

Studies In The Epistle of James

**By William L. Brown
Central Baptist Church
Little Rock, AR.**

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GENUINE RELIGION

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by W. L. Brown

Introduction

There is no doubt as to the divine authority of this small but powerful book. Yet, you need to be made aware of those who have an opinion otherwise. Satan would love to put doubt in our minds about any passage of the Bible if he can. When he can place doubt about the authority of an entire book, in the mind of a man, think of the ground he has gained? It is extremely sad to know that some men have allowed themselves to be used of Satan to hinder God's word and work rather than stand upon His word which is forever settled in heaven. (There were men, during the Reformation, some of whom many Christians consider to be great men, who discounted the authority of the epistle of James.)

Any man who attempts to impeach the authority of this epistle is either wicked or of some unsober wit. It serves no real purpose to deal at length with this argument except to make you aware of those who, considering themselves to be theologians, doubt the authenticity of this epistle.

The author, of course, is God. But God did use James the Apostle, the brother of the Lord Jesus, to pen these words. James was indeed the brother (Gal. 1:9), or if you prefer, the half-brother of our Lord. We know his father was not the same as our Lord's, but his mother was Mary. James was known as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9) and later became the pastor of the church at Jerusalem. There is no doubt as to his leadership role in the church at Jerusalem. The account of the council in the fifteenth chapter of Acts shows clearly his influence and authority.

Tradition has it that he died about thirty-three years after the death of Christ. It is said he died a martyr, being thrown down from a pinnacle of the temple. The validity of this story bears little upon the truth of God's word or upon the character of James.

Much question has taken place as to the time of the writing of this epistle, whether it was before the epistles of Peter or after. Suffice it to say the approximate time of it's writing was 45 A.D., making it before the letters that Peter and Paul wrote. There is not sufficient reason or time to go into all the facts or arguments concerning the date of it's writing.

To whom was this epistle written? The answer is given without delay within the first verse of the epistle itself. The greeting is *"to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, . . ."*. The Jewish brethren who had been scattered abroad elier by their own desire or the desires of the Romans who wanted to control them. More will be said about this later.

The main theme which seems to invade each thought within the epistle is true religion. In other words; what does it mean to really be a christian. It deals with the contrast between a working faith and a dead faith. One which is unaffactive and lacks patience compared to real faith which is effective in it's duties and produces patience. This epistle will instruct us concerning; The bearing of afflictions, how comfort may be gained in the midst of persecutions, on the use of the tongue, in a proper understanding of the nature of God, and the adornment of our Christian life with meekness, peace and charity. We will look at the contrast of earthly and spiritual wisdom. We will see the battlefield of prayer and know how to be more effective in our prayers. This is a very practical and challenging book and you should not be the same once you have studied it in full! Enjoy the epistle of James.

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Lesson One

Pure Religion

James 1:1-27

Memory Verse 1:22, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*

James, the pastor of the church at Jerusalem and brother of our Lord, knew the religion of God. He was raised as a Jew, but he soon found that Judaism, fulfilled and transfigured, became Christianity. Everything that was a shadow in the Old Testament was now opened clearly in the New Testament.

James considered himself as a *"servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"* (vs. 1) not as the brother of our Lord nor as the Pastor of a great and mighty Church. He did not lift himself up as having any authority other than being one of God's lowly servants. He used the Greek word *doulos* to emphasize the honor of being in one of the lowest of God's offices. This was his claim to fame!

Joy In Trials 1:2-4

He is directing his words to those believing Jews who have been scattered, either by their own will or by the Romans.

"My brethren, count it all joy. . .", he says, when you find you have troubles which have come upon you while unaware (vs. 2). This encouragement does not mean to consider it a joy when we have brought troubles or trials upon ourselves because of sin or foolishness, but when they have come upon us unknowingly, or for reasons other than our own sin. But why, James? Or better yet, how is it possible to count falling into a trial a joy? Because, it is a trial of faith and will build us to maturity (vs. 3 & 4). There is a divine purpose in allowing,

or sending, these trials in our lives. These trials work patience into our very hearts. Isn't it odd, something which we so often use as our reason to justify our murmuring and complaining is actually that which God uses to build and prosper an attitude of patience? God will use trials to show our sincerity and our weaknesses. How else might we know His power, His love, and His desire to make us like Christ?

Peter, in the garden, thought himself to be strong and never one to falter in following the Lord. Yet, in a strong trial Peter found his strength was weak. From this experience Peter learned to not rely upon himself but upon God. He began to learn patience! We will learn that God places us in trials, not to be consumed but to be refined, to learn not only our weaknesses but God's marvelous strengths.

In making the best of knives the most precious of metals is chosen. Before this metal is brought to it's final perfection it is exposed to the greatest of temperatures; the extremes of both hot and cold. It is exposed to these alternative extremes so it might be given the right shape and temper. I am sure that we would think it silly of the metal to scream for relief from the heating, the pounding, and the plunge into the cold water knowing this is exactly what it takes to make it strong. This is what is needed for it to be able to be sharpened and stay sharpened for years and years to come. What about us? Are we willing to allow patience to "have her perfect work" so we might become mature? Are we willing to endure?

Wisdom For The Trial 1:5-8

In the midst of trials we find we do not always understand all that is happening or why. When we lack this wisdom James tells us to ask God for the wisdom to respond properly to the situation.

There are two items to be acknowledged in verse five concerning this wisdom. First, we must realize we do lack wisdom for the trial. Second, we must ask God for wisdom.

The condition to receiving wisdom is to believe, not doubt, that God can and will give the wisdom needed (vs. 6). The contrast given in verse six is the man (or woman) who does not ask in faith is in a state of unrest. They are like a wave which is tossed to and fro by the wind. In other words they are at the mercy of the trial and are not certain of what God is attempting to accomplish in them. God is building patience!

