is it is in the middle voice. This is something not easily translated into English. It conveys the meaning this is an action one must do for himself. We have to make the effort on our own; no one else can do it for us. It has to be a conscious decision we make in our mind. It is not a suggestion, but rather a command demanding a response.

What is your response? "Okay, so I will take this attitude after I go through some minor trials." No. James says we must take this attitude when we *face* (at the start of) trials. In fact the word "trial" here is deeper than a first glance may convey. The word carries with it not only outward trials, like the loss of a

job, or the death of a family member, but also inward trials which manifest themselves in temptations to do evil. Our very battle against our sinful nature on a daily basis is what James has in mind here. The temptations that Satan is trying to use to destroy us, God is actually using to prove and test our faith and make us more mature. Do we see it that way? James says we should look at temptations as an opportunity to prove our faith. Have you ever faced a huge temptation and stood up under it and overcome it? You look back and say, “Wow, I did it!” It is a way for you to see your true faith in action. It is a great and joyful occasion.

We all experience trials, but God has something great in mind, and James is calling us to see it. Here is how a Christian will look at the events of his life. Here is what God’s plan is for you.

It was tough to see it at first as a six year old child though. I wondered what good could ever come of my sister dying in a car accident. Satan would love to have taken that event to shake our family’s faith and destroy our ministry. But what he intended for evil, God intended for good. My sister and her boyfriend were taking another young girl to a youth group event. She wasn’t a Christian, but they wanted her to attend and let her know what it was all about. She never arrived at the meeting, and she spent quite a bit of time recovering from serious injuries. We have continued to pray for Robin over the years that God would work in her life and bring her to salvation. You see my sister was already a Christian, and that night she went to be with the Lord, but had Robin been killed, it would have been another story.

That isn’t all God had in mind. A few years ago when I was a youth pastor, I received a call from a girl

who was hysterical. She was crying and sobbing into the phone so much I could barely understand what she was saying. After I finally had her calmed down some, she told me a friend of hers had just been killed in a car accident. His truck rolled over on the way home from school. Immediately, it struck me how God was using that trial of losing my sister to make me more mature and complete. He had given me the tools to help this young girl understand the tragedy better. I could relate to the feelings she was having. I had an understanding that could not have come about through any other source than the trial and testing of my faith. After I was off the phone with her, I just prayed to God and thanked Him for the work He had done in my life, and the experiences He had given me. I now had a whole new understanding of why James calls us to “count it all joy.”

Your understanding of this passage means nothing though, if you put this book down unchanged, and unchallenged. You have wasted your time. James demands a response, a real, mind-altering, life-changing response. We must understand trials for what they are. And it is a measure of our Christian faith how we approach trials. Remember the complete argument of James, and the complete promise of God.

James sums it all up well in verse 12 of chapter one.

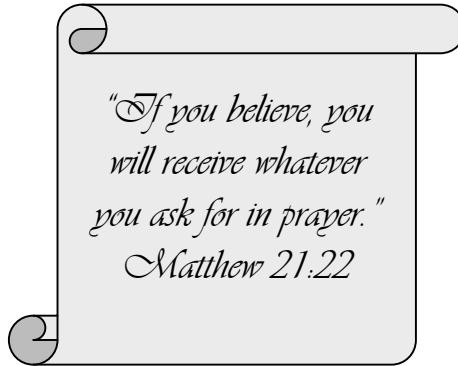
Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Let me share with you a thought from Charles Spurgeon (the great 19th century preacher and theologian).

“I have always looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I felt it then, to feel the power of faith as I felt it then, to hang on to God’s powerful arm as I hung on to it then, and see God at work as I saw him then.”

Let that be your attitude, as you count it all joy.

“Spiritual MPD”



"It is an inconsistent thing for a believing man to doubt his God. If you believe, why doubt? If faith, why little faith? If you doubt, why believe? Oil and water will not mix. Oh, how should faith and unbelief unite?"

Charles Spurgeon

James 1:5-8

His name was Ross. Ross was a handsome young 19 year old. He lived with his family in a very nice upper middle class neighborhood just outside of Denver, Colorado. Ross was a charmer, who could (or would try to anyway) convince you of just about anything he wanted. Yet behind the charm and good looks, there was something else. One day he went to a movie with a friend. Halfway through the movie he left, called his parents, and told them he wanted to show them a birdhouse he had built for some people out in the country. So he met his parents and had them drive out into the countryside. Then he asked them to get out of the car and lay down by the side of the road. Ross shot them both in the back of the head.

The next day the police came to inform Ross his parents had been mysteriously shot and killed. They found him alone in his living room eating pizza. Not too long after that, the evidence began to mount it was in fact the couple's son who had killed them. Ross then began working on his defense. He began to exhibit strange personalities, and was diagnosed by psychiatrists as having MPD, Multiple Personality Disorder. Ross had known he would not have to stand trial if he could convince people he was mentally unfit. He hired the top lawyer in Denver, with his parent's money, and spent the better part of seven years in various mental hospitals attempting to convince doctors of his disease. Ross became kind of an infamous "cause celeb" in Colorado. The story even appeared on "Hard Copy" and other TV news shows. Finally after seven years, the judge was convinced Ross was faking this disorder, and ordered him to stand trial for the murders. That week Ross was diagnosed with

Leukemia, and died 2 weeks later on Thanksgiving Day.

When thinking back to the last chapter, you might wonder how anyone could consider this trial a joy. As James moves from one topic to another, he helps us answer that question in the transition. Look at James chapter 1 verses 2-5:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,³ because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance.⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

When you think of the families involved in this situation it may seem impossible to apply this command from James. It seemed that way from the inside as well. You see, Ross was my cousin, and his mom and dad were my aunt Marilyn and my uncle Rod. For the longest time, it just didn't seem to make any sense. Human reason could not find an answer. But what does James say when we get to that point where we just can't find any joy? Look again at verse 5, which serves as his transition picking up the word "lack" from the end of verse 4 and using it at the beginning of verse 5.

James knows there will be times when we will simply need to ask God for wisdom concerning our trials. We will need to have God provide answers where none seem possible. We will need God to give us insight into His will, and the wisdom to understand it. Sometimes that wisdom allows us to focus on God more, and the sin and imperfections of this world less. It was a lesson for me personally in how a person can

fool others: doctors, lawyers, judges, even family members. But no one can fool God. God knows the heart. He knew the split personality of Ross was contrived, and he allowed leukemia to be the judge and jury. It reaffirmed in me the power God has to look into our hearts, and judge our thoughts and motives.

That is the same type of transition James makes for us here in this passage. Let's look at three personalities; the Giver, the Receiver, and the Double-minded Taker. Once again we will be able to use these verses as a yardstick against which we can measure our own relationship with God, especially our understanding of prayer. Be looking inward as James presents the challenge.

Let's look at the first personality we see in verses 5-8. Someone I call...

I. The Giver

First and foremost, something jumped right off the page at me as I looked at this passage. But it is so subtle we probably missed it in the first reading. Look at verse 5 again.

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

Read that again and see if you kind find what I am getting at. Now replace "God" with Buddha, Allah, Oprah, Donahue, the Virgin Mary, St. Peter, St. Michael, Jolly old St. Nicholas, Mother Earth, the sun God, Zeus, Carl Sagan, Bill Clinton, your college professor, your dad, your pastor...NO! Who are we to ask for wisdom? To whom are we to pray? God. And

why God? Because He is the only one who can give these things to us. You wouldn't come to me and ask me if you could borrow someone else's car. I couldn't give it to you. We are to go to the source, not just the source of wisdom (just one example given by James here) but God is the source of everything. 1 Chronicles 29:12 declares:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. ¹² Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.

God is the source of all! He is even given the Hebrew names ***Yatsar Kole***—*Maker of all things*, and ***Mashal Kole*** — *Ruler of all things*. So who you gonna call? Well, it isn't the Ghostbusters. God is the giver.

James also tells us more about the giver by telling us how He gives. Look at the last part of verse 5. God gives “generously.” That is the Greek word ***haplos*** which can be translated “with generosity,” but can also be understood as the idea of “singleness, undivided, unwavering intent, without reservation.” In Ephesians, Paul uses the term to refer to the manner in which slaves should obey their masters, “with singleness of heart.” Undivided, committed loyalty. I think both qualities are in mind here with James, there is no question God is generous, but His nature is intent on giving to us, without reservation. Notice how this relates nicely to the next term in the verse, “without finding fault.”

Have you ever thought God was not going to listen to you or answer your prayer because of a past sin in your life? “God will never listen to me again after that mistake,” you might have thought. But James is reassuring us of not only the generosity of God, but also His forgiveness. God does not hold past failures against us and punish us for them by not answering our prayers, or worse yet—giving us the opposite of what we ask. That is not His nature. Jesus explains God’s nature to us in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. A sermon I am sure James attended and was well familiar with, as you will see evidence of throughout this book. Jesus says:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

James wants us to know as God's children we can come to Him boldly with our requests. Not in fear or embarrassment, but with confidence—confidence in the unwavering, giving God. With Him there are no limitations. God gives “to all” James says, and so we are given great insight into the personality of our giving God.

The next personality we come in contact with is one I call...

II. The Receiver

As Jesus promised us, when we ask we will receive, as long as we do our part and ask in faith, believing that God will answer. Look at verse 6 here, and note James is using a command again. **“But when he asks, he MUST believe and not doubt.”** It is a two part command. First, note the parallel of this verse to a statement of Jesus’ in Matthew 21:21-22:

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. ²² If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

Sound familiar? James was an excellent student of his brother’s teachings wasn’t he? The first command we find is we *must believe* or have faith. It doesn’t read we *should* have faith. The word here is *pisteou* which means “belief and conviction and assurance in,” and it refers to something more than just believing God will give us what we ask for, but also includes a confident, unwavering, and complete trust in God and submission to His will. Notice the connection here with the unwavering nature of God in His desire to give, and the unwavering trust we should have in Him in order to receive.

The true Christian prays with this kind of faith, not just lip service. Merely invoking God’s name doesn’t cut it, there must be faith. God only answers the prayers of Christians. It may be a nice sentiment to think God answers the prayers of everyone who starts out by saying, “Dear God,” but it doesn’t work that

way. You might want to ask a non-Christian friend or family member sometime why they are praying to a God in whom they don't believe or serve. Do you want access to all the great gifts God can give, including joy in the midst of trials? Then believe and have complete faith in God. If you don't want to do that, then don't waste your breath.

The second part of the command is, "You must not doubt." Not only do you have to be a believing Christian, but you must also not doubt.

The word "doubt" or *diakrino* literally means "a divided calling or judgment." Think about what we expect from NBA referees. When Shaq explodes down the lane and jams the ball home crashing into Jason Kidd, we want the official to "make a call," don't we? The Lakers hope the call is blocking; the Nets fans hope it is charging, and Jason hopes Shaq doesn't land on him. But what happens when the ref can't make the call? When he can't decide which it was? How would we respond to him? We would call him a moron or something and be indignant about his ability to "make a call," to decide one way or another. How long would an official last in the NBA if he "doubts" all the time and just can't choose one way or the other? That is a picture of the doubt James has in mind. Yeah, you may be an NBA official, but don't expect a raise if you can't make a call. Yeah, you may be a Christian, but don't expect to receive from God if you doubt.

James wants us to have that absolute confidence and absolute faith in God. He doesn't want any "if you can, God" prayers. As the saying goes, "If 'ifs' and 'buts' were candy and nuts, then we would all have a Merry Christmas." Look at how Jesus responds to unbelief and "ifs" in Mark 9:19-27:

"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered.²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."²³ "If you can't?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead."²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

For James, a lesson learned. No "ifs," just believe! Just like the centurion who only needed to have Jesus say the word, our faith must be definite. The true Christian is recognized by his absolute faith in God. God gives, the faithful, unwavering Christian receives, but what about the next personality we come to. A personality I call...

III. The Double-Minded Taker

As James lays it out for us in verses 6-8, this person is in opposition to both the character of God and the character of the true Christian. So what is a double-minded man? Look at verses 6-8 again. That is where we find him described:

But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

The word translated “double-minded” here is only used by James in the New Testament. Here in verse 8 and again in chapter 4:8. The word here is *dipsuchos* and when broken down, it literally means “split mind.” *Di* meaning divided or two parts, and *psuchos* meaning mind or soul. We might even call this person someone with split-or multiple personality disorder, in the spiritual sense. This person is characterized by someone who:

One the one hand	and on the other hand
<i>Does not know what he needs</i>	<i>Asks God for stuff anyway</i>
<i>Doesn't seek or know God's will</i>	<i>Thinks God should be giving him everything he wants</i>
<i>Has an intellectual knowledge of God</i>	<i>Doesn't have God in his heart</i>
<i>Says he loves God</i>	<i>Loves money and riches</i>
<i>Says he listens to God</i>	<i>Follows the ways of the world</i>
<i>Wants the good</i>	<i>Refuses to accept that which he thinks is bad</i>
<i>Goes to church on Sunday</i>	<i>Spends the rest of the week in a bar</i>
<i>Says one thing</i>	<i>Does the opposite</i>
<i>Asks God for things</i>	<i>Would rather just take from Him as he pleases</i>

A double-minded man is someone who holds dual allegiances. It is a person who cannot give himself fully to God, because he is too in love with the world. He wants the best of both worlds. He wants to be able to think God is answering his prayers, and at the same time he wants only what fits into his worldly life which he loves.

James, like Jesus as we mentioned earlier, is fond of metaphors. He compares this man with a wave which is just blown and tossed with the wind. If you have ever been out in a boat when it has been windy, you know what waves are like. As we read earlier, Peter sure learned about waves. They tend to toss and turn in every direction. James adds to the metaphor by stating the double-minded man is also “unstable in all he does.” Just like someone trying to stand in a boat that is being tossed about by the waves.

Contrast this person then with the qualities of God the Giver and the Receiving Christian.

- This person is double-minded as opposed to the single-mindedness of the others.
- This person wavers where the others are unwavering.
- This person is unable to decide where the others are decisive.
- This person is unstable while God is the rock and the Christians are his church which stands firm.
- This person is generally this way in all his beliefs. And those who are unstable or without conviction, tend to believe in or lean toward:
 - Whatever is convenient
 - Whatever is non-threatening
 - Whatever is politically correct
 - Whatever is agreeable
 - Whatever is non-convicting
 - Whatever is most accepting
 - Whatever sounds good

The question is, “Where do you fit in to all this?” Which descriptions fit you the best? How do you ask God, and how sure is your faith? Do you approach God with a single-minded confidence, or do you suffer from spiritual MPD. Just like with my cousin Ross, God sees into your heart and knows which you are. Examine your own thoughts and motivations and beliefs when you pray. Are you praying believing, or are you praying and doubting? Are you seeking God’s will or your will?

God is so wonderful and so powerful and so benevolent, why should we ever doubt Him. Perhaps recently you had some questions about whether God really could turn trials into joy. Maybe you’re like me, and the answer didn’t come right away. But James tells us God will give us joy; He will give us wisdom to understand life’s trials; He will give us anything we ask as long as we believe and not doubt. God will give us. After all, He gave us His son to die for us, even though we didn’t deserve it, so why doubt? Ask and believe!

“When Did James Visit Arizona?”

*“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.”*

1 Timothy 6:18-19

“No man can tell whether he is rich or poor by
turning to his ledger. It is the heart that
makes a man rich. He is rich according to what
he is, not according to what he has.”

Henry Ward Beecher

James 1:9-12

In this chapter we will be looking at James' visit to Arizona and the death of Jerry Garcia. Sounds interesting, huh?

For those of you who don't know who Jerry Garcia was, he was the main character in a rock band known as the "Grateful Dead," which became popular in the 1960's and maintained a cult-like following of fans known as "Deadheads." Garcia spent the better part of his 53 years playing his guitar and doing just about any drug he could get his hands on. He died in 1995 in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center where he was being treated for a heroin addiction. And yet in spite of that unsavory description of his life, a big portion of the world mourned the death of this rock hero. One news story reported how Garcia and the "Dead" didn't mind at first the unauthorized distribution of their tapes and T-shirts and other paraphernalia. However, when Garcia found out how much money he could be making from these items, he decided to begin marketing them himself. He became quite rich, and in fact even though his trademark was a grungy black T-shirt, he lived in the very affluent Marin county area of California. The news article reported at the time of his death, Garcia was a multi-millionaire.

Correction, at the time of his death, Garcia was worth nothing. You see money, guitars, fame: you can't take them with you. It is my guess Mr. Garcia isn't so "grateful" he is dead now. A pretty humbling experience for someone so popular and so rich.

Consider the death of someone else. Perhaps one of the poorest men to ever die was Jesus. Jesus hung on a cross naked. He owned nothing. Not even clothes for his body. And yet, through Jesus' death and

resurrection, he became elevated to the Right Hand of God, and made His sheep rich with eternal life. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says;

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Now that is someone to look up to!

James 1:9-12, our text in this chapter, deals with this issue of the rich and poor.

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

At first glance, this appears to be a very abrupt transition in James' writing. He has just finished talking about the double-minded man and the faith we should have in prayer, and then all of a sudden, he starts into this poor and rich thing. Some commentators even hold there is absolutely no connection between verses 9 and 10 and those which precede or follow it. But this isn't the case.

First of all, think back to our opening discussion of the book of James, and who we said his readers were. They were Christian Jews who were either under persecution or were becoming too attracted to the

world. So first he mentions how those going through trials should view them, and then he cautions those who might not completely rely on God—those who put their trust in money and wealth—by calling them double-minded men. Now look at how nicely that ties in with this thought in verses 9-11. The poor man and the rich man.

James is actually giving encouragement to his readers who are undergoing two different types of trials, poverty and wealth. James probably experienced a little of both of these, and so again he speaks from experience. Let's take a closer look at James' evaluation of the poor man and the rich man.

I. The Poor Man

First James addresses the “brother in humble circumstances.” He doesn't really say just “poor” or “those who are in poverty.” His idea is any person who is either poor financially, or low on the social ladder or even poor as in rejected, one without many friends, family etc...and so the NIV translates this nicely by saying “the brother in humble circumstances.” Someone who probably thinks he has nothing in life of which to be proud or boastful.

Make no mistake about it, poverty is definitely a trial. Anyone who has ever been in really humble circumstances can tell you that. Poverty can lead people to crime; it can also lead people to curse God. Remember what Job's wife told him to do when he found himself in humble circumstances? “Curse God and die!”

In a certain sense, Christians in general are beginning to be those looked down upon by society.

We are the new minority in America—a new despised minority in some circles. This shouldn't come as any great surprise though, because Jesus said in Matthew 10:22, "***All men will hate you because of me...***" Certainly Jesus himself knew what it was to be poor.

When Jesus was born (and when any baby was born in Jewish society), an offering was to be made in the temple for him. Normally, the offering was to be a little lamb. But if you were poor and didn't have anything, you were allowed to offer turtle doves. When Jesus was born, his parents carried a sacrifice of turtle doves into the temple. He was born into a poor family from Nazareth. The same poor family into which James himself was born. Poor, humble circumstances. But rather than commiserating with his readers in this condition, James instead encourages them by letting them know they will be exalted. James wants the humble to know they can take pride in their circumstances, because they will one day be exalted and lifted up high to a new and glorious place in heaven. Notice again the correlation of this statement to the statement of Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, "***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.***"

When a poor person from a poor family in a poor neighborhood becomes a Christian, a remarkable thing happens. That person now has access to the incomparable riches of God, he becomes part of *God's* family and secures himself a home *in heaven* where the streets are paved with gold. Sometimes we read in the newspaper about a very, very poor person who has a very rich relative. The rich relative suddenly dies, and instantly the poor man becomes a millionaire. That is similar to what has taken place in the life of a believer.

Because of the death of another, you have been made incredibly rich in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what James is talking about. The poor believer is to rejoice (in his trial), because he has been exalted.

Then James goes on to explain the paradoxical trial, - riches. As we have already seen, James thinks of those who rely on riches instead of on God as double-minded. So what else does he say about them here? Let's look at the rich.

II. The Rich Man

Some have said the poor man in verse 9 is the Christian, and the rich man in verse 10 is the non-Christian. However, this isn't the case. In verse 10, to whom does the "one" refer? Which one? James is referring to "the brother" in verse 9, and it is a compound thought that continues in verse 10, and therefore could be accurately translated as "the brother who is in humble circumstances...and the brother who is rich..." James is talking about the poor and the rich who reside in the church. That is the proper context for this contrast.

The rich here may also likewise be thought of as those with many possessions and monetary wealth, or those who have a high social standing, popularity or fame. Normally, these people would have plenty to be proud of and plenty to boast about. But James redirects them here. He challenges them to think about their situation in life from a completely different perspective. He tells them they should take pride in the fact they have been lowered or given a low standing. That doesn't seem to make much sense does it? How can this be? Like Jerry Garcia, nobody can take his fame or

wealth with him when he dies. Something a rich church-goer may actually resent. However, James encourages them by telling them they should feel lucky those possessions will pass away, and not keep them from coming into heaven. They have a faith in something eternal that won't ever waste away like earthly possessions. James doesn't want them to lose sight of that or ever even *think* about putting their trust in those possessions, because he knows the disaster it can cause to their walk with Christ. Yes, riches can be a trial too.

There are so many dangers that come with material prosperity. Money can lead you into situations you never thought you would have to face. Money can be perhaps one of the strongest temptations. Greed and desire often take over the rich person and push God completely out of the picture. It always bothers me when I hear "health and wealth gospel" preachers talking about how, "God will make you rich and bring you prosperity." "Not very often," I think. More often than not, it is Satan who will bring you wealth and prosperity because he knows he can take over your life, when you allow the material possessions of the world to rule your daily thoughts. How many straight-thinking, super-rich Christian movie stars do you know? How many top executives of major companies spend time with God and rely on him? Wealth and riches are a temptation and a trial. James says you should be thankful if you are rich, because you have a lot of neat stuff. No. Rather, be thankful God brings you back down and can give you a humble spirit. Because as Jesus said in Matthew 19:23-24:

I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Riches can't buy your way into heaven; they can't bring you closer to God, and they can't even bring you joy. It has been said, "*Money is a universal passport to everywhere but heaven. And it's a universal provider of everything but happiness.*" Only God can give you those things, so why look anywhere else? But we do, don't we? We fall into that trap of looking to wealth to make us happy. Have you ever been really down about something, and just decided to go out and buy yourself something to make yourself feel good? How long did that joy last? Not very long, did it? Usually until the bill arrives. We think if we just made a little more money, we would be more happy. If we work just a few more hours a week, we would be able to afford a better car. Money becomes that which controls our thinking. But James reminds us here that riches pass away.

You might have wondered what I meant by the title of this chapter. As we mentioned, James likes to use metaphors from nature. In the last section it was the wave of the sea, and here he compares the riches of man to a wild flower. If you have ever visited Arizona sometime between April and June you will see a beautiful array of wild flowers in bloom. Yet by July, most of them will be dried up and withered away. James must have visited Arizona sometime to use this metaphor. Actually, the area around Palestine is full of desert-like wildernesses. And like Arizona, many beautiful wild flowers bloom in the spring, only to quickly dry up and blow away in the hot desert wind.

James uses an interesting tense in this metaphor. It is called the “Gnomic aorist.” It means this metaphor can almost be thought of in the proverbially sense, in other words, this is what always happens—it is a widely accepted truth. The scorching sun (which actually refers to the hot east wind) dries up everything very quickly, and just blows it away. What one day was beautiful and fertile, disappears into barrenness the next.

The same can be said about the rich man and his wealth. Have you ever been playing Monopoly, and been riding high? You are sitting pretty with a big wad of cash and tons of property. You think “Ha ha, this game is just about over.” When suddenly, you happen to land on Park Place with a hotel on it. Then you roll a 2 and land on Boardwalk with a hotel on it, and then you get sent to jail. The tide of the game changes rather quickly, doesn’t it? Many a famous athlete, movie star, and lottery winner has been riding high one day, only to see it disappear just like that. James says the rich man will be going about his business, (literally, on a business trip) and he will get a call from his broker, and it will all be gone. Perhaps, when James was visiting Arizona, he may have even paid a visit to Las Vegas to see just how fast riches can be taken away.

Rich or poor, brothers in both circumstances must learn to look at their situation in life through the glasses James provides. For the poor, the glasses are rose colored. “Take heart,” he says, “You have a reward and great riches awaiting you in heaven.” For the rich, the glasses are thick and black, so the rich man may not see, and therefore rely on his wealth in place of God.

Jesus Christ is the great equalizer. He takes the poor and lifts them up, and takes the rich and pulls them down. Jesus said to the poor blind beggar, “Arise.” Jesus said to Zacheus, the rich tax collector, “You come down.” We are all sinners in need of redemption. And, we all become equal in God’s family. We all are on the same level.

Where are you? Do you consider yourself rich or poor? Maybe you are thinking to yourself right now, “I am not poor, but I am not rich either. What does James say to me?” You are in luck. James is referring to you twice then.

When things are going bad, or you are being persecuted, rejoice that God will lift you up, and even already has. When things are going good—a new job, a raise etc—be careful not to let those things distract you from God, and rejoice that one day they will be gone and replaced by something even greater, something eternal.

James wants us to have a different perspective on things than that of the world, doesn’t he? That’s an understatement, right? Why does he want and even command this? Because, he says these are the true marks of a Christian. That campfire song from the 70’s said, “you will know we are Christians by our love...” and James sings, over and over again, “you will know we are Christians by not only our love, but also our attitudes, our hearts, our thoughts, and our actions.”

He sums up this whole first section, verses 1-11, in verse 12, when he reminds us all, rich, poor, or middle class, if we persevere in these various trials and temptations of life, we will be tested and proven and will receive the crown of life God has promised all Christians. What a great encouragement! With all these

commands and talk of trials, you wouldn't think James would be such a big encourager. But he certainly is to me. I hope, my Christian friend, you will accept his encouragement too, no matter your situation in life.

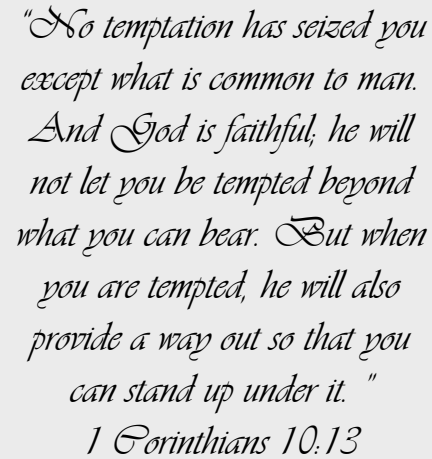
For my non-Christian friends, will you allow yourself to be humbled so you can come to Christ? Or will you continue to rely on the world. You know, sooner or later you are going to be humbled. If you live long enough. He says, the rich man will fade away in all his ways. There is going to come a time when that old body of yours is going to begin to break down. There will come a time when you won't be able to walk unassisted anymore. There may even come a time they will check you in to a rest home and you will be dependent on your next bite of food to the mercy of someone who will bring a spoon and put it in your toothless mouth. It won't matter if you have a million dollars in the bank. It won't matter if you have a thousand acres of land. It won't matter if you have three Rolls Royce in your garage. You are humble now. You are helpless. You are dependent on somebody for the next spoon of food. You are dependent on the eternal God for the next breath.

Sooner or later, you are going to be humbled.
Ask Jerry Garcia. 1 Peter 1:3-9:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith -- of

greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

“Hook, Line and Sin”



*"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. "
1 Corinthians 10:13*

"No degree of temptation justifies any degree
of sin"

Nathaniel P. Willis

James 1:13-15

It all started quite innocently. I was to simply go to the dentist for a regular check-up. I was 16, so my parents decided I could take the car and go by myself. Being able to drive *sans* parental units was always a great treat, and it even made a trip to the dentist appear inviting. After some X-rays and painful teeth scraping, and a bout with Mr. Thirsty, that annoying suction tube which evacuates your mouth of all moisture (always an enjoyable situation), I was informed I had a cavity. And—lucky me—the dentist had an opening, and could do the work right then and there. There was one bright side to this however—two words—Nitrous Oxide, a.k.a. laughing gas. I always loved that stuff. So much so, that when the dentist hooked it up and left the room for a minute, I began inhaling full strength. Needless to say, I felt no pain. In fact, I don't really even remember the dentist actually filling the cavity. Come to think of it, that would be a pretty good racket, wouldn't it? "Hey, you have a cavity, and it will cost you \$100 to fill it." Then you load the guy up with laughing gas, and just hand him the bill and say, "That oughta do it."

Feeling good, I decided I would take a little detour on my way home, even though my father had been rather explicit about just going to the dentist office and back. But I figured, "What harm is there in taking a little detour past the mall?" Once at the mall, I was still feeling pretty good, and I figured, "What is the harm in going in and just checking if there is anyone I know at the video arcade?" Back then, we had to actually go some place to play video games. I didn't see anyone I knew, but I did happen to wander past my favorite game, Donkey Kong Jr. And, as luck would

have it, no one was playing it. I was getting pretty good at the game, and with the help of some nitrous, I thought it would be worth a shot to play just one quick game and then be on my way. No one would be the wiser. Well, apparently nitrous does have some beneficial attributes, because I started scoring more points than I ever had. I reached levels I had never attained before. I was so “into” and excited about all of this, I failed to notice some three hours had passed since I had determined to play one “quick” game. Hmm, no problem I thought, I will just tell my parents it took a little longer than expected at the dentist’s office. They would never suspect a thing.

When I arrived home, my dad and mom were both waiting for me in the living room, with odd looks on their faces.

“Where have you been?” my dad asked calmly, almost too calmly.

“Uhhhm, just at the dentist office...had a cavity and they decided to fill it then, but it took a really long time.” The brilliance of my own story even caused a smile to trickle across my face.

“Hmmm, just to the dentist, huh? Are you sure you didn’t stop anywhere on the way home?”

“Nope.”

“That’s funny, because I could have sworn that was your car, parked outside the mall by the video arcade.”

“Wow. Must have been some other car.”

“You know, that is what I wanted to believe, but, funny thing is, it had our license plates on it, and your jacket was in the back seat.”

Undaunted, I continued, “Oh, yeah...I stopped in to pick up some batteries for my walkman.”

“Really, it took 3 hours to pick up batteries?”

“Why do you say that?”

“Because we called the dentist when you didn’t show up, and they told us you had left shortly after 12:00, and now it is 3:30. You were playing video games, weren’t you? I told you to come straight home, and you defied us, and worse than that, you turn around and lie to us.”

Okay, I thought to myself, I have been caught red handed. There didn’t appear to be any way out of this one. Or was there? Allowing my human nature to even more fully possess me, I replied, “It was that stupid dentist and his nitrous oxide. It gave me a headache, and caused me to not think straight. I just forgot you told me to come straight home.” The old blame switch-a-roo. It had worked a million times on my sister, but not this time.

“You are grounded from using that car for a month. You are forbidden to go to the mall and play video games, and you will ride the bus to and from school from now on.” It was that last decree which really hurt.

“The BUS?!” That was death. Yeah, it all started pretty innocently, but it lead to death.

In this chapter we will examine the steps I took in my descent. Perhaps you have had a similar experience. Notice carefully what James says about the following three concepts related to temptation and sin.

- I. The Nature of Sin
- II. The Nurture of Sin
- III. The Net of Sin

Let's begin with James 1:13-15 so we can take that closer look.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

I. The Nature of Sin

James begins this section by using a word he has already introduced us to. The word translated "temptation" here is from the same root word translated as "trial" or "test" in verse 2. In our discussion of trials, we mentioned this word included not only outward trials but also inner temptations. This appears to be the aspect of the word James is getting at now, but is still uniting this section with the ideas which have preceded it, reminding us temptations can indeed be trials and tests.

It is interesting to note in verse 13, that James says, "when tempted" not "if you are tempted." James knows all men face temptation. No one is exempt, not even James' brother Jesus. You might recall Jesus' 40 days in the desert and Satan's tempting of him. Don't forget Jesus was 100% man as well as 100% God. He underwent the very same temptations we all face. Hebrews 4:15 encourages us with the words:

For we do not have a high priest [Jesus] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin.

So always know, Jesus understands the pressures we face. Therefore, God understands. But notice how James cautions us in attempting to tie God to temptation. He says, ***“no one should say ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.”***

But like me, what does our human nature tell us to do when we sin or are tempted? We attempt to place the blame for our actions on someone else. It is always someone or something else (like nitrous oxide) which is to blame. It is a pretty prevalent philosophy in American culture today, isn't it? John MacArthur, in his book *The Vanishing Conscience*, addresses this blame switching, and refers to it as the “victimization of America.” No one is responsible for what he does anymore. “What, you killed three people? You're not responsible because you were abused as a child.” “What, you murdered your husband? You're not responsible, you were under the influence of PMS.” “What, you burned down your own house? You're not responsible, you are simply mimicking what you have seen on TV.” “What, you shot your mom and dad? You're not responsible, you have MPD.” The blame is always shifted. In fact, MacArthur states;

“Victimism has gained so much influence that as far as society is concerned, there is practically no such thing as sin anymore. Anyone can escape the responsibility for his or her wrongdoings simply by claiming the status of a victim.”

He's nailed our society right on, hasn't he? And lest we think this is a novel idea, let's look at Genesis 3:8, where we pick up the story of Adam and Eve after they have eaten the forbidden fruit.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me -- she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The old blame-shift-a-roo has been around as long as man has been tempted and sinning. When I think back to my dentist visit, it came all too naturally to me. Sometimes we can't find anyone suitable, or close at hand, to blame for our sin, so what do we do? We turn the finger of blame at God. We say, "God you tempted me. It is your fault. You made me this way. You gave this weakness. It is your fault. You can't hold me responsible. I won't accept responsibility for this."

James cautions us about our natural tendency to shift the blame to God by declaring in dramatic, certain, and emphatic terms, God does not tempt anyone. As we have already learned from James, God's nature is single-minded towards giving us good things and maturing us. We also know God has no evil in Him and no association with it at all. Because of God's hatred of evil, why would He entice us into it? He

wouldn't. So don't blame Him. God doesn't bring temptation into our lives, but He can use the temptations and trials we face to strengthen us. So what Satan attempts to use to destroy our faith, God uses to perfect it. That is the nature of sin and temptation.

II. The Nurture of Sin

James continues his discussion of temptation (in verse 14) by saying it comes about through man's own evil desire. "Okay, but didn't God create me with these desires, so isn't it still his fault?" Absolutely not. God creates good desires, we nurture the desires into temptations, which then become sin.

Let me illustrate this, by sighting for you three good desires God gave man.

1. God gave us the desire to enjoy things in life; for example, the desire for food (which keeps us alive), and the desire for sex which keeps mankind alive. Imagine how boring life would be without this desire. Both of these desires are good, as long as man fulfills them within the rules established by God. When he doesn't, it's sin. The sin of gluttony or intoxication, and the sin of adultery or pre-marital sex. Any improper satisfaction of a natural desire is an instance of a lust of the flesh. In fact the word used here in verse 14 for desire, actually means "a lust after that which is forbidden, or a craving."

2. God gave us the desire to obtain things. Material possessions and lordship over the earth are legitimate desires, but when this desire becomes an all-consuming thought and lust in our heart, it becomes sin.

3. God has given us a desire to achieve. Something we all experience, and when fulfilled within God's plan, it is a good desire for man to have. But when it results in our striving at all costs, or the trampling on of others, it becomes a sin.

James tells us God doesn't tempt us, WE tempt ourselves. Just like I kept tempting myself with that video arcade. I intentionally put myself in the place of temptation, which then led to sin. Do you ever do that? Do you ever intentionally put yourself in the place of temptation? There is a certain thrill involved in nurturing a temptation. We allow ourselves to get so involved in the temptation, that we don't even realize when we have crossed the line sometimes, and then we point the finger of blame at God for the guilt we feel. Not a game Christians should be playing. Are you?

As we have said, James has an affinity for metaphors, and this verse is no different. He tells us we are tempted by our own evil desires, until we are enticed and dragged away. The metaphor comes from the world of fishing and hunting. The word translated "dragged away" here in verse 14 is the word *exelko* which literally means "to lure out with bait." And the word translated "enticed" is the Greek word *delazo*, which mean "to catch by bait." If you want to catch an animal, you usually lure it out with some kind of bait—something it really likes. Once the animal sees the bait, it draws closer and closer to it. It is no longer in its safe surroundings, but that bait looks and smells so good. Of course when it finally takes the bait—BANG! The hunter snares it or kills it.

