

The book cover features a vertical spine on the left with a grey and white marbled pattern. The rest of the cover is a solid teal color. A white diamond shape is positioned at the center of the spine, overlapping the teal background. The title is printed in a black serif font on the teal background.

A Study Of  
The Epistle  
Of James

By David Phillips

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# INTRODUCTION

## To the Book of James

### The Author:

In James 1:1, the letter is addressed by, “*James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*” There are three men prominently referred to in the New Testament as James. 1. The brother of John. He was one of apostles. 2. James the less, or so he is referred to in Mark 15:40. He too was an apostle (Matthew 10:2). 3. James the physical brother of Jesus. The first James was martyred in Acts 12:1-2 before the book is supposed to have been written. It was customary for the apostles to state their apostleship when writing an epistle (see 1 Cor. 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1). The author does not address himself as such; therefore it is unlikely that either of the apostles wrote the book. Thus, we are left with James, the physical brother of Jesus as the most likely author.

In the list of the Lord’s brothers in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, James is listed first. Therefore, it is assumed that he is next in age after Jesus. During the public ministry of Jesus, it appears that James (as well as his other siblings) did not believe in Him as the Son of God (John 7:5). However, some time after Jesus’ resurrection we find that James believed and even became a prominent member of the church, as is attested to by his letter and Paul’s statements in Galatians 1:19; 2:9. One of his other brothers is attributed with writing the book of Jude (Jude 1:1).

### Recipients:

In James 1:1, the letter is addressed to, “*the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.*” It is supposed that James was addressing the Hebrew Christians who were scattered due to the persecution that had arisen in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Their Hebrew background would account for James’ reference to “*the twelve tribes.*” It is also possible that James was referring to all Christians; Jews and Gentiles alike. A combination of these two explanations seems to be the best explanation. The date the letter was written is supposed to be between 44 and 62 A.D. The conversion of the first Gentiles in Acts 10 took place about 40 A.D. By the time the letter was written gentiles were being added to the church as well as Jews. Therefore, it is most likely the case that James addressed the letter to all Christians, for Jew and Gentile believers alike are God’s special people; they are the spiritual Israel or “the twelve tribes” (compare Deut. 26:18; 1 Pet. 2:9).

### Attacks Against the Book:

Beginning with Martin Luther in the early 1500’s, those who strongly advocate the doctrine of *Salvation by Faith Only* have a great dislike for the book of James. Their conflict is based, among other things, on a misunderstanding of Paul’s comments concerning justification by faith. They take Paul to mean that since we are saved “by faith” (Romans 3:28; 5:1; Ephesians 2:8), nothing more is required of man for salvation than faith alone. Because of this misunderstanding, when they read James 2:24, “*You see then that man is justified by works, and not by faith only,*” they see it as a direct contradiction of Paul’s teachings. Yet, they fail to realize that even Paul taught that faith that results in justification is a faith that is obedient (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; Heb 11:1), and that mere mental ascent never saved anyone (John 12:42-43; James 2:19). Nevertheless, their dislike for the book is so strong that some even go so far as to argue that the book is not inspired. This is, of course, absurd. Every word in the book of James is in complete agreement with all other inspired writers of the Bible. We must understand that the scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35), therefore if two passages seem to be in conflict with one another it is we who are mistaken, not one passage or the other. Rather than cutting passages out of the Bible, as king Jehoiakim did in Jeremiah 36:23, we must strive to harmonize our understanding with all of God’s inspired word.

### The Practicality of the Book:

Some people in the religious community may not like this book, but its practicality can be clearly seen. The book of James does not allow men to remain at an academic or theoretical level of understanding. It forces one to step out of their studies and take a good hard look at their own character and manner of life. “*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing*

*his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was”* (1:22-24). It breaks down the platform of human wisdom upon which many “Bible scholars” stand in their own self-confidence. “*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy”* (James 3:13-17). One cannot read this epistle without taking note of the earnestness with which the Holy Spirit entreats the reader. The passion with which the epistle was written ought to move every honest servant of God to action.<sup>1</sup>

Mark Dunagan points out the following applications that we can make while reading this book. “1. This isn’t a Christianity which is practiced in the comfort of a study or with the perks of tenure and a successful book tour (1:2-4). 2. God isn’t impressed by the skeptic (1:6-8). 3. There is a wisdom that cannot be obtained apart from God and submitting to His will (James 1:5). 4. This book gets down to the nitty-gritty of temptation (1:14-16), and removes all the human explanations, excuses and rationalizations for why people do bad things. The teaching on why people give into evil clearly goes against modern political correctness and what often passes for ‘science.’ 5. Often, religious or secular scholarship doesn’t like to hear that lip-profession means nothing (1:22-27). Being a Christian means getting your hands dirty, getting into uncomfortable situations, changing your attitude, controlling your tongue and so on. 6. The teaching concerning personal favoritism (2:1-9) goes against the preferences of those who see themselves as belonging to an elite class. 7. A faith that works upsets the Calvinist or the elitist, who wants their salvation locked in, so they can concentrate on more important matters (2:14-26). The book is so practical that some have called it ‘the gospel of common sense.’ Or as the writers of the ISBE stated, ‘The sentence construction is simple and straightforward. There is usually no good reason for misunderstanding anything James says.’ Another writer noted, ‘There are those who talk holiness and are hypocrites; those who make profession of perfect love and yet cannot live peaceably with their brethren; those who are full of pious phraseology but fail in practical philanthropy. The epistle was written for them. It may not give them much comfort, but it ought to give them much profit. All who are long on theory and short on practice ought to steep themselves in the spirit of James; and since there are such people in every community and in every age, the message of the epistle will never grow old” (*The Book of James*, Introduction).

## Themes in the Book:

1. Pure religion vs. vain religion.
2. An active faith (1:21-27; 2:14-26).
3. The power of the tongue (3:1-12).
4. Wisdom from above (3:13-18).
5. The truth about temptation (4:1-6).
6. Humility (4:7-17).

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<sup>1</sup> James Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, pp. 19-20.

## Outline of the Book:

- I.** Greeting
- II.** Trials and how to meet them (1:1-4).
- III.** Wisdom and how to obtain it (1:5-8).
- IV.** Wealth and how to regard it (1:9-11).
- V.** The true source of temptation (1:12-15).
- VI.** The true source of every good gift (1:16-18).
- VII.** Hearing and doing (1:19-27).
- VIII.** Against partiality (2:1-13).
- IX.** Against a barren faith (2:14-26).
- X.** Qualities regarded in teachers (as well as all Christians – 3:1-18).
  - A. Control of the tongue (3:1-12).
  - B. True wisdom (3:13-18).
- XI.** Dangers/source of dissention (4:1-17).
  - A. Selfish motivation (4:1-3).
  - B. Desire to compromise with the world (4:4-5).
  - C. Arrogance (4:6-10).
  - D. Unconstructive criticism (4:11-12).
  - E. Rash confidence, presumption (4:13-17).
- XII.** Warnings to wealthy oppressors (5:1-6).
- XIII.** Encouragements to the oppressed (5:7-11).
- XIV.** Against oaths (5:12).
- XV.** The power of prayer (5:13-18).
- XVI.** Help
- XVII.** For backsliders (5:19-20).

# QUESTIONS

## FOR THE INTRODUCTION

Use the lesson to answer these questions:

1. Which man bearing the name of James most likely authored the Book of James?
  
2. What is meant by “the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad?”
  
3. Why do some people say that the book of James is not inspired of God?
  
4. What would you say to those who argue that James is not inspired?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Is the book of James useful for understanding Christian life?  
How it useful?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. List at least four principle that we can learn about by studying this book:
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.

# LESSON ONE

James 1:1-8

## Text

“James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

## Comments

James was written by the Lord’s brother and addressed “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed,” which, in fitting with the time of its writings, may refer to those Jews who had become Christians (See Acts 2-9), but is certainly applicable to all Christians. For in Christ, Jew and Gentile become one body—spiritual Israel (Eph. 2:16).