If there is doubt in our hearts we can expect nothing! (vs. 7). The man who disputes the validity of God's promises, such as we have in verses five and six, is considered to be double minded and will be unstable (vs. 8).

The Proper View 1:9-11

James now begins to turn his attention to the topic of the rich and the poor. I am sure most churches differ little in that they have both those who are poor and those who are wealthier in their membership.

James approaches the subject from the viewpoint of ones standing in Christ. For the poor, they are to "boast" in having been made rich in Christ and have a high standing (vs. 9). For the rich, they are to "boast" in having been made humble and must recognize their emptiness and unworthiness. James wants them to realize that all material things will one day perish (vs. 10-11). What an equalizer Christ is. Your financial situation is made null and void in Christ. All have equal standing in our Lord.

Standing Against Temptation 1:12-17

The man who bears affliction with patience and consistency, without gripping and complaining, will be happy. Not only happiness, but approval before God and man, as well as receiving a crown of life, will be his.

The temptations which are under consideration here have more to do with the inward type rather than the outward as mentioned before. The outward trials, made to try and purify,

are designed by God with perfect intentions. The inward trials, or temptations to sin are inconsistent with the nature and character of God. God does not tempt any man to sin.

The problem is many of us do not always bear up under temptations and trials. James points out the source of temptation is not God. He knows our natural tendency is to blame our falling, during times of tribulations, upon someone else. This is why he tells us to recognize temptation to sin comes as a result of our own lusts. We can not blame God, the world, or Satan for our falling into sin. We carry with us a nature which needs no help when it comes to sinning.

Lust, once began grows to sin, and sin when it is all done ends in death. Lest we think too lightly of this; remember Ananias and Sapphira, their lust, their sin, and their death (Acts 5:1-11).

God is not the author of sin. In this, James does not want us to be confused. He wants those he is writing to, and us, to know God is the source for all good and nothing evil. God gives only the best gifts. He has done so and will continue to do so because He can not and will not change.

Be Ye Doers 1:18-27

Up to this point in the chapter James has basically been dealing with our relationship between ourselves and God. Now he turns our attention to our relationship between ourselves and others.

A "Pure Religion" is only possible when it begins with the new birth. Nothing in man causes God to give him eternal life (vs. 18). He does it freely of His own will. It is through the "...word of truth..." by which we are begotten. The word of truth being the good news about Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Because of the aforementioned facts how are we to live?

We are to order our lives by the very word of God which He used to bring us to a saving faith. James first mentions that

we are to be quick in our hearing, to be slow in our speaking, and to be slow in anger. This latter has to do with the patience mentioned before.

The reason for slowness in becoming angry is because it is not helping in perfecting God's word or work in us. Nor is it showing forth any righteous type of living. What will show a reality in conversion is a receiving of the "...*engraved word*..." with meekness. This meekness is a submissive and obedient attitude towards the word of God. Meekness towards God, and His word, means that the word will have a life changing affect upon us.

Finally, in verse twenty-two James puts it all together. He says; if we are simply listening to the word, and this word never affects our actions then we are simply deceiving ourselves. There is no reality to our being born again if the word does not change us.

Can you imagine a person looking into a mirror and then as soon as he walks away he forgets what he looked like? It would seem a rather absurd notion to think anyone could do this. But, this is exactly what James is trying to share with us about one who looks into God's word and is unaffected. The Bible shows us who and what we are. It is a mirror for the soul. The Holy Spirit ministers to us through the word of God, showing us our sins, our weaknesses, God's righteousness and God's strength and mercy. He tells us again that the man who will be happy is the one who hears the word, doesn't forget it, and acts upon it.

In the last two verses James shows us what *pure religion* really is. It is easy to see that one who has an authentic relationship with God will be known by their speech and actions. If one is critical, sharp, or bitter with their tongue, if they care nothing for those who have no one to care for them, and if they do not attempt to follow after God's life changing word, they do not have a *pure religion*. It is most likely they have a vain religion. The inference that James is making is that we have a religion that is true, pure, or real. It is a religion (better stated it is a

faith!) that has some substance to it. It may not be limited to visiting the fatherless and the widows, and ministering to their needs. But, it must include something as far as actions go. If nothing follows the proclamation of our faith except fine and fancy words we must question the existence of real faith.

Discussion Questions

1. What was James' claim to fame?
2. What is to be our reaction in times of tribulation?
3. What are the conditions to receiving wisdom?
4. Upon what ground can the poor and rich meet and be equal?
5. What is in store for the man who endures or withstands temptations?
6. How are we tempted?
7. What is the end result of lust?
8. Since we are born again, what are the three admonitions for us concerning our being quick and our being slow?
9. How might we be guilty of deceiving ourselves?

Lesson Two

Dead Faith

James 2:1-26

Memory Verse 2:26, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

In this lesson James continues on with the conduct of the Christian within the church. The are two basic points that he deals with in this chapter. The first being the respect of persons, regarding the wealthy over the poor. The second being the improper attitude or opinion of faith. We might add that the very problems that James addresses are those that we still encounter in our churches today. Though ancient in it's age, this book is up-to-date and timeless in it's practicalities and doctrines.

Favoritism Condemned 2:1-7

It is sad that some people have not yet learned that the Church is not a social club. The outward appearance of an individual has no affect or pertinence upon the validity of one's faith or christianity.

James started right away saying that the faith of Christ, that faith which represents Christ, should not be associated with a concept of favoritism. Some people were apparently giving more respect to those who came into their assemblies wearing fancy clothing and jewelry than those who had ragged or unkept clothes.