Satan loves to dangle those tempting things in front of our eyes. Just like in hunting and fishing, the

same bait doesn't catch every animal. Some fish have to be caught with flies, others can be caught with plain old worms. What is tempting to one person, is not always tempting to another. But be assured Satan knows what kind of bait to use with you. Why? Because you have demonstrated your weaknesses many times in the past, no doubt. Maybe for some it is a sexy magazine with Cindy Crawford or Brad Pitt on the cover. The temptation is there, just sitting at that check-out counter. That is not a sin, but then what happens? You pick up the magazine, while waiting in line, nurturing that temptation. Then you buy it...and so on and so on...the bait was set and you took it, **hook, line and sin.**

James changes metaphors from verse 14 to 15. He says when our lust or desire takes that bait, we are led on a course to certain sin, because of our own evil nurturing of the temptation. Where does the path go next?

III. The Net of Sin

First we looked at the *nature* of sin, then the *nurture* of sin, and now we will look at what James says the result or *net* of sin is. What is the metaphor in verse 15? There is a little play on that term James used for "desire" which carries the idea of a pregnant woman's strong cravings. The metaphor now becomes one of the biological processes of birth. He says temptation, when nurtured by our own evil desires, conceives. The word for "conceives" also implies a "taking hold of or grabbing and seizing to take prisoner." Once we have conceived, there naturally is a birth, and that child of temptation and our desire is sin. There is no question

here sin is a conscious act of the will. It is not someone else's fault. There is no one else to blame. The only one to blame is ourselves, because we have taken the bait and sinned.

So the child of temptation and evil desires is sin, and sin when it grows up, James says, it gives birth to death. In a sense then, death is the grandchild of our taking that bait of temptation. James is warning us about the natural path of our actions. He encourages us to not even start in that direction. If you are familiar with *Star Wars*, this might sound like a familiar exhortation. Obiwan Kenobe warns Luke Skywalker to, "*Beware of the dark side, because once down the dark path you start, forever will it dominate your destiny.*" George Lukas has paraphrased James here. As sure as sex leads to conception, and conception leads to birth, and birth leads to death, so it is with temptation and our sin.

The result of sin, or net gain, is death. Not too promising, is it? Then why do we constantly flirt with temptation and sin? James says the true Christian resists temptation, and is strengthened by the test. When he fails (which we all do sometimes), he will take the responsibility for his sin upon himself, and not push the blame on God or anybody else. The Christian will recognize his sin, and ask God for forgiveness, which He freely gives. It is a much better way to live, says James. And in fact, he says it is the **ONLY** way to live—truly live.

So how do we avoid giving in to temptations? First let me refer you to a particularly encouraging passage of scripture, 1 Corinthians 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.

Print that verse out on a sheet of paper and put it in your wallet, or tape it to the visor of your car, or place it somewhere you are bound to see it when you are in your usual place of temptation. If it is TV, tape it to the back of the remote control, or the back of your video rental card. Remember, Jesus was tempted just like you, and so he knows how to design ways for you to escape from it. Be encouraged that temptations are something we all face; they are a part of life, but a part of life we need to deal with effectively.

Finally, to help make it through temptations without taking the bait which leads to death, dedicate yourself to the following three biblical principles:

1. Meditate on the Word. “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against thee (Psalms 119:11).

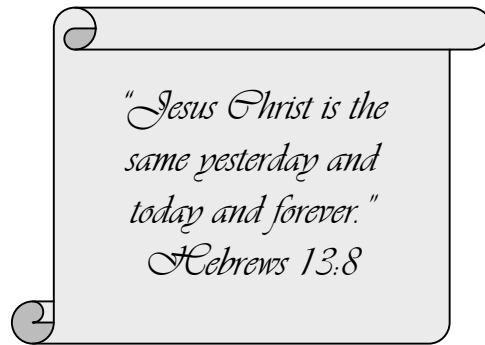
2. Pray. Ask God, as Jesus taught his disciples, to keep you from falling into temptation, and deliver you from evil.

3. Resist Satan and yield to God. James exhorts us in chapter 4 verse 7 to “*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” Each time we resist a temptation, we are made stronger and our faith increases. That frustrates Satan, but pleases God. That is the life of the true Christian.

Will you dedicate yourself to these principles? If not, ask yourself why you won't. Is it because you enjoy your sin? Is it because you like the thrill of a

temptation? Always remember that sin leads to death, a death no Christian will take part in.

“Compare and Contrast...”



"The shifting systems of false religions are continually changing their paces; but the Gospel of Christ is the same forever. While other false lights are extinguished, the TRUE LIGHT ever shineth."
Theodore Cuyler

James 1:16-18

Each year when school starts it is funny to see the different effects it has on people. I talk with teachers, who, although they like their work, always find it a little difficult to head back to school with all the headaches it can bring. I talk to kids who aren't so excited about having to return to the daily grind, and give up the freedom which summer usually brings. I talk to parents who are extremely glad to have the house back during the day, and actually able to get something done without hearing, "Mom, what can I do now?" "Mom, what is there to eat around here?" "Dad, can I watch *The Lion King* for the 397th time?" So going back to school means different things to different people. For me, it means I have to drive at a snail-like 15 miles per hour for about a mile past the school near my house. Actually, going back to school was never too exciting for me. And, after going back to school for 21 straight years, I am glad not to have to go back anymore.

You see, going back to school means learning a new locker combination, making new friends, finding the shortest route to your next class through the labyrinth which is the school hallway system, and just all the changes. Not only do you have to go through all these changes, but also you have to face periodic tests. As we have discussed, it is kind of in our human nature, no matter how old we are, to hate tests.

During the study of this chapter of James, I decided James must have gone to the same school I did, and had the same Biology teacher I did. Mr. Mahoney. Every week, Mr. Mahoney would pull out a stack of freshly dittoed pages of white paper. After a groan and a few deep breaths of the still moist ink, my classmates

and I would begin reading the first question. “Compare and contrast the circulatory systems of frogs and humans, citing examples wherever possible. Use the back of the page if necessary.” Oh no, not another “compare and contrast” question! I hated those. It meant you really had to explain what you knew (or didn’t know, as the case may be). You couldn’t just guess and fill in the little circle with your #2 pencil. As a result of this grueling practice of asking “compare and contrast” questions, my classmates and I actually learned a great deal. Mr. Mahoney made us learn the material and then really convey we knew it in the most complete way possible.

James chapter 1 looks like an answer to a “compare and contrast question.” It seems like the first section had a question that asked James to “Compare and contrast the single-minded nature of God and the double-minded nature of man.” The second section must have been in response to the question, “Compare and contrast the rich and the poor.” And in the next section, James responds to “Compare and contrast the nature of God and the nature of man.” As always, James, always the good student, uses examples wherever possible.

In the last chapter we looked at how it was man’s own evil desires that bring him to sin, not God tempting him. Now we will look at the contrasting viewpoint which touches even more on the nature of God. Let’s examine two attributes of God, and an example of each, and a stern warning from James.

Let’s start with verse 13 and work our way into verses 16-18.

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶ Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

There it is. What God isn't compared to what God is. And plenty of examples. James has done his homework, so let's learn from him as we look at the nature of God.

I. God Gives Good and Perfect Gifts.

James tells us "*every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of heavenly lights.*" Anything that is truly good in this world, comes from God. There is no goodness apart from God. He is the sole author of good things. He is the only one who can make good things. Genesis 1:31 reports following the creation, "*God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.*" The word translated "good" here in James is the Greek word *agathos*, which carries with it the meaning, (1) of good constitution or nature (2) useful, salutary (3) good, pleasant, agreeable, joyful, happy (4) excellent, distinguished and (5) upright, honorable. Remember what we said about God's single-minded nature to in fact give us these gifts? Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 7:9-11?

⁹ "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Sound familiar? A little compare and contrast straight from the mouth of Jesus. This was from his Sermon on the Mount. Once again it appears James was present for this sermon because his words in verse 17 reflect Jesus' point with remarkable similarity. Instead of saying the good gifts come from "your Father in heaven" though, James uses the poetic turn of phrase, "**coming down from the Father of heavenly lights.**" In fact, some believe this whole first part of verse 17 is meant to be a poem or perhaps was taken from one, because in the Greek it forms a hexameter, a traditional form of poetry. It has even been postulated James, referring to Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount, takes them and mixes them with a popular poetic phrase. The phrase was, "Every gift is good and every present perfect," which would be akin to our saying, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth." James alters the poem to describe the supreme goodness of God. God is so good that He can even give us "perfect" gifts.

Think back to past Christmases. Have you ever received something and declared, "The Perfect Gift! How could you have known?!" Maybe you have also had the occasion when you have said, "Oh....my....isn't that...um...just...um...you shouldn't have." There are some gifts that are just perfect, and others that, well, hopefully they can be easily exchanged. Our human concept of the perfect gift however, doesn't even begin to compare with God's concept of perfect. The word

translated “perfect” here is the Greek word *telios*, which implies “wanting nothing, not lacking anything, complete.” Does that definition ring a bell? Look back at verse 4. This is the same word which was translated “mature.” God wants us to be mature and complete, or perfect and complete, not lacking in anything. He can give that to us, because, as James now states, it is God’s nature to give perfect gifts.

Sometimes, like when going through a trial, we don’t quite understand how the gift is perfect, but later, we are able to look back and discover how God brought about the perfect circumstances in our life. Sometimes we think we know what we need, but God ALWAYS KNOWS what we need. And it is His nature, His single-minded nature, to give us those good and perfect gifts we need, when we need them.

As James concludes this first thought, he introduces a new phrase in the transition. He refers to God as “*The Father of heavenly lights.*” This is the only time in scripture where this name is given to God. As we said, this passage relates very well to the Matthew 7 statement of Jesus, so what could be James’ reason for introducing this new title? Well, it serves as a setup for the second nature of God he discusses. Watch this one now.

II. God Does Not Change.

Look at this beautiful transition. James says God is the “Father of heavenly lights.” This probably is a reference to God as the creator of lights. Genesis 1:14-18 says,

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so.¹⁶ God made two great lights -- the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars.¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth,¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.

God created the heavenly lights, therefore He is the Father of them, and, what did He say about His creation? It was good. Nice connection there, huh? But wait, Batman, there is more.

Now James, using that reference to creation and light, makes a dramatic statement as to God's nature. God does not change. Unlike the creation, the Creator never changes. Unlike light which casts ever changing shadows, God is eternally the same. His nature never changes. This is not an isolated reference to this attribute of God. Scripture is full of proclamations about God's immutability—His changeless nature.

In Numbers 23:19, Balaam's second oracle declares ***"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"*** The prophet Samuel proclaims to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:29, ***"He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind."*** And in Malachi 3:6 God himself announces, ***"I the Lord do not change."***

The author of Hebrews explains God's nature in Hebrews 6:17-19, when He explains God's covenantal promise to Abraham.

¹⁷ Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. ¹⁸ God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. ¹⁹ We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

This explains why this is such a great idea for us to understand. If God were to change, we wouldn't know how to act, and we could perhaps rationalize our sin (perhaps even through the blame shift we have already discussed).

A friend told me once, one of the things she regrets the most about her upbringing, was that her parents were inconsistent. Their rules, attitudes, punishments and expectations always changed. My friend didn't know how to respond to that, and therefore used that as an excuse to justify some of her behavior. Maybe you have parents who have been inconsistent. Or, maybe you have worked for a boss or a company which was always changing the rules of the game. What is that like? It's difficult isn't it? But you see, that is the great thing about God. He never changes. He is always the same. As the author of Hebrews said, God's unchanging nature is a source of encouragement for us. We know what to expect of God. We can learn about His nature and know it won't change. In a world which is changing so quickly, isn't that a great aspect of God to hold on to?

When I saw the movie *Apollo 13* with some friends, we all remarked how fast things have changed since we sent men to the moon in the early 1970's. I

have more computing power on my desk at home today than probably all of NASA had in 1970. What used to take a room full of computers days to do, I can now do with the click of a mouse. Mail that once was written down on paper and mailed (and took days to reach its destination), can now be E-mailed anywhere in the world in seconds. In fact, talk about change; it was my 91 year old, very conservative Grandmother who recommended that I go see *Apollo 13*. Now that is change. The world we live in, God's creation, is changing so quickly, it is scary sometimes. It's like a blur, but out of the corner of our eye, we see just one thing in focus, and that is God. The Creator, our God, does not change. He is not tied to time and space.

In movies when people travel back in time, they are always shocked by how much everything has changed over the years. But if Marty and Doc were to have looked up God's address in 1885, they would have found Him exactly the same.

God gives good and perfect gifts, and God does not change. Good answer, James. Good comparing and contrasting, and nice transitions. But wait, where are your examples? Oh, here they are, on the back of the page, actually verse 18.

III. Examples

God is the giver of good and perfect gifts. James points out what was the most perfect gift of all time in verse 18. He gave us a new birth. Referring back to the path of sin which gives birth to death in verse 15, James now explains to us God, on the other hand, through His sovereign choice, gives us birth through the Word of truth. A birth which is life. Paul

summarizes this well in Romans 6:23 saying, ***“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

Jesus Christ, God’s son, was and is the perfect gift. He was the gift above all other gifts. He was the exact gift we needed. Have you ever become so overwhelmed by the generosity of someone’s gift that you exclaim, “You didn’t have to.” That leads to the example of God’s unchanging nature. No, He didn’t have to. God said the penalty for sin was separation from God and death. It still is. But the mercy of God reached out and chose to give us life. He will never stop giving good gifts, or change and give us bad things, or tempt us with evil, nor will God ever change His decision about saving us through the Word of Truth, which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Referring back to creation again, James tells us we are a “first fruits” of all he created. You see God had it in His mind from before the heavenly lights were even created, that He would, in his mercy, create (or give birth to in a sense) something special that would serve as a representation of God’s goodness and nature.

A “first fruit” as understood in the Old Testament, was an offering of the first ripe fruit of harvest, or the best of the harvest, which was given back to God. James sees Christians as that part of creation first harvested by God as a part of His New creation. Just like the whole crop really belongs to God, and the farmer recognizes this especially with the first ripe fruit, so also the world will recognize all Christians belong to God. We are His sons because He chose us to represent the whole crop of His new creation. Christians represent just a sample of what is to come from God.

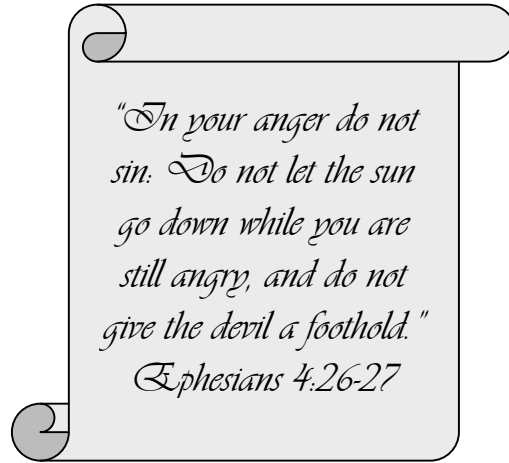
And so we are encouraged by these words, because we understand God will not change. He will continue to give us good gifts. He will never take back what He has given us. His rules will never change. His promise will never be forsaken. Our salvation through Christ can never be revoked or pulled out from under us. God is our benevolent Father, our unchanging Creator, and our anchor, which is firm and secure, even in a world that is changing so quickly.

As I promised, verse 16. This is James' point which interlocks these two passages, 13-15 and 17-18. His warning, placed directly in between his comparing and contrasting, cries out to us, "***Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.***" *"My beloved brothers in Christ, please, please, DO NOT be lead astray by any other philosophy or concept of God."* This **is** who God is. If you begin to think of Him as some mean, tempting, inconsistent, aloof, stingy God, your behavior is likely to shift away from what it should be as a true Christian. You are bound to start distrusting God, living in the ways of the world, and neglecting the perfect gift He has given you. Don't let that happen brothers. Understand who God really is. Not who the world says He is. Not who the Mormon Church says He is. Not who the media says He is. Not who the New Age movement says He is. Not even who you might be inclined to think He is some days. God is the giver of good gifts, and only good gifts. Only good gifts can come from Him. He is the giver of the perfect gift, Jesus His son, who saves you, and He is an immutable God who doesn't change His mind or ever go back on a promise. That's who God is.

If you are enjoying the world, or think God is aloof or mean, or the one who tempts, or who brings

bad things into your life, what does that say about your theology—literally your knowledge of God? You are being deceived, and failing to see who God really is, and failing to live like a true Christian. Because knowing who God is, should give us confidence in our faith. It should cause us to be trusting of God and His will. We should call upon His name and seek Him daily. We should bring our requests to Him boldly, and our spiritual life should be full and complete, not lacking in anything. All of this should be true of us, because that is who God is. That my dear friends, is, who God is.

“Advice for Dr. David Banner”



"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

King Solomon

James 1:19-20

Now let's skip ahead to James chapter two. I just feel the remainder of chapter one is too difficult to deal with. It probably would hit too close to home with all of us, so let's just move on and not look back. We'd like to say that, but you know, we can't. God's word isn't a pick and choose buffet, where we can pass over the stuff we don't think we will like. It is all or nothing.

Each year as football season rolls around I get excited. In Minnesota—where I came from—the football season meant a great deal. When you live just a few miles south of the North Pole, there isn't an abundance of things to do or be excited about in the fall and winter. So, the start of the football season and the first Viking game became rather significant.

Now as a Viking fan, there are two teams to whom you never want to lose. The Chicago Bears, and the Green Bay Packers. Both extreme rivals. Games you don't want to miss. I recall one such game many years ago. I was downstairs watching the game by myself, and my mom was upstairs reading the Sunday paper. The Vikings seemed to have the game in hand in the fourth quarter, but the Bears came back and won in the final few seconds. My blood was boiling. I started slamming pillows around, jumping up and down, pounding on walls, and stamping my feet. My mom came down to see what all the commotion was about. She saw the post game show on and asked in a sweet voice, "Oh, did your team lose?" My mom, bless her heart, always trying to be nice and supportive. But, that was the last thing I wanted to hear. My emotions went completely ballistic and I shouted back, "Yes! And I don't need you to remind me about it, so

just leave me alone and get out of here!” Whoa. My mom kind of just stood there dumbfounded, wondering what had set off her bratty little powder keg. I stomped around a little more, mumbling my disgust for the Bears, and then I decided I just had to vent this rage. So I put on some mittens and a hat and ran out of the house into the cold fall air. It was actually even snowing a bit, but I didn’t care. It just figured, I hated snow about as much as I hated the Chicago Bears.

What transpired next was adapted and written into the movie, “Forest Gump.” I just started running as fast as I could to the end of the block. And when I arrived at the end of the block, I just kept on running to the next major street. And when I was to that street, I just kept on running to the edge of town. This is where the screenwriters embellished the story a little. I don’t know how long I ran, but it didn’t seem very long, and I just didn’t seem to wear out. I kept running and running, fueled by my anger. Finally it started to get dark, and I turned for home. I ran right into the house, right into my room, and just laid down on the bed and fell right to sleep. I can’t imagine what my mom was thinking. Perhaps maybe something like, “Stupid is as stupid does.” The next morning when I woke up, I noticed my entire body was stiff as a board. I could not move a muscle. Later I took the car and clocked how far I had run, by retracing my route—7 and 2 tenths miles! I had never run more than a mile before in my life. Wow, 7 miles! I didn’t have too long to enjoy the agony of my stiffened muscles though. My dad had come home at night and my mom had explained my little explosion to him. So as soon as I was up, he came into my room and told me I had to go apologize to my mom for getting angry at her and I should know better

and be more sensitive and blah blah blah. I thought about it for awhile, and then after several injections of morphine (just kidding), I got up, went down stairs and told my mom how sorry I really was.

I don't remember ever having another outburst like that again. Oh, sure, I get a little irritated now and again, but I really learned how dangerous and painful anger can be. It isn't worth it, and it surely isn't an emotion which ever does much good. On the contrary, anger can, and often does, lead to a great many sins which erode our Christian witness.

James reminds us of this in verses 19 and 20 of chapter 1.

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Is James in touch with human nature, or what? Well it's not "or what." He knows our tendency is to react negatively to trials—instead of seeing God at work in them. He knows we tend to want to have the best of both worlds and are therefore often double-minded. He knows our inclination to blame God for the temptations in life, even though we know they are a result of our own evil desires. James knows how we respond to all the above. So he instructs us in a loving, caring, and affirming manner, we should do the opposite of what comes natural.

James encourages, exhorts, and commands us as Christians to react to the world around us in a uniquely Christian manner. A manner, which reflects God in us, not the world in us. Jesus was called Emannu'el, which means "God-with-us." We however live like we

worship Emmanu'tebel, which would mean "World-with-us." James cautions us and even pleads with us to do three things.

Here again there are commentators who feel these two verses are completely separate and not connected to the rest of this chapter in any way. But as we have noted in the past, James' thoughts *are* connected. Connected in very profound and significant ways. Look at the verses again, and reflect on what he has just said.

His thoughts could be summarized as follows, "Know this my beloved brothers, because you are the first-fruits of creation, because you have been chosen by God and given salvation through God's only son, and because God gives you other good things as well, like even joy in the midst of trials, be worthy examples, worthy representatives of our great God in every aspect of your life, no matter how small or trivial it may seem." Here then are the three qualities which James challenges us (notice he says "everyone") to take hold of in our Christian life. Let's look at each one of them more closely.

I. Be Quick To Listen.

Notice the positive tone James creates here. He not only starts off referring to his readers as beloved brothers, but also puts his exhortation in the positive. Instead of being negative and telling us what *not* to do, or saying "Don't!", he instead positively redirects our thinking to the things we in fact *should* be doing. Positive redirection is a term which has recently become more popular. You hear it in parenting classes. Teachers use it. Counselors use it. In fact, when

counseling people with Autism, you are instructed “Don’t say don’t” and “Never say no.” (Apparently the training of autism counselors wasn’t included in the theory of positive redirection.) This concept isn’t new though, because right here in James 1:19, we find James using it to instruct us.

James says we should be *quick* to listen. The word translated “quick” here by the NIV is the Greek word *tachus* meaning "swift or speedy." It is the only time in the New Testament this exact word is ever used. The root of the word *tach* is used in other words which denote quickness or speed, and are more popular in Greek, but James uses the form *tachus* because it is fitting for his poetic nature. I’ll show you why in a moment.

James encourages us to be quick to *listen*. This word means “to hear” and carries with it the meaning: *to attend to, consider what is or has been said, to understand, perceive the sense of what is said, to comprehend, to understand*. That drives home the fullness of what it means to really listen.

Sometimes Michelle will be talking to me and my mind will be elsewhere, and she will pause and say, “Are you listening to me?” I will nod and say, “Sure,” and repeat verbatim what she had just said. Of course, I have no idea what I just said, but it at least gave the appearance I was listening. But with James, that wouldn’t cut it. Come to think of it, it doesn’t cut it with Michelle either. Real listening is more than just a mere echo response. Real listening doesn’t happen involuntarily. Hearing does, but listening doesn’t. You can hear all kinds of sounds going on at any given time, but listening is the *conscious* act of selecting a particular sound to concentrate on.

You see your dog do this all the time. Dogs have great hearing, but you know when they are really listening because their ears perk up. Our dog Kharah's ears stick straight out from her head when she is really listening to something. You know you have her full undivided attention with her ears in this position. There is no way she is going to miss you asking her if she wants a treat.

Humans however, are not quite as obvious. It is difficult to tell sometimes, if others are really listening. When I am speaking or teaching I think about this. I think, "Oh, I know you hear the sound of my voice, but are you thinking and concentrating on what I am saying or are you daydreaming about lunch and that nap you are going to work in later?"

James wants us to make an extra special, swift and speedy, effort to truly listen. Listen to the proclamation of the Word. Listen to our spouses. Listen to our friends. Listen to our co-workers. Listen. Listen. Really listen. Really concentrate on what is being said, so we can apply what we hear, and so we can understand how to better relate to the people around us. If we really listen, we will know what our spouses are saying. We will know what they mean and the emotions they are feeling. You can't pick up a marriage enrichment or marriage preparation book without several chapters being devoted to the art of listening. You know how important it is to effective communication. But it doesn't always happen. James understands it is not in our nature to listen well, so he encourages us here to make the decided effort and concentrate on listening.

The flip side of that is his second point.

II. Be Slow To Speak

Here is where James' poetic side picks up as he uses the Greek word "*bradus*" which means "slow." Remember what word he carefully chose for "quick"? *Tachus*. Now he restates his point by using a like-ending word, *bradus*. In fact the word for listen is *achouo* and the word for speak is *laleo*. He says we ought not only be quick to listen, but we must also be slow to speak. In a sense, pointing out we were given TWO ears, and just ONE tongue for a reason. Sometimes it might not be a bad practice to pretend you are mute. The saying goes, "It is better to keep your mouth closed and be thought stupid, than open it and leave no doubt about it."

With your mouth closed, you will be more inclined to listen to what others are saying. You will be less likely to come to premature judgment. Less likely to say things that can't be taken back. Less likely to do more harm than good. Have you ever wanted to tell a televangelist to just shut up and put a sock in it, because you thought he was doing more harm than good by opening his big embouchement?

We all too often do Christ a big disservice by spewing forth from our mouths all kinds of rabble. As you read from the book of Job, you may find interesting how God responded to Job's seemingly knowledgeable and talkative friends. Job 42:7-9 describes God's response:

After the LORD had said these things to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. ⁸ So now take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and sacrifice

a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has." ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite did what the LORD told them; and the LORD accepted Job's prayer.

There is some real truth to the saying, "If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything at all."

This is tough though, isn't it? I mean, I consider myself a fairly decent listener, but, slow to speak? I can't remember being accused of that too many times. But I have been working on it. How about you? When God brings these truths to mind, how do you respond? Do you work on it, or just keep on blabbing away? James will be addressing that attitude in the next passage.

James feels for a Christian it is better to be mute than deaf, spiritually speaking. Not listening and fast speech lead us to James' next exhortation.

III. Be Slow to Become Angry

What happens when we don't listen and spout off without thinking? Not only does it usually encourage the development of our own anger, but it also often leads those around us into anger as well. You have heard it said, a smile can be infectious, but I would posit anger is perhaps one of the most infectious emotions around.

Case in point. Not long ago my wife and I were at home in the evening, and Michelle was trying to engage me in some form of two-way communication. I wasn't listening. Michelle proceeded to inform me of

this shortcoming. I then decided to be quick to speech and inform her of her own shortcomings. Not only did my not listening and quick speech build up my own anger, it ignited Michelle's anger. Anger is infectious. After awhile, anger gave way to brooding silence. Then I remembered that verse, Ephesians 4:26, "***In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.***" Okay. Well, too late for the first command, but let's work on the other two, because we don't want Satan to use our anger to do any more damage.

Perhaps you saw the movie "The Incredible Hulk" based on that TV series from the late 1970's. It featured mild mannered Dr. David Banner who, when angered, would turn into a huge, green, grunting, violent creature who would throw things around and then run off. He would warn people by saying, "Don't make me angry, you wouldn't like me when I'm angry." The same is true for most people, granted not quite to that extent. Even though Michelle would probably say she saw a greenish hue to my skin on occasion, as hulking monsters of anger, we are quite unlikely to be an effective witness for Christ, needless to say. Control, not catharsis, is the proper prescription.

Anger, as James goes on to say in verse 20, "***doesn't bring about the righteous life that God desires.***" On the contrary, anger usually drives you, and everyone around you, further and further away from God and righteousness. Notice how James qualifies the statement though. He says, "*for man's anger...*"

God in his sovereignty and goodness has the right to be angry—angry at sin and evil. God declared, through the prophet Isaiah, His hatred and anger for sin in Isaiah 13:9-13:

See, the day of the LORD is coming -- a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger -- to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. ¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. ¹¹ I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. ¹² I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. ¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the LORD Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.

God's justice demands His anger at a sinful world. But at the same time we also know God's mercy abounds in His chosen ones. The Psalmist describes the nature of God toward His people in Psalm 103:8-10;

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

We might call God's anger "righteous indignation." Jesus himself displayed this in John 2:13-17:

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples

remembered that it is written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Jesus rightfully displayed righteous indignation at the defilement of the holy temple. And to a certain extent, in very limited ways, God permits men to exhibit righteous indignation. But raw, human, prideful, anger is sin, and certainly not the nature or habit of the true Christian. It is right to be disgusted with and angry at a world which kills unborn babies and openly defies God's moral standards. But that anger must not lead us into sin, nor should it provoke in us a spirit which leads to pointless emotional arguments. Don't forget what God thought of Job's friends.

Paul's words in Romans 12:18-21 put the whole matter into perspective:

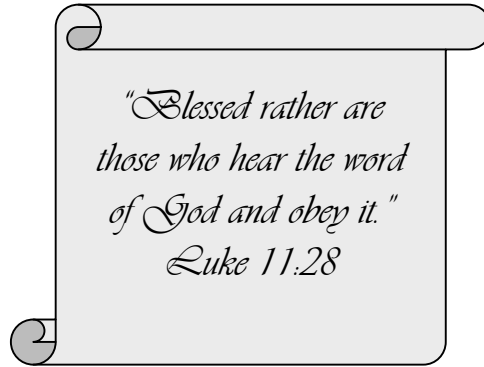
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In other words, just because the world is shouting angrily at you, it is no reason to respond in kind. No, James tells us the Christian, because of what God has done for him, should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Does that describe you? Or does that describe the opposite of you? If it does, even on one point, ask yourself why. Ask those around you how they would rate your behavior. Challenge yourself to fall in line

with James' exhortation on how the Christian is to behave.

“James: Hired by Nike?”



"Obedience is the mother of true knowledge of
God"
— John Calvin

James 1:21-25

I love to play golf (especially when I play well). It's fun; it's challenging, and it is a reasonable form of exercise. But it struck me as being funny as I glanced at the TV guide and saw not only was there golf on TV, but also tennis. Okay, let's think about that for a second. Why were golf and tennis invented? I think they were invented because someone thought they would be fun activities to engage in. They provide exercise, fresh air, and a physical challenge. Why then are they on TV? TV encourages us to sit down—in a Lazy-boy, eat foods like Ding-Dongs and Twinkies, and passively view other men walking around outside in short pants. Something has gone desperately wrong here.

Look around. Hotels know how passive we like to be. They have a guy who parks your car, a guy who opens the door, a guy who carries your luggage, a guy who pushes the button on the elevator, a guy who turns back your sheets, a guy who picks up your clothes to be cleaned, a guy who brings you your food, and a guy who cleans up after you when you leave. It is the ultimate in passive experiences. It's everywhere though. We have drive-through windows at fast food restaurants, and if that is still too difficult, *Dominoes* delivers. Instead of going to the video rental store now you can call and order the movie you want from your phone. We have automated sidewalks in airports, cruise control in our cars, about a dozen home shopping networks on our TVs, and a myriad of video games which boast about being "interactive." Apparently all we need to exist is a thumb and forefinger in which to dial the telephone, operate a mouse, or click the remote control. All are great modern conveniences, but they

point to an attribute of human nature that is growing more and more prevalent in our society.

We live in a know-nothing, feel-nothing, do-nothing world, that is becoming more and more passive about everything. Accept evil. I guess since we approach everything else so passively, we feel we need some type of challenge, and so we encumber ourselves with the evil baggage of the world.

A horrible event which happened in Detroit a few years ago, crystallized this point in my mind. A young girl was just driving along in her car, minding her own business, when a group of young men decided to crash their car into hers—forcing her to stop. They then dragged the 5 foot tall, 100 pound girl from the car and started beating her in the middle of the street. If that wasn't bad enough, about 40 onlookers had stopped their cars to see what was going on, and simply stood by and watched the young woman being beaten and harassed. No one used a cell phone to call for help. No one attempted to stop the men. No one drove to a policeman for help. They did nothing but watch, as finally the men chased the horrified, now half naked woman onto a bridge, and forced her to jump into the river below. Finally, a young man came forward and jumped into the river in an attempt to save her. He was too late. The woman died. A victim of violent men and a victim of a passive society.

Are you a passive or active person? Are you a person who just watches what goes on, or do you get involved? Are you a spectator or a player? We are going to look at possibly the three most important commands James gives in the entire book; three imperatives for the Christian and his walk. Three critical areas which will help us measure whether we

are a child of God, or whether we are merely a Christian in name only.

Our text is James chapter 1:21-25.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. ²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it -- he will be blessed in what he does.

Prior to writing this chapter, I was discussing it with a friend. I mentioned to him how straight-forward this passage is. The meaning is very clear and very simple. It won't take much to understand it. It won't take much effort on my part to explain it. But that is James' whole point. The hearing and listening and understanding don't mean anything, not one thing, unless something else happens. Let's look at what James' three commands are in this passage.

I. Lay Aside the World

The first imperative comes up in verse 21, "**Therefore...**" Stop. What must we do when we see the word "therefore" in Scripture? We must recall what the author has just said. Always keep that in mind in your Bible reading and study. Context is one of the most important lessons in proper biblical interpretation. That is why you won't see Mormons or Jehovah's

Witnesses or any other cult which twists the meaning of the Bible ever worry about context. But we do. We summarized the first 20 verses earlier by stating James is saying, “*Know this my beloved brothers, because you are the first fruits of creation, because you have been chosen by God, because God gives you great gifts, including the perfect gift of His son, and including the gift of joy in the midst of trials and temptations, be a worthy representative of God and a true, tested and proven Christian.*” So then we come to his first imperative in this section, “***Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent...***”

The Greek word nicely translated by the NIV as “get rid of” comes from two words which literally mean “to separate oneself from by laying aside”. In everyday language it usually meant the taking off of one’s clothes. In the ancient Near East there were two popular reasons to take off one’s clothes. One was because they were dirty and filthy and needed to be cleaned. The other was because the clothes encumbered you or impeded your progress. Remember tunics and robes were the garment of the day. *Neoprene* would not be invented for another 2000 years. In fact we know the early Olympic athletes tended to compete in races uh...shall we say, unencumbered by garments. Both of these ideas were picked up by the early church and used quite extensively to describe what the Christian is to do upon his conversion. In fact 4 of the 5 letter writers in the New Testament (including James) use the phrase.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:22, “***You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;***” and Peter says in 1 Peter 2:1, “***Therefore, rid***

yourself of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.” The author of Hebrews similarly writes in Hebrews 12:1, “let us ***throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.***”

It is a popular Christian theme, because it is a popular Christian problem. Separating ourselves from the world. But that ***is*** the command, not only here in James 1:21, but in all these other verses as well. Do you get the idea God is trying to communicate something important with us here? The apostle John summarizes the whole situation in John 2:15-17:

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world -- the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does -- comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who ***does*** the will of God lives forever.*

James commands us as Christians to free ourselves from these worldly lusts and sins. The critical reasoning of John being, you aren't a Christian if you don't. Think about it for a minute as you reread that Scripture. Plain and simple, and James would heartily agree. There is the command; Lay aside the world. As explained earlier, this is a volitionally possible command, it can be done, and it must be done. So what are you going to do with it? How are you going to respond?

The second command appears in the second half of that same verse, verse 21.

II. Accept the Word

First, lay aside the world, and then after you have dropped the world, you are commanded to pick up and accept the Word. In other words, drop the “L” in “world” and pick up the “word.”

Attached to this command are three other important ideas which answer three basic questions we might have. When you are a kid, you are familiar with this form of command and question conversation. Your dad commands you to mow the lawn. You say, “Which lawn?” He says, “Our lawn.” You ask, “Why?” He responds, “Because I said so.” In an attempt to further put off obeying the command, you ask, “But how?” Growing tired of your insolence, your dad responds sarcastically, “With a scissors. Go cut our yard with the lawnmower now!” James already knows we might want to slither out of or postpone the inevitable, so he answers all those questions in advance within the command.

We would ask, “What word?” James says, “The Word planted in you, that Word of truth I just mentioned in verse 18, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” We would then ask, “Why should we accept it?” James says again, “Because it is able to save your soul, and in fact, has already saved you if you are a true Christian, now what better reason is there than that?” “Okay, but how should we accept it?” “With humility or meekness, not with anger or regret, or while loving the world.”

James is thinking ahead of us here. As we have pointed out, James surely knows human nature. He knows every trick in the book we will use to try to avoid facing the facts. Why is he so familiar with all of these things? Because as we said in the introduction to

the book, -James has been there. He had rationalized away believing in his own brother as Savior. The man had stood right before him, and yet he didn't want to see it, and didn't want to accept it. "Don't make the same mistake I initially made," James might say.

Accepting the Word involves all of these things as well as accepting the Word *in full*. Not just the parts you like, or the parts that don't convict you, or the parts that are easily understood, but all of God's Word. You must replace the world's wisdom with the Word's wisdom; the world's way of thinking, with God's way of thinking; the world's passivity with a Christian's activity. The Christian must accept and put on the Word, and resolve himself to knowing God's Word is the ultimate truth.