We are exhorted to “consider it all joy” when we face the various trials which test our spiritual strength and endurance through life. Our culture’s understanding of the term *joy* has prevented many from truly appreciating this instruction. The joy of a Christian is not, as so many see it, a mindless pleasure wherein men “let themselves go” in the sense of physical pleasure and self-fulfillment. Rather, it is the delight we may have in knowing that our trials will produce something wonderful. It is the joy that the farmer experiences as he contemplates the fruit that his labors will produce. Therefore, when we consider it all joy we are putting forth a conscious effort to set our minds on the light shining at the end our tunnel of trials. We delight in our spiritual growth which we undergo, knowing that the end result is an everlasting reward.

In order for the Christian to consider the testing of his faith a joyous occasion, he must have his heart in the right place—in the treasures of heaven (Matt. 6:20). If what we value lies only in the temporal pleasures of this life, no manner of reasoning will cause us to take joy while suffering. Yet, all Christians have had to leave a life in which our motivations were purely physical (Eph. 2:1-3). For this reason, many are hard-pressed at first to find joy in the spiritual rewards of godly living. Knowing our weaknesses, God offers us wisdom for overcoming our trials and learning the patience which is so vital to the lives of His people. God alone is the source for true wisdom. To those who ask in prayer, He is able and willing to give wisdom in abundance. For it is through the wisdom of God that the true value of our spiritual rewards can be seen.

However, with our requests comes a certain obligation—faith. Without faith in the willingness and ability of God to help, no amount of prayer will give us wisdom to overcome. For if we doubt God, what is to say that we will not also doubt the value of our suffering? Such is the man who, when he suffers, is guilty of complaining and ill treatment of others, even grumbling against God for allowing him to suffer. Such is not the result of faith, but of double-mindedness. For in one instance he glorifies God, but when made to suffer for the name of Christ he turns in cowardice. He is unstable in all his ways. Therefore, let us ask in faith, having all confidence in the willingness and power of God, and let us be constant, always looking to the reward that is in Christ.



# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON ONE

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. How should Christians view trials in their lives?
2. Explain how the testing of our faith can *produce patience*.
3. What is the value of developing patience?
4. What should we ask God for when struggling with patience?
5. How can that help us to have patience and take joy in our trials?
6. What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
7. How will God respond to our requests if we doubt?  
  
If we do NOT doubt?
8. Why is faith so necessary when we pray to God?
9. What is the character of a person who doubts?
10. What does it mean to be “double-minded?”

# LESSON TWO

James 1:9-20

## Text

“But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10 and let the rich man glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass; and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away. 12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow. 18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures. 19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.”

## Comments

In the previous lesson we studied James’ instruction for rejoicing in trials. In these next few verses he acknowledges that circumstances can bring their own temptations and that wisdom is needed in order to live godly lives in light of those circumstances.

The term “*humble circumstances*” speaks of lowliness according to the world’s standard. This may be the person of no reputation, undistinguished, or poor. This situation in life comes with its own set of temptations, one of which is the temptation to curse God for our struggles, i.e. “Why me?” However, when such a person comes to Christ, he does not need to be ashamed of his situation or discouraged by it. For regardless of the world’s standard, he is exalted in Christ; he is a child of God (1 John 1:1). “...and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Such a person can take satisfaction from the exaltation and honor of being a servant of Christ, for that is the most dignified position that any man can attain.

In contrast, the rich may be tempted to forget God. His situation in life may cause him to put too much faith in his wealth. He may learn to value comfort more than godliness and his heart may be turned away from the Lord, as was Israel’s according to Hosea 13:5-6. Therefore, just as the lowly man must glory in his high position, so the rich man must glory in his humiliation. Certainly, such a man must glory in the rewards of his faith, but such rewards must remind him that he has a more permanent home than what his riches can provide. The wealth of this world is like the flower of the field which withers in the hot sun. But our reward in Christ cannot be destroyed (Matt. 6:20). To glory in the humiliation of his flesh will help the rich man to refocus his eyes on what really matters; to remind him of the instability of earthly riches and the eternal security of faith in Jesus Christ. “*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy*” (1 Tim. 6:17).

Those who persevere during temptation, no matter their situation in life, are blessed in the sight of God. Like Abraham, they will prove their faith in God by trusting in Him rather than in the things of this life. Those who persevere are tested and proven as precious metals that are purified by fire. We must notice, however, that those who are approved do not simply face trials, for this can be said of all men. Rather, they persevere, they endure. They “bear bravely and calmly” (Thayer pg. 644). These are the people who continue to uphold God’s righteousness in the midst of their trials and temptations; who do not use their temptation as an opportunity to sin, in word or in deed. If this can be said of us then we will receive the crown of life when the Lord comes. This is God’s promise to those who love Him.

When we are tempted we must not say that it is God who tempts us, for He does not tempt with evil. He allows us to be tested with the hardships and struggles that are inherent in this physical life; He even uses those things to discipline us as His children (Heb. 12:5-11). But God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does He tempt with evil. Rather, the sinful temptations of our eyes, flesh and pride are the result of our own misplaced desires. When we give

in to our own lusts and desires sin is born and the result is death. Only when we understand and admit this truth can we learn to persevere in our temptation.

An understanding of how sin develops can help us to overcome it by stopping it at its source. There are, in fact, four ways by which this can help us to overcome. 1. Since the progression of sin begins with our own desires, the best place to begin overcoming it is to change our desires. The word of God can direct our minds and desires to those things which are of God (Matt. 6:19-21). But changing our desires takes time. While engaging in that process there are other things we can do to keep from sinning. 2. Limit opportunities. Some people try to get as close to the line as possible; to see how far they can go without actually sinning. But when we see the opportunity to sin we must learn to flee it as Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:7-12). God always offers us a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). 3. Exercise self-control. We cannot avoid every temptation. When we do encounter them we must exercise self-control. We must control our bodies, and not allow our bodies to control us. It is here that our love for God and our faith in His promise are tested. 4. Obtain forgiveness. We may sin from time to time (1 John 1:8-9), but we can be forgiven and have another opportunity to overcome through that forgiveness.

We must acknowledge the righteousness of God when dealing with sin and temptation. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that God is the cause of our temptation. No evil thing can come from Him. God does not cause us to sin, nor does He hinder us from overcoming our sins. Our own lusts and desires do that. But from God we receive all things that are good. For every good thing that we encounter in this life, from the rain that waters the ground to our salvation in Christ, is a gift from God. There is no variation to this truth. It is according to His will that we are brought forth (become new creatures—John 3:3, 5) by the word of truth (the gospel of salvation) and that we should be the first fruits (the choicest of all creation) dedicated to His purpose. This is God's will for us!

For this reason we must be quick to hear. That is to say, we must be ready and willing to hear the instruction and correction of God's word. We must not fear it. Rather, we must seek it out. In order to be quick to hear we must also be slow to speak. We cannot hear God's instruction when we are too busy spouting off our own ignorant philosophies. We must also be slow to anger or wrath. This requires self-control. When we control our anger then we are better able to reason concerning godly things and to strive for the righteousness of God. For His righteousness cannot be achieved by man's anger, but by humble submission to His word. Therefore, let us listen.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON TWO

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. Why does James introduce the poor into a discussion of trials (1:9)?  
The rich (1:10-11)?
2. To what does God compare the wealth of a rich man (1:10-11)?
3. What can we set our hearts on in this life that will far out last earthly treasures?
4. Why are we blessed for enduring temptation (1:12)?
5. How are we blessed when we endure temptation?
6. What is a “crown of life?”
7. How do temptations draw us into sin (vs. 14-15)?
8. How does sin bring forth death (1:15)?
9. How can understanding the progression of sin help us to overcome it?
10. Where do all good gifts come from (1:17)?
11. What does it mean to be:
  - a. “Quick to hear?”
  - b. “Slow to speak?”
  - c. “Slow to anger?”
12. What will produce the “righteousness of God” (1:20)?