James uses the term "...the Lord of glory,..." when referring to Christ our Lord. I believe the Holy Spirit is using James to show us that Christ had all glory, yet He did not show respect of persons. In fact, Christ left His glory in heaven and

put upon Himself the ragged clothes of human flesh. How can we be of the faith of Christ and yet judge a person by their outward appearance?

If we do compare the extreme appearances that are listed and then treat these two people different we are guilty of making an unjust difference. This would constitute our being *partial*. No true judgment was made on our part. Our own conscience will tell us that this is a distinction that God Himself has never made.

The problem with favoritism is that it uses our own corrupt and perverted thoughts and intentions. It puts outward grandeur over and above the inward spiritual graces. This is wrong and evil and James makes no bones about it. There is nothing wrong with looking nice. There is nothing wrong in helping others to look their best. But treatment of others based upon appearances of wealth is not worthy of the name of Christ and should not be named among us.

According To The Law 2:8-13

That's good philosophy, good ideology, but why? We are told in verse five to look at the way God works. Look at our most glorious and magnificent God. Whom does He choose? '*Hath God not chosen the poor of this world...*'. Though they may be poor he also states that they are rich in faith and are heirs of the kingdom. The richness of a man in this manner is not judgeable from the outside.

Normally the rich are no friends to the Christian. The scriptures say it, not me! James knew that the majority of the Jewish Christians, during this time, were not a wealthy bunch. In fact, they had suffered at the hands of some of the wealthier people (vs. 6). The reality of I Tim. 6:10 must be admitted. Those who have fallen in love with money fall dangerously close to erring in the faith.

Partiality strikes at the heart of God's love. Partiality is an offense and a transgression against the '*royal law according*

to the scripture . . . ". God's love does not pass judgment upon man for what is on the outside, nor should we. If we do, then we are guilty of breaking the law and are therefore guilty of the whole weight of the law (vs. 10). It does not matter how much of the law we keep if we break one small commandment. Breaking of the law points to our sinfulness and brings us back into reality about ourselves and others. We all find equality at the cross of our Saviour for we are all made perfect in Him.

In verses twelve and thirteen we have a reminder that sounds much like I Corinthians 3:10-15. '*Every man's work shall be made manifest...*'. James encourages us, and those to whom he is writing, to speak and act knowing that all will be brought into account one day.

The point that James is making has to do with how we treat one another, and how we treat those who come to us. If we make prejudicial judgments based upon the apparent social status of an individual we can expect judgment without mercy. The law has no mercy. And, it seems those who lack mercy upon others can anticipate no mercy upon themselves. If we are indeed born again then mercy should be an evident part of our character, as it is in God's. And, that leads us to the next point of James discourse.

Dead or Alive? Faith! 2:14-26

These passages are deadly to one who has an idle faith. It really doesn't matter what you **say** about your faith. What does matter is what your faith produces, or if it even does produce. Our faith is made evident in what we do, not what we say.

The point to be made is not *what justifies* a man, but *who is justified*. James is not inferring that one who has works is justified by those works. But, he is saying the works give evidence of ones being justified. In verse fourteen, the words '*though a man say he hath faith...*' imply a boasting or pride of ones faith. Men of faith do not need to *speak* of their faith. Their faith is evident in their actions and attitudes.

The faith that saves is a faith that produces. If your life is empty of the things of God then what claim do you have upon His faith? You may say that you have faith, but a mere intellectual assent can not be classified with an alive and energetic faith. Transformation takes place in and upon the one who is born again. Where no evident change has taken place, most likely no inner change has taken place. That is why the statement is given "*can faith save him?*". This is a question that James wants to be considered. Can this type of faith really save? A faith that produces nothing, benefits no one, and is simply verbal confirmation of known facts. Is this really a faith that saves?

At the end of verse sixteen we see again the words "*what doth it profit?*". James is going to illustrate his previous point by a man who uses empty and worthless words. The man sees one who is in need of food and clothing. To this individual he says 'go away now in comfort and relaxation for you have your clothes and food'. Yet, nothing that was really needed, the food and the clothing, were actually given. If we saw, or heard, of someone doing this we would be shocked at the vanity, and stupidity, of his words. Saying it is not doing it.

Those words used by the man in the illustration were empty and worthless. No actions went with the words. That is what James is saying about a man who talks his faith up. It has been said that "*the man who talks his religion up by the yard, but lives it by the inch, needs to be kicked by the foot*". It's humorous but true. Even more true is the fact that one who talks his religion, and never lives it, doesn't have it. The apparent faith that is so boldly spoken of is dead. That is not much different from one who says that he loves another, yet there are no actions to go along with the words. The words are empty.

Intellectual assent to Biblical facts alone, is not faith; look at verse nineteen. The Demons gave intellectual assent to God and believed it so much that they trembled at the thought. Faith

is not only believing God's word, but obeying it as well. The intellect, the emotions, and the will are all involved in saving faith. That is why in verse eighteen James talks of one who challenges another to show his "*faith without thy works*" while he will show his "*faith by my works*".

Now, in the following verses we will see what some would have us to believe is a teaching of works for salvation. Instead we have seen, and will see, works because of salvation. James is not referring to being justified (or accounted as righteous) before God by doing good works. We must keep the verses in context. Previously James mentioned that one man attempts to show to others his dead faith without works. While another man shows his alive and vibrant faith by his works. Who would you say would be justified before men as having faith? That is the point and reason for the illustrations used in verses twenty-one through twenty-six.