"Okay, that is fine. I understand. Put off the world, put on the Word. Good encouragement from James." But James doesn't end there does he? He moves on to explain through another command what it really means to lay aside the world and accept the Word, and it isn't just an intellectually passive duty.

James' third, and perhaps the most important command, is found in verse 22.

III. Do the Word

The command here is a two part command expressing the negative and the positive. He says, "***Do not...merely listen to the word...Do what it says.***" It is this verse that leads me to believe, perhaps someone at Nike has attempted to employ James as a spokesperson, because this sounds quite a lot like their familiar slogan which commands, "Just do it."

In other words, James is saying, “When I say ‘accept the Word’ I don’t mean just listen to it. I don’t mean just hear it. Listening to the Word, coming to church and listening to a sermon, or listening to a sermon on tape or hearing the Bible read are all good things, but they mean nothing, absolutely nothing, unless you DO WHAT IT SAYS.” You may say to your pastor on the way out of the sanctuary on any given Sunday, “Nice sermon pastor, good message, good job.” Thanks, but unless you DO WHAT THE WORD SAYS, you have wasted your time. You have neglected the most crucial part of James command. Just listening, and then forgetting or not letting the Word effect a change in your life, means you are displaying an attitude which is all too representative of a person who is a Christian in name only. Oh sure, I go to church. Oh sure, I know the 10 commandments and the Beatitudes. Oh sure, I love to hear a good sermon, or go to a Billy Graham Crusade. Oh sure, I enjoy a good Bible study. Well you know what? Who cares! It doesn’t mean anything if you don’t live it. Saying it, no more means you are a Christian than a person who hates doing all of that. He isn’t living for God and neither are you, unless you *do* what the Word says. My friend, if you are a perpetual listener, and not a doer, you better examine your relationship with God.

God doesn’t want just listeners. He wants doers. The Word wasn’t given to us, so we could say, “Sounds good, nice message.” The Word is meant to penetrate our hearts and lead us to action. Much of the rest of this book in fact, will focus on those actions. If it doesn’t lead you to action, then you haven’t received it. James says exactly this in verse 22, when he states, “***Don’t deceive yourselves.***” Don’t miscalculate your

status by thinking just because you are willing to listen to the Word that means you are a Christian. No, only those, who do what it says are.

Remember, James' main audience is Jewish Christians, living in the world. James is reminding them what it means to be, and how they can test and see whether they are true Christians. The first chapter of James has included a number of those test questions. Do you consider trials a joy? Do you ask for wisdom? Do you persevere? Do you stand up under temptation? Do you recognize the true nature and character of God? Are you quick to become angry? This question is the big one. It is the 100 point bonus question? And James makes sure no one misunderstands what he means. So he gives an example, as he is fond of doing, located here in verses 23-24.

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

Many have tried to super-analyze this little metaphor, but as always the point of a parable is simple and straightforward. Have you ever looked in a mirror, and because you are so used to seeing your own face, you just look and then walk away. A few minutes later someone comes up to you and smiles and says, "Do you realize you have a smudge of dirt on your face?" You say, "What? I just looked in the mirror." "Well you must have missed it, because it is pretty obvious." When you return to the mirror and look a little more closely, you realize you do have a smudge on your face. Why didn't I notice that the first time? It is because, in a sense, you have become so familiar with your own

face, that you never really look at it closely any more. You just see what you expect to see, and nothing more. You don't bother to make any adjustments or let what you just saw change your behavior in any way.

Think back to Jr. High though. You probably rarely had this problem then. In fact, you probably spent an hour every morning, searching your face over and over again, for even the slightest hint of a pimple you may have to cover with Oxy. What you saw in the mirror each morning, greatly affected your behavior and your attitude for the day. I remember occasions when I would be so embarrassed about my face or my hair or something I would purposely spend the whole day facing a certain direction, so no one would notice, what I thought was a major problem. In Jr. High our appearance sometimes dictated our entire life, often in a negative way. But James wants us to respond to the Word the same way, we responded to our face in the mirror in Jr. High,—only in a positive way. He warns us to not just give a passing glance and think nothing more of it. Instead he instructs us in verse 25 that:

the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it -- he will be blessed in what he does.

There goes James again, using that compare and contrast technique. Pretty effective isn't it? Notice the contrast he draws between the man who gives a look into a mirror, but it has no effect, and the man who "looks intently" into the perfect law that gives freedom. The Greek word, here translated, "looks intently", means the following, "To stoop to a thing in order to look at it; to look at with head bowed forward; to look

into with the body bent; to stoop and look into; metaphorically, to look carefully into, inspect curiously: of one who would become acquainted with something.”

When I lived in Minnesota as a kid, we lived in a little house on the prairie with our father Michael Landon. No, actually we did live in a house that had kind of a prairie right behind it. This meant we would often have different wild animals around our house. In the Midwest you have something called “window wells.” These are basement windows that are actually underground, but a hole is dug out around them to allow natural light in. During a rain storm they filled up with water and would usually leak into your basement. Because they were somewhat shielded from the world however, they made good homes for all kinds of little creatures. Each week, Melissa Gilbert and I would go outside and get down on our knees, or crouch down by the window wells and peer expectantly into the darkened hole. After our eyes adjusted, we would reach in and grab what we could find. Frogs, toads, salamanders, rabbits, and even snakes were often our reward for the careful search.

That is exactly the kind of intense looking this word implies. If you would just walk by those window wells and casually look in, you would never have seen anything. But when you really made the effort, there was a reward.

For us then, it is not just the hearing; it is the doing which is the measure of our Christianity. And the reward for being a doer is a blessing. Not only an earthly blessing, but an eternal blessing as well. James lays out tough commands, but always informs us of the reward that awaits our completion.

What does James say, we are to be looking intently at? He says in verse 25, **“the perfect law which gives freedom.”** At first glance, that might seem to be an oxy-moron. Isn’t a law something that restricts my freedom? I mean, when the school speed limit sign says 15 mph, isn’t that restricting my freedom to drive at a reasonable pace? When the law says my dog has to be on a leash, isn’t that restricting her freedom to run and play? How is it, then that the law gives freedom?

James is drawing upon Jesus’ teaching that He came to fulfill the law, and truly make it perfect. That new law involves Christ, covering our sin. With Christ in our lives, we are then given the grace and ability to be freed from our old sinful nature which had entangled us. We have therefore become free through Jesus Christ and His Word, which this phrase refers to in verses 18 and 22. Notice the similarity to Jesus’ teaching in John 8:31-32.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

This is a popular theme throughout the New Testament. Paul says in Romans 8:2, **“because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”**

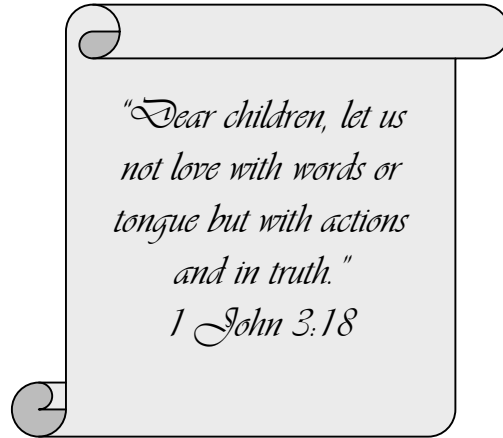
James puts it all together for us here, in these three incredibly important commands. Lay aside the world, accept the Word, and do the Word.

Have you taken these steps? Are you ready to put aside the things of the world? Are you ready to accept the whole Word of God? Are you ready to start doing, instead of just listening? Ask yourself right now

whether or not you get up from your pew every Sunday morning, after having glanced into the mirror which is the Word, and walk out the doors never applying, really applying a thing you have heard. Don't deceive yourselves my friends, a true Christian applies what he hears. A true Christian is a doer. A true Christian is an active seeker and a person who diligently executes and puts into practice what he knows. Is that you? Do you go to church to be a spectator of good music and preaching, or do you go to learn, apply, and serve. Does God's Word make its way from your ears to your brain and out to your hands and feet and lips, or does it just come in one ear, whistle through the tunnel, and go out the other ear?

Lay aside the world. Accept the Word. Do the Word. A command calls for action, and so does the Word of God. So what will you **do**?

“Religion 101: Instructor, God”



“The appearance of religion only on Sunday
proves that it is only an appearance.”
John Adams

James 1:26-27

Not long ago I received a note from a young man who was a student in my youth group at a former church. He told me how he had been leading the Jr. High group at that church this past summer and had really been enjoying it. It is always nice to see fruit like that. He also talked about how he was just getting back to school at the University of Minnesota and registering for his classes. That reminded me of what it was like to register for classes in college. It was the single most important event of the year. One everyone planned for, but dreaded.

While I was at Bethel College, there weren't a whole lot of choices for classes to take because it was a relatively small school. There was usually ample room in the classes, and registration time wasn't too stressful. However, when I transferred to Iowa State University, it was a different story. Instead of 1800 kids registering for classes, there now were 25,000 students registering. It didn't seem like it would be too hard though, I mean after all, there were some 35 sections of the more popular classes. I shouldn't have any problem getting what I want. When I showed another student my list of classes I had selected, he just looked at me and laughed. "Oh, like you think you are going to get into any of those. You probably won't even get your 5th or 6th choices, much less your first choices." That scared me a little, because it was really important I registered for the right classes, AND the right teachers.

As I stood in the queue (what they call "the line" at Iowa State), I noticed everyone had the look of fear on their face. Not only that, but I also noticed the line itself (well actually I couldn't really call it a line, because you see, a line implies it has a beginning and

an end, and this particular ‘line’ didn’t appear to have either. It just stretched out for as far as the eye could see). It was not unlike the line at the Department of Transportation driver’s license bureau. When I finally arrived at the lady who would enter my choices into the computer, and then tell me I would have to take Animal Husbandry 310, Nuclear Physics 440, and Ancient Art and Artifacts 211, I just kind of offered up a little prayer. “Okay, there you go Mr. Baltz, you are all set.” What? No 6 hour Zoology Lab? No “Theories of Modern Oboe” practicum? How could this be? Of course no one I told believed me, when I shared my triumphal registration experience. But it had indeed happened. I had been registered for all 6 classes I wanted, exactly when, and with whom I wanted them.

Now, we come to a class we all need to take. However, I personally would rather be told it is not available this semester. The class is Religion 101. The Instructor (who I hear is a real stickler) is named God, and his TA is James. This is a class we usually want to avoid because all too often our grade turns out to be a big fat “F”. But here we are; there is no other section, and no better teacher, so let’s learn together, shall we?

James 1:26-27 is the conclusion to the first chapter of James, and in these two verses James concludes his thoughts from the first chapter, and prepares us for the following chapters.

If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

James answers the question, “What does it mean to be religious?” by making three points. Good Baptist that he is. Let’s take a closer look at each one of them, and remember these will be on the final exam.

I. The Truly Religious are not Hypocritical

Look at verse 26 again. Notice the phrase James uses, “considers himself religious.” Some versions translate this phrase, giving the impression another person sees you as being religious. But, the subsequent phrase says the person is deceiving himself, so it is more likely James has in mind a person who actually thinks he himself is religious, perhaps because of his outward adherence to ritual.

But notice the stern warning James gives to anyone who thinks they are in good shape just because they may talk a religious blue streak, and perform rituals with great precision. That kind of “religion” isn’t a religion at all. In fact James says it is worthless. This verse refers back to the section we just studied on being “doers.” But James wants to clarify that thought one more time for us. First he told us to listen to the word. Then he clarified that by telling us listening to the word meant accepting it completely. He clarified that by telling us accepting it completely meant actually doing what the Word said. And now he clarifies that even more, by telling us doing the Word doesn’t mean just carrying out a religious ritual, and then bragging about how pious or holy we are.

Like Jesus, James had been around Pharisees quite a bit, and this verse greatly discourages any of his readers from assuming that, because a person talks

religion and does religious things, means anything close to what God considers true religion--true Christian faith.

As he discusses in great detail in chapter 3, the tongue generally does far more to prove our religion false than it ever does to prove our religion true. We will go into that discussion more when we get to chapter three. James' point is to tell someone you are a Christian, or to talk in King James English, doesn't mean anything. The only thing it will mean is you aren't following God, but want to make others think you are, by telling them how you go to church, and read your Bible, and pray before dinner, and sign petitions against pornography and abortion. None of these things is bad, but if you have to tell others about it, if you have to flap your gums to get people to think you are a Christian, you probably aren't. What you are instead is a hypocrite whose speech has no basis in reality.

I'd rather say nothing and be *thought* a Christian, than say I am, and be thought not to be one.

But keeping control of my tongue and on my hypocrisy is difficult. Do you ever struggle with it? Do you ever say something you wish you hadn't, or something that didn't reflect too well on your Christianity? I sure have. James warns us and reminds us we must be more diligent in the control of our tongue because control is a sign of our profession. Let's let our actions speak for our Christianity and not our mouths.

Specific actions are what James addresses in the next verse. Look at verse 27. Here is where the TA is instructing us, what the professor is really looking for, what he is most likely to grade us on, his expectations.

Notice what James says about religion. He says God is looking for a pure and faultless religion. These Greek words imply a religion that is free from corruption, free from any worldly filth, free from spiritual impurity, free from disfiguring accommodations, and free from human manipulation. A religion with any of that junk in it, is NOT accepted by God at all! But look at the religions of the world. How much God is there or how much man? Is the religion God- centered or man-centered? God-focused or world-focused? God-reliant or human-reliant? God-designed or designed by man?

Take for example the religion of Scientology. Scientology was begun by L. Ron Hubbard, a science fiction writer. In some of his earlier writings, he even admitted how cool it would be to write the “ultimate Science-fiction” which would become a religious reality for those who read and followed it. Its focus is on developing our own inner strength and building ourselves up. God designed or man written? God focused or man focused?

How about Jehovah’s Witnesses? A religious sect developed through the writings and thoughts of Charles Taze Russell. Its focus is basically of earthly paradise. God-developed and God-centered, or man-developed and man-centered? What about Mormons, Masons and Muslims? What about the New Age movement? God or man? What about your Church?

Two practical examples of this pure and faultless religion God desires, are given next by James. In his review, the first characteristic of a truly religious person is one, who is not hypocritical. Now the next characteristic is here in his introduction to the rest of the book. Look at the second part of verse 27.

II. The Truly Religious are Compassionate

James states the truly religious are *to “look after orphans and widows in their distress.”* James believes caring for needy people is a sign and a duty of the church and of truly religious people. It is one thing to just say you are compassionate for the poor and the needy, but another thing altogether, to actually BE compassionate and caring. We get “A’s” on the first part, and “D-minuses” on the second.

When James speaks of “orphans” and “widows” he is not exclusively talking about those children with no parents and those women with no husbands. These are examples of the type of people God expects us to look after. This is strengthened by his use of the phrase, “in their distress.” This generally refers to people who bear a heavy burden, are afflicted, troubled, or suffering persecution. His use of the word “orphans” or “fatherless” ties in with his preceding statement, where he refers to God as our Father or THE Father.

This is not a new idea in terms of the Bible either. God points out this rule in Exodus 22:22-24 where he commands:

“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. ²³ If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

and it is said about God in Deuteronomy 10:17...

*He defends the cause of the fatherless
and the widow, and loves the alien,
giving him food and clothing.*

God desires the distressed of the world be taken care of. But something has happened in our society. God says it is the truly religious who take care of widows and orphans, but what has the church allowed to happen? We have allowed this job to be taken over by a cold, mechanical, politicized government, which seeks to enslave the troubled of our country with something called welfare. First of all, if the church (those who are truly religious) had been doing the job God wanted them to do, there would not be a need for welfare. Secondly, the church and its people have decided it is much easier to just have money deducted in the form of taxes and given to the needy via the government, rather than getting personally involved and actually helping the needy overcome and become self-sufficient. We would rather keep them nameless and faceless, because it is easier to cope with. Welfare has become big business, and a source of ever-continuing power for those in government, who would love nothing better than to usurp the church, enslave the needy, and use them for political gain.

That isn't the way it is supposed to be though. God would rather see the families, the local church, those who know and care, see to the needs of the orphans and widows of our day. Not only have we allowed the government to arrest? control from the church, but now we see ourselves ridiculed and mocked when we even suggest it might be best to have someone other than the government take care of them. When the former speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt

Gingrich, suggested returning this job of caring for the needy back over to those who really care, instead of the government bureaucrats, he was bashed mercilessly by liberals who saw his suggestion as a threat to their political future. Those same people use the needy as political bargaining chips, parading them out as the poster children for their beloved beast, the welfare state. Welfare is not compassion. But the truly religious are compassionate and will take care of the needy around them. Is your Church doing that? Are you personally? Do you look after those you come in contact with that are in need?

Of course when we think of the helpless, we as Christians invariably look at unborn babies. They are the ultimate helpless. How are we looking out for them? This is one area, the church has been working on. But there is a lot more work to do, and we must continue to not just talk about it and express our horror, but instead develop effective action steps we can take to prove our concern. God wants doers, not talkers.

Caring for the needy is an outward reflection of an inward reality. Those who truly have the love of God in their heart seek to express that through their acts of compassion. God doesn't want outward rituals which are meaningless. He wants outward expressions of love and concern which point to a God-filled heart of love. The truly religious are compassionate, that is the outward side of the coin. Next is the inward.

Look at the last phrase of verse 27.

III. The Truly Religious are Pure

James tells us the truly religious keep themselves from being polluted by the world. A great

picture of words used here in the NIV! The word for polluted means to be spotted or sullied, kind of like a dirty T-shirt. God wants Christians who do not allow the filth of the world they live in to splash up on them.

How do we usually respond to that charge though? We say, "Hey! I can just go out and buy some spot remover, a little "Shout" or "K2R" or "Spray and Wash", and it will be as good as new. But what happens when you use those spot removers over and over again? The colors on the shirt begin to fade. The threads start to weaken, and before long, the shirt is destined for the rag pile.

God doesn't want His people to play in the mud and then just expect to come in and get cleaned up. You might say, "Didn't Jesus die on the cross for my sins?" He sure did, but he didn't die so you could live it up and have your worldly party. To do so is to insult Jesus and God in the worst way.

No instead of using the spot remover, we need to reach for a spot prevention. "Scotchgard" would be a good choice, or "Thompson's Water Seal," or perhaps even some "Turtle Wax." We must prevent the world from polluting us. We must do something to protect ourselves from the dirt and filth that is around.

You have seen these infomercials for all of these amazing car waxes, haven't you? What? You don't stay up till 3:00am watching infomercials? These waxes are a bit of a model for us, even though their commercials are utterly annoying. What does the guy on the show do? He waxes up the hood of a car and then he pours lighter fluid on it and lights it on fire. Then he pours mud and grease all over it. Next he aims a laser at it. Finally he drops different, highly corrosive, acids on the hood of the car. The audience moans and groans in

horror each time a new destructive agent is place on the hood. “It’s ruined for sure” the host cries out in agony. But wait, just then the British guy, selling the wax, takes out the hose and washes the gunk off, and the hood of the car looks as if it were never touched. Spotless and shiny! Amazing! What number do I call to buy some? Well, operators are standing by to take your call.

As Christians, we need to polish ourselves with that kind of protectant. In fact, it wouldn’t hurt to drink a few bottles while we are at it. The world is like all that crud on the car, and it eats away at us, and leaves spots on us, if we don’t protect ourselves.

- TV is a little acid rain.
- Pornography is lighter fluid.
- New Age thinking is grease.
- Political correctness is mud.
- Alcohol is sand paper.
- Sexual promiscuity is fire.
- And religious accommodation is the dulling affects of day after day in the sun.

So how do we protect ourselves? Look over at your Bible. There are your directions. Now look at your hands; there is your applicator. Concentrating on **doing** the Word of God, rather than passively adapting to the world, is the product we need to order more of right now. And guess what? God is standing by, so order by midnight tonight. Don’t delay. God is ready to help you. The Holy Spirit is ready to be your protector. Paul says, in Ephesians 6:13-17:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your

ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

And in Romans 13:12 he encourages us to:

Put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

How is the world trying to pollute you? In what areas of your life do you find yourself reaching for the spot remover?

James lays it straight out for us. Do the Word. Don't just talk about it, but really do the Word by seeing to the needs of those in distress, and by protecting yourself from the pollution of the world—by being pure. After all, James says is what God is looking for in you. It's what he expects of you. It is the final exam.

So how do you score? If you were to be graded right now in each of these three areas, what grade would you receive? Hypocrisy? Compassion? Purity? Grade yourself. Then think back to say 5 or 10 years ago. What were your grades like back then? Are you learning, or are you really letting your grades slide? And finally, where will you be on graduation day, when

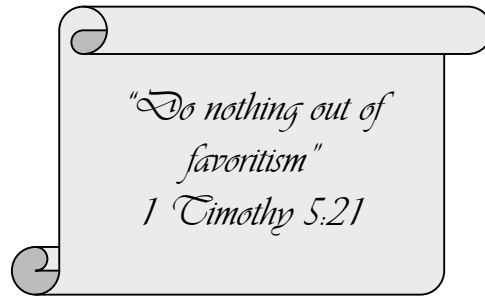
Christ returns, or on the day you die, whichever comes first, what will your grades look like then?

If you wanted to improve your grades in school, what did you do? Listen better in class; take better notes; work harder; study more; concentrate on school rather than free time. Hey, same thing here. Listen more to other Christians. Take notes on your Bible reading and the sermons. Work harder at seeking God's will. Study God's Word more and more. And, concentrate more on doing God's Word. In doing so, you will find yourself a proven and tested "A" student, prepared for life on earth, and secured for life in heaven.

Measuring Up

James 2:1-26

“Was O.J. Guilty?”



"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."
Peter

James 2:1-7

Remember the trial of the century, the O.J. Simpson trial. (Queue the CNN O.J. theme music). It was one of the longest, most bizarre, and most infamous trials in America. Why is that though?

Certainly the media coverage promoted it. The drama of the case. The personalities involved. One of the most interesting aspects of the case to me however, was the opinion polls. Now, I am not one who likes opinion polls a great deal, but the breakdown in the O.J. polls was fascinating, and I believe it points to a problem in our society.

An ABC poll asked people whether or not they thought O.J. was guilty. On the whole, 71% of the people did. However, that stat does not tell the whole story. When you break the poll down by race, you find 78% of whites think he was guilty, but only 22% of blacks. I can hardly imagine any other question which would result in such a wide difference between blacks and whites. Why the difference? I think there is probably about 5-10% of whites who may be inclined to think O.J. was guilty because he is black, and probably about 50% of blacks who think he was innocent because he is black. That is a great number of people, basing their judgment about guilt or innocence on the color of someone's skin.

There are even more aspects to this though. People liked Kato Kaelin because he "had pretty hair." Many liked Johnny Cochoran because he "wore nice suits." The whole trial pointed out how much people pay attention to, and make decisions about people based on their outward appearance. You know what though? I am not the first person to make this observation.

James made the same observation, and tells us about it here in James 2:1-7:

My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?

We are going to discuss four areas of favoritism in this chapter. In doing so we are going to answer some questions that are raised in this passage. Be looking not only intently at the Scripture, but also be looking intently at your own heart. Will the glove fit?

I. The Problem of Favoritism

The first thing James does in this passage is to again refer to his readers as brothers. We have mentioned before he often does this, because he wants his readers to understand how closely knit together true Christians are. The reason for doing this will pay off in a couple of verses. James says his brothers, the readers, are "believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ." True Christians share that in common. That is why they are

brothers. He has spent the entire first chapter explaining to them what it means to be a true Christian, and he now continues to build on that theme.

This passage, as usual, begins with a command. That command is, “***do not show favoritism.***” This idea may relate back to what he was just talking about with respect to widows and orphans. They would generally be people who were viewed unfavorably. What does favoritism mean actually? The word here is an idiomatic expression which literally means “to accept a face.” Its meaning encompasses the idea of looking on a person favorably, because of his outward appearance, and making unjust distinctions between people, treating some with respect and others without it. It is an especially deplorable characteristic of a judge, who is expected to be completely fair in his judgments, and to be unaffected by any private sympathies he may have toward people because of their social class, race, political allegiance, whatever. Imagine the strain on Judge Ito. Some would say, he couldn’t put aside his favoritism for minorities. Others said he tried to even things up by making unfair concessions on both sides. Whatever the case, would you have wanted his job? I don’t think so. Being completely impartial is difficult.

God is however. James refers to Jesus as our “glorious” Lord, probably insinuating the lofty status of His judgment and His ability to be completely impartial. This is a fact stressed throughout the Bible. 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us “***the LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.***” God sees something different than we often do. He has no care what anyone looks like or what his social status is, but we sure seem to. Even Christians. James reminds

these “Christians” this worldly practice of showing favoritism is not to be accepted and embraced by them.

Next James comes to an example of favoritism.

II. The Examples of Favoritism

We are not sure from the text whether this is something James has actually witnessed, or whether he is just discussing a generalized example about what probably does happen all too often within gatherings of Christians. Suppose a man were to come into your meeting, and he happens to be wearing a gold ring and fine clothes. Today we would associate that with a guy who wears an Armani suit, silk shirt and tie, stylish Italian leather shoes, and a gold and diamond Gucci watch. What would we think, if someone like that walked into church? Would dollar signs pop up in our eyes like they do in cartoon characters? Would we think, “Hey, imagine all he could do for this church. Wow, with even 5% of what he makes we could remodel the sanctuary.” We would be sure to talk to him and invite him back. We would be sure to follow up by getting his name and address. And we would probably walk him out to his car, so we could see what the inside of a Mercedes looks like.

But then what about the flip side? If a man poor man wearing shabby clothes came in. This would probably be someone who is wearing dirty clothes which are much worn. He might smell, his hair would be mussed, his hygiene not too good. Would we think, “Ooo, that guy reeks. What a loser. He’s just looking for another handout. What a drag he will be on the church.” James suspects that is what would transpire. He is probably right, isn’t he? We may act nice and

compassionate and all, but our inward thoughts would probably represent this picture pretty well.

James says you will probably show the rich guy in and find him the best seat in the house. The poor guy you will tell to stand in the back, or even sit on the floor in the foyer. The illustration is not necessarily about rich and poor though. James has in mind any outward appearance that might cause us to look favorably on one and unfavorably on another. In our society we do that with those who are rich and those who are poor, but we probably do it to a greater extent with regards to race. I think the O.J. polls point to this. We are so concerned about race in this country. Some of this is blatantly negative, such as the comments made by detective Mark Furman. Other examples are more subtle though, but in essence they are doing the same thing. Schools that let someone in, just because they are a minority, are making decisions based solely upon outward appearance. Music award categories and beauty pageants for blacks are dividing people based on race alone. That is what James is speaking against here. He doesn't want appearance centered judgments to be a mark of Christians. He does not want us to favor rich over poor, but not the other way around either. He doesn't want us to favor whites over blacks, but not the opposite either. He wants us to totally disregard outward appearances and instead look, as God does, at the heart of each individual. Never does he tell us to hate the rich, but rather not favor them over the poor. We should focus on our inward similarities, not our outward differences.

God wants us to look at those things which bind us together, not draw attention to those things which might divide us.

Next James moves to a question which is a charge against this kind of behavior and attitude. Look at verse 4.

III. The Charge of Favoritism

Here we find the summation of James' illustration which comes in the form of a question. This is a special question though. He says, when you do this, "*have you not discriminated among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?*" Most people probably would have looked at this situation and said, "Yeah that might happen, but what is really wrong with it?" After all, these rich people may improve the standing of the church, which might advance the cause of the Gospel. "No," James says, "that is the kind of thinking which I am talking about." It is evil, discriminatory, and judgmental. In Greek, the construction of the question assumes a positive or affirmative response. Haven't you discriminated? Yes. James wants the people to see how inappropriate those thoughts and actions are. In Christ, there is neither slave nor free, Jew or gentile, poor or rich, black or white.

James uses a little play on words here. The word for "discriminate" means to "make distinctions or judge between. So, he rebukes the readers for being judges—unjust judges for that matter. He says, "Don't you know when you do or think things like this, you are like a judge who sits at the bench and declares all of his skin color innocent, and people of all other skin colors guilty? That would be ridiculous wouldn't it? Well, that is in fact what you are doing."

He tells his readers straight out they are probably engaging in some form of racism or favoritism, even at this very moment. In the past they have been completely oblivious to it, but now James tells them they must stop and take a good look at what they are doing.

How about you and how about your church? Does this charge hold true against you? Could James point out an incident in your recent walk, where you acted as an unjust and discriminatory judge? Could he ask this same question of you? How do you view other people? Do look on the inside, or do judge them by their appearance, or their race, or the way they speak, or their education, or their fashion sense, or some comment they have made, or their social status, or whatever? Really look deep inside, and test yourself and see whether or not this question must have an assumed “yes” for an answer.

Next, James moves to an explanation of why showing favoritism is just plain ignorant.

IV. The Ignorance of Favoritism

He begins verse five again by saying “dear brothers”, and then drawing their close attention by saying, “Listen.” This is an active imperative—a definite command. He is afraid his readers don’t understand, so he calls them to stop for a second and really see the ignorance of favoritism.

James basically says, “Look, why would you want to favor the rich or pay special attention to those of the upper social class? Don’t you know God has chosen many of us poor people to be with Him in heaven? Why would you envy a rich person then? What

good comes of showing favoritism?" God doesn't. God could have rejected you because you are poor, but he didn't. No, instead He chose you. You have access now to the ultimate riches in heaven. You are rich in faith, and that is what matters, not the outward appearance or accumulation of money.

But that is precisely what we do. We insult the poor, many who will be in heaven. We praise and fawn over the rich, and they are the ones who persecute us. They are the ones who try to take away what we do have. They are the ones who drag us into court and make our lives miserable. But we turn around and treat them like friends, and spit on those who are less fortunate. Why can't we see the ignorance in all this? Why don't we understand? As we look around the world, we see they are even cursing the very name of the person we claim to worship and believe in. Shouldn't that tell us something?

Look around you. Who is it in this world that is often hurting Christians the most? Who is it that defames the name of Jesus? It's people we often look up to and admire and want to get close to. It is TV and movie stars, celebrities, politicians, athletes, and business moguls. How many of us put up pictures of Bible characters, or elders, or pastors in our rooms as young people? None. Who was it?

Now remember, James doesn't want us to go the other way and hate these people. He doesn't want reverse discrimination. He doesn't want class envy. He doesn't want politically engineered programs that steal from the rich and give to the poor. What he wants, is people who simply look past all of these things. People who have their minds on the things God has His mind

on. People who look inside others, not just at the outside.

This is the attitude of the true Christian. Impartial, non-superficial. Someone, who pays no attention to race or gender or riches or beauty. These things are all temporary. All earthly. All unimportant in God's eternal plan.

What it really comes down to goes back to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:1-2:

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

This warning to not show favoritism comes because James knows that, if we unjustly judge and discriminate against others, we will be likewise treated. Christians in today's society are becoming more and more the ones being told to sit on the floor. You don't matter. Your views don't count. Your speech isn't protected. Is it, because we are reaping what we have sewn? To some degree the answer might be “yes.”

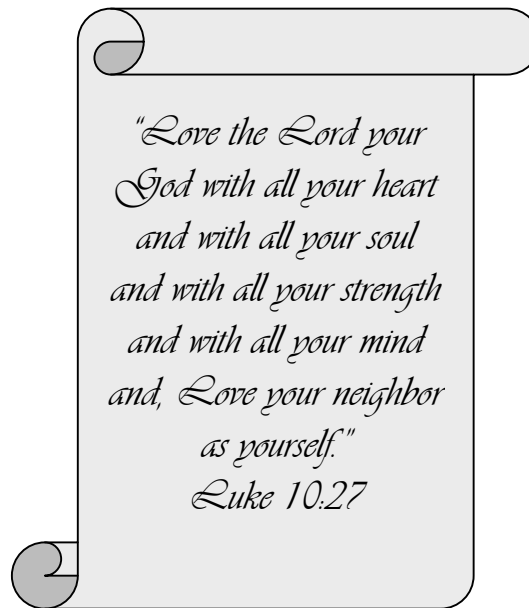
But we ought to know better. “You are Christians for heavens sake!” James might say. “Come on people, Let's start acting like it. Let's stop behaving like the world.”

So how about you? Are you guilty of showing favoritism? Honestly, now. Don't put your head in the sand, or plug your ears and sing happy birthday. The cure has been spelled out here by James. First, recognize what the problem is. See it for what it is—favoritism, discrimination and prejudice. Secondly, be aware of examples. Learn from them. Learn from

others' mistakes. Thirdly, accept the charge and seek to change your attitude and behavior, so that no one will ever look upon you as someone who shows favoritism. And finally, realize favoritism is based on pure ignorance. Those who are racist or prejudiced, and base their opinions on outward appearances or social status are just plain ignorant.

Rise above that. Look around you at the world, and see it for what it is. Look to Jesus as your example. Look to God for wisdom and understanding.

“You Know Nothing about the Law”



"The LORD does not look at the things man
looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance,
but the LORD looks at the heart."

1 Samuel 16:7

James 2:8-13

Some years ago, my sister and her husband lived in Texas, and I lived in Iowa. Every so often, I would drive down to Fort Worth to visit them. On one occasion, I went with my brother-in-law's brother. After we had spent a week in Fort Worth, we began our 750 miles journey back to Iowa. It was very early Easter Sunday morning. I remember a little way into the trip, we ended up behind a car that had a bumper sticker which read, "I love Allah." They also had another bumper sticker that was in Arabic. Since it was Easter and all, we decided to write a little sign and show it to them as we drove past. "Happy Easter" it said. We proudly displayed the sign in the window. The people in the car smiled politely back at us. Then we turned the sign over and displayed the message on the back. "Allah is dead, signed Jesus." After we defused the pipe bomb they hurled into our back window (no, just kidding), they rolled down the window and asked us what that sign meant. We said, "It means, Jesus is the only way to heaven." It didn't seem to register with them.

A little bit later, as we were crossing the flat, lonely plains of Oklahoma, we noticed how we had not seen a car for several miles. We had the road all to ourselves. A few seconds after saying that, we saw a police car up ahead. As we moved closer to it, it began to drive down across the median and up to our side of the freeway. Then it proceeded to pull in behind us and pull us over. I just happened to be driving the vehicle at this time, so I was asked to step out of the car and make my way back to the police unit. The trooper had me sit in the front seat with him. He was everything you would think an Oklahoma State trooper would be.

I was just waiting for him to call me “boy” and then spit some tobacco.

“What is the speed limit in Iowa?”

“65.”

“Well, it is 55 here in Oklahoma.”

“I didn’t know that. I thought it was 65 everywhere now.”

“Nope, and ignorance of the law is no excuse. So do you have \$65 you would like to spend this morning?”

“I sure don’t.”

“Well, I am just going to write you a warning then, and remember to pay attention to those speed limit signs from now on.”

“Yes sir.”

The whole while, I could see my friend in the car parked in front of us. He had adjusted the rear view mirror, so he could see what was taking place. He was just laughing and smiling away. Meanwhile, I was engaged with Sheriff Moonshine.

The whole thing kind of stuck with me. James addresses the “ignorance of the Law” statement in our passage for this chapter, James 2:8-13.

⁸ *If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right.*
⁹ *But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.* ¹⁰ *For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.* ¹¹ *For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.* ¹² *Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,* ¹³ *because judgment without mercy will be shown to*

anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

In the last chapter, we discussed the problem of favoritism. James uses the groundwork he laid to make a very significant point about the law and about our status in God's eyes. We are going to look at James' underlying points, and then summarize the big picture of his brilliantly organized argument.

I. The Depth of the Law

First of all, notice here the excellent use of connecting thoughts James uses in his writing. Look back at verses 5-7. James says the poor of the world will be rich in faith and inherit, what? The KINGDOM he promised to those who love him. Then notice in verse 7, he says it is the rich who are slandering, what? The NOBLE name of him to whom you belong—Jesus. As he makes his transition to the second part of his argument, he mentions the ROYAL law. This is the Greek word *basilikos* which means “of the king” (same root word as kingdom in verse 5). This then is a law of the King, who is God. What is his law? James then quotes the entire Old Testament. No, he does just like his brother Jesus did, and summarizes the entire law with the statement, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Now, immediately you might think to yourself. “Oh yeah, I remember Jesus’ said that in Matthew 22:39.” He certainly did, and Paul says it in Romans 13:9, and it is found elsewhere in the New Testament. But look at where James is saying he has taken this quote from. This is the royal law, the law of God, which is found in “Scripture.” This denotes a reference to an Old

Testament passage. “Wow, I didn’t think that was in the O.T. I thought it was only in the new.” Read Leviticus 19:18. These are the exact words found here, and they come at the end of a lengthy section on how God’s people are to treat one another. It sums up God’s law about our treatment of others.