# LESSON THREE

James 1:21-27

## Text

“Therefore putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does. 26 If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless. 27 This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

## Comments

The wrath of men does not produce the righteousness of God (see vs. 20). What does? The putting aside of all filthiness. To put aside means to cast off, to get rid of. Filthiness is most often applied to the filth and dirt that we wash off of our bodies. In a spiritual sense, it depicts the nature of the sin which stains the souls of men. With this one word, “filthiness,” James shows us why we must not try to justify our sinful practices or to down-play their evil nature. Sin is filth and if we want to please God then we must get rid of it. This is the commitment we make when we obey the gospel. “Filthiness” is what we repent of when we turn our hearts to God (Acts 26:20). Yet, even after we obey the gospel there is some wickedness that remains; sins that we struggle with as we strive to grow as Christians. Therefore, it is not enough to simply put off the filth that we practiced while in the world, we must also put aside all that remains of wickedness. Every evil thought, every bad habit, and every secret sin that remains with us after our conversion. By this we will prove ourselves to be children of God (1 John 3:5-9).

When we get rid of sin we cannot allow the void it creates to remain empty. We must fill the void with those things that are godly in nature, lest our sins return worse than they were before (Matthew 12:43-45). For this reason, James instructs us to receive with meekness the word implanted, which is able to save our souls. We must take special care that we receive God's word with the right attitude. We must receive it with the humility and gentleness of heart, surrendering ourselves to its every command. Only then can it save us. The word becomes implanted when we obey the gospel of salvation. When we first hear the gospel, believe it and obey it, it becomes apart of us; it is implanted in our hearts. From that point on it is our responsibility to continue to learn and understand it and allow it to completely fill our lives.

In order for this to take place, James says that we must be doers of the word and not merely hearers. Many religious minded people throughout the world are known for always having their Bibles at the ready, either sitting on their end tables or their coffee tables. But such devotion to their Bibles is absolutely useless if they are not practicing what it says. James says that those who hear the word but do not do what it says delude themselves. They think they are righteous and religious, but they are sorely mistaken.

James likens God's word to a mirror. It is the reflection of what the man of God ought to look like. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul said that the scriptures are able to make the man of God “adequate, equipped for every good work.” It shows God's people the character they must have and the kind of lives they must live. It shows them what they must become as children of God. There are many people who look into this mirror and study the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in-depth. Yet, when they close its pages they turn and do the very things God condemns or fail to do the things that God commands. They become forgetful hearers. They look into the mirror, but when they walk away they forget the image that they saw. For such a one, God's word has no profit.

How can a person benefit from God's word? “*But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does.*” This is why God's word was given to men; that we might hear it, understand it, and practice it. When we are obedient to the word of God, then we know

that we have a right relationship with God. “*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments*” (1 John 2:3). This describes the person who looks into the mirror and does not forget what he sees.

James affirms that God’s word is in fact a law. It contains commandments that must be obeyed. We must understand, however, that there are laws which take away freedom and there are laws which give freedom. The law of Christ is one of liberty—it provides for the freedom of God’s people. It does so, not only by salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus, but also by revealing the wisdom and righteousness of God which frees us from the foolishness that is in the world. However, this freedom places great responsibility on God’s people. For the law of liberty will make us free only if we obey it. When we do this, as James says, we will be blessed in what we do.

There are many who show great evidence of being pious followers of God’s law. Such people may manifest their devotion through many good deeds, through a zeal for sound doctrine, or through diligent study of God’s word, but if they do not bridle their tongue their religion will be worthless. Why is this? James comments on this in James 3:6, “*And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.*” If we do not bridle or control our tongue, it can ruin everything. For this reason Christians must learn to refrain from speaking when they are tempted to lash out, when they are tempted to gossip, or when they are tempted to speak things that are not true. A single word can ruin days, even years of good works.

We must also understand that “religion” in the sight of God is more than the reading of our Bibles or attending services. “*This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*” Bible study is necessary, but it is the means by which we learn how to live as God’s people. If we read our Bibles but do not live the way it instructs us to, then our devotion is useless. For this reason the individual must put to practice all that God commands in the scriptures. The result will be love from a pure heart toward all men. For the first and second greatest commandments are these, “*And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these*” (Mark 12:30).

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON THREE

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What needs to be laid aside (1:21)?
2. What needs to be received with meekness (1:21)?
3. What does it mean, “the word implanted” (1:21)?
4. How can you deceive yourself (1:22)?
5. Why is a hearer like a man looking into a mirror (1:23)?
6. What is one like who hears the word but does not do it (1:23-24)?
7. Who will truly be blessed in what they do (1:25)?
8. What is the perfect law of liberty (1:25)? Why?
9. Whose religion is useless (1:26)?
10. Define “religion” (1:27).
11. Define “visit” (1:27).
12. Who is to visit orphans and widows (1:27)?
13. Define “unspotted” (1:27).

# LESSON FOUR

James 2:1-13

## Text

“My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. 2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, ‘You sit here in a good place,’ and you say to the poor man, ‘You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,’ 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5 Listen, my beloved brethren: did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court? 7 Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called? 8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. 11 For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not commit murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.”

## Comments

Jesus died for all men because all have sinned. Therefore, all men have equal need for salvation. At the same time, all who are in Christ are equally blessed, regardless of their physical circumstances, and they are equally precious in God’s sight (Eph. 1:3). This is the unity which Christ established when He died on the cross. Through His sacrifice He tore down whatever separation existed between men and made all who believe in Him to come together as one man or as one body (Ephesians 2:11-13). It is for this reason that we are commanded to not hold our faith in Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism. When we honor one man over another on account of his wealth, social circumstances, or any other physical attribute, we make ourselves judges of one another causing one person to be regarded as greater than another. We show partiality where Christ has created equality.

During the time the book of James was written, there was a common attitude in the societies of the day which discriminated against the lesser classes. When we obey the gospel, this is one of the many forms of *wickedness* that we must *lay aside* (James 1:21). Our goal must be to regard men as Christ does and not according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16).

Therefore, when we see a brother of high circumstances or worldly importance, we must not exalt him above the others. And when we see a brother of poor circumstances, we must not humble him, but seek to lift him up instead. As James said, “*God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom.*” The Psalmist wrote of this in Psalm 113:7-8 saying, “*He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap, that He may seat him with princes – with the princes of His people.*” Jesus was poor when He preached the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 9:58). He preached the gospel to the poor (Luke 41:8). He chose men who were poor to be His apostles (Acts 3:6). With this pattern God was able to show us that His salvation does not rest upon the wealth and power of men, but in His wisdom, might and righteousness from which the gospel receives its power. God is our exaltation, not the riches of this world! Therefore, as we learned in chapter one, the poor ought to rejoice in their exaltation in Christ and the rich in their humiliation. As we put our faith in Christ we must also view our brethren in the same manner as Christ did—with love, giving one another the preference (Romans 12:9-13).

In response to the above statements, some may be tempted to argue that they are fulfilling the royal law, which is to “love your neighbor as yourself,” by giving the rich man the seat of honor. However, James shows that this argument is not a valid one. He makes the point that if we are trying to show love toward our neighbors then we do well. However, he goes on to say that if we love one brother but show partiality toward another, we are still in sin.

God gives us the law by which we must walk. One command in His law is just as authoritative as another. Therefore, if we disobey one command, though we are obedient to every other command, we become guilty according to that law. “*For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.*”



The Law of Christ is a law that brings freedom to those who obey it. Therefore it is called the *law of liberty*. However, as a law it is still binding upon those who are under it. While it offers freedom, it also condemns those who are disobedient. During His ministry Jesus said, “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (John 12:48). Therefore, we must obey the law of liberty with the understanding that we will be judged by its every word.

We cannot pick and choose which commands we are going to obey. We are not “good enough” if we only fulfill part of what is expected of us by God. Therefore, if we obediently honor one brother, while at the same time withholding our honor from another brother, we are still in sin. Why? Because partiality is a sin according to the law of Christ.

This principle applies to every aspect of God’s law. This was what James meant when he wrote, “*So speak and so act, as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.*” If we are going to follow Christ we must obey all of His commands, not just the ones we want. If we are going to learn God’s word, we must also practice what it says. If we are going to love our neighbors, we must also worship God in spirit and in truth. If we are going to assemble with the saints at every opportunity, then we must also honor God every other day of the week. This is what God expects of His people.