Thomas Manton, in his book on The Epistle of James, draws a great conclusion from verse twenty. Concerning the words "*faith without works is dead*" he comments on the importance of the phrasing of these words. He first points to the fact that James did not say that "*faith is dead without works, but faith without works is dead*;" "... For instance look at these statements; '*a man without motions is dead*' is proper, but a '*man is dead without motion*' is a prediction far different." Again in illustration he says "*as apples do not give life to the tree, but show it forth*." The grace of God is most commonly made evident to other men through the outward appearance or actions. God looks upon the heart, but man can only see what the heart produces from the outside. Much like the wind, we know it is there by the effects.

One last point. Abraham and Rahab were not justified, or made righteous, before God because of their works. Their works displayed an alive and vibrant faith. Our walking from the pew to front of the Church, our kneeling before God, and our prayer is not what saved us. God's grace saved us and those things

we did were evidence of that saving grace and faith in God. Just remember James admonition. *‘For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.’* Is your faith a possession or just a profession? Does your faith produce or is it unproductive? Is your faith obedient to the word of God or is it indifferent to His commands? Your answers are a matter of life and death. **Dead or Alive?** That’s a question to ask about *your faith!*

Discussion Questions

1. Does James promote a social gospel that involves redistribution of wealth?
2. Are Christians to be against all rich people?
3. Who are we to be partial towards?
4. Are believers supposed to have good works?
5. What would you conclude about someone who never demonstrates good works?
6. Are good works a means of becoming justified before God?
7. What is faith?
8. What would be wrong with saying that *‘Faith is dead without works’?*

Lesson Three

Wisdom, And The Tongue

James 3:1-18

Memory Verse: *‘Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.’*

Wisdom and the tongue do not often go together. In this chapter they are bound together as our subjects under consideration. Control of the tongue follows wisdom, but wisdom does not necessarily follow control of the tongue. James has already mentioned the tongue and wisdom in our previous studies. Here, James approaches them in connection with those who are in places of authority, or teachers of God’s word.

There is probably no on item that has the potential of getting us into more trouble than our own tongue. As we proceed through this chapter we will find two basic thoughts; the controlling or understanding of our tongue, and to recognizing true wisdom rather than earthly wisdom. In Proverbs, chapter four and verse seven, we find that *‘Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding.’*

Authority with Responsibility 3:1-2

An overlooked teaching in the third chapter of James is that of responsibility with authority. This is where a lack of control of the tongue, or using the tongue without wisdom, can really get us into trouble. James encourages us to *‘be not many masters...’* There are many who aspire to become leaders in the local church, or have a place of prominence. To instruct or teach others in the matters of God’s word carries with it a solemn responsibility. Those who are in places of responsibility

will receive the greater condemnation. Realize that we are going to make mistakes, there is no doubt about that. But, when one is in a place of responsibility, those mistakes will have a greater affect upon others, and upon ourselves. One unprepared or unqualified teacher, or preacher, has the potential to do unrepairable harm to others, and to themselves

There is real wisdom in James telling us we should not attempt to be a bunch of teachers or masters. As a teacher, or Preacher, we have the opportunity to say more than others. In that position we also will be handling God's word. In these situations we have ample opportunity to make mistakes. Mistakes will be made and we will no doubt offend many in those mistakes. No one can speak, or teach others, without making mistakes. We just need to remember that along with the authority to teach, comes the responsibility of handling God's word. How we handle His word determines the reception of God's blessings or corrections.

In verse two we find one who does not offend by his words is a mature man and has gained control of his words, attitudes and actions. Yet, we have a need to look other than at the mature man. Let's look at the problem that we so often encounter.

A Two Edged Tongue 3:3-12

Parents, quite regularly, express an eager desire for their young children to begin to talk. They patiently work with their children to form their first words. And, it is a race to see if Mom can get the baby to say mama before Dad can get them to say dada. Not soon after we help them on their way to conversation we are wondering if that was such a good idea at all. Their new-found chatter often becomes a source of irritation for the tired Mom and for the busy Dad. Soon after they begin to talk we seek to help them gain control of that wagging little noise maker. And, all along their life's path we attempt to help them with their speech patterns. We attempt to teach them that their tongue can do much good or much harm.

A major concern most parents have is that they talk too much and listen too little. Too bad we don't realize that for ourselves.

The Holy Spirit knows our need to control the tongue. He uses varying illustrations to help in understanding this little member with such big impacts. He then exposes the abilities of the tongue and the need of being consistent. Within these words we will also see that the tongue is simply "*a bucket with which you bring up that which is within your heart.*"

The first illustration used is of a horse and it's bit. The horse is a powerful creature. (We need to realize that in James' day it was the main means of transportation upon land.) Such a powerful creature and yet such a small article, the bit, can cause this animal to be directed at the whim of the smallest man. Notice also that James mentions that with the use of the small bit we are able to turn about *the whole body*. Keep this thought in mind.

The second illustration is that of a very great ship and by what means it is directed. Though the ship be large and the winds they are driven by be fierce, their direction is determined by the captain of the ship controlling the small helm. The size of our ships today would dwarf those of James' day. Yet, the illustration still works. Our largest ships are still directed, or turned, by use of the small helm and small rudder.

Now, look at verse five. Our tongue is also a small member in our body. It is comparable to the bridle and the rudder because of it's ability to turn the direction of our whole body. Often what we say will direct what we do next. Just as the powerful horse and the huge ship may directed to good uses, so our tongue can be also. But, James also mentions "*how great a matter a little fire kindleth!*". The tongue, if not controlled, can also cause shipwreck.

The ability of the tongue to do damage, when uncontrolled, is listed in the sixth verse. It holds a *world of iniquity* within itself. It's effect is upon the whole body. In Ecclesiastes 5:6, it is stated that we should "*Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy*

flesh to sin;'' An awful picture is drawn for us concerning the improper use and ability of the little member known as our tongue.