James says if you keep this law, you are doing right. What does he mean by “keep?” The word translated “keep” here is a word which signifies the fulfillment of something, bringing something to completion or fulfillment, or to carry out completely. Therefore, if you really fulfill this command you will be doing well in God’s eyes. But (James continues by going back to the issue at hand) **if** you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.

In the last chapter we mentioned James was afraid his readers were completely unaware there was anything wrong with their practice of favoritism. They just assumed it was okay. But James sternly brings to their attention their actions show their evil thoughts and their unjust discrimination. It also points out their ignorance with regards to what was going on around them.

Now James tells them, not only are all these things true, but also favoritism is a flat out sin. You see the law isn’t just the specifics of a written command, but it is also the complete fulfillment of the intent of that law. The Pharisees completely misunderstood this and were soundly rebuked by Jesus as the worst kind of hypocrites for trying to abide by the letter, but breaking the spirit of the law. James does not want these relatively young Christians to fall into the same trap the Pharisees did. God’s word is more than just adherence to rules; it goes much deeper than that. God’s royal law

gets at the heart and the motives. James didn't want his readers to forget this.

You can't live by the letter of the law, so don't deceive yourselves into thinking you are. Be aware how deep the law is, and that it just doesn't address major outward actions, but also sometimes our thoughts and things we think inconsequential. Ignorance of the law is no excuse.

Next, James sites an example of what he means, and also makes a sweeping statement about the nature of the law and the nature of our sin.

II. The Depth of Our Sin

“Okay,” we might say, “But I am not a big sinner. I mean, I might show favoritism a little bit every once in a while, but that isn't that bad. Certainly God doesn't look at that as being too big of a deal. I just tell little white lies that don't hurt anyone. That isn't the same as stealing or taking the Lord's name in vain.” Is that what you think sometimes?

Look at what James says about that mode of thinking. Verse 10 says ***“For whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”***

Not too long ago, I was watching a 4x100 track and field event. The U.S. team was by far the fastest of the bunch. Each individual runner had world class speed. After about two thirds through the race, the U.S. was way out in front and coasted to what seemed like a gigantic victory. Or was it? The judges noticed one of the runners had stepped out of his lane on one of his strides. The whole team was disqualified. The team that thought they had won did not even officially finish.

They ran a nearly perfect race. They made all the right passes. They ran smoothly and quickly. They did everything perfectly, except one stride. But that one stride is all it took. With that step out of the lane, the team broke the rule and was disqualified. It didn't seem fair. They were faster than everyone else. They were the best out there. Come on judges, give them a break. They deserve to win. But they don't, because to break just one rule means disqualification.

To break just one of God's laws, means you are a lawbreaker and guilty of sin. No law is more serious than any other. To finish or fulfill the law, you must obey them all. The athletes on that U.S. team might have said, "Yeah, but we don't take steroids or didn't gain any other unfair advantage. We didn't get an early start." But that doesn't matter you see. A rule is a rule.

The same holds true for God's laws. One law is as valid as the other. To break one, means to break them all. Don't ever look around at somebody near you and think to yourself, "Well my sins aren't as bad as theirs." Sin is sin. And, the wages of sin is death. James has already affirmed that in 1:15. The law is a unit. It is a perfect unit. God is just and demands the entire law be kept. Not just the convenient laws, or the major laws, but all of them. James says, if you don't understand this, you know nothing about the law.

He gives an example of this. If you commit adultery but do not murder, it doesn't matter, you are still a law breaker, condemned by that law. The purpose of God's law is to show us His perfect standard, and show us the depth of our rebellion and sin. It points out to us in flashing red lights our need for forgiveness. In fact, the Greek word translated "convicted" means "to be exposed." The law exposes

our sin, all of our sin. Whether we think it big or small, it is still sin, and it still convicts us as lawbreakers. That word “law breaker” comes from a root word which means “one who steps over, around, or neglects something.” Literally, one who crosses the line. Once you cross that line (like the U.S. athletes found out), there is no getting back on track. You are disqualified, and no longer worthy of the Kingdom God has promised.

Then what? Since we are incapable of keeping that perfect law, and step over the line time after time, and are mired in the depth of our sin, what must happen? The answer is found in the next two verses. Points one and two bring us to the need for point three.

III. The Depth of God’s Mercy

We are lawbreakers. We have broken the law—even ones we think small—and even ones we claim not to have known about. Our actions and our thoughts have betrayed us time and time again, and there is no way we can make ourselves right. There is nothing we can do to correct the situation.

But when we see our completely lost state, that is when God does something amazing.

I had a senior pastor in Iowa who, not unlike me, was stopped by the police. But he was not so fortunate and received a ticket. Now, this was quite embarrassing for him. Here he is, the pastor of a church, and trying to be an example, and now he finds himself in court for speeding. The bailiff reads off the next case for the judge, “Rev. Daniel K. Anderson, speed violation.”

The judge's eyebrows raise. "Ah, Rev. Anderson, huh. Hmm. Well Rev. Anderson, let me ask you a question. You being a pastor and all, I would think you would want to see justice done in this case. So, I ask you, do you want justice?"

Clearing his throat, Pastor Anderson responded, "No, sir, I would like mercy."

"Case dismissed. Next."

Wow! Lesson learned. Mercy 101. What a great concept!

The final phrase of verse 13 states, "***Mercy triumphs over judgment!***" Our sin deserves judgment, no matter how small it is. Even the sin of favoritism. And God's judgment on sin is death. But for those he has chosen, His mercy triumphs over his judgment, because of Jesus Christ, who has already paid the penalty.

What if the O.J. jury had returned a guilty verdict in the case? Most of us would have said justice had been served. But then what would we think if Judge Ito stepped down from the bench and said, "O.J. you have been found guilty of murder in the first degree, and your penalty is life in prison. But O.J., I am going to pay the price for you. I am going to serve out that punishment for you." We would probably think he was nuts. We would say, "That isn't fair. Judge Ito isn't responsible for O.J.'s horrible crime. He shouldn't pay the price. What is he doing? O.J. deserves to rot in jail." Our anger would probably boil and our indignation erupt. But why?

This is exactly the same picture of our life. We have sinned. It doesn't matter if it was murder or adultery or favoritism, the punishment is the same. We are guilty as charged. The punishment is death—no

exceptions. The punishment must be paid. But then God sends His own son, and Jesus says, “I will pay the price. I will die for you.” You see we deserve death. We all are guilty. But God is merciful. He accepts Jesus’ death as payment. We don’t deserve it. We couldn’t have done or couldn’t ever do anything to earn it, but God shows His mercy nonetheless. Could O.J. or any criminal ever say anything to convince the judge to step down and serve his punishment? No way. Neither can we ever do anything to bring about the mercy of God. It is His choice. It is his prerogative. God and only God, chooses when and where and on whom to be merciful. In fact God’s Holy name, *Yahweh*, as revealed to Moses at the burning bush means, “I am who I am.” But God was further revealed to Moses in Exodus 33:19 as “I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” Paul quotes this passage in Romans 9:14 and then follows it up with the statement in verse 15, ***“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”***

That is the depth of God’s mercy, even though we don’t deserve it or could ever earn it, he still chooses to bestow it upon us. What a marvelous thing!

In helping us to understand all of this, James is making one solid argument. Let’s see if you can pick up on it as you read verses 12 and 13.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom,¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

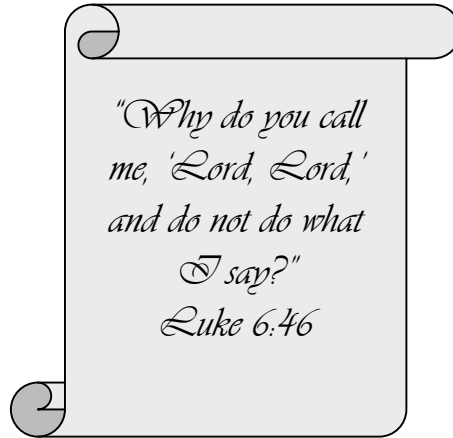
Did you see it? What is this whole section, verses 1-13, about? Favoritism, right? What is James point then? He

says we are showing favoritism. And when we show favoritism, aren't we being unjust judges? And, in fact, isn't favoritism a violation of God's whole law, "Love your neighbor as yourself?" And isn't breaking one law like breaking all the others? Favoritism is the same as murder in God's book. And when we break God's law we are therefore law-breakers— sinners. The punishment is the same. And isn't the punishment of sin death. But don't we receive mercy from God, in spite of our condition of sin and depravity? Therefore, should not we live by those standards and show mercy on those around us, even those who we don't think "deserve" it? God is a God of mercy, and He wants His people to be merciful in return. He wants us to fulfill His law by showing mercy, by loving our neighbors as ourselves. If we aren't doing this, and if we aren't showing mercy, what does that say about our understanding of God? What does that probably say about our understanding of our own position? What does that probably say about whether or not we are true Christians? God's people will show mercy, because they have been shown mercy. It is a wonderful argument. Is it clear to you? Do you understand how to use it to measure your faith and the reality of your Christianity?

You know my friends, James is not trying to be hard on us as Christians. He is not trying to lay a guilt trip on us. What James is trying to do, is really encourage us. He is encouraging us to live out our faith, so we will have the confidence of that faith, and so we will understand how merciful and wonderful our God is. Don't read the book of James as a book of rules, but a book of challenges. A book of encouragements. From now on, be aware of God's

mercy, and be liked-minded. Do not show favoritism, but instead be merciful to those around you. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Show others the respect you want to have shown for you. Love others with the depth and sincerity you would like from others. Say and do those things you would like to have said and done for you. In doing so, you will be fulfilling God's royal command to love your neighbor as yourself.

“The Wonder of Disney’s Animatronics”



“We believe that men are saved by faith alone,
but not by a faith which is alone. They are
saved without works, but not by a faith which is
without works.”

Martin Luther

James 2:14-17

Years ago when I moved to Florida, I was excited about this for a number of reasons. The weather (Minnesota to Florida!), the new job, getting away from family (just kidding). But also exciting was the idea I would be close to Disney World and could go any time I wanted. I had been there once as a kid, but was looking forward to going back as an adult. After I had been in Florida for a month, I made my first trip to the Magic Kingdom. There it stood in all its glory. A parking lot which could hold 75,000 vehicles! Oh yeah, and I could see the park in the distance as well. It looked pretty much like I remembered it. Space Mountain was still fun. The Jungle ride seemed a little cheesier than when I was a kid, and the 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea ride was actually working. The “Future World” just looked like about 1975, so that was pretty funny. But it was fun. One of my favorite Disney features though, is the animatronics. Those are the life-like figures that are computerized and motorized. Animatrons greet you at several attractions. The best though is the “Hall of Presidents.” They are all there, from Washington and Lincoln to our current president. As the show goes on, each one of them addresses you for a short moment. They even stand up and sit down. It is quite realistic. They move and talk like real people. It is really a pretty amazing feat of engineering. People who look and act quite real, but aren’t. They are just machines who simply do programmed things. They have the appearance of reality on the outside, but are really just imitations on the inside.

In this chapter we are going to look at four huge verses. Not in length, but in content. James 2:14-17.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Let's take a closer look at the three questions James' poses, and his one powerful statement of fact.

Question 1:

What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Look back at the first part of that question. "**What good is it**" (NIV) "**What use is it**" (NASB).

My mom has a favorite saying. Well, actually I don't know if she knew this was her favorite saying, but we all pointed out to her how often she said it, so I think it was just appointed her favorite saying by the sheer repetition of it. When I was a kid and wanted to buy something because I thought it would be fun, and my mom on the other hand figured it was impractical, she would say, "Well, what's the sense of that?" As if to say, "There is no use for that, don't waste your money or your time on it." This then became her hallmark for everything that was not practical (as she saw it). In fact, on a number of occasions, I recall one of us kids or even my dad, mimic my mom before she even uttered the phrase. The implication from my mom's question was the answer would be, "Well there is no sense to it, because it is totally impractical and

worthless.” Thus, the question itself implied the answer, “None.”

That is much like James’ question in verse 14. “*What good is it*” implies a response that should be, “None. It is no good at all. It is impractical.” The word the NIV translates “good” is the Greek word, *ophelos* which is fairly rare in this form, but it is a noun which means “advantage, use or profit.” Therefore, we can understand the implied answer to be, “None, there is no advantage or profit in this.” What is it James is speaking of, though?

The question centers around the idea of a man who claims to have faith, but has no deeds. One of the most important aspects of this verse and in fact James’ whole argument is the phrase, “a man who claims to have faith.” The NIV translates the meaning of this sentence nicely by using the word “claims.” The NASB has “says,” leaving out some impact in what James is saying. This hypothetical person James is referring to simply “claims to have faith.” He just “says” he does. We do not know about the true condition of his heart and relationship with God, but we can guess what it might be. James has already told us about people who boast about their faith. He has said on several occasions talk is cheap, and God really desires action—“Doers” not “talkers.” So it appears this man has this problem, because James says he claims to have faith, but has no deeds.

James has already stated what some deeds are; caring for orphans and widows, showing mercy, loving thy neighbor as thyself. If this person claims to have faith (i.e. claims to be a Christian) but shows none of the signs of a true Christian, what good does this claim to faith do him? It is worthless and meaningless. Such

a person is a Christian in name only, and not a true believer. Oh they may seem like a Christian at times, saying the right things, praying the right prayers, showing up at all the meetings etc...but those are not “deeds” God cares about. True faith (*pistis*) involves a total commitment and dedication. This person is playing along, hoping to be accepted by his mere words. But the implication of the question is, that kind of “faith” will get him no where.

Question 2:

Can Such Faith Save Him?

The phrase from verse 14 has caused a good number of people a lot of problems in the past. Martin Luther for one. Luther seemingly misunderstood James completely. Why? Perhaps because Luther was so concerned with one particular argument, he merely looked at the surface of James’ argument and pretty well dismissed him altogether as contradicting Paul. But look at that question again.

If you have a King James Version, you might have a clue where the problem with understanding the verse comes from. The KJV reads, “*can faith save him?*” You can see how one might react to that in a defensive manner. You might say, “Of course faith can save him, it is the only thing that can save him. James you are wrong.” But that translation misrepresents the meaning of the Greek. In this phrase, *pistis* (faith) has the article. In Greek this means a better translation would be “the faith” or in context “that faith” referring back to the faith of the man who is a Christian in name only. In other words, “Can that bogus faith save him?” Implied response must be, “No Way!” Paul would

definitely agree there. A false faith or faith that is in words only, is no faith at all. Therefore it does the man no good—it will not save him. Notice, at this point, James has not made any attempt to associate mere works with salvation. Instead, next James provides us with another little hypothetical story to support the notion implied in his first two questions. The story itself ends with the same idea as question 1, “What good is it?”

Question 3:

What good is that?

Read verses 15 and 16 again. Think about this supposed situation for a moment. Let’s put this into an even more contemporary setting. Suppose you know of someone in the church who has an obvious need. They have absolutely no money and their clothes are practically rags. But Sunday morning you see them come in. You greet them kindly, because we have already learned, that we shouldn’t show favoritism. But when you see they obviously have needs, rather than finding out how you can help them after church, you just smile again and say, “Well, have a good week. Good luck to ya.” What good is that? How has that helped them? How has that displayed the love of God? Don’t deceive yourselves and think mere words are all that counts, or that merely saying you care makes points with God. It doesn’t!

James says if you really want to show the love of Christ in you, you will be more concerned about outward acts of love and compassion than just a mere profession that you are a Christian. Big deal, anybody can say he is a Christian. In fact, when a random

sample of Americans is asked if they are a “Christian” over 55% of them say, “yes.” Now we know there is no way 55% of America are true Christians. How do we know that? Look at America. Just saying you are, doesn’t mean anything.

James might even say, “Do you really think you are going to get into heaven just because you *say* you are a Christian.” True salvation is not about a magic set of words. It is about the total work of God in one’s life, producing genuine faith and good works. I could tell you I am a great NBA basketball player. I could say that all day long. I might even tell you I go to the arena for every game wearing my uniform. I might tell you I train and practice everyday. And I might even tell you about some of the other players I know. However, none of that makes me a NBA player. No, I would have to own a BMW and wear a lot of gold jewelry to truly be one. Just kidding. I would have to prove it by being on that court at tip off.

Such is the Christian life. James is afraid there may be a movement out there that believes there is some special power in just saying or claiming to be a Christian. That maybe if you say it enough and associate with the right people, you will get into heaven kind of by default. But it doesn’t work that way, does it?

The answer to these three questions James asks, is “No” or negative. James then compares these hypothetical examples with a great truth. Look again at verse 17.

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

That is one incredibly powerful statement. One incredible challenge. One incredible test. Let's take a closer look at it, and how we stack up against it.

Summary Statement:

Faith without works is dead.

After asking three questions in which the implied response is "No," James finally states his main point of this whole section. This might be the summary statement for the whole book of James. He has set his reader up, so when he makes this statement, they understand what he is talking about. The point has already been made, just not stated. There should be no question at this point what James thinks about faith and works.

Yet many have questioned James, saying he completely contradicts Paul's well developed theology of salvation by faith alone. However, James not only supports Paul's theology, but clarifies it as well, helping the Christian to better understand his complete relationship with God.

Examine Paul's argument from Ephesians 2:1-10.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in

transgressions -- it is by grace you have been saved.⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith -- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God --⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Verse 8-9 are often cited as proof of a contradiction between Paul and James. But then there is verse 10, which is often left out.

James is not saying salvation comes through works. On the contrary, James is saying salvation, true salvation, comes through the grace and mercy of God, which supplies us with the faith we need to accept Him into our lives. And this is the crucial point, -evidence of this transformation—our salvation—will be seen in our doing good works, which Paul states God has already prepared in advance for us to do. If there are none of these deeds or works, it is evidence our salvation is in word only, and as James has already shown, worthless, fake, not real. The true Christian will display the fruits of the Holy Spirit living in him. Therefore James can accurately make the statement, “Faith, if not accompanied by action, is dead.”

The Greek word for dead here is *nekros* which also has the implication of completely inactive and inoperative. It is like a corpse that has no life. It may still look human, but it really isn't. This person (who claims to have faith, but has no works which evidence this in his life) is like one of Disney's animatronics. They might look great. They might even act like a

Christian at times. They may do some ritualistic-type programmed behaviors, like attending church weekly, but there is no real fruit and no real life to their Christianity. We are often fooled by these people who claim to have Christianity. But James is not writing this passage for us to use it to judge others. We are not to say, “Well, they are surely not Christians, because they never do any good works.” It is only for God to judge the hearts and actions of others. Don’t forget what James just said at the beginning of chapter two, warning us against being unjust judges with evil motives. No, we are to use this passage to measure ourselves. That is James purpose for the whole book. He wants to challenge us to look inside our hearts and really see if there is evidence of our Christian profession. Are we in fact doing the word, or merely talking about it? Is God truly in our hearts, or are we just animatrons who talk convincingly enough, but are just facades for the imitation reality inside us?

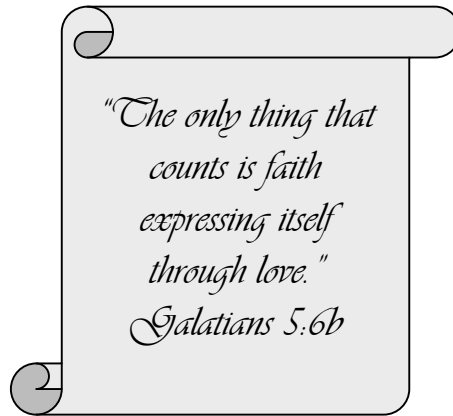
Let’s ask ourselves those questions again.

- **Question 1: What good is it, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?**
- **Question 2: Can Such Faith Save Him?**
- **Question 3: What good is that?**

Are you convinced yet? If not, James has more to say on the matter, and we will get to that in the next chapter. But if you are not convinced, you might ask yourself why you want to disagree with James. Is it because you want to continue to live a bogus faith, without facing the real questions of true Christianity? Or is it, because you just don’t understand what a true relationship with God is all about?

If you are convinced, begin to take that deep look inward. Ask yourself whether or not your faith is alive or dead. Active or Inactive. Are you a doer or a talker? Be encouraged if your life does show true evidence of faith, you can have that assurance of your relationship with Christ. But never become stagnant. Never take the attitude “I don’t have to live out my faith, saying the magic words and praying the prayer, was all there was.” The true Christian who has genuinely been saved, will *do* the good works God has prepared for them. Challenge yourself. Encourage yourself. Know that between James and Paul there is no dispute—true faith comes from God’s grace and mercy and nothing else. But that true faith always exhibits itself in actions.

“I Believe in God and all,
but...”



"We believe that men are saved by faith alone,
but not by a faith which is alone. They are
saved without works, but not by a faith which is
without works."
Charles H. Spurgeon

James 2:18-26

I had the opportunity to be in a school not too long ago, and it reminded me of my junior high days. In some ways it seems like a lifetime ago. In others, it seems like just a few days have passed. I remember though, how hard it was to make friends in Junior High. I went to one of the largest junior highs in the state of Wisconsin, and it was extremely intimidating. I probably didn't talk to anyone for a week. When I did start talking to other kids, I was concerned I make the right kind of friends. Occasionally, when I could muster up enough courage, I would ask someone if he was a Christian. The response I received more often than not was, "Well, I believe in God and all, but..." The sentences varied after that most deadly of conjunctions. What they said after "but" didn't much matter, it was the fact they had to say it at all. I once had a teacher tell me, when you insert the conjunction "but" in a sentence, it pretty much nullifies everything you have just said. Husbands, your wives know this all too well, and will pick up on it every time. For example, "Gee honey, your hair looks nice, but..." It doesn't make much difference what you say after that "but." Whatever it is, you can bet the first part of the sentence will not be given any weight and probably won't be remembered at all. Another example: You could say to your girlfriend after your first date, "I really dig you, but..." Boy, will that keep her guessing! The point is, it is a negation, usually, of your first idea. So when people told me in junior high (and probably a thousand times since), "I believe in God and all, but..." it generally meant nope, they aren't a Christian, but want to be thought of as one or want to kind of be associated with God, but not completely. They think

this intellectual assent to the fact God exists, is all it will take to get into heaven on judgment day.

James lays out for us, how this is a weak argument that is worth nothing. That kind of “bogus faith” has no worth whatsoever. In James 2:18-26 he completes his argument in this section, and provides even stronger statements, so we will never forget the significance of what he says.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”^b and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. ²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

This whole section, including verses 14-17, we covered in the last chapter, is in a style known as a “diatribe.” This is a method developed by Greek philosophers, whereby the speaker interjects his own questions, and then proceeds to answer them. Paul was very familiar with this style and used it often, and now we see it in James. Let’s look at how he develops it in 3 stages.

I. Faith and Works Must Go Together

Verse 18 begins with one of these questions from a hypothetical person. The statement made, shows James is familiar with how his readers might object to his “faith without works is dead” statement of a verse ago. Some early Christians may have been under the impression faith was a gift and works were a gift, and you might have one and not the other. So the question comes, “Well, James, can’t I have faith, and you have works?” Look, how James responds to that.

The second part of verse 18 is James’ powerful response. Do you get the impression James might be from Missouri, —the “Show-Me” state. A faith that can’t be seen is no faith. A faith that has no works is no faith at all. The only way we can prove our faith, is to show it through good deeds done in love.

The basis of James’ whole argument lies here. He says faith and works are inseparable, and that any contention about the division of the two is unthinkable and impossible. Genuine faith cannot exist without works. Period. This argument is somewhat a paraphrase of Jesus, from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:20 where Jesus says, “You will know them by their fruit.” This fruit is not just religious ritual. It is not just one act of seeming kindness. It is a complete life spent in dedication to doing good works which stem from the heart of the true believer.

The second part of the diatribe comes next in verse 19.

II. Intellectual Assent Means Nothing

In this verse James uses an example near and dear to the Jews. It is known as the *Shema*. This was an Old Testament statement of faith. It took affirmations from various Old Testament scriptures, but the principle acknowledgment was found in Deuteronomy 6:4.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.
5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with
all your soul and with all your strength.*

Literally, this proclamation said: Our God is Yahweh and He is the only God. The Jews recited this *Shema* twice daily. And in the New Testament period, the new Christians also continued to make this profession, taking their cue from Jesus himself. Look at what Jesus said about the *Shema* in Mark 12:28-34.

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^c There is no commandment greater than these."³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him."³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on, no one dared ask him any more questions.

We have heard Jesus quote this before. But what is interesting, is what he says in response to the questioner who agrees with the *Shema*. Did Jesus say, “Hey wow, you are a Christian!” Did he say, “Surely you will be with me in paradise”? Did he say, “Only a man of true faith could admit that”? No. What did Jesus say? “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” You know what, that was a double meaning there. “Yeah, agreeing to that is a good step on the way, but it doesn’t mean anything by itself. It must be followed with actions.” Secondly, the man was in fact standing close to the keeper of the kingdom of God. Accepting Jesus, who was standing right there, close to him, would be the other part of the scenario the teacher of the law would have to accept. The intellectual assent itself got him nowhere.

James makes the same basic argument here. Sure, it is good to agree to the *Shema*. It is the great commandment after all. But guess what? Even Satan’s little helpers believe there is one true God. They know God is God. They know Baal is fake. They know Buddha is just made of wood. They know God is God, and they know what that means in the end, and so James says they shudder at that truth. That is a greater reaction to the statement than even many claiming Christians have.

So don’t think you are doing anything with eternal significance by simply accepting the validity of a statement. Think of the first astronauts. They had to believe the spaceship would get them to the moon. I am sure on a purely mathematics level, they agreed it would work. But I will bet that was entirely different than putting on that spacesuit and climbing into what

amounted to a flying bomb. Doing good works is what separates us from demons in many cases. It is the only way to prove a true faith and evidence of God in your life.

Let me do a little diatribe of my own here. You might say, “Well I don’t have to prove my faith to anyone, God knows I believe in him.” But, by simply saying that, you have already proven what kind of faith you really have. Faith and works cannot be separated.

Next James concludes this entire section by sighting biblical proof for his argument. Two examples of which he knows his readers will be well aware.

III. Evidence Which Proves the Thesis

Notice how the section begins in verse 20. It is James response to anyone who would question the validity of his argument.

Both the NIV and the NASB translate the Greek work *kenos* as “foolish.” But this does not give us the full understanding of the word. It literally means “empty” as in an empty vessel or a lantern with no oil, or a jug with no wine. How good is such a thing? No good at all. This person’s argument there can be a faith without works is not only foolish, but it also completely empty of thought and understanding and is, as the word also implies, devoid of truth.

James then further supports his argument, so that hopefully even the fool—the empty headed—can see how true it is. He turns to the Old Testament for examples of this thesis in action. The obvious first choice is Abraham, the father of the faith. His readers, even dim-witted ones, will be aware of Abraham and his story.

Look at verse 21. “Wait a minute,” you might ask. “I know that story and doesn’t it say Abraham had faith, and that was credited to him as righteousness? It didn’t have anything to do with works.” This is true. Look at verse 22 though to see how James explains this seeming contradiction in his understanding of Abraham’s relationship before God. He makes his argument Abraham’s action, his actually lifting the knife to carry out God’s command, was the ultimate sign of his inward faith. In fact, the text tells us Abraham’s faith and his works were working together. There is a little play on words here, and also the verb is in the imperfect tense, denoting an action that continued to occur. Without that action, how would we know Abraham was truly faithful to God? We wouldn’t, would we? So it is that faith—accompanied by the action—that is a model of true faith. To be a friend of God like Abraham, one must not only claim to have faith, but that faith has to display itself in actions. Sometimes actions that really test our fortitude and the depth of our faith. Is that the kind of faith you have? We will be tested. We are going to be challenged, perhaps in a way we never thought possible, to an extent we never dreamed of, but we will be challenged. How will we respond? Will we respond like the man who is empty? Will our faith just be words and ritual attendance, or will it be the kind of faith which represents itself in true actions of love, compassion and mercy? Will we truly live what we have learned? Our actions will tell the story. Satan will attempt to put a test in front of us that seems insurmountable, and then whisper playfully in our ear to become bitter and turn our ear from God’s Word. Don’t let that happen. Let’s

let Abraham be our example of faith and works together.

Verse 24 has caused problems for many people and scholars alike. On the surface, this statement appears to contradict Paul. James says we are justified by what we do, and not by faith alone. There are several things about this statement we need to understand. First of all, James' use of the word "justify" is somewhat different than Paul's, because of the different points each is attempting to drive home. Paul is telling his readers it is faith alone which can bring about that initial justification which brings one into a relationship with Jesus. No amount of adherence to the laws and ceremonies can ever bring this about. No amount of works will ever bring us into this relationship. For James however, he is speaking of the ultimate justification which comes about at the final judgment. It is at this point, where our faith is evaluated, and those who have displayed this true faith in actions, are truly God's. Their faith has been proven worthy in the final judgment. Their works didn't bring about God's initial justification. They didn't come into that relationship via anything they did or could have done, but they did prove the relationship through a life lived in devotion and obedience to God.

"Okay," we might say, "point well made, and what a great illustration, using Abraham, the father of the faith." But then James adds one more thought. He mentions Rahab, the prostitute and her actions which showed her true faith. Even she was justified, James says. Many of us are closer to Rahab than we are to Abraham, aren't we? But James shows that previous adherence to the law or right living cannot bring about faith. Rather, first there is faith, and that is followed by

good deeds. Such was the case in Rahab's life. Such should be the case in our lives.

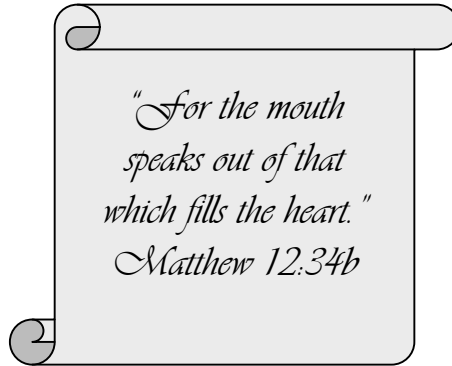
James restates the argument for the third time in verse 26, as he summarizes the entire section. A body without a spirit is dead. It is an animatronic. Such is a faith that has no works or deeds.

Are we the objector to James in this passage? Or are we one of the faithful. I believe most of James' readers were truly faithful and practicing that faith. As I have mentioned before, I don't think the book was written to beat Christians up. Rather it is here for us to challenge ourselves. And remember the warning from last week. We cannot use this passage to judge the hearts of others. Only God knows the heart. We can, however, use it to evaluate our own faith. Ask yourself the question, "Do my deeds point to my faith, or do they only point to hypocrisy and ritualistic behaviors?" That is a tough question. Look inside your heart and ask God to help you develop a fruitful relationship with Him, one that produces good deeds, compassion, mercy, love, and forgiveness. These qualities exemplify the true and active Christian. I trust that is who you are, for that is what God wants you to be.

Measuring Up

James 3:1-18

“Ships, Sparks, and Snakes”



"Some people only open their mouths to change
feet."
EDB

James 3:1-11

Welcome to a day in the life of Mr. & Mrs. Adder.
“Honey, I’m home.”

“How was your day dear.”

“Terrible, my boss was on me like a cheap suit, and what do you care anyway.”

“I care because I am the one who has to put up with your attitude every time you have a bad day.

“Yeah, well..., what’s for dinner anyway?”

“Fried chicken and mashed potatoes.”

“Fried chicken, You know I hate fried chicken, especially the way you make it.

“Well just for that, you can take your good-for-nothing self **out** to eat.”

“Good, this place is a pig’s sty anyway, don’t you ever clean?”

“All the time, but you’re too much of a slob for it to do much good.”

“Yeah well I’ll be home when I am home.”

“Good, maybe I can get some peace and quiet without you and your stupid TV tonight.”

“Good-bye!”

“Good-bye!”

¹ Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great

boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.⁶ 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.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man,⁸ but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?¹² My brothers can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that come from wisdom.

We are going to take a close look at this passage and what James has to say about ships, snakes, and sparks.

This chapter of James deals mainly with our use of our tongue, or better stated, our misuse of our tongue. I am going to break the text down into three separate parts.

I. The Power of the Tongue

The tongue is an amazing organ. The tongue, like the heart, is almost all muscle; unlike the routine and repetitive cardiac contractions though, the tongue is capable of very precise, complicated, and elaborate movements. It has many important responsibilities we probably take for granted. The tongue is necessary for all speech. No matter what language you speak, the tongue is crucial to your ability to create the sounds

which make up the letters and the words you speak. Without a tongue you would be unable to communicate the way you do every single day, no talking, no singing, no whistling. Secondly, the tongue is necessary to eat with. The tongue is designed to help you move food around in your mouth and direct it to your throat. Without your tongue, you would pretty much have to lie on your back to eat. Thirdly, the tongue is the source of one of your most favorite senses, your sense of taste. Mmmm, chocolate. Imagine food with no taste. That is what things would be like without your taste buds which are located on your tongue. Life would be pretty dull and boring without a tongue. The tongue also seems to get a lot of recognition. Because we hear of

- Tongue-in-cheek
- Sticking your tongue out
- Being tongue tied
- Cat got your tongue
- Tongue Twisters
- Speaking in tongues

With all these abilities attached to it, still, the tongue is a very small organ.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to go horse back riding with one of the kids from the youth group. It was a lot of fun. It was my first time in a long while, so I was a little unsure of my horsemanship. The trainer, who makes sure you get on the horse headed in the right direction, told us to keep the horses on the path and not to let them take the short cuts. I didn't know what he meant by that, but whatever, "Giddy up!" About one third of the way through the course, we came to an intersection where one path continued on

straight ahead, and another was on its way back to the stables. Well, my horse decided to take the short cut. “Ahh. That is what he was talking about.” I attempted to tell my horse to continue straight ahead, but he decided it was hot, and he would rather end the day more quickly. Finally after about 50 yards of battle, I was able to turn Trigger, or whatever his name was, around and continue in the right direction. I learned the importance and the power of that little bit in my horse’s mouth. With that little thing connected to the reins, I could turn that big horse completely around. Well, that is when I learned how to.

People in James’ day were familiar with this as well of course.

Another example James cites is a ship. Not long ago, I read an article that stated one of the reasons the Titanic sank, was because it was built out of a relatively low grade steel which ripped more easily in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. Of course, it could have avoided the iceberg all together, if the Captain would have simply used the tiny little rudder and steered the ship out of danger. Big ships. Small, but oh-so-important, oh-so-powerful rudders.

Much like the tongue. It has great power and agility, but it is wrapped up in a tiny package. In verse 5 James finally points out what exactly he is talking about: the tongue. He tells us, even though it is a small organ, “it makes great boasts.” The word translated “great boasts”, is *megalaucho*. In other words, it does mega-work and is always ready to proclaim its status.

But even though the tongue is important, it has a big down side.

II. The Nature Of The Tongue

Not long ago Michelle and I went to Yellowstone National Park. Some years prior to our visit, Yellowstone suffered a severe forest fire. Nearly half the park, some 8 million acres of land, was burned. A bolt of lightning, or a carelessly thrown match or cigarette usually causes such disasters. That tiny little spark can ignite millions of acres of land, kill thousands of animals, and chase people from their homes. All of that because of a little spark of fire.

James compares our tongues to that spark. We know our tongue is powerful, but it is also very powerful in a negative way. In fact, James says our tongue is a “world of evil.” Its nature can be (and is more often than not) to destroy, and to corrupt. It can set a person’s whole life on fire. One misspoken word can ruin a life. You don’t have to think very long about how you could say one thing and maybe ruin the rest of your life.

Satan’s bag of tricks is pretty deep, but not too original. He loves the tongue. James tells us it is hell itself that sets our tongues a-flapping and ignites them with harsh, critical, scorching, blistering words that destroy. The tongue is a wild fire, out of control.

One of my favorite theme parks is Sea World. Mainly because you don’t have to wait in line like you do at most other parks. But I also enjoy watching Shamu and seals and walrus and the dolphins. You are informed at the Shamu show killer whales weigh somewhere between 3000 and 10,000 pounds. In fact, one of the whales gave birth to a 300 pound baby calf. How would you like that, moms? These are big animals. Killer animals. But guess what? They have

been trained by man. They even have an exhibit at Sea World now showing you how they go about training these huge sea creatures. The movie “Free Willy” depicts some of this training. It is amazing to see what can be done with these animals. Not only at Sea World, but with trained reptiles and birds at Cypress gardens, and with trained bears and elephants at the circus. It is amazing, what man can tame.

While living in Florida, I had a visitor. One night I came home from a deacon meeting and found him waiting for me in the bathroom.