When we show partiality toward our brethren, we are being merciless. Mercy is what causes us to care for a person according to their needs. We are merciless when we withhold that which our brother needs. Therefore, when we honor a rich man while degrading a poor man (“sit down at my footstool”) we are not being merciful. We must understand that “*judgment will be merciless to the one who shows no mercy.*” What is the point? In order to receive mercy from God, we must cast off personal favoritism and show mercy to our brethren who are in need: feeding the poor, clothing the naked, going to the imprisoned and visiting the sick. We must associate with the humble that we may lift them up. By this we will walk in the steps of our Lord and Savior, and in return God will have mercy upon us.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON FOUR

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What are the three main points for this chapter?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
2. With what is one not to hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ (2:1)?
3. What situation does James use to illustrate his point concerning partiality (2:2-3)?
4. Why would some pay attention to the rich man (2:3)?
5. Of what is one guilty when they show partiality (2:4)?
6. Why should one not show prejudice against the poor (2:5)?
7. How and why did God choose the poor of this world (2:5)?
8. What had the rich been doing against those to whom James wrote this epistle (2:6-7)?
9. What is the “royal law” (vs. 8)?
10. What is the consequence of showing partiality (2:9)?
11. Of what is one guilty if they stumble in just one point of the law (2:10-11)?
12. What is the law of liberty (2:12)?
13. In your own words, explain the point James makes in verse 12.

# LESSON FIVE

James 2:14-26

## Text

“What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18 But someone may well say, ‘You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ 19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. 20 But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. 25 And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

## Comments

At this point in the book, we should be able to see one of the major themes that the Holy Spirit is developing. In chapter one, James wrote of our need to continue in patience (continue to exemplify godly character) even in the midst of trials, to endure temptation, to lay aside filthiness and wickedness, and to be doers of the word. In the first part of chapter he wrote of the need to be obedient to the law in all things without partiality. In each of these points great stress is placed upon the need to be obedient in light of God’s grace. James shows us that we cannot be Christians while doing things our own way. Christians cannot please God while living the way they did in the world. Neither can they simply “tag along for the ride.” If we want to be pleasing to God we must be workers, actively and zealously doing God’s will and diligently striving to overcome our sins. In response to this, some may raise the question, “If we are saved by grace through faith, why does James put such emphasis on doing the work?” See James 1:25. James addresses this very question in 2:14-26.

Of what use is our faith if it is not backed up with actions? This was James initial question to those who believed they could be saved by faith alone. To illustrate his point, James used a common greeting among the Jews of the day. “*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?*” If we tell a person to be warmed and filled without giving them anything to warm them or fill them, does our statement benefit them? Not in the least. We may tell them to be filled, we may even desire that they be filled, but such a statement is worthless unless we act upon it! The same thing is true for our faith. We may say we believe in God. We may confess Jesus as Lord. But if we do not also obey Jesus as Lord, our confession will prove useless in the Day of Judgment. Jesus taught on this principle in the parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-31. When the father asked one of his sons to work in his vineyard, the first son said he would work, but he never did it. Jesus implied that this son did not do the will of his father. Even so, we do not do the will of our Father in heaven when we say we have faith in Jesus as Lord but fail to obey Him as Lord. Therefore, our faith, if it does not have the works to back it up, is useless—it is dead.

James strengthens his point with the statement, “*You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*” Some have become confused at this point because they misunderstand the term “works.” Paul used this term in the book of Romans to say that we are saved by faith “*apart from works*” (Rom. 4:6). But in no way do these passages contradict one another, for in Romans Paul was making the point that a person cannot earn their salvation through their works; that a person cannot say “I deserved salvation because I offered sacrifices, tithed, and fed the poor.” However, James was making the point that God will not save us unless we obey Him. In no way did James imply that we can earn our salvation. When we understand this we will find that James and Paul were in perfect agreement, for Paul wrote in Romans 2:5-11 that in the judgment God will render to each person according to their deeds, “*glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good*” (emph. mine, DP). James point was that our works are a manifestation of our faith.

If we have faith but do not obey God, our faith is no better than that of the demons. Some have been tempted to scoff at this argument, saying, “Demons cannot be saved, therefore it is foolish to compare their faith to ours.” However, Jesus used this type of reasoning several times during His ministry. One example can be found in Matthew 5:46 where He taught us to love our enemies. He said, “*For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*” Jesus was not arguing whether or not the tax collectors *could* love their enemies. His point was that, generally speaking, tax collectors love only those who love them back, but that God has called us unto greater things. If we want to be better than the tax collectors we must learn to love as God loves—to love our enemies. Likewise, James was not arguing whether or not the demons *could* be saved; this had nothing to do with it. Rather, that the demons acknowledge that there was one God, but they did not serve Him. Even so, we are no better than the demons if we acknowledge that there is one God but do not serve Him.

James goes on to use God’s faithful servants to illustrate how faith must be accompanied by works. In Genesis 22:1-14, God told Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. In Hebrews 11:17-19 it says that Abraham believed that God could raise Isaac from the dead. Could Abraham have proven his faith if he stayed home and refused to obey God? Of course not! So what did James say about it? “*You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.*” This is the point of this whole section. We cannot *earn* our salvation through works. Rather, our faith and our works work together. In this way we are saved “through faith” (Eph. 2:8). That is to say, we are saved by our faith when it is perfected by our works. This is the kind of faith Abraham had. This is the kind of faith we must have. Only then will our faith will be accounted to us as righteousness.

Rahab was another example of a person whose faith was perfected by works. She believed in the Lord God, but her faith would have been useless had she kept silent. Instead, she helped the spies escape and in so doing saved her own life as well (read Joshua 2; 6:17).

Can a body function without its life force? No. Neither can our faith function without our works. There may be faith, just as there may be a body, but as our spirit causes the body to be animated, so our works cause our faith to be animated. If we take works out of the equation, then “*as the body without the spirit it dead, so faith without works is dead also.*”

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON FIVE

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What question does James address in this section?
2. What is the first example James uses to illustrate the futility of faith without works (2:15-16)?
3. Of what value is faith without works (2:17)?
4. How does James challenge a person who only has faith (2:18)?
5. What example does James use next to show the futility of faith only (2:19)?
6. Do the demons really believe (2:19)?
7. Even though the demons cannot be saved, how does their faith in one God illustrate our need to have faith and works?
8. How does James 2:17 describe faith without works?
9. How was Abraham justified (2:21)? Compare with Hebrews 11:17
10. What was the relation between Abraham's faith and works (2:22)?
11. What two things resulted from Abraham's works (2:23)?
12. Why was Abraham the friend of God (2:24)?
13. How are we justified by works (2:24)? Does this contradict Romans 5:1? Explain.
14. What does James 2:24 teach us about the belief that one can be saved by "faith alone?"
15. How was Rahab justified (2:25)? Compare with Hebrews 11:31.
16. How does James 2:26 describe "faith without works?"

# LESSON SIX

James 3:1-8

## Text

“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they may obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Behold, the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder, wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed, and has been tamed by the human race. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison.”

## Comments

There is a sense in which all of God's people must be teachers. That is, all must be ready and willing to teach the gospel to any who are in need. Christians are commanded to “*always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15). Jesus said that His disciples were to be the light of the world. As such, He commanded them saying “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:13-16). Thus, God's people are to be teachers in word and in deed.

At first glance, it would seem that James discouraged Christians from being teachers. “*My brethren, let not many of you become teachers.*” Understand that James does not contradict the rest of the scriptures, but refers specifically to those who desire to be designated as teachers. Like the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and elders, teachers had their own designation in the church. Notice, “*Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers*” (Acts 13:1), “*And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers*” (1 Corinthians 12:28), “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers*” (Ephesians 4:11). So you see, though all Christians should strive to teach men about righteousness and salvation, there are also those in the church who are specifically designated to the role of teaching. The context of James 3 suggests that it was this specific designation to which James was referring. But why would he discourage people from becoming teachers?

“*Knowing that you shall receive a stricter judgment.*” Every Christian has a responsibility to consider their words carefully and to avoid foolish and erroneous talk, for all will give an account for the things that they say (Matt. 12:36). But those who become teachers have much more responsibility placed on their shoulders than the people they teach, for there is a greater potential for leading others astray. Teachers will not be judged by a different standard than everyone else, but they will be held accountable for the greater level of responsibility placed upon them. Jesus taught this principle in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Teachers will also be held to the standard that they teach. They guide others toward a better understanding of the scriptures and they instruct others in how to apply scriptural principle in areas such as morality, Christian characteristics, worship, etc. Everything a teacher teaches becomes a part of the standard by which he will be judged. “*You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal*” (Romans 2:21)?