In verse seven it is stated that every creature known to man has been tamed by man. Yet, in verse eight James states that *the tongue can no man tame;*'. With this member we bless God and turn around and curse men. The paradox is we have only one mouth, but out of it comes both cursings and blessings. Our memory verse states that this ought not to be so.

More illustrations are used by James to show the paradox mentioned in the previous verses. He uses how that a fountain of water doesn't give out both bitter and sweet water. It is either one or the other, never both. Trees bear only one kind of fruit never two. Again we go to the fountain. It can not send forth both fresh water and salt water. It is either one or the other.

So what conclusion can we draw of the tongue? In the same manner that nature is consistent in it's activity we ought also to be consistent within our activity. It is the nature of a fig tree to bear figs. It is the nature of a natural, fresh water, spring to bear fresh water. And, it is the nature of an olive tree to bear olives. It is inconsistent with our nature, if we are born again, to speak evil of our brethren or curse another. Our new nature should guide our tongue in speaking only blessings. We need to be consistent with the divine nature that God has imparted to us in salvation.

Wisdom Demonstration Demanded 3:13-16

James' subject matter seems to change just a little. Actually that is not the case. Every thought that he presents is tied to those which come before and lead to those which follow. Remember that we are talking about *Genuine Religion*. We have also been talking about words, works, real or dead faith and now wisdom. Again James writes that our words must be backed up with actions.

Wisdom and Knowledge do not always flow together. You

may know a lot and say even more, but do your actions convey a wisdom? The question presented, in verse thirteen, is that if you claim to have wisdom and knowledge, show it in your lifestyle and actions. The word "*conversation*" is an Old English word referring to our whole life; our walk and our talk. If you say that you have wisdom your actions with either betray you or bear the truth out.

There seems to be an indispensable ingredient to the wisdom James speaks of. It is meekness. Meekness towards God deals with an attitude of submission towards Him and His word which results in obedience. Meekness towards man will reflect that very attitude. Meekness conveys the idea wisdom will be carried out with respect to others and not in anger. There is an earthly wisdom, that so many have, and it is carried out in a prideful and arrogant manner, and often spoken or acted out in unpurposeful rage.

Bitter envying and strife are not mentioned in verse fourteen on accident. It points to a problem that some Christians have. There are those who desire to be teachers and claim to have wisdom, yet they have an animosity (*bitter envying*) towards those who are teachers and who are wise. They seem to be bitter against those who act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and carry out their duties in an attitude consistent with their new nature. This all hints of someone who has an attitude of jealousy and lacks real, alive faith.

When wisdom is something merely spoken of and carried out with feelings of bitter envying and strife, you will find "*confusion and every evil work*." (vs. 16). When the wisdom used is corrupt chaos is the result. This is the point that James is making to us as brethren. The "*evil work*" that is spoken of means that man will stop at nothing to achieve his own goals. This wisdom says the ends justify the means.

The Wisdom From Above 3:17-18

We now enter into two small verses that show an extremely

large contrast between earthly wisdom and spiritual wisdom. It is God's wisdom that we need and should desire. With this wisdom we will not falter in tribulations, we will not be an inactive Christian lacking in works, we will not be partial to a certain type of men, we will not speak with a double sided tongue and we will not promote ourselves over others.

God's wisdom is manifested in a *pure life*: One who does not have corrupt ulterior motives. They are consecrated to God's honor and will.

God's wisdom is manifested in an attitude of *peaceableness*: One who is in harmony with others, promotes their good, and is not disturbed when others are blessed. They do not want to wrong others nor revenge themselves when they are wronged.

God's wisdom is manifested in *gentleness*: One who is kind, courteous, gracious, merciful, patient, and lacks harshness. This person makes the best of matters rather than the worst.

God's wisdom is manifested in being *easily irritated*: One who is yielding to others, willing to admit wrong, open to reason, and lacks and attitude of conceitedness. This man is not under the assumption that changing one's mind is a sign of weakness.

God's wisdom is manifested in being *full of mercy*: One who is able to forgive and recognize that we are all sinners and all deserve nothing. This is the character of God.

God's wisdom is manifested in *good fruits*: God's wisdom is not a barren tree. It produces to it's full extent and produces not just any fruit, but good fruit.

God's wisdom is manifested in the absence of *partiality*: One who does not respect the outward appearance. This man does not make difference where God makes none. This wisdom does not seek to expose other men's faults. This wisdom places all at the cross of Christ and allows God to lift them to the place He has for them.

And lastly, God's wisdom is manifested without *hypocrisy*: One who is genuine, not two faced and acts in sincerity that

abides within the truth. This is being exactly what you are and saying exactly what you mean with all the above characteristics. No false motives or designs are intended.

The end result of all of this will be peacefulness. You will reap exactly what you sow. This is the impact that James is making in the last verse of chapter three. Sow peace and you will reap peace. Sow the seed of righteousness and righteousness will be the fruit produced.

Discussion Questions

1. Should our ambition be to become teachers?
2. Why do you think James used the illustrations of the horse and the ship?
3. In what way can the tongue defile the whole body?
4. What things '*ought not so to be*.'?
5. What can we learn from the illustrations of the fountain, the fig tree, and the vine?
6. Give some of the characteristics of God's wisdom.

Lesson Four

Unheard Prayers

James 4:1-17

Memory Verse 4:3, "*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*"

Look back for just a moment at the last two verses of chapter three. Notice the mention of peace? In the first few verses of chapter four we have a sharp contrast. Here we find that James begins to talk of wars and fightings, of lusts, and of enemies of God. The words we find in this chapter are hard. I wonder had we been one of the receivers of this letter, what would be our reaction to these last two chapters?