Now you must remember I am from Minnesota, and the only kind of snakes we have up there, are garter snakes which are green and black. And the only kind of snake I had seen in Florida was a black racer. So I was a little bit concerned about what might be lurking in my bathroom. Being the brave human being I am, I walked quickly into the bathroom, picked up the snake and tossed it outside. Well, no, not exactly. I peeked under the door, saw it was red and orange and tan, so I grabbed a golf club, a 3-wood I believe, and then made a call to the building maintenance guy.

After a couple of minutes, Jerry showed up with his fiancé. He surveyed the situation, and decided to hit the snake with the golf club. Just as he was about to strike it down, the snake slithered up into a hole underneath the bathroom counter. Apparently, Jerry can't hit a 3 wood either. Then Jerry called the head maintenance guy and the building manager. Then he called 911 to see if they could send out an animal removal unit. They couldn't, so they sent a police officer instead. Let's recap. At this point there is me, Jerry the maintenance guy and his fiancé, Celia, the building manager and her friend, Bob, the head of

maintenance and his wife, and a police officer, all in my apartment at about 11:30 in the evening. The police officer couldn't help either, so he called a snake guy—a guy who likes snakes I guess. With all of these highly skilled people we were able to...rip apart our bathroom wall and find nothing.

Nobody knew quite exactly what to do, because we weren't sure what kind of snake it was or if it was poisonous. So I called a young person from the youth group, Jeff Morris, thinking because he had lived in Florida his whole life, he would know. Jeff just mumbled something about wanting to eat it. No, actually he said if it had red, it was poisonous. As it turned out, it wasn't poisonous. It was a rat snake. The next day, I went to the bookstore and bought a book about Florida reptiles. In the section about rat snakes, it stated they were quite popular because they *make good pets* and are easy to tame. Uhhhgggg! Unfortunately, you have to find them first! Needless to say, I slept in the other room for a couple of weeks, until the snake showed up in the apartment next to mine, and was finally set free.

Those words rang in my head for some time. “They make good pets and are easy to tame.” Yeah, but who would want to? The event did prove exciting, and I now know more about snakes than I ever thought I would.

In old cowboy and Indian western movies, they always had an Indian quote the phrase, “White man speaks with forked tongue.” The Indians compared certain lying, deceiving, cheating men to snakes—which, of, course have forked tongues. This however, is an insult to snakes, who used their forked tongues to smell and find their way around. On the other hand,

men use their tongues to do evil. Unlike a snake's tongue, which has no poison on it, men's tongues are "full of deadly poison." The word for "poison" here, actually means a type of snake venom or corrosive rust.

Our forked tongues attempt to say two things. We attempt to praise God on one side, and curse men on the other. James says this can't be so. How can praise and cursing come out of the same mouth? How can we stand up on Sunday morning and sing beautiful praises to our God, and then go home and curse and swear and cut down. It can't work that way. One of those must go. Our tongues are to be used as our instrument of praise to our God, not a weapon of destruction and cursing of men, who after all, as James says, are made in the likeness of God—no matter what we think of them. Husbands, don't expect to be able to cut your wife down (like Mr. Adder), and then think your wife will want to kiss the same mouth that just put her down. It doesn't work that way.

Is your tongue an instrument of praise or a weapon of destruction? At the same time, we cannot become so hyper-sensitive, that we lose sight of the intentions and the heart of those around us. We must understand we all say the wrong thing, accidentally, sometimes. We need to look at the heart.

James gives several obvious illustrations to establish his point. Salt water springs produce salt water, not fresh. Fig trees produce figs, not olives or grapes. It seems so obvious. But when it comes to our tongue, we attempt to change the rules. James doesn't mention specifically what type of speech he is talking about here, but he does in chapter 4 verses 11-12.

III. The Cure for the Tongue-The Antivenin

It has been said some people have such a problem with their tongue, they only open their mouths to change feet. James has told us what causes many Christians the most problems in life; their tongue. Certainly this is the case for me. I have probably spoken my way into trouble more times than spoken my way out. I am part of the crowd James is speaking to. Perhaps you are too. Sometimes I should just pour Tabasco sauce on my tongue to burn it before it burns me.

James does not leave us without any suggestions or advice however. He does more than an adequate job of explaining what the problem is, but where do we find the answers?

Let's look back to verse 1 and 2. Embedded in them is some good advice.

In verse one James tells us those who teach, or those who have more knowledge, will be judged based on that knowledge, and how they present it when they teach. Teaching is an important job, and those who teach need to be especially precise in what they say. But nevertheless James says, "***We all stumble in many ways.***" James is the first one to admit he struggles in his Christian walk too. There are areas of his life, where he has difficulties. But James tells us if we can focus on our tongue and our speech and what we say, if we can begin to control it, if we can begin to be more careful about how we use it, this will solve many of our other problems. Let's put our efforts towards the source of most of our stumbling—our mouth.

Let's shift our attention now back down to verse 13. If you have an NIV it has verse 13 as part of a new section or area of thought. But James intentionally places these two thoughts together, and rather than have verse 13 as only an introduction to the next section, I believe it serves as both the conclusion and answer to the previous section, *and* as an introduction to that which follows.

Okay, we have this problem with our tongue. How do we go about correcting it? Well, "***Who is wise and understanding among you?***" In other words, "Who knows? Who can figure this out? What is the answer?" If you are wise, you will SHOW it, give evidence or prove it by your good life and by deeds (not words), done in humility (not boasting) that come from wisdom.

If you seek God's wisdom, He will teach you to live a quiet, peace-loving life which is characterized by actions done in humility, not words. Christians must live by actions. Sound familiar? (cf. James chapter 1:17-19)

Actions are what God is looking for. Not just mere verbal acknowledgments. Therefore, if we are to keep control on our tongue, let us focus on our deeds, our lifestyle, our actions, more than on what we say. Let the cat get our tongue sometimes. It will be good for you. Rather than criticize others for doing something wrong, let us quietly and humbly show them the right way to do it. Let our actions speak. Actions not only speak louder than words, they speak more effectively and more accurately. Don't talk about it, do it. Have you heard the phrase "all talk and no action"? Unfortunately, that applies to many Christians. Let's

begin to change that and make others say, “Christians are all actions, and little talk.”

Will you make that commitment? Will you make it today? I hope you will.

Welcome to an alternate day in the life of Mr. & Mrs. Adder:

“Hi Honey, I’m home.”

“How was your day dear?”

“Not so good, I had a difficult time with the boss today, but I am not going to let it spoil my night with you, okay?”

“Thanks honey, that means a lot. Can I make you something special tonight?”

“No, whatever you were fixing will be fine.”

“Are fried Chicken and mashed potatoes okay?”

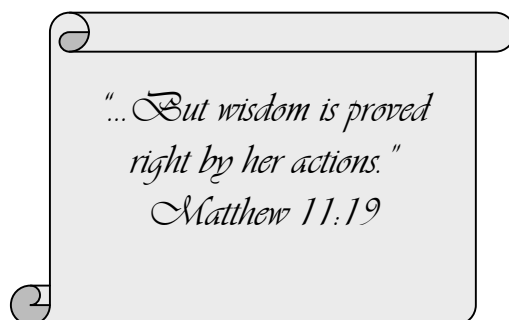
“That will be fine; can I help you fix it? Maybe that will help take my mind off my day.”

“Thanks honey.”

“You know, rather than watching TV tonight, maybe you and I could just go for a walk or something.”

“I’d like that; I’d like that very much.”

“Diamonds and Latex Paint”



"Many just hold religion up to illuminate their
intellect, instead of holding it down to
illuminate their practice"
Charles Spurgeon

James 3:13-18

Have you ever had the opportunity to shop for a diamond ring? You select the diamond separately from the setting. The jeweler pulls out a box filled with diamonds and begins to show you individual ones, describing their quality and color and cut. First he shows you a half-carat one that looks beautiful. Ooooo! “This one is only fair though as far as color goes,” he says, “see how it is slightly yellow at the bottom.” Then he pulls out absolutely the best half-carat stone he has. Top grade cut, clarity, and color. He then sets it down next to the other stone. Wow! Suddenly the first diamond looks very poor, almost ugly, in comparison with this almost perfect one. What a difference! But you would have never noticed it unless we had compared the two.

A few years ago, I was searching for some E-mail addresses through an on-line service, and found a listing for the person my parents bought a house from many years ago in Minnesota. We always thought him aptly named. Carelton Rust. The house looked like it. Apparently Mr. Rust and his spouse, Mrs. Rust, were major league smokers. Six packs a day between the two of them. The entire house was covered with this layer of grimy gold tar. The whole house just smelled like an ash tray. So of course, we decided to have the entire place stripped bare and redone. First we started with paint for the walls. Fresh white paint. As I began to roll on the new white paint, I immediately noticed something. “Wow, this is too bright!” It was much whiter than the tan paint that was there. Actually, we found out the old paint was white. It was just so covered with tar it appeared to be tan. The brilliant new white paint showed just how bad it had become. What

a difference! But we would have never noticed it, unless we had compared the two.

Let's look now at James 3:13-18.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

We mentioned previously James was fond of a writing style known as a diatribe, —a style, whereby the author or speaker asks himself questions, rhetorical questions, - questions which have an implied "yes" or "no" response. James begins this section with a question. We said in the last chapter, verse 13 was not only an answer to the problem of verses 1-12, but was also an introduction to James' next thought. It makes an extremely effective transition into this new area under consideration: wisdom.

We have also said in the past, James likes to compare and contrast things. First there was the stable man and the unstable, then the rich man and poor man, then the nature of the creator verses the nature of the created, then hearing and doing, then mercy and judgment, and finally faith and works. Compare and contrast.

In this chapter James will compare and contrast two things for us. Well, actually some might say it is really just one thing, but as we shall see it is not. Let's take a closer look at the first concept James mentions.

I. The Wisdom of the World

This idea came up at the end of verse 13. But let's skip over verse 14 for the moment and look at verse 15. It is here, where we see James make his statement. ***“Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly.”*** What he is talking about here is worldly wisdom. He gives us a pretty good description of all that this kind of wisdom entails.

First of all, in that same verse (15), he mentions this “wisdom” is earthly, unspiritual, and of the devil. Now that sounds pretty bad, doesn't it? Remember what James said in chapter 1 verse 17, ***“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...”*** This wisdom, James says, most certainly does not come down from heaven and, in fact, is earthly. Supporting that idea, James tells us it is “unspiritual” (NIV), or “natural.” Literally, “of man's spirit or breath”—the Greek word being *psuchikos*, as opposed to coming from God's Spirit, which would be *pneumatos*. If he didn't get his point across yet, as to the nature of this kind of wisdom, he says it, in fact, comes from the devil, or it is devilish in nature. Based on this description, one would think it would not be difficult to spot this kind of earthly, worldly wisdom. But is it?

Some time ago I went through a TV guide and counted up how many daytime talk shows there were. You know what I am talking about, Oprah, Dr. Phil,

Montel, et al. I counted 23 separate such programs. That is one huge pile of worldly wisdom. But guess what? A lot of people (even Christians), subject themselves to a regular dosage of that garbage.

Another example: The World Wide Conference on Women in Beijing. Worldly wisdom poured forth. They told us there were now five genders, and that lesbianism might be the answer to many of the world's problems. "Okay," you might say, "It is obvious to see worldly wisdom in that." Yet so many believe and follow it. "Oh, but I don't", you say. "No. I know the difference."

For over 30 years, psychiatrists and child psychologists have been in the foreground, telling us how we should raise children. Many of their ideas have become immensely popular and the subject of countless best-seller books, even among Christians. But yet, look around you at the children of America. Things have only gotten worse, and seem to be going downhill daily at an alarming rate. Worldly wisdom, but very attractive.

Consider the world of politics. In the 1960s, we were told the government would be the answer to poverty and all the social problems of our country. The Great Society. But here we are, 30+ years later, after spending 3 trillion dollars on the problems, and what has all of that worldly political advice brought us? Things are no better today than they were then. In fact, things are probably much worse. But many believed it then, and many still believe it today.

Consider the New Age movement of today. That worldly wisdom tells people they can achieve happiness, because they are God themselves. Fate is in their hands. Their will is supreme. They possess all the

power; it just needs to be channeled by power crystals or by sitting next to a red rock in Sedona. We will have peace on earth, if we just all get in touch with our inner deity. Yeah, that has really gone a long way, hasn't it?

Look at how James says this worldly wisdom will manifest itself (v. 14). Characteristics of this wisdom are bitter envy, or as the words imply, virulent zeal. That would describe many a Women's World Conference attendee. In fact, Bella Abzug led a group of women in a chant, mocking a religious song, and thrusting their fists in the air singing, "We have the power." But hey, they are considered enlightened people by the world.

The second characteristic is selfish ambition. This word basically implies someone who seeks political office for selfish or sinister motives. I wonder if you can think of anyone who fits that category? For James, the sickest part of all of it is that many of these people, in the name of "wisdom" and "intelligence", boast about how smart they are or how great they are. Example: former president Clinton stated he was such a good president, that the American people should consider themselves lucky for having someone with his caliber of wisdom, because only one president a century is that good. Well, in a sense, we *are* lucky a president like him comes around only once every 100 years. But it is that kind of absurd boasting that was prevalent in James' day as well. Men who thought themselves so wise, were deceiving many. So James warns both the boaster and those who listen to him, their wisdom is from the devil.

Notice in verse 16, how James repeats that very thought and describes to us, what results from such boasting. He says, "***there you find disorder and every***

evil practice.” Looking around, it wouldn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that is what we have. We have listened to worldly wisdom for so long, and become so infected with its virulent nature, that we are unable to discern true wisdom. And you know what; we wouldn’t see it, unless we were able to compare the two. There is another kind of wisdom.

II. True Wisdom (or Heavenly Wisdom)

Verse 17 begins the contrast, as James begins to tell us what true wisdom is all about. As we have mentioned in the past, James often uses poetic styles to convey his thoughts. Verse 17 is a literary form known as “assonance.” You know what “dissonance” is: things that don’t sound alike or clash. So “assonance” is words that *do* sound alike or begin with the same vowel sounds. It is like an alliteration in sermon points. James is extremely creative with the descriptive words he uses to express what heavenly wisdom is all about.

- *hagnos* - pure, undefiled by human touch or carnal motives (the “h” is silent)
- *eirenikos* - peaceloving.
- *epieikice* - considerate or gentle.
- *eupeithes* - submissive or obedient
- *eleos* - full of mercy
- *agathos* - good fruits,
- *adiakritos* - impartial, without uncertainty or ambiguity
- *anupokritos* - sincere, without hypocrisy or undisguised

When looking at the Greek sentence, it is really quite remarkable to come up with that many words with similar vowels. Try it some time; it isn't too easy. But all of them so beautifully describe the Godly, heavenly wisdom that is the only true wisdom there is. These words all stand in some way or another, in total opposition to the kind of worldly wisdom that is so prevalent. Godly wisdom and worldly wisdom are antithetically opposed to one another. It is so very obvious, but we might have never seen it, unless we were able to compare them.

What is this Godly wisdom then? It stems from pure, non-political motives. It is not harsh or abrasive, like so many protesters and "rights" people we see around us. Rather God's wisdom displays itself in gentleness and right thinking. Remember Jesus and his ability to deal firmly, but gently, with those around him. This wisdom is also obedient to God's will. It does not pride itself in statements like, "I choose..." or "I will..."; rather it is constantly submissive to the will of God and His leading. As James has already stressed, this wisdom is full of mercy. A true Christian must be merciful, and this will provide proof of his Godly wisdom. This person will not be judgment-oriented, but rather merciful and forgiving and restoration-seeking. He will also show his wisdom in his good fruit. Remember, faith without works, is a faith which doesn't work. Action, doers, fruit-producers are the true Christians. This is also a sign of wisdom; one, who lives by what he says.

Finally, wisdom from God is sincere. It is not merely someone pretending to be wise for public consumption or political motives. Wisdom comes from a pure heart, not corrupt planning. That may be

cunning or craftiness, but it is surely not Godly wisdom, and is not to be confused with true wisdom.

Example: During a party presidential convention a few years ago, a candidate from Arkansas gave an hour long speech, in which he referred to the “good book” and “the scriptures” several times. Many Christians thought to themselves, “Hmm, he can’t be all bad, he is quoting the Bible.” He seemed to be showing a biblical wisdom. However, there were several problems with that. The verses were often misquoted and, in fact, completely changed in some cases, so they would fit his particular political motivation. One glaring and horrifying example of this, was the reference made to 1 Corinthians 2:9. It was quoted as saying,

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what we can do together.”

“Gee, sounds good. What is wrong with that?” Here is what the verse really says.

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”

Now that ought to just make your blood boil, that someone would have the audacity to misquote Scripture, turn it into human wisdom and use it for political gain. That is exactly the evil-that-is-straight-from-the-devil James is talking about. It wasn’t just something first century Christians, living in the world, were up against; it is what you and I are up against more and more each day. We must “learn to discern.” And James gives us the tools, the measuring stick,

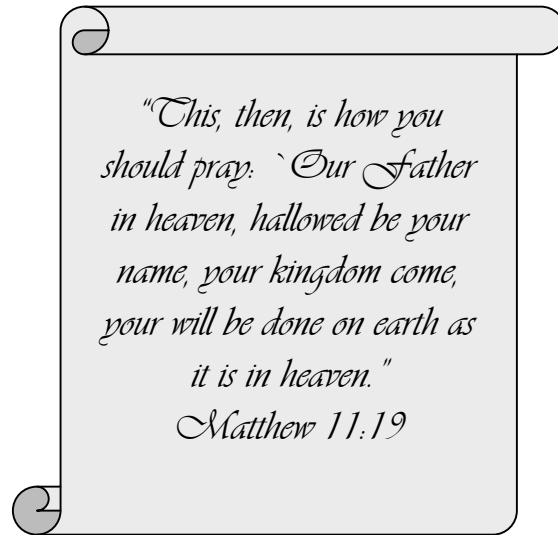
against which to measure any claims of wisdom. Not only should we evaluate what we hear and see, based on these criteria, but we should also seek to internalize it. We can judge our own wisdom and our own decisions, to see whether it is wisdom from God or wisdom of the world.

In the computer world there is a well known slogan, “Garbage in, garbage out.” That is what happens to us. We take in worldly wisdom, fail to see it for what it is, and then we use it to make our decisions. But James shows us the contrast. He points out to us how dull that wisdom is, when compared to the pure diamond or the pure white paint of Godly wisdom. We must carefully apply what James has taught us, so we CAN discern true wisdom from the worldly counterfeit. The best way to do that, is to hold it up against God’s pure and righteous wisdom. If we don’t, we may never notice the difference.

Measuring Up

James 4:1-17

“Give Me Your Sneakers”



"Me' is always at the bottom of all sin. One little word, M-E. It may spell drink, lust, pride, covetousness, self-will; but it is some form of 'me.'"

Anonymous

James 4:1-3

Imagine the following scene for a moment. A young Jr. High boy is walking home from his school on a fall afternoon. A bright orange hue glistens off the leaves of the changing trees which stand against a crisp blue sky. There is the sound of laughter and joy, as many other children make their way home for an afternoon treat. The young boy begins to imagine what warm goodies his mom has prepared for him, and he can practically smell them already. The weight of the books in his backpack reminds him, just how much homework he has, “But I will still have time for a little TV”, he thinks to himself. As he rounds the corner to make his way up the two final blocks to his house, he hears footsteps behind him, and then a demanding voice cuts through the coolness of the air, “Hey kid, give me your sneakers!” This seemed like a very odd request. Even though the boy’s shoes were the most popular brand, it seemed an odd question nonetheless. “I paid a lot for these, and I’m not giving them to you, because they are mine,” he said, with all the confidence he could muster, to the dangerous looking stranger. “I said, give them to me!” The boy had no intention of relinquishing his pride and joy, so he turned around to continue walking home. After just two or three steps, he felt a sudden pressure in his shoulder, then felt weak, and finally fell to the ground. As his head came to rest in the grass, he heard a loud noise, then noticed himself being jostled about. He felt strangely warm and then smelled his mom’s fresh bread, and then...

His body was found shortly thereafter, and the police determined this 13 year old boy had been shot in the back, because someone wanted his new Air Jordan

basketball shoes. It doesn't seem possible, does it? Killed for a pair of sneakers. It has happened much like this several times across the country. What has our world come to? Well, it has come to the same place it has always been, and that is dominated by greed, strife, war, jealousy and hatred. The names and items have changed, but, oh, human nature stays the same.

Let's examine James chapter 4:1-3, to see how accurate James' understanding of his world and our world is.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Did you notice a stark contrast in tone from 3:17-18 to these three verses? Look back at James' last idea of peacemaking and righteousness. He quickly changes gears here, and describes for us the opposite end of the spectrum. He shows what happens, if we do not follow the wisdom and Spirit of God in our lives.

I. The Cause of Conflict

As he is fond of doing, James continues the diatribe in this section with a question. He moves from peacemaking to fighting in the same breath. He asks his readers, why there are fights and quarrels (NIV) literally, wars and battles, among them (and in the world in general). The word for "war" is *polemos*, from

which we get the word “polemic” that relates to being an expert on arguing or fighting. James asks the question people have wanted the answer to for thousands of years: Why is there war?

He answers the question with another question, because he thinks we should know the answer. Don’t these conflicts among you start, because of your own desires that conflict within yourself?

Let’s first look back to chapter one verse 15. Desire gives birth to sin. Then chapter three, verse 16, where James says selfish ambition and envy, which come from your own worldly wisdom, inevitably lead to disorder and evil. Is that not the definition of war--disorder and evil?

James is saying we allow our own personal desires to take control of our lives, and when that happens, they lead us into a selfish state which seeks only to please ourselves. This fleshly part of our human nature is in constant battle with our spiritual side. Worldly wisdom and Godly wisdom are at odds in our minds, and we foster the conflict on a daily basis. The word for “desires” here in verse one is the Greek word *hedone*. It is from this term we get the word “hedonism.” It means “living for pleasure.” Sounds sinful and evil, doesn’t it? But do you know what? It doesn’t have to be that way. In fact, God wants us to be living for pleasure. His pleasure. If we do, he in turn, will give us an unsurpassed joy that will make our human lives a living pleasure. This is the very idea of John Piper’s book, Desiring God, in which he describes how to become a Christian hedonist.

Instead of taking the good desires God has planted in us (as we describe in our examination of the James 1 verses), our sinful nature attempts to twist

them. We sit with a little angel on one shoulder, and a little red pitchfork- wielding devil on the other, and the two do battle in our mind—with our permission. Some of us might be considered the Don Kings of the inner fights. We promote them all day long, until our hair stands straight up.

What battles are going on in you right now? What selfish desires do you have, which are leading you to come in conflict not only with yourself, but also with those around you? Maybe it is your desire to only do the things you want to do. Maybe it is your desire to have more money. Maybe it is your desire to be more popular than someone else. Maybe it is your desire to have things, possessions. Maybe it is your desire to have the church run the way you want it, or the way you think best. Are those desires causing conflict inside you? Are they causing conflict outside of you? James says, this is always how conflicts start. Our own selfishness. Our own coveting.

II. The Consequence of Coveting

Verse 2 is a little more difficult to understand because of the structure. If you look at the NIV, you will notice the first part of the verse is divided into three statements. But in the RSV and NASB this is two statements. The NIV takes the positive-negative verbs as the key to understanding the thought and renders this:

*You want something but you do not get it.
You kill and covet but you cannot have what you want.
You quarrel and fight.*

The focus is the frustrated desire. But what about “killing”? This seems a little out of place in this rendering. Therefore the NASB has the following:

*You lust and do not have; so you commit murder.
And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight
and quarrel.*

The emphasis here is on the consequences of your frustrated desire, and how it leads you to conflict, even murder if allowed to run its natural course unimpeded. The consequence, therefore, of coveting and desire is conflict. This is James’ point and thus, this punctuation more clearly communicates his message.

James traces back for us the source of every verbal argument or national war. The frustrated desire of a person or people to have more than what they already have, whether it is position or possession. That hedonism leads to war and destruction, whether it is on a small scale or large scale.

Take for example World War II. Why did it start? Basically, because one man, Adolph Hitler, wanted to rule the world. His own selfish desire which became the desire of Germany, threw the entire world into a devastating war which cost millions and millions of lives.

Or take, for example, the argument a certain church had over the color of carpet which was to go in the sanctuary. During a business meeting, the church leadership informed the church, they had consulted an interior decorator who had helped them select a very nice beige colored carpet. Everyone seemed pleased with that selection. Everyone, except one gentlemen who stood up and remarked the church had always had

red carpet, ever since he had attended here as a boy. He didn't want this to change now and was unwilling to accept the decision. He began shouting he would never attend this church again, if they went against his desire to have red carpet. Several others stood up and voiced support, saying they also liked the red carpet, and where did the church leadership have the right to make these decisions without consulting them first. This was important after all. Now, people on both sides of this issue were making their desires known, and the meeting erupted into a verbal argument which lead into other areas, in which selfish concerns were voiced. Because of this meeting, the church eventually split, and many of the families no longer talk to each other at all. Why the conflict? James tells us; selfish desires. The consequences? World wars, church splits, divorces, hurt feelings, fights, worthless arguments, saying things that shouldn't have been said. Not a pretty picture any way you look at it.

How then can we avoid all this? The answer doesn't come easy.

III. The Criticism of Your Complaint

Look at the end of verse two. The reason you don't have things you need or want is because you don't ask God. Remember, James has already told us God is the giver of all good gifts; therefore if we desire something, it is Him we should turn to. But...there is a hitch.

Perhaps, one of James' readers might have interjected at this point and said, "Wait a minute, James, I do pray. I pray every day, and God doesn't answer. I have been praying for a new tunic for a

month now, and I don't have one yet. The guy down the street has a new tunic, and I want one too, so I have been praying for one, but God hasn't given it to me." That might seem like a realistic complaint at first. I will venture to guess you have had a similar complaint of God at some point in your life. Think about it for a minute. Have you ever prayed for something really hard yet never received it? You prayed and prayed, but God just didn't provide it for you. As a result you complained to him and to others, about how God was not answering your prayer. Have you ever done this?

What does James say about your complaint?

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Here James provides the answer as to why we are not receiving from God. Does that sound like anything familiar? Isn't that the same reason James has just cited for the cause of quarrels; hedonism? You want things for your own pleasure. You want that nice pair of sneakers and that is all that matters. You don't care what God's will is; it would just be more comfortable (or less uncomfortable) for you. You pray, "God help me to pay off my debt." But the debt remains. Why did you ask God that? So you would be less uncomfortable? Did you ever stop to think what God's will might be in the situation? Perhaps he wants you to be more careful with your finances. Maybe it will cause you to rely on Him more. Your motives were wrong and selfish. But do we ever consider that? No. We think God is some magic wand we can force into action whenever the situations of life become

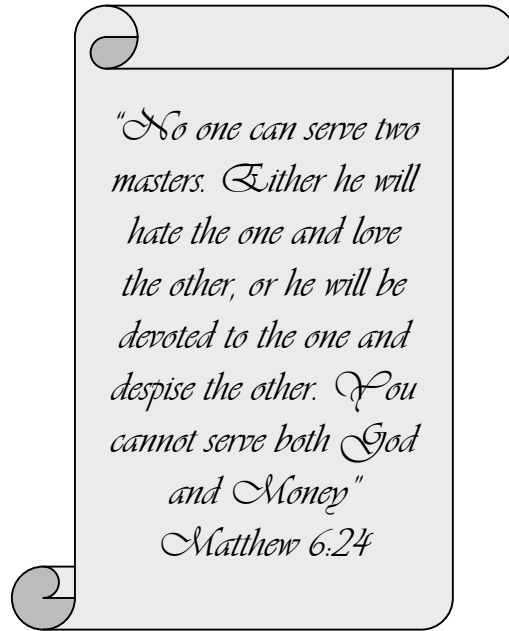
uncomfortable, or whenever we would like more of something.

It doesn't work that way. God is not your Santa Claus or Genie in a bottle. He is the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, and he has a plan. And he has reasons for the events in your life. Haven't we seen that in James? Life isn't always about being comfortable and full. It is about desiring God's will, and being a Christian hedonist. Seeking to please Him, so he can fill your life with joy and make it pleasing to live.

Think about your life. Think about the times, perhaps even as recently as this past week, when you have been involved in some kind of argument. What was at the root of that quarrel? What factors in you might have brought it about? What selfish desires did you foster? This is a tough thing to do, isn't it? To look inside and be honest with whom we are and what we want? It doesn't come very natural to many of us. But herein lies James challenge to us. He wants us to be constantly examining ourselves, so we can rid ourselves of such hedonistic desires, such worldly wisdom, such favoritism, such arrogance, such envy. For if we don't, not only are we in trouble as individuals, but those around us are likely to be affected as well. Left unchecked and unsupervised then, there will be disorder and wars and evil of every kind. So, let's start right now examining our motives and our desires. Carefully look inside and see what has been causing your disagreements. Focus your efforts on purifying your mind with desires for God and His will for your life. Become submissive to Him, and seek to please Him, not yourself. If you do this, watch and see if you fight less with your spouse or parents or children or siblings. Watch and see how your relationships with people and

the church improve. Watch and see God work in your life!

“Take a Chill Pill James”



"The Christian is the most contented man in the world, but he is the least contented with the world."

Charles Spurgeon

James 4:4-6

Did you ever build forts when you were little? I remember when I was probably 9 or 10, the best thing I could think of was building a fort in the woods behind my house. My friends and I invented all sorts of ways to erect forts. We would use my mom's good sheets and tie them to trees. We would sometimes find big pieces of wood and nail them together. We made all kinds of really cool forts where we could just hang out. Part of the fun was pretending the fort was some secret hideaway we had to guard with our lives. We would develop passwords and codes to only permit entrance to those people we wanted. I remember having someone posted at the door who, when he heard someone approaching, would yell out "Friend or foe!" I don't remember where we came up with that, but it must have been some movie we had seen. We thought it was pretty cool at the time. If the person would answer "Friend", we would ask a few other secret questions only "friends" would know. If he said "Foe" (which never really happened), we would work on some plan to ambush the marauding swine. It was such fun. When you are a kid, you know who is a friend and who is a foe—in games and in real life. But when you become older, the lines tend to be not quite as clear.

Think back to the old westerns. The good guy wore white; the bad guys wore black. No problem there, determining who was on whose side. But that was the movies, and the real world doesn't seem to work like that much anymore. Instead of black and whites, there are a lot of grays. Or so we think.

It isn't just true about today though; this line-blurring has been around a long time. Even in James' day. Look at James 4:4-6:

You adulterous people, don't you know friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? ⁶ But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Hey, James! What happened to "My dear brothers?" Aren't you starting off a little hard here? Why don't you just take a chill pill? What is the big problem?

Do you get the idea James is really concerned about something here? He starts off with such a biting tone. What is he so serious about?

I. The Nature of God's Relationship with Us

To understand this passage more fully, we are going to first look at the kind of relationship God has with His people. We find a clue to that in verse 5. This is a very difficult verse to translate, because of the ambiguous nature of the Greek words. The NASB and NIV each approach the verse a bit differently. The NIV speaks about the spirit in us (our soul) always being filled with envy. The implication being man envies the world, and this is what causes God concern. The NASB suggests God is the one who is jealous, because He wants our whole heart and soul which He gave us. Both statements are true, but the NASB translation more accurately fits the context of this section. Some

might be uneasy about this though, because the word “jealousy,”—which we usually think of as being bad—, is ascribed to God. However, we find many references to God’s jealousy in the Old Testament. 1 Kings 14:22 says, “*Judah did evil in the eyes of the LORD. By the sins they committed they stirred up his jealous anger more than their fathers had done.*” And David cried out in Psalm 79:5, “*How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?*” So this is a recognized trait of God. He loves His people so much, and wants them to serve only Him, that He is intensely jealous when we do not. Jealousy for God is not wrong. Why? Because we are His. We belong to Him. He made us. And, He gave us everything we have.

The other difficulty with this verse is James use of the stock phrase “Scripture says”. There is, however, no exact quote which immediately follows as one would normally expect. Two likely solutions to this difficulty are (1) James does not intend to refer to a specific passage, but rather a number of different passages which all speak of God’s jealousy—like the ones we quoted. He knew his audience would be familiar with them. Or (2), verse 5 is just a set up for the quote which comes in verse 6. It is, actually, probably a little of both.

The point James makes is clear. His readers have read about and are very familiar with who God is. He is a God who loves His people, but becomes jealous when they look away from Him or embrace the world He created.

God wants us to worship Him, and worship Him only. He is the only true God. So why do we set our minds on the things of the world? God wants our hearts.

He wants our minds. He wants all of us. He yearns to take care of us and protect us. The Bible describes God's relationship with His people like a marriage. God is the husband who would (and has, through Jesus Christ), give His life for His bride. He takes care of His bride, sees to her needs, and loves her completely and unconditionally. He wants her to be devoted to Him only.

II. The Nature of Our Relationship with God

James sums it up in verse four, especially the first line. James begins, not with his customary address "Brothers", but this time with "You adulterous people". James wants to get his readers' attention. They are in danger of doing something very despicable, but they don't recognize it. They have grayed the lines which used to separate the black and white of loving God. They have been fooling around with the world, and have thereby become, in a sense, adulterers. The Greek here uses the female form of the word *moichalis*, which refers to the female partner in an adulterous relationship. This fits nicely with the imagery we have just painted, regarding God being the groom, and His people—the church—being His bride. But the bride is messing around. Not the husband. Early scholars were initially troubled by this use of only the female form, and thus inserted the male as well, thinking the problem James was addressing was physical adultery between husbands and wives. The King James Version reflects this error in its translation. But James was not talking about an earthly form of adultery.

James is letting his readers know what a serious predicament their spiritual state is in. They have been making friends with the world, thinking this was okay, as long as they continued to also pay lip service to God. But James resoundly and harshly corrects them by saying, (and you can just hear the urgency in his words), ***“Do you not know friendship with the world is hatred toward God.”*** He says, “Look people, there is no gray area here for you to play around in. There is no middle ground.” He says when we choose to be a friend to the world, we make ourselves enemies of God.

We have become so adept at inventing gray terminology in our culture. We have taken God’s black and whites and mixed them together to form some hybrid lie which seems more suitable to our worldly palettes. It helps us displace our guilt and shore up our wounded self-esteem. But instead of making things better for ourselves, we have in fact made God our enemy. God says murder is sin; but we say, “Well, not if you were provoked or had a good reason.” God says incest and homosexuality are sins, but we say, “Well God made me this way, so it can’t be wrong.” God says we must honor our father and mother; but we say “Only if they deserve it.” God says you shall have no other gods before me; but we say, “Well my job and my money aren’t really gods per se, I just need more money to get what I want and be financially stable.” God says favoritism is a sin, but we say, “Hey, the rich can help our church more than the poor, so he must want us to reach out to them more.” God says wives should obey their husbands, but we say, “When he says ‘obey’, he really means mutual love and respect.” God says husbands love your wives, but we say, “Only as long as she does what I say and remains attractive.”

God says the only true wisdom comes from Him and His word, but we say, “Yeah that’s fine, but there are all these other great ideas out there, that really help me get in touch with myself.” And on and on it goes, where it will stop nobody knows.

Actually, James tells us where it is going. We are becoming enemies of God by turning to the world. There is no gray area. We are either God’s friend, like James told us Abraham was, or we are God’s enemy. God spews out of His mouth the fence-riders who want to try to have the best of both worlds (Rev. 3:16). But we can’t have the best of both worlds. James says you are not just a compromising Christian or a poor Christian, what you are is an enemy of God. The question James begs then is, “Is that really who you are?”

So Christian brother, is that who you are? What parts of this world are you making your friend? In what areas of your life are you hanging on to worldly pleasures? In what ways are you committing adultery on God? It isn’t just a minor principle at stake here. It is our very relationship with God. Are we friend or foe?

III. The Nature of God’s Solution

Verse 4 tells us we are committing adultery on God. Verse 5 tells us God desires our complete devotion, because He is a jealous God. Then verse 6 provides for us a little more insight into who God is. Remember, James 2:13 told us God’s mercy triumphs over His justice. Here again, James provides hope for us by telling us God’s grace surpasses His jealous anger. He quotes for us Proverbs 3:34 which states

“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

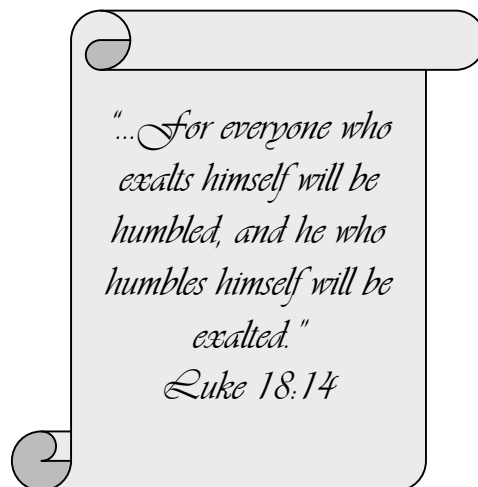
James sets up that quotation by telling us God gives us more grace. The Greek word translated more here is *megas* which mean “great.” When used in this comparative form, it implies “so much more” or “so much greater”. God’s grace is greater than His jealousy, and His grace can overcome His jealousy, as long as we remain humble.