To illustrate the responsibility teachers have, James discussed the power of the tongue. For most people, it is hard enough to control their bodies, for “*we all stumble in many things.*” We try to control ourselves, but eventually give in to the temptation. We try to do what is right, but as soon as we divert our attention we do what is wrong. It is an ongoing challenge for all men. Yet, to control the tongue is a far greater challenge. So much so, that if a man has the strength to control his tongue, controlling the rest of his body ought to be no problem. “*If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*”

What is the point? Since the most essential tool of a teacher is his tongue (mouth, voice, etc.), he must not only control his body in order to practice what he preaches (1 Cor. 9:27), he must also control his tongue so that he

teaches the right things and avoids saying the wrong things. Herein is the difficulty of this task. As a bit controls a horse and as a small rudder controls a large ship, so the tongue is able to control a person. It may be small, but its power is great, as is the damage that it can do. It has the ability to lead us where we do not want to go, hence the saying "I put my foot into my mouth." If a person desires to become a teacher they must understand this truth, as well as the risks.

There are many parts of various sizes within the human body. The tongue is one of the smallest members. Nevertheless, it is able to do the greatest amount of damage. The tongue is able to defile the whole body (Mark 7:15). What comes out of our mouths is a manifestation of what exists in our hearts. If we say evil things it is because there is evil in our hearts. For this reason our tongue is able to set fire to our lives. While the evil is contained within our hearts we may repent and put it off. But once it proceeds from our mouths there is very little that can quench the fire that it creates. Therefore, it is able to set fire to our entire world.

Like a small flame which is able to set an entire forest ablaze, the tongue is able to set fire to the world of men. With a slip of the tongue a man can fall into sin. With one word life can be granted or denied. With a whisper of deceit a nation can be hurtled into war. Men have the ability to tame all manner of life on this earth, from giant whale to the tiny flea, yet never has he been able to tame the tongue. Its poison can be seen in the damage caused by false doctrine and in the deadly nature of gossip.

Many have set their hands to the task of teaching and have failed (1 Timothy 1:7; Titus 1:11). Therefore James says, "*Let not many of you become teachers.*" Though not all Christians are meant to be teachers, all must learn from these principles. As we will see in our next lesson, the dangers of the tongue are prominent in every person's life. Therefore, it ought to be a constant struggle for every Christian to control their tongue.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON SIX

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. Why does James caution against many becoming teachers (3:1)?
3. Why will teachers receive a “stricter judgment” (3:1)?
4. What is one indication of maturity and self-control (3:2)?
5. In this context, what does it mean to stumble (3:2)?
6. What two illustrations does James use to show the power of the tongue (3:3-4)?
7. What illustration is used to show the danger of the tongue (3:5)?
8. How does James describe the tongue (3:6-8)?
9. Why does James mention birds and beasts (3:8)?



# LESSON SEVEN

James 3:9-18

## Text

“With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; 10 from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. 11 Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs? Neither can salt water produce fresh. 13 Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. 18 And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

## Comments

Continuing his discussion, James points out the dual nature of man’s use of the tongue. With a word men can do great good or great evil. Many times, they do both. How is it that our words can be so dangerous? Deception. With one word we can greet our brother with kindness and with the next curse him or spread gossip to this ruin. In one moment we may bless God and in the next curse man whom God created in His own image. Such inconsistency is not fitting for God’s people.

James illustrates this principle with the fountain and the tree. A farmer would not expect to pick oranges off of an apple tree, would he? In a fountain of water there is either fresh water or salt water. There cannot be both. Even if there are two sources of water, one fresh and one salty, if they were to be combined it is inevitable that both would become salty. Such is the case when we allow both good and evil things to proceed from our mouths. We are as fountains, with our words pouring out. We must choose whether the water will be good or bad. We are trees bearing fruit for our Master. We must decide whether we will bear good fruit or bad fruit.

There are many teachers who have not considered these principles. With their mouths they instruct men in the word of God and bless Him openly, but having failed to purify their hearts, their good words are marred by evil speech, backbiting, and error. As God’s people, Christians must do all they can to overcome this. We must allow only those things which are good and wholesome to proceed out of our mouths, confirming what we say by our good deeds. This will take great self-control, but it is a goal that we must strive to attain.

Who is wise and understanding? Many who assume the role of teacher believe themselves to be wise and understanding. There are also many Christians who, though they do not assume the role of a teacher, lift themselves up as better than others because they believe themselves to be wise and understanding. But God teaches us that if we have true wisdom then we will prove it through our good works rather than through our many words. “*Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.*” This is the true test of wisdom. True wisdom does not boast of itself, rather, it proves itself through righteousness and humble service. “*But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant*” (Matthew 23:11).

When there is a disagreement between two people, those involved may become bitter or jealous against one another. These feelings may be caused by each person’s fear of the other proving him wrong. Many people will go to great lengths in order to avoid being proved wrong, even if it means denying the obvious truth. James warns against this attitude. “*Do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*” Because of their arrogance men will twist facts, base arguments upon pure speculation and abandon sound reasoning. They will make arguments against that which they know to be true for the simple purpose of being clever. There are many men who are very clever when it comes to convincing others at falsehood. They have an uncanny knack for making sin and error seem good. The world views such people as wise. But we should know that true wisdom is not found in the ability to defend our point of view, to justify our own false beliefs, or to make error seem good. Some may call it wisdom, but James says that this kind of wisdom is earthly and demonic. Why? Because it perverts truth and deceives the hearts of men (2 Thess. 2:9-12).

This earthly wisdom is not motivated by the righteousness of God. Rather, it is motivated and governed by jealousy and selfish ambition. Selfish ambition causes us to seek, even fight, to fulfill our own desires rather than the will of God. This type of wisdom is the source of all deception, corruption, and division. Therefore, James said that every evil thing is the result of this kind of wisdom. The damage it can do if allowed exist in the members of the church is incalculable. Why are there so many religions in the world? Because men base their faith on this earthly wisdom rather than the truth of God's word.

What is true wisdom? It is wisdom that is from above—that originates from God and is in complete agreement with the will of God. This wisdom is pure. It is motivated by a good and honest heart. It is not governed or directed by ulterior motives, it does not seek to manipulate people, and it is not controlled by selfish ambitions. Wisdom that is from above is also peaceable; it loves peace. It does not seek to create strife, but to make peace in so far as that peace is in accordance with the truth (Eph. 4:1-3). Those who have this wisdom are not afraid to admit when they are wrong, neither are they afraid to stand for the truth.

Wisdom that is from above is gentle. It does not tear other people down, nor does it exalt itself. It causes a person to interact with others in a gentle and friendly manner. "*Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*" (Matthew 10:16). When dealing with brethren who are in sin, this wisdom is what causes us to approach them with humility and gentleness while encouraging them unto greater faithfulness (Galatians 6:1). This wisdom is also reasonable. It causes a person to respond to challenges in a reasonable manner without lashing out in frustration or anger. It is willing to listen and to be persuaded when the truth is presented. It causes a person to not only hear instruction, but to seek it out (Proverbs 9:9).

This is the wisdom of God. When we put on this kind of wisdom we will be merciful as God is merciful. We will diligently bear the fruit of righteousness as Jesus has left us an example. We will seek out the truth and will not waver under the attacks of error (Prov. 4:13). Neither will we waver under the challenges of life, knowing that God gives us this wisdom that we may overcome (James 1:5). When we have this wisdom we will not say one thing and do another as the hypocrites do. Rather, our words and our actions will be in perfect harmony according to the will of God. And so, through a desire to make peace and keep the unity of the spirit which is according to God's truth, we will bear fruit in our lives which is defined by the righteousness of God.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON SEVEN

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What example does James use to show how the tongue is often misused (3:9-10)?
2. What harm is done by the same mouth giving both blessing and cursing (3:10)?
3. How does one demonstrate wisdom (3:13)?
4. What does it mean to be self-seeking (3:14)?
5. What are the characteristics of human wisdom (3:15)?
6. What accompanies “envy and self-seeking” (3:16)?
7. List the seven characteristics of heavenly wisdom (3:17-18):
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.
  - d.
  - e.
  - f.
  - g.
8. Who produces the fruit of righteousness (3:18)?