The Combat Zone 4:1-4

Have you ever heard someone end a prayer another way than "*in Christ's name*"? If you have, did it strike you as improper? Is there something magical about closing our prayers with those words? By saying those words are we guaranteed an answer fitting to our requests? To these last two questions we must answer with an emphatic no!

Prayers are hindered by many things. One certain hindrance is if our church becomes a combat zone. Making petitions before the Lord and then ending them in some prescribed manner will do no good if there are fightings among us. Bickering will not profit our prayers. Often, when these problems arise in our churches, we ask how it all happened. James fills us in; they come from our own personal desires to pleasure ourselves.

In verse two he makes mention of the endless cycle of our fleshly desires. Man hopes to bring happiness with his search for satisfaction. Yet, the desired end result never comes. The

words "*cannot obtain*" that James uses are emphatic. These lusts are an empty cavern which cannot be filled up.

If we keep all of our studies within it's context we can better understand the idea of "*ye kill*". Christians don't often commit murder. But all too often they commit character assassination. The lack of love, the envyings, and the strife which were all mentioned in our previous studies deal with this very concept. These problems are not foreign to our churches.

We talked of those who desired the position of teacher within the church. They did not understand the responsibility that went with the position. Some were not receiving this desired position simply because they were not asking for it. Others were not receiving it because they simply wanted to be the *big cheese*. They were desiring something God had no design upon giving to them.

The principle is the same in our own prayer life. We cannot seek to bring certain things about of our own power. Nor can we ask God for them if it is based upon a fleshly desire rather than a spiritually motivated one. God is not our servant to do as we wish Him to do, but we His. We need to remember this in each of our prayers.

Our own lusts are not the only problems we can encounter with our prayers. When we find that our associations are too closely tied to the world we find ourselves at odds with God (vs. 4). James' words are hard in verse four. He equates a Christian, who is a friend to the world, as an adulterer or adulteress. He is speaking of spiritual adultery much like what was spoken of Israel when she strayed from the one true God.

A Christian has no business aligning himself with a world that opposes the very person he professes to love. When affections are drawn to the world they are drawn away from God and the brethren. One who is guilty of this will find his prayers are little more than empty and vain words which reach no where. The combat zones are drawn out. We must be aware of the lines that destroy our prayers.

The Christian's Artillery 4:5-6

The flesh is weak and we will enter into a conflict. But praise God He has not left us helpless, nor defenseless. There is a power that is ours. Better stated there is a power within us that makes us His. This power is the Holy Spirit, and according to these verses He strives to have complete mastery in our activities and attitudes. The Holy Spirit is continually working within us and upon us to make us more like Christ. He affects our mind, our emotions, and our will to the glory of God.

It is the Holy Spirit that manifests the grace of God in our lives. If we humble ourselves to Him, allow Him to take control, then God promises *more* grace to that individual. *More* grace to overcome our own lusts. *More* grace to prevail against envying thoughts. God the Holy Spirit will provide the grace to understand and accept our own spiritual poverty so that we might understand and accept His spiritual riches and power.

There is a battle and there are weapons to be used. Our only means of fighting against the lusts of the flesh and the power of the world is in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Then and only then will our prayers be unhindered and effectual. But there is more than just the fact that we have the Holy Spirit. We need to be aware of His directions that are laid out in God's word.

The Battle Plan 4:7-10

Some of the greatest battles were won with the simplest battle plans. God's plan of victory for us, though not always followed, is just this simple. Through James, God tells us to submit to Him and resist the devil. The promised result is that the devil will flee from us (vs. 7).

These things can not be done in the flesh. The enablement to humble ourselves and resist the devil is through the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God. Our old nature is still present and must be put aside. The humble man recognizes that

his own powers are inadequate in standing against the devil and the flesh. He must, as James tells us, submit to God and resist the devil. These two commands must go together, they are not to be seperated.

In this submission there is the yielding of our will to that of God's will. It is accepting the Lordship of God. If there is no yielding to God then there is a yielding to the old nature of man. Though we can no longer be the slaves of satan, if we are born again, in this case we certainly seem to be surrendering to satan's will.

We have need to draw close to God each and every day, not just when things seem to be going wrong, or when we feel we are under attack. The promise is to '*draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you*'. This is all involved in the act of submission to God.

In verses eight through ten we have a wonderful promise. The first part of this promise has already been listed. When we draw nigh to God then He will not draw away but will draw closer to us. The second is that when we admit who and what we are; sinners that need to be cleansed, children that need to have our faith strengthened, and again humble ourselves before the Lord; then He will lift us up. This all involves confession of our sinfulness.

God will not draw close to a man who will not submit nor humble himself and give up his pride. We must come before Him that are dedicated to God's service. We must come before Him with hearts that believe and are not twisted with doubt. We must be willing to give all up for Him, and give it up.

Self-centeredness is the disease that ruins a Christians effectiveness for the Lord. Our prayers will be greatly hindered when we are concerned with only the promotion of ourselves or our projects. We must concern ourselves with God's will and turn away from desires of self. There are battle lines that have been draw. And, there is some special artillery for the fight. Humility before the Lord is one of the greatest weapons

that the Christian has.

If You Know It, Then Do It 4:11-17

We know that our relationship with the Lord is important. So is the relationship that we have with our fellow brethren. When we have unkind words for our brethren we show a great disregard for the Word of God (vs. 11). If we speak evil of one another then it means that we are judging one another.

We are not to be self-acclaimed critics of other christians. To do this means that we have elevated ourselves above others. Usually when we do this we can turn right around and find the very same fault that we are identifying in others, in ourselves.