God is looking for a spirit of humility from us. A spirit of repentance. A spirit which recognizes what Christ has done for us, and a spirit which seeks to be truly faithful to our spiritual husband—God. Without that spirit, we are God’s enemies. Plain and simple. With that spirit however, God’s grace overcomes His jealousy and forgives us for our wandering hearts and minds. But we must always remain humble, and must always seek to grow and mature and become more committed to Christ. It will be those actions and that spirit, which will prove our devotion to and faith in God.

These verses are a wake-up call to us as Christians. It is a stern reminder to someone who claims to be a Christian and yet wants to blur the black and white lines. It is not a path James wants His readers to go down. It is not a path He wants us to go down. You are either on God’s side—His friend, or you are against Him and His enemy. So where are you? You either are a Christian or not a Christian. There is no middle ground. If you are not where you think you want to be, take on that spirit of humility and repentance and ask God to forgive your unfaithfulness, and ask him to give you the strength and courage and

wisdom to draw ever closer to Him. Are you friend or foe?

“Doing the Opposite”



"What is the true character of repentance? It is not only an outward amendment of life, but its beginning is the cleansing of the heart."

John Calvin

James 4:7-10

When you were a teenager, did you ever resent your parent's authority? Do you ever remember them telling you not to do something, and you went ahead and did it anyway? Or did they ever tell you **TO** do something, so you intentionally and defiantly **DIDN'T** do it? I think at some point or another, most of us have acted that way. There is something special about those teen years where that attitude manifests itself with a fairly consistent frequency.

If my dad told me to mow the lawn, it would make me not want to do it. I even remember telling him that once. I said, "Dad, if you just leave it up to me, I will get it done. But if you tell me to do it, I won't want to." I think it was some kind of fascination with doing the opposite.

I once visited a church where the music director kept telling me to "Just worship God," and "Just praise him." *Ding, Ding, Ding*. My "opposite meter" started flashing. "I *was* doing those things, but now that you *told* me to do them, I don't want to any more, because now it would feel fake and contrived." You know, I bet each one of us has certain areas of our lives where we just want to do the opposite. Maybe out of spite. Maybe out of stubbornness and pride. Whatever the case, it seems to be part of our nature at some level, doesn't it? And we usually think of it as a bad thing, don't we?

Well, at least until I came across a show where one of the characters decided he would try doing the opposite of what he normally did. He figured, "I have never had any luck doing what I normally do, so what could be wrong with trying the opposite?" It worked.

He began doing the opposite in every situation. Each time he was rewarded with more and more success, and even got his dream job. All by just being the complete opposite of everything he had ever been before. He made the comment at one point in the show, ironically enough, “this is my religion now--doing the opposite.”

James 4:7-10.

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.

Normally, when developing an outline for a text, I take the action verbs or commands and develop points from those ideas. Usually this works out about right. Usually there are 3 or 4 major verbs in a 3 verse passage. However, in this passage things are a little different. There are actually 11 commands—imperatives—in these 4 short verses. An 11 point outline might be a little confusing, so I have grouped the commands into 3 central ideas, book-ended by a fourth.

The first of these central commands is found in the second half of verse 7.

I. Resist the Devil and Come near to God

James is stating his command in both the negative and the positive. First, we are to resist the devil. He has already told us we are tempted by our own evil desires (1:14). We entertain evil thoughts and

temptations which give birth to sin. This is the devil's way of controlling us. He knows what will tempt us and what will lead us astray, so he is sure to provide an ample supply of opportunities for us. But rather than entertaining those temptations and desires, James now instructs we are to resist the devil. The command here is an active imperative. This is a command we must be active in completing. Resisting Satan doesn't come easy for many of us. It takes conscious thought and definite actions. This verb literally means to "take a stand against" or "withstand."

We often try to do this as Christians. We try to take a stand against those things in the world which are overtly evil. James is asking us to be ever vigilant in our stand against Satan, even in the smallest areas of life. Each time Satan approaches us with a temptation, we are to stand against him, stand up to him, resist him. But all too often we don't. Instead we invite him in and put our arm around him, and tell him he is welcome as long as he isn't too bad. More often than not, we probably do the exact opposite of what James commands.

The positive part of this first idea is the command, "Come near to God." This also is an active imperative. This word gives the meaning to approach God, to draw near to Him, to attach or join yourself to Him. But we do the opposite on this one too, don't we? When things get tough sometimes or when we are going through a trial, we blame God and turn our back on Him. But what James tells us we must do is to come closer to Him.

Those are the commands. But what makes them special is that James attaches a promise to each one. This is a great incentive tactic, isn't it? Remember the

10 commandments. God attached a promise to “honor your father and mother”. He really wanted us to understand how good this was for us. I am sure many of us have been on the giving and receiving end of commands like that at home. My dad’s favorite line was, “If you mow the lawn, I will give you a nickel when you are 21.” He used that “promise” all the time. Of course, when I turned 21 and demanded my reward, my dad just laughed at me. God doesn’t do that however. If we obey these two commands, we are promised a positive result.

If we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Imagine that! If we take a stand, Satan will turn and run away from us. Because, Satan knows how powerful God is. When we reflect that power by taking a stand, the bully will back down every time. That doesn’t mean he won’t try to come back though, and so that is why we need the promise attached to the second command.

If we come close to God (I love the imagery here), James says God also comes near to us. What an incredible promise! God, in fact, is always drawing close to us, but we often stiff- arm Him away. We ignore Him, but He is always there. Why wouldn’t someone want to be close to God? The only thing I can think of is, because they haven’t resisted the devil. It really is a two part command then. Turning away from the devil is one thing, but when we have done that, we must turn toward God. Satan will hear God’s footsteps and take off like a shot.

Think about how you can resist the devil. When recently haven’t you? Why? Remember as part of the Christian life, James commands us to do this. It is the only way. How can you take a stand against Satan, and

how can you draw closer to God? I think you know how. But will you do it? The wonderful parallelism of James continues in the next commands found in verse 8. **“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”**

II. Wash Your Hands/Purify Your Hearts

This set of commands gets a little more specific, and informs us of what we need to do to approach God. Notice the similarity of this verse with that of Hebrews 10:22:

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Both authors are telling us what it takes to approach or draw near to God. God can have no part of sin or evil. Therefore we must be made clean before we can come to him. The only way that can happen is through Jesus Christ, His son. Paul declares this truth in Colossians 1:21-22, when he states:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

These commands deal both with an outward cleansing, but also with the inward cleansing. The washing of our hands signifies our outward actions. God is looking for our obedience to Him in our actions. For our actions are the proof—as James has repeated over and over

again—of our faith. We must be willing to bring our actions in line with God's desire for our life. But it doesn't stop just at that. There are people in the world who live lives which might seem blameless. Their outward actions might be "holy" to some degree, but as always, God looks at our hearts, and that is why James also commands we purify our hearts. Of course, that can only be done through the work of Jesus Christ.

Amazingly so, it is often these two actions themselves which bring us closer to God. Our desire and willingness to be cleansed and forgiven, is a great step to becoming closer to God. And as we get closer to God, we become more aware of our need for further cleansing. We desire to root out even more sin in our lives. Each of these commands is *so* interrelated to the others.

Becoming clean is not easy to do, even though in a certain sense it is so simple. Because being forgiven and becoming clean takes true repentance. True repentance implies the readiness to discard everything that provides facilities for further sinning. That includes resisting Satan and discarding our sinful nature, and clothing ourselves with the Holy Spirit.

Notice how James again returns to his harsh names for his readers. Even though most would call themselves Christians, James knows they're "sinners." They are living up to what that word means—missing the mark. Some are not only missing the mark, but may be shooting in the wrong direction. James returns to a word he used in chapter one to describe this type of person--double-minded. We want the best of both worlds. We want to be a friend of God and a friend of the world, and James tell us in doing so we have become unstable and are suffering from a kind

of spiritual split personality. Part of this split personality philosophy holds it doesn't matter what my thought life is like, as long as my actions are respectable. Wrong. James has spent the better part of three chapters telling us isn't so. Thoughts lead to temptations and temptations lead to sin. Therefore, we must not only cleanse our actions, but also our hearts and minds as well.

Verse 9 contains the next five commands in rapid succession. But we will sum them up in one statement.

III. Don't Be Happy about Sin

At first glance, it might appear as if James is really a killjoy. He sure gives the opposite advice the world gives. The world is always telling us about "positive thinking" and "happy thoughts." But then here comes Mr. Negative himself, James, telling us to grieve, mourn, wail, laugh no more, and be gloomy. How about that for five positive uplifting commands? What could he be talking about?

What James is talking about again is the sincerity of our repentance. A half-hearted or light-hearted casual approach to forgiveness doesn't cut it. To be truly sorry for something means to be distressed over it, to feel shame and grief. One would hardly be laughing or be light-hearted when feeling and showing *these* emotions with the sincerity God is looking for.

When I ask God for forgiveness, when it is just He and I, and I open my heart and confess my sins to God and seek His forgiveness, it brings me to tears. I think about how I have failed Him. How I have mocked Him and hurt Him with my sin. I feel

ashamed. I feel so unworthy of His love and forgiveness. It overcomes me every time. It isn't a ritual. It isn't something I do flippantly or light-heartedly.

I often think of David. He was so close to God, and yet he sinned in so many ways. Why did God call such a sinful man, "A man after God's own heart"? Because David truly repented. He was *truly* sorry. He truly sought God's forgiveness. Look at his Psalms. They are filled with his tearful pleas for God's mercy. Psalm 51:1-12 is one such plea. Note the depth of his heartfelt sorrow and longing for God's forgiveness.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.⁶ Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Does that sound like any of your prayers? It should. That is what James is talking about. We cannot rejoice or be happy about our sin. At the same time, he is not saying there are no joyous or happy moments in life.

There most certainly are. But not in sin. James wants us to understand just how serious this is. True joy can only come from God. That is precisely what James means by the first and last lines in this passage. Let's look at this final command.

IV. Humble Yourself

Once again, James beautifully weaves his words to bring them full circle. He concluded the last section by saying *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* Here he concludes by saying *“humble yourselves before the Lord.”* In verse 7, we find what it means to be humble before God. James commands us simply to *“Submit to God”*.

The Greek word *hupotasso*, translated “submit”, means 1) to arrange under, to subordinate 2) to subject, put in subjection 3) to subject one's self, obey 4) to submit to one's control 5) to yield to one's admonition or advice 6) to obey, be subject. Okay, this is where it really gets hard, doesn't it? That is the opposite of everything we want to do. When we are young, and even sometimes when we are older, we say defiantly, “You can't tell me what to do, I am going to do what I want to do.” It is part of our selfish, rebellious human nature. It is also part of Satan's nature, in fact, it is his nature. He has done a good job of rubbing it off on us, wouldn't you say? The Old Testament character Jonah is a prime example of this. God told him to go to Ninevah. Jonah said, “No way, God!” and went in the opposite direction to keep a date with a whale.

The world tells us *we* should be in control, and *we* shouldn't let anyone push *us* around. Religion is for weaklings—people who need a crutch. But here is

James, telling us to do the exact opposite of what seems to be so natural. And that is just it. What comes natural is often from our sinful nature. You see, we think an awful lot like Satan. We are familiar with his thoughts. It is God's thoughts we have a problem with. We want to elevate ourselves. We want to be powerful. We want to control our own destiny. We don't want to have to answer to God or anyone else. Just like Satan.

But we like doing the opposite, so here is something we can try. I would like you to just try it for a day or two and see what happens. Since we are so familiar and so close to Satan's way of thinking, let's try using that to our advantage. Let's think like Satan. It shouldn't be too hard for most of us. When faced with a situation, just ask yourself, "What would Satan want me to do in this situation?" You will know the answer. We think so much like him and are so familiar with his ways. Here is the payoff though. Do the opposite. If you aren't sure what God's will is in situations, it is because you aren't close enough to Him to know His will. But Satan's "will" you do know in most situations. So do the opposite. Then watch what happens. As you defy Satan and take your stand and resist him, he will flee from you. And in doing so, you will put yourself in a place where you will want to draw closer to God. You will be humbled by your own sinful nature, and realize you must rely on God.

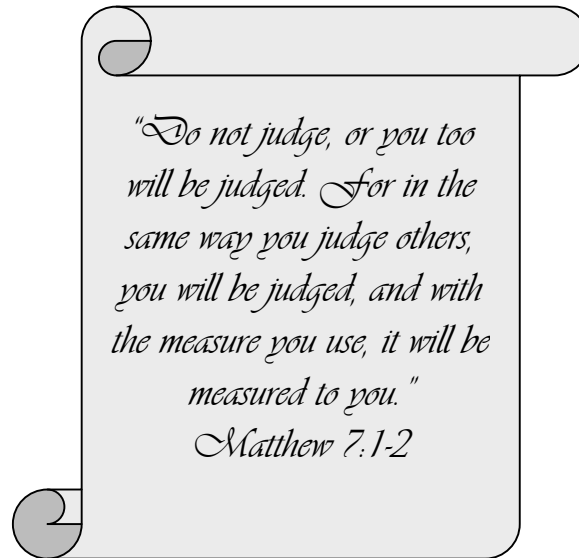
The ultimate promise comes at the end of verse 10. If we truly work on all of these 11 commands, the promise is God will lift us up. When you are down, He will lift you up. When you are broken by sin, He will lift you up. When you are undergoing a trial, He will lift you up. When you are dirt poor or flat broke, He will lift you up. When you are experiencing pain and

loss and sorrow, He will lift you up. When you are depressed and anguished, He will lift you up. God's promises are true. So...

- **Resist the Devil and come near to God**
- **Wash your hands and purify your hearts**
- **Don't be happy about sin**
- **Submit to Him and humble yourself**

He WILL lift you up. What a great promise! What a great challenge! Will you take it and let it transform your life and walk with God? Please do. And start today. Right now.

“Sticks and Stones”



"Christianity is something whose reality is to be tested by the measure of obedience."

Douglas Moo

James 4:11-12

I used to work at a publishing company. Part of my job was working with graphic artists to help them best use their computers to produce artwork for the covers of the magazines we worked on. I was even able to design a few covers myself. There was however one very temperamental artist (I know, I know, that sounds redundant, doesn't it?). She always seemed to have problems with something. Sometimes it was computer related, but most of the time it had to do with what the boss thought of her work. She would spend hours on end picking certain colors. Why it took hours we never really knew. But then the owner would come around to preview the work in progress and say, "Hmmm? I think that should be green and that a little lighter and maybe red there. See what you can do." On one particular occasion after giving such instructions and leaving the room, the artist loudly protested to those of us within earshot, "It is ridiculous to have such idiots who have no artistic ability whatsoever judge my work!" Then she stomped off in her usual mature fashion. She was passing just as much judgment on them as they had on her work, even more so.

That is the kind of circle we often get drawn into. That is the problem James addresses in James 4:11-12.

Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him, speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. ¹² There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?

At first glance, this may appear to be a harsh transition within this chapter. But as we have noted in the past, there always seems to be very relevant connections in James' thoughts. This is true here as well. James concluded his last thought by saying we should humble ourselves before the Lord, and He will lift us up. But what do we normally do? In order to artificially lift ourselves up, we bring everyone else down. We can make ourselves look better if we cut everyone else down. So this transition from verse 10 to verse 11 is a very natural one.

Perhaps you remember the childhood rhyme which goes, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Even at a very young age I knew there was something drastically wrong with this statement. Because words *do* hurt. In fact, they can often hurt much more than physical abuse. When you are young, you would probably rather have a friend sock you in the arm than tell you that you were a creep or a loser or something of that ilk. Words are powerful. James has already told us how evil our tongues can be and now he mentions slander. In these two verses James describes for us three reasons why we shouldn't slander or, as the Greek word implies, speak against one another. That is the command. In his usual fashion, James provides ample supportive evidence to encourage us to obey this command—to show us how important it is we follow it. Let's look at his three reasons for not slandering one another.

I. We Violate the Royal Law

Think back to James 2:8. What does James say the royal law is? Love your neighbor as yourself.

Remember this comes from Leviticus 19:18, and was often sighted by Jesus as the summation of the Old Testament law. So now James makes the obvious correlation; if you are slandering or speaking evil of or speaking against or putting down or judging your brother, you cannot be loving him. You are therefore violating the great and royal command. Plain and simple. There is no way to overlook that fact. Slander against a brother is a sin. And, it is a sin against the royal law.

Loving our brothers means treating them as we would like to be treated. Speaking to them as we would like to be spoken to. But instead of doing that, we often try to inflate ourselves by cutting one another down. You would think that in a church, where we are very aware of the *love-your-neighbor* concept, this wouldn't be a problem. But it is as much of a problem in churches as it is anywhere else. This shouldn't be. In the business world, or perhaps at school, we talk negatively about someone to get ahead or improve our own status among co-workers and peers. Sadly enough, we are often rewarded for that effort. In the church, we gossip and talk behind each other's back, and criticize one another in an attempt to perhaps convince others we are more spiritual. It is something we all fall prey to. It is a practice that damages the people we speak against, damages ourselves, and damages the church as a whole. Yet we continue, not realizing, or just ignoring the fact, that it is a sin—a violation of the royal law.

Jesus cautioned against this in his Sermon on the Mount, with which we have shown James was very familiar. In Matthew 7:1-5, Jesus tells us why this

slandering or judging of one another is not only wrong but also dangerous.

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. ² For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. ³ “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴ How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.

Not only are we judging, but in doing so we are failing to examine our own heart and our own shortcomings. We are forgetting to humble ourselves. Does this mean though we can never correct a brother or point out a sin or rebuke open sin? No, of course not. But we must be careful to first examine ourselves, and then we must approach our brothers in a loving manner face to face. This is a job best suited for the elders of the church, not the gossip chain and rumor mills.

But not only is it a violation of the love-your-neighbor concept, it also points to something much deeper. Look at the second half of verse 11.

II. We Dis the Law (or, We Judge the Law)

I thought I would throw in a little contemporary lingo for you here. To “dis” something means to “disrespect” it. That is what we are doing if we slander one another. You might be saying, “How so?” James says when we openly and blatantly disobey the royal

law, we are saying in effect the law is stupid; the law isn't valid; the law is worthless.

When you are out on the freeway and see a speed limit sign that says, "Road work ahead. Reduce speed to 35mph.", what do you normally do? You are in a hurry to get where you are going. You drive this stretch every day at 55mph and it doesn't look like they have even started the roadwork. So you drive 55mph. The signs are clearly posted. There is no doubt what is expected of you, but yet you still drive 55mph. What are you saying about that law? You are saying it is not valid and that you think it is stupid and that you shouldn't have to obey it, and so you don't; you ignore it. Such is the case James is making with our slandering of one another. God has clearly stated His law—love one another—but we ignore that by our cutting down of each other, which says to God, "This law is dumb, and I am not going to follow it."

Is that what you want to say? James has pointed out to us many times, as Christians we are to be *doers*. We are to *do* His word, not simply listen to it or read it or acknowledge it. We must *do* it. But James says here when you slander one another, you are not being doers, you are being judges. Think back to James 2:4. We know what trouble the tongue can get us in. James has discussed that in each chapter. Yet we persist. We disobey God. We say His laws aren't valid, and we wreak havoc and promote discord with our evil tongue.

Look at the company we are keeping when we "dis" God's laws. Paul puts this practice of slandering one another in context in Romans 1:28-32. In this passage, he uses the noun form of the same word James uses in verse 11 for slander.

Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Those verses fit pretty well with what James is talking about here, don't they? Note the words that surround "slanderers". Gossips, God-haters, arrogant. I don't think we want to be part of that crowd. But when we cut each other down unjustly, that is exactly where we are. We sit in judgment on God's laws by being disobedient.

If this were not enough, James adds one other very important reason for not slandering each other: Verse 12.

III. We Usurp God

First "dis" and now "usurp." It is the perfect word to describe what is going on. Webster defines "usurp" as: *to seize and hold (as office, place, or powers) in possession by force or without right, to exercise authority wrongly.* BINGO! The perfect word for what James is talking about.

James gives us a little refresher course in history here in verse 12. He says in effect, "Look, this town isn't big enough for the two of you. God is the sheriff

in town. He is the law. He is the judge. He is the only one who can lock you up or let you go free. Who do you think you are, stranger, moseying into town and thinking you can just take over?" When we slander one another, we are breaking God's royal law. We are saying the law isn't valid; and therefore we are placing ourselves above God, saying we know better than He. We are better judges than He is. We could make better laws than He has. James reminds us, in no uncertain terms, it is only God, and God alone who makes the laws and is able to judge man. Because only God can see into man's heart. We only see the outward acts and so only have a portion of the picture, so we cannot pass judgment. But God sees everything. He looks into our hearts and evaluates our actions and attitudes. It is His job to judge and to give life. Who are we to think we can play God? Who are we that we should think we can do better than God? Who are we to think we will notice things God is missing? Who are we to pass judgment? It is like an alcoholic telling a smoker he has a terrible habit. We are in no position to judge each other. That is God's job and His job alone. He can do His job just fine without us, and He doesn't appreciate it when we attempt to elevate ourselves to His status. Remember, we are called to humble ourselves.

Again, does this mean we should not seek to expose evil in the world? No, James has just said we are to stand up against Satan. Does it mean we can't confront a brother? No, Scripture commands we do. This however must be part of a total process of drawing near to God and first recognizing our own sin. Instead of doing that though, we point our fingers at everyone else and say, "Look at him; look at his sin. My sin is minuscule compared to that guy's." Merely thinking

that is breaking the royal law, passing judgment on it, and usurping God all at the same time. We don't realize it though. James knows how flippant we become. He knows how negative we are and how great is our propensity to speak against each other. So he again cautions us sternly to be aware of this deep-seated sin in our lives.

That is James' alert to us. How are we going to respond? First, let's look back at our week. Think about the times when you have spoken against a brother. Perhaps it was someone in your family or at work or someone in the church. Maybe you said it to his face, or maybe you whispered it to someone else. Maybe you even wrote it down. Whatever the case, you said something negative, something that hurt him. Have you done this? You know this is something we probably do a dozen times a day, without even thinking about it. But James is commanding us and pleading with us to catch ourselves and stop doing it.

Before approaching someone who has spoken against you, do you examine your motives and humble yourself first?

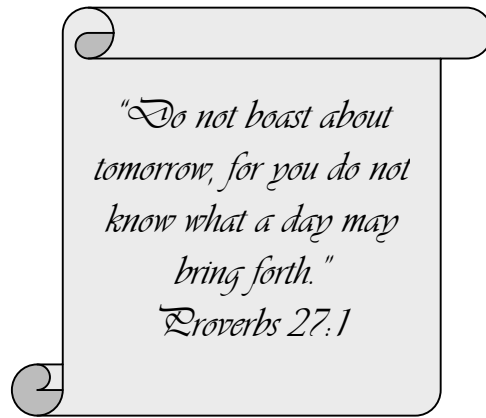
Negative speech is like a cancer. If left unchecked and untreated, it can grow and grow until it finally affects the whole body and eventually kills it. In our church such speech could have the same effect. Many a church has died a painful death because of slander. I trust we won't follow that path. I trust James has alerted us to a problem while there is still time to correct it.

James theme in this letter is examining ourselves. Be ever vigilant to examine yourself first before you speak. Humble yourself. Don't try to lift yourself up by bringing others down. Watch your

speech. Know how serious slander is and what you are saying to God when you do it. Instead of slandering one another, let's take Paul's advice found in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and make it our goal and what we strive for as individuals and as a church family:

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

“The Bottom Line”



“Free will is the delight of sinners, but God's Will is the glory of saints”
Charles Spurgeon

James 4:13-17

His name was Brandon Lee. He was the son of the famous martial arts expert and movie star Bruce Lee. Growing up with that background, Brandon said all he ever wanted to do was become a martial arts expert himself, and be a successful movie actor. His career didn't really go very far early on. He acted in a few American made "B" movies and several foreign martial arts films, but then he had the opportunity to star in a major motion picture called "The Crow". During the making of the movie, Brandon displayed a fairly decent acting ability, and began receiving other offers to make movies. His career looked like it was headed on the fast track upwards. During one interview, Brandon discussed how he was planning on making several other films after he was finished with "The Crow." He discussed how he was excited about the prospects for his career. He even talked about how he admired the invincible nature of the character he was presently portraying. The next day on the set, a fellow actor was mistakenly handed a prop gun with a metal fragment in the barrel. During the scene when the gun was fired at Brandon Lee, he was shot and killed. He never was able to make the movies he had planned to. He never was able to see his career take off, like he was looking forward to. He didn't even get to finish the movie he was working on. He, unlike his character, was not invincible, and it is unlikely he had made any plans that really mattered—plans for his soul.

In Hollywood and in real life, this story is played out time after time, and yet so many of us continue to believe we are in control and have the right

to plan out our future, without any consideration of who is really in charge.

James 4:13-17, tries to teach us a lesson. A lesson that goes right along with the attitude of humility he has already commanded us to display, as well as his teaching on the worthlessness of befriending the world.

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. ¹⁷ Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

James returns to the diatribe. We are going to learn from James the practical side to obeying his previous commands, and how to better live our lives in compliance with God's will.

I. The Statement of Arrogance

In verse 13, James changes the focus of his address a little bit by broadening his audience to those who might make such statements as follows. He uses a colloquial phrase which would be similar to "Come now, you people, listen up here for a second". Perhaps James has heard people arrogantly making their plans all the time without reference to God, and it has caused him some concern. He says these business men say, ***"Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."*** James tells us such statements are made in

arrogance. Now we might say, “Boy, James is really nit-picking here”, but James alertly detects something here akin to practical atheism.

To be an atheist means you say you don’t believe in God or any gods. It is a philosophy which one holds to and articulates. Then, there is practical atheism. And this is much more prevalent.

Picture this. A man is walking down the street, and sees a watch in a vendors display case. He looks to see if the vendor is watching, then he looks both left and right to see if anyone else is watching, and when he determines no one is looking, he grabs the watch, slips it into his pocket and walks off. That is practical atheism. Why? Because the man gave no thought to the fact someone was watching—God. Why didn’t the man look up? He displayed arrogance and a practical atheism—either ignoring or intentionally thinking there was no God who could see his crime.

James tells us is precisely what these business men are doing when they arrogantly make their plans. Not just for tomorrow or next week. They are making plans a year or more in the future, and calculating how much money they will be making and how much they will have made by that time. They travel and go about their business, as if God does not exist. They are failing to realize they are not in control of their own lives, God is.

James is not condemning making plans. Obviously we must plan, and are encouraged to plan ahead. What he is condemning is our arrogance of not consulting God or even thinking about what He might have in mind for us. That kind of planning then is a Statement of Arrogance. What does James say about such statements?

II. The Sentence on Arrogance

The sentence begins at the end of verse 13 when James reminds us we do not even know what tomorrow holds. How is it we arrogantly plan for next year? I like the sense the NIV gives us here. ***“Why, you don’t even know what will happen tomorrow.”*** You could die tonight. You could cross the street tomorrow on your way to work and get hit by a bus. Are you fortune tellers? How do you know what God has in store for you?

The sentence gets even more severe in verse 14. James asks the tough question, “What is your life?” Well, it is something pretty darn important, James. I mean, I am a very important person. I own a business and have many people under me. Or, I am a parent with children who depend on me. Or I am a teacher or pastor who has people who need my wisdom and direction. I am pretty important. But do you really want to know what your life is like? Light a match and blow it out. James says you are a puff of smoke. Literally the word *atmis*, translated by the NIV as “mist”, means “a vapor, which is almost invisible and quickly disappears such as steam or a puff of smoke.” It is the word from which we get the term atmosphere, which is that invisible layer of water vapor that encircles our planet. James’ point is our lives are but a puff of smoke or steam in the grand scheme of things. Something, over which we have little or no control. Now isn’t that a boost of confidence to our self-esteem? Do you get the impression self-esteem building is not the central theme of the book of James? In fact, don’t you get the idea it is not the central theme of any of God’s word? Self-esteem building is something man

has invented to elevate himself, and inflate his own self worth. But in God's eyes this only brings about trouble with a capital "T" which rhymes with "D" which stands for Devil.

The arrogance of practical atheism is so prevalent, and James is attempting to counteract that by infusing a little reality check here for us. Just when we begin to become all proud of ourselves and our earthly accomplishments, that is the time when we need to be reminded of just how insignificant the world is, not to mention our lives in it. Does that mean God doesn't care? No. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:29-31 God does care.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

And also in the Sermon on The Mount in Matthew 6:26, Jesus teaches,

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?

So God does care very intimately about His people. But James wants us to be mindful God is a big God, and we are a puny vapor in comparison to Him, and acknowledging that fact alone should help us be the humble people we ought to be. This sentence on arrogance ought to help us better understand point three.

III. The Solution for Arrogance

In verse 15 James dives right into the practical suggestions on how to avoid this kind of arrogance and practical atheism. He gives us the alternative statements we should make and think. Rather than saying, “I am going to do this and that and make this much money here and there”, we should instead say, “If God wills it for my life and provides the opportunity, I will go here and there...”

Paul is a good example of this attitude. He says in Acts 18:21, “***I will return to you, if God wills,***” and to the Corinthians he writes, “***I will come to you soon, if God wills.***” Paul understood all his plans were under God’s ultimate control. His free-will, decision making ability was under God’s command. Do his prayers indicate doubt then? Is this a contradiction of what James 1:6 says, “***When we ask we must believe and not doubt?***” No. The crucial aspect of our faith is if we believe God can do something. The crucial part of our obedience is placing ourselves in subjection to His will to do or not to do something. That is the submission James 4:7 was talking about.

He repeats that theme here. We should be more concerned with whether something is God’s will or not, than our own planning and boasting about our future desires. James declares all such boasting (which means an empty presumption which trusts in the stability of earthly things), and bragging and arrogance are evil. It is not just a simple matter of a little human bragging, it is actually an affront to God and therefore evil. It is part of Satan’s tricks to make us think our human lives and wills are more important than they are. Remember

the tactic Satan used on Adam and Eve in the garden?
Note what Satan said to Eve.

*You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.
⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will
be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and
evil.”*

You will be like God. The lie of Satan. Tempting humans with that idea of significance. Posing as a spiritual guide to greater self-esteem. Oh, and did Adam and Eve listen! And oh, has not the entire world been listening since then to that lie? Look at the world around you. One visit to Sedona’s mystic rocks will convince you Satan’s “oldie but a goodie” tactic of inflating human significance is alive and well in the New Age culture of today.

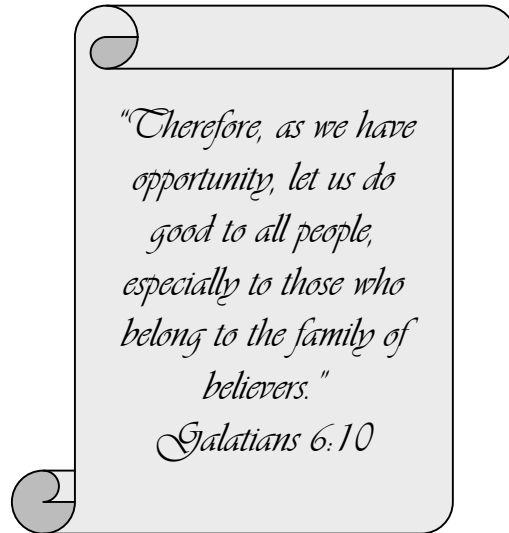
But such boasting and such self-elevation is evil. Make no doubt about it. Does God want poor little helpless humans who are always beating themselves up? No, but certainly better than humans walking around and boasting about their divine qualities.

This is not to say we must verbally preface all we say and plan with a “magic” phrase, “If God wills.” Rather, the solution for arrogance comes in the form of simple humility before God. An understanding that God is sovereign and in control. And understanding that it is God who gives us all we have, —including our salvation and eternal life. An understanding that the entire universe is held together by God’s word alone. An understanding that God could destroy us and the universe we live in, in a blink of an eye. James is calling us to a right perspective. When we place things in their proper perspective, James is confident we will

be much more likely to be living as Christians should be, —in submission to God’s will.

Do you have things in proper perspective? Are you seeking more self-significance or more humility before God? Does God’s will factor into your planning, or are you living the life of practical atheism? Is your bottom line money, or is your bottom line the salvation of your soul? Like Brandon Lee, we don’t know what tomorrow may hold. That means today is the day to submit to God. Today is the day to be forgiven. Today is the day to pray. Today is the day to worship Him. Today is the day to share Christ with that friend. Today is the day to humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, for He will lift you up. My friends, today is the day.

“It’s Not Just Semantics”



“I do not know of any subject that so much depresses me, humbles me, and lays me in the dust as the thought of my omissions. It is not what I have done about which I think so much, as of what I have NOT done.”

Charles Spurgeon

James 4:17

Imagine the following situation. It is the week after Christmas, and you have decided it is time to go to Sheplers Western Wear to purchase something with the gift certificate you received from your cousin in Iowa. You don't know exactly why he thought you would want a gift certificate to Sheplers Western Wear, but so be it. While in Sheplers, you marvel at just how many red-necks can fit into one large department store at any given time (just kidding). You also wonder if you have ever smelled this much leather at once. Finally you have your purchase narrowed down to two items: the Official Willy Nelson leather bandanna, or the genuine synthetic rattlesnake boots with the Harley Davidson logo stamped on the heel. It's a tough choice, but you decide for the boots. After using your certificate, you head out to the parking lot to get in your car. As you are unlocking your door, you look down and notice there is a wallet on the ground next to the car beside you. You pick it up and notice right away it is considerably heavier than your wallet. It appears to be loaded with crisp, green money. You also notice there is no identification in the wallet, and there is no one around to see you pick it up. Free Money! This could help pay off my sizable Christmas shopping debt. I could use it to fix my car, and still have enough left over to give a good tithe to the church. What a fortuitous situation!

But then it hits you. Wait a minute, this isn't your wallet, and it is not your money. It belongs to someone else. But there is no ID. It will be such a bother to take it in somewhere. Your choices as you see them are; (1) take the wallet and the money. Finders-keepers, losers- weepers. Besides you could

give some of it to the church. Or (2) you could just leave the wallet there, not get involved and be on your way. Or (3) you could take the wallet into the store to see if anyone has asked about it and if not, take it to the police station and write up a “found” article for the classifieds. Hmmm? What will it be? “I wouldn’t really be stealing money if I took it. I mean after all, I am just picking up trash someone left on the ground. If I left it, it wouldn’t be my problem and therefore, no moral dilemma for me.”

James 4:17. We are going to look at this one verse as we close out chapter 4, and we will use it as a kind of review of the book so far.

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

One simple verse. One incredibly overlooked idea. It seems a bit out of place here at the end of chapter 4, but we will examine what James intends by placing it here, and we will look at the major principle of this verse, and how it relates to the whole of the Bible. One simple verse, but one profound concept. But is it just a matter of semantics?

What is our present day impression of sin? It doesn’t exist anymore, right? Unfortunately that is an all too accurate description of the world’s view of sin. How about Christians and the church? How do we usually view sin? We generally think of sin in terms of the 10 Commandments. Those are the “sins” that most easily come to mind. The list is familiar. A lot of “shall not” and “shall not commit” statements. God seems to be telling us the things He *doesn't* want us to do. From that we formulate the idea, obedience to God comes

from *not* breaking His law by *committing* certain acts God finds offensive. That is generally the way we think, isn't it? We say to ourselves, "Ooops, I just told a lie and therefore, have "committed" a sin." Or we may say to ourselves in pride, "You know, I haven't committed a sin in several weeks now." The word "commit" seems to come into play quite a bit, doesn't it? Let's look at what God says about committing sins, and then we will turn our attention to what James has to say about sin.

I. Sins of Commission

Not long after God gave the law to His people, they begin to break it, and commit the sins He told them not to. Just 12 chapters after the law was given in Exodus, the people of Israel place a golden calf before God. Exodus 32:31-35 says:

So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written." ³³ The LORD replied to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin." ³⁵ And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

God was teaching His people the lesson if they committed sins, they would be punished. Punishment always follows sin, and the only way to escape eternal judgment would be God's mercy, ultimately given through Jesus Christ. Paul also speaks about the

punishment for men who commit sins in Romans 1 and 2.