# LESSON EIGHT

James 4:1-10

## Text

“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: ‘He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us’? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”

## Comments

In the previous chapter James discussed the nature of earthly wisdom. In this section he shows us the outcome of that wisdom and the effects it can have on the church. He begins by asking, “*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?*” This is a good question, for every person has had to deal with such quarrels in their family, at work, among friends, etc. Some people say that these conflicts come from a clash of personalities, but James takes it to the very heart of the matter: “*Is not the source your pleasure that wage war in your members?*” This has been true from the very beginning. It is because of self-seeking that men fall into sin and thus separate themselves from God, and it continues to be the cause of arguments and wars among men.

Men lust for many things (money, power, glory, etc.) and they go to great lengths to attain them. When this selfishness is placed in the midst of a group of people where each person is seeking their own interests, the result will be conflict through and through. Some have gone so far as to kill their neighbors in order to get what they want. We often want things to be done a certain way, but when we cannot have our own way we argue and fight with those who hinder us.

Sadly, many do not see this because they are not willing to stop and honestly ask the question, why are we fighting? Churches have split because men lusted after worldly things. Brethren have become enemies because they were envious of one another and could not attain what they wanted. True, many make the claim of seeking after righteousness, but their works are evidence to the contrary (Matthew 23:25-26). Have you stopped to consider what your motivations are? Try it the next time you find yourself in a disagreement.

Often times, men desire things but cannot attain them. Why? James says that it is because they do not ask God. They would rather trust in their own earthly wisdom in an attempt to attain what they want through selfish scheming and conniving. “But I do ask God,” some will say. In response to this James responds, “*You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.*” We may make our requests known to God, but what use is it to ask God for something that we intend to use to sin against Him? Men want good health so they do not have to rely on God for strength. Men want money, not so they can help others, but so they can spend on their own pleasures. Men want things to be done a certain way in the church, not because they want to glorify God, but because they seek their own glory and their own will. Thus, James says, “*...you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives.*”

When we put our own desires above the will of God are called adulterers and adulteresses because our hearts are supposed to belong to God. When we obeyed the gospel of Christ we were made new creatures, we were joined to God in Christ, we became servants of God. Together, Christians make up the church which is also pictured as the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-24). Now, what happens when a man’s wife seeks intimate relationships with other men? She commits adultery. This is also true when husbands seek intimate relationships with other women. When we set out hearts to fulfill our own desires rather than the will of God we are as those who seek relationships with other people. We commit adultery because we who are meant for Christ give ourselves over to the world, fulfilling the lusts of our flesh rather than the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:19-26). Thus, we become adulterers. And for this reason James said, “*...do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?*”

When we seek the things of the world we become a friend of the world because we show approval of its sinful practices. For some, worldly pleasure may make them feel good for the moment, but it causes them to sacrifice their relationship with God. When we become friends of the world in this way we make ourselves enemies of God because we are choosing to practice the very thing that Jesus died in order to destroy (1 John 3:8).

When God created us He gave us an eternal spirit which, when this body has died, will return to Him (Eccl. 12:7). The scriptures teach us that God jealously yearns for our spirits; He desires that we belong to Him. Nevertheless, the soul of every person who rejects God will be lost, cast into eternal condemnation. Without Christ, this would be the case for all men, for all have sinned. But because of God's desire for our salvation, He was willing to send Jesus Christ to die on the cross. He gave us the means to devote our lives, our spirits, to Him. So what hinders us from approaching God in this way? Pride! Sin is the result of our pride, and it is because of our pride that we continually reject His offer of salvation. For this reason, it is written, "*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*" In short, God rejects those who walk by earthly wisdom, but gives grace to those who walk by the wisdom that is from above.

Therefore, all who desire salvation and a right relationship with God must submit to Him in all things. We must draw near to Him through humble obedience. When we do this, then God will draw near to us. He will be with us and His word will be in our hearts. He will take pleasure in us. How do we draw near to Him? By resisting the devil. The devil would have us continue in sin and deny God. We resist him by fleeing from sin and pursuing the righteousness of God. We must cleanse our hands, not with soap and water, but by removing sin from our midst. We must purify our hearts, no longer living as hypocrites. Our soul's desire must be to do the will of God. We must be honest. What can be seen of our actions must be a direct manifestation of the righteousness that should be in our hearts, not a disguise for evil motives (Matt. 23:14).

How do we know if our hearts are pure? When we are miserable, and when we mourn and weep over the knowledge of our sins. Sinfulness is no small matter. Every sin ought to be a blow to our conscience, causing us to humble ourselves in the sight of God, to beg for His mercy, and to submit wholeheartedly to His instruction. This is the result of true love for God. This is the result of the wisdom that is from above. Do not be afraid of humbling yourself in this way, for when we do this, God will be the one to exalt us in Christ.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON EIGHT

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What are the main points in this chapter?
2. Where do wars and fights find their origin (4:1-2)?
3. Define "Lust" (4:2).
4. Why do some not receive what they ask for (4:3)?
5. What does James call those who would be a friend of the world (4:4)? What does he refer to them in this way?
6. How does one become a friend of the world (4:4)?
7. Who does God resist (4:6)?
8. To whom does He give more grace (4:6)?
9. How can one resist the devil (4:7)?
10. How does one draw near to God (4:8)?
11. How should one turn laughter into mourning (4:9)?
12. How does one humble himself before God (4:10)?

# LESSON NINE

James 4:11-17

## Text

“Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. 12 There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor? 13 Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ 14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. 15 Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.’ 16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

## Comments

We would do well to read the previous section again (James 4:1-10), for the points made in this section are directly connected with the principles set forth in the previous section. James shows us what we will do if we have purified our hearts. He shows us how we will treat our brethren if we have the wisdom that is from above. And he shows us how we will view our lives if we humble ourselves in the sight of God.

Humility will ultimately result in our complete submission to God’s law. It will also result in our serving our brethren (Rom. 12:10; 1 John 3:16-17). However, when we speak against a brother or judge a brother, we exalt rather than humble ourselves. Speaking against a brother is the same as gossiping, slandering, backbiting, even condemning them. Our purpose in life is to be doers of the law (James 1:22ff.). But when we speak against our brethren we are not doing the law, we are judging the law.

What does it mean to judge the law? It means that we presume to judge how the law ought to be carried out. When we speak against a brother, we determine for ourselves whether or not that person should be condemned. In doing so, we exalt ourselves as judges rather than doers of the law. In the courts no person has authority to pronounce judgment except the judges appointed. Those who exceed their place are charged with contempt of the court. When we speak against one another and thereby pass judgment, we show the same contempt for God as those people do for the court. For we presume to place ourselves in the judgment seat of God, thereby making ourselves judges of the law.

Let us understand, however, that though we have no authority to pronounce judgment upon a brother, we do have an obligation to judge (determine) whether or not a brother is living in sin. Read Matthew 5:3-5, 15-20; 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1. When we point out a brother’s sin, our purpose ought to be to help them avoid the wrath of the Lord’s judgment. But if we speak evil against them we bring down our own wrath upon them.

There is only one Lawgiver and He alone is Judge. He alone has the ability to save our souls and He alone has the authority to destroy. In light of this, James asks, “*But who are you who judge your neighbor?*” One might as well say, “What is the bowl that he should say to the plate, ‘You are not worthy?’” We are the creation—possessions meant for the Master’s use. Do we have the authority to determine whether or not our brother is saved or condemned? Not in the least! When it comes to judging the law, we are nothing. For this reason, let us be content to humble ourselves. If we see a brother in sin, let us approach him with a spirit of humility. In all that we do, our goal must be the salvation of our brethren. But let us be content to allow God to be judge of their fate.