God is the lawgiver and it is He who will judge us just as he will judge all others. That is why James asks the question; “*who art thou that judgest another?*”. Again, we find a possible hindrance to our prayers.

Speaking against others is wrong. But, so is ignoring God in our every day details of life. This too will be a hindrance to our prayers. We can not ignor God and His will in even the smallest of details in our lives.

God is not to be restricted to just the spiritual aspects of our life (vs. 13). He must be included in all areas of our life. Our business, our daily chores, and our expectations of physical preservation. Our physical dependance is not just upon our earnings and spending our earnings for sustenance. Our physical dependance is upon Almighty God. This is what James is referring to in verses eleven through seventeen.

I really think that James is trying to share with us a fault that we too often have. We like to make our plans and then ask God to bless them. I believe that we need to ask God to make our plans and then they will surely be blessed. All this means is that we are submitted our will to that of God's and will allow for divine interventions.

James likens our life to that of a vapor that is here for just a short moment and then is gone. When we realize the brevity

of life our conduct will be much different then if we feel we have an unending span of time.

Many will say that I do not do these things that James mentions. I don't speak evil of my brother. I don't count myself as being proud. James concludes this chapter with a rebuke. It is not against those who are guilty of the aforementioned sins, he already has done that. His rebuke is to those who kown what to do and don't do it. We must not simply rid our life of evil, but must do those things that we know are good. If we don't, then it is sin. Again, a hindrance to our prayers.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do Christians fight with one another?
2. Give some of the hindrances of prayer.
3. How can James use the terms “*adulterers and adulteresses*” in reference to christians?
4. What is the relationship between submitting and resisting?
5. Two things seem to be promised to one who humbles himself before the Lord, what are they?
6. Are we ever justified when we speak evil of another christian?
7. Are we to include God in more than just our spiritual affairs?
8. To what does James compare the length of our life?
9. Though we might not do evil, what are we think of one who knows what to do and doesn't do it?

Lesson Five

The Coming Of The Lord

James 5:1-20

Memory Verse 5:8, "Be ye also patient: stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

The coming of the Lord should disturb us in a positive manner. All through the New Testament we are encouraged to consider the closeness of Christ's coming and act accordingly. Peter, in his second epistle, explains the time of the end and then tells us that we are to be concerned with "what manner of persons ought ye to be. . . ." The coming of Christ is under consideration when James, in this last chapter, speaks to the rich and the impoverished, the patient and impatient, and the need for prayer.

Poverty in Riches 5:1-3

There were at this time, men in the churches who it appears were not saved. There is a distinct absence of the term brethren until we get to verse seven. Some of these men were financially well to do. But, along with their money came corruption. James' words here in the beginning of this chapter are very strong. Apparently there were some wealthy men who had become corrupted by a love for their money.

Understand that the Lord does not oppose wealth, but He does oppose the love and desire for wealth. These men were rich financially, but were destitute spiritually. They had gained their riches through deceit and impropriety. When we look at verses four through six we will see that they were also

mistreating their servants and employees for personal gain. For us, we can see that earthly wealth is temporary. These men's riches were corrupted, their garments were moth-eaten, and their precious metals were rusting. The concern that James is attempting to raise is that there is a coming judgment. These temporal items are not near as valuable as the spiritual. They must begin to see what eternal values really are.

Before passing on to the following verses note the last phrase of verse three. "Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." Their preparation against what evil might befall them in their old age or the end of the ages is exactly the problem. They had hoarded things that don't last. The wrong designs were in mind. What sense does it make to amass great wealth and riches at the expense of the spiritual side of man? When we leave this world we will take nothing with us. Only those things that have been sent on ahead will pass through the fires.

Unjust Employers 5:4-6

These verses really deal with an employer who hires workers for a particular fee and then fails to pay it. The reason they fail to pay is because of greed. Employers, or any company, are entitled to a profit margin. But here they were gaining their's by fraud.

These men were not happy to just make a profit, but they wanted a profit that would enable them to live in abnormal pleasure. They were taking advantage of those who worked hard with their hands in the fields. They were putting others in harsh circumstances so that they might live higher. In fact, verse five states that they were not only satisfying the need of their stomachs, but they were satisfying the need of their hearts as well (vs. 5). In other words they were going to the extremes in satisfying themselves.

So how do we apply all of this to us? I'm sure most that read this do not have the problem of wealth. But, we can have the problem of greed for wealth, or some of the other problems

that were expressed. The rich which are mentioned did not take into consideration the needs of others. Even those who were under their direct supervision were taken for granted. They went about ignoring the needs of those around them knowing they had the ability to meet some of those needs.

This rebuke is for anyone who lives to satisfy the physical appetites. Even we common folk can do that. When a missionary comes by and presents his need; do we look in our wallets, consider how much we were going to do spend after church and then decide how much? Who do you know that is in need? Has God prompted you to give? Do you then indulge the flesh at that individuals expense?

Before James turns his attention back to the *brethren* we want to take a short look at verse six. It seems that James is accusing these wicked rich-men of murdering the poorer christian. Murder can be considered to have been committed in the sense of the injustice. It may also be that some had actually been so deprived of their pay they could not afford the basic needs and had died. Whatever the exact case might have been, these christians did not fight back. They left all of the retaliation and judgment to the Lord.

Hurry Up And Wait! 5:7-9

That is exactly how we often feel. Patience is hard to come by and that is usually the way it does come. It is through trials and tribulations that we gain patience. It is in the actual trials and tribulations that have been mentioned which James encourages them to patiently endure.