To commit a sin means to deliberately carry out an action which breaks one of God's laws. It is an active evil. If I were to steal your wallet, I would be deliberately acting and doing something which was evil and a sin, —namely stealing. Every time we lie or steal or covet or use God's name in vain, we are committing a sin. We are generally aware of the times we do this, and often avoid committing many of these sins. When we do commit them, we are also aware we need to ask for forgiveness for them, and so we do. Think back to the last time you asked God for forgiveness. What sins did you mention? I will bet they were sins of commission. Sins you had committed. But James points out there is another kind of sin.

II. Sins of Omission

Look back at James 4:17. James makes a statement challenging the way we think about sin. He tells us “not doing what we know we should do”, is also a sin. In other words, God not only holds us responsible for breaking His laws and rules like the 10 Commandments, but He also expects us to make the most of every single opportunity to do good! Sounds like a lot, doesn't it? It is, and that is just the point. Hasn't James been trying to teach us about humility? Facing the fact we can never rest comfortably and say, “I am not sinning so I can just sit back and not sin and I'll be doing what God wants.” God isn't looking for monks who live in a cave and deny themselves every opportunity of life. He does not want us to separate ourselves from our community and culture, so we don't

ever come in contact with a situation which might prove tempting, thus being able to avoid all sins of commission.

James is summarizing for us here the other kind of sin, which is the sin of omission, or overlooking those good things we know we should do but don't.

It is not a new theme or idea invented by James either. It is depicted throughout the Bible, especially in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus warns us doing evil is not the only kind of sin, not doing good is as well. In Luke 10:30-37, in this story of the good Samaritan, Jesus clearly identifies the priest and the Levite in the story, although they did no evil, as sinful men who missed an opportunity to do good. And in Matthew 25:14 and following, the servant who had been given one talent fails to do good with it and is punished as a worthless or fake-in-name-only-servant, a sinner. Then Matthew 25:34. Notice here how some of those condemned, are condemned not because of the evil they did, but because of the good they failed to do.

We don't like to admit what James says is true, because we almost never stop to think of all the times, even in the past week, we have sinned by failing to do something good. If you are at all like me, there is one large pile of sin in your life you have failed to ask forgiveness for—you have failed to recognize. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, and God expects us to be diligent at doing good.

Isn't that why James places this summation here? Doesn't he want to remind us, by way of review, that all the things he has taught us throughout these first 4 chapters must now be done? He has made us aware of what we as Christians should be doing, and now he is

making it doubly hard on us by telling us if we fail to do these things now, it is a sin.

We must be kind to those in low position every time we get a chance. We must listen and be slow to anger. We must speak words of encouragement and blessing. We must draw closer to God and resist the devil. And we must make our plans in accordance with God's will. To not do so is sin.

Think back to the opening example. Stealing someone's wallet would be a sin. We would all agree to that. Picking up and keeping a lost one would be too. As James points out, so would be just leaving the wallet there for someone else to deal with. It would be a missed opportunity to do good. God brings us these opportunities and places them squarely in our path for a reason. He wants us to be about doing good. Remember James has said our faith is dead and useless unless it shows itself through these good deeds.

So then, what good deeds have you failed to do? What recent opportunities have you let slide by? I can think of plenty, and I am ashamed. But James challenges me, and encourages me to try harder too recognize these opportunities as chances to be a witness for God. What a great privilege. It is not a burden to do good or to serve. It is a great honor to do good for our Lord.

How about your church? Do you see areas where your church could use your good work? Are there areas of ministry you have simply said to yourself, "Oh, someone else will come by and do it. Someone else will do a better job. God isn't really trying to get me involved. God doesn't really want me doing this." Are you telling yourself that? Your church needs you, and I know God has placed burdens in your heart for

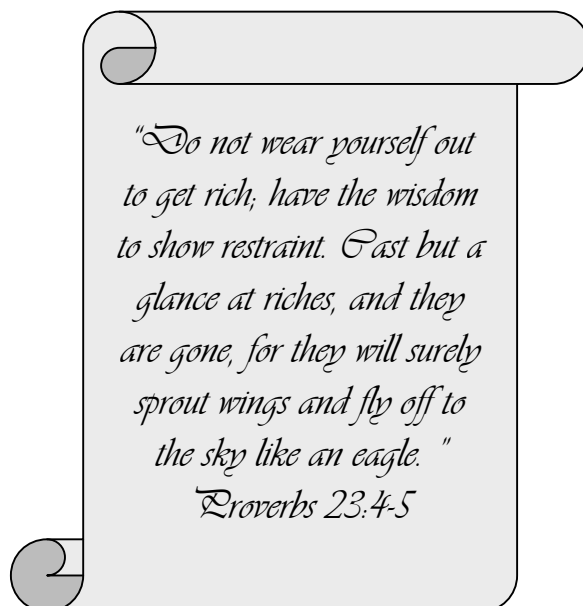
service. How do I know? Because that is how God works in His people.

Please take it upon yourself to do the good you know you should and step up to James' challenge. Commit yourself to God's team of good workers, not Satan's band of bystanders and spectators. Take those opportunities God gives you in your church and in the world, and do the good you know you should. Will you do that? If not, what are you saying to James? What are you saying to God?

Measuring Up

James 5:1-20

“Reversal of Fortune”



“One of the dangers of having a lot of money is that you may be quite satisfied with the kinds of happiness money can give and so fail to realize your need for God.”

C. S. Lewis

James 5:1-6

Young William—or “Trey”, as his family called him,—was a bit of an under-achiever. He enjoyed being the class clown in school and being a bit of a rebellious goof-off. It was to a point where eventually, Trey’s parents felt it necessary to send him off to a private school which would provide a more strict and structured environment for him. They sent him to a psychiatrist for a while to help him better understand how to focus his concentration so he would work harder. When Trey was 13, he met a friend who had similar interests. As these two “nerdy” guys grew older, they went off to college but quit after a couple of years to form their own company. They had some interesting ideas and a little money—about \$15,000. But Trey made the right business decisions with his first simple product, and received the attention of a business giant who paid him to develop something they needed. He did so successfully, and then continued to build on his successes. About 10 years later, at the age of 35, he became the youngest person in America ever to reach billionaire status. ~~revise~~Now in his 50’s 40’s, he is the richest private individual in the entire world, with a net worth approaching 30 billion dollars.

For young Trey (or William H. Gates III or Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft) it didn’t start off so successfully. And yet, he was certainly able to achieve a reversal of fortune. Just the kind of story we are interested in quite often, isn’t it? We like to read books and watch movies about people who in some way or another, either through hard work or just dumb luck, have their lives turned around. Countless rags to riches books and movies have been big sellers. We are fascinated by the super rich. We are even entertained

by shows about the “rich and famous.” We are intrigued by people who have reversals of fortune. That is even the title of one movie which depicts once-convicted-of-attempting-to-kill-his-wife, Claus Von Bulow, and his acquittal of all charges. Those kinds of things fascinate us, don’t they? People like Bill Gates, Lee Iococa and Walt Disney often attract our eye of interest, fascination, and sometimes envy.

James 5:1-6.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ²Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Okay, now wait a minute. We need to get something clear right away here with this passage. Is James talking about me? Is James telling me I am “rich”? Remember who his audience is. James is writing to Jewish Christians living out in the world. It is unlikely many of them are rich, although there certainly would be a few. He is not writing this section about his readers, he is writing this section to encourage his readers, and also to caution them. How he does this will unfold as we take a closer look at this passage.

We are going to examine just who James has in mind here, when he says “rich” by looking at four

things he believes characterizes these people. Generally, in James' day, the rich were wealthy land-owners. As is the case now, property was often the key to success. James prefaces his look at these "rich" by declaring up front their condemnation, but we are going to save that until the end. First let's look at who they are. Verse 3 gives us our first clue as to who the rich are.

I. They Hoard Their Wealth

Do you ever remember when you were a kid playing a game like marbles or where you were able to keep what you won? Were you the kind of kid who would win as much as you could and then just selfishly keep it all to yourself until none of your friends had any marbles left to play with? I am sure you weren't. Neither was I. But that is a little of what these people James describes are like. They have more money than they can possibly spend, but yet they still don't give any of it away or help anyone with it.

It was interesting, as I was researching Bill Gates for this chapter, I came across an interview with him where he said he planned to give most of his money away when he is 50 years old or so. He said he realizes it is just a ridiculous amount of money, and it isn't good to hold onto things like that, because "It's easy to get spoiled by things that alienate you from what's important". That actually sounds pretty profound. It seems a bit ridiculous right now for the richest man in the world, who owns a company criticized for monopolizing the computer industry to say that, but it certainly will be interesting to see what happens.

There are in our day, just as there was in James', a group of people who love to hoard their wealth and just count it. It is funny how Hollywood-type people are always telling us to give our hard earned money to one of their pet causes, and yet at the same time, as a group, they give a far smaller percentage of their money to charity than the average person. Sounds like people hoarding their money to me.

II. They Defraud Their Workers

When I was in seminary, I worked at Red Lobster for a time. I was always amazed at how great it was for the waiters to be able to end the day with a big wad of cash. I, on the other hand, as a host, was paid once a month. That was hard, because I did all this work, and then had to wait a whole month to see any money for the work. It was depressing sometimes.

The principle in James' day was to always pay the worker his wages at the end of the day. That was the common practice. If the worker didn't receive his wage at the end of the day, he would get depressed and demoralized, and would not work as hard the next day. So it was generally the accepted practice to do business this way.

Apparently, however, some of these rich land owners decided to hold back employee wages for whatever reason. Perhaps they would tell the workers they would be paid at the end of the week, and then at the end of the week, they would stiff them and hire new workers. It is like an employer, who owes you Christmas pay, firing you before Christmas, so he doesn't have to pay your bonus. Then he just hires someone new the next week at a lower wage. Pretty

lousy, huh? But it happens, and that is the kind of people James is talking about here. In fact, he says the unpaid wages themselves cry out about the injustice. Paying someone for his work is a very solid biblical principle. James tells us the cries of the workers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty, literally, “the Lord of Sabaoth” or the “Lord of Armies”. Our God, the Almighty of the universe, who has power over all, cares about the lowly workers in the field and whether or not they have received their wages. What a wonderful God!

The next accusation James makes about these rich people is...

III. They Live Self-indulgent Lifestyles

The other night as I was flipping channels and ran across the early 80’s movie “Arthur”. It was about just such a person. A spoiled brat millionaire named Arthur. He was the picture of self-indulgence, sipping Champaign in a huge hot tub while a butler waited upon his every desire. The words James uses here carry quite a biting description. He uses the Greek terms, *truphao*, meaning “to live delicately, live luxuriously, be given to soft and luxurious life,” and *spatalao*, meaning “to indulge oneself excessively in satisfying one’s own appetites and desires.” Not attributes normally associated with good people.

Interestingly enough, Bill Gates’ interviewer seemed quite penchant to discover Bill’s personal indulgences. He related several rumored stories about Bill ordering a pizza for \$242 one night, and about having people fired on his whims. Most of these were denied, but it seemed those are some of the things the

readers find the most interesting. Isn't that what TV shows like "Entertainment Tonight," "Inside Edition," "Showbiz" et al are all about? It is the same with magazines like "People" and "Us" (which should actually be called "Them"), and for that matter, all the tabloids. They chronicle our fascination with the self-indulgent habits of the rich and famous.

On the contrary, James has been pounding the drum consistently for us to be humble and think more of others. In fact, that is the consistent message throughout the New Testament. Yet there are people who live such lifestyles with custom made spoons and chairs and cars and beds, and who knows what all. Their money is spent on those earthly pleasures which have only one purpose—self-gratification. And, as James says, all they have really done is fattened themselves for the day of slaughter. Just like cows are allowed to eat away and get fat and be happy, unknowingly preparing themselves for slaughter. That is what these people are doing in essence.

IV. They Persecute the Righteous

In verse 6, James tells us not only do these rich people hoard their wealth and defraud their workers and live self-indulgent lifestyles, but they have also gone so far as to persecute and kill righteous people,—perhaps on a whim. Does a certain King who died around 4 BC come to mind? King Herod had innocent children put to death in Bethlehem, just because of his own whimsical paranoia.

The text implies the rich have perhaps used their influence and power and money to prosecute and judge and kill innocent, righteous people. Perhaps even

people with the community of believers James is writing to. They use their money to pay lawyers to trump up charges, then bribe judges to convict them and sentence them to death just to get them out of their way. Those living in darkness sure don't want the light exposing their sins.

Film critic Michael Medved feels this is what Hollywood and other liberal establishments are attempting to do to religion. They know religion is a stumbling block to their industry. They know righteous people will attempt to block the sale of disgusting and pornographic movies and books which make big money for them. So they find ways, some subtle, some not, to persecute and otherwise condemn us. The ACLU, backed by many rich Hollywood-types, files law suits (many completely baseless) against Christians who are simply exercising their rights.

In James' day, and the era that would follow, Christians were routinely charged and convicted with all manner of crimes. Many were put to death often in violent ways. The world, (especially the rich and famous and powerful), did not like what Christianity stood for, and saw it as a threat. Such is still the case today.

Keep in mind, not all rich people are evil. James is blasting the *unrighteous* rich. What will become of these "unrighteous rich"? Look back to verses 1 and 2. James lays out their condemnation in amazingly harsh and straightforward terms. He says, in effect, "Listen up, you evil rich jerks. You might as well start crying right now, because you are in store for one massive reversal of fortune." This riches to rags story involves the rotting of their food (a very important commodity in James' time), moths eating their clothes,

and their precious metals and jewelry rusting and corroding away, perhaps even while they are still wearing it. Not a pretty sight. James is proclaiming the truth that these earthly things are all just temporary, and the rich, who have placed their faith in them, will find out in very harsh fashion just how temporary they are. They will all be gone in an instant when Christ returns to judge the hearts—not the bank accounts—of men.

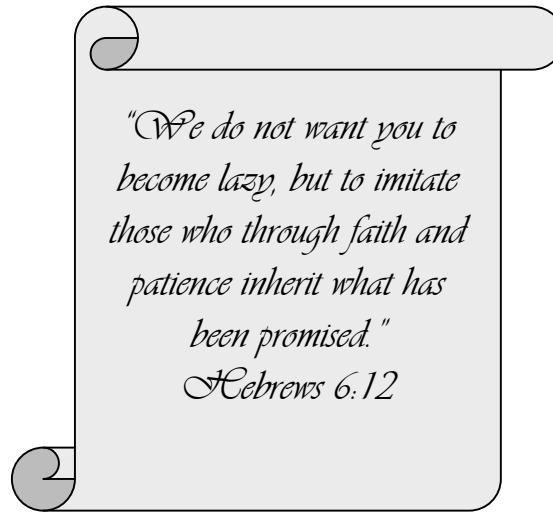
Does James want to stir up class warfare? Is he against all forms of wealth and does he think all money is evil? Why is he telling all of this to his generally poor readers?

James doesn't want his readers,—who are living out in the world and coming in contact with the wealth it has to offer,—to begin to envy wealth and those who possess it. It will corrupt and stain most who strive after it. As Bill Gates himself said, "It's easy to get spoiled by things that alienate you from what's important." Who knows what that is for Bill, but for Christians, whether living in the first century or the twenty-first century, that something important is our relationship with God and our relationships with our neighbors. Money doesn't bring you closer to God or your family, but it sure can do the opposite. So why are we so fascinated with people who have it? Why do we envy them?

James says we can no longer do this. Look at what will happen to the rich some day. This then is also an encouragement to James' readers, for they will see the unrighteous rich receive their due. Do you want that outcome for yourself? I don't think so. So don't admire them or look up to them or want to be like them. Should I just try to be poor my whole life then and not work? No, but make your goals in life what they ought

to be. They ought to be about how to get closer to God, how to serve Him better, how to work harder for His church, how to be a better parent or husband or wife or neighbor or friend. Those should be your goals, and the focus of your mind and your effort. Are they? The money will be gone one day. But your relationship with God is eternal. The work you do for him, and how you use the gifts he has given you, builds eternal rewards, rewards that will never spoil or fade. Set your mind and heart and time and energy on seeking after those rewards. Will you do that?

“Mail Order Customers”



"Patience is a pearl which is found only in the deep seas of affliction, and only grace can find it there, bring it to the surface, and adorn the neck of faith with it."

Charles Spurgeon

James 5:7-11

Do you know one of the greatest inventions ever is Federal Express? A while ago, I bought a DVD online at Amazon.com. When finishing the order it asked how I wanted it shipped. I said “Next Day.” Whamo! It was there the next day. I love that! Fast delivery like that has made ordering online a fun and exciting experience, and I have ordered quite a few things by such means.

But it hasn’t always been that way, has it. Do you remember when you were a kid, and you would see on the back of a “Capt’ Crunch” box some really cool toy you could send away for? All you had to do was collect 4 box tops and send \$3.95. Of course the small print you didn’t usually read stated you had to allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. I remember once being excited about ordering some plastic Frisbee-like toy. I gathered up my box tops and scraped together my hard earned money, put it all in an envelope. and ran off to the mailbox (you know, those big metal things at the end of your driveway with a red flag on them—not your e-mail box on your computer). I was so excited. I couldn’t wait to get my toy.

Of course weeks went by, and I began to get more and more frustrated my toy hadn’t arrived yet. My mom tried to explain to me the principle of the 6 to 8 week waiting period, but I didn’t have the patience to listen to that speech. I wasn’t buying an assault rifle here. It was just a toy Frisbee. Finally my impatience grew too out of control, and I decided it was never coming, and I just gave up waiting for it. I went on with life as if it was never coming. In fact, I think I even traded another toy to someone for a Frisbee around week 6.

Then one day, I was playing in the front yard, and the mailman drove up. I, (being the polite and thoughtful child that I was), retrieved the mail and brought it in for my mom. After a few moments, she came back outside with a big smile on her face and told me my long awaited Frisbee had arrived. Frisbee? What Frisbee? I don't remember anything about a Frisbee. Oh, yeah, that thing I sent away for a lifetime ago. I had forgotten all about it, and it had just finally shown up one day out of the blue (of course within the 6-8 week period as I was told). I had kind of gone on to other things, and it wasn't even as great as I remember thinking it would be. From that time on, (until just recently when I realized I could order computer stuff and get it the next day), I pretty much gave up on the whole mail-order experience. I never had the patience to wait.

Let's now turn our attention towards James 5:7-11. Does he tell us how to be good mail-order customers?

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸ You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹ Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹ As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

James returns to addressing his main audience here by using his favorite address, “brothers.” He has just finished blasting the unrighteous, especially those who are wealthy *and* unrighteous, but he has at the same time encouraged his own readers God is just, and will make the score right in the end. In the mean time though, James recognizes his readers may become impatient at Christ’s delay in returning, and they also may become impatient with the injustices they are presently undergoing at the hands of these unrighteous rich.

Therefore James lays out for us in these 5 verses an exhortation or encouragement to be patient. It comes in the form of three commands with a couple examples and cautions added to help clarify. Let’s take a look at these 3 commands more closely.

I. Be Patient

James sets the theme for the whole section with this command he gives right up front. He begins verse 7 with this command and the word *oun* which means “therefore” or “so then.” As we have said before, when we look at a section that begins with “therefore”, we need to look back to what the author has just said, because this new information relates to that. Unrighteous rich were oppressing and persecuting Christians, but their condemnation is coming...therefore, James says, “be patient.” The word he uses is the Greek word *makrothumeo*, (literally *long sacrifice*) which means “to be of a long spirit, not to lose heart, to persevere patiently and bravely in enduring misfortunes and troubles, to be patient in bearing the offenses and injuries of others”. This

appears to be perfect advice for what his audience is going through, doesn't it? The word however, is an imperative; it is a command. In other words, James knows how important it is Christians persevere patiently, so he commands his readers to do so. But notice how there is a bit of a double meaning here. Not only does James want his readers to persevere under these trials and injustices, but he also wants them to be patient "until the Lord's coming".

The word used here for "coming" is *parousia*, which actually is the Greek word for "presence" or "advent". We celebrate Christ's first coming as a baby, and now we look forward to His second advent, an event which became known simply as "The Parousia". It was spoken about as such in Matthew 24:3, and Paul refers to it in the same way in 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

James is exhorting us as Christians to wait patiently until Christ returns. It has been a long wait, but just like my Frisbee surely came, so too will Christ return. James wants us to be waiting patiently for Him. A difficult task sometimes, especially in the light of the trials and persecution we often undergo, but nonetheless this command is volitionally possible—we can do it!

He follows up that command with an illustration with which his readers would be very familiar. Some of us who have lived in the Midwest might be familiar with as well. I grew up in Iowa, and there are two big events in Iowa: planting and harvest. Crucial to both of those days is the weather. The farmer does all he can to insure a good crop, but he depends on the rain to make it grow. Some years the rains would come, and the fields would be green almost over night. But there was a year when it didn't rain. The farmers waited and waited. They had done what they could and now all

they could do was wait and hope for rain. It didn't come, and most farmers simply had to plow their fields under and wait for next year. It takes great patience to be a farmer, even in James' day. They are a model to us of what it means to wait patiently. Unlike the rains that sometimes fail to show, Christ will certainly return, so we are to be patient until that time.

The second command comes more quickly, and on the heels of the first one.

II. Stand Firm

Verse 8 begins by repeating the first command and then adding to it the command to “stand firm” (which fits nicely as the flip-side of the man tossed about by the wind in chapter one). The phrase used here literally means “to strengthen or firm up or establish your heart”. In a similar fashion, Paul encourages the church in Thessalonica to strengthen their hearts. In both instances it is a charge to us as patiently waiting Christians to firmly establish our hearts in God's Word and truth, and strengthen ourselves against the sin and temptation and trials of the world. James has been trying to teach us about these things all along the way, and now is reaffirming what he has said by encouraging us the “Lord's coming is near”.

Again, this is a reference to the parousia—Christ's second coming. You may be thinking since this letter was written in the first century, and here we are 2000 years later and Christ has still not returned, that James was either lying or wrong about Christ's return. That sounds like a valid question.

First of all, if James is lying, then we have wasted our time studying this book. And if there is a lie in the Bible, we may just as well throw it out as well. And if we throw out the Bible, we have no basis for our faith. No, I don't think James was lying. In fact, Jesus and Paul and Peter all speak about Christ's return as very close and imminent (Matthew 24:34, Romans 13:12, 1 Peter 4:7). But no one, not even Jesus himself, knows the exact date of His return (Mat. 24:36), and James makes no prediction about a date.

The second argument might be James was just wrong, and Christ's return was not that close. But this rests on an understanding that James feels Christ *must* return soon. But is that what he is saying? That is not what James' or Paul's or Peter's or the early church's belief was. They simply believed Christ could return at any time. The parousia *could be* soon, and so we should be prepared and should be living as if it will be soon. Christ's return draws nearer every day. It is getting closer all the time. James wanted his readers to be encouraged by that news, and wait patiently with strong hearts.

The third command comes in verse 9.

III. Don't Grumble

Grumble. There is a word his Jewish readers would be familiar with. It pretty much defined what God's people did when He was leading them to the Promised Land. They grumbled when the food didn't come fast enough, when it wasn't what they wanted, when they were thirsty, when it was taking too long to get there, and on and on.

Do you remember when you were a kid and you would be in the car with your parents on a trip, and it seemed like it was taking forever to get where you were going? You would keep bugging your parents by asking them, “When are we going to get there?” or “Are we there yet; are we there yet?” Children in the back seat of a car are not the most patient beings in the world. Of course, this constant drone from the back seat would put Dad and Mom on edge. Dad would tell Mom if *she* didn’t get *her* kids to shut up, he was going to have to stop the car. “Don’t make me stop the car! If I have to stop the car and come back there, you are in big trouble! Just sit still and be quiet!” Those, of course, are the two commands no child ever wants to hear. This whole situation can erupt into a war of words and wills. Dad against Mom. Mom against kids. Kids against kids. Dad against kids. The impatience sets off major grumbling and major problems. James hopes we can avoid those conditions as we wait for Christ’s return.

Like the dad in the situation though, James inserts a stern warning about what this grumbling might lead to. He says if God has to stop the car and come back there, we are in big trouble. James tells us God the Judge is standing at the door. He may open the door any minute and walk in, and He better not find us grumbling against Him or one another.

When I was in 5th grade, I had a teacher named Ms. Lefevre. Yes Ms. She was a 50 year old divorcee who smoked heavily. She would occasionally leave our classroom to go to the teacher’s lounge for some important business—read: to spark one up. She would leave a stern warning that when she returned, she had better find us working diligently on our projects. Of course, being 5th graders, we could not concentrate for

more than 5 minutes on our projects, and soon the room was filled with spitballs and kids arguing and chasing each other around the room and wrestling on the floor. We tried our best to figure out how long it would take Ms. Lefevre to smoke a couple of Winstons and then return, but invariably we would miscalculate, and her return would be sooner than we had expected, and she would walk in at the most inopportune times. She would find sheer pandemonium. It was like Wrestlemania. Her jaw would tighten and her eyes burn in anger at our wanton disobedience and impatience. She was the Judge, and her rule often came down hard on those who had been the most egregious offenders. That is pretty much the picture James offers here. He says, “Look, Christ may return at any time, so He better find you waiting patiently, standing firm, and not grumbling against each other, or else you will be judged.”

There are the commands and the warning. It is certainly good advice. Not only for the first century Christian, but for us as well. James wants us to be ready and make the most of the time we have. Are you doing that? Are you making the most of the time you have, or are you grumbling and starting quarrels?

In verses 10-11, James concludes this section by giving us other examples of such patience and showing us the benefits of waiting patiently for our Lord’s return. James is good at always giving us a reason to obey.

He reminds us of the Old Testament prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord, and were persecuted, but persevered. James reminds them people who persevere are considered blessed,—literally “happy” or “fortunate”. This is still true today. We

often admire and look up to people who have persevered through all sorts of trials and persecution. We think of POW's and Holocaust survivors, and those paralyzed in accidents, who walk again. These people are special because of their perseverance and their patience in adversity.

Specifically, James mentions Job as an example of someone who persevered (NIV) or showed endurance (NASB). The word is *hupomone* and means "patient enduring". But you might say, "Wait. Didn't Job complain and, in fact, grumble as he waited?" This is true, so what aspect of Job's personality is James pointing to? Even though Job did complain,—and God certainly put him in his place for doing so,—he was steadfast in his faith. Job did not let his trials and the persecution of Satan break him off his faith and trust in God. His faith endured because he stood firm in his faith. That is the aspect James is referring to.

James concludes by encouraging us with the positive outcome of such patient endurance. For Job, it was the 10-fold replacement of all his possessions. For us, it will be eternal life in heaven and our heavenly rewards for being good and faithful servants. As was the case with Job, God showed himself (in the end—when it really matters) to be a compassionate and merciful God. God's compassion and mercy will rest on those who persevere, those who prove their faith, in trial and prosperity, those who truly are the Christians James commands us to be throughout this letter.

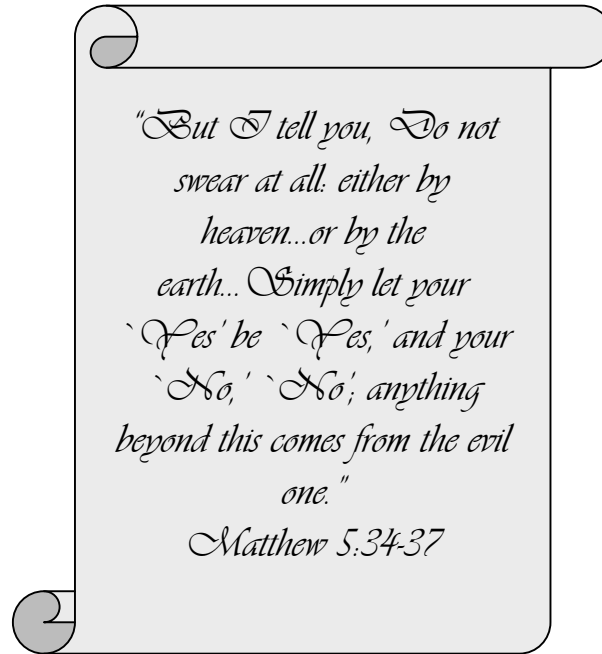
These five verses are really the summary of all James has taught us, "Be busy with doing the good things I have taught you, and in so doing you will not only be proving your faith, but you will also be

standing firm, too focused on Christ to grumble, and waiting patiently and faithfully for His return.”

So are you patient, or have you given up on Christ’s return? Are you grounding yourself firmly in God’s Word and making the most of your time, or are you grumbling with others and grumbling at God, because things aren’t the way you think they should be? Take this challenge from James and...

- Be Patient
- Stand Firm, and
- Don’t Grumble.

“Truth or Consequences”



"I hate that man...who says one thing but hides another in his heart."
Achilles, from Homer's Iliad

James 5:12

Permit me to demonstrate. Some time ago I met with one of the elders from my church for lunch at a local restaurant. We just sat there and talked and started laughing about some Swedish joke we had heard. So I told another Swedish joke (being Swedish of course allows me to do this). Apparently it was overheard by the man at the next table, because he stood up and come over to our table. He said he was from Sweden visiting for the Super Bowl and found it highly offensive what we had been discussing. We apologized and said it was just in fun and all, but he was a little irate. We were really embarrassed, and tried to calm the guy down a bit, but he decided to go to the manager and complain and ask us to leave the restaurant. It became really awkward. We decided to just pay and leave before it became any worse. We couldn't believe it. I mean here we are, two Christians, getting kicked out of a restaurant. As I left for my car, this guy came up to me again and pushed me. I thought, "Oh this is really uncool now." He kept kind of getting in my face and backing me up. I tried to talk to him, but he wouldn't listen. He couldn't understand I was just joking and meant no harm. Then, just as I was going to get into my car again, he pulled a razor out of his pocket. I was terrified. I thought for sure this guy was going to cut me up. But he couldn't find a place to plug it in, so I got away.

Gotcha! Let's look at James 5:12.

Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no, or you will be condemned.

As just demonstrated, being known for telling the truth is vitally important to our Christian witness and to our ability to have others listen to us and take stock in what we say. It is like that old TV game show's title, "Truth or Consequences." I took a risk at the beginning of this chapter. I told you a story that wasn't true. As you were reading however, you probably believed me. How did you feel when you found out it wasn't true? How do you feel now? You probably feel like you won't know when to trust me anymore. You don't know if you can believe anything else I say. That demonstrates for us the power and importance of James message in this passage. Christians need to be people of honest integrity. It is vital to every aspect of our witness. And, now you know why. Let's examine this passage step by step.

I. The Original Intention of Oaths

We need to examine some Old Testament scripture here to find out where the taking of oaths came from, and what it was about.

In Genesis we find God makes His oath with Abraham. God's seal and covenant. He confirms this to Isaac in Genesis 26:3 when he says,

"Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham."

As God is revealing his law to the Israelites in the desert, he declares in Exodus 22:10-11,

If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his neighbor for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no one is looking, ¹¹ the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an oath before the LORD that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other person's property. The owner is to accept this, and no restitution is required.

The oath was to seal the truth and validity of someone's statement. It was a promise that it was wholly true. But God cautions His people in Leviticus 5:4:

Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil—in any matter one might carelessly swear about—even though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be guilty.

So even early on, the practice of haphazardly taking an oath was heavily frowned upon, and considered sinful. The ground rules for taking oaths are summarized nicely by God in Numbers 30:2:

When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.

An oath then was a binding agreement for a person to do all he said he would do.

But like so many other of God's laws, man tends to corrupt the intention of them. What began to happen was people felt if they swore an oath to something other than God, then it made that oath less binding and could be weaseled out of if the person changed his mind, reasoning, "After all, I did not swear before God." Obviously the practice became rather

prevalent, so God laid down the law in Deuteronomy 6:13, “***Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.***”

II. Why We Shouldn't Take Oaths

Oath taking was a pretty common practice in the world, and it had become a bit of a joke, one that did not delight God or many of the more conservative sects of the day. The Essenes refrained entirely from oaths, thinking it was worse than perjury. This entire oath taking led to three basic evil consequences.

1. It made untruthfulness seem unimportant except when an oath was used.

2. It led to the distinction between oaths that were binding and those which were used for simply misleading and cheating people.

3. It was responsible for an irreverent use of God's name, or sacred words merely as a means of ensuring the honesty of commercial transactions.

The overall outcome of this was the very use of an oath acknowledged the prevalence of falsehood in ordinary speech. Even as young kids we are aware of this, and make our young friends (who we know often lie to us and others) swear to us all sorts of oaths which promise we get to stick needles in their eyes if they are lying. Swearing to something generally means you're not too trustworthy most of the time, and this can be the death of a Christian witness. That is one reason why James writes this exhortation.

It is so important to everything else we do and say, James even begins the verse with the lofty and important sounding phrase, “Above all.” Now, surely James doesn't mean this is THE most important thing

he has told us in this letter. It isn't more important than living our faith and not slandering or favoring others, or murder or adultery or unrighteousness, is it? In some regards certainly not, but in others if you are not known for telling the truth, what difference does it make how you act and what you say. This is probably, in James' mind, the most obvious of all those things he has warned us about. And it is, no doubt, the most pervasive. It is so easy. Double-speak is par for the course in our day as well. I was vividly reminded of this fact listening to a recent political address.

You see, if I have to take an oath for you to get to believe me, than what does that say about my daily speech? Is that what you want to have people think of your daily speech?

Is James forbidding all oaths, even those taken in a courtroom, or those written down in legal documents? No, I don't think so. As we saw in the Old Testament, there certainly wasn't anything inherently wrong with making an oath. God did. But the practice became so corrupted that it took on other meanings.

It reminds me of something that happened in high school. When I was a senior, I was dating a girl around prom time, and she began hinting about wanting to go. I thought it might be fun, but at my school, (which unfortunately was like so many others), the *Prom* was nothing more than high school kids renting motel rooms and getting drunk. Prom itself wasn't bad, but it had become something known for being bad, and I didn't want to have anything to do with that. So I told my girlfriend I wasn't going to go. That was the end of that relationship.

Such was the case with the taking of oaths. But James, as well as Jesus, (in the parallel teaching in the

Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5), aren't specifically mentioning required or compulsory oaths, like on the witness stand, but rather the voluntary oaths people flippantly made to just try to be believable.

The other problem James sees was non-Christians, (who were nonetheless a part of the fellowship and most likely Christians in name only), were also taking oaths in God's name. This is much like what James says in the following passage we will look at in the next chapter. He says the prayer of a righteous man is powerful. The prayer of a non-Christian is worthless. In chapter one James says the same thing, telling us a non-believer's prayer won't do anything, because he is double-minded. So, a non-Christian in the fellowship who hears Christians taking oaths might be under the inclination to do the same thing, but it only brings judgment, or as some translations say, condemnation. This non-Christian who takes an oath in God's name is only storing up judgment for himself. There might even be a bit of a play on words intended here with the Greek words being *hupo krisin*, meaning "judgment" or "coming under condemnation" for the non-Christian. But as some texts have, when those words are joined (*hupokrisin*), it becomes the word for hypocrisy, which would certainly be the relevant outcome for the Christian who takes oaths in vain.

III. How to Be a Christian of Integrity

So then, what is the challenge from James? Once again he is calling us to a standard. Charging us to be true Christians by being people of our word. How do we do that? The formula is so simple. Instead of taking and swearing elaborate oaths, all we need to do

is simply let our “Yes” be yes and our “No” be no. Say what we mean, and mean what we say. That is really all there is to it. Why is it so hard for us then? The world we live in doesn’t live by that standard. We live in a world that rewards people who can manipulate the truth. In the political realm they are often known as “spin doctors” (not to be confused with the music group of the same name). We applaud people who avoid the truth by crafting their sentences to avoid making any kind of factual statement. No need to give examples here, you can just turn to your TV set and see plenty of them. On second thought, don’t turn to your TV’s.

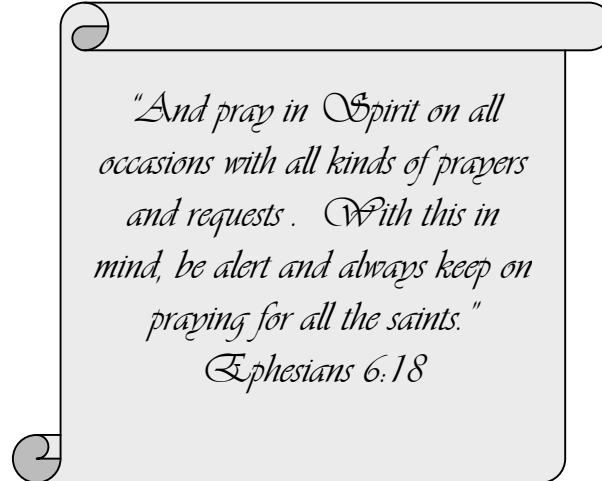
We are to live by a standard which is pure. When you say “Yes”, mean yes. If you agree to do something—do it. When you say “No”, mean no. When asked by your parents if you went anywhere after your dentist appointment, don’t say “No”, unless you really didn’t go some place. Also, when you say “No”, don’t buckle to temptation or peer pressure. If you say you don’t drink—don’t. Live by what you say.