James also teaches us to have this humility while making plans. We often presume to plan out our entire lives believing that we are in absolute control. However, the wisdom from above teaches us that, though we make some plans for our lives, God is the One in control. Yes, we must determine to do righteousness. Yes, we must make some preparations for our futures. But, in so doing, we must always remember to acknowledge God’s absolute preeminence in our lives. We may say that we will go to such and such city in order to trade, but how do we know that something will not happen along the way? We may make grand plans for our lives (schooling, a career, a family, etc.), but how do we know that the Lord will not come tomorrow? Our lives are vapor. If you have ever watched a pot boil, you would have noticed that, after the steam leaves the pot, only a moment goes by before it disappears. This represents our lives perfectly. Men often speak as if they will be here for eons, but for all we know we may be gone tomorrow.

Arrogance causes us to think we are in absolute control, but humility and godly wisdom teach us that God is in control. Therefore, if we are going to make plans for our future, we are exhorted to say “*If the Lord wills, we shall live...*” Solomon acknowledged this truth in the Proverbs saying, “*In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths*” (Proverbs 3:6).

We boast in our arrogance when we make plans and then brag about them to our friends. James says that such boasting is evil. Why? Because it shows that our desire is not for the will of God, but for our own will. When we make plans without including God or acknowledging Him, we exalt ourselves. When we purpose to do our own will without considering God’s will, we become adulterers (see James 4:1-5). However, if we have cleansed our hands, purified our hearts, and humbled ourselves in the sight of the Lord, we will make His will first priority in our lives. No matter what our plans are, we will gladly give them up for the opportunity to serve God. “*Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*” (Philippians 3:8).

If we plan our lives around the will of God then we will constantly be aware of opportunities to serve Him. However, if we see an opportunity to serve but choose not to, we are in sin. Why? Because once again we place our own plans ahead of God’s will. Christ purchased us with His blood in order to make us pure and to prepare us to be zealous for every good work (Tit. 2:14). But when we know to do good and do not do it, we forsake God’s plan for our lives. There is only one thing that would prevent us from doing good works—selfishness. If our brother is hungry and we do not feed him because we want to buy ourselves some new clothes, we fail to love our brother. Christians are expected to assemble with one another (go to church), to study God’s word, to pray, to help one another, and to build one another up. But if we fail to do any of these things because “We are too busy,” “We don’t feel like it,” or “We have made other plans,” we are in sin.

If we have truly humbled ourselves in the sight of God then we will not allow anything to prevent us from doing what we know to be good. No matter what situation we are in, we will do all we can to serve our Lord and Savior.



# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON NINE

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. Why would one speak evil of another (4:11)?
2. What type of judgment is discussed in James 4:11?
3. How would one judge the law (4:11)?
4. What other reasons does James give for not judging one another (4:12)?
5. What power does our Lawgiver have (4:12)?
6. Why should we be careful about the plans we make (4:13-14)?
7. What must one remember to consider when making plans for the future (4:15)?
8. How is our life like a vapor (4:14)?
9. How should we view tomorrow (4:15)?
10. Of what is one guilty when plans are made without considering the Lord's will (4:16)?
11. Define "arrogance" (4:16).
12. Of what is one guilty when they know what is good but fail to do it (4:17)?
13. Explain James 4:17. What is the "good" in this passage?

# LESSON TEN

James 5:1-8

## Text

“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. 7 Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. 8 You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

## Comments

It should be understood that wealth is a relative term, for we all know someone who is better off than ourselves. The point of James’ comments is, if we are going to find true happiness and stability, we need to give up the idea that they can come through earthly riches. Remember, this letter was originally addressed to Christians in the first century, to a generation where greatness was thought to be found on the back of wealth and power. Needless to say, things have not changed much. Therefore, this exhortation is just as applicable and just as necessary for Christians today as it was for those in the first century.

No matter how secure we may feel at the moment, if our security is found only in riches then it will be destroyed. Riches may “rot” in one of two ways. 1. They may be taken away in this life, forcing the rich to eat the dust of poverty (Prov. 23:5; Matt. 6:19-20). 2. Even if our riches last until the day of our death, when this life is over we cannot take them with us. We will go to our judgment and our riches will be left to burn with the rest of creation at the coming of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:10; Luke 12:16-21).

The deterioration of earthly riches is a witness against those who put their trust in them. That is to say, they will be the evidence of their wickedness. God gives us eternal, spiritual blessings to strive for in this life—things that are established and attained through righteousness. But the temporary riches of this world are sought by those who do not regard the righteousness of God. Such people look for the physical pleasures rather than the eternal, spiritual pleasures of God. It is written in Proverbs 4:23, “*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*” Therefore, we may know the nature of a man’s heart by the things that he desires. Those who desire earthly riches over the righteousness of God have wickedness in their hearts. For this reason, their riches are a witness against them; they are the proof of the wickedness in their hearts.

The last days are now. We are in the final days before the coming of the Lord and the destruction of the heavens and the earth (see Acts 2:16-17; Heb. 1:2). Trust funds and College funds are examples of how parents and children store up their treasure for future events. But if the children were to have access to those funds while still children, they would be wasted on the vain and frivolous desires of childhood. It is the same for the treasures of our heart. The righteous are those who set up their treasure in heaven. Such will receive their reward in the future when Jesus gathers the saints to the Father. But the wicked waste their desires on present earthly treasures. Therefore, just as the earth that remains in these last days will be destroyed, so will their treasure.

In verse four, James begins illustrating the kinds of wickedness that fills the lives of the rich. He describes the injustice done to their laborers by withholding their pay. The laborers cry out to God for the injustice that is done them and the Lord of Sabbath, that is to say the Lord of Hosts, hears their cry. Those who are persecuted are not left alone, but the Lord who has authority over all things is on their side. “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom. 8:31)?

James continues to describe the wickedness of the rich by listing some of the lavish comforts for which they seek in this life: their luxurious living, their wanton pleasure, and their fattened bellies. He points out that those who desire and consume themselves with such things are like beasts fattened for the slaughter. They fill themselves with their hearts every desire, striving to attain the greatest level of happiness possible with their physical possession. Then, when they have consumed all they can, the end comes. When they feel as though they have experience the highest level of

happiness this life has to offer, they go to meet their maker where they find that, in their earthly pursuits of happiness, they gave up the only true source of happiness—obedience to God.

Yet, the wickedness of the rich does not stop with their carnal living. In their pride they look down and mock those who put their treasure in heaven—the Lord’s righteous. God’s people are those who do not get drunk with wine, but are filled with the Spirit for they do the deeds of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). They are not consumed with storing up riches in this life, but with storing up treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21). They do not practice the ways of the world, but are imitators of their Father in heaven (Eph. 5:1). As little children who mock the one who tries to help the teacher; as co-workers who mock the one who refuses to get drunk and carouse with the others; so are the rich who mock and persecute the Lord’s righteous for choosing not to live the life of wanton pleasure. But the righteous man does not resist them. He endures their attacks without returning evil for evil and without wavering, for he bears his cross as Jesus did when He was rejected by the world (Luke 9:23-24).

How does the righteous man survive such treatment? How does he endure the attacks of the wicked while at the same time resisting the temptations of this world? Patience! He knows that there is a greater reward waiting beyond this life, so he waits (Rom. 8:18). He understands that to live in a righteous manner is worth having to face the persecution of the wicked, so he waits (Prov. 22:1). He knows that the good pleasure of God far outweighs the good pleasure of men, so he waits. He waits for the coming of the Lord where his enemies will be destroyed, his suffering will cease, and the true joy which he so earnestly sought for while on the earth will be with him in heaven for eternity. For this reason, James exhorts us saying, “*Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.*”

Such patience is illustrated by the farmer. For the farmer does not plant his seed in the early spring then expect to reap the fruit of it in the next month. Rather, he waits. He allows the rains of spring to nourish the seed as it opens in the ground. He allows the sun of summer to shine on the young leaves and cause growth. He waits while the rains of early fall nourish the maturing crop as it prepares for the harvest. Then, when the time is right and the blessing of the Lord is full, he harvests his fruit. In this same manner God’s people are sown in righteousness through the word of God, they grow as they struggle and learn throughout their physical lives (James 1:4). Then, when the time is right, God will raise up the righteous to be with Him for evermore. Therefore, as the farmer waits, so must we. The coming of the Lord is at hand.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON TEN

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. Who is being condemned in James 5:1-6 (see vs. 1)?
3. How can our riches be a witness against us (5:3)?
4. Why is God angry at those who are rich (5:3-6)?
5. Who is the “Lord of Sabaoth?” What does this mean?
6. Does James 5:5-6 describe all rich people? Explain.
7. Define “patient” (5:7).
8. Name the three examples of patience given by James (5:7-11).
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

# LESSON ELEVEN

James 5:9-15

## Text

“Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. 10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. 12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but let your yes be yes, and your no, no; so that you may not fall under judgment. 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him.”