James uses the coming of Christ to give them the hope they need to wait patiently and endure the hardships they were experiencing. The patience they needed is to take the place of the natural tendency of fighting back. Few of us enjoy being taken advantage of. Few of us will tolerate being cheated and abused. This is what was happening to some of the poorer christians, yet James tells them to be patient.

But, now the question. How long do we have to wait? How long must we endure the abuse from the wicked? This is where we get the statement; "Hurry up and wait". We will wait, but hurry up because we can't wait too long. How long? "*Unto the coming of the Lord.*" That is how long we must wait. This means we must give it totally up to the Lord to take care of. Because, by that time, we won't be here.

Verse eight continues on with the thought of waiting in patience. The reason a Christian can wait is because of the hope that he has in Christ's return. Even in James' day it was considered to be close. Imagine how close it is to us today. This should give us even more hope. And, this hope should "*stabilish*" or strengthen our spiritual man. Again in verse nine the comment is made that Christ's coming is near, so don't be critical, judgmental, or grumbling at our brethren.

Our Examples 5:10-12

James likes to use examples or illustrations to make his point. These three verses are no different. He asks us to look at the prophets of old. They stood for, and spoke for, the name of the Lord. They had to endure suffering. They are our examples in how they suffered, how they were afflicted, and how they were patient. We have only to look at Hebrews, chapter eleven, to see what their examples really were like. They had not actually received the promise made to them, yet they waited with faith and hope.

Prophets are mentioned in general in verse ten. In verse eleven he mentions Job specifically. Job stood firm though his accusers were cruel. He had much to learn from his experience, but through it he was able to say "*though he slay me, yet will I trust him*".

We can see the end purpose of what God accomplished with Job. This is also to serve as an example to us. In the end of Job's trials we see "*that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*" The end of Job was far greater than his beginning.

Impatience often causes us to make rash oaths to gain our desired end. This is something that James ask all to guard against. When we are to affirm or deny a matter make your answers simple. When impatience is at it's high and causes rash statements to be made, there will surely be a condemning of the failure to keep the oath, or the stupidity in which it was made.

Purposeful Prayers 5:13-15

James ends this epistle on a most important note, that of prayer. If you have mental anguish or troubles with being afflicted then prayer is the proper expression that needs to be made. If you are happy then sing psalms, the highest means of praise to God. And, if you are sick then call upon the elders to pray over you.

Keeping this all within the context of the book will help in understanding verse fourteen and fifteen. The elders mentioned are just that, elders. The word elder is used interchangeably with pastor or bishop. The oil that is mentioned had no special healing power other than in those days it was used as a medicinal ointment. This takes all of the hocus pocus out of the pseudo healers of today and puts the healing back in the hands of God. We might add that James seems to infer that there are some sicknesses that comes as a result of sin.

So many denominations have warped the meaning of these few verses that it would take a small book in itself to adequately deal with all their false teachings. Keep it in context, understand the meaning of a few words and the errors fall away quickly.

The Righteous Man's Prayer 5:16-20

Elijah, he was a man just like you and I. Yet, he prayed and the course of nature was affected. Prayer is a too often untapped source in our churches today. We think that we are too unlike Elijah. He must have been some super-duper saint with a direct line to God. Lets look into this matter that James uses to

encourage us.

Elijah suffered as we do. Elijah had the same weaknesses as we do. He experienced the same trials of despair that we often do. Yet, there was a difference. His prayer was powerful, why?

Elijah was not just persistent in some personal desire that he wanted it not to rain. He was persuaded by God's will that this was the proper thing to pray for. Our prayers become earnest, as was Elijah's, when we are so close to God that we know the mind of God on a particular matter and have peace about it.

Do you suppose that it was also because Elijah had some special righteousness that made his prayer more effectual than ours? No, his righteousness was provided in the same manner ours is today. We are made righteous in and by Christ. This is our standing and this should increase our faith in God's answering of our prayers.

Confession of our sins also plays a great role in the effectiveness of our prayers. The confession mentioned is not to be confused with the error of confession in the Roman Catholic doctrine. If we have unconfessed sin in our lives our prayers are indeed hindered. If we have not made things right between our brethren then that too will hinder our prayers. Any inquiry in our heart creates a problem with the effectiveness of our prayers (Psa. 66:18)

The closing statement of this epistle is a summary of need. **There are those who have fallen into the various faults that James has mentioned. These are the brethren who need our prayers. These are the ones who are in need our concern and effort. We have an obligation to bring our brothers and sisters back to the truth. Though one might think he is a giant in the faith, if he falls, plck him up. Dont' make an excuse for their sins, but help them return to the ways of God. In this manner we hide a multitude of sins.**

These thoughts are pointed at those who have backslidden.

There are those who have turned completely away from God. John tells us in his epistle that they go out from us because they were never of us. James does not have this type of man in mind. We know of christians who have backslidden. But do we remember an attempt on our part to restore them? Christ's return is near. Do we dare let them stay backslidden? Is our faith genuine? Do we really have a faith that is evidenced by our works? How do these words of James affect you?

One More Word!

The epistle of James has been very practical and very pointed in it's direction. If there have been points of interest go back and study them. Ask more questions concerning those thoughts or verses which have interested you. Don't let this small but powerful book lay dormant in your studies. Practical and challenging, that is the letter that James wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you consider to be the danger of having riches or wealth?
2. What were some of the wealthier people doing to the poorer people who worked for them?
3. What encouragement is there in being patient?
4. In what manner should the Lord's return affect us?
5. How soon do you think the Lord's return is?
6. What examples do we have for being patient?
7. What does it mean to swear not?
8. Do you feel it is important to confess your sins to other christians, if so when?
9. Can our prayers be as effectual as Elijah's?
10. What part should we play in helping backslidders?