Jesus’ greatest criticism of the religious leaders of his day was their hypocrisy—not meaning what they said. One of the greatest complaints people have about Christians today is likewise our hypocrisy. We preach and talk one game on Sunday, and then we live by some other standard during the week. That is not what *true* Christians will be doing, says James.

What happens to our witness when we don’t live by the “Yes=Yes and No=No” standard? It ruins our credibility. It makes people not believe what we say, even if we speak the truth about God. Think back to how you felt after the introduction to this chapter. Is that what other people think of you? How do you measure up to James’ standard? Make the conscious

effort to evaluate your speech. Imagine you have a little lie-detector or half-truth detector connected to your finger which will alert your brain every time you begin to comprise this standard. Make it your goal to truly mean what you say, and have other people respect your words. May others say of you, “Your word is as good as gold.”

“Pray Nothing, We’re Going”



"If Christians spent as much time praying as they do grumbling, they would soon have nothing to grumble about."

Anonymous

James 5:13-18

There was a pastor who lived out in the middle of Nowhere, -Nebraska, whose name was Steve. He had a very small church. So small they could not afford to pay him a full-time salary, so he had to work at a local grocery store several days a week, just to provide for his family. Most of the people in the church were older, and many were retired. There was very little possibility for growth. The church hadn't really changed in 50 years or so.

Steve began sending out résumés with the hope he might have the opportunity to go to a different church. After some time a growing church of about 350 people in southern California called him, and was very interested. The young pastor was very excited. He shared this excitement with Harold, a fellow minister in town. Steve was asked to candidate at the new church, and so took his family and went out to visit California. The church was beautiful and vibrant and young and exciting, and they had a wonderful stay. When Steve returned to Nebraska, his pastor friend Harold asked him about the trip. Steve was so excited. He told Harold about all the wonderful possibilities, and the young people and the building and the salary. The salary would be 3 times what he was making now.

Harold, who was a godly older minister, said to Steve, "Well, you know Steve, this sounds like it might be a great opportunity for you and your family, but I am a bit concerned."

"Concerned about what?" Steve inquired.

"Well, have you prayed about it?"

Steve paused for a second, and then said with great conviction, "Pray nothing, we're going! I am not taking any chances God doesn't want me to go there."

Sometimes, that is our attitude toward prayer, and our attitude toward God. But we have come to a passage in which James wants to teach us some practical lessons about prayer, and about how we who fellowship together should view each other, God and prayer. Let's look at James 5:13-18.

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

We are going to look at four imperatives in this text. These commands have been so important throughout the book of James. It is his charge or challenge to us. It is also a way for us to measure our obedience to Christ, and therefore the reality of our Christianity. To look at these commands we are going to ask four questions, and use James' commands as the response.

I. Is Any One of You in Trouble?

This first question comes straight from the text itself. We have also said as we have gone through this letter of James, how often he likes to ask his own

questions, perhaps in response to what his readers might ask, or perhaps in response to what he knows them to be feeling and thinking. It is an effective style (diatribe) and it continues here as James begins his concluding remarks.

Is any one of you in trouble? You might say, “What kind of trouble?” The word here in Greek is *kakopatheo* which means “to suffer or endure evils or hardships or to be in distress.” That is something his readers can relate to. Are you in the midst of a hardship? Perhaps it is with your job. Maybe it is your family situation. Maybe it is your relationships with those around you. You feel like you are just being pounded from all directions. Your boss is unfair. Your teacher is mean. Your financial situation is bad. You feel persecuted and misunderstood, and are just living in a state of distress. Perhaps because of a direct attack from Satan, but whatever the case, you feel troubled. Does that describe you in any way?

If it does, let’s look at James’ answer which comes in the way of a command. Look at verse 13 again. The NIV weakens the emphasis and seems to depersonalize the command a little bit here. The command is actually just one word in Greek, *proseuchomai*—Pray (to God)! It is a middle imperative. Imperative, we know, is a command. Middle voice, as we have mentioned before, means it is reflective in nature. In other words, it is something we do for ourselves. This is an exhortation to pray when we are troubled. Notice how James doesn’t tell us to weep and wail here, because these are troubles that are probably external in nature. He doesn’t want us sitting in ashes. He doesn’t want us to beat our chests and spread our misery. He commands us to do only one

thing, and that is pray. Our first response in the midst of trials and distress should be to sit down and pray to God. Do you do that?

II. Is Anyone Happy?

The second half of verse 13 is the flip side of the coin. Are you happy? Maybe you have just gotten a new job. Maybe you have been ill, and are feeling better. Maybe you just received a raise at work, or an “A” on an important test. Maybe you finally figured out how to open that bottle of Tylenol with the child proof cap. You’re happy. Maybe you are happy you live in sunny Arizona and not Minnesota where it is below zero six months of the year. Maybe you are happy, because you know what good friends you have around you, who love you unconditionally. Maybe your little baby has just spoken her first words or taken her first few steps. Whatever the case, you are happy. Is that you? What is James command to you?

In the Greek, the command is simple again: *psallo*. This is an odd command, because literally it means “to pluck or twitch or twang, as in playing a stringed instrument”. The word *psallo* sounds much like “psalm”, (which it is related to in meaning), and actually means “the singing of praise or songs, generally done to the plucking of a harp or lyre or some other stringed instrument”. When we refer to the psalmist, we are really talking about the guitar player who leads the singing. So I guess you could say the playing of the guitar is much more biblical than the playing of an organ. Just kidding. Why this command?

God doesn’t only want to hear from us when we are moaning about our problems. In that way He is a

lot like us. We don't always like to hear only other people's problems; we also like to hear what makes them happy. God desires when we are happy, we express that joy and good cheer through singing. Singing praises to God is a way of thanking Him for the happiness He has provided us. What a wonderful thing it is to sing praises to God, and it is what James exhorts us to do. It is our prayer of thanks.

III. Is Any One Sick?

The word for "sick" simply means "weak or feeble", but does not, as some have suggested, necessarily imply a kind of spiritual illness or spiritual weakness. At this point, James is merely asking if anyone is sick. Now if in the 21st century in the age of medicine we have a number of people getting sick each week, what is your bet there were quite a few people within the church sick at any given point in the year 65 AD? Illness was a major problem and a major concern for the first century human being.

What is the sick person commanded to do? This command is involved. He is commanded to call the elders of the church. The Greek imperative means "to summon to oneself". The elders are to then come and pray over the sick person, and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. "Okay", you may be saying, "That sounds all fine and good. I can see the elders going to pray for someone and all, but what is this anointing with oil stuff?"

For the Catholic, it is called *extreme unction*, a sacrament delivered by a priest for a very sick or dying person. But there isn't any indication James or any other New Testament author, (or even Jesus himself),

considered this practice to be significant. As is generally the case with James, his commands are extremely practical. Oil in his day was the wonder chemical. It was used in many different ways, including as an ointment to help heal external wounds, such as leprosy and other skin diseases. We don't know much about its effectiveness, but it was about the only "medicine" available. The Greek word used here for "anoint" is *aleipho* which is a less significant term than *chrío* which is the root of the word *Christos* or "Christ", meaning "anointed one."

James most likely had in mind, what might be considered in the modern world as the equivalent of visiting to pray for someone, and bringing some chicken soup or cough medicine. The concern about the physical reality of the illness helps lift the spirit of the sick person. It also lets us know, James (and therefore God) doesn't rule out medicine as a part of the cure. In other words, God often uses medicine and doctors to heal us—but it is still God's power which has done so.

The point James makes in verse 15 supports this. He says "*the prayer offered in faith will make a sick person well, the Lord will raise him up.*" Our faithful prayers are answered by God who will lift up, (through whatever means He chooses), the sick person and make him well. The key word again here is "faith." Praying and not believing is worthless. As James has already commanded us in chapter 1, we must pray and *believe*. We must also remember it is God who heals and it is His will that controls the how and the where and the when.

The second half of verse 15 and verse 16 are interesting as well. James says if he, (the sick person),

has sinned, he will be forgiven. What does he mean by that? In ancient days it was believed sickness and illness and disease were caused by sin. This is evident in John 9:1-3:

*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”
³ “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.*

Jesus makes the point sicknesses and diseases are not always the result of sin. But they can be. Anything you do to harm your body is a sin, and these things often lead to sickness and disease. Smoking leads to cancer and lung disease. Alcoholism to liver disease and heart problems. Homosexuality to AIDS. Promiscuity to venereal diseases. So it may be the case, not necessarily though, the sick person’s illness is sin related, and the elders should also be praying with the person for forgiveness of the sin.

IV. Is Any One Part of God’s Church?

The general principle James then makes from these verses is found in verse 16. As a body of believers, we should be confessing our sins to each other, and praying for each other in all situations. It is one of the primary functions of the church—to pray together and look out for one another, and to be concerned with the needs of each other, and most importantly, to be concerned about the faith of one another. It is the fourth command in this passage, and it is compound. Confess and pray. And it surely should

apply to all of us. Those of us who are troubled, those who are happy, and those who are sick.

Prayer is so important to the life of a church. All of these commands relate to prayer. It is a crucial part of our fellowship and of our worship and of our personal lives, and we can't look at it flippantly (like the pastor in the opening illustration), and we can't ignore its importance in our lives. Why?

Well, as always, James provides a reason and an example. The reason we should pray and confess is because we will be healed. The Greek word here, *iaomai*, is the perfect word to summarize James' thought. If you are sick, *iomai* means you will be healed. If you are a Christian who has sinned, you will be forgiven and made new and whole again. If you are a non-Christian (or Christian in name only), it can mean through your confession and prayer, you can be truly forgiven and truly saved. What a wonderful reward for all of us! This is what the church is to be about. If you are part of God's church, it is what you are commanded to be about. How are you involved then? How are you seeing to the needs of others? How are you being used to win others to Christ?

The second part of the reason is, "***The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.***" God listens to His people and answers their prayers, if they are offered with the kind of faith James has mentioned.

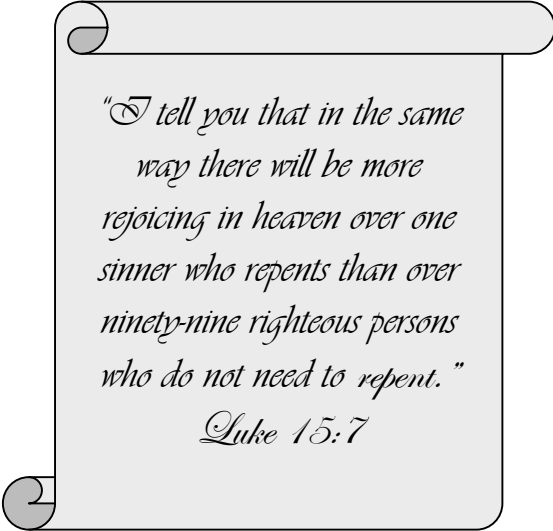
As an example, James gives us Elijah who, under the direction of God, prayed for no rain, and it didn't rain. Then he prayed for rain, and the rains came. Prayers offered in faith by God's children can do wonderful things! Without them we are like the dry land of the desert, parched and dry, thirsting for God.

So why aren't you praying? You say, "I am." Keep on praying. In your trouble, pray. In your happiness offer praises and prayers of thanks. In your illness, have others pray with you. Whatever your circumstances, be in prayer for those around you, whether they be your brothers and sisters in Christ, or family and friends who need the Lord. Pray.

Paul's exhortation from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 serves as a nice summary of James' exhortations:

Be joyful always; ¹⁷ pray continually; ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

“One for the Road”



“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

Luke 15:7

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy; to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen”

James' brother, Jude

James 5:19-20

As we have examined this letter, we have discovered it to be a great challenge for the Christian to measure his obedience to God. And a warning to the Christian in name only, who falls short and doesn't measure up—someone with a dead faith. James doesn't want his readers to be deceived about our salvation. He wants us to be aware of the reality of our profession.

As in any church, there are obviously some people in the churches James is writing to, who won't measure up. People who have made only professions of faith, but there has never been any evidence to prove their faith—thus a faith that is dead. They have never entered into a true relationship with Christ. James knows this is the case because of Jesus' teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 7:20-23, Jesus taught his disciples:

Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

These are people, who will have named the name of Christ or maybe sat in church for many years, but they never really knew Christ, and so they were not part of His family, part of His flock; they were not true, genuine Christians. This book has been a call to us to examine and see if our faith is real and genuine or merely a superficial, artificial and dead faith—which is

no faith at all. We recall what James taught in chapter 1:22, “*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*”

As we look back, we see the letter has been a series of tests by which we can measure the status of our faith.

Chapter 1

- How do you respond to trials?
- How do you respond to temptations?
- How do you respond to the word of God?
- How do you respond to the standard of holiness?

Chapter 2

- How do you respond to different kinds of people? The poor and the rich.
- How do you respond to righteous works?

Chapter 3

- What kind of speech comes out of your mouth?
- What kind of wisdom is characteristic of your life?

Chapter 4

- What is your response to the world, do you love it, are you a friend of it?
- What is your attitude towards self, arrogant and prideful--or humble?
- What is your attitude towards God's will?

Chapter 5

- What is your attitude towards riches?
- How do respond to suffering? Are you patient?

- What is your attitude towards speaking the truth? Is your “Yes” your Yes and “No” No?
- Are you dedicated to prayer—for yourself and others?

All of these are tests by which we measure our faith to see whether it is real or not. It calls on those who name the name of Christ (call themselves Christians) to be sure they are genuine.

So now at the end of the letter, James calls upon the Christians—those who pass the test, those whose faith is real—to evangelize those who have failed the test—those who are unsaved within the church. Evangelism in the church! What an amazing idea! But this is how we will display our love for each other by caring about those around us. Let’s conclude our examination of the book by looking at James 5:19-20.

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back,²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

James begins this last section with his customary address, “*brothers.*” This is his general term for his readers—Jews, Christians, and the church body as a whole. He has just moved from how the elders are to treat the sick and how those in the church are to treat one another, to how the believers are to treat those who have failed the test. He began addressing the whole church by saying, “If any one of you is in trouble, he should pray.” Then, “If anyone is happy, let him sing songs of praise.” Then, “If any one of you is sick, he should call the elders to pray.” And now finally in verse

19, “If any one of you should wander from the truth.” Not all were in each of these categories. The people within the church were to respond differently, depending on the situation and here the situation is that there may be some within the church who have failed the test, and are not true Christians. So James has set before those with real faith a challenge.

We are challenged to take on the ministry of going after people who give evidence of not being genuinely saved. Do you know anyone like that? Do you know people who used to go to church, but don't any more? Perhaps they have turned their backs on church or God. Do you know any people who maybe used to talk about honoring Christ, but are now living in overt sin? Do you know people who used to claim to be a part of the church but now deny the faith and have joined a cult of some kind or another, or just totally reject religion? These are the people who have failed the test. They may have named the name of Christ at some point, but they never really knew Him. Their Christianity was in name only—it never was a reality. Do you know someone in your family who, at some point or another, has made a claim of faith, but there has never been any proof of it in his life? James is calling on us, those who truly believe, to proclaim the Gospel to, and pray for, lost people in the church. With that in mind, let's take a closer look at this passage and our challenge, as we examine the following four ideas: The indications, the danger, the agent, and the objective.

I. The Indications

How does James tell us we are to identify these people? How do we know who to go after? Look at verse 19 again. In the Greek, the phrase “wanders (or strays) from the truth”, is a phrase of possibility, which is to say it is possible that within the walls of the church there will be those who aren’t saved, and will stray from what they have heard.

The Greek word here is *planao*, which means “to be lead astray, to wander or be deceived.” It is from the same root which meant *planet*, which was something that wandered through the sky. It is used a number of times in the New Testament, but it usually refers to the condition of an unsaved person.

In Matthew 22:29 Jesus says, “***You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.***” That word translated “error” is the same word—*planao*—, and is the condition of an unsaved person. Paul says in Titus 3:3-7,

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The word “deceived” is this same word again. It refers to a person’s pre-salvation sinful state. Here in James, these are people who have never been saved. They are

unbelievers, even though they may have claimed to believe, but now have wandered away from what they have heard.

What have they heard? The Truth. James 1:18 tells us Word of Truth is the Gospel message itself, in other words, the way of salvation. This is someone, therefore, who has rejected, despite their claims to the contrary, the message of salvation.

We may be surprised by these people, but God isn't. In John's gospel, we see the disciples were oblivious to Judas' false faith, but Jesus wasn't. In John 6:70-71 Jesus called him a devil. We might be shocked or mistaken by some who were once in the church and claimed faith. They may have gone along for the ride, been a part of the action, yet their heart was never true. Jesus said in John 8:31 ***"If you continue in the truth you are my real disciple,"*** and so consequently if you don't, you never were. You see, a true Christian will never reject the truth. A true Christian will never turn his back on the Gospel and the God who saves. Oh, we may fall into sin or disobedience for a time, or have momentary doubts, but we will not wander away from or leave the saving truth.

Jesus makes the unequivocal promise in John 5:24,

I tell you the truth; whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Jesus gives a similar absolute, with no qualifications, promise in John 6:51, ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever."*** And in John 10:27-28, he proclaims

again clearly, ***“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”*** When God makes a promise, He makes good on it. ALWAYS. His promises aren't dependent on us.

So we see these are people who made a claim, never had real faith, and now are wandering or away from the truth. Do you know anybody who has made some claim, but then later denied the truth?

Look at the other indications. Verse 20 speaks of someone in the “error of his way”. This is from the same root word as “wander”. “His way” equals “His path of life or his lifestyle”. Errant living maybe the clearest evidence of “dead” faith. A lifestyle, which is a rejection of the principles of the word of God. Self-styled Christianity—their own way, not God's way. A life that is a contradiction of God's word. This is evidence of a spurious, pseudo or false faith.

Look again at verse 20. This person is called a “sinner”. This is very important. This term is only used in the Bible of unregenerate, unsaved, never been saved, lost, unbelieving people. In fact, it refers to someone who is a hardened unbeliever, or one who is devoted to sin—a slave to sin. It is the character of an unbeliever. The word is used in some 64 scriptures in the Bible. I won't quote them all, but look how the word is used by many different authors:

Genesis 13:13 - “Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and **sinner**s against the LORD.”

Psalms 1:5 - “Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor **sinner**s in the assembly of the righteous.”

Psalms 51:13 - "Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways, And **sinner**s will be converted to Thee."

Proverbs 11:31 - "If the righteous will be rewarded in the earth, How much more the wicked and the **sinner!**"

Isaiah 13:9 - "Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its **sinner**s from it."

Matthew 9:13 - "But go and learn what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but **sinner**s."

Luke 5:32 - "I have not come to call the righteous but **sinner**s to repentance."

Luke 15:7 - "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one **sinner** who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet **sinner**s, Christ died for us."

1 Timothy 1:15 - "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinner**s."

"Sinners" is ALWAYS used to refer to those outside the kingdom. To compare, 1 John 3:8-10 says:

The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."

And so John says essentially the same thing, the "sinner" cannot be a Christian. While a Christian may

sin, he will never be characterized as a “sinner.” These are the people James is talking about, ones who have perhaps been a part of the church, but their nature never really was changed, they never were truly of God. John says again in 1 John 2:19:

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

These are people who went out. They were deceiving themselves and perhaps others as well, but they are lost. That leads us to the second point.

II. The Danger

These people give evidence of being lost, and there- in lies the challenge—we see the danger these people are in. This alone should compel us who pass the test to be active. What is at stake? Their soul! (v. 20). The immortal soul. And it is in danger. It is facing death—eternal death. Romans 6:23 says “*the wages of sin ?deat..*” Revelation 21:8 says,

But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

The first death is physical. The second is spiritual and is eternal. These people face death, and they face it with, as James says, a “multitude of sin”. Sins just keep building up and accumulating. Those who are unbelieving are like the unrighteous rich James spoke

of in 5:5— those who have fattened themselves for they day of slaughter. They have become weighted down with an incredible load of sins. How many sins does it take to send a person to hell? One. Imagine the immense damning reality of all the sin of the unsaved. Paul confirms this in Romans 2:5:

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

These people are just piling up sin for judgment. What a horrible danger they face. Can you understand the urgency then? Do you understand the importance of what James is calling us to do? These people are now living the reality of sin and rejection of God, and their eternal soul is headed for death, carrying a multitude of sins. That is the danger.

III. The Agent

So, who is God going to use to bring salvation—a true faith—to those who are lost? Who will be the agents of this ministry? The elders? The pastor? Only those who are seminary trained?

Look at the text. The NIV says in verse 19, “if *someone*,” and in verse 20 it says “*Whoever*.” So who can God use as His agent? Anyone. It doesn’t say just pastors or elders or apostles or preachers. It is the job of *anyone* who is saved. Don’t just think to yourself, “Well, that is what we hired the pastor to do,” or “Well, that is what we appointed elders to do.” No. This is for all of us. Paul proclaims in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us.

Do you understand that my friends? Once you have been saved, you then have the job or the ministry of reconciliation. It is a job for all of us. Sometimes we sit and wait for someone else to do it. We sometimes even pray God might bring someone to us who is unsaved, and provide us the opportunity to witness to them. But this is a call to be even more deliberate. Start right now by thinking of those people you know who give indications they are unsaved. Perhaps they used to attend your church or maybe once made some kind of profession, but are now living as they always truly were—sinners. You need to go after them. Our evangelism should start right here in the church. We need to go after those who may have been brought into the church and made some profession, but never really believed and are now gone. Do you know anyone like that? Don't think to yourself, "Well I will tell the pastor or an elder to go after them. It is their job, not mine." We all have the ministry, and if God has placed someone on your heart, if there is a name in your mind, it is because He wants to use you, He wants *you* to be His agent.

That is an awesome challenge—to be the agent or ambassador of God. But that is what we, who are in Christ Jesus, have been called to do. That is James' challenge for us. But what a blessing for us to be used by God! God wants to use you to bring others to a

saving faith. WOW! God delights in the salvation of the lost, and blesses those whom He uses.

IV. The Objective

Look at verse 20 again. “*Whoever turns*”—that is the Greek word *epistrepho*. It can refer to a physical turning or facing a different direction. But it often refers to being turned to God in a one time act of salvation. This further supports the idea the people James is talking about here are unbelievers. Notice how the term is used in the following scriptures:

Matthew 18:3 - “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Acts 3:19 - “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out”

Acts 11:21 - “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

Acts 15:19 - “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”

Acts 26:18 - “I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

Acts 26:20 - “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”

2 Corinthians 3:14-18 - “But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit

of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

1 Thessalonians 1:9 – “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”

They speak of salvation. Conversion. That is the objective. Salvation. In fact, the word “save” here is the Greek word *sozo*, which is the dominant word used for salvation in the New Testament.

With salvation comes forgiveness. James says salvation will cover a multitude of sin. We want to turn sinners from sin in order that they may be saved, and in being saved, their sins will be forgiven—no matter how many of them there are. This is a description of the extent of God’s forgiveness. God in His grace forgives multitudes of sins. John promises us in 1 John 1:9 that ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”***. Our sins are covered and buried. Psalm 103:12 encourages us with the words:

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

And Psalm 32:1 states, ***“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”***

Conclusion:

Our ministry is then a ministry of perception, examining the evidence, and looking at the indications of those who have abandoned truth. We must

understand the danger involved; these people have eternal souls headed for eternal death, with a multitude of sins. But God wants to use us, all of us, as His agents to bring about the salvation of others. We are the *someone* and the *whoever* James is talking about, and God wants to use us to achieve the great objective, which is turning them from their sin and that multitude of sins, and receiving forgiveness and becoming truly and genuinely a Christian of faith.

Isn't that what this book of James is about? We measure our faith. If we don't measure up at all, we seek to make our faith real and active. Any other faith is dead and in fact never was alive. If we measure up, even though we may stub our toes along the way, we need to strive harder to do the good works Christ has prepared for us to do, as we seek a more mature faith. We then are encouraged to help bring about this change in others. It is how we encourage and build each other up within the church, thereby strengthening our witness and outreach to the world.

It's a challenge though. It has been a challenge all the way through this study, hasn't it? James is not an easy book. James calls it like it is. Sometimes he has made us feel uncomfortable. Other times, he has uplifted and encouraged us in ways we never thought possible. But one thing for sure, James has called us to action, to be doers, to possess a real faith. In closing the book he gives us the greatest call to action—"one for the road"—to take part in the salvation of the unsaved, especially those closest to us, especially those who have heard the truth.

There is only one question remaining then. Will you do it?

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INDEX

A

anger, 36, 102, 103, 108, 109,
110, 111, 120, 136, 166,
241, 244, 290, 316, 350

B

believe, 19, 23, 31, 50, 51, 52,
53, 54, 55, 69, 74, 90, 121,
147, 154, 185, 186, 189,
190, 208, 216, 275, 277,
280, 321, 322, 325, 326,
327, 336, 346, 348
Bible, 24, 117, 121, 122, 134,
136, 140, 142, 149, 154,
220, 242, 286, 289, 314, 349
brothers, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21,
22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 36, 46,
50, 60, 61, 63, 66, 76, 89,
96, 103, 104, 118, 121, 148,
153, 159, 161, 174, 199,
200, 240, 242, 244, 263,
265, 266, 270, 310, 311,
321, 339, 345, 350

C

Christian, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 32,
33, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 50,
51, 52, 54, 60, 61, 62, 63,
67, 68, 80, 82, 83, 95, 96,
97, 103, 104, 108, 111, 112,
116, 118, 119, 120, 121,
122, 123, 127, 134, 138,
139, 140, 142, 148, 149,
150, 151, 154, 155, 162,
168, 175, 176, 177, 178,
179, 180, 181, 182, 185,

187, 188, 189, 193, 207,
208, 216, 219, 220, 229,
234, 244, 245, 251, 252,
254, 267, 282, 286, 289,
298, 303, 304, 311, 312,
313, 316, 317, 322, 324,
326, 327, 338, 343, 345,
348, 349, 350, 356
church, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, 29,
35, 53, 54, 87, 96, 118, 122,
127, 131, 134, 135, 136,
137, 138, 150, 152, 165,
177, 181, 230, 231, 235,
242, 243, 249, 265, 266,
270, 271, 285, 286, 290,
305, 313, 314, 321, 331,
332, 335, 337, 338, 343,
345, 347, 348, 351, 353, 356

D

dead, 52, 59, 68, 159, 174, 178,
179, 180, 182, 186, 187,
193, 290, 343, 349, 356
desire, 23, 32, 33, 36, 50, 64,
76, 79, 80, 81, 82, 88, 89,
103, 109, 118, 119, 135,
137, 141, 167, 228, 229,
230, 231, 232, 234, 250,
254, 256, 280, 301, 335, 350
double-minded, 47, 52, 53, 54,
55, 60, 61, 63, 78, 88, 89,
91, 103, 169, 189, 250, 253,
254, 312, 326

E

Evan, 121

F

faith, 18, 21, 24, 25, 29, 32, 34,
35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 46, 50,
51, 52, 55, 60, 64, 68, 79,
83, 97, 134, 141, 148, 154,
161, 168, 174, 175, 176,
178, 179, 180, 181, 182,
186, 187, 188, 189, 190,
191, 192, 193, 214, 219,
245, 253, 254, 280, 290,
304, 314, 317, 325, 332,
336, 337, 338, 343, 344,
345, 346, 348, 349, 352,
354, 356
favoritism, 148, 149, 150, 152,
153, 154, 155, 160, 161,
162, 163, 166, 167, 169,
177, 234, 243
forgiveness, 49, 82, 164, 193,
245, 255, 256, 282, 287,
288, 289, 337, 354, 355, 356
friendship, 240, 243

G

gift, 49, 51, 89, 90, 94, 95, 96,
118, 187, 215, 232, 285, 305
God, 15, 21, 22, 31, 32, 33, 34,
36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 46, 47,
48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54,
55, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65,
66, 67, 68, 76, 77, 78, 79,
80, 82, 83, 88, 89, 90, 91,
92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 101, 103,
104, 108, 109, 110, 111,
118, 119, 121, 122, 123,
126, 127, 129, 132, 134,
135, 136, 137, 138, 139,
140, 141, 142, 148, 149,
151, 153, 154, 155, 156,
161, 162, 163, 164, 165,
166, 167, 168, 175, 176,
177, 178, 179, 180, 181,

182, 183, 185, 186, 188,
189, 190, 191, 192, 193,
200, 206, 208, 215, 219,
220, 221, 228, 229, 232,
233, 234, 240, 241, 242,
243, 244, 245, 249, 250,
251, 252, 253, 254, 255,
256, 257, 258, 259, 267,
268, 269, 271, 276, 277,
278, 279, 280, 281, 282,
286, 287, 288, 289, 290,
301, 304, 305, 311, 313,
314, 315, 317, 318, 322,
323, 324, 325, 326, 327,
331, 332, 333, 334, 336,
337, 338, 339, 343, 344,
346, 347, 348, 349, 350,
351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356
good, 16, 31, 32, 36, 37, 39, 45,
49, 54, 65, 67, 73, 78, 79,
80, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94,
95, 96, 103, 104, 107, 108,
111, 121, 122, 125, 127,
133, 139, 148, 150, 153,
154, 174, 175, 177, 180,
181, 182, 186, 187, 188,
189, 190, 193, 199, 200,
205, 207, 208, 209, 214,
215, 217, 218, 219, 220,
229, 232, 239, 243, 252,
257, 276, 280, 281, 285,
286, 288, 289, 290, 299,
301, 312, 316, 317, 323,
328, 334, 335, 349, 356
grace, 60, 126, 180, 182, 240,
244, 245, 257, 347, 355
Greek, 38, 48, 80, 89, 90, 91,
105, 107, 118, 124, 135,
152, 161, 164, 175, 176,
180, 186, 190, 215, 229,
240, 242, 245, 257, 264,
301, 311, 312, 326, 333,
334, 335, 336, 338, 347,
354, 355

H

holy, 111, 133, 140, 167, 180,
253, 254, 256, 344, 347
humility, 21, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64,
68, 110, 120, 200, 208, 214,
240, 245, 250, 257, 259,
264, 266, 269, 270, 276,
279, 281, 282, 288, 302, 344

J

Jesus, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24,
25, 26, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54,
59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68,
76, 77, 83, 89, 90, 91, 95,
96, 103, 110, 111, 120, 126,
133, 139, 141, 148, 149,
154, 155, 156, 159, 161,
162, 166, 167, 187, 188,
189, 192, 219, 242, 253,
254, 265, 279, 287, 289,
314, 325, 327, 335, 337,
339, 343, 347, 348, 350, 353
joy, 25, 32, 36, 37, 40, 41, 46,
51, 55, 65, 69, 104, 118,
123, 227, 229, 234, 250,
256, 257, 335, 350
judgment, 51, 107, 147, 149,
160, 166, 167, 186, 192,
214, 219, 263, 268, 269,
270, 287, 326, 349, 352, 354
justice, 110, 166, 244

L

law, 117, 124, 126, 157, 159,
160, 161, 162, 163, 164,
165, 167, 168, 173, 188,
189, 192, 263, 264, 265,
266, 267, 268, 269, 270,
287, 288, 289, 303, 322, 323

live, 16, 19, 21, 22, 24, 68, 82,
94, 97, 101, 103, 111, 116,
122, 125, 139, 163, 168,
181, 182, 191, 208, 234,
240, 254, 276, 281, 288,
301, 302, 327, 334, 348
love, 20, 23, 39, 40, 53, 60, 67,
69, 110, 115, 119, 122, 137,
138, 148, 159, 160, 161,
168, 169, 177, 187, 188,
191, 193, 220, 243, 252,
256, 264, 265, 266, 267,
300, 334, 344, 345, 347,
350, 355

M

mercy, 68, 95, 110, 160, 165,
166, 167, 168, 175, 180,
182, 191, 193, 214, 218,
219, 244, 256, 287, 310,
317, 347

N

nature, 25, 33, 34, 39, 48, 49,
65, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 81,
82, 87, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93,
95, 103, 105, 106, 110, 111,
116, 123, 125, 126, 141,
163, 203, 214, 215, 218,
228, 229, 231, 234, 240,
242, 244, 249, 254, 257,
258, 264, 275, 333, 351

P

poor, 60, 61, 62, 63, 66, 67, 88,
136, 148, 150, 151, 152,
153, 154, 161, 207, 213,
214, 243, 244, 258, 281,
304, 344

pray, 20, 34, 39, 47, 49, 50, 55,
60, 83, 108, 132, 134, 176,
182, 232, 233, 282, 326,
329, 331, 332, 333, 335,
336, 337, 338, 339, 345, 353
pride, 60, 62, 63, 110, 111, 219,
227, 249, 287, 344
problems, 74, 119, 124, 131,
147, 155, 161, 175, 176,
192, 207, 208, 214, 216,
220, 239, 240, 242, 258,
263, 265, 270, 286, 315,
326, 334, 335, 337

sin, 20, 46, 49, 67, 75, 76, 77,
78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 88,
89, 93, 94, 109, 110, 111,
119, 126, 160, 162, 163,
164, 165, 166, 168, 229,
243, 250, 251, 253, 254,
255, 256, 258, 265, 266,
269, 286, 287, 288, 289,
290, 313, 332, 337, 338,
345, 346, 348, 349, 350,
351, 352, 353, 355, 356
snake, 49, 90, 125, 197, 200,
205

R

religion, 23, 25, 129, 132, 133,
134, 135, 250, 257, 303, 346
rich, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65,
66, 67, 68, 88, 148, 151,
152, 153, 154, 161, 214,
243, 297, 298, 300, 301,
302, 303, 304, 311, 344, 351

S

salvation, 68, 96, 104, 116, 117,
120, 141, 174, 176, 178,
179, 180, 181, 182, 256,
263, 282, 299, 338, 343,
345, 346, 347, 348, 349,
350, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356
Satan, 39, 64, 76, 79, 80, 83,
109, 189, 191, 203, 214,
215, 217, 220, 230, 250,
251, 252, 254, 257, 258,
269, 280, 281, 290, 291,
317, 333, 348, 350, 354
scripture, 15, 20, 29, 82, 91, 92,
117, 148, 160, 161, 186,
188, 220, 240, 322, 347, 349
Sermon on the Mount, 25, 62,
90, 155, 187, 265, 326, 343

T

temptation, 39, 64, 67, 75, 76,
77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83,
84, 89, 95, 96, 103, 118,
123, 251, 255, 313, 327, 344
tongue, 107, 132, 134, 199, 200,
201, 202, 203, 205, 206,
207, 208, 267
trial, 23, 26, 31, 34, 36, 37, 38,
39, 40, 41, 45, 46, 51, 55,
60, 61, 63, 64, 67, 68, 76,
79, 91, 103, 104, 118, 123,
147, 251, 258, 312, 313,
317, 334, 344
true, 18, 22, 25, 29, 31, 34, 37,
39, 50, 52, 67, 82, 83, 96,
97, 109, 111, 118, 120, 123,
127, 134, 149, 153, 155,
162, 164, 168, 175, 178,
180, 181, 182, 187, 189,
190, 191, 192, 193, 218,
219, 220, 221, 240, 241,
244, 254, 257, 259, 264,
289, 316, 317, 322, 323,
326, 327, 343, 346, 348,
352, 355
truth, 20, 50, 65, 66, 89, 94, 95,
108, 120, 121, 126, 141,
178, 189, 190, 214, 253,
256, 304, 313, 319, 322,

323, 325, 327, 345, 346,
347, 348, 349, 355, 356

W

wisdom, 17, 46, 47, 55, 121,
123, 156, 200, 208, 214,
215, 216, 217, 218, 219,
220, 221, 228, 229, 234,
244, 246, 256, 278, 344
Word, 83, 106, 120, 121, 122,
126, 127, 133, 140, 141,
142, 191, 313, 318, 348
works, 25, 177, 179, 180, 182,
187, 190, 191, 192, 193,
214, 219, 250, 291, 344,
350, 356

world, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24,
25, 26, 33, 46, 53, 59, 61,
64, 67, 68, 80, 89, 93, 95,
96, 103, 110, 111, 116, 117,
119, 120, 121, 123, 125,
126, 127, 132, 135, 137,
138, 139, 140, 141, 148,
150, 154, 155, 156, 161,
163, 173, 200, 203, 215,
216, 217, 219, 220, 221,
228, 229, 231, 232, 234,
239, 240, 241, 242, 243,
244, 251, 254, 255, 257,
265, 269, 276, 279, 281,
286, 291, 297, 298, 299,
303, 304, 313, 315, 324,
327, 336, 344, 350, 353, 356

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—1 Peter 2:9