## Comments

No doubt, James is making applications from his previous comments. In James 4:1 he asked, “*Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?*” Therefore, when brethren are grumbling and complaining against one another it is a direct result of their selfish ambitions. It is for this reason that James exhorts us saying, “*Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged.*” Why will be judged for complaining? Because in it there is no love, only hatred. The wisdom that is from above results in peace (James 3:18). But complaining and contention comes from a heart that is not right with God. If we are found with such grumbings in our hearts when the Lord comes, we will be condemned. Our need to overcome such wickedness is ever more urgent seeing that “*the Judge is standing right at the door.*”

If we are not to complain against one another, what then should we do? James tells us to follow the example of the prophets who endured great struggles at the hand of God’s people, yet still remained faithful. Jesus draws our attention to the suffering of the prophets in Matthew 5:10-12 where He says, “*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

When we read the accounts of Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the rest, we are in awe of their faith and devotion to God. We honor these prophets for the work that they did in proclaiming God’s word to the people against all odds. We take delight in the fact that God saw it fit to bless them for their service. For though they seemed to be poor while they walked the earth, they have been placed in high esteem in the kingdom of God. We rejoice in the final chapter of Job where we read that Job, in spite of all his pain and suffering, was richly blessed by God on account of his patience and faithfulness. Therefore, we can rejoice knowing that, God is full of compassion and that He is merciful.

James brings these truths to mind so that we may know that we will receive this same reward if we endure as the prophets did. They became examples for us to show us that we too can attain the blessedness of God through humble and patient endurance. We can be like Elijah and Jeremiah if we are willing to endure as they did. But when we complain against one another we are not like these prophets. Rather, we make ourselves like the people who persecuted the prophets. Let us be aware of this. Let us avoid such wickedness. Rather than complaining, let us learn to show love toward one another as commanded by Jesus (Matthew 5:38-48; John 13:34).

In James chapter three we discussed the use of the tongue and the evils that it is capable of. Such evil can be seen in the use of making oaths. How? The practice of making oaths is nothing more than proof of the prevalence of lying. You may have heard it said, “As God as my witness,” or “May God strike me,” or various other statements like these. James shows us that God condemns this kind action. Jesus taught this same thing in Matthew 5:34. The danger in using God’s name while making oaths or swearing is that we are calling God to be a witness to what we say. If we are lying, we are asking God to sanction our lies. Even if we are telling the truth, we are still asking God to do something (strike me down) which He most likely will not do.

During the first century A.D. men were making a distinction between different kinds of oath. The Rabbis were teaching that if a person swore by the temple he did not have to keep his oath, but if he swore by the gold in the

temple then he did have to keep his oath (Matthew 23:16-22). It is this kind of double mindedness that God condemns. Truth be told, God's people should have no use for swearing or oaths. If we are striving to control our tongues (James 3:2), if we are striving to be free from hypocrisy (James 3:17), and if we have cleansed our hands and purified our hearts (James 4:8), then a simple "yes" or "no" ought to be as binding as the strongest oath. If we agree to something but do not do it "because we didn't promise" or "we had our fingers cross," then we are danger of the judgment. Such character is the result of hypocrisy and it must be avoided.

Let us understand, however, that not every oath is sinful. For example, there are the wedding vows. God also makes oaths to His people (Ps. 110:4). The condemnation here is upon making rash oaths, calling down divine threats upon people, or abusing the use of oaths especially in order to deceive people.

When times are hard men tend to be rash with their tongues, either condemning God or making an oath to change if God will remove their suffering. Similarly, when men are joyful they tend to forget God. They get caught up in the moment and forget to thank God for His kindness. But James shows us that if our hearts are in the right place, then when we are suffering we will not be rash and if we are joyful we will not be forgetful. Rather, at all times we will acknowledge God in our lives, praying to Him when we are suffering and singing His praises when we are joyful.

Rather than warring amongst each other, members of the church ought to be caring for one another. Therefore, if one of the brethren is sick he should call for the elders of the church to pray over him. The anointing of oil may have had some small medicinal value, but it was mostly a traditional practice that went with praying over a person (Mark 6:13). When we pray in this manner we must have faith that there is power in our prayers. This power comes from God, for He is the one who works to the benefit of His people. For this reason we may pray for those who are sick, and may also pray for their sins.

Notice the progression made in these passage: 1. if he is suffering, 2. if he is joyful, 3. if he is sick, 4. if he has committed sin. In every situation we are to trust in God. Human wisdom causes us to trust in ourselves entirely too much. If we have the wisdom that is from above, then we will turn to God in every situation, acknowledge Him in all our ways (Prov. 3:6), and trust Him with our lives.

# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON ELEVEN

Use the text and the lesson to answer these questions:

1. What are Christians to do in response to oppression (5:7-12)?
2. Define “endurance” (5:11).
3. Are all oaths prohibited (5:12)?
4. What are those who are suffering to do (5:13)?  
The cheerful?
5. Who are the sick to call for (5:14)?
6. What is to be done for the sick (5:14)?
7. What is the purpose of the oil in James 5:14? Compare Isa. 1:6; Ezek. 16:9; Luke 10:34.
8. What will “save the sick” (5:15)?
9. Who will raise him up (5:15)?
10. What if a person has committed sins (5:15)?
11. What overall principle can we learn from the progression of James’ comments between verses thirteen and fifteen?

# LESSON TWELVE

James 5:16-20

## Text

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit. 19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”

## Comments

Through prayer Christians have the ability to make their requests known to God. They even have the ability to ask for the forgiveness of their sins. For this reason, God commands that brethren confess their sins to one another and pray for one another.

Many are afraid to confess their sins to their brethren. But if we have the love of Christ then we should not be afraid of such things (1 John 4:18). The act of confessing our sins can fulfill two purposes. 1. It allows our brethren to know what we are struggling with so that they can pray about it to God. 2. It gives them an idea of what our spiritual needs are. God may be able to use their righteous instruction and encouragement as a means of helping us overcome our sins. If we do not confess our sins one to another it takes away the blessing of being a member of the Lord's body.

When we pray we must understand that it is effective only when we are striving to live righteous lives. If we are walking in disobedience our prayers will be hindered (1 Pet. 3:7). But, “*the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.*” This term “effective” is translated in the King James Version as “*effectual fervent.*” The single word “effective” means to be powerful or to work. But the term used in James 5:16 is more intense than that. It not only means to be powerful, but to be mighty in it, to show itself. It gives a sense of abundance. Men can do great things, but it is written of God, “*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*” (Eph. 3:20). God can do far greater things than we can imagine, and it is His power that “*works in us.*” When we live righteous lives, praying to God in faith we have access to this abundant power so that our prayers will not only be effective, but effectively fervent through the power of God. Elijah is a wonderful example of this kind of prayer. For when he prayed to God for the rain to stop, it stopped for three and a half years. Then, when he prayed again, God caused the rain to come at Elijah's request. Imagine what God can do in our lives when we pray for one another in this way!

Our desire ought to be for the benefit of our brethren. If we see a brother in need, there should be no hesitation to care for their need, even if they need to be corrected. Therefore, we ought to strive to help one another to overcome sin. Jesus did this for us, so we should do it for one another (John 13:15, 34). In so doing, we will save our brother's soul from death and a multitude of sins will be covered because they will have repented and turned to God.



# QUESTIONS

## FOR LESSON TWELVE

Use the text and the lesson to complete these questions:

1. What are Christians commanded to do to one another in James 5:16? Why?
2. What avails much?
3. What Bible character is a good illustration of this (5:16-18)? Compare 1 Kings 17:1-6; 18:1-19, 41-46.
4. What does the phrase “among you” refer to in James 5:19?
5. What happens when one turns a sinner from the error of his way (5:19-20)?
6. How can we turn the wanderer back (5:19)?
7. How does this cover a multitude of sins